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From Nature to Spirit: Schelling, Hegel, and the Logic of Emergence

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the relationship between ‘nature’ and ‘spirit’ in the philosophies of F.W.J. Schelling and G.W.F. Hegel. I aim to show that Schelling and Hegel are involved in a shared task of conceiving spiritual freedom as a necessary outcome of nature’s inner, rational development. I argue that by interpreting spirit as ‘emergent’ from nature, the absolute idealists develop a ‘third way’ beyond Cartesian dualism and monist naturalism. For on the idealist account, nature and spirit are neither ontologically discontinuous, as if separated by an insurmountable ‘gap’, nor are they identical, as if spirit were simply a ‘second nature’. Rather, according to both Schelling and Hegel, spirit emerges *from* nature as its ontologically distinct and non-natural *telos*.

What makes Schelling’s and Hegel’s philosophies of nature so unique, however, is not simply that they present spiritual freedom as dependent upon nature, but that the ontological specificity of spirit is shown to be *rationally necessary*. In fact, neither the early Schelling nor Hegel is concerned with the *historical* emergence of spirit. Rather, both philosophers see the ‘emergence’ of spirit as an atemporal feature of being that must be derived through sheer reason—be it Schelling’s method of ‘depotentiation’ or Hegel’s dialectical logic. I therefore argue that by bracketing the question of historical emergence, Schelling and Hegel each develop a distinctive *logic* of emergence whereby spiritual freedom is shown to be necessary thanks to the ontological structure of the impersonal, natural world.

In my concluding chapter, I consider Schelling’s argument in his Berlin lectures of the 1840s that the idealist logic of emergence must be supplemented with a speculative consideration of *historical* emergence if philosophy is to be a complete science of reality. From this perspective, it looks as though both Hegel’s and the early Schelling’s ‘logics of emergence’, despite all their promise, presuppose the idea that nature’s necessary stages need not express themselves in temporal succession (as do the necessary stages of human history) in order for them to be fully realised. I conclude the thesis by suggesting that Schelling’s *Ages of the World* was meant to overcome this apparent limit of the ‘logic of

emergence' without abandoning its fundamental aims. For in the *Ages*, nature's rationally necessary development is presented as unfolding in time, and time is understood as nothing other than the actual development of nature into spirit.

Abbreviations

SW Schelling, F.W.J., *Sämmtliche Werke* (Stuttgart and Augsburg: Cotta, 1856-1861)

W Hegel, G.W.F., *Werke in 20 Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970)

Introduction: Why Idealist *Naturphilosophie*?

In his recent *Mind and Cosmos*, Thomas Nagel takes issue with contemporary naturalism for its tendency to conceive features of reality that are distinctively human, such as consciousness, cognition, and value, as accidental byproducts of a contingent evolutionary process. In mounting this critique, Nagel takes on not only prevailing metaphysical assumptions within academic philosophy, but a fundamental way of thinking that characterises modern culture writ large. On this prevalent, naturalistic view, the only valid explanations for any phenomena are those explanations which appeal to the natural world and the presumed contingency of its historical development. Consequently, the existence of human life and what philosophers had hitherto taken to be its distinguishing characteristics are understood to be strictly contingent phenomena. Nagel suggests that this view which colours so much of our thought today is fundamentally misguided. At the very least, acknowledging that our naturalistic assumptions about the universe and its development are indeed assumptions allows us to take seriously other metaphysical possibilities. For what if there were some *necessity* at work in the natural emergence of consciousness, cognition, and value? What if these weren't in fact accidental byproducts of physical processes but necessary features of reality?

In raising this possibility, Nagel mentions the absolute idealism of F.W.J. Schelling and G.W.F. Hegel as, if not inspirational for his arguments, historical antecedents to his way of regarding the structure of the universe.¹ As far as I am aware, this reference to Schelling and Hegel has done little to popularise absolute idealism within contemporary analytic metaphysics. To be sure, Schelling and Hegel have had enormous influence upon various philosophical traditions from the nineteenth century to the present day, and Hegel in particular has begun to play an increasingly important role in philosophical debates that have traditionally rejected German idealism. Nevertheless, the Schellingian-Hegelian endeavour

¹ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 17.

to comprehend nature's *necessary* development into human consciousness has inspired little enthusiasm. This is unfortunate, since the idealist systems of Schelling and Hegel contain profoundly compelling discussions of nature and our place in it.

There are many historical and sociological reasons as to why Schelling's and Hegel's conceptions of the necessary emergence of consciousness have not been taken up with enthusiasm, but perhaps one of those reasons can be traced to the fact that the idealists were not interested in the merely human (*menschlich*) but the *spiritual* (*geistig*). That is to say, Schelling and Hegel are not simply concerned with the relation between nature and *mind*, but with that between nature and *spirit*. And if the idealist programme of describing nature as *necessarily* developing into 'mind' is antithetical to contemporary ways of thinking, then the discussion of a *spiritual* reality is certainly beyond the pale.

As will become clear over the course of this study, 'spirit' is nothing 'other-worldly' for Schelling or Hegel, but is simply the inner freedom which defines a distinctive way of being. What makes spirit *non-natural* is not, therefore, that it is 'supernatural', as if there were a spiritual reality above and beyond nature. Rather, spirit is non-natural in that it is structured in a very different manner than any natural forms and is consequently capable of a range of activities which no natural entity—not even highly developed non-human animals—are capable, activities which are expressions of spiritual *freedom*.² That the idealist conception of spirit is not 'supernaturalist' has, in recent years, impelled a number of naturalistic philosophers to draw upon this concept in an effort to clarify the distinctive activity of human subjectivity. Although these commentators are certainly right to emphasise that spirit is not supernatural, it is my view that something is nonetheless lost when *Geist* is translated as 'mind' or, even more anachronistically, when it is translated into the language of 'normativity'. As I will argue throughout this thesis, that spirit is not some supernatural entity does not imply that spirit is *ipso facto* natural. Those who downplay the distinctive ontological character of spirit exhibit their desire to make Schelling and Hegel our contemporaries in an age dominated by a naturalistic worldview.

² Schelling does, in certain texts, appear to conceive spirit as 'supernatural' and 'other-worldly'. I address this issue in the Appendix to this thesis.

For this reason, one could very well distinguish Schelling's and Hegel's idealist systems from all forms of naturalism by focusing exclusively upon the concept of spirit. But it is my view that this doesn't get us very far. For one can only understand the non-natural character of spirit if one begins with *nature*, the domain of being which precedes spirit in both philosophers' systems. Indeed, neither Schelling nor Hegel simply asserts that there is some non-natural, spiritual reality, but instead, they begin their ontologies with a consideration of the most *basic* forms of reality, forms which are utterly impersonal, inorganic, and non-spiritual, and they argue that it is only through a consideration of these basic forms that the more complex forms, such as consciousness and freedom, are made intelligible. For Schelling and Hegel, then, the transition from nature to spirit is *necessary* insofar as the structure of nature's basic forms *immanently develop* into a rational system inclusive of more complex forms. Without presupposing the existence of anything non-natural, Schelling and Hegel *arrive* at the necessary existence of spiritual freedom through rationalist derivation.

Once we come to see that Schelling and Hegel are engaged in the shared task of deriving the rational necessity of spiritual existence, idealism proves to be at an even further remove from our contemporary philosophical assumptions. For Schelling and Hegel, not only is spiritual freedom a *necessary* feature of reality, and not only is this spiritual freedom *non-natural*, but we come to understand this necessary existence of spirit by considering the *rational structure* of being itself. The idealist philosophy of nature, then, is a fundamentally *rationalist* project, one which is committed to the idea that thought is disclosive of the structure of non-spiritual (as well as spiritual) forms of being. But because a key feature of this unique form of rationalism is the derivation of spiritual freedom from that which is non-spiritual, one must begin with nature.³

When Nagel refers to the idealism of Schelling and Hegel, he is well aware of the fact that, for these philosophers, there is an intrinsic connection between the necessary

³ As Errol E. Harris has argued (albeit with reference to Hegel alone), the distinguishing feature of idealist *Naturphilosophie* which sets it apart from all subsequent philosophies of emergence is its commitment to explaining *why* life and spirit emerge from nature as opposed to simply claiming that such emergence 'occurs'. See Errol E. Harris, *The Spirit of Hegel* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), pp. 189-190.

existence of spiritual or cognitive phenomena, on the one hand, and nature's internally rational structure, on the other. As Nagel puts it, 'mind...is doubly related to the natural order. Nature is such as to give rise to conscious beings with minds; and it is such as to be comprehensible to such beings.'⁴ Nagel is right to describe absolute idealism in this manner, but only so long as we clearly distinguish between the 'mind' which *emerges* from nature and the 'mind' which is already 'present' in nature, namely, as nature's immanent, rational structure. In other words, the rational structure of nature is *not identical* to the mental phenomena that arise therefrom. This is a further reason why translating *Geist* into our Latin *spiritus* is helpful. For it drives home the point that emergent *Geist* is ontologically distinct from the natural *logos* or *nous* from which it emerges. It is therefore of the utmost importance to recognise that, for Schelling and Hegel, the rationality intrinsic to nature is not anything spiritual. Being is not, at bottom, spirit. For spirit only emerges as the culmination of a non-spiritual, yet rational, process. Maintaining this distinction between reason and spirit is necessary if Schelling's and Hegel's logics of emergence are to be made intelligible.

Although 'emergence' is not a term employed in any systematic manner by either Schelling or Hegel, I am by no means the first to describe either of their ontologies as

⁴ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, p. 17.

‘emergentist’.⁵ However, neither Hegel nor the early Schelling is concerned with any natural-*historical* processes of emergence, and this means that they have little interest in the emergence of spirit *in time*. Nevertheless, the idealist philosophies of nature are emergentist insofar as spirit emerges, *systematically speaking*, from the rational structure of nature as nature’s ontological consequence. What I am calling the idealist ‘logic of emergence’, therefore, refers to a *rational* process and not a temporal one. The ‘emergence’ under consideration here is not an historical event, but an atemporal *feature of being* that expresses a relation of ontological dependence. Spirit is thus ontologically dependent upon nature, but this dependence is not indicative of a chronological evolution of nature *into* spirit. This is not to say that the idealist logic of emergence is necessarily incompatible with the notion that spiritual freedom emerges in time, and I consider this possibility in Chapter 7. However, we will only be able to consider this possibility once we have understood Schelling’s and Hegel’s respective logics of emergence.

The ahistorical character of Schelling and Hegel’s emergentism does not detract from the essentially *processual* nature of their ontologies. To see this, it is perhaps helpful to consider the idealist logic of emergence as an inverted form of Neoplatonist emanation. Whereas emanation describes an atemporal process of ontological degradation, the idealist logic of emergence describes an atemporal process of ontological elevation. Rather than an

⁵ Although Schelling is often described as promoting some form of ‘emergentism’ (see, for example, Dieter Wandschneider, ‘The Philosophy of Nature of Kant, Schelling and Hegel’ in *The Routledge Companion to Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, ed. by Dean Moyar [London: Routledge, 2010], p. 79), Schelling has inspired far less work on the subject of emergence than Hegel. For example, Kenneth Westphal—while dismissive of Schelling’s contribution to the topic—celebrates the fact that ‘Hegel sought to avoid both substance dualism and eliminative reductionism by developing a sophisticated and subtle emergentism’ (Kenneth R. Westphal, ‘Philosophizing about Nature: Hegel’s Philosophical Project’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. by Frederick Beiser [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], p. 305). James Blachowicz similarly argues for an emergentist reading of Hegel in *Essential Difference: Towards a Metaphysics of Emergence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), but he takes a different approach from the one pursued here, conceiving Hegel’s emergentism in terms of potentiality and actuality. From yet another angle, Adrian Johnston draws upon German idealism, and Hegel in particular, in his promotion of a Žižek-inspired ‘transcendental materialism’ in which ‘more-than-material subjectivity’ is shown to emerge from material nature (Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014]). Although Johnston construes Hegel’s nature philosophy as a far more empirically-minded project than I do, his work has significantly influenced my understanding of the contemporary relevance of an emergentist conception of subjectivity. For my engagement with Johnston, see ‘Idealism and Emergence: Three Questions for Adrian Johnston’ and his response, ‘Transcendentalism in Hegel’s Wake: A Reply to Timothy M. Hackett and Benjamin Berger’ in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 24, *Schelling: Powers of the Idea* (2014), pp. 194-203, 204-237.

absolute One that is degraded in its overflowing procession, then, both Schelling's and Hegel's philosophies of nature describe a process whereby less plentiful levels of reality gradually raise themselves to more plentiful levels as complexity accumulates from inorganic nature to life and human freedom.⁶ To be sure, Schelling and Hegel conceive this elevation in very different ways, and this will become one of the themes of this thesis. Nevertheless, both Schelling and Hegel understand higher forms of being to emerge, *ontologically*, from lower forms, despite the fact that this emergence does not 'take place' in time. The idealist logic of emergence should therefore be seen as a distinctive form of the *scala naturae* in which being is intelligible 'from the bottom up', i.e. from nature to spirit. Note that this does not only mean that philosophical science is epistemically required to investigate nature prior to spirit, but that spirit is itself ontologically dependent upon the lower stages of reality.

Central to the idea of a *scala naturae* is that the various levels of being are both continuous with and different from one another.⁷ Significantly, Schelling and Hegel regard their attention to the relation *between* ontological continuity and difference as setting absolute idealism apart from the entire modern tradition. From this idealist perspective, modern philosophy has failed to properly unify nature and spirit, i.e. to present the inner *identity* of natural and spiritual reality without reducing spirit to nature (or vice versa) and thereby obscuring their *difference*. According to Schelling and Hegel, modern philosophers have either emphasised the intrinsic *unity* of nature and spirit at the expense of their

⁶ This should not imply that Schelling and Hegel are simply opposed to Neoplatonism, as this tradition is significantly influential for both philosophers. Yet the Neoplatonist degradation of the One is, at best, one-sided (*W 9*: Addition to § 249, 33; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 21) and, at worst, a refusal to conceive the absolute as in any sense ontologically derivative (*SW 1/7*: 347; *Freedom*, pp. 19-20). As Beierwaltes puts it with respect to Schelling, the difference between Schelling and Plotinus turns on the Neoplatonist conception of the 'progressive weakening or destruction (*Zer-Nichtung*) of reality (i.e. of the ontological intensity or living activity) of being, down to matter as the furthest point of the unfolding of the One' (Werner Beierwaltes, 'The Legacy of Neoplatonism in F. W. J. Schelling's Thought', trans. Peter Adamson, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 10 [2002], p. 415). However, as we will see in Chapter 2, Schelling comes to advance a quasi-emanationist conception of ontological development in his so-called 'system of identity' and, in doing so, temporarily leaves behind the idealist logic of emergence.

⁷ Cf. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 55-65. On this point, Schelling and Hegel are in full agreement with the Neoplatonists. 'Nothing...is completely severed from its prior. Thus the human soul appears to reach away away far down as to the vegetal order' (Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Third Edition, trans. by Stephen MacKenna [Faber and Faber: London, 1969], Fifth Ennead, Second Tractate, p. 380).

difference; or they have insisted upon an ontological gap separating the natural from the spiritual. Absolute idealism therefore seeks to overcome this either/or and replace it with a both/and: nature and spirit are indeed *identical*, and yet this identity is one in which the natural and the spiritual are ontologically *distinct*. This is why both Schelling and Hegel are committed to the ‘identity of identity and difference’, for it is only with such a conception that nature and spirit can be shown to be different from one another in their *unity* and united with one another in their *difference*.

But as I have already remarked, Schelling and Hegel do not simply seek to understand the intrinsic unity between an ontologically distinct nature and spirit, but they aim to show how the former necessitates the latter. The task of absolute idealism, therefore, is to conceive the ‘identity of identity and difference’ as a *processual* identity, i.e. an identity which arises through nature’s own self-differentiating activity. Now, Schelling and Hegel do not always hold such a processual view of the identity of nature and spirit. In particular, their texts of the early 1800s do not present spiritual freedom as an ontological consequence of nature’s immanent development. But the most compelling Schellingian and Hegelian texts promote such a conception of identity as processual and in doing so articulate a distinctive way of thinking about the relationship between nature and spirit. Thus, absolute idealism does not simply present nature and spirit as two aspects of the same substantial being, as in the Spinozism with which Schelling and Hegel are often associated; instead, at their most profound, Schelling and Hegel understand nature to necessitate the existence of spiritual freedom which is neither natural nor substantial.

In order to understand freedom as emergent from nature, both Schelling and Hegel call into question what they see as another failure of modern philosophy, namely, its assumption that nature is a ‘dead thing’. For this reason, both philosophers have often been understood to promote an ‘organic’ conception of nature in which the self-determination of a living cosmos makes possible spiritual freedom. In this way, it is supposed, nature and spirit are made ontologically continuous thanks to the fact that nature and spirit are both, at bottom, *alive*. Although I disagree with this interpretation, it is understandable for a number of reasons. First, Schelling and Hegel both draw upon Kant’s conception of the organism as

presented the third *Critique* in an attempt to retrieve the ancient conception of natural teleology. In conceiving nature in its entirety in terms of self-organisation, and in claiming that we are not only compelled to regard nature as a self-organising whole but that nature is such a whole *in itself*, Schelling and Hegel extend the Kantian conception of the organism to nature *as such*. Moreover, Schelling and Hegel often utilise the language of ‘life’ and ‘organism’ in their attempt to throw light on the immanent dynamism at work in nature. Undoubtedly, all of this speaks to a certain infatuation with the ‘organic’ in idealist nature philosophy. And yet it would be entirely mistaken to describe either Schelling or Hegel as ‘organicists’. To see this, we need only consider the fundamental reason why Schelling and Hegel reject the idea that nature is a ‘dead thing’.

From the idealists’ perspective, nature is not a ‘dead thing’ because it is not a mere *object*, i.e. a ‘thing’ which is passively affected by something *other* than it. It does not follow, however, that nature must be a living *individual* akin to actual *organisms*. Not only can we comprehend nature’s intrinsic, self-determining activity without describing this activity as that of an individual organic body; but, as Schelling in particular makes absolutely clear, organic individuals *exist* thanks to nature’s self-determining, *inorganic* productivity. And because all individuated, organic life owes its existence to a more primordial process, the latter cannot be, by definition, organic. Thus, once we consider the idealist *scala naturae* in detail, it becomes clear that we cannot conceive of nature as ‘organism’ without abandoning the idealist logic of emergence. For this logic aims to elucidate the ontological structure of not only the higher forms of reality such as life and freedom but also the lower forms of reality, i.e. the inorganic material processes which make organic life and spiritual freedom possible. As Schelling puts it in the 1810 *Stuttgart Lectures*, ‘Hylozism postulates a *primordial* life in matter, whereas we do not. By contrast, we claim that matter contains life not *in actu* but only *in potentia*, not explicitly but implicitly.’⁸ One of the significant lessons of idealist nature philosophy, therefore, is that genuine anti-reductionism secures the ontological integrity of both the higher *and* lower

⁸ *SW I/7*: 444; *Stuttgart Seminars*, p. 215.

forms of being by distinguishing between the ontological structure of that which *leads* to life and spirit on the one hand, and life and spirit *as such*, on the other.

This strong anti-reductionist approach leads Schelling and Hegel to develop philosophies of nature in which the higher forms of nature, despite the fact that they owe their existence to the lower forms, are nonetheless assigned a greater axiological significance. A remark of Hegel's in the *Encyclopaedia* makes this point well:

It has been rumoured round the town that I have compared the stars to a rash on an organism where the skin erupts into a countless mass of red spots; or to an ant-heap in which too, there is Understanding and necessity. In fact I do rate what is concrete higher than what is abstract, and an animality that develops into no more than a slime, higher than the starry host.⁹

Thus, neither Schelling nor Hegel romanticise nature by understanding ontologically primitive natural forms as good and beautiful in themselves. Instead, they look to nature *as it is*, without projecting onto its fundamental stages the values associated with life and freedom.

One consequence of this approach is that Schelling and Hegel do not conceive the task of nature philosophy as exclusively practical. To be sure, the authors of the 'Oldest System-Programme' (which likely include both Schelling and Hegel) ask how nature must be constituted if there are to be 'moral beings', and there is no question that this issue remains important for Schelling and Hegel throughout their philosophical development.¹⁰ But neither Schelling nor Hegel is exclusively interested in nature for the sake of practical reason. On the contrary, idealist nature philosophy seeks a theoretical comprehension of nature *for its own sake*. It is for this reason that Schelling claims that the philosophy of nature is more fundamental than the philosophy of subjective freedom, for nature philosophy 'proves its propositions purely theoretically, and has to make no particular, practical demands, unlike the latter [i.e. the philosophy of consciousness] which precisely for this reason possesses no purely theoretical reality.'¹¹ That a strictly theoretical philosophy of

⁹ *W 9*: Addition to § 341, 365; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 297.

¹⁰ *W 1*: 234; 'The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism', p. 110.

¹¹ *SW I/4*: 91; *On the True Concept*, p. 17.

nature will, in the end, disclose the ontological necessity of human freedom is made all the more compelling by the the non-instrumental character of the philosophy of nature. Indeed, Schelling and Hegel bracket the fundamental aim of their shared project (i.e. to derive the higher forms from the lower) in order to simply think through the being of nature and see where such thought leads.¹²

This refusal to presuppose the higher forms of being while nonetheless remaining committed to their ontological status as higher is unique to the Schellingian-Hegelian version of the *scala naturae*. Indeed, this is one reason why the organicist interpretation of idealism is mistaken, for it tends to downplay the ontological distinctiveness of the higher and lower forms of nature and, consequently, the hierarchical character of nature's sequence of stages (*Stufenfolge* or *Stufengang*). By thematising this aspect of Schelling's and Hegel's nature philosophies, I intend to not only defend an emergentist interpretation of absolute idealism, but to show that Schelling and Hegel are in full agreement with respect to the hierarchical structure of reality (even if they differ with respect to significant features of this hierarchical structure). I therefore disagree with Dale Snow, who distinguishes Schelling from Hegel on account of the former's supposedly 'dynamic view of both nature and spirit which does not subordinate one to the other'.¹³ There are certainly texts in which Schelling appears to hold such a view, and I will consider this in Part I of this thesis (Chapters 1-3). But at his best, Schelling sheds as much light upon the 'hierarchical structure' of reality as does Hegel's dialectic.¹⁴ And this is a particularly important point that can be easily missed if we become overly enthusiastic about Schelling's turn to an ontology of nature in the wake of Kantian and Fichteian idealism. Although Schelling insists that nature philosophy must be the starting point for philosophical science—and in this way departs from what he sees as

¹² For a compelling argument against naturalism from the perspective of the axiological commitments of German idealism, see Sebastian Gardner, 'The Limits of Naturalism and the Metaphysics of German Idealism' in *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Espen Hammer (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 19-49. I am in full agreement with Gardner that the 'present-day philosophical interest of German idealism can be demonstrated' from the perspective of both axiological and strictly theoretical or ontological concerns (*ibid.*, p. 49n).

¹³ Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) p. 111.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the subjectivism of Kant and Fichte—this does not mean he departs from the Enlightenment celebration of human reason and freedom. On the contrary, by beginning with the immanent productivity of inorganic nature, Schelling argues that the humanity championed in the modern era is only fully explicable from the perspective of the nature which makes possible and necessary such an ontologically distinct and, indeed, higher, form of life. In other words, while the philosophy of nature inaugurated by the young Schelling is indeed a ‘struggle against *subjectivism*’ it is equally a struggle *for* subjectivity, albeit as the ontological consequence rather than ground of reality.¹⁵

While Schelling is often misinterpreted as rejecting hierarchical systematicity in his turn to nature, Hegel is often misunderstood as a subjectivist, as if Schelling’s philosophy of nature were a mere detour in the history of the idealist metaphysics of subjectivity. For example, Elaine P. Miller suggests that while ‘thinkers such as Schelling attempted to return to “nature in itself” rather than to a fiction about nature...Hegel radicalized Kant’s elimination of the natural.’¹⁶ On this view, Hegel’s philosophy of nature is not so much a ‘metaphysics of nature’ but a ‘metaphysics of the compounded knowledge of nature’.¹⁷ Such an interpretation not only confuses Hegel’s ontology of nature for something far more epistemological, but it also obscures the close proximity of the Schellingian and Hegelian projects. For Hegel is unabashedly committed to understanding the immanent structure of nature itself, pursuing a version—albeit significantly reformulated—of Schellingian nature philosophy. Indeed, much like Schelling, Hegel seeks to comprehend the *being* of nature, beyond the subjectivist limits of transcendental idealism.

In order to address these misinterpretations of both Schelling and Hegel, I will argue for the similarity of their metaphysical vision. Consequently, if the Schelling I present here appears uncannily similar to Hegel and the Hegel I present here appears uncannily similar to

¹⁵ Cf. Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Elaine P. Miller, *The Vegetative Soul: From Philosophy of Nature to Subjectivity in the Feminine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). p. 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124. It is worth noting that this interpretation of Hegel is shared by philosophers working from a variety of perspectives and is put forward by a number of Hegel scholars. For more on this topic, see Chapter 4 below.

Schelling, I will have accomplished one of my aims. This is not to say that I seek to ignore the fundamental differences between Schelling and Hegel. On the contrary, my ultimate objective is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the differences between these philosophers. But it is my view that we get to the heart of these differences only if we first acknowledge and attend to the fact that Schelling and Hegel set out to accomplish the same philosophical task.¹⁸ Thus, it is by looking at the Schellingian and Hegelian logics of emergence side by side that their differences are brought to light.

One major point of divergence between Schelling and Hegel concerns philosophical methodology. In fact, Hegel saw this as the *essential* difference between his system and Schelling's.¹⁹ According to Hegel, the philosophy of nature must be pursued *logically*, which means one must render explicit what is *logically implicit* in the most abstract 'levels' or 'stages' of nature. Once Hegel arrived at his logical method, he never ceased to insist that it is the only way to think *immanently*, i.e. to understand nature as it is in itself. From Hegel's perspective, Schelling's various experiments in philosophical methodology—which include the utilisation of intellectual intuition, reasoning *more geometrico*, and presenting philosophical ideas in dialogical form—fail to achieve the immanence of a properly scientific philosophical practice. Thus, while Hegel praises Schelling's speculative approach to nature—for only with such an approach can the philosopher overcome the Kantian limits on our knowledge of the natural world—Hegel is deeply critical of the methodology he understands Schelling to employ.²⁰ In particular, Hegel sees the Schellingian approach to nature to be far too formalistic and dependent' upon an analogical understanding of the natural world which by definition lacks the immanence central to a logical method.²¹

¹⁸ As H. S. Harris notes, the fact that Schelling and Hegel regarded themselves in the early 1800s as involved in a shared systematic endeavour 'did not prevent them from formulating the "system" in quite different ways' (Harris, *Hegel's Development: Night Thoughts [1801-1806]*, p. xlviii). And although Schelling and Hegel continued to revise their views following their collaborative period, they nevertheless remained committed, throughout their lives, to the same task of conceiving nature and spirit as both identical and different.

¹⁹ *W 20*: 436; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, pp. 526-527. My emphasis.

²⁰ See, for example, *W 20*: 435-437; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, pp. 518, 525-527.

²¹ See Chapter 4.4.

It is true that Schelling never conceived nature's immanent structure in terms of either logical or conceptual development, and in his late philosophy he relentlessly criticised Hegel's system for making the 'logical' or 'conceptual' into something that *becomes* objective, rather than showing that concepts and the creatures who think them emerge from an objective, natural world.²² As the late Schelling says, 'Concepts as such only exist in consciousness; they *are*, therefore, taken objectively, *after* nature, not *before* it.'²³ But it is important to recognise that Schelling remains, even in this late work, committed to the rationalist project of disclosing *what there is* through *thought*. Schelling's lack of interest in logical method and his refusal to conceive 'conceptual' development as intrinsic to nature are ought not, therefore, to be understood as a rejection of rationalism. Rather, these aspects of Schelling's thought are merely indicative of the fact that Schelling's rationalism is pursued along different lines than is Hegel's. As we will see, not only is the philosophy of nature just as rationalist a programme for Schelling as it is for Hegel, but for Schelling, nature is *utterly* rational in itself, and its development is not determined in any manner by contingency (as it is for Hegel).²⁴ Nevertheless, Schelling's various methods for explicating nature's rational structure cannot be understood as logical in the technical, Hegelian sense of the term.

Thus, when I refer to Schelling's 'logic of emergence' I do not mean to imply that Schelling thematises logic in the manner that Hegel does. Nor, for that matter, do I mean to imply that Schelling's and Hegel's philosophies of nature constitute a single 'logic' of emergence. Yet both Schelling's and Hegel's philosophies of nature are logics of emergence in the more general sense of constituting a *rational* explication of the fundamental structures of being which lead from nature to spirit. And it is in this non-technical sense with which I attribute a logic of emergence not only to Hegel, who explicitly thematises the nature-spirit relation in terms of logic, but to Schelling as well.

²² See Chapters 4.5, 4.6, and 7.2.

²³ *SW I/10*: 140; *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 145, translation modified.

²⁴ See Chapters 1.5, 4.4, and 7.3.

Because I am primarily interested in elucidating the *ontological* development from nature to spirit as conceived by Schelling and Hegel, I do not focus in this study upon methodological issues regarding *how* each philosopher ascends the *scala naturae*. Instead, I aim to make as intelligible as possible the manner in which each philosopher understands the nature-spirit relation *as such*. Yet here too a fundamental difference between Schelling and Hegel comes to light. For it is one thing to say that Schelling and Hegel agree that through an ahistorical process nature raises itself to higher stages of organisation and, ultimately, necessitates the existence of spiritual freedom. But just how nature goes about ‘elevating’ itself is an entirely other matter. Whereas Schelling conceives the intrinsic *powers* of matter to necessitate its development into successively more complex forms, Hegel conceives the sheer *externality* of nature as necessitating a movement in which self-external being gradually ‘turns back’ upon itself through a progressive logic of ‘inwardisation’. Thus, whereas nature is immanently active on account of its power for Schelling, it is in fact nature’s impotence and *negativity* that drives nature ‘forward’ for Hegel. Schelling’s logic of emergence is therefore a logic of potentiation (*Potenzierung*), while Hegel’s is a logic of negation. This fundamental difference between Schelling and Hegel, however, can only be articulated if we first read their nature philosophies in light of their shared perspective regarding the immanent necessity with which nature, thanks to its intrinsic rational structure, raises itself to higher degrees of organisation in an ahistorical development.

As I briefly noted above, in the final chapter of this thesis I consider a fundamental limit of the logic of emergence by considering the late Schelling’s critique of Hegel. In his Berlin lectures on positive philosophy, Schelling argues that the movement of reason (i.e. the immanent development from nature to spirit) must be supplemented with a speculative consideration of *historical* emergence if philosophy is to be a comprehensive science of reality. From this perspective, it looks as though both Hegel’s and the early Schelling’s logics of emergence, despite all their promise, are intrinsically limited. For a comprehensive account of the *scala naturae* would require attention to the chronological evolution of natural forms and the historical generation of spiritual freedom. I conclude the thesis by

suggesting that Schelling's *Ages of the World* was meant to overcome this apparent limit of the logic of emergence without abandoning its fundamentally rationalist aims. For in the *Ages of the World*, nature's rationally necessary development is presented as unfolding in, and even *as*, time.

Before considering the possibility of a speculative-historical philosophy of nature, it is necessary to elucidate the atemporal logic of emergence championed by both Schelling and Hegel, and this elucidation comprises the majority of this thesis. In Part I (Chapters 1-3), I consider Schelling's philosophical development from 1797 to 1809, and I focus on how Schelling's commencement of idealist philosophy of nature with the *Ideas* (1797) determines his intellectual course through the system of identity (1801-1804) and the essay on *Human Freedom* (1809), in which nature is identified as the ground of non-natural freedom for goodness and evil. In Part II (Chapters 4-6), I briefly consider Hegel's early collaboration with Schelling before turning to Hegel's mature system as presented in the 1830 *Encyclopaedia*. Central to my Hegel interpretation is the idea that nature is a system of *stages* for Hegel and these stages should not be understood as mere *parts* of an organic whole. Rather, such stages involve a certain amount of autonomy, which allows us to understand Hegel's claims about the limited forms of freedom encountered in the impersonal, natural world (e.g. in celestial motion and organic life). These chapters therefore trace the 'logical path' nature takes from mechanical motion to the 'self-liberation of spirit' in order to show that Hegel conceives reality as a *scala naturae* constituted by ascending levels of self-determining freedom.

There are some important differences between my treatment of Schelling in Part I and Hegel in Part II. First, because my interpretation of Schelling involves tracing an intellectual development from 1797 to 1809, Part I covers more textual ground than Part II, which focuses almost exclusively on Hegel's 1830 *Encyclopaedia*. Whereas my aim in Part I is to offer an interpretation of Schelling's conception of the nature-spirit relation from the perspective of his philosophical development, my aim in Part II is to elucidate the logical movement from nature to spirit in Hegel's mature system. This means that my chapters on Schelling involve a less detailed analysis of the actual path by which nature becomes

spiritual in comparison with my chapters on Hegel, and it means that my chapters on Hegel involve a far less detailed analysis of Hegel's philosophical development. Consequently, there is a certain imbalance between the chapters devoted to Schelling and those devoted to Hegel. However, this is an imbalance which I believe is called for by the texts themselves. On my view, Schelling's perspective regarding the nature-spirit relation cannot be done justice with reference to one single text; his philosophical thought is intrinsically plastic, stretching over a period of time in which it is formed and reformed anew with each of its systematic presentations. It is only through a consideration of Schelling's intellectual development, then, that his distinctive logic of emergence—which finds its most compelling expression in the *Freedom* essay—can be made clear. With Hegel, things are quite different. Although the young Hegel should not be taken to be any less 'protean' than Schelling, the fact remains that once Hegel published the first edition of his *Encyclopaedia* in 1817, his philosophical perspective remained relatively unchanged. This provides us with an opportunity which Schelling's texts do not: to elucidate in detail the logic by which nature transforms itself into organic life and, ultimately, spiritual freedom.

There is one further difference between my treatment of Schelling and Hegel which should not go unmentioned. With regard to Schelling's conception of spirit, I focus primarily upon the freedom for goodness and evil (Chapter 3), whereas with Hegel, I emphasise the freedom for thought (Chapter 6). It would be wrong to assume, however, that Schelling's conception of spirit is strictly practical and Hegel's is strictly theoretical. On the contrary, both philosophers conceive spiritual freedom as the freedom for action *and* thought. However, on my view, Schelling offers a more compelling account of practical freedom and Hegel a more compelling account of theoretical freedom, and my interpretation of Schelling and Hegel should be read in light of this preference. Although such a decision raises important questions regarding the differences between Schelling's and Hegel's conceptions of freedom, this study is exclusively focused upon their conceptions of *nature* and how nature develops *into* spirit. It is therefore beyond the scope of the present work to consider in detail the differences between the Schellingian and Hegelian conceptions of spirit as such.²⁵

²⁵ For some remarks on this topic, see Appendix: Accounting for Schelling's Spiritualism

Part I: Schelling

Chapter 1: The Commencement of Speculative Physics

1.1. Introduction

In recent years, Schelling has become recognised along with Kant, Fichte, and Hegel as one of the great philosophers of the German idealist tradition. No longer seen as a merely transitional figure on the way ‘from Kant to Hegel’, Schelling is now commonly acknowledged to have carved out a distinctive philosophical space from which he developed a unique perspective on the fundamental questions of the Western tradition. One of these questions is how spiritual freedom is related to the natural world. In the following three chapters, I consider Schelling’s conception of this nature-spirit relation.

1.2. The Interpretive Difficulty of Protean Thinking

A significant hermeneutic difficulty presents itself as soon as one decides to approach Schelling in a thematic manner such as the one I am pursuing here. For one must decide which ‘Schelling’ will be under investigation. The Schelling of *On the Possibility of an Absolute Form of Philosophy*, *Of the I*, and the *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*? The Schelling of the identity philosophy? Or perhaps the Schelling of the positive philosophy of revelation? The nature-spirit relation is thematised throughout Schelling’s sixty years of philosophising and cannot possibly be done justice in a single study. Yet even if I were to

limit this study to one period of Schelling's development, the question of 'which Schelling' would not be entirely resolved, since his perspective appears to change dramatically even within a year or two. Hegel's claim that 'Schelling worked out his philosophy in view of the public' may have been unfair in certain respects, but it speaks to an essential feature of Schelling's thought, one which continued to characterise Schelling's development even after Hegel's death. To quote Hegel again: 'If we ask for a final work in which we shall find [Schelling's] philosophy represented with complete definiteness none such can be named.'¹

Schelling's thought is often divided up into five distinct periods, although Schelling himself certainly never saw his work as so discontinuous.² Recently, a number of commentators have followed Schelling's own self-appraisal in arguing for the continuity of Schelling's corpus.³ On my view, however, this continuity is only made intelligible if one can provide an account of the apparent *discontinuity* of Schelling's thinking. I follow S. J. McGrath, therefore, in holding that Schelling's philosophical perspective is best understood *through* its development, as an evolution of a *way* of thinking.⁴ In this thesis, I aim to shed light on Schelling's conception of the nature-spirit relation by focusing on the development of Schelling's thought from the late 1790s to the *Freedom* essay of 1809. My intention is not to exclude his earliest work or later development from consideration, and in fact, Schelling's philosophy post-1809 becomes important for arguments in Part II and the conclusion to this thesis. However, I take it that Schelling's most insightful views regarding the nature-spirit relation are presented in his *Freedom* essay, and I believe these views can only be properly grasped if they are seen to continue and transform a way of thinking that was begun in the

¹ W 20: 421; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, p. 513.

² The five periods are 1) Schelling's early, Fichtean-inspired idealism; 2) the philosophy of nature; 3) the identity philosophy; 4) the philosophy of freedom; and 5) the philosophy of revelation. Although this periodisation is somewhat helpful for dividing Schelling's output up thematically, it is fundamentally misleading, even if one wants to emphasise, as I do, the differences between Schelling's various stages of thought.

³ See, for example, Iain Hamilton Grant's influential reading of Schelling which has served to not only popularise the notion that Schelling's thought is entirely continuous (*Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, pp. 3-6) but has popularised Schelling's philosophy more generally by treating it as a viable philosophical perspective in the twenty-first century.

⁴ S. J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 2, 36.

early philosophy of nature.⁵ Thus, the first chapter of this thesis concerns Schelling's early nature philosophy or what he also calls 'speculative physics'.

Schelling developed his philosophy of nature after studying physics, chemistry, and physiology in Leipzig. He published his first work of nature philosophy, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* in 1797, followed by *On the World-Soul* in 1798. The latter work greatly impressed Goethe who was instrumental in Schelling's appointment as professor in Jena where he lectured on the philosophy of nature. The third major work of this period, *The First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, was published in 1799 as an outline for Schelling's lecture course. Although it was not reissued in the 1800s as were the *Ideas* and *On the World-Soul*, the *First Outline* is an equally important text, thanks in large part to its significant *Introduction* wherein Schelling spells out in no uncertain terms that nature philosophy is an independent branch of philosophical science, distinct from transcendental philosophy. In 1800, Schelling published his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, which does not belong to this independent branch of philosophy but is immediately followed by the *General Deduction of the Dynamic Process*, a work which has unfortunately received far less attention than the *System*, presumably due to the latter's superficial similarities to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Finally, in January of 1801, Schelling published a response to Eschenmayer's critique of the *First Outline* under the title, *On the True Concept of the Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems*.

Taken together, these texts constitute the bulk of Schelling's early philosophy of nature, and they lay the groundwork for Schelling's system of identity (1801-1804) and *Freedom* essay (1809), which were themselves devoted in large part to nature-philosophical themes. However, the protean character of Schelling's thought makes focusing even upon the nature philosophy texts of 1797-1801 a difficult task. For even if we limit ourselves to this period in Schelling's development, there appear to be major inconsistencies in the aims,

⁵ By beginning this study of Schelling's thought with his nature philosophy, I do not mean to imply that Schelling's work prior to 1797 is entirely separate from the project of nature philosophy, its transformation in the identity system, and its culmination in the essay on human freedom. On the contrary, even the texts which precede 1797 should be seen as continuous in important ways with Schelling's nature-philosophical vision. See Dalia Nassar, 'Pure versus Empirical Forms of Thought: Schelling's Critique of Kant's Categories and the Beginnings of Naturphilosophie', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52 (2014), pp. 113-134.

scope, and method of nature philosophy.⁶ Many of these inconsistencies can be interpreted in light of Schelling's gradual disentanglement from a subject-centred idealism, wherein nature remains strictly 'for consciousness', and his subsequent promotion of an 'absolute idealism' which is not subject-centred at all but is, rather, 'absolute' on account of its consideration of the ideational or rational forms within nature itself, barring any reference to consciousness. Thus, as Hegel notes, it is only through a 'gradual process...that Schelling raised himself above the Fichtean principle' and thereby begin to defend a version of idealism which is as concerned with the structure of the natural world as with that of human activity.⁷ Pinpointing Schelling's precise break with 'subjective idealism' is therefore a difficult task, and it is not one I propose to accomplish in this thesis. Instead, I will attempt to elucidate a general movement of thought at work within this stage of Schelling's development, with an eye towards the non-subjective ontology of nature as presented in the *Introduction to the Outline*, the *General Deduction of the Dynamic Process*, and *On the True Concept of the Philosophy of Nature*, all of which express Schelling's more developed views on the task of nature philosophy.⁸ This does not, however, preclude us from drawing upon the *Ideas*, *World-Soul*, or *First Outline*, since Schelling continues to stand by these texts as containing fundamental insights into the philosophy of nature, even if the framework within which these insights are found remains relatively 'subjectivist' or 'transcendental'.

⁶ By including the nature-philosophical works written during the period of 'identity philosophy' as part of the evolution of the nature philosophy, Joseph Esposito identifies 'at least six major reformulations of [Schelling's] system'. Joseph L. Esposito, *Schelling's Idealism and Philosophy of Nature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), p. 87.

⁷ *W 20*: 421; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, p. 513. We therefore find Schelling, in the *Ideas* of 1797, focusing exclusively upon why the transcendental subject is 'compelled' to conceive nature in particular ways, as Schelling continually qualifies his claims about reality, objectivity, and materiality as being 'for us'. See, for example, *SW I/2*: 29-30, 45; *Ideas*, pp. 23, 34. But by the time Schelling writes the *Introduction to the First Outline*, he has clearly disentangled himself from this subjectivist standpoint, and his philosophy of nature is without a doubt an *ontology* of nature, far more removed from the concerns of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* than was the *Ideas*. See, for example, the *Introduction to the Outline*, *SW I/3*: 273-274; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 195. As Robert F. Brown writes: 'Schelling's recognition of the genuine independence of the object comes gradually, as the successive essays on the philosophy of nature move further away from the transcendental perspective.' Robert F. Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809-1815* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), p. 92.

⁸ On this score, I follow Beiser who claims that the *Introduction to the Outline* constitutes the first unequivocal claim to nature philosophy's disciplinary autonomy and the *General Deduction* promotes the idea that nature philosophy is first philosophy. See Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 487-489.

Focusing on this early period of nature philosophy is meant to accomplish two goals: 1) to elucidate what exactly idealist ‘nature philosophy’ or ‘speculative physics’ is; and 2) to show how, in his early philosophy of nature, Schelling operates with two distinctive yet interrelated conceptions of the nature-spirit relation. This will allow me to consider Schelling’s first presentation of the identity philosophy (Chapter 2) and the *Freedom* essay (Chapter 3) in light of the project of speculative physics and the two conceptions of nature-spirit identity at work therein. To begin, let us consider how Schelling sees himself as pursuing an ontology of nature after Kant’s critical turn. Before doing so, it is important to note that the Kant presented here is Schelling’s Kant and the following should not, therefore, be taken as an attempt to do full justice to Kant’s thought.

1.3. Speculative Physics after Kant

Schelling’s relationship to Kant is extraordinarily complicated, and I do not intend to exhaust its details here. For our purposes, it is necessary to simply unpack the notion that Schelling’s philosophy of nature is, on the one hand, an explicit rejection of the epistemological limits of Kant’s system, and, on the other hand, is made possible only through a reconfiguration of the subject-object relation as conceived by the critical philosophy.

The first point, namely, Schelling’s distance from Kant’s epistemological ‘humility’, cannot be overstated. Schelling’s philosophy of nature is a rationalist *ontology* of nature, and it therefore seeks to uncover the necessary, rational structure of nature itself, without reference to any empirical or transcendental subjectivity. The aim of the philosophy of nature is therefore neither to provide a transcendental grounding for the physical sciences, as in Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations*, nor is it to work out the regulative ideas which allow the subject to conceive organic life *as if* it were intrinsically purposive, as in Kant’s third *Critique*. As we will see below, these texts are indeed important for particular developments within Schelling’s speculative physics, but the project of speculative physics itself has very little in common with Kant’s critical standpoint regarding the natural world. Indeed, from a

Schellingian perspective—and this is a point Hegel takes up without qualification—Kant’s philosophical engagement with nature is fundamentally flawed in its exclusive consideration of nature as conforming to the categories and forms of intuition of transcendental subjectivity. It is for this reason that when Schelling is distinguishing his project from the idealism of his immediate predecessors, he often refers to the idealism of the Greeks as inspirational,⁹ and that, with regard to modernity, Spinoza and especially Leibniz appear as interlocutors throughout Schelling’s nature philosophy texts. Indeed, when it comes to inquiring into the *being* of nature, Plato, Spinoza, and Leibniz all outstrip the standpoint of Kantian idealism, with its limitation of genuine cognition to the cognition of objects of *experience*.

And yet despite Schelling’s determination to reinvigorate the philosophical study of nature by considering the natural world *in itself*, Schelling never proposes to simply ‘return’ to pre-Kantian metaphysics. Kantian idealism remains central, for Schelling, not simply because he utilises Kant’s dynamic construction of matter and conception of life in his own philosophy of nature (1.6 and 1.9 below), but more importantly, because Schelling sees something truly revolutionary in Kant’s insistence upon the intimate connection between nature and human subjectivity. It is therefore crucial to understand the extent to which Schelling’s philosophy of nature, while it is indeed an ontology of nature, remains *post-Kantian*.¹⁰

Schelling’s philosophy of nature begins with nature itself, without reference to any transcendental subject. And to begin with nature itself is certainly to transgress the Kantian injunction against dogmatic metaphysics. But the Copernican turn is decisive for Schelling’s

⁹ Whenever the young Schelling refers to the ancients, it is almost exclusively the Platonic tradition he has in mind and almost never Aristotle. It is only in Schelling’s late thought that Aristotle becomes profoundly influential for his own philosophical project, and this, I take it, has more to do with Schelling’s newfound appreciation for scholasticism than anything else.

¹⁰ I therefore disagree with Iain Hamilton Grant’s interpretation of Schelling as *rejecting* Kant and Fichte in favour of a Platonist philosophy of nature. By opposing Schelling to the ‘subjective idealism’ of Kant and Fichte, Grant further downplays Schelling’s interest in the unique form of freedom expressed in human existence. While Grant has rightly emphasised the fact that, for Schelling, theoretical philosophy of nature grounds any practical philosophy of freedom, it is clear that Schelling himself sought to affirm the ontologically derivative freedom of *human* subjectivity as the apex—and, as we will see, *non-natural* apex—of his system. Cf. Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, pp. 3-14.

thought in that it exposes the intrinsic relationality between nature and human subjectivity. Kant rightly articulated how an *objective* nature is a ‘nature’ only insofar as it conforms to the categories of the subject—not, of course, a particular, empirical subject but subjectivity *as such*. Kant equally saw how this subjectivity is subjective only insofar as it makes objective experience possible, as the conditioning, categorial matrix of objective knowledge. As we will see, Schelling calls into question this reduction of nature’s total ontological structure to mere objectivity (a reduction which reaches new heights in Fichte’s conception of nature as the ‘Not-I’ posited by the ‘I’). But in order to understand Schelling’s critique, we must recognise that *implicit* in the Kantian conception of objectivity is the intrinsic relationality and, moreover, *unity* between the human subject and nature. Thanks to Kant’s revolution in thinking, one can no longer understand the objective and subjective as simply ‘other’ than one another—despite all of the dualisms that result from Kant’s system and lead to an unbridgeable divide between the subject and things-in-themselves. What Schelling takes away from Kant, then, is that to think nature properly requires us to conceive nature as the ‘objective’ side of a unity (*Einheit*) or ‘identity’ (*Identität*) between subject and object.

Schelling’s speculative physics therefore pursues two apparently contradictory paths: to conceive nature as it is *in itself*, without reference to a subject to which nature is ‘given’; and to conceive nature as an objective reality which is in some sense united with and even ‘identical’ to subjectivity. It is this apparently contradictory combination of tasks which distinguishes Schelling’s speculative physics as a distinctive programme of post-Kantian nature philosophy. It is also what makes possible the two conceptions of the nature-spirit relation I mentioned above and will explore in detail below. Let us therefore consider how Schelling understands nature philosophy to be, on the one hand, an ontological investigation into nature itself, and on the other hand, a philosophical programme committed to the intrinsic unity of nature and spirit.

1.4. Nature as Impersonal Subject

From a Schellingian perspective, Kant places limits on our knowledge of nature because he determines nature as *exclusively* objective, i.e. as something given. On the Kantian view, any discussion of cognising nature ‘in itself’ simply misunderstands the being of nature, which is precisely the objective realm of possible *experience*. It follows that, on the Kantian conception of nature, we can only know nature as it conforms to the categories of the understanding and the forms of intuition not because *we* are limited but because nature *just is* this objective field of givenness. In other words, underlying Kant’s apparent epistemological humility is an implicit ontological claim regarding nature, i.e., that nature is a strictly objective being entirely dependent upon the categories and human forms of intuition for it to be a nature at all. According to Schelling, then, Kant makes explicit the dominant assumption running throughout the modern period, namely, that nature is ontologically derivative and therefore dependent upon something *other* than it.¹¹ So long as nature is determined as exclusively ‘objective’, it will always be conceived as set over against or posited by a subjectivity external to, and more fundamental than, nature.

Schelling’s philosophy of nature is premised upon the absolute rejection of this modern assumption. For Schelling, nature can only be properly understood—and the relationship between nature and spirit can only be properly grasped—if the philosopher considers nature as actually existing in itself. In other words, the philosopher of nature must work out how it is that nature *is* without appeal to any extra-natural substance or activity. It is central to this project, therefore, to call into question the presupposition that nature is an ‘objective’ reality, i.e. a realm of being set over against a subjectivity which it is not. Inspired by the ancient conception of nature as *physis*, Schelling conceives nature not as a ‘being’, but as a coming-*into*-being, as the becoming, growth, and development *of* beings.

¹¹ As Schelling remarks in the *Freedom* essay, ‘The whole of modern European philosophy since its inception (through Descartes) has this common deficiency—that nature does not exist for it and that it lacks a living ground’ (*SW* I/7: 356; *Freedom*, p. 30, translation modified). See also the *Ideas* of 1803, *SW* I/2: 72-73; *Ideas*, pp. 54-55.

As Pierre Hadot remarks, Schelling thereby rediscovers the ‘ancient meaning of *phusis*, that is, of productivity and spontaneous blossoming.’¹²

In order to grasp the full extent of Schelling’s break with the modern conception of nature, we must note that this productive activity does not come to nature from without; it is not granted to nature by a transcendent divinity or a transcendental subject, but is intrinsic to nature itself as its immanent, *self-determining* productivity. It follows from this that any conception of nature as fundamentally ‘objective’ is misguided. For not only is nature a productive activity ontologically distinct from the derivative activity and relative stasis of the objective, but this nature is *subjective* or self-determining insofar as it acts *according to its own law*: ‘Since Nature gives itself its sphere of activity, no foreign power can interfere with it; all of its laws are immanent, or *Nature is its own legislator* (autonomy of Nature).’¹³

With Schelling’s characterisation of nature as autonomous, it becomes apparent that he doesn’t simply return to the Greek conception of nature, but rather comes to see nature as intrinsically developmental by extending the Kantian notion of the productive, transcendental subject *to nature itself*. The concept of subjectivity at work in Kantian idealism thus provides Schelling with the occasion to conceive nature as immanently active. We should note, however, that this ‘natural subjectivity’ is radically impersonal, more so even than the transcendental subject of the critical philosophy. For nature’s subjective activity is not structured in such a manner as to coincide with an anthropological character, as is Kant’s transcendental subject. On the contrary, the originary subjectivity described in Schelling’s system is unaware of its productive activity, incapable of reflecting back upon itself in any manner (e.g. through sensation or thought). The blind, productive activity of nature thus has little in common with any form of consciousness. And this is why Schelling’s transposition of the modern conception of the autonomous subject onto nature

¹² Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: an Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 274. Also, see the 1803 *Ideas*, (*SW* I/2: 70; *Ideas*, p. 52), where the physics of antiquity is seen as a special kind of discourse on nature, one destroyed by Bacon, Boyle, and Newton.

¹³ *SW* I/3: 17; *First Outline*, p. 17.

itself allows Schelling to conceive nature, along with the Greeks, as a cosmological process of ‘becoming’.

Schelling’s conception of nature as subject does not only signify that nature is a self-determining, non-objective activity. For this activity is productive and, *as* productive, must actually engender finite *products*. As Schelling most clearly articulates in the *First Outline* and its *Introduction*, nature must therefore be understood as fundamentally ‘duplicitous’, characterised by both productivity (*natura naturans*) and the natural products of that productivity (*natura naturata*). Nature as subjective productivity is therefore, like Kant’s transcendental subject, the condition for the possibility of objectivity; it is what makes possible the natural phenomena we encounter in the world, from inorganic matter to animal life.¹⁴ Nature, for Schelling, is thus both subjective and objective—subjective insofar as it is an infinite *activity*, objective insofar as this activity produces determinate, spatiotemporal *beings*. Nature is therefore not simply *there* as an objective realm set over against a human subject, but is also the infinite productivity whereby natural objects *come to be*. In this way, all natural products have as their fundamental being the originary productivity which nature itself is.

It is important to recognise, however, that this ‘fundamental being’ of nature is neither ‘fundamental’ nor a ‘being’ in any ordinary sense. *Natura naturans* is no foundational substance or being (*hypokeimenon* or *ens*) which would give rise to ontologically derivative beings.¹⁵ Rather, *natura naturans* is the condition for the possibility of substantial being, ‘the *principle* of everything objective’¹⁶ that is exhibited *within* each and every finite product. Thus, this ‘constructing activity’ makes all spatiotemporal beings

¹⁴ As Schelling puts it in the *General Deduction*, ‘The dynamic is for physics precisely that which the transcendental is for philosophy, and dynamic explanation means in physics precisely that which transcendental explanation means in philosophy’ (*SW* I/4: 75-76).

¹⁵ This is why Schelling insists that nature is not *a being* but sheer *activity* [*Tätigkeit*] (*SW* I/3: 11-12; *First Outline*, pp. 13-14). Although Schelling is clearly drawing upon Spinoza regarding *natura naturans* and the immanence of the modes, Schelling uses this Spinozist conception of nature to call into question Spinoza’s own substance ontology. For Schelling, not only is natural productivity the ‘unconditioned’ (*Unbedingt*) in that it is unconditioned by anything *other* than it, but this activity of production is also *not a ‘thing’* (Ding) in any sense—unlike, Schelling later argues, Spinoza’s substance. See Chapter 3 below.

¹⁶ *SW* I/3: 12; *First Outline*, p. 14.

possible because ‘every individual is, as it were, a particular expression of it.’¹⁷ Schelling does not, therefore, posit two orders of nature—a productive order and an order of products—but rather understands natural products as finite expressions of nature’s infinite activity, an activity which does not lie anywhere beyond those products but is nevertheless unexhausted by any determinate set of products. The ‘duplicity’ of nature, therefore, is in no way a ‘dualism’ of nature; nature is a ‘one’ that is intrinsically duplicitous.¹⁸

This allows us to see how Schelling conceives the immanence of nature’s subjective activity. Because nature is intrinsically both productivity and product, the determinacy of objects is not owed to their conforming to categories and forms of intuition extrinsic to them, but rather by the natural activity of which they are immanent expressions. Natural products have their ontological dependence only on the infinite productivity of nature itself, and this nature *just is* the production of those products. Productivity thus requires the products it engenders to be the productivity it is, and those products require their production in order to be the products they are. In this way, nature is a self-sufficient reality which is only ontologically dependent upon its own ‘duplicity’.

1.5. Reason in Nature

The notion that nature is a constructing activity responsible for conditioning the possibility of objectivity does not exhaust the manner in which nature is ‘subjective’ for Schelling. Whereas Kant assumes the forms of space and time to be utterly distinct from the self-determination of reason, Schelling understands the spatiotemporal cosmos to be immanently rational. And this immanent rationality signals, for Schelling, another sense in which nature

¹⁷ *SW I/3*: 11; *First Outline*, p. 13. Emphasis removed.

¹⁸ We should note that, in the *First Outline*, nature’s duplicity cuts deeper than this distinction between productivity and product, since productivity *itself* is understood as intrinsically duplicitous. According to Schelling, for productivity to actually *be productive*, i.e. for productivity to yield real products, that productivity must be inhibited. For if productivity were simply infinite activity, we could not account for how that activity became localised in finite, determinate products. What is required, according to Schelling, is an inhibiting activity at work within productivity itself, such that *natura naturans* is understood as both productivity and a force of *anti-production*. As Schelling puts it in the *Introduction to the Outline*, there is thus an originary duplicity which ‘[arises] in productivity itself’ (*SW I/3*: 308; *Introduction to the Outline*, pp. 218-219).

is ‘subjective’. Yet again, Schelling goes ‘beyond’ Kant by transposing defining features of transcendental subjectivity onto nature itself.¹⁹

Schelling is unequivocal that nature is rationally structured and therefore knowable, at least in principle.²⁰ This does not mean that our knowledge of nature’s rational structure should be derived without any reference to experience, an idea which Schelling finds absurd.²¹ To assume that knowledge of nature’s rational structure implies turning a blind eye to experience is to misconstrue the meaning of a priori knowledge and the very project of rationalism. According to Schelling, judgments about the structure of nature prove to be ‘*a priori* principles [only] when we become conscious of them as *necessary*’.²²

Every judgment which is merely historical for me—i.e., a judgment of experience—becomes, notwithstanding, an *a priori* principle as soon as I arrive, whether directly or indirectly, at insight into its internal necessity...It is *not, therefore*, that WE KNOW *Nature* as *a priori*, but *Nature* IS *a priori*; that is, everything individual in it is predetermined by the whole or by the idea of Nature generally. But if Nature *is a priori*, then it must be possible to *recognize* it as something that is *a priori*, and this is really the meaning of our affirmation [that in the philosophy of nature ‘all that we know, we know absolutely *a priori*’].²³

A speculative investigation into nature is a philosophical activity that seeks the necessary structure of nature itself. However one happens to come to the *knowledge* of nature’s rational structure, the philosophy of nature explores the manner in which nature is organised

¹⁹ See, for example, the *General Deduction*, § 63: ‘The idealist is justified in making reason the autonomous creator of all things, for reason is grounded in nature itself’ (*SW*, I/4: 77). It is important to note, however, that in the *General Deduction* and *On the True Concept*, Schelling has begun to think of nature’s *objectivity* as the active, productive dimension of nature.

²⁰ In his *Lectures on the Method of Academic Studies*, Schelling affirms the notion that philosophy, along with mathematics, is a ‘purely rational science’ (*SW* I/5: 248-256; *On University Studies*, pp. 42-50).

²¹ *SW* I/3: 278; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 198.

²² *SW* I/3: 278; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 198. My emphasis.

²³ *SW* I/3: 278-279; *Introduction to the Outline*, pp. 198-199. Citation in brackets from *SW* I/3: 277; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 197.

as a system according to its immanent, rational necessity. Schellingian philosophy of nature is thus an unapologetically rationalist programme.²⁴

This is a point worth emphasising, since it has become something of a commonplace to see Schelling as at the very least opposed to rationalism if not outright irrationalist in his philosophical tendencies, especially as he becomes increasingly interested in mythology and the possibility of a ‘philosophical religion’ in his later years. Indeed, the essential difference between Schelling and Hegel is often identified as pertaining to Schelling’s supposed rejection of Hegel’s rationalism beginning with the *Freedom* essay and becoming more explicit throughout Schelling’s development.²⁵ That in his later Berlin lectures Schelling becomes fixated on empirical contingency as that which is left out of a rationalist account of reality should not overshadow the fact that even in that late work, Schelling remains committed to the idea that philosophical science ought to present the ontologically necessary features of reality through a system of impersonal or cosmological reason. In the 1850 lecture ‘On the Source of the Eternal Truths’, for example, Schelling holds that it is possible to derive the ontological necessity of plant life from sheer reason, even if we cannot ever guarantee that we have been successful in doing so: ‘A continuous progression is discoverable from the highest Idea of reason all the way down to the plant as a necessary moment of the same.’²⁶ What the late Schelling does call into question—and here is a decisive difference between Schelling and Hegel that I will not consider in this thesis—is *why* being is rationally structured. However, even at this late stage in Schelling’s thought where he enters into a consideration of the ground of reason, Schelling never questions the

²⁴ As we will see in Chapter 4, Hegel has a similar conception of the relationship between the rational structure of nature (knowledge about which can be characterised as a priori knowledge), and the way we come to know that rational structure (which necessarily draws upon experience). Neither Schelling nor Hegel, in other words, believe that the idealist philosophy of nature could have been constructed without the sciences of their day, and yet this does not make nature’s structure any less determined by rational necessity.

²⁵ See, for example, Bruce Matthews’s Introduction to *The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, pp. 54-68. Matthews, in fact, sees Schelling as having *always* had in mind a philosophical activity based in the intuition of life and experience of freedom, even in the early work. Cf. Matthews, *Schelling and the Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

²⁶ *SW* II/1: 576-577; ‘On the Source of the Eternal Truths’, p. 57. Whether or not we can *show* the necessary movement from the Idea to the essence of the plant is not the crucial point for Schelling. *In itself*, according to Schelling, there is a necessary link between ‘the highest Idea of reason’ and the ‘multiply conditioned and complex possibility of the plant’ (*SW* II/1: 576; ‘On the Source of the Eternal Truths’ p. 57).

view held in his early nature philosophy that the ontological gradations of nature are rationally necessitated—not from on high, but from within nature itself, as the unfolding of nature’s immanent, structural sequence.

It is helpful, then, that Alison Stone has pointed out that the early Schelling’s conception of nature as ‘productivity’ is intrinsically bound up with his conception of nature as a *rational* system.²⁷ As Stone argues, Schelling does not explain the productivity of nature in terms of an irrational will, as does Schopenhauer. Instead, Schelling conceives the activity of nature—even when he begins to understand this activity as, indeed, one of ‘willing’²⁸—as a *rational* activity on the part of nature as ‘subject’. For ‘subject’ designates, in idealism, not only ‘self-determining activity’ as opposed to objective being,²⁹ but an activity that is pursued rationally, motivated by reason (if not reasons). To be sure, the rationality of nature remains a ‘blind’ rationality so long as it is non-conscious and generally non-reflective; productivity does not relate *to* itself through sensation or thought, and it does not make decisions about what products it engenders through any reflection upon its aims. Nevertheless, the manner in which nature generates products is rational and, indeed, teleological, since it follows a course which nature itself posits, a course leading from inorganic forces to magnetism, electricity, chemical processes, organic life, and, ultimately, human freedom. According to Schelling, this final stage of nature’s development is unique in that its appearance within nature’s development signals the need for a second branch of philosophical science, a system of transcendental idealism which would unpack the ontological structure of consciousness as a unique natural product capable of reflecting upon nature’s own rational process. But prior to the emergence of consciousness at the end of the

²⁷ Alison Stone, ‘The Philosophy of Nature’ in *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Michael Forster and Kristin Gjesdal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 320.

²⁸ Stone does not herself connect the early Schelling’s nature philosophy to his conception of the will in the *Freedom* essay. See my account of this connection in Chapter 3.9 below.

²⁹ As Schelling puts it in a note to the *First Outline*, ‘The philosopher of nature treats nature as the transcendental philosopher treats the self. . . This is not possible, however, if we proceed from objective being in Nature’ (*SWI*/2: 12n; *First Outline*, p. 14n).

system of nature, the entire development of nature has already been *rational*—without any reference to conscious reflection.³⁰

At times, Schelling's rationalism leads him to argue that 'there is no chance in nature at all', since the *whole* of nature is a self-determining, rational system.³¹ On this score, Schelling is distinct from Hegel, for whom the production of individual natural entities is rational *only* insofar as nature must necessarily particularise itself, which also means, for Hegel, that nature gives itself over to *contingent* determination.³² As we will see in Chapter 4, Hegel insists that nature is both rational and yet lacking in robust self-determination, and in this way Hegel conceives nature as ontologically impoverished. From a Schellingian perspective, Hegel's conception of nature as an impoverished sphere of reason is unjustified, since nature is itself a *wholly* rational system, even though nature becomes *more* rational as it potentiates itself in successively more robust forms of rational organisation. With this, we hit upon a fundamental difference between Schelling and Hegel, but one which will require a more detailed consideration when we turn to Hegel's own philosophy of nature. At this stage, let us simply note the following: on Schelling's view, the lower stages of nature do not *lack* anything; they are not defined by ontological negativity, but are driven to express

³⁰ As Schelling remarks in the *Introduction to the Outline*, 'We suggest that all phenomena are correlated in one absolute an *necessary* law, from which they can all be deduced' (*SW I/3*: 276; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 197).

³¹ *SW I/3*: 278; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 198. See also the *First Outline*: 'If there were chance in Nature—just *one* accident—then you would catch sight of Nature in universal lawlessness. Because everything that happens in Nature happens with blind necessity, everything that happens or that arises is an expression of an eternal law and of an unimpugnable form' (*SW I/3*: 186; *First Outline*, p. 135).

³² See Chapters 4 and 7 below.

themselves as *more* rationally self-determining on account of their immanent *power*, their intrinsic striving and potential to *be more rational*.³³

One difficulty attending any comparison of Schelling and Hegel on the question of nature's rationality is that Hegel has a far more restricted conception of 'rational necessity' than does Schelling. For Schelling, rational necessity is not strictly onto-*logical* necessity, as it is for Hegel; instead, a feature of reality is 'rational', according to Schelling, so long as its being is determined by its function within the whole system of nature. Nature is, for Schelling, a 'purposive creatrix' who has 'brought forth all the multiplicity of species, types, *and individuals* in the world'.³⁴ This teleological conception of rational necessity means that *actual phenomena*—and not only their intrinsic, logical *structures*—should be interpreted as rationally necessitated by nature itself, as opposed to being generated by some contingent, natural-historical process.³⁵ This is why, despite Schelling's commitment to an

³³ Thus, as Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback points out, 'Schelling denies the traditional metaphysical conception that *omnis determinatio est negatio*, that every delimitation is a negation, both of another delimitation and of the whole. Singularity is not the lack of a totality. It is in itself—that is, in its life—a totality. Singularity is in itself a whole, the whole affirmation of itself, as the whole affirmation of its own force' (Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, 'The Work of Experience: Schelling on Thinking beyond Image and Concept' in *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings*, ed. by Jason Wirth [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005], p. 74). As Schelling puts it in 'Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature', 'Definiteness of form in nature is never a negation but always an affirmation [*Bejahung*]. Generally, of course, you think of a body's shape as a restriction which it undergoes; if, however, you were to turn your attention to *creative force* [*schaffende Kraft*], it would strike you as the bounds which this latter sets itself and within which it appears as a truly meaningful force. For the *ability* to set one's own bounds is everywhere regarded as an excellence, indeed one of the highest. Similarly, most people look upon the single creature as a negative, namely as that which is not the whole or all: the single creature, however, does not subsist through its limitation, but through the force that inhabits it, by means of which it asserts itself as a whole on its own in relation to the whole' (*SW* I/7 303; 'Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature', p. 334, translation modified, my emphasis). See also Daniel Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 178-179.

³⁴ *SW* I/2: 269; *Ideas*, p. 214. My emphasis. Note that this passage from the *Ideas* is far more Kantian in that Schelling argues that we only *think* of nature as such a self-determining whole. Nevertheless, it is clear from the *First Outline* that Schelling does not revise his conception of nature as 'purposive creatrix' (*zweckmäßige Schöpferin*) except in that he understands this to be a constitutive, as opposed to regulative, claim about nature.

³⁵ As Schelling begins, in the identity philosophy, to conceive of individuation as a breaking away (and eventually a 'fall') from the absolute, he attempts to provide an account of history which is not strictly rational. However, he does not thereby rely on *contingency* as explanatory, but rather upon the freedom of the individual to separate itself from the absolute of which it remains a part: 'Now, it is clear that the process by which an Idea is progressively realized—such that the whole (though never the particulars) is adequate to it—must express itself as history. History is neither a purely rational process subject to the concept, nor is it purely irrational; rather it combines necessity in the whole with the appearance of freedom in the individual' (*SW* I/5: 280; *On University Studies*, pp. 75-76). Thus, even when Schelling appears to loosen up on his extreme rationalism of the whole-part relation, he does not interpret the history of particular entities as contingently determined (until his late philosophy where contingency takes on central significance).

ahistorical account of nature's total organisation (that is, until the *Ages of the World*), he nevertheless emphasises *production*, *genesis*, and *creation* as central to any ontology of nature.³⁶ Now, in his later years, Schelling does distinguish between a rationalism of essences (negative philosophy) and an empiricism of contingently existing particulars (positive philosophy). But prior to that period, Schelling appears to promote a rationalist philosophy of nature in which both nature's general stages (or forms) *and* its particular, individuated entities are understood as necessary features of a rationally ordered cosmos. As I will argue in the conclusion to this thesis, this extreme form of rationalism ultimately gives Schelling's philosophy of nature a significant edge over Hegel's, since it implies that the actual history of nature, wherein particular natural entities emerge as ontologically distinct from other natural entities, is of consequence to a complete systematic account of nature's reality (although this idea is only made explicit in the unfinished *Ages of the World* and is subsequently retracted in Schelling's positive philosophy).

With these remarks, it looks as though Schelling's nature philosophy isn't so far from Krug's characterisation of it as a systematic derivation of individual, finite entities from sheer reason, and one might be tempted to ask, along with Krug, for the strictly rational derivation of the existence of particular dogs and horses, a pen, or even the determinate personalities of Alexander the Great and Cicero.³⁷ But this would be to misunderstand Schelling's insistence upon the rational character of nature's productivity. Although any given natural product is, for Schelling, a rationally necessary part of nature's total reality, individual products are never the focus of speculative physics. On the contrary, the philosophy of nature 'aims generally at the inner clockwork [*Triebwerk*] and what is

³⁶ And in fact, intimating what is to come in the *Ages of the World*, Schelling suggests in the *First Outline* that a philosophical consideration of nature's productivity, when properly speculative, could amount to a genuinely *scientific* account of natural history: '*Natural history* has been, until now, really the *description of Nature*, as Kant has very correctly remarked...However, if the idea set out above were put into practice, then the name "natural history" would get a much higher meaning, for then there would actually be a *history* of Nature itself' (*SW* I/3: 68; *First Outline*, p. 53). Schelling goes on to say that nature's history would be properly historical if it proved to 'gradually [bring] forth the whole multiplicity of its products' through a *free* and yet *lawful* (i.e. rationally necessary) development (*SW* I/3: 68; *First Outline*, p. 53).

³⁷ See Hegel's response to Krug's critique of Schelling in *W* 2: 188-207; 'How the Ordinary Human Understanding Takes Philosophy (as displayed in the works of Mr. Krug)', pp. 292-310. Cf. Lauer, *The Suspension of Reason in Hegel and Schelling*, pp. 80-82.

nonobjective in nature',³⁸ and the natural products of this non-objective *Triebwerk* are only discussed in general terms, as products which are expressions of nature's fundamental activity. Thus, the rational world-system which is indeed responsible for producing particular objects—without any dependence upon contingency—is the focus of speculative physics.³⁹ And according to Schelling, we grasp the *being* of this rational system not by concerning ourselves with the production of a particular geological feature or organism (despite the rational character of their generation), but by uncovering the necessary sequence of nature's general forms of which particular entities are expressions. Thus, the productivity of nature must be conceived not only as the productivity of products, but as the activity which organises the whole of nature in terms of general 'categories' of natural entities and processes. The early philosophy of nature is, then, exclusively concerned with elucidating the ahistorical development from inorganic matter to life and human freedom. As Schelling puts it, 'the fundamental task of all nature philosophy [is to] TO DERIVE THE DYNAMIC GRADUATED SEQUENCE OF STAGES [*STUFENFOLGE*] IN NATURE',⁴⁰ which we now see has nothing to do with the rational derivation of finite products.

Schelling's *On the World-Soul* is his first work to thematise the rational connections throughout all of nature's general stages, from matter and light to heat, air, electricity, magnetic polarity, and finally to the organic processes which define plant and animal life.⁴¹ Indeed, it is in this work that Schelling first conceives nature as one total organisation within which every feature of nature becomes intelligible. But it is with the *Introduction to the Outline* and the *General Deduction* that Schelling settles upon a conceptual apparatus that can explain the connections between these various phenomena.⁴² From this point on, Schelling's philosophy of nature is a philosophy of nature's 'powers' or

³⁸ *SW* I/3: 275; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 196.

³⁹ *SW* I/3: 307; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 218: 'A true system of natural history...has for its object not the *products* of Nature but *Nature itself*.'

⁴⁰ *SW* I/3: 6; *First Outline*, p. 6.

⁴¹ The *Ideas*, which precedes *On the World-Soul*, is far too empiricist in its methodology to be understood in this manner.

⁴² Schelling does use the term '*Potenz*' prior to this period, but it is only in these texts, and especially the *General Deduction*, that the term takes centre stage in his system.

‘potencies’ (*Potenzen*), a mathematical term taken over from Eschenmayer’s philosophy of nature but put to a very different use by Schelling.⁴³ Below, I will consider this difference between Schelling and Eschenmayer in more detail, for it remains central to Schelling’s thought throughout the remainder of his life and is essential to how he conceives nature and spirit as ontologically continuous yet distinct. Here, we need only note that, according to Schelling, each stage of nature’s rational structure is characterised by the immanent *elevation* of matter to a higher level of organisation. For example, within the domain of strictly inorganic nature, there is an immanent development from magnetism, which Schelling identifies as the ‘first potency’ of qualitative determinacy, to electricity, the ‘second potency’, and this immanent development can be understood as a ‘potentiation’ (*Potenzierung*) wherein matter is raised from the first to the second power. It is important to keep in mind that this potentiation of matter is not a historical process, as if magnetised matter *became* electrified. ‘Potentiation’ does not name a historical process, but an ontological set of relations. Thus, electricity expresses the same polarity as magnetism, but it does so at a more complex level of organisation. As we will see below, this allows Schelling to conceive the various features of inorganic and organic nature as qualitatively distinct expressions of the same material ‘base’. Potentiation is thus meant to account for the material diversity of nature as stemming from nature’s intrinsic unity.

In *On the True Concept*, Schelling suggests a profoundly idiosyncratic method for understanding the rational movement at work from one potency to another. According to this text, the philosopher of nature must abstract from the higher potencies of nature—life and consciousness—and sink into the lowest levels of materiality—the inorganic, impersonal basis *of* life and consciousness. Schelling calls this method of abstracting from the ‘I’ ‘depotentiation’, a process whereby the philosopher descends from the height nature has achieved in humanity and plunges into the inorganic depths from which consciousness

⁴³ First, Eschenmayer’s nature philosophy is Kantian and is not, therefore, an *ontological* investigation of nature as is Schelling’s speculative physics. Second, Eschenmayer retains the strictly quantitative sense of *Potenz* and does not, as does Schelling, conceive the potentiation of nature as involving qualitative determinacy. See 1.8 below.

emerged.⁴⁴ From the ‘depotentiated’ standpoint, then, the philosopher—no longer a ‘consciousness’—can mimic *nature*’s activity of potentiation, moving dialectically from the inorganic forces of nature to their qualitative expression (magnetism, electricity, and chemical process) and organic life (sensibility, irritability, and formative drive) before he finally returns to consciousness as if awaking from sleep.

The method of depotentialization is not one Schelling advances throughout his nature-philosophical texts, but it is helpful to elucidate Schelling’s general commitment to a rationalist ontology of nature wherein consciousness is shown to emerge from nature’s non-conscious stages of reason. And because depotentialization is only possible thanks to the ontological *continuity* throughout nature, this method also highlights a key difference between speculative physics, on the one hand, and any empirical approach to nature, on the other. Whether Schelling presents nature’s immanent potentiation by ‘abstracting’ from consciousness (depotentiation), through some form of intellectual intuition, or through the geometrical method, Schelling takes himself to be engaged in a *philosophical* consideration of nature insofar as the connections between each of nature’s stages are elucidated as *rationally explicable*. This does not mean that Schelling ignores the natural sciences of his day; on the contrary, he is profoundly engaged with those sciences. Empiricism, however, only ever considers nature as it is *given*, regarding nature ‘as something already prepared and accomplished’ as opposed to something which requires *explanation* from a theoretical perspective.⁴⁵ To explain the diverse phenomena of the natural world is, for Schelling, not to simply understand *what* there is, but to unpack nature’s *why*.⁴⁶ Thus, the nature philosopher seeks why the Earth is composed of magnetic poles; why certain forms of material

⁴⁴ *SW* I/4: 85; *On the True Concept*, p. 12. See also Daniel Whistler’s excellent analysis of this text, ‘Schelling’s Doctrine of Abstraction’ in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 26 *Schelling: Powers of the Idea* (2014), pp. 58-81.

⁴⁵ *SW* I/3: 283; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 201.

⁴⁶ On my view, Schelling never gives up on the rationalist project of explaining *why* there are the forms of nature that there are through rational derivation. What the late Schelling becomes critical of is not the idea that reason can disclose why nature’s *Stufenfolge* unfolds as the *Stufenfolge* it is, but the inability of reason to explain why there *is* a rationally structured nature *in the first place*. The late Schelling’s positive philosophy is thus meant to address the question ‘why the *why*?’, i.e. to seek the ground *of* rational grounds. As Schelling puts it in his Munich lectures on the history of modern philosophy: ‘The whole world lies, so to speak, in the nets of the understanding or of reason, but the question is *how* exactly it got into those nets’ (*SW* I/10: 143; *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 147).

organisation become sentient; and, ultimately, why spiritual freedom is a necessary feature of reality. While such explanations require reference to experiential knowledge, experience does not itself provide answers to the speculative philosopher's questions.⁴⁷ Such answers are only provided by a philosophical activity of reason (however that activity is to be construed).⁴⁸

Speculative physics is thus a distinctive enterprise on account of its attention to the rationale at work in nature's self-potentiating activity. If we now step back and consider the entire sequence of nature's stages we learn something further about the task of speculative physics. The derivation of nature's graduated sequence of stages does not only account for the unity of nature's diverse phenomena, but it reveals that nature's unity is a particular kind of unity, namely, a *scala naturae* that is only intelligible *from the bottom up*. The higher forms of nature and even spiritual freedom are therefore not only taken into account as part of a larger system, but they are shown to be ontologically dependent upon the lower forms of nature. Indeed, organic life and spirit are inorganic nature 'raised to higher powers'. From this perspective, we see that when the philosophy of nature derives nature's *Stufenfolge*, it provides an account of how inorganic nature necessitates the existence of life and spiritual freedom. In other words, the philosophy of nature is meant to account for the movement from nature to spirit. This is the 'physical explanation of idealism' of which Schelling speaks in the *General Deduction*.⁴⁹ And with this realisation we arrive at the second sense in which nature can be approached 'in itself' and yet as intrinsically united with subjectivity. For not only is nature intrinsically subjective, constructive, and rational, but nature

⁴⁷ This is why 'our science has an ineluctable demand to fulfill: that it accompany its *a priori* constructions with corresponding external intuitions, since otherwise these constructions would not have meaning for us anymore; no more than the theory of color for those born sightless' (*SW I/3: 20; First Outline*, p. 19).

⁴⁸ I consider the method of a rationalist nature philosophy in more detail in Chapter 4.4. Note that from this perspective Fichte's subjective idealism is also insufficiently rationalist, since it treats nature as something merely opposed to consciousness without explaining why this nature is the way it is. As Schelling puts it in his letter to Fichte of November 1800, 'for the philosopher himself, reality is not something simply found, but [is such] only for ordinary consciousness.' Schelling's letter to Fichte, 19 November, 1800 *Briefe und Dokumente II*, p. 295; *The Philosophical Rupture Between Fichte and Schelling*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ *SW I/4: 76*. This is also what Schelling means in the *Introduction to the Outline* when he says that nature philosophy is an inverted form of transcendental philosophy which aims to show how 'the ideal must arise out of the real and admit of explanation from it' (*SW I/3: 272; Introduction to the Outline*, p. 194, emphasis modified).

constitutes a self-potentiating process that culminates in the emergence of *spiritual* subjectivity.

1.6. Two Models of Nature-Spirit Identity

We now understand that the task of speculative physics is to present the emergence of spirit from nature as its non-spiritual ground. As I will argue in Chapter 3, Schelling's account of the nature-spirit relation in the *Freedom* essay involves a reformulation of this basic, nature-philosophical perspective according to which nature is conceived as a non-spiritual yet subjective activity productive of spiritual freedom as an ontologically distinct form of existence. What I am calling Schelling's logic of emergence is therefore incomprehensible without reference to the manner in which spiritual subjectivity immanently emerges from nature as ontologically distinct.

However, in the early philosophy of nature, Schelling seems, at times, to understand the impersonal, subjective dimension of nature as not only generative *of* spirit, but as *itself* spiritual. In such instances, Schelling describes nature as the 'real' manifestation or 'visible' expression of spirit. The passage which most clearly articulates this conception of nature as spiritual—and one which is often cited as central to Schelling's distinctive philosophical vision—is found in the Introduction to the *Ideas*, where Schelling describes the 'absolute identity' of nature and spirit as follows: 'Nature should be spirit made visible, spirit the invisible nature.'⁵⁰ On my view, this formulation of Schelling's confuses matters greatly, as it implies that nature is not, in fact, ontologically primary, but is simply spirit under a different guise. Moreover, it makes of spirit a merely 'invisible' expression of nature, as if the ontological specificity of consciousness were reducible to something simply natural. Since this second conception of the nature-spirit relation throws the ontological specificity of both nature and spirit into question, it deeply complicates Schelling's logic of emergence.

Another way to put this is that Schelling's early philosophy of nature suggests two distinctive ways of conceiving the relationship between nature and spirit and, at first blush,

⁵⁰ *SW* I/2: 56; *Ideas*, p. 42. Translation modified.

they look to be mutually exclusive options. It is tempting—particularly considering the aims of the present study—to simply dismiss the conception of the nature-spirit relation described in the above paragraph as inessential to Schelling’s thought of this period. One could reasonably argue, with reference to Schelling’s growing dissatisfaction with subjective idealism at the close of the eighteenth century, that while the *Ideas* certainly involves a conception of nature as ‘visible spirit’, it does not take long for Schelling to revise this view. Although *On the World-Soul* appears to also conceive nature ‘spiritually’, this would be to misunderstand both the Platonist conception of the *anima mundi* and Schelling’s utilisation of that conception in his text of 1798, where the ‘world-soul’ is better understood as the self-animating activity of nature’s complex of inorganic forces.⁵¹ And by the *General Deduction* of 1800 it is fully clear that Schelling conceives nature as ontologically distinct from and more fundamental than spirit, consciousness being utterly dependent upon inorganic natural processes.⁵² From this perspective, then, it would be misguided to give too much weight to Schelling’s formulation of the nature-spirit relation in the *Ideas* of 1797.

Alternatively, one could argue that Schelling uses the language of spirit differently in different instances. At times ‘spirit’ may signify the more general, rational structure of being (i.e. the subjective activity which I have identified as the impersonal productivity of nature), while at other times ‘spirit’ may signify human consciousness as a distinctive, ontological structure, a form which is only spiritual insofar as it is a transformation or potentiation of nature’s *non*-spiritual processes. This would at the very least recognise that the term *Geist* does not operate within Schelling’s philosophy as monosemic, but rather expresses a number of different meanings depending on systematic context.⁵³ It would also provide us with an analogue in Schelling’s thought to a difficulty I will address in Part II regarding Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*, a difficulty which also involves the seeming flexibility of the concept of

⁵¹ Note the hypothetical character of the ‘world-soul’ concept, which is explicit in the full title of the book, *Von der Weltseele, eine Hypothese der höheren Physik zur Erklärung des allgemeinen Organismus*.

⁵² See, in particular, *SW I/4*: § 63, 75-78.

⁵³ I address this issue in more detail in the Appendix to this thesis, where I consider Schelling’s turn after the *Freedom* essay to a consideration of spirits (*Geister*) and the spirit-world (*Geisterwelt*).

Geist.⁵⁴ We could arguably, then, dismiss the conception of nature as ‘visible spirit’ as simply a different usage, on Schelling’s part, of this polysemic term.

The problem with both of these interpretive strategies is that they too swiftly resolve a tension within Schelling’s nature philosophy that isn’t resolved by Schelling himself until much later in his philosophical development. On my view, the early philosophy of nature never satisfactorily addresses this tension, because Schelling continues in these works to hold on to a conception of nature and spirit as two aspects of the same being—even when this is an implicit, background assumption, as is the case in the *General Deduction* and *On the True Concept*. Indeed, this is why the second edition of the *Ideas* published in 1803 does not revise the view of nature as ‘visible spirit’, but only further substantiates that perspective: ‘The real side of the eternal act is revealed in nature; nature in itself, or eternal nature, is just spirit born into objectivity.’⁵⁵ As I see it, then, Schelling’s early nature philosophy does operate with two distinctive conceptions of nature-spirit identity, one which is far more central to the explicit programme of the philosophy of nature and a second that is operative in the background of that project and reemerges as an explicit theme in the publications associated with the so-called system of identity (which includes a number of nature philosophy texts including the second editions of both the *Ideas* and *On the World-Soul*). What is necessary, then, is to consider how these two ‘models’ of the nature-spirit relation are themselves related within Schelling’s philosophy of nature.

First, we can note that both models of conceiving the nature-spirit relation turn on the notion that nature and spirit are in some sense ‘identical’. Indeed, accounting for the ‘identity’ of nature and spirit is the only way that the philosophy of nature will ever overcome the oppositional dualism of Cartesian metaphysics. What makes the absolute idealist project unique, however, is not simply its insistence upon the identity of nature and spirit, but its insistence that this identity is one inclusive of real difference. On Schelling’s view—and as we will see, this is equally true for Hegel—nature and spirit can only be *absolutely* identified if they are in some sense different from one another, since absolute

⁵⁴ See Chapter 4.8.

⁵⁵ *SW* I/2: 66; *Ideas*, p. 50. Translation modified.

identity is the identity of identity *and difference*. We should therefore consider the different ways that Schelling conceives this identity and difference of nature and spirit.

One way Schelling understands nature and spirit to be identical and different is through spirit's immanent emergence from nature. Throughout the following three chapters, I call this an 'identity of emergence' and oppose it to the 'identity of coincidence' or 'originary identity' in which nature and spirit are identical, different, and yet coincide as inverse aspects of the same being. Because the language of emergence might imply something along the lines of historical genesis, allow me to reiterate: Potentiation is not a historical process; Schelling is interested in the *structural* emergence of spirit from nature, i.e. the rational necessity whereby nature raises itself to the standpoint of freedom in consciousness.⁵⁶ The emergence of spirit from nature is therefore analogous to the positing of the 'Not-I' by the 'I' in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and it is helpful to consider Schellingian emergence in light of Fichte's system. Fichte does not propose that empirical consciousness actually posits the objective world as its other *in time*. Rather, transcendental subjectivity *just is* the activity of self-positing through the positing of an 'other', i.e. nature.⁵⁷ It is in this sense that Fichte claims that critical philosophy is a '*genetic* deduction of what we find in our consciousness'.⁵⁸ The emergence of spirit in Schelling's nature philosophy is Fichtean in this formal sense; both philosophers are concerned with an ahistorical, ontological relation between nature and spirit. According to the Schellingian logic of emergence, which inverts Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, spirit is dependent upon nature as an ontologically distinct reality, and this relation of immanent emergence proves the identity *and* difference of nature and spirit. For spirit is *identical* to nature, according to Schelling, insofar as it is an immanent product of a strictly natural activity, spirit being the

⁵⁶ Starting with the *Ages of the World*, however, Schelling understands the potencies to not only be historically related but as the ontological development of time itself. I return to this issue in the conclusion to this thesis.

⁵⁷ Boris Gasparov recounts an anecdote in which Fichte responds to Friedrich Schlegel's enthusiasm about historicising the self by saying that he, i.e. Fichte, 'would rather count beans than muse about history'. Boris Gasparov, *Beyond Pure Reason: Ferdinand de Saussure's Philosophy of Language and Its Early Romantic Antecedents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 128.

⁵⁸ 'Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* or, of So-called "Philosophy"', Preface to the Second Edition, in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. by Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 97.

telos of nature's inner development; yet spirit is *different* from nature insofar as this *telos* is itself *non-natural*, an activity which, although it emerges from nature, is not a *natural* activity. Note that the identity between nature and spirit is, on this model, entirely dependent upon the manner in which nature differentiates itself *as spirit*. In other words, both the identity *and* difference between nature and spirit is dependent upon nature's unique ontological structure as generative of spiritual freedom.

From this perspective, Schelling's philosophy of nature is rightly understood as 'Fichte standing on his head', and we have before us the distinctively Schellingian understanding of the nature-spirit relation as one of emergence.⁵⁹ But what about the second conception of nature-spirit identity? In order to understand this second model of identity, we need only recognise that despite Schelling's commitment to the priority of nature philosophy and the programme of conceiving spirit as emergent from nature, he also accepts that philosophy must include a Fichtean account of our *cognition* of nature. Schellingian philosophy does not end, therefore, with the emergence of spirit in the nature philosophy, but includes a full account of consciousness as the condition for the possibility of *cognising* the natural world, this latter dialectic being traced in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*.⁶⁰ Schelling's interest in a transcendental account of objective cognition does not, in itself, complicate matters. But it is clear from Schelling's remarks of this period that, if we take a step back from both nature philosophy and transcendental idealism, we discover that both branches of philosophical science are possible because nature and spirit are *fundamentally* identical, cut from the same ontological cloth.⁶¹ Whether one focuses on the

⁵⁹ Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 507.

⁶⁰ We learn in the *General Deduction* (which I take to contain a more reliable account of Schelling's position than the *System of Transcendental Idealism*) that it is only through nature's intrinsic, graduated sequence of stages, at the end of which man 'erupts' from nature, that we can make a transition to the system of transcendental idealism and thereby account for the manner in which objects conform to the subjectivity of consciousness (*SW* I/4: 75-78). Schelling clarifies this dependence of transcendental idealism on the philosophy of nature in *On the True Concept*, where he states unequivocally that the philosophy of nature is *first* philosophy, 'because it lets the standpoint of idealism itself first come into being, and thereby provides for it a secure, purely theoretical foundation' (*SW* I/4: 92; *On the True Concept*, p. 17, emphasis modified).

⁶¹ For instance, the *System of Transcendental Idealism* begins with Schelling's claim that 'all knowledge is founded upon the coincidence (*Übereinstimmung*) of an objective with a subjective' and goes on to identify the objective with nature and the subjective with 'self, or the intelligence' (*SW* I/3: 339; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, p. 5).

primary task of deriving consciousness from nature (speculative physics) or the systematically derivative task of deriving the cognitive objectification of nature (transcendental idealism), it is the *originary* identity of nature and spirit which is disclosed to philosophical thought. In other words, the movement from nature to spirit and that from spirit to nature arrive at the same metaphysical standpoint in which nature and spirit are understood to be two aspects of the same being.

This is the conception of nature-spirit identity with which Schelling introduces his *Ideas*, where nature is essentially ‘spiritual’ and spirit essentially ‘natural’. Note that this does not mean that nature and spirit, on this model, are simply the *same*; nature remains *visible* or *real* spirit while spirit is *invisible* or *ideal* nature. Nevertheless, conceiving nature and spirit as inversions of one another allows Schelling to interpret their difference as one of mere degree. Schelling explicitly champions such a view in his first work of identity philosophy, the 1801 *Presentation*. As we will see in more detail below, that work describes nature as *different* from spirit in that it expresses an ontological surplus of ‘objectivity’ or ‘reality’, and spirit is understood as expressing a surplus of ‘subjectivity’ or ‘ideality’. What is unique on this model is not, therefore, that nature and spirit are conceived as *simply* identical, but rather that 1) the *difference* between nature and spirit is reduced to a merely *quantitative* difference and 2) this quantitative difference is conceived as proceeding from an *originary* identity or ‘indifference point’. Unlike the ‘identity of emergence’, then, this ‘originary identity’ does not grant ontological primacy to nature; nor does it account for the manner in which nature is generative of a qualitatively distinct form of being, namely, spiritual freedom.

In Chapter 2, I will explore these issues in more detail. Suffice it to say that the ‘originary identity’ of nature and spirit that Schelling describes in the *Ideas* and is operative in the background of the early philosophy of nature becomes absolutely central to the philosophy of identity. And as Schelling begins to emphasise this conception of ‘originary identity’ in the early 1800s, he temporarily leaves behind his conception of the nature-spirit identity as an identity that is *achieved* via a process of nature’s *self-differentiating* activity.

In the early nature philosophy, however, Schelling seems to conceive the identity of nature and spirit as *both* originary *and* emergent from nature.

Hermeneutic charity requires that we hold fast to this ambiguity in Schelling's early nature philosophy. For it is only with a recognition of the ambiguity regarding the nature-spirit relation that we can make sense of the development of Schelling's views regarding this conceptual pair. In addition to providing a framework with which to interpret Schelling's subsequent philosophical development, emphasising this ambiguity in the philosophy of nature allows us to call into question much of the received wisdom about Schelling's Spinozist tendencies without ignoring those tendencies. As I will argue in Chapter 3, Schelling finally embraces in no uncertain terms the 'identity of emergence' in the *Freedom* essay, and this is made possible through a reappraisal of Spinoza and the logic of identity. For Spinoza's intimation of a truly immanent ontology is unachievable so long as nature and spirit are simply attributed, as they are in the *Ethics*, to the same substantial being. In order for nature and spirit to be *truly* identical, then, it must be shown that the difference between these regions of being emerges *from nature itself*.

I therefore propose to read Schelling's development from the *Ideas* to the *Freedom* essay as an intense struggle with Spinozism and the impoverished immanence of the 'originary identity' of nature and spirit. As Heidegger remarks in his lecture course on the *Freedom* essay, 'if Schelling fundamentally fought against a system, it is Spinoza's system.'⁶² But what Heidegger fails to acknowledge in that lecture course is that Schelling's struggle against Spinoza's thought is an *Auseinandersetzung* in the Heideggerian sense, a philosophical encounter which is only intelligible if we recognise within Schelling's thought a profound appreciation for Spinoza and the metaphysics of immanence. Schelling's critique of Spinozism, therefore, should be interpreted in light of the ambiguity in the early philosophy of nature regarding the nature-spirit relation. Whereas the identity philosophy will occlude the more profound conception of human consciousness as emergent from an inorganic, non-spiritual, yet self-organising cosmos, the *Freedom* essay will return precisely

⁶² Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 34.

to this conception of human spirit and, in doing so, reaffirm the early Schelling's idea that nature and spirit can only be unified in an immanent system if their difference emerges from a non-spiritual nature.

1.7. Dynamic Physics and the Fundamental Forces of Nature

Since Schelling's nature philosophy is explicitly engaged with the movement from nature to spirit, we can now bracket his largely implicit assumption regarding the 'originary identity' of these terms and focus exclusively upon the immanent development of nature as Schelling describes it. Because Schelling provides different accounts of this movement in his various works of nature philosophy, I do not claim to provide a definitive account of Schelling's conception of nature's graduated series of stages. Instead, I simply want to highlight some of the key stages in that development which are repeated throughout Schelling's various sketches, outlines, and presentations of nature philosophy. The remainder of this chapter will therefore constitute a brief account of how Schelling thinks nature becomes successively more organic in such a manner as to pave the way for the emergence of the final stage of nature's development, the human spirit.

The first stage of Schelling's philosophy of nature is his dynamic construction of matter. This 'construction' of matter is absolutely crucial to Schelling's project for two interrelated reasons: First, everything which follows in the philosophy of nature is only made possible by this initial stage of nature and is, therefore, incomprehensible without reference to the dynamic forces of matter; and second, it is only by conceiving matter as *immanently active* that the philosophy of nature can present the ontological continuity between inorganic nature, on the one hand, and the self-determination of life and human spirit, on the other. What becomes apparent, therefore, is that Schelling's rejection of the modern conception of nature as mere 'objective thing' informs his appreciation for a *dynamic* conception of matter in which change of motion is understood to be immanent to matter itself.

Schelling's understanding of matter as immanently mobile is therefore conceived in response and opposition to the Newtonian conception of matter. According to Schelling, Newtonian mechanics fails to capture the reality of matter for a number of reasons. Primarily, however, Schelling takes issue with the very first law of Newton's physics which states that 'every body perseveres in its state of being at rest or of moving uniformly straight forward, except insofar as it is compelled to change its state by forces impressed.'⁶³ All change in velocity, on this view, is attributed to an external force, whether this be a force leading to physical impact *between* inert bodies or a force acting from a distance, as in gravity. Either way, material bodies are seen as ontologically distinct from the forces which move them, and as a result, the Newtonian physics conceives nature in terms of a dualism between material bodies and immaterial force.

Of course, Schelling was not the first to see the dualism of Newtonian mechanics as problematic. One attempt to solve this problem seeks to eradicate the Newtonian conception of 'force from a distance' by interpreting all motion in terms of mechanical contact. This was the strategy taken up in the mid-eighteenth century by Georges-Louis le Sage, who Schelling praises as a truly speculative philosopher despite his failure to see the limits of mechanism.⁶⁴ Because le Sage represents the paradigmatic mechanistic solution to Newtonian dualism, considering Schelling's critique of le Sage will put us in a position to understand Schelling's alternative solution to Newtonian dualism: to conceive matter as intrinsically dynamic.

The mechanical physicist follows Newton in conceiving matter as inert but rejects the idea that change in velocity results from anything other than contact. Consequently, any change in motion of a given body is necessarily caused by contact with *another* body, and

⁶³ Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. by I. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 416.

⁶⁴ Note Schelling's reference to le Sage in the Foreword to the *First Outline*: 'This treatise may surely be called a *first* outline, because no attempt of its kind has previously existed—for no one has yet ventured for dynamic philosophy what has been done for the *mechanistic* philosophy of Lesage' (*SW I/3*: 4; *First Outline*, p. 3, emphasis modified); and more praising still: 'In its tendency, [our science] is exactly what the systems of the ancient physicists were, and what, in more recent times, the system of the restorer of Epicurean philosophy is, i.e., *Lesage's* mechanical physics, by which the speculative spirit in physics, after a long scientific sleep, has again for the first time been awakened' (*SW I/3*: 274; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 195).

the task of the thoroughgoing mechanist is to account for gravity, magnetism, and chemical processes with reference to contact alone. As we will see, Schelling is fundamentally opposed to a mechanistic conception of any of these natural phenomena and, in fact, understands mechanical motion to be an ontologically derivative form of dynamic, or immanent, non-contact based movement. But at this stage, we can focus exclusively upon the mechanistic explanation of gravity and Schelling's critique thereof. In order to overcome Newtonian dualism, le Sage proposes the following: An indefinite number of ethereal particles or gravitational atoms move rectilinearly throughout the universe in every direction. Given two material bodies A and B, body A acts as a barrier blocking the stream of particles that would otherwise continue moving towards body B (and vice versa). Thus, the stream of ethereal particles moving between the two bodies is decreased, as each body upsets the balanced portion of particles making contact with the total surface area of the *other* body. The two bodies are thereby driven towards one another by the ethereal particles insofar as *more* particles or gravitational atoms make contact with the *unshielded* sides of each body.⁶⁵

According to Schelling, le Sage's account of gravitational motion is the most comprehensive mechanistic account possible. *Everything*, on this account, is explained mechanically—everything, that is, but the 'first cause' of motion which sets the material bodies and ethereal particles into contact from the start. Schelling asks: 'But whence does this inexhaustible stream [of particles] come, from what era does it derive, and what supports it continually?' And since the mechanist has no response, according to Schelling, 'this system ends with the inexplicable'.⁶⁶ The ground of movement must reside in some

⁶⁵ See Schelling's description of le Sage's account of gravity in the *Ideas* and the *First Outline* (*SW* I/2: 207; *Ideas*, p. 166 and *SW* I/3: 96; *First Outline*, p. 73), an account largely dependent upon the 1794 German translation of Pierre Prévost's *Origine des forces magnétiques* (1788). For a detailed explanation of le Sage's theory of gravity, its historical motivation, and its reception, see Frans van Lunteren, 'Eighteenth-Century Conceptions of Gravitation' in *Hegel and Newtonianism*, ed. by Michael J. Petry (Dordrecht: Springer Science and Business Media, 1993), pp. 357-360.

⁶⁶ *SW* I/3: 98-99; *First Outline*, p. 74.

extra-mechanical sphere which mechanical physics is unable to explain.⁶⁷ Moreover, because nature is understood to be entirely mechanistic on this view, the ‘extra-mechanical’ sphere must be located outside nature itself, a ground of movement ontologically separate from the natural world.⁶⁸

Thus, according to Schelling, mechanism is ensnared by the same metaphysical dualism that it attempted to avoid. For even if one attempts to overcome the Newtonian dualism of material bodies and immaterial force by way of a thoroughgoing mechanism, dualism *reappears*: a mysterious principle of movement is implicitly posited as external to the material bodies and ethereal particles that are *put* into motion. This reappearance of dualism stems from the mechanist’s claims to ignorance about the origin of movement. Therefore, according to Schelling, it is the Newtonian assumption that matter is *inert* and dependent upon some external *activity* in order for it to change its state of motion that necessitates a dualism in which matter is ontologically distinct from the fundamental cause of motion, and mechanistic philosophy cannot, *by definition*, overcome this dualism.⁶⁹

In order to liberate matter from its supposed inertia, Schelling draws upon Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Although Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations*

⁶⁷ See van Lunteren: ‘In fact, Le Sage referred to Newton’s suggestion in query thirty-one of the *Opticks*, that the world needed a correcting hand to compensate for the constant loss of motion’ (‘Eighteenth-Century Conceptions of Gravitation’, p. 359).

⁶⁸ Additionally, Schelling believes that the basic positions of mechanical physics as outlined above are inconsistent with its empirical methodology. According to Schelling, mechanism only appeals to experience in order to substantiate its claims. Schelling focuses on Prévost’s description of these atoms as ‘*very small, well-nigh identical bodies*’, a clearly *relative* description of their ontological status (*SW I/2*: 204; *Ideas*, p. 164). For Schelling, experience does not tell the physicist anything *absolute* about the nature of matter, only what experiment has shown thus far. Relatedly—and this becomes central to Schelling’s dynamic account of matter as intrinsically spatial—mechanical physics assumes that space is intrinsically empty, but *this*, Schelling thinks, certainly cannot be discovered in experience (*SW I/2*; 204; *Ideas*, p. 164).

⁶⁹ It is perhaps helpful to note that Newton’s equivocal thoughts about gravity gave credence to the eighteenth century mechanical theories which followed. Le Sage’s mechanical philosophy is therefore not only representative of a distinctive yet ultimately insufficient solution to Newtonian dualism, but a systematic attempt to explicate the mechanist strand of Newton’s own ambiguous natural philosophy. As Patricia Fara notes, ‘From about 1740, natural philosophers started turning their attention to Newton’s alternative explanation of gravity. Inspired by his alchemical investigations, Newton had suggested that special tiny repellent particles pervade the whole of space, making up an invisible, weightless medium capable of transmitting gravity or magnetism, yet rare enough to leave the planets virtually unaffected. This subtle spiritual aether eliminated the objection of action at a distance, and until the early twentieth century, versions of it were routinely summoned up to account for gravity, electricity, and other phenomena.’ Patricia Fara, *Science: A Four Thousand Year History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 167.

fully endorses Newtonian science and seeks to ground it metaphysically, Kant criticises the Newtonian position that makes gravitational attraction *contingent* in relation to the existence of matter.⁷⁰ Thus, in the second chapter of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant develops a ‘metaphysical grounding of dynamics’ in which force is shown to be entirely necessary for the existence of matter. In this chapter, Kant argues that matter is conceivable *as matter* only if such matter is constituted by force. On this dynamic model of matter, gravitational motion is no longer seen to be accidental to matter but is instead conceived as intrinsic to matter as such. In this way, Kant paves the way for a reconceptualisation of mechanical motion as derivative of a more basic activity on the part of matter itself. For it is only by *already* being constituted by forces that material bodies are mechanically responsive *to* contact.⁷¹ For these reasons, Schelling sees Kant’s dynamics as central to overturning the dualism of matter and force.

Kant’s analysis of the constitutive forces of matter begins with his rejection of the idea that matter ‘fills’ space by just *being* there, ‘in’ space. Instead, according to Kant, matter ‘fills’ space because matter is only possible as an expansive or repulsive force of *space-filling*.⁷² In other words, matter is an activity of *repelling* other matter from its location in space. Repulsion, or expansive force, is thus the condition for or ground of the

⁷⁰ ‘The possibility of matter *requires* a force of attraction.’ Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* in *The Philosophy of Material Nature*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), p. 56, my emphasis. Following Kant, Schelling writes: ‘When Newton himself said of the force of attraction that it was *materiae vis insita, innata*, etc., he was mentally attributing to matter an existence independent of attractive force. Matter could thus also be *real*, without any attractive forces; that it has them (that, as some of Newton’s disciples said, a higher hand has impressed this tendency upon it, so to speak) is a *contingent* thing, as regards the existence of matter itself’ (*SW* I/2: 192; *Ideas*, p. 154).

⁷¹ We should therefore understand the Kantian-Schellingian view as not so much *opposed* to mechanical physics but as the transcendental explication of the implicit truth within the mechanical philosophy (or what for Kant are the categorial conditions for the possibility of mechanistic physics). ‘Yet at once we fail to understand how the mechanical physics proposes to explain the communication of motion...A matter which does not possess original motive forces could not, even if it chanced to have motion, be receptive of any force, which originally does not attach to it at all. If matter has no originally motive forces, which attach to it even when it is at rest, we must posit its essence in an absolute inertness, i.e., in a total absence of force. But this is a concept without sense or significance. To such a non-entity as matter is in this case, it is no more possible to communicate anything than it is to take anything away’ (*SW* I/2: 206; *Ideas*, p. 165); ‘Since [attractive force] first makes all matter possible as determinate occupation of space, and so also something palpable, it also contains the ground of contact itself. It must then precede contact, be independent of it, i.e., its action does not depend on contact; rather, it is action through empty space’ (*SW* I/3: 100; *First Outline*, p. 75).

⁷² Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, p. 41.

impenetrability of matter.⁷³ And yet if matter were *only this*, if matter were sheer expansive force extending infinitely outwards in infinite directions, then this matter would not *be* in its place. As Kant puts it, ‘with merely repulsive forces of matter, all spaces would be empty; and hence, strictly speaking, there would be no matter at all.’⁷⁴ If there is to be spatially extended matter, then, this matter must not only expand infinitely outwards via an activity of repulsion but contract toward a single point via an activity of *attraction*.⁷⁵

From the *Ideas* on, Schelling promotes a version of Kant’s dynamic construction of matter, although as Schelling gradually dissociates himself from the transcendental standpoint, it becomes clear that on his view, the dynamic construction of matter has *ontological* consequences which are meant to ground the merely ‘subjectivist’ standpoint of Kant’s idealism. Indeed, on Schelling’s view, it is not that matter must be expansive and contractive in order for it to be cognisable *as* impenetrable, spatially extended stuff; rather, matter is *in itself* a dual activity of expansion and contraction, and an ontology of nature must begin with an account of this immanent dynamism which defines the *being* of matter—without any reference to natural-scientific cognition.⁷⁶

Below, I will consider a further sense in which Schelling differs significantly from Kant regarding the forces of nature. At this stage, however, I want to clarify a feature of Schelling’s dynamics which shows that Schelling remains committed to Kant’s dynamics in an important way. In their respective constructions of matter, neither Kant nor Schelling

⁷³ Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, p. 56.

⁷⁴ Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, p. 57.

⁷⁵ Schelling rehearses Kant’s argument in the *Ideas* (*SW* I/2: 231-232; p. 185). It is worth emphasising that, for both Kant and Schelling, repulsion *and* attraction are equally necessary features of matter. For just as attraction acts against the infinitely expanding principle of repulsion, the latter is necessary if the material world is not to collapse into an ideal point. As Schelling puts it, ‘Repulsive force without attractive force is *formless*; attractive force without repulsive force *has no object*’ (*SW* I/2: 234; *Ideas*, p. 187).

⁷⁶ This has important consequences for how Schelling conceives the ‘impenetrability’ of matter. According to Schelling, matter is not ‘*made up* of infinitely many parts’ but simply *is* the discord between infinite extensibility (expansion) and compressibility (attraction) (*SW* I/2: 238; *Ideas*, p. 189). ‘In Nature there is nothing either absolutely impenetrable or absolutely dense or absolutely hard. All conception of impenetrability, density and so on are always merely conceptions of *degrees*’ (*SW* I/2: 211; *Ideas*, p. 169). *Nevertheless*, we rightfully judge nature to be impenetrable with respect to *experience*: ‘That matter is *made up* of parts is a mere judgement of the understanding. It consists of parts, *if* and *for so long as* I wish to divide it. But in itself it originally consists of parts is false, for originally - in productive intuition - it arises as a *whole* from opposing forces, and only through this *whole in intuition* do parts become possible for the *understanding*’ (*SW* I/2: 238-239; *Ideas*, p. 190).

describe this construction as an *historical* process. At times, this is how Grant appears to interpret Schelling's dynamic physics, as if there were forces *and then bodies*.⁷⁷ But Schelling's construction of matter is a *philosophical* construction—not an account of historical generation—which means it is an attempt to understand matter from the perspective of the necessary features that make matter *what it is*.⁷⁸ To be sure, Schelling breaks with Kant's transcendental standpoint by insisting upon the ontological priority of matter itself (as opposed to making that matter dependent upon the categories of the understanding and human forms of intuition). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Schelling posits the existence of immaterial forces *outside* or temporally *antecedent* to matter. On the contrary, the dynamic construction of matter is meant to prove that *matter itself* just is the dual activity of *expansion* and *contraction*, and that without reference to this immanent activity, one cannot account for the being of matter.⁷⁹ It is in this sense of identifying the transcendental—yet strictly natural—conditions for the possibility of materiality that Schelling claims speculative physics is a *genetic* enterprise.⁸⁰ It is also what allows Schelling to overcome the Newtonian principle of inertia. For if forces actually generated material bodies in time, then the same matter-force dualism would animate Schelling's own philosophy of nature.

This leads me to another point which will become important in Part II of this thesis, and that is Hegel's identification of *all* metaphysics of force as necessarily dualistic. Along with Kant and Schelling, Hegel conceives repulsive and attractive activity to be immanent to

⁷⁷ See, for example, Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, pp. 8, 55.

⁷⁸ Beiser makes this point well in his account of Schelling's nature philosophy. See *German Idealism*, p. 534.

⁷⁹ In Dale Snow's words, 'Schelling's point is that the *essence* of matter is force' (*Schelling and the End of Idealism*, p. 75.). I would argue, however, that this way of putting it implies a remnant dualism between matter and its 'essential' force. While Schelling himself does at times articulate his position in this way, I take it that he is fundamentally committed to the idea that matter simply *is* its dynamic activity. As he puts it in the *Ideas*, 'matter is itself *nothing else but a moving force*' (*SW I/2*: 231; *Ideas*, p. 185, my emphasis).

⁸⁰ See, especially, § 30 of the *General Deduction* (*SW I/4*: 25-26). Cf. Robert F. Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling*, pp. 95-96: 'The heart of Schelling's philosophy of nature is the construction of the various levels of reality in the objective world, beginning with matter and proceeding through the strata of the inorganic and organic realms. The direction of analysis, moving from lower to higher, from simple to complex, is not a doctrine of evolution in time (although not incompatible with such a view). It is a "genetic construction," in which the analysis of the constituents of nature shows how each of the lower levels participates in, and is presupposed by, all of the more complex levels "above" it.'

matter itself. However, as we will see in Chapter 5, Hegel understands these activities to be strictly *kinetic* features of matter, and he is critical of Kant's and Schelling's use of the language of 'force'. Such language implies, on Hegel's view, a continuation of the matter-force dualism that all three idealists seek to overcome. The primary stages of nature are therefore strictly *mechanical* for Hegel, and it is only through the immanent development of mechanics that nature proves to involve anything *more* than mechanical motion. This Hegelian conception of matter-in-motion is distinct from Schelling's view, for the latter insists upon the intrinsic *dynamism* of matter as distinct from and more fundamental than its *mechanical* motion. Indeed, whereas Hegel begins with the immanent mechanics of matter, Schelling insists that mechanical motion is ontologically derivative and thus only possible insofar as matter *is force*.⁸¹ But it would be hasty to end our discussion here and suppose that Schelling and Hegel are simply at odds with one another regarding the nature of matter. Schelling identifies the immanent mobility of matter in terms of 'force' not because he thinks that matter 'has' forces which are notionally separable from it, but rather, because he conceives *self-movement* along the lines of dynamic *power*. Indeed, the notion that strictly mechanical motion could be *self-caused* is a simple category error on Schelling's view, since the mechanist assumes precisely the fundamental inertia of matter in order to explain motion.

From these remarks, we can see that, from a certain perspective, the difference between Schelling and Hegel on this issue is simply a difference in terminological preference; neither philosopher posits forces which are anything other than matter itself. But from another perspective, there is an important difference between Schelling's and Hegel's conceptions of matter which underlies and perhaps motivates their terminological preferences. Schelling understands nature to be self-moving and, moreover, capable of raising itself to more intricate forms of organisation because nature is immanently *powerful*; indeed, it is nothing other than the complex of *forces* which paves the way for more complex

⁸¹ 'All mechanical motion is the merely secondary and derivative motion of that which is solely primitive and original, and which wells forth from the very first factors in the construction of a Nature overall' (*SW I/3*: 275; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 196); 'Matter occupies space, not through its mere *existence*...but through an inherently *moving force*, whereby the *mechanical* motion of matter first becomes possible' (*SW I/2*: 231; *Ideas*, p. 185).

structures of nature to emerge. Hegel, on the other hand, understands the most basic forms of immanent, self-development to be strictly mechanical and, indeed, associates this form of movement with *negativity*, a negativity that negates *itself* and in so doing achieves more complex forms of organisation. Schelling's insistence upon the *derivative* character of mechanical motion, then, should be read as a consequence of his more general commitment to a conception of nature as a *self-potentiating process* animated by nature's fundamental forces.⁸² The difference between Schelling and Hegel, therefore, regards the manner in which they each conceive the immanent development of matter *beyond* its strictly repulsive and attractive activity. I return to these issues in Chapters 4 and 5.

Following the *Ideas* and *On the World-Soul*, Schelling revises his conception of the fundamental forces in an important way. Beginning with the *First Outline*, Schelling draws upon Franz Baader's conception of gravity in order to distinguish it—as does Baader—from *attractive* force.⁸³ Although the Kantian construction of matter resolves an important issue in Newtonian mechanics by insisting upon the immanence of gravitational force to bodies themselves, this model fails to distinguish between the *attractive* force, which works against repulsion as the determining element in materiality, and gravitational motion. The latter, according to Schelling, 'is not a simple, but a compound motion', since free fall is only possible insofar as a body exists *as* a determinate body occupying space, i.e. a body already defined by its expansive and contractive activities.⁸⁴ The crux of Schelling's argument is that material bodies can only fall towards *other* bodies if they are already constituted as quantitatively determinate, spatially extended bodies. Consequently, the attractive force

⁸² I cover these issues in more detail in Chapters 4.4, 5.4, and 5.5 below.

⁸³ According to Friedrich Überweg, Baader was himself greatly influenced by Schelling's *On the World-Soul*, and this Schellingian influence is apparent in Baader's own 'The Pythagorean Square in Nature or the Four World-Regions' which Schelling cites approvingly in the *First Outline*. Friedrich Überweg, *A History of Philosophy, From Thales to the Present Time: Volume 2*, trans. by G.S. Morris (New York: Charles Scribner & Company, 1909), p. 229. Cf. Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. by Brady Bowman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 241-242.

⁸⁴ *SW* I/3: 313; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 223. Note that this means that gravity, as the unity of repulsion and attraction, is a *derivative* unity. 'Gravity is simple, but its *condition* is duplicity.—Indifference arises only out of difference' (*SW* I/3: 312; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 222). As we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, Schelling abandons this notion of a derivative unity in his *Identitätssystem* only to return to it with more focus in the *Freedom* essay.

integral to the construction of matter should not be mistaken for the more complex phenomenon of gravitational motion.

Again, following Baader, Schelling identifies gravity as the ‘identity’ or ‘indifference point’ of repulsion and attraction;⁸⁵ it is a third, notionally separable feature of matter which accounts for the specific manner in which material bodies seek one another through their sheer heaviness. Note, however, that because gravity is the *unity* of attraction and repulsion, it is just as immanent to matter as are those constitutive forces. Indeed, the fundamental ‘forces’ of nature could be said to be repulsion, attraction, *and* gravitation—except for the fact that Schelling is not convinced that ‘force’ is the best name for gravitational motion.⁸⁶

Gravity is thus *neither* a force acting *from a distance* nor is it explained through gravitational *particles* making contact with a material body. Rather, gravity constitutes the intrinsic mobility of material bodies; it is the activity whereby one material body is driven of its own accord to unite with *other* material bodies. Thus, for Schelling, matter simply is its self-construction via attraction and repulsion together with the inner unity of these forces, its heaviness (*Schwere*) which immanently propels it to fall towards a body beyond it.

According to Schelling, this structural complexity of gravity which immanently propels matter to seek union with other matter signals an important achievement within nature, namely, a certain form of material *unity*. Insofar as bodies fall towards other bodies, nature accomplishes the unification of otherwise disparate matter. As Schelling puts it in the second edition of the *Ideas*, ‘By virtue of gravity the body is in unity with all others.’⁸⁷ Thus, in simply being heavy, a body exceeds its self-identity, signifying its inner *telos* of becoming one with all other matter (and this *telos* of ‘oneness’ is ontologically distinct from the attractive principle wherein matter contracts towards a null-point). This motion towards unity is no insignificant feature of nature; up to this point, nature is fundamentally

⁸⁵ Gravity, according to Schelling, ‘fixes the opposition’ between repulsion and attraction and is, therefore, the principle of ‘indifference’ (*SW* I/3: 264n; *First Outline*, p. 189n).

⁸⁶ In a note to the *First Outline*, Schelling uses the term ‘force of gravity’ only to then immediately deny that there is any one *force* of gravity, claiming that, instead, the most one can say is that there are *forces* of gravity insofar as each material body seeks a distinct centre outside itself (*SW* I/3: 113n; *First Outline*, p. 84n).

⁸⁷ *SW* I/2: 165; *Ideas*, p. 128.

duplicitous, but with gravitational motion, a kind of unified being appears on the horizon of nature's possibilities.

As we will see in the following section, gravitational motion is structurally analogous to—and therefore a more basic potency of—chemical processes. For both gravity and chemical processes *dissolve* a certain duplicity in nature. However, before we move on to consider qualities of natural entities such as chemical distinctness, it is worth noting the uniquely *inorganic* character of gravitational (and, as we will see, chemical) unification. According to Schelling, it is exclusively the *non-living* which aims to achieve utter indifference or unity with all. Life, for Schelling, is nothing less than the striving *against* such indifference—a tearing away of self from the all and the ceaseless activity of maintaining this separation. At its more basic level, however, nature is *inorganic*: a duplicitous complex of forces which seeks the unification of all via the immanent motion of gravity.

1. 8. Magnetism, Electricity, and the Chemical Process

In the *General Deduction*, Schelling describes how the three forces of nature—repulsion, attraction, and gravity—constitute, when raised to the second power, the ‘universal categories of physics’: magnetism, electricity, and the chemical process.⁸⁸ In this way, the strictly quantitative determinacy of spatially extended bodies with specific weight is immanently potentiated into *qualitative* differences, signalling a transition from dynamics to physics proper.⁸⁹

According to Schelling, magnetism is the most basic feature of nature's qualitative determinacy. In magnetism, the dynamic forces of repulsion and attraction are expressed within an *individual* body as a simple polarity. Thus, repulsive and attractive force are

⁸⁸ *SW I/4*: 4. The importance of these three categories for Schelling cannot be overstated, for *all* of inorganic nature's qualitatively distinct products involves various combinations of magnetism, electricity, and chemical process (*SW I/4*: 75).

⁸⁹ *SW I/4*: 51.

‘united in one and the same identical subject’ or natural product: a magnet.⁹⁰ The second level of qualitative determinacy—electricity—is a higher expression of this same magnetic polarity. However, whereas magnetism expresses duplicity within one body, electricity is a potentiation of that duplicity as ‘two distinct individuals’.⁹¹ According to Schelling, this means that the positive force of repulsion and the negative force of attraction must be sundered from one another, such that an electrified body is distinguished as either positively or negatively charged.⁹² At the third level of qualitative determinacy, the positive and negative poles are reunited. However, since this reunification of positive and negative is indeed a *reunification*—passing through the stage of electricity where products are *either* positively *or* negatively charged—this new stage cannot be a return to the more simple duplicity of magnetism. Instead, this third stage is identified by Schelling as the *chemical process*, where qualitatively determinate products are unified *through* their difference. This final stage of inorganic quality is perhaps easier to comprehend if we recognise that on Schelling’s view—and he was by no means alone in holding this opinion—chemical substances should be conceived as either positive or negative substances, and the effects of their combination are intelligible with reference to their positivity and negativity.⁹³ What happens in this combination is significant: for in the chemical process, two qualitatively distinct products *unite* with one another, but in doing so, they do not create a product which is *intrinsically* duplicitous (i.e. a magnet), but *dissolve* their respective qualities and make possible *new* chemical substances with their own qualitative determinacy. Thus, the chemical process—a potentiated form of gravitational motion—leads to the dissolution of distinct, natural products through their intrinsic affinity for one another. Indeed, this is why

⁹⁰ *SW* I/4: 15.

⁹¹ *SW* I/4: 15.

⁹² *SW* I/3: 316, 317n; *Introduction to the Outline*, pp. 224-225, p. 226n.

⁹³ As Michael Friedman notes, many nature philosophers, including Schelling, Ritter, and Ørsted, held the view that chemical combustion is explicable with reference to the relation between negative charge and oxygen, on the one hand, and positive charge and hydrogen, on the other. See Michael Friedman, ‘Kant—Naturphilosophie—Electromagnetism’ in *Hans Christian Ørsted and the Romantic Legacy in Science: Ideas, Disciplines, Practices*, ed. by Robert M. Brain, Robert S. Cohen, and Ole Knudsen (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), p. 138.

Schelling remarks that chemical substances ‘*gravitate* toward each other’.⁹⁴ Note that unlike the phenomenon of electricity, however, where positively and negatively charged products are related to one another with respect to their electrical charge alone and can therefore retain their substantial integrity after their charge has been neutralised, the chemical process involves products whose entire character *as products* is bound up in this relationality; indeed, this is why a product is entirely dissolved or returned to ‘indifference’ in the chemical process.⁹⁵

The triplet magnetism/electricity/chemical process, therefore, does not constitute a cyclical return to unity, but a progressive series in which inorganic nature proves to involve three basic forms of inorganic organisation: internal duplicity (or duplicity within identity); qualitative specificity (or identity *as* duplicity); and qualitative specificity in which the *whole* product is entangled with alterity and thereby leads to the dissolution of such specificity (or identity *through* duplicity). Throughout the remainder of Schelling’s intellectual development, he holds this series to be the essential series explicative of inorganic, physical forms. Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that when Schelling derives the necessity of magnetic, electrical, and chemical phenomena, this has nothing to do with the derivation of a ‘special kind of matter’.⁹⁶ On the contrary, these are the ‘universal categories of physics’ because they are ‘*functions of all matter universally*’.⁹⁷ Each and every body has the potential to express the duplicity of attraction and repulsion as magnetic polarity, electrical charge, and chemical affinity. For ‘there is *one* antithesis [or polarity] which, beginning at magnetism and proceeding through electricity, finally

⁹⁴ *SW* I/3: 316; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 225. Emphasis modified. See also *SW* I/3: 318n; p. 226n.

⁹⁵ *SW* I/3: 317; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 225. In other words, whereas a body can conduct electricity and thereby be related to other conductors of electricity, the body *itself* is not related to that other *throughout its being* as is the case in chemical affinity.

⁹⁶ *SW* I/3: 322n; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 229n. Thus, *all* bodies can *potentially* be magnetised or conduct electricity. Were this not the case, then the magnet (or electrically charged body) would indeed be an ontologically distinct substance, which Schelling fundamentally rejects. It is necessary, therefore, that an *immanent* theory of material diversity refuse the distinction of qualities via an appeal to substantial difference. See *SW* I/2: 157-158; *Ideas*, pp. 122-123 where Schelling considers the formation of magnets, further supporting the notion that there is nothing *substantially* distinct about magnetised bodies.

⁹⁷ *SW* I/3: 322n; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 229n.

dissipates in the chemical phenomena,⁹⁸ and it is this single antithesis which is at work throughout the whole of nature.

It is therefore central to Schelling's derivation of magnetism, electricity, and chemical process that such qualitative determinacy is nothing other than a series of novel configurations of the originary duplicity of force. And since the complex of repulsive and attractive force is nothing other than matter itself, Schelling can identify matter as 'the general seed-corn of the universe, in which is hidden everything that unfolds in the later developments.'⁹⁹ At the risk of beating a dead horse, this development from sheer dynamism to the qualities associated with magnetism, electricity, and the chemical process is not achieved in time or on the part of particular phenomena which undergo metamorphosis. Potentiation is an ahistorical, rational development wherein nature proves its necessary qualitative determinacy. For on Schelling's view, the immanent dynamism of matter, when reconfigured to express identity and duplicity in three fundamentally distinct ways, expresses itself as not merely quantitatively determinate (e.g. as specific weight), but as qualitatively distinct matter.

On my view, Schelling doesn't satisfactorily explain *why* sheer quantitative determinacy must develop into qualitative determinacy in nature. Although it is relatively clear how Schelling conceives magnetism, electricity, and the chemical process to be reconfigurations of nature's originary polarity, it isn't clear why this originary polarity must *necessarily* become reconfigured. Hegel's explanation of the development from quantitative to qualitative determinacy in nature is far more complete, and I will consider it in detail below (Chapter 5.7). However, despite Schelling's lack of clarity on this issue, it should not go unrecognised that up until the *Presentation* of 1801, Schelling is fully committed to the idea that nature does involve qualitative determinacy and that such determinacy must be understood as both *different from* and yet ontologically *dependent upon* quantitative difference. This feature of Schelling's nature philosophy has often been overlooked thanks in large part to Hegel's influential criticisms of Schelling's *Presentation* and Hegel's failure to

⁹⁸ *SW* I/3: 318; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 226.

⁹⁹ *SW* I/2: 223; *Ideas of 1803*, p. 179.

clearly distinguish between *Schelling's* philosophy of nature and those *Schellingian* nature philosophies, such as that of Lorenz Oken, which depart from Schelling's affirmation of real, qualitative difference in nature.¹⁰⁰

It is central to my interpretation of Schelling's philosophy of nature, then, that qualitative differences are real differences which account for the diversity of the natural world. Schelling's central interlocutor on this issue is Karl August Eschenmayer, who, to Schelling's dismay, takes the dynamic construction of matter—without any qualitative potentiation—to account for material diversity.¹⁰¹ According to Schelling, Eschenmayer's dynamic physics necessarily fails to account for natural diversity, since the play between repulsion and attraction *as such* only ever yields differences in 'degrees of extension', i.e. strictly quantitative differences.¹⁰² Certainly, argues Schelling, the specific weight or density of a given body can be determined with reference to the quantitative relation between its repulsive and attractive force. But if the relation between forces—*as* strictly quantitative forces—is all that one considers, then one cannot possibly account for the apparent qualitative determinacy which distinguishes one body from another. Thus, Schelling asks provocatively:

I would like to know how the specific weight of iron, for example, could be directly proportional to the considerable coherence of this metal, or how the specific weight of mercury could be directly proportional to the weak coherence of this metal? — Even through endless changes to specific weight

¹⁰⁰ Oken's nature philosophy does not only begin with quantitative difference—as do both Schelling's and Hegel's nature philosophies—but with an explicitly mathematical construction of nature, and it never sufficiently moves beyond this mathematical basis: 'The Mathematical is certain, and, by virtue of this character, it stands also alone. Mathematics is the only true science, and thus the primary science, the Mathesis, or Knowledge simply, as it was called by the ancients. The fundamental propositions of mathematics must, therefore, be fundamental propositions for all other sciences also.' Lorenz Oken, *Elements of Physio-Philosophy*, trans. Alfred Tulk (London: The Ray Society, 1847), p. 4. Note how this mathematical conception of philosophical practice extends into the ontology of both nature and spirit: 'Spirit is the motion of mathematical ideas. Nature, their manifesation' (*ibid.*, p. 2). I consider Hegel's critique of Schelling and Schellingianism regarding the issues of formalism and qualitative difference in 4.4 below.

¹⁰¹ *SW I/3*: 24-25n; *First Outline*, p. 22n and *SW I/4*: 94-95; *On the True Concept*, pp. 19-20. As stated above, Schelling also takes issue with Eschenmayer's commitment to a Kantian conception of nature in which the transcendental 'I' remains central (as opposed to emergent).

¹⁰² *SW I/3*: 101; *First Outline*, p. 76.

— and [Eschenmayer] knows nothing of matter but this — nothing would ever change but the specific weight.¹⁰³

In the *First Outline*, Schelling attempts to account for qualitative determinacy by positing ‘dynamic atoms’ which would ideally construct natural bodies and thereby determine their qualitative particularity. I believe this Leibnizian conception of dynamic atoms or ‘actants’ (*Aktionen*) is in certain respects more compelling than any other explanation Schelling gives for the necessity of qualitative determinacy in nature, but as it is presented in the *First Outline* these ‘dynamic atoms’ remain merely regulative principles for cognising nature.¹⁰⁴ What is clear, however, is that every time Schelling seeks to account for qualitative determinacy, he does so with reference to the intrinsic activity, dynamism or, once it becomes the technical term at the centre of his system, the *powers* (*Potenzen*) of nature, and Schelling insists that such powers are not reducible to their quantitative relations, despite the mathematical origin of this term. Thus, for Schelling, inorganic nature is immanently powerful and therefore raises itself to higher forms of expression; in doing so, nature proves that its powers are *genuine potencies* which allow nature to manifest itself in the form of unique material organisations, forms of activity which are qualitatively distinct as attested to by the phenomena of magnetic polarity, electrical charge, and chemical affinity, none of which can be understood in terms of sheer repulsion and attraction.

As I see it, the key to Schelling’s ‘qualitative’ conception of the potencies is that matter is *primarily* active for Schelling, since it is nothing other than repulsive and attractive force, and this originary activity secures the immanence of all diversity that follows. Unlike the mathematically reductive conception of natural powers which insists upon the immanence of all diversity to quantitative determinations, the Schellingian conception of matter as immanently powerful leads to the idea that nature is qualitatively differentiated yet

¹⁰³ *SW I/4*: 95; *On the True Concept*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ On this view, although there are no permanent, selfsame parts which constitute matter, we can posit *dynamic* constituents or insubstantial monads in nature. Such atoms would be singular ‘dynamisms’ within nature, and this would allow for *qualitative* material difference, since each insubstantial atom would be different from the others (*SW I/3*: 22-23; *First Outline*, p. 21) and quality itself would be understood in terms of the particular activity which conditions the possibility of a given spatiotemporal process (*SW I/3*: 24; *First Outline*, p. 22).

nonetheless ‘one’. For matter does not differentiate itself *substantially*, as ‘special, subtle, and...quite imponderable, matters’.¹⁰⁵ Rather, matter distinguishes itself through the various ways it interacts with other matter, and such interaction can be seen in material qualities that are irreducible to velocity, mass, and weight. Thus, for Schelling, all matter is one, and yet this one is *qualitatively* multiple on account of its self-differentiating power.

As we will see, this same logic of qualitative potentiation is at work in Schelling’s conception of organic life, where magnetism, electricity, and chemical process are raised to the higher powers of sensibility, irritability, and formative drive. What the logic of potentiation allows for, then, is an account of nature’s identity in which real differences obtain. Indeed, this is why Schelling can claim, on the one hand, that ‘organic nature is nothing other than the inorganic repeated at a higher power’¹⁰⁶ and yet insist upon the *qualitative difference* between the inorganic and organic.¹⁰⁷ For Schelling, the self-potentiation of matter is a *self-differentiating* process resulting in qualitatively distinct forms of nature which are irreducible to its more basic, ontologically antecedent forms.¹⁰⁸

Although Schelling’s argument for the necessity of qualitative difference lacks the clarity and rigour we find in Hegel, his conception of the inner unity of inorganic physical processes inspired important developments in the natural sciences. Ørsted’s discovery of electromagnetism, for example, owes itself to Schelling’s account of the development from magnetism to electricity.¹⁰⁹ That being said, it would be an anti-philosophical gesture to pass judgment on Schelling’s speculative physics on the basis of empirical-scientific discovery.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ *SW I/2*: 147; *Ideas* of 1803, p. 114.

¹⁰⁶ *SW I/4*: 4.

¹⁰⁷ As Schelling puts it in the *First Outline*, ‘life is not a chemical process’. *SW I/3*: 174; *First Outline*, p. 126. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ As we will see in Chapter 2, Schelling revises this view in the 1801 *Presentation*.

¹⁰⁹ Ørsted was introduced to Schelling’s philosophy of nature by Johann Wilhelm Ritter. See Friedman, ‘Kant—Naturphilosophie—Electromagnetism’, p. 138.

¹¹⁰ Grant rightly identifies the tendency to promote historical-philosophical conceptions of nature (such as Schelling’s) only insofar as they may resolve problems in the contemporary sciences as ‘not only anachronistic, but also positively reduces, as Popper recommends, philosophical interventions into nature to a theoretical resource to be raided as and when the natural sciences deem it necessary’ (Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, pp. 10-11).

Schelling's nature philosophy stands on its own—as do the natural philosophies of Plato, Leibniz, and Whitehead—as a distinctively *philosophical* attempt to understand the structure of nature, even if Schelling's philosophical investigation of nature is not always argued for with the same logical specificity and consistency of someone like Hegel.

On my view, Schelling's fundamental philosophical gesture here should be read as an attempt to overcome Kant's merely *regulative* idea of a unified metaphysics of nature by attempting to show—from the immanent rationale of Kant's own dynamic construction of matter—that repulsion and attraction raise themselves, *by necessity*, to more complex and qualitatively determinate expressions of material polarity. In this way, Schelling aims to not only salvage a speculative *biology* from Kant's restriction of organic teleology to regulative principles in the third *Critique*, but at a more fundamental level, and as a propaedeutic to his speculative biology, Schelling calls into question Kant's claim in the Preface to the *Metaphysical Foundations* that chemistry is a 'mere art' and not a proper science capable of categorial grounding.¹¹¹ By allowing nature to 'construct itself' from sheer spatial extension and gravitational motion into the physical activities associated with magnetism, electricity, and chemistry, Schelling is able to conceive nature as a unified system of ascending determinacy:¹¹²

For us, then, nature will no longer be a dead, merely extended whole, but rather a living whole which increasingly reveals the spirit incarnated in it and

¹¹¹ Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, p. 7. See Friedman's account of Kant's reevaluation of this claim in light of his discovery of Lavoisier. In the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant has Stahl's chemical theory in mind. Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences*, pp. 264-290. My focus on Schelling's aim to overcome the merely regulative status of the idea of the unity of the sciences is influenced by Friedman's essay 'Kant—Naturphilosophie—Electromagnetism', pp. 135-158.

¹¹² In the foregoing I have left out Schelling's derivation in the *General Deduction* of the three dimensions and their intrinsic connection to the universal categories of physics. In that work, Schelling attempts to both identify those categories with one-, two-, and three-dimensionality, and to *derive* spatial extension from the physical categories. Thus, in the *General Deduction*, magnetism is identified as the 'condition of *length*' (*SW I/4*: 10) since the length of the magnet (and this one dimension alone) determines its force (*SW I/4*: § 21, 15-18); electricity is associated with two-dimensionality, since electrically charged bodies are such throughout their surfaces (*SW I/4*: § 22, 18); and chemical processes are associated with three-dimensionality since chemical substances are altered *throughout* their three-dimensions (not just upon their surface) in the chemical process (*SW I/4*: § 42, 44-45). Yet it isn't clear to me how Schelling understands the categories to be '*conditions*' of spatial extension as opposed to merely qualitative expressions of nature's extended structure.

which, by means of the highest spiritualisation, will in the end return into itself and complete itself.¹¹³

1. 9. Life Between Nature and Spirit

The passage quoted above raises important questions about Schelling's dynamic system of nature. For it looks as though Schelling opposes the mechanist conception of nature by promoting the idea that nature is a 'living whole'. But if nature is indeed *alive* for Schelling, hasn't he in some sense given up on the ontological specificity of *inorganic* phenomena? If Schelling's solution to the modern conception of nature as mere object is to conceive nature as a subjective world-soul, does he not thereby grant inorganic nature an ontologically derivative status? In other words, does idealist nature philosophy not favour the *organic* at the expense of the inorganic in its attempt to circumvent both the matter-force dualism of Newtonian physics and the mechanism of eighteenth-century French materialism? And if so, doesn't this amount to a certain reductionism in idealist philosophy of nature, namely, a reduction of the inorganic to the organic?

These questions are absolutely central to an interpretation of idealist philosophy of nature, since too often this period of nature philosophy is assumed to be 'organicist' in the strong sense of the term, as if the Schellingian alternative to Newtonian dualism and French materialism were to simply conceive nature as fundamentally *living*. It is necessary, therefore, to emphasise the fact that, despite Schelling's constant use of terms such as 'life' when describing the whole of nature, his system in no way underplays the ontological autonomy and even *priority* of inorganic phenomena, phenomena which are not living but, instead, develop *into* life on account of their non-vital yet dynamic productivity. This is why it is only at the *third stage of potentiation*—after the strictly quantitative dynamics and qualitative physics—that life, properly speaking, comes on the scene in Schelling's system. As a higher and ontologically derivative potency, life simply cannot be foundational for Schelling.

¹¹³ *SW I/4*: 101; *On the True Concept*, p. 25.

The derivative character of the organic is lost on a number of interpretations of Schelling and, on my view, these interpretations consequently obscure Schelling's distinctive logic of emergence. Dale Snow, for example, reasons as follows:

Higher levels of development in nature, such as life, are inadequately understood if they are conceptualized as being a less complex level of nature (such as matter) plus a *qualitas occulta*, such as vitality. Obviously the proper method would be to understand the lower levels in terms of the higher ones.¹¹⁴

Snow's first claim is absolutely right: for Schelling, we improperly understand the structure of life if we conceive it as inorganic matter which has somehow been endowed with a vital force. But Snow's second claim certainly does not follow. We need not—and on my view, Schelling does not—understand the inorganic in terms of the organic. On the contrary, for Schelling, once we understand the *lower* levels of nature as immanently *self-differentiating* (through the activity of potentiation), it becomes clear that the higher, more complex stages of nature *emerge from* the lower stages. Indeed, Schelling's entire logic of potentiation is incomprehensible without recognising that, for Schelling: 1) matter, *at its basis*, is not alive; and 2) those particular material organisations which *are* alive (i.e. living organisms) are only intelligible with reference to the self-potentiating structure of the *inorganic* forces of nature. Snow's insistence upon 'understand[ing] the lower levels in terms of the higher' is therefore fundamentally at odds with Schelling's system of emergence.

Beiser also describes life as the central concept which allows Schelling to conceive the intrinsic unity of all natural phenomena. According to Beiser:

The difference between the organic and inorganic is...only one of degree... Both are one and the same substance—*living force*—that has developed and organized itself in different degrees, first as the inorganic phenomena of matter and then as the organic phenomena of life.¹¹⁵

Beiser recognises (as does Snow) that there must be *some* difference between the inorganic and organic, hence this emphasis on the *different* degrees of self-organisation. As Beiser

¹¹⁴ Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, pp. 84-85.

¹¹⁵ Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 549. My emphasis.

rightly notes, Schelling's nature philosophy must provide some account of this difference if it is not to reduce the organic to inorganic or vice versa.¹¹⁶ And Beiser goes on to argue, as I have above, that the concept of 'power' or 'potency' allows Schelling to account for such difference without sacrificing the immanence or all natural forms:

With the concept of potency Schelling finally arrived at his middle path between dualism and materialism. There is no dualism since the higher potency includes and presupposes the lower; but there is also no materialism because, as a greater degree of organization and development, the higher potency cannot be reduced down to the lower.¹¹⁷

But then Beiser confuses the matter with his insistence on conceiving the material base of the potencies as a *substantial, living force*: 'The middle path is based on the potencies differing only in form *but not in content or substance*: they are only different kinds of manifestation of one and the same thing, namely, *living force*.'¹¹⁸ Despite his recognition that Schelling's logic of potentiation is meant to circumvent all reductionism in the philosophy of nature, Beiser ends up reducing the ontologically distinct levels of nature to various degrees—and we should note Beiser's strictly quantitative description of the potencies here—of 'living force'. In doing so, the ontological specificity of both inorganic nature *and* organic life is lost in a wash of sheer vitality.

The ontological specificity of life is not a merely local problem within Schelling's system. For life is the bridge between inorganic nature, on the one hand, and spirit, on the other. Thus, the way we interpret Schelling's conception of life has significant consequences for how we conceive the essential relationship between nature and spirit. Snow seems to interpret the nature-spirit identity in Schelling's nature philosophy as one of *non-hierarchical coincidence*,¹¹⁹ i.e. the identity of the visible and invisible features of the same reality. As I see it, this plays perfectly well into her interpretation of life as the horizon of nature-philosophical intelligibility, since the *higher* forms of reality (such as life and spirit)

¹¹⁶ Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 539.

¹¹⁷ Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 549.

¹¹⁸ Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 549. My emphasis.

¹¹⁹ Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, p. 111.

are seen, on Snow's view, as *already* at work in inorganic nature. Beiser's interpretation of Schelling's 'dynamic and organic concept of nature' is even more explicit in this regard, despite his recognition that Schelling is at pains to overcome reductionism. For Beiser, Schelling unifies nature and spirit through an extension of life to *every* domain of being, such that inorganic nature and spiritual freedom are, at bottom, expressions of organic life.¹²⁰ As I will argue throughout this thesis, these organicist interpretations of idealist nature philosophy miss out on the unique manner in which life unifies nature and spirit. For Schelling, as for Hegel, life unifies nature and spirit insofar as it is the ontologically *unique* form of nature which immanently leads to spiritual freedom, the latter being distinct from both inorganic and organic nature. In this way, idealist nature philosophy amounts to a strongly anti-reductionist system in which inorganic forces are shown to necessitate the existence of organic life, an ontologically derivative existence which in turn necessitates the existence of non-natural freedom.

My interpretation of Schelling as an 'anti-organicist' takes its inspiration in large part from Grant's reading. Although he has given little attention to the ultimate stage of nature's productivity—namely, non-natural spirit—Grant has single-handedly brought Schelling's interest in the fundamentally *inorganic* productivity of nature to the fore in contemporary scholarship on the philosophy of nature. As Grant rightly argues, 'organization is a power or *Potenz* of "the self-construction of matter"' and we misunderstand Schelling if this self-organising power is interpreted as signalling that the 'organism is the dominant paradigm of all physics'.¹²¹

I agree entirely with Grant's view that Schelling, at least when he is at his most consistent and philosophically most compelling, is no organicist. However, Grant does not only insist upon the priority of the inorganic in Schelling's nature philosophy, but he argues

¹²⁰ Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 538. The connection between the organicist interpretation of Schelling and the 'identity of coincidence' is clear in the following passage where Beiser explicitly refers to nature as invisible spirit: 'The thesis of subject-object identity...means that the subjective and objective are simply different degrees of organization and development of a single living force. The subjective is the internalization of the objective, the objective is the externalization of the subjective. Or, as Schelling once put it, "spirit is invisible nature, and nature is visible spirit"' (Beiser, 'Hegel and Naturphilosophie', p. 141). I consider Beiser's organicist interpretation of idealist nature philosophy in more detail in 4.10 below.

¹²¹ Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, p. 11.

that once we understand inorganic nature as self-organising, there is no longer any ontological difference between inorganic and organic phenomena. In fact, Grant interprets any nature-philosophical endeavour to distinguish the organic from the inorganic to be the antithesis of the Schellingian programme, and consistently pits Schelling's immanentist, anorganicism against the dualist nature philosophies of Blumenbach and Kant.¹²² Thus, Grant emphasises the centrality of the inorganic without attending to the manner in which this inorganic nature potentiates itself as an *ontologically distinct, organic* sphere of nature. On this score, Grant's inorganicist interpretation is just as reductionistic as the organicist interpretations of Snow and Beiser. So long as the inorganic and organic are understood to be mere 'differences of degree'—be these degrees of inorganic organisation (Grant) or degrees of organic life (Snow, Beiser)—Schelling's logic of emergence remains unintelligible. For the idealist logic of emergence marks out a distinctive ontological standpoint in which inorganic nature is conceived as ontologically primary and yet productive of an ontologically distinct *organic* life (and, ultimately, spiritual freedom).¹²³

To see that Schelling is committed to the ontological *difference* between inorganic and organic nature, we need only recognise that the development from second to third potency involves the emergence of novel forms of nature. Thus, when Schelling identifies sensibility, irritability, and *Bildungstrieb* as potentiated forms of magnetism, electricity, and chemical process, he does not mean that magnetic, electrical, and chemical phenomena have simply become *more forcefully* magnetic, electrical, and chemically dissoluble. On the contrary, Schelling is interested in what distinguishes *particular* forms of nature—namely,

¹²² In a telling passage, Grant dismisses a discussion of Schelling's in the *Annals of Medical Science* in which life and humanity are conceived as the crowning achievement of nature's progress as a 'relatively rare' instance, on Schelling's part, of promoting a linear conception of ontological development (Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, p. 12). But the very passage from the *General Deduction* which Grant goes on to cite as evidence of Schelling's non-linear conception of development *again* describes the organic as a higher potency of inorganic nature. That inorganic nature is the condition for the possibility of organic life and human spirit does not make life or spirit any less the 'crown' or 'blossom' of nature's development; on the contrary, it is precisely thanks to the activity in the depths of nature that ontologically distinct and more valuable forms of being are generated.

¹²³ As we will see in Part II of this thesis, Hegel takes up the same standpoint but understands the development from inorganic nature to life and spirit not in terms of self-potentiating powers but *self-negating negativity*, this latter conception of development being necessary, on Hegel's view, to secure the qualitative difference both philosophers take to be at work throughout the various stages of nature and spirit.

the three fundamental features of organic life—as more complex configurations of the strictly physical categories. Of course, this does not mean that organic nature is *substantially* different from inorganic nature; Schelling’s logic of emergence does not describe the emergence of distinct *substances*. But we should keep in mind that this is not due to some commitment on Schelling’s part to Spinozist monism. On the contrary, Schelling rejects *all* substance ontology for its refusal to conceive nature as fundamentally *active*, as a self-legislating, self-determining *process*. That nature’s various levels or potencies do not differ *substantially*, then, says nothing about their ontological distinctness or similarity. For Schelling, life is *ontologically* distinct from the inorganic not on account of some underlying, vital substance, but on account of the structurally distinctive activity *that life is*, an activity of *sensing* the surrounding environment, being *stimulated to respond* to that environment, and *driven to reproduce* itself.¹²⁴

In order to understand these distinguishing features of life, it is helpful to consider Kant’s influence on Schelling’s conception of the organism. For Kant, organic beings are judged as if they are *internally* purposive, as opposed to those natural entities judged as *externally* purposive, such as soil, air, and water, which are judged as purposive only insofar as they are means to an organism’s end.¹²⁵ Now, for Kant, even phenomena which are judged as internally purposive are only internally purposive *for us*; teleological judgments

¹²⁴ These remarks have undoubtedly simplified a profoundly ambiguous issue within Schelling’s early nature philosophy, and it is very possible I have sacrificed nuance in the hopes of making my interpretation clear. Allow me to elaborate here on Schelling’s ambiguity regarding the specificity of life. At times, Schelling certainly appears to conceive the whole of nature as an organism. For example, Schelling states that ‘we will also probably have to accept that the sensibility of plants and animals is only a modification of *universal sensibility*’ (*SW I/3*: 161n; *First Outline*, p. 117n), that ‘*sensibility* is probably the UNIVERSAL source of activity in Nature, and therefore is not a property of the individual organism but of the *whole of Nature*’ (*SW I/3*: 190; *First Outline*, p. 137). There is no question, then, that Schelling does, in certain instances, conceive organic activity as pertaining to the whole of nature. Yet we should note that 1) this conception of nature as universally sentient is only ever suggested or hypothesised as a *possible* explanation for sentience at the local level of the individual organism; and 2) by the *Introduction to the Outline* and the *General Deduction* there is little remaining of this conception of a ‘universal sensibility’. Nevertheless, this view is indeed at work in Schelling’s early nature philosophy, and we must account for it somehow. On my interpretation, these ‘organicist’ remarks of Schelling’s must be interpreted along the lines of the ‘originary identity’ or ‘identity of coincidence’ between nature and spirit discussed above. And it is this conception of nature-spirit identity which I hope to disentangle from Schelling’s far more compelling conception of the nature-spirit relation as one of processual differentiation or emergence.

¹²⁵ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 293

provide us with strictly regulative knowledge and do not, therefore, disclose the actual being of the organism. Note that this further removes the transcendental subject from cognition of nature as it really *is*: not only do objects of experience conform to our specifically *human* forms of intuition, but knowledge of organic life is even more ‘subjective’ since we only ever judge life *as if* it were internally purposive.

It should be clear by now that Schelling entirely rejects this Kantian restriction on our rational capacity to understand the nature of organic life. But Kant’s description of the self-organisation of life as self-causing and intrinsically purposive is absolutely central to Schelling’s speculative biology. Whereas inorganic nature is, as a whole, self-causing, any individual material body is produced by some *other* process. To be sure, matter is immanently mobile and actively involved with other matter, e.g. in gravitational motion, electrical discharge, and chemical processes. But despite this immanent activity, inorganic matter does not *cause* itself as do ‘organic forms’ which are ‘reciprocally means and end’:¹²⁶

Every organic product carries the reason of its existence in *itself*, for it is cause and effect of itself. No single part could *arise* except in this whole, and this whole itself consists only in the *interaction* of the parts.¹²⁷

Each organ and organic system (nervous, nutritive, respiratory, reproductive) within a whole organic life *is* and is constantly *maintained* for the sake of the whole. While inorganic bodies are features of an overall teleological structure (i.e. nature as totality), they do not maintain their individual character through an active, *individual* teleological process. For inorganic bodies are unlike organic bodies in an important way. Whereas the inorganic body does not intentionally oppose itself to its surrounding environment, ‘the organism is everything that it is only in opposition to its outer world’¹²⁸ and the maintenance of this opposition is the maintenance of the life of the *individual*, i.e. the refusal on the part of life to pass over, as a mere chemical process, into indifference.

¹²⁶ *SW I/3*: 186; *First Outline*, p. 134.

¹²⁷ *SW I/2*: 40; *Ideas*, p. 31.

¹²⁸ *SW I/3*: 147; *First Outline*, p. 107.

In sections 1.7 and 1.8 above, I considered how both gravitational motion and the chemical process signal the tendency of inorganic matter to seek ‘indifference’ or unity with all other matter. We are now in a position to see why this ‘drive to indifference’ fundamentally distinguishes inorganic nature from life. For the latter—so long as it remains *alive*—is nothing less than the active refusal to return to ‘indifference’, a striving *against* the chemical process wherein individual determinacy is lost.¹²⁹ We can now also see why Schelling’s system requires us to distinguish the inorganic from the organic, even when he seems, at times, to conceive *all* of nature as ‘organic’. For Schelling, the philosophy of nature must not only derive the qualitative or non-mechanistic combination and separation at work in chemical phenomena,¹³⁰ but it must show how the life process is neither mechanical *nor* chemical, but distinctively biological. Hence Schelling’s *affirmation* of the vitalist view of life as ‘something *sublime, beyond the chemical*’, a view which ‘infinitely tower[s] over [that of] the chemical physiologist’, despite the fact that the vitalist is utterly misled in conceiving this sublime transcendence of chemical process as dependent upon a mysterious, vital force.¹³¹

Schelling’s distinctive view, then, is that we must understand life as ontologically distinct from the non-living, and yet we must conceive the uniquely teleological character of life as immanently emergent from inorganic processes. The only way to properly conceive the relation between the inorganic and organic, then, is to leave behind the assumption that the *identity* between inorganic and organic is an identity of *coincidence*, for it is ‘*impossible* to reduce the construction of organic and of inorganic product to a *common* expression’.¹³² Instead, the identity of inorganic and organic—which prefigures the emergent identity of nature and spirit—must be conceived as a processual differentiation of the inorganic *as organic*:

¹²⁹ *SW I/3*: 322, 325; *Introduction to the Outline*, pp. 229, 231.

¹³⁰ *SW I/2*: 257; *Ideas*, p. 206.

¹³¹ *SW I/3*: 151-152; *First Outline*, pp. 110-111. See also *SW I/3*: 84n; *First Outline*, p. 63n: ‘It is a completely false assumption that the sublimity of life-processes over the chemical can only be explained in terms of an immaterial force.’

¹³² *SW I/3*: 325; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 231.

[The organic product] is only the *higher power* of the former, and is produced only by the higher power of the forces through which the latter also is produced.—Sensibility is only the higher power of magnetism; irritability only the higher power of electricity; formative drive only the higher power of the chemical process.¹³³

Thus, on Schelling's view, the development from inorganic matter to organic life is one of ontological differentiation without any 'gap' between the inorganic and organic. 'Nature...makes no leap...nothing which *comes to be* in Nature *comes to be* by a leap; all *becoming* occurs in a continuous sequence;¹³⁴ 'In Nature there is a continual determination of figure from the crystal to the leaf, from the leaf to the human form.'¹³⁵ As we will see in Part II of this thesis, for all of their similarities, Hegel explicitly rejects this Leibnizian principle which Schelling takes up with such enthusiasm.¹³⁶ On my view, this is because Hegel conceives the process of nature's development as one motivated by nature's intrinsic *negativity*, making the 'leap' from one stage to another a necessary consequence of nature's ontological asunderness—a notion quite distinct from Schelling's conception of nature as a fully rational whole productive of ever increasing *powers*. Nevertheless, Schelling's insistence upon the gapless character of the development from inorganic to organic nature should not be interpreted as a reductionism of any kind: the inorganic develops *into* the organic with ontological continuity, because the powers distinctive of life are inorganic powers that have become *reconfigured* as to be productive of a teleologically structured *individual*. Thus, the *continuous* process of 'becoming' which leads from inorganic to organic nature leads to *ontologically distinct* forms of nature, forms which are made distinct precisely by this continuous process.¹³⁷

But how does Schelling conceive this development from inorganic to organic powers? How does the polarity of repulsive and attractive forces become reconfigured as an

¹³³ *SW I/3*: 325; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 231.

¹³⁴ *SW I/2*: 171-172; *Ideas*, p. 133.

¹³⁵ *SW I/3*: 30; *First Outline*, p. 26.

¹³⁶ See Chapter 6.9.

¹³⁷ *SW I/2*: 171-172; pp. 133-134.

intrinsically teleological polarity through which the organism distinguishes itself from the rest of nature? In order to see how life is a potentiation of the inorganic, we need to consider the fundamental features of life in some detail.

Schelling's ontology of life was central to his nature-philosophical programme from the start. He projected a third book of the *Ideas* to cover organic life and physiology in particular, and he first attempted to give an account of the structure of life in *On the World-Soul*. It is with the *First Outline*, however, that Schelling hits upon 'the essence of the organism'.¹³⁸ According to Schelling, 'the organic formation happens only through the mediation of the *process of excitability* [*Erregbarkeit*].'¹³⁹

Schelling takes up this conception of organic excitability from John Brown, a Scottish physiologist who had enormous influence on nineteenth-century German medicine and Romantic science more generally.¹⁴⁰ According to Brunonian physiology—made attractive to Schelling via Röschlaub's rationalist interpretation of Brown¹⁴¹—organic life is characterised by an active responsiveness to the external world. The organism, on this view, is neither a purely spontaneous nor passively receptive individual, but an active responsiveness *to* external stimulation. In other words, excitability is the ability to actively respond to the external world to which the organism is originally receptive. Significantly for Schelling, this model of life allows one to conceive the organism as both receptive *and* actively responsive to external stimulation. Thus, identifying the concept of excitability as the 'essence of the organism', Schelling avoids the limited standpoints of both reductive

¹³⁸ *SWI/3*: 145; *First Outline*, p. 106. It is not until the *Introduction to the Outline* and *General Deduction*, however, that Schelling becomes fully committed to the idea that the activities of the organism are potentiations of inorganic nature. Cf. Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 548.

¹³⁹ *SWI/3*: 61n; *First Outline*, p. 48n.

¹⁴⁰ On the reception of Brown's theory of health in Germany, see John Neubauer, 'Dr. John Brown (1735-1788) and Early German Romanticism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 28 (1967), pp. 367-382 and Nelly Tsouyopoulos, 'The Influence of John Brown's Ideas in Germany', *Medical History*, 8 (1988), pp. 63-74.

¹⁴¹ Indeed, Brown's physiological theory is important for Schelling because it makes possible a *rationalist* medical theory, one which depends neither on mere empiricism nor mysterious explanation. See Andreas Röschlaub, *Von dem Einflusse der Brown'schen Theorie in die praktische Heilkunde* (Würzburg: Köllischen Buchhandlung, 1798), § 259, p. 237: 'Diese Theorie ist es, wodurch die Epoche der rationellen Heilkunde begründet wird, und die Ausübung der Heilkunde selbst ihren philosophischen Weg bezeichnet erhält, welcher ihr bisher entweder ganz fehlte, oder doch nicht deutlich und gründlich genug vorgezeichnet war.' My thanks to Lydia Azadpour for referring me to this passage and for making her research on this topic available to me.

physicalism (which understands life as the pure passivity of mechanical motion or chemical process) and mysterious vitalism (which understands life as pure activity). Taking Brown's concept of excitability as the synthesis of receptivity and activity, then, Schelling is able to conceive the organism as *both* receptive and active, as a fundamentally 'excitable' individual.¹⁴²

As Nelly Tsouyopoulos has argued, Schelling's fundamental contribution to the theory of excitability regards his conception of health as a perpetuation and reproduction of the organism.¹⁴³ According to Brown, the health of an organism is dependent upon a balanced state of excitement from external stimuli. Illness ensues when the immanent activity of an organism is either insufficiently stimulated (resulting in an excess of organic activity in the 'sthenic' illnesses) or overly stimulated (resulting in a depletion of organic activity in the 'asthenic' illnesses). What Schelling contributes to this theory is the idea that the *equilibrium* of excitability sought by the organism allows that organism to continually produce itself anew (and ultimately reproduce itself)—hence the appropriate Brunonian identification of equilibrium with 'health'. In Schelling's words, 'The excitability of the organism presents itself in the external world as a constant *self-reproduction*.'¹⁴⁴ The balance between activity and receptivity, therefore, is central for the organism to be the self-reproducing being that it is, lest it become ill or die.¹⁴⁵ Because the organism is a self-reproducing or self-constructing activity, it is fundamentally duplicitous, a self-producing

¹⁴² 'The system whose standpoint I have now just developed takes a stand between two opposed systems: the chemical system knows the organism merely as an object or product, and allows everything to act upon it as object upon object, i.e., chemically; the system of vital force knows the organism only as subject, as absolute activity, and allows everything to act upon it only as activity. The third system posits the organism as subject and object, activity and receptivity at once, and this reciprocal determination of receptivity and activity, grasped in one concept, is nothing other than what Brown called "excitability"' (*SW I/3: 90n; First Outline*, p. 68n).

¹⁴³ Tsouyopoulos, 'The Influence of John Brown's Ideas in Germany' p. 72.

¹⁴⁴ *SW I/3: 146; First Outline*, p. 107.

¹⁴⁵ From this perspective, we see how life is far different from the chemical process, which results in the dissolution of qualitative particularity. Rather than a chemical *product* of *another* process, the organism is a perpetual activity of *maintaining its own* individual character. As Schelling puts it, 'The organic distinguishes itself from the dead simply in that the existence of the first is not an actual *being* but rather a continual *being-reproduced* (through itself)' (*SW I/3: 146; First Outline*, p. 107).

product.¹⁴⁶ By actively *relating* to itself *as an object*—the organism proves to be both *subjective* and *objective*. Indeed, this is how Schelling ties Brown’s theory of excitability to the Kantian conception of organism as cause and effect of itself.

As both subject and object, the organism expresses a uniquely teleological form of duplicity which is *undivided* in the organism’s self-relation.¹⁴⁷ But in order to see this, we need to consider the ‘most original factors of excitability’:¹⁴⁸ sensibility and irritability, each of which is a unique form of the duplicity of activity and receptivity (or subjectivity and objectivity). Sensibility is the more basic of the two and is understood as a potentiation of magnetism because it is, like magnetism, an ‘originary duplicity’.¹⁴⁹ As I understand Schelling, this is because sensibility is a simple relation-to-self *as object*, the active or subjective capacity to *be affected* by external stimuli. The sentient organism is thus *both* subject and object in that it subjectively *feels* its objectified *self*, and there is no *difference* between the self which feels and the self which is felt in sensation.¹⁵⁰ Because sensibility involves this immediate identity of subject-object duplicity, it is not only analogous to magnetic polarity but is a more complex expression of magnetism, where positive and negative force are always present in the individual magnet.

Thanks to the manner in which the organism relates to itself via its receptivity to stimuli, the organism is capable of a distinctive form of *movement*. Indeed, Schelling identifies sensibility as ‘absolutely nothing other than the inner condition of organic movement’, the ‘source of organic activity.’¹⁵¹ In other words, sensibility allows the organism to become agitated to *act*, an activity Schelling identifies with the physiological concept of ‘irritability’, the second necessary feature of excitability. The development from

¹⁴⁶ ‘The organism is its own object’ (*SW I/3*: 145; *First Outline*, p. 106, emphasis modified).

¹⁴⁷ *SW I/3*: 145n; *First Outline*, p. 106n.

¹⁴⁸ *SW I/3*: 206; *First Outline*, p. 148.

¹⁴⁹ *SW I/3*: 218; *First Outline*, p. 157. See also *SW I/4*: 74.

¹⁵⁰ Schelling’s speculative biology appears, at first glance, to be almost exclusively concerned with animal life, since, according to Schelling, without sensibility ‘no organism is possible’. However, Schelling insists in the *First Outline* that plants are also sentient although indemonstrably so (*SW I/3*: 156-157; *First Outline*, p. 114).

¹⁵¹ *SW I/3*: 157-158n; *First Outline*, pp. 115-116n.

sensibility to irritability is perhaps easiest to comprehend with reference to the ‘organic equilibrium’ which is *disturbed* thanks to the openness of the organism to its environment (sensibility).¹⁵² Insofar as this disruption of equilibrium makes possible an active attempt to *restore* the equilibrium (irritability), sensibility is the condition for the possibility of irritability.¹⁵³ In other words, the sentient life which is already subjective simply needs an opportunity to be activated, to respond to the external stimuli which disturb its life-process.

Schelling identifies irritability as the potentiation of electricity, and I take it that this is, in part, because the irritable ‘restoration’ of organic equilibrium is analogous to the neutralisation which results from electrical discharge. Moreover, whereas magnetism and sensibility are both expressions of *simultaneous* duplicity (or ‘difference in identity’), electricity and irritability are expressions of *sundered* duplicity. In the case of irritability, this is seen in the ‘*alternation* of expansion and contraction’ that defines the either/or responsiveness of the organism to its environment.¹⁵⁴ Finally, the galvanic experiments of the late eighteenth century cemented for Schelling the intrinsic connection between electricity and the spontaneous motion of organic life.

For our purposes, however, the most important feature of irritability is not its connection to electricity but the fact that irritability does not only aim to restore organic equilibrium but to restore the organism *itself*, since the organism simply would not remain the active life that it is were it not for its perpetual responsiveness to stimuli.¹⁵⁵ For this reason, the irritable, ‘self-production of the organism’ is in a sense a ‘force of reproduction’.¹⁵⁶ Thus, according to Schelling, ‘*Irritability* must pass directly into *formative drive*’,¹⁵⁷ expressed as a technical or creative drive (*Kunsttrieb*) under certain environmental

¹⁵² *SW I/3*: 206; *First Outline*, p. 148.

¹⁵³ *SW I/3*: 205-206; *First Outline*, p. 148.

¹⁵⁴ *SW I/3*: 172; *First Outline*, p. 125. Emphasis modified.

¹⁵⁵ *SW I/3*: 206; *First Outline*, p. 148.

¹⁵⁶ *SW I/3*: 206; *First Outline*, p. 148. Emphasis modified.

¹⁵⁷ *SW I/3*: 171; *First Outline*, p. 124.

and physiological conditions but ultimately expressed throughout the organic sphere as *sexual reproduction*.¹⁵⁸

For Schelling, the organism's drive to reproduce is the highest form of purposiveness in nature, and this can be seen in the extent to which the formative drive involves the activity of chemical processes raised to a higher level. While chemical processes are in some sense productive—making possible new material products through chemical combination and separation—the organic productivity is ‘a still higher kind than the merely chemical’¹⁵⁹ on account of the fact that organic production *maintains* the life of the species. Sexual reproduction does not signify the *dissolution* of the original product as does the chemical process; rather, the reproductive process results in the *continuation* of the original product as a new product, the perpetuation of the individual as *another* individual. Thus, with the reproductive process the organic realm proves to be a *distinctive* form of the chemical ‘identity through difference’. In the reproduction of itself as *another* individual life, an organism continues its own identity in another product, a product which is *itself* nothing other than an individual activity of production. From this perspective, Schelling's claim about the immanent development through the organic potencies becomes clearer: At each stage—sensibility, irritability, and formative drive—the organism expresses a novel form of the identity-difference relations at work in magnetism, electricity, and chemical process.

Schelling does not claim to be the first to suggest that sensibility gives way to irritability and irritability to formative drive. On the contrary, Schelling's account of this development is only possible by drawing upon the thought of Kiehmeyer, Herder, Blumenbach, and Sömmering, all of whom Schelling mentions explicitly as conceiving the inner unity of these three organic activities. But what these philosophers fail to account for, according to Schelling, is the mechanism by which sensibility develops into irritability and formative drive.¹⁶⁰ In other words, what is lacking prior to Schelling's speculative intervention is an account of the *rational* development which leads from the more basic to

¹⁵⁸ *SW I/3*: 180-181; *First Outline*, p. 131.

¹⁵⁹ *SW I/3*: 61n; *First Outline*, p. 48n. Emphasis modified.

¹⁶⁰ *SW I/3*: 195n; *First Outline*, p. 141n.

more complex activities of life. As I have attempted to show, this rational development consists in the various ways each stage of nature potentiates the originary duplicity of repulsion and attraction (which is nothing other than matter itself).

Now that we have reached the highest stage of organic life, we can see that life is not only 'higher' than inorganic nature on account of its ontological dependence on the latter. What makes organic life 'higher' is that it is a more explicit expression of nature's originary *productivity*. Indeed, the organism is not so much a product of nature's productivity, but an *individuated* form of production itself, and thus a 'higher' expression of nature's own subjective activity. That being said, I began this section on life with the insistence upon the difference between the universally productive or subjective dimension of nature and the ontologically specific potency of organic life. I argued that Schelling should not be understood as an 'organicist' because he conceives nature's total self-organisation as something other than 'life'. Now that we come to see that Schelling also conceives the organism as a subjective, productive activity, it is necessary to define in more certain terms the manner in which life—as a unique form of nature—is distinct from nature as a whole. In order to do so, we need only note that the organic is 'an indirect effect of external, impinging influences'.¹⁶¹ Indeed, the excitability which defines organic life is only possible insofar as the organism is responsive to an environment with which it is not identified; a separated existence from 'external, impinging influences' is a condition for the possibility of life. Nature as a whole, on the other hand, is not *provoked* into productivity; there is no 'external world' compelling nature to production. Rather, nature (*natura naturans*) *just is* originary, creative power. And this distinction has important consequences for the kind of production expressed by the 'world-soul' on the one hand and the individual organism on the other. Nature as a whole is *unlimited* in its powers of production, for it is an infinitely creative impulse from which all forms emerge. The organism, on the other hand, is not defined by infinite productivity, but its *limited* form of production, since it only ever reproduces its own form (a reproduction of its *individuality*). As Schelling says, this 'does not mean that it

¹⁶¹ *SW I/3: 146; First Outline*, p. 107.

absolutely stops being active, but that it is limited with respect *to its productions*; it cannot reproduce anything to infinity except *itself*.¹⁶²

With this final stage of organic life, we learn that what fundamentally distinguishes organic life from inorganic nature is that the organism is not a mere *product* of nature's productivity, but is itself *productive*, albeit at a diminished level, since it only ever reproduces itself. The organism, then, is distinct from the *whole* of nature as well as the more basic, inorganic stages of nature on account of its *limited form of productivity*. Life is therefore that stage of nature which transcends all prior stages in its activity not only to move itself and relate to other matter, but to produce itself anew; and yet this organic productivity in no way exhausts the originary productivity at work within nature. Thus, the graduated sequence of stages does not reach its culmination in life, but leads to a further stage of creativity in the life of the human *spirit*.

At the end of the organic process, therefore, we reach the transition out of nature and into an ontologically distinct region of being: that of consciousness or human freedom. In none of his nature-philosophical works does Schelling explain this transition in any detail. It is not until the *Freedom* essay of 1809 that Schelling provides an account of the emergence of spirit, an account I will consider in Chapter 3. To conclude this chapter, however, I want to remark on Schelling's refusal in the *First Outline* to conceive life as a deficient form of human reason, as if the being of life were a privative form of spirit.¹⁶³ For this refusal gets to the heart of Schelling's logic of emergence.

In the *First Outline*, Schelling rejects outright the idea that organic life should be conceived as either a 'degree' or a 'kind' of reason.¹⁶⁴ This further substantiates the interpretation that, for Schelling, one cannot understand the lower forms of nature from the perspective of the higher forms. Now, however, we see that this rule does not pertain exclusively to the inorganic-organic relation, but extends to that between life and spirit (however Schelling ultimately conceives the latter). To be sure, there is rationality—or

¹⁶² *SW I/3*: 59; *First Outline*, p. 46. Emphasis modified.

¹⁶³ *SW I/3*: 180-183; *First Outline*, pp. 131-132.

¹⁶⁴ *SW I/3*: 180-183; *First Outline*, pp. 131-132.

reason *as such*—in the life of the organism, as well as in the motion of the planets and, indeed, in all aspects of nature, since nature is intrinsically rational. But the unique capacity for *reasoning* expressed by the human spirit is ontologically distinct from this cosmological rationality. As Schelling states, human rationality requires deliberation, intuitive experience, and a historical tradition—none of which characterise the activity of the non-human animal or anything else in mere nature for that matter.¹⁶⁵ It is necessary, then, that Schelling’s early nature philosophy be interpreted as an outright rejection of the Neoplatonist idea that lower forms of reality are degradations of higher forms. Although he will find inspiration in such a view in the *Presentation* of 1801, the early philosophy of nature marks out the distinctive Schellingian standpoint in which higher forms of reality are potentiations of lower forms, and it is only with the emergence of consciousness that the power of reasoning arises from an already rational nature.¹⁶⁶

That such a reasoning activity arises through the immanent, rational development of nature itself means that spiritual consciousness will have at its disposal its own atemporal ‘prehistory’ to reflect upon or, better put, to ‘reenact’ through intellectual intuition. For, according to the *General Deduction*, man is not a ‘pure spirit’ but is always a potentiated form of nature’s fundamental forces, the source of man’s non-natural activity.¹⁶⁷ Emergent from nature, then, the human spirit is capable of ‘recalling’ the potentiation of inorganic matter into consciousness, hence Schelling’s identification of Platonic *anamnesis* as one way

¹⁶⁵ *SW I/3*: 183; *First Outline*, p. 132.

¹⁶⁶ The same distinction between cosmological rationality and emergent, human reason can be seen in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*: ‘The dead and unconscious products of nature are merely abortive attempts that she makes to reflect herself; inanimate nature so-called is actually as much an immature intelligence, so that in her phenomena the still unwitting character of intelligence is already peeping through. –Nature’s highest goal, to become wholly an object to herself, is achieved only through the last and highest order of reflection, which is none other than man; or, more generally, it is what we call reason, whereby nature first completely returns into herself, and by which it becomes apparent that nature is identical from the first with what we recognize in ourselves as the intelligent and the conscious’ (*SW I/3*: 341; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, p. 6)

¹⁶⁷ *SW I/4*: 77. That the human is both natural and *more* than natural is clear from the fact that neither Schelling’s account of transcendental consciousness in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* nor his subsequent account of emergent, human freedom are strictly speaking texts of nature philosophy. As Schelling remarks in the *System* of 1800, ‘if our whole enterprise were merely that of explaining nature, we should never have been driven into idealism’ (*SW I/3*: 332; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, p. 3).

to characterise the task of nature philosophy.¹⁶⁸ But at this stage in Schelling's development, *anamnesis* must be understood as quite the opposite of the Neoplatonist version of the same. The idealist philosopher of nature does not recall the life of the soul prior to its degradation in the material world, but rather, he recalls how *matter itself* has raised itself, step by step, to the standpoint of human spirit.

¹⁶⁸ *SW I/4*: 77.

Chapter 2: The ‘Originary Identity’ of Nature and Spirit

2.1. Introduction

The groundbreaking question Schelling poses in his early philosophy of nature is that of the ontological conditions for spiritual freedom. By inquiring into how nature develops *into* consciousness, Schelling turns transcendental philosophy on its head, initiating a post-Kantian idealism which seeks to account for the necessary existence of spiritual subjectivity without presupposing its existence in the first place. But we must keep in mind that during the years Schelling worked out his philosophy of nature, he also remained committed to pursuing a version of transcendental philosophy, one that would describe the path whereby consciousness comes to know itself as united with the natural world, a non-temporal development presented in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. The nature philosophy and transcendental philosophy, then, were to be the two necessary parts of the system of philosophy as a whole, hence Schelling’s claim that ‘neither transcendental philosophy nor the philosophy of nature is adequate by itself.’¹ Now, according to the *General Deduction* and *On the True Concept*, nature philosophy is *first* philosophy and transcendental philosophy the derivative part of philosophical science.² But the fact remains that, even according to this nature-philosophical perspective, philosophy is only a comprehensive science of being if it traces the ontological development from nature to spirit as well as the higher-order development from spirit to nature, the latter of which discloses the nature-spirit unity resulting from our subjective *cognition* of objective nature. Both the philosophy of nature and transcendental idealism, then, reveal the fundamental identity between nature and

¹ *SW I/3*: 331; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, p. 2.

² *SW I/4*: 75-78; *SW I/4*: 92; *On the True Concept*, p. 17.

spirit. Indeed, it is the *originary* identity between nature and spirit which makes both the philosophy of nature and transcendental idealism possible in the first place.

In Chapter 1, I called this originary identity between nature and spirit an ‘identity of coincidence’ and distinguished it from the ‘identity of emergence’ that is Schelling’s more explicit concern throughout his early works of nature philosophy. Although Schelling only occasionally conceives the nature-spirit relation as one of originary identity in the early philosophy of nature, this idea remains implicit for the years following Schelling’s claim in the *Ideas* that nature is spirit made visible and spirit is invisible nature.³ For the early Schelling, in both speculative physics and transcendental idealism, nature and spirit prove to be—and this means they have *always already been*—two aspects of the *same being*: the subject-object identity prior to its differentiation as natural and spiritual.

In the so-called identity philosophy, Schelling focuses on this originary identity of nature and spirit. Thus, beginning with Schelling’s 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, Schelling’s philosophical concerns shift in a significant manner. Yet despite the fact that this new focus of Schelling’s distinguishes his identity philosophy from the works which precede it, there is also continuity between these periods of thought, which explains why he could reissue the *Ideas* and the *World-Soul* during the years he was promoting the identity system. Indeed, it also explains how, in his late philosophy, Schelling often equates the philosophy of nature with the system of identity as his version of ‘negative philosophy’ or rationalist ontology. On my view, the system of identity makes explicit the largely implicit assumption in Schelling’s earlier work, namely, that the originary identity of nature and spirit is the condition for the possibility of nature and spirit *as such*. I thus take Schelling at his word when he describes his intellectual development in the Preface to the *Presentation*:

I now find myself impelled by the present situation of science to publicly bring forward, sooner than I wish, the system that for me was the foundation of these different presentations [i.e. the philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy]...no one should think...that I have altered my system of philosophy: for the system that appears here for the first time in its

³ *SW I/2*: 56; *Ideas*, p. 42.

fully characteristic shape is the same one that I always had in view in the different presentations, and that I continually used as my personal guide-star in both transcendental and natural philosophy.⁴

To take Schelling at his word here, however, does not mean that we must hold the view that his system remains unchanged from the early nature philosophy to the philosophy of identity. In this chapter, I will argue that there is a significant difference between the early nature philosophy, on the one hand, and the identity philosophy, on the other. But this difference is only intelligible from the perspective of the continuity of these periods of Schelling's philosophising. On my view, the identity philosophy makes fully explicit the implications of his early Spinozist tendencies regarding the *originary* identity of nature and spirit, but it does so *at the expense* of his more profound and, indeed, more provocative conception of the *emergent* identity of nature and spirit. As will become clear in this chapter, in the philosophy of identity, Schelling abandons his earlier concerns for the emergence of spirit in order to attend to the manner in which nature and spirit are primordially 'one'. Thus, with the *Presentation* of 1801, Schelling conceives the absolute as the *indifferent* unity of nature and spirit. The question which drives Schelling during this period, therefore, is not how we account for the emergence of spirit from nature, but rather, what becomes for Schelling the more pressing and fundamental question of ontological development: Why does an originary and absolute identity develop into nature and spirit at all? From whence the original separation?

2.2. Indifference as Absolute identity

The system of identity shows Schelling at his most Spinozist; indeed, Schelling even reasons *more geometrico* in his *Presentation* of 1801.⁵ The logic of emergence at work in the early nature philosophy is thus occluded by Schelling's newfound commitment to present the

⁴ *SWI/4*: 107-108; *Presentation*, p. 141.

⁵ 'Concerning the manner of exposition, I have taken Spinoza as a model here, since I thought there was good reason to choose as a paradigm the philosopher whom I believed came nearest my system in terms of content or material and in form' (*SWI/4*: 113; *Presentation*, p. 145).

absolute as originally *one*. Indeed, the mantra of the *hen kai pan* championed by Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel in their youth comes to its fullest fruition in Schelling's identity philosophy. Such an identity is not achieved by way of dialectical movement, but is present from the very beginning. Let us therefore consider this beginning, the first definitions of the first presentation of the identity system, in order to elucidate Schelling's idea of a primordial, as opposed to processual, form of identity.

Schelling begins the *Presentation* with a definition of this absolute or primordial identity as reason itself: 'I call *reason* absolute reason, or reason insofar as it is conceived as the total indifference of the subjective and objective.'⁶ Reason, for Schelling, is the '*indifference*' of subject and object because it is both 1) *different* from subjectivity and objectivity (reason itself being neither subjective nor objective) and 2) *identical* to subjectivity and objectivity insofar as reason will prove to involve both subjective activity and objective being—albeit not *as* subjectivity or objectivity *per se*. It is perhaps helpful, however, to hold off on describing reason in terms of 'indifference' and note that Schelling's aim here at the beginning of the *Presentation* is to understand the absolute as, at one and the same time, *thought* and *being*, yet without any reference to a subjective form of thinking or an objective 'thing'. As Schelling remarks in the *Bruno* of 1802, reason or 'absolute cognition' is 'absolutely identical, simple, sublime, free of all duality [and] self-estrangement...for there is no opposition of thought and being within it.'⁷ To comprehend the absolute identity that defines the being of beings, then, it is necessary to come to the standpoint of this 'absolute cognition' wherein thought and being are identical.⁸

⁶ *SW I/4*: 114; *Presentation*, p. 145.

⁷ *SW I/4*: 324; *Bruno*, p. 218.

⁸ Schelling's conception of the identity between thought and being can be traced back to his earlier, so-called 'Fichtean' period. In *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, Schelling argues that the unconditioned must be an identity between thought and being, since 1) the unconditioned cannot *be* on account of our thinking something *else* (otherwise it would be conditioned by the thought of something that it *is not*); and 2) it cannot be *known* on account of *another* being (otherwise *knowledge* of the unconditioned would be conditioned and thus render such knowledge conditioned) (*SW I/1*: 162-163; *Of the I in The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, pp. 71-72). The unconditioned must therefore *be* because it is *known* and it must be *known* because it *is*. By the 1801 *Presentation*, the 'unconditioned' becomes even less dependent upon a subjective 'I' such that we can formulate the logic of this unconditioned (or absolute) as follows: the absolute must *be* because it is *knowable* and it must be *knowable* because it *is*.

But how does one arrive at this standpoint of reason? Is reason not a faculty of *mind*, a *subjective* power of cognition? According to Schelling, this is to illegitimately presuppose a Kantian conception of reason, and the standpoint of reason can only be achieved by shedding such subjectivist notions:

The thought of reason is foreign to everyone; to conceive it as absolute, and thus to come to the standpoint I require, one must abstract from what does the thinking. For the one who performs this abstraction reason immediately ceases to be something subjective, as most people imagine it.⁹

In other words, we can only access the standpoint of thought *as such*, being *as such*—and these are the same thing—if we let go of the notion that the *subject* thinks the being of the *object*. To abstract away from the ‘domain of consciousness’ in order to arrive at reason *as such* is to intellectually intuit the identity of thought and being.¹⁰ Again, Schelling’s fundamental inspiration during this period of thought is Spinoza, whose third kind of knowledge is a model for Schelling’s conception of intellectual intuition.¹¹ It is only by letting go of the limited standpoint of consciousness that one arrives at the essential truth of what *is*.

Because reason is a non-differentiated unity, its ‘law of being’ is the law of identity: $A = A$.¹² Now, ‘between the A that is posited as subject in $A = A$, and the A that is posited as predicate...no intrinsic opposition is possible.’¹³ However, it is *also* the case that ‘absolute identity cannot cognize itself infinitely without infinitely positing itself as subject and object’ and *this* latter notion—a proposition Schelling remarks is ‘self-evident’—leads to the *differentiation* of the absolute into subjective activity and objective being.¹⁴ However, before considering this process of differentiation in any detail, it is first important to recognise that

⁹ *SW I/4*: 115-115; *Presentation*, p. 146.

¹⁰ *SW I/4*: 293, 325; *Bruno*, pp. 190, 218-219.

¹¹ Cf. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), Part II, Proposition 40, Scholium 2, p. 90.

¹² *SW I/4*: 118; *Presentation*, p. 148.

¹³ *SW I/4*: 121; *Presentation*, p. 150. Emphasis modified.

¹⁴ *SW I/4*: 123; *Presentation*, p. 151. Emphasis modified.

any difference between A as subject and A as predicate is ontologically *derivative*. Indeed, as we have already seen, subject and object, thought and being, and—most importantly for our purposes—nature and spirit, are only possible *as* distinct terms thanks to their originary unity in reason which is ‘simply one and simply self-identical’.¹⁵ Thus, however Schelling may account for the process of differentiation which yields a distinctive nature and spirit, this process will be logically secondary to the common source of that difference, namely, absolute identity itself.

The derivative character of difference has significant consequences for how Schelling conceives the ontological status of both nature and spirit. In this regard, it is important to note that in the system of identity, especially as it is exhibited in the 1801 *Presentation*, Schelling conceives the derivative status of subjective activity and objective being as indicative that these are merely *apparent* phenomena. For example, Schelling writes that ‘one is accustomed to viewing things not as they are in reason, *but only as they appear*’,¹⁶ as if the appearances—wherein differences obtain—were *mere* appearances that fail to express the inner truth of originary identity. As Schelling puts it, ‘this A in the subject position and the other in the predicate position is not what is really posited; what is posited is only the identity between the two.’¹⁷ In other words, the sign of equality in $A = A$ is not first and foremost a copula linking subject and predicate; it does not signify predication or a coming-to-unity of something and something other. Rather, the sign of equality signifies the absolute *in its pure and simple being*, an identity which encompasses *all that is* as the eternal identity of all with all.¹⁸

As we will see in Chapter 3, this conception of originary identity—for all of its problems—its essential to how Schelling reformulates his metaphysical system and finally comes to a fully processual conception of nature-spirit identity in the *Freedom* essay of

¹⁵ *SW I/4*: 116; *Presentation*, p. 147. Emphasis modified.

¹⁶ *SW I/4*: 116; *Presentation*, p. 146. My emphasis.

¹⁷ *SW I/4*: 117, Editor’s note; *Presentation*, p. 250n.

¹⁸ ‘*Absolute identity is absolute totality*. —Because it is itself everything that is, or, it cannot be conceived as separated from everything that is...It *is*, therefore, only as everything, i.e., it is absolute totality’ (*SW I/4*: 125; *Presentation*, p. 152).

1809. In particular, the notion that the sign of equality does not, first and foremost, connect two *previously existing* terms but rather *makes those terms possible* is central to Schelling's conception of identity, in the *Freedom* essay, as the coming-into-existence of nature's ontological consequents. However, in order to unpack the full significance of Schelling's distinctive logic of predication in the *Freedom* essay, it is necessary to first consider his identity philosophy and its insistence upon the derivative character of difference. For it is this which sets the identity philosophy apart from what precedes and follows it in Schelling's intellectual development. In the *Presentation*, Schelling conceives the difference between nature and spirit as derivative of their originary identity, and it follows from Schelling's views of this period that what is derivative is, ontologically speaking, *less true*. That is to say, according to the *Presentation*, derivative existence *is* less. It is thus the *undifferentiated* unity of nature and spirit which truly *is* for Schelling during this period of his thought.

With these remarks, one cannot help but think of Hegel's comment in the *Phenomenology* about the 'night in which all cows are black', and it is no wonder that Schelling's *Presentation* had such an affect on Hegel's turn away from Schellingian metaphysics in Jena.¹⁹ As I will argue in Chapter 4, I take Hegel's rejection of the concept of 'indifference' to be far more nuanced than is ordinarily assumed, and I believe both philosophers fundamentally rejected the idea that 'identity' is, at bottom, devoid of difference. Yet if Schelling's conception of identity in the *Presentation* stifles difference to the extent that reason is determined as simple oneness and all processes of differentiation are conceived as merely apparent, then the system of identity fails to account for the identity of identity *and difference*. Thus, it is necessary to ask how Schelling's identity philosophy accounts for difference as in some sense immanent to identity. If Schelling conceives identity in the *Presentation* to be the essential truth of being, how does he account for the plurality of natural and spiritual forms and, more fundamentally, for the difference between nature and spirit as such? In order to answer these questions, I will consider two interrelated

¹⁹ *W* 3: p. 22; *Phenomenology*, p. 9.

strategies Schelling employs to conceive difference within absolute identity: a Neoplatonic logic of emanation and a reworking of the concept of ‘potency’.

2.3. The Logic of Emanation

Michael Vater describes the system of identity as ‘a field-metaphysics, where one identical reality finds expression under different forms in the ordered phenomena of nature and of consciousness’.²⁰ But how does the *one* identical reality become expressed as natural phenomena, on the one hand, and spiritual phenomena, on the other? In the system of identity, Schelling develops a version of the Neoplatonist doctrine of emanation to account for the difference between nature and spirit.

As I argued in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the idealist logic of emergence with which this thesis is primarily concerned is in principle opposed to the logic of emanation, despite the undeniable influence of Neoplatonism upon the entirety of German idealist metaphysics. It is therefore of the utmost importance to note that despite the continuity between Schelling’s early nature philosophy and the system of identity, a fundamental difference separates these periods of Schelling’s thought insofar as the identity philosophy is characterised by a logic of emanation.²¹ Whereas Schelling’s early nature philosophy describes the emergence of higher forms of being from lower forms, the system of identity describes the differentiation of the absolute as a process of ontological degradation.²²

Note, however, that this does not mean Schelling simply inverts the emergentist programme of his nature philosophy. The identity philosophy does not describe a process whereby pure spirit *becomes natural*. On the contrary, after working out the basic metaphysics of the system of identity in §§ 1-49 of the *Presentation*, Schelling goes on to

²⁰ Michael Vater, Translator’s Introduction to Schelling’s *Presentation of My System of Philosophy in The Philosophical Forum*, Volume 32 (2001), p. 341.

²¹ Cf. Robert Stern’s Introduction to the *Ideas*, p. xxiii.

²² Christopher Lauer has noted this shift in Schelling’s emphasis on emergence to emanation with respect to the relationship between the understanding and reason. Whereas in *On the World Soul*, the *First Outline*, and the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling describes reason’s emergence *from* the understanding, in the identity philosophy, reason devolves *into* the understanding. Cf. Lauer, *The Suspension of Reason in Hegel and Schelling*, (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 138-139.

describe his philosophy of nature (§§ 50-159) and abruptly concludes the work before going on to consider consciousness in any detail. Schelling does not return to a subjective idealist account of nature, then, but rather aims to understand *both* the philosophy of nature and transcendental idealism from the perspective of their inner unity. The task of the system of identity is thus to present the emanation of nature *and* spirit from their originary indifference.

It is not immediately obvious that Schelling utilises a Neoplatonist logic in his identity philosophy, since he struggles with the notion that the processes of differentiation that lead to the various levels of natural and spiritual being might be *necessary* given that the absolute is a self-sufficient identity. The notion that ‘absolute identity...has not stepped beyond itself’,²³ however, is not incompatible with the Neoplatonic overflowing of the One. For the Neoplatonic One remains *transcendent* and *self-sufficient* with respect to its hypostases, despite the fact that these hypostases are instances of the One ‘stepping beyond itself’. The One is beyond all beings—beyond being itself—and is absolute precisely because it is beyond all particularity and difference. And yet the One, in its ontological abundance, proceeds ‘outwards’, constituting lower levels of being—the intellect, the soul, the material world—in a process of overflowing donation. Thus, ‘The One is all things and no one of them.’²⁴ In this way, emanation comprises a model of ontological development that moves from ‘high to low’ insofar as the *greater* develops into the *lesser*. But because the lesser forms of being are not *separate* from the One—indeed, they are less plentiful hypostases *of* the One—these levels of being are entirely *immanent* to the One. In other words, *what is* for the Neoplatonist is nothing *other than* the absolute.

According to Vater, Schelling’s apparent Neoplatonism is ‘more a matter of affinities holding between his thought and themes and preoccupations of the Neoplatonists than one of bookish or directly textual inheritance.’²⁵ Yet these affinities are instructive, particularly

²³ *SW* I/4: 120; *Presentation*, p. 149.

²⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads*, Fifth Ennead, Second Tractate, p. 380.

²⁵ Vater, ‘Schelling’s Neoplatonic System-Notion’ in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. by R. Baine Harris, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1976), p. 275.

since we are attempting to distinguish Schelling's identity system from his logic of emergence. Although Schelling continuously struggles to identify the impetus behind the absolute's differentiation, he takes on board the Neoplatonist notion that any distinctive being or form of being is an expression of the absolute itself. And yet in *some* sense such beings or forms of being must be *distinctive* and therefore 'different' from the absolute to which they are entirely immanent. This allows Schelling to both conceive the absolute as simple identity *and* account for the apparent differences between the natural and spiritual. As Schelling puts it in the *Bruno*, the identity philosophy provides us with the joy of recognising 'the stamp of the eternal in everything from the structure of corporeal things up to the forms of the syllogism'.²⁶ It does not follow, then, that because there is *only identity* that there must be no difference; rather, absolute identity is the origin, source, and essence of difference itself.

As McGrath has argued, Schelling's conception of identity is based on a Neoplatonic logic in which two terms of any binary (e.g. subject and object or mind and matter) can be differentiated from one another only insofar as they share a fundamental commonality.²⁷ The difference between nature and spirit, then, has its origin in a third term which is itself neither natural nor spiritual but is their 'identity' conceived as 'indifference', i.e. a third term which is indifferent *to* natural or spiritual determination. For Schelling, it is only on account of this indifferent form of identity that there can *be* nature or spirit, for nature and spirit *as such* must result from a being which is *neither* natural nor spiritual. This logic can be traced back to the *Enneads*, which states that 'it is precisely *because* there is nothing within the One that all things are from it.'²⁸

According to McGrath, this Neoplatonic logic distinguishes Schelling's understanding of the difference between nature and spirit from Hegel's understanding of the same. Although Hegel agrees with Schelling that 'reason'—the identity of thought and being—is *notionally distinct* from both nature and spirit, and although Hegel's account of reason's

²⁶ *SW* I/4: 297; *Bruno*, p. 194.

²⁷ McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit*, pp. 23-24.

²⁸ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Fifth Ennead, Second Tractate, p. 380.

structure precedes his account of the structure of nature or spirit, Hegel refuses the notion upheld by Schelling's identity philosophy that non-natural, non-spiritual reason is *more true* than its actual manifestation as nature and spirit. Indeed, as I will argue in Part II of this thesis, it is only with reason's manifestation as *other* than itself (i.e. as nature) and the process of nature's gradual 'inwardisation' that reason comes into its own and expresses itself as the truly self-determining being that it is implicitly, namely, spiritual freedom. Furthermore, reason is not the 'indifference' of nature and spirit for Hegel, but is rather the dialectically organised system of the most basic determinations of being that proves to realise itself as a natural world and the spiritual freedom at work within it. It is only through the process whereby reason negates its natural character and becomes spirit that nature and spirit prove to be ontologically continuous or united. In other words, the mature Hegel holds a *processual* conception of nature-spirit identity, where nature and spirit do not *begin* identical but, rather, *achieve* their identity in the dialectical process whereby nature necessitates spiritual freedom. It is thus understandable that in Jena Hegel became dissatisfied with Schelling's identity system, the *Presentation* of 1801 being the text upon which Hegel based most of his critique of Schelling. For in the system of identity, the absolute only develops into nature and spirit through a process of ontological degradation, as if the absolute were better off not becoming manifest at all. To be sure, Hegel himself conceives nature as an ontologically impoverished manifestation of reason, and I will consider this in detail in Chapter 4. But Hegel also insists that reason (or the absolute Idea) *only is* as nature and, subsequently, as spirit. The 'appearance' of reason as a natural world and as spiritual self-determination is, therefore, nothing ontologically superfluous but the very *being* of reason itself.

As I will argue in Chapter 3, Schelling does not remain committed to the view that nature and spirit are primordially and essentially identical. Whereas he argues in the *Presentation* with explicit reference to Spinoza that thought and extension are present *everywhere* and are 'never separated in anything, not even in thought and in extension, but are without exception together and identical',²⁹ he later claims that his own system of of

²⁹ *SW* I/4: 136; *Presentation*, p. 158.

identity was never meant to promote such a Spinozist view. Indeed, in the *Stuttgart Lectures* of 1810, Schelling argues that Spinoza failed to genuinely *unite* thought and extension as a proper nature-spirit identity because he does not account for their unity through a process of *differentiation*.³⁰ Thus, Schelling retrospectively argues that his own system of identity did not simply ‘combine’ nature and spirit as two aspects of substance but was meant to prove the *true* identity of nature and spirit through a conception of their unity as intrinsically *dynamic*, i.e. as ‘the living God’.³¹ I will explore this idea in Chapter 3, but suffice it to say that Schelling clearly misrepresents his earlier system of identity in these passages. For it is clear that in the early 1800s Schelling holds fast to the notion that neither nature nor spirit is ‘of higher value than the other, and neither of them can serve to explain the other; on the contrary, the orders of knowledge and of being are simply different aspects reflected from one and the same absolute.’³²

Thus, before moving on to consider Schelling’s later consideration of the nature-spirit relation in terms of a dynamic identity, it will be helpful to explore in further detail the nature-spirit relation as conceived in the identity philosophy. If Schelling understands nature and spirit to emanate from their originary indifference, in what sense are nature and spirit *different* from one another? What distinguishes nature from spirit if they are expressions of the same originary identity? Schelling addresses this issue by reconceptualising the nature of the potencies.

2.4. Powers: Qualitative and Quantitative

In Chapter 1, I considered how Schelling’s early philosophy of nature described nature’s *Stufenfolge* as a process of ‘potentiation’ leading from the inorganic forces of nature to the universal categories of physics and life. Finally, this process culminated in the emergence of consciousness as the highest stage of nature’s immanent development. I argued that

³⁰ *SW I/7*: 443; *Stuttgart Seminars*, p. 214.

³¹ *SW I/7*: 444; *Stuttgart Seminars*, p. 214.

³² *SW I/4*: 304; *Bruno*, p. 200.

Schelling's utilisation of the mathematical conception of 'power' or 'potency' to conceive this process of potentiation allowed Schelling to describe the more complex forms of being as immanently emergent from the more basic forms, as the more complex were conceived as nothing other than the more basic 'raised to a higher power'. On this model, the powers associated with spiritual freedom have their source in the non-spiritual powers of inorganic nature, and it is only through nature's self-potentiating process that consciousness and human freedom are possible.

In the philosophy of identity, Schelling continues to mobilise the concept of power, but now this term takes on a far different sense. Whereas Schelling insists in the nature philosophy that potentiation necessitates a *qualitatively differentiated nature*, the identity philosophy presents the power of differentiation in *strictly quantitative* terms. Here, Schelling's mathematical figures, which throughout Schelling's thought are meant to illustrate a form of difference immanent to identity, are reduced to their quantitative signification. Just months before, Schelling had rejected Eschenmayer's conception of the potencies as strictly quantitative, and now, in the *Presentation*, Schelling appears to be in full agreement with Eschenmayer regarding the notion that *differences* in nature are only ever differences of *degree*.³³

As we saw above, Schelling argues that absolute identity posits itself as subject and predicate, illustrated as $A = A$. This is necessary, according to Schelling, because absolute identity not only *is* (i.e. it is not only *being* prior to the differentiation between being and thought) but it is *thought*, i.e. it is *cognised*. Thus, absolute identity must posit itself as $A = A$, which can also be represented as $A = B$ insofar as we intend to emphasise the *difference* between subject and predicate.³⁴ But given that A and B remain *identical* to one another, how do we conceive their *difference*? According to Schelling, any difference between A and B must result from a quantitative *imbalance* on either side of the equation.

³³ This does not mean that Schelling revises his criticism of Eschenmayer's *subjectivism*. On the contrary, Schelling remains fully committed in the identity philosophy to the criticism he puts forward in *On the True Concept* regarding the subjectivism of Eschenmayer's nature philosophy. Cf. *SW I/4*: 101; *On the True Concept*, p. 25.

³⁴ *SW I/4*: 131; *Presentation*, p. 155.

Between subject and predicate, none other than quantitative difference is possible...since there is no possible difference between the two terms of being itself...there remains only a quantitative difference, i.e. one that obtains with respect to the *magnitude* of being, such that the same identity is posited, but with a predominance of subjectivity or objectivity.³⁵

Since the absolute is fundamentally self-same, there can be no *qualitative* difference between subject and object, or to put this in the language with which this thesis is concerned: nature and spirit cannot be *qualitatively* differentiated. Wherever there *appears* to be spirit—and we should not lose sight of the fact that, in the *Presentation*, even quantitative difference is associated with mere appearance—this apparently spiritual phenomenon is *essentially* nature-spirit identity which expresses a surplus of ‘subjective’ activity. Likewise, whatever appears as natural is nature-spirit identity which expresses a surplus of ‘objective’ being. Thus, absolute identity appears as nature, on the one hand, and spirit, on the other, as a result of quantitative imbalances of the originary nature-spirit identity. Schelling uses the diagram below (Figure 1) to illustrate this conception of quantitative differentiation, calling it ‘the fundamental form of our entire system’.³⁶

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 + & & + \\
 A = B & & A = B \\
 \hline
 & & A = A
 \end{array}$$

Figure 1. The form of absolute identity represented as line.³⁷

The line differentiates absolute identity ($A = A$) from the realm of difference, the realm in which spiritual subjectivity ($+A = B$) and objective nature ($A = B+$) are distinguished by an imbalance in the equilibrium of absolute identity. But we should recall that $A = A$ and $A = B$ are different ways of representing identity itself. This means that the equations *above* the line ($+A = B$ and $A = B+$) are also versions of absolute identity ($A = A$).

³⁵ *SW I/4*: 123; *Presentation*, p. 151.

³⁶ *SW I/4*: 138; *Presentation*, p. 160.

³⁷ *SW I/4*: 137; *Presentation*, p. 159.

The only difference the line expresses is that between originary equilibrium and the derivative imbalance of identity that has such equilibrium as its eternal presupposition. Again, Schelling utilises the Neoplatonist logic in which the absolute *transcends* its various formations (it is not *itself* an instance of quantitative determinacy) but those formations are utterly immanent to—and are therefore nothing *other than*—the absolute.

Thus, Schelling writes: ‘the power (*Kraft*) that bursts forth in the stuff of nature is the same in essence as that which displays itself in the world of spirit, except that it has to contend there with a surplus of the real, here with one of the ideal.’³⁸ In this way, nature and spirit are nothing other than ontologically disproportionate manifestations of their primordial identity. ‘All differentiation consists just in this: A = A is posited in one direction or tendency as infinite cognition, in the other as infinite being.’³⁹ Thus, even when nature and spirit are expressed, or appear, *as* nature and spirit, they *essentially* remain manifestations of nature-spirit *indifference*. The linear diagram (Figure 1) is modeled on the magnetic line, which is central to Schelling’s conception of identity during this period.⁴⁰ As we saw in Chapter 1, Schelling understands magnetism as a universal category of nature which expresses duplicity *within* identity.⁴¹ The individual magnet is composed of both positive and negative poles, and these poles cannot be *separated* from one another. Up until the *Presentation*, however, Schelling conceived magnetism as only *one* of nature’s categories and, moreover, a category which signaled the *qualitative determinacy* of natural forms. Beginning with the *Presentation*, however, Schelling utilises the category of magnetic duplicity-in-identity as descriptive of the absolute *as a whole*, which is fundamentally different from the more restrictive conception of magnetic duplicity-in-identity as a *potential* qualitative feature of all material bodies. The result is that each and every aspect of inorganic, organic, and spiritual being are understood, on the magnetic model of the

³⁸ *SW I/4*: 128; *Presentation*, p. 153. Translation modified.

³⁹ *SW I/4*: 137, Editor’s note; *Presentation*, p. 253n.

⁴⁰ Cf. Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language*, pp. 111-112.

⁴¹ See Chapter 1.8 above.

Presentation, to be actually present in everything that exists.⁴² Although some forms are *more* organic than inorganic and some forms are *more* spiritual than natural, there is no ontological *difference* between these various forms since they are merely expressions of primordial indifference.⁴³

Thus, in the *Presentation*, Schelling abandons his conception of the ‘identity of emergence’ in which life and spirit develop *out of* inorganic nature. As Whistler notes, the potencies of the identity philosophy are not properly dialectical, ‘where each element succeeds the previous one’ because the potencies—conceived along the lines of magnetic polarity—are *always coexistent*.⁴⁴ As Schelling puts it, ‘all potencies are absolutely contemporaneous’.⁴⁵ Whistler affirms this Schellingian logic, since it makes possible a unique conception of difference without negation.⁴⁶ But Schelling’s entirely *affirmative* conception of difference need not reject dialectical *progress*. On the contrary, already in the nature philosophy Schelling conceived nature’s *qualitative* differentiation without referring to a process of *self-negation*. While Whistler rightly distinguishes Schelling’s logic of the potencies from Hegel’s logic of negation, he is too sympathetic to Schelling’s 1801 formulation of potentiation as a strictly quantitative and, moreover, non-dialectical process.

Whistler’s defence of Schelling’s identity system is incredibly helpful, however, for drawing out the unique character of that system. I am in full agreement with Whistler that not only is Schelling’s system of identity a rationalist ontology with little in common with

⁴² Schelling affirms the logic of indifference with respect to the inorganic-organic relation in his lectures *On University Studies*: ‘To penetrate the essence of matter, we must abstract from its particular forms (for instance, so-called organic or inorganic matter) for matter in itself is only the common seed of these forms’ (*SW I/5*: 327; *On University Studies*, p. 125). Schelling has therefore reversed his claim in the *First Outline* that it is ‘impossible to reduce the construction of organic and of inorganic product to a *common* expression’ (*SW I/3*: 325; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 231).

⁴³ According to Holland, ‘Schelling’s use of indifference can be traced back to the work of Dutch scientist Anton Brugmans, who describes a plane of indifference between the two poles of the magnet’ (Jocelyn Holland, *German Romanticism and Science: The Procreative Poetics of Goethe, Novalis and Ritter* [London: Routledge, 2009], pp. 136-137).

⁴⁴ Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language*, p. 113.

⁴⁵ *SW I/4*: 135; *Presentation*, p. 157.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language*, p. 107.

apophaticism, but that this is one of its great strengths.⁴⁷ *Pace* White, then, the system of identity doesn't fail on account of its rationalist dismissal of mysticism.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the system of identity constitutes a significant retreat on Schelling's part from his more compelling notion of the nature-spirit relation as articulated in the early nature philosophy. On my reading, it is not Schelling's rationalism that is questionable, but his insistence upon a primordial as opposed to processual conception of nature-spirit identity. For it is this conception of nature-spirit indifference which leads Schelling to not only conceive nature and spirit as 'merely apparent' phenomena (a view which Schelling gradually leaves behind over the course of his identity philosophy texts), but it leads him to conceive nature and spirit as strictly quantitatively distinct and, moreover, as always expressive to some degree of both natural *and* spiritual being. In doing so, Schelling fails to provide an account of not only the *difference* between nature and spirit, but also their processual *unity*.

As we will see in Part II of this thesis, Schelling's conception of the potencies in the *Presentation* motivates Hegel to develop a new way of thinking about the nature-spirit relation, one which would not only grant qualitative distinctness to the various stages of nature but between nature and spirit themselves. On Hegel's view, it is only by conceiving nature as the *negative* of reason—or, more precisely, as reason in negative form—that qualitative determinacy emerges in nature's rational development. However, before considering Hegel's alternative to Schelling's system of identity, let us consider Schelling's own advance upon his 1801 system. In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling returns to conceiving the nature-spirit identity as involving 1) an *essential*, as opposed to merely apparent, difference; and 2) a *processual*, as opposed to primordial, character. He does so by reformulating § 35 of the *Presentation* ('nothing individual has the ground of its existence in itself'⁴⁹) in light of the idea, inspired by Jakob Boehme, that nature is the non-spiritual ground of individual, spiritual existence.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-179.

⁴⁸ White, *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom*, p. 74.

⁴⁹ *SW* I/4: 130; *Presentation*, p. 155.

Chapter 3: Primordial Night and the Emergence of Spirit

3.1. Introduction

In 1809, Schelling published the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. In the preface to the *Freedom* essay, Schelling claims that his philosophy of spirit will be presented therein for the first time ‘with complete determinateness’.¹ In this chapter, I intend to both elucidate Schelling’s conception of spirit as presented in the *Freedom* essay and argue that it is in this essay that Schelling comes to articulate his most compelling account of the nature-spirit relation.

3.2. Identity Reconsidered

In the previous two chapters, I attempted to show how Schelling’s conception of the nature-spirit relation is guided by a reconsideration of the concept of identity. In Chapter 1, I argued that Schelling’s early philosophy of nature contains two distinct yet interrelated conceptions of nature-spirit identity: on the one hand, Schelling conceives nature and spirit as the visible and invisible aspects of the same being, an ‘identity of coincidence’ or ‘originary identity’ in which neither nature nor spirit is more fundamental. And on the other hand, Schelling describes the *emergence* of spirit *from* nature as the highest potentiation of nature’s ontological yet ahistorical development. From this latter perspective, nature and spirit are conceived as ‘identical’ insofar as nature proves to be the origin of spiritual existence.

In Chapter 2, I argued that Schelling dedicates himself to comprehending the former conception of nature-spirit identity in his *Identitätssystem*. In the *Presentation* of 1801 in particular, natural and spiritual phenomena are understood as *quantitative* imbalances of the originary *equilibrium* of nature-spirit *indifference*. Indeed, in the system of identity, the

¹ *SWI* 1/7: 334; *Freedom*, p. 4, translation modified.

notion that spirit emerges from nature as qualitatively distinct is replaced by a conception of the generation of the *real* (natural) and *ideal* (spiritual) series from out of their originary identity. And while there are important shifts in Schelling's thought between 1801 and 1804,² the same general notion of nature-spirit identity is at work throughout the various modifications of Schelling's system of identity. In that system, spirit emerges not from nature but from the originary identity of nature and spirit, their point of absolute 'indifference'.

With the *Freedom* essay of 1809, Schelling returns to the second conception of identity found in the early nature philosophy and abandoned in the system of identity. That is to say, Schelling returns to his earlier attempt to trace the development of nature through its graduated sequence of stages until it reaches its highest 'potentiation' in spiritual subjectivity. But as we saw, the early nature philosophy is ambiguous on this point, and prior to the *Freedom* essay Schelling never provides a systematic account of the transition from nature to spirit. It is therefore only with the *Freedom* essay that Schelling completes the radical gesture of that early work and presents his definitive conception of identity as emergence. As will become clear over the course of this chapter, Schelling finally affirms an emergentist conception of the nature-spirit relation by reformulating his conception of *indifference*. The *Freedom* essay thus resolves the ambiguity of the 'two models' of nature-spirit identity by combining them in a novel manner. It is no wonder, then, that the entirety of Schelling's *Freedom* essay turns on his reconsideration of the concept of identity.

It is early on in the essay that Schelling redefines his conception of identity, but it is necessary to consider the context in which this discussion arises. Generally speaking, the essay is dedicated to explicating the ontological specificity of human freedom, and Schelling is at pains to deliver a conception of freedom that would be free from the traps of

² Cf. White, *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom*, pp. 50-92.

Spinozism.³ As Heidegger remarks in his 1936 lectures on the essay, ‘If Schelling fundamentally fought against a system, it is Spinoza’s system.’⁴ To read Schelling as ‘fighting against’ Spinozism is certainly unorthodox. There is no question that Schelling is profoundly indebted to Spinoza’s thought, from the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* in which Spinozist realism and Fichtean idealism are seen as the only genuine possibilities for philosophy; to the early nature philosophy’s distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*; to the system of identity, Spinozistic both in its deductive method and, more significantly, in its notion of an essential identity between nature and spirit. On the surface, the *Freedom* essay continues on this path, with its abiding appreciation for Spinoza’s commitment to the *real*. And yet, Schelling’s incessant praise for Spinoza should not overshadow the essential incompatibility of Schelling’s system, on the one hand, and Spinoza—or, more precisely, the German idealist interpretation of Spinoza—on the other. Whether or not the idealist interpretation of Spinoza does justice to his thought is not my concern here. I therefore intend to focus exclusively upon Schelling’s own assessment of Spinoza in order to clarify the distinctiveness of Schelling’s system. And as Alan White has argued, Schelling’s system of freedom was meant precisely as ‘an antithesis to Spinoza’.⁵

In order to draw out the difference between Schelling and how he understands Spinoza, it is important to note that Schelling does *not* deride Spinoza for his pantheism. Rather, on Schelling’s view, it is Spinoza’s ‘fatalism’ which leads to the failure of the *Ethics*.⁶ Spinoza’s fatalism—and here this means Spinoza’s system of mechanical

³ The *Freedom* essay should be read in light of the Spinoza or pantheism controversy initiated by Jacobi’s *Letters to Moses Mendelssohn on the Doctrine of Spinoza*. In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling refuses the notion that pantheism (and, implicitly, rationalism) necessarily leads to atheism and fatalism, and he argues that in fact, genuine pantheism is the only true form of theism and the only way to secure the ontological integrity of individual autonomy. Thus, when I claim in what follows that Schelling is intent on overcoming Spinozism, this should not imply that Schelling is *simply* opposed to Spinoza. On the contrary, it is only through a confrontation with Spinozism that Schelling believes one can arrive at a true conception of freedom. Jacobi’s irrationalism, *is* simply opposed to Schelling’s system, since Jacobi refuses everything essential to the project of idealism. See Schelling’s polemic against Jacobi’s *On Divine Things and their Revelation*, the only text to be published during Schelling’s lifetime after the *Freedom* essay (*SWI*/8: 19-136).

⁴ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 34. Emphasis modified.

⁵ White, *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom*, pp. 5-6.

⁶ *SWI*/7: 349; *Freedom*, p. 22.

determinism—has its source in the Cartesian physics which Spinoza adopts without question. Although Schelling praises Spinoza for presenting a dogmatic system of *reality*, the reality Spinoza presents is, according to Schelling, utterly lifeless. Schelling thus argues that it is only by revising essential features of Spinoza's system that it can be saved from its own fatalism. In particular, Schelling argues that Spinoza's mechanistic physics must be replaced with a dynamic conception of nature in which nature itself and its various forms are understood to be intrinsically *active*.⁷

But Schelling's criticism of Spinoza's mechanistic physics goes further: to be sure, mechanism ignores the essential dynamism at work in nature—not only the forces of attraction and repulsion, but the non-mechanical phenomena of magnetism, electricity, and chemistry, as well as the teleological, self-organisation of nature that eventually proves to generate plant and animal *life*. Mechanism thus fails to account for the diversity of the *natural* world. But mechanism *also* fails to explain the specificity of *spiritual* life. Indeed, for Schelling, the failure of Spinozism does not end with its mechanistic conception of nature but follows from this conception into the domain of human subjectivity, Spinoza's 'denial of freedom'.⁸ Thus, Spinoza's physics impedes our understanding of nature *and* spirit.

I propose, therefore, that the *Freedom* essay be read as an attempt to overcome Spinozism by granting *both* nature and spirit their proper ontological determinations. Schelling's strategy, however, is not to reject Spinozism outright, but to begin with the tenet of Spinozism with which he sympathises most: the immanence of things in God, or more

⁷ *SW I/7*: 349; *Freedom*, p. 22. A defence of Spinoza which might show him to be potentially closer to Schelling than Schelling himself acknowledges might not only focus upon the central role of *conatus* in Spinoza's metaphysics but also to Letter 81 to Tschirnhaus (5 May, 1676) in which Spinoza explicitly rejects Descartes's conception of extension on account of its interpretation of matter as inert (Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 292). Yet even if Spinoza departs from Cartesian physics in a manner unrecognised by Schelling in the *Freedom* essay, the charge of fatalism remains in full force. As we will see, on Schelling's view, if one does not account for the difference between existence and the ground of existence, a supposedly pantheistic system proves incapable of accounting for the concrete freedom of human spirit, i.e. the freedom for goodness and evil. In other words, even if Spinoza's system is more of a 'living' system than Schelling recognises, it cannot account for the specificity of *human* life since it conceives all action on a reductive model of power, whereas Schelling's idealism of powers details how the ontologically distinct powers of human freedom emerge from the powers of inorganic nature.

⁸ *SW I/7*: 345; *Freedom*, p. 17.

precisely, the identity of God, nature, and man (pantheism). However, in order to liberate pantheism from fatalism, Schelling writes, we must reevaluate the concept of *identity* at the heart of all pantheistic claims. Indeed, if pantheism is the notion that God is ‘identical’ with all, then everything hinges upon how one interprets the concept of identity.⁹ And according to Schelling, there has been a ‘general misunderstanding of the law of identity or of the meaning of the copula in judgment’.¹⁰ Such a misunderstanding, Schelling tells us, leads to the fatalist refusal to comprehend the ontological specificity of human freedom. For within a confused pantheistic system, the identity of nature, God, and the human is construed as their *sameness*.

Opposed to the interpretation of identity as *sameness*, Schelling writes, the law of identity must be understood to be ‘of an intrinsically *creative* kind’.¹¹ The *creativity* of the law of identity is disclosed in ‘the profound logic of the ancients’ which ‘distinguished subject and predicate as what precedes and what follows (*antecedens et consequens*) and thus expressed the real meaning of the law of identity.’¹² In statements of identity, subject and predicate are *identical*, but they are not the *same*. This is the case for all predication, whether in ordinary judgments (A = B), such as ‘this body is blue’; or in tautologous statements of identity (A = A), such as ‘the body is body’.¹³ In A = B and A = A alike, the predicate expresses something *different* than is expressed in the subject itself. To take Schelling’s example of tautology, in the statement ‘the body is body,’ the predicate ‘body’ explicates something *distinct* from ‘body’ understood as simple *subject*, and the statement as

⁹ *SW I/7*: 339; *Freedom*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *SW I/7*: 341; *Freedom*, p. 13.

¹¹ *SW I/7*: 345; *Freedom*, p. 18. My emphasis.

¹² *SW I/7*: 342; *Freedom*, p. 14. Translation modified.

¹³ *SW I/7*: 341-342; *Freedom*, pp. 13-14. These are Schelling’s own examples, and his further examples of predication set the tone for the remainder of the essay: ‘perfection is imperfection’; ‘the Good is the Evil’; ‘necessity and freedom are one’; ‘the soul and body are one’; and ‘the body is soul’. Of course, the form ‘A and B are one’ is not the same as ‘A is B’. Schelling’s apparent confusion, however, evinces his interpretation of the copula as indifference, a concept considered in Chapter 2 and to which I will return below. For ‘A is B’ is equivalent to ‘A and B are one’ insofar as ‘A is B’ expresses the notion that both ‘A’ and ‘B’ have their being in the originary activity of the copula, i.e. ‘the one’.

a whole thereby expresses the literal *explication* or *unfolding* of a content ($A = A$) that does not appear in the mere subject of the proposition (A).

Thus, ‘identity’ names this process of unfolding which discloses a *difference* between subject and predicate. Such an unfolding expresses *identity*, however, because it equally reveals the intrinsic *unity* of the antecedent and consequent—the fact that the consequent is consequent *upon* the antecedent. In other words, the consequent *only is as consequent* insofar as it is explicated from the subject, revealing their inner unity. And yet this unity only becomes apparent insofar as the consequent is in fact *explicated* as predicate, i.e. as distinct from the subject—hence Schelling’s claim that identity is ‘creative’. Central to Schelling’s idea here is that the predicate is wholly dependent upon the subject from which the predicate is unfolded, for without the subject (antecedent) there could be no predicate (consequent). And it is by emphasising this relation of dependence in predication that Schelling can interpret the law of identity as a genetic process of differentiation.

3.3. Ground and Existence

The distinction between antecedent and consequent in predication brings Schelling to the pair of concepts for which the *Freedom* essay is best known: ground and existence. Incidentally, Schelling writes that his own nature philosophy ‘first established [this] distinction...between being [*Wesen*] insofar as it *exists*, and being [*Wesen*] insofar as it is the mere *ground* of existence’.¹⁴

There is a further and highly significant connection between the philosophy of nature and the pair ‘ground/existence’. To see this, we must recognise that the ground/existence pair is a *conceptual* pair, and as such, it applies to various beings: inanimate objects, animals, humans, and so on. However, in the *broadest* sense, ground and existence refer to *God*. The *Freedom* essay is, after all, an essay on pantheism. But here the identity at the heart of pantheism proves unusual: The ground of God’s existence, although not *external* to

¹⁴ *SW I/7: 357; Freedom*, p. 31. Translation modified, my emphasis. What is more, Schelling goes on to say that this distinction is precisely what distinguishes his thought from Spinoza’s (*SW I/7: 357; Freedom*, pp. 31-32).

God as a whole, is somehow *other* than his *existence*. Indeed, the ground of existence does not itself *exist*, and this goes for the ground of divine existence as well: the ground of divine existence, although divine *as ground* is not divine existence *per se*. Now, why is this related in any way to Schelling's philosophy of nature? Because in the very passage in which Schelling distinguishes between God's ground and existence, he identifies the ground of the divine life as nothing other than *nature itself*: 'This ground of his existence, which God contains, is not God viewed as absolute, that is insofar as he exists. For it is only the ground of his existence, it is *nature*.'¹⁵

Nature is the ground of God's existence, and, as ground, nature is 'not to be called God' even though it is, properly speaking, contained within God as the broader unity of his ground and his existence.¹⁶ I will come to consider this 'broader unity' in detail below. At this stage, it is important to clarify the ontological character of the natural ground of the divine life. First, we should note that when Schelling describes ground as nature he does not have in mind nature insofar as it exists in determinate natural products. Instead, Schelling identifies ground with nature's essential productivity, the productivity responsible for the emergence of all individual being (all of which is in God). Again, Heidegger is helpful in elucidating Schelling's thought here:

['Nature'] signifies a metaphysical determination of beings in general and means what belongs to beings as their foundation, but is that which does not really enter the being of the self. Rather, it always remains what is distinguished from the self.¹⁷

These remarks should not, however, imply that when Schelling identifies the ground of God's existence as 'nature' he doesn't mean precisely what he says, that 'ground' in the most *general sense* is nothing other than *nature*. Thus, keeping in mind the notion that ground is an non-individuated, productive depth, we can understand Schelling's conception of the nature-spirit relation in light of Schelling's identification of ground with nature. To do

¹⁵ *SW I/7*: 358; *Freedom*, p. 32. Translation modified.

¹⁶ *SW I/7*: 398; *Freedom*, p. 78.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 112.

so, let's consider the pantheistic statement 'nature is spirit'. Given Schelling's identification of ground with nature, this pantheistic statement can be read as the central albeit implicit thesis of the *Freedom* essay. But in order to see this, we need to keep in mind Schelling's logic of predication and acknowledge that Schelling's interest in the principle of identity is not a merely formal interest in the logic of judgment. On the contrary, the relationship between antecedent and consequent in predication reveals the *ontological* relationship between ground and existence. Thus, when Schelling designates 'ground' as 'nature', we should read this back into his logic of identity wherein ground corresponds to the subject of any given judgment. Nature, therefore, proves to be the quintessential subject in predication. And although Schelling does not explicitly say so, it follows that the statement 'nature is spirit' is the statement of identity *par excellence*, since it expresses the pantheistic maxim by positing nature as the *ground* of spiritual *existence*.

The implications of Schelling's logic of identity for his conception of the nature-spirit relation now become clear. Because statements of identity do not express *sameness* between subject and predicate, the pantheistic statement 'nature is spirit' does not claim that spirit can be *reduced* to nature (or vice versa). On the contrary, the true statement of nature-spirit identity expresses the notion that spirit unfolds *from* nature as *distinct* from it. 'Nature is spirit' must therefore be read as a statement of nature's *self-differentiation*, or as the *unfolding* of spirit *from* nature. Just as 'this body is blue' describes the manner in which 'blueness' unfolds as distinct from 'this body', 'nature is spirit' expresses the genuine standpoint of pantheism, that nature *is* spirit insofar as nature explicates itself as the spiritual

existence which it itself *is not*. But the order of dependence is utterly crucial here: spirit *is* only insofar as it is consequent upon nature as its *non-spiritual ground*.¹⁸

Reading the statement ‘nature is spirit’ in this manner, we gain a better sense of what Schelling means when he says that the Spinozist concept of *immanence* should be replaced with ‘the concept of *becoming*...the only [concept] adequate to the nature of things’.¹⁹ The ‘thing’ with which Schelling is most concerned in the *Freedom* essay is, of course, human freedom, and thus the overcoming of Spinozism involves providing a *genetic* account of human freedom. To be sure, in the *Freedom* essay, Schelling does not go so far as to understand this *becoming* of human freedom in *temporal* terms. Schelling is explicit here, as in his early nature philosophy regarding the emergence of spirit, that existence is not *temporally* consequent upon the ground of existence, but rather that the relation between antecedent and consequent in predication discloses a relation of *ontological dependence*.²⁰ Nonetheless, throughout the *Freedom* essay, Schelling is at pains to uncover the *birth* of light from darkness; the *actualisation* of the good from out of the *possibility* of evil; the *emergence* of *conscious* understanding from *preconscious* will. The language Schelling uses throughout the *Freedom* essay—and in Schelling’s thought more generally—indicates an implicit concern for historical creation and development. As we will see in Chapter 7, Schelling finally comes to embrace a conception of genesis as historical in the *Ages of the*

¹⁸ The above is a simplification of Schelling’s argument. Complexities arise when we consider the fact that Schelling understands dialectical thought to require that we consider the inverse formulation, ‘spirit is nature’, as *also* expressive of the ground-existence relation. It might seem, then, that I am stacking the cards in favour of my emergentist reading by arguing that ‘nature is spirit’ is the pantheistic identity statement *par excellence*. However, Schelling himself identifies the ground of *God*—in which all beings have their being—as *nature*. It follows that the statement ‘nature is spirit’, where ‘nature’ occupies the place of grammatical subject, expresses something more fundamental than the inverse statement, ‘spirit is nature’. I’d like to suggest that while the statement ‘spirit is nature’ must also be central to Schelling’s philosophical thought, this statement should be read as a higher-order claim analogous to the higher-order (and therefore ontologically derivative) development from spirit to nature presented in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. In that work, the construction of matter is really a *reconstruction* of matter from the standpoint of productive intuition (*SW* I/3: 440-454; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 83-93). Nature as *cognisable* is consequent upon spirit as its ground, and the claim ‘spirit is nature’ expresses this cognitive achievement of nature-spirit identity. But this higher-order identity between nature and spirit is only possible because sheer nature makes spirit possible in the first place, namely, as its logical consequent. The Schellingian dialectic is not, therefore, cyclical but directional: it moves from nature to the spirit which subsequently proves to be united with itself in its knowledge of nature.

¹⁹ *SW* I/7: 358-359; *Freedom*, p. 33. My emphasis.

²⁰ *SW* I/7: 358; *Freedom*, p. 33.

World project of the 1810s. Prior to that period, however, any notion of natural-historical development remains merely hinted at in Schelling's thought. The atemporal relationship between nature and spirit is, however, entirely clear: spiritual freedom depends upon a nature from what it is distinct and *in this dependence* proves its ontological continuity with nature. By conceiving spiritual freedom as a *consequence* of nature's productive powers, spiritual subjectivity is dethroned from its reign over *what is*. At the same time, such a dethroning *saves* spirit from reductionism and, as we will see below, allows Schelling to champion spirit as the greatest of nature's products.

3.4. Nature Philosophy and the *Freedom* Essay

The ramifications of Schelling's logic of identity for philosophical practice and the organisation of philosophical science prove significant. Indeed, if nature is the *ground* of spiritual existence, then the task of philosophy *as such*—to present, systematically, the rational structure of beings as a whole—becomes directed to *nature* as the fundamental site of ontological investigation which must precede any account of spiritual freedom. Thus, the logic of identity presented in the *Freedom* essay reaffirms the view Schelling promoted in the *General Deduction* and *On the True Concept*, namely, that the philosophy of nature must be pursued up until it derives the necessary existence of consciousness, and only then can a philosophy of spirit begin.

It is not always acknowledged that the account of spiritual freedom in the *Freedom* essay is entirely dependent upon Schelling's nature philosophy. Part of this is due to the fact that the *Freedom* essay and the closely related *Ages of the World* are often read as the beginning of Schelling's later philosophy of mythology and revelation. The rationalist project of the early nature philosophy and identity system, then, is assumed to be in some sense out of step with the late Schelling's interest in non-rationalist modes of philosophical thinking. While there are certainly themes which emerge in the *Freedom* essay and *Ages of the World* that Schelling takes in new directions in the later philosophy—and particularly towards what Schelling calls a 'metaphysical empiricism'—it would be a mistake to read the

Freedom essay in particular as anything but a transformation of Schelling's earlier rationalist project. Moreover, Schelling never gives up the idealist project of a rationalist philosophy of nature, even in his late thought when he comes to demand that the rationalist philosophy of essences be supplemented with an empiricism of divine existence. Schelling's distinctive conception of the nature-spirit relation is thus unintelligible if we do not recognise that until the end of his life Schelling conceives the non-historical emergence of human freedom as a *rationally necessary* feature of reality.

Schelling himself notes in the *Freedom* essay that the philosophy of nature 'could indeed stand by itself', indicating that it is separate from the other parts of philosophical science.²¹ But that the philosophy of nature is self-sufficient in no way indicates that it exhausts the science of being. On the contrary, the self-sufficiency of the nature philosophy speaks to its status as the *first* part of philosophical science, since it derives the stages of the *primary* forms of being. But as we have already seen (Chapter 1), the nature philosophy itself proves that nature is not all that there is, since consciousness emerges as the final stage of nature's immanent development. The philosophy of nature therefore necessitates the consideration of further, i.e. non-natural forms. Thus, for Schelling, the total system of philosophy cannot exist as a philosophy of nature alone, but requires systematic presentations that exceed the bounds of the philosophy of nature, works such as the *Freedom* essay which Schelling appears to have planned as the first of a series devoted to the philosophy of spirit.²²

In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling explicitly reaffirms this view of the relationship between the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit. According to Schelling, when consciousness bursts forth as the final stage of nature's self-potentiating activity, i.e. as the 'final intensifying [*potenzierend*] act' of nature's productivity,²³ the philosophy of nature

²¹ *SW* I/7: 350; *Freedom*, p. 23.

²² *SW* I/7: 334; *Freedom*, p. 4. Schelling mentions the *Philosophy of Religion* of 1804 as being his first account of 'the ideal' but says that it 'remained obscure because of faulty presentation' (*SW* I/7: 334; *Freedom*, p. 4). It is also worth noting that Schelling provides an account of the whole nature-spirit system in the 1804 *System*, but as White notes, Schelling did not publish this himself and it should be taken as a sign that 'he was seriously dissatisfied with it' (White, *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom*, p. 81).

²³ *SW* I/7: 350; *Freedom*, p. 24.

proves that it is incapable of accounting for the ontological specificity of the spiritual existence which it *grounds*. But because it is the philosophy of *nature* that necessitates that there be a philosophy of spirit, any account of spiritual existence must follow the nature philosophy, and any philosophy of spirit that does not reflect upon spirit's natural ground will fail to properly comprehend the ontological character of spirit. As Schelling puts it elsewhere, 'A person earns, so to speak, the right to the most spiritual objects only when he has already taken care to understand their opposite.'²⁴ The philosophy of nature, therefore, must necessarily precede any philosophy of human existence, freedom, or God.

Schelling's views regarding the relationship between the philosophies of nature and spirit help us to understand his unique stance regarding the history of philosophy. Schelling is profoundly critical of what he sees as the tendency of modern philosophy to focus exclusively upon spiritual subjectivity.²⁵ But Schelling's reason for taking issue with the 'subjectivism' of modern philosophy is twofold: On the one hand, to turn away from nature or to engage with nature only to the extent that it serves the ends of practical philosophy is simply to ignore the truth of being as it is thought by the first philosophers, to lose sight of being as *physis*.²⁶ Yet on the other hand, to treat the spiritual in *isolation* from *physis* is to philosophise without a natural ground, without an earth upon which the unique being of human freedom and divine grace might appear. As Schelling writes in an unfinished work of the same period:

Because [metaphysics] wanted to spiritualize itself completely, it first of all threw away the material that was absolutely necessary to the process and right from the very beginning it kept only what was spiritual.²⁷

To be sure, one of Schelling's concerns is to develop a philosophy of nature *for its own sake*, and the modern philosophical tradition, on Schelling's view, has failed to do so properly. But a second problem with this tradition's 'subjectivism' is that it fails to provide us with a

²⁴ *SW I/9: 7; Clara*, p. 5.

²⁵ *SW I/7: 356; Freedom*, p. 30.

²⁶ See Chapter 1.4 above.

²⁷ *SW I/9: 3-4; Clara*, p. 3.

satisfactory account of *spiritual subjectivity*. Thus, Schelling's criticism of modern thought is never aimed at somehow 'overcoming' the metaphysics of subjectivity. On the contrary, Schelling insists that the speculative idealist turn to nature is necessary in order that we not only understand *nature* properly, but that we comprehend the entire structure of spirit as well, the latter of which is grounded in the non-spiritual world. Hence Schelling's claim that despite its self-sufficiency, nature philosophy 'would permit of being raised into a genuine system of reason only by first being *completed* by an ideal part wherein freedom is sovereign'.²⁸

Those who tend to read Schelling's *Freedom* essay in light of the later work sometimes fail to emphasise this notion that the metaphysics of human freedom presented in the essay 'could only be developed from the fundamental principles of a genuine philosophy of nature'.²⁹ Jason Wirth, for example, interprets the *Freedom* essay (as well as the *Ages of the World*) as raising the following question: 'How does the ideal give rise to the real?'³⁰ As I have argued, Schelling's question should instead be seen as systematically continuous with the early nature philosophy and could be phrased as follows: 'What *is* this ideal which has risen *from* the real?' As Heidegger remarks, 'Schelling was granted the profoundest grasp of the spirit *because* he begins with the philosophy of nature and straightaway recognizes its importance for the system.'³¹ Schelling's philosophy of spirit, therefore, does not move in

²⁸ *SWI*/7: 350; *Freedom*, pp. 23-24.

²⁹ *SWI*/7: 357; *Freedom*, p. 31.

³⁰ According to Wirth, 'Schelling's earlier investigations were like the Platonic dialogues, raising the concrete up to the level of the Good...But what if, like Plotinus, one were to begin with the One, with the blazing sublimity of the Good, and move in the reverse direction? Rather than asking how the ideas lead to the Good, one would ask how the Good produces ideas. This is the turning point that the *Freedom* essay occasions...The negative philosophy always concludes with generalities about freedom. If philosophy were only to produce generalities, it could not think what was unique to human freedom, to the specific difference that the "human" makes to freedom.' Jason Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 156. Wirth is right to note that there is no account of the ontological specificity of human freedom in the early nature philosophy and identity philosophy. But this does not mean that the philosophy of spirit must move from the ideal to the real. On the contrary, the philosophy of spirit must follow the philosophy of nature, because it is only by comprehending nature's self-potentiating process that we can understand the human spirit that emerges from nature. As Wirth states, 'Humans, like all things, have a unique kind of freedom' (*ibid*, p. 156), but, according to Schelling, the unique structure of freedom that is particular to each general ontological form requires *genetic* explanation.

³¹ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, trans. by Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), p. 233. My emphasis.

the opposite direction of his philosophy of nature, but rather, his philosophy of spirit continues where the philosophy of nature left off.

Emphasising the continuity between the philosophy of nature and the *Freedom* essay in this manner, a further question regarding Schelling's intellectual development comes to the fore. If the *Freedom* essay simply reaffirms the organisation of philosophical science described in the *General Deduction*—indeed, if the *Freedom* essay can be read as Schelling's philosophy of spirit which follows from his early philosophy of nature—then how are we to interpret the system of identity which chronologically separates the early philosophy of nature from the *Freedom* essay? Does Schelling simply come to reject the identity philosophy? To hold that the system of identity was simply Schelling's great philosophical failure is to persist in what Whistler calls the 'pathological neglect of the *Identitätssystem*' that has characterised the entire reception of Schelling's thought.³² If Schelling is indeed the Proteus that Hegel claims Schelling is, he is no unstable entity, but a protean *philosopher*. As such, the developments in Schelling's evolution as a thinker must be grasped as *philosophical* developments. It is important, then, to consider the continuity, as well as the differences, between Schelling's various periods of thought. The question which I want to consider here is the following: if in the *Freedom* essay Schelling again comes to see nature philosophy as first philosophy which leads to the equally necessary yet systematically derivative philosophy of spirit, and if he does so as a result of his reaffirmation of the notion that spirit *emerges* from nature, then what happens to the 'originary' identity of nature and spirit hinted at in the early nature philosophy and explicitly thematised in the system of identity? Does Schelling simply return to the processual 'identity of emergence' without any consideration of the 'primordial' identity of nature and spirit? In what follows, I argue that this is not the case at all. On my view, Schelling's conception of the nature-spirit relation in the *Freedom* essay is entirely dependent upon his earlier conception of the originary identity of nature and spirit. Thus, the development of thought traced in Chapters 1 and 2 will prove integral to grasping Schelling's first presentation of his philosophy of emergent spirit in the *Freedom* essay.

³² Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language*, p. 9.

3.5. Indifference

Thus far, we have seen that the conceptual pair ground/existence allows Schelling to 1) articulate a logic whereby spiritual existence can be shown to emerge from its natural ground; and 2) affirm an organisation of philosophical science which reflects the ontological priority of nature. Below, I will consider how this same conceptual pair is integral to Schelling's understanding of the ontological specificity of spiritual life. But first, it is important to consider in further detail the conception of identity at work in Schelling's discussion of ground and existence as features of the true logic of identity.

Ground and existence, for Schelling, are 'identical' insofar as existence is consequent upon the ground of existence. Ground and existence are not, therefore, the 'same' but are nonetheless intrinsically united insofar as ground makes existence possible and existence, by existing, allows ground to be the ground it is. But returning to the symbolisation of this ontological relation, how are we to understand the '=' which makes $A = B$ possible? In other words, what is the nature of the *copula* such that the law of identity expresses a relation of differentiation and dependence? Although Schelling discusses the logic of predication early on in the *Freedom* essay, he curiously does not consider the ontological status of the copula itself until the essay's final pages, where he identifies the copula as 'indifference'. But despite its late appearance, this concept of 'indifference' is implicitly at work throughout the whole of Schelling's *Freedom* essay. Indeed, as we come to learn, indifference is 'the only possible concept of the *Absolute*'.³³ Schelling thus continues to hold the view, promoted in his system of identity, that the absolute is nothing other than identity itself conceived as indifference. Yet in the *Freedom* essay, Schelling fundamentally revises his conception of indifference or, if we are to be more charitable, he renders explicit what was only implicit in the *Presentation* of 1801.

We have already seen that, in the *Freedom* essay, identity ('=') does not signify the *sameness* between subject and predicate, but a relationship between antecedent and consequent. Identity *itself* then—the copula in judgment—must be of an entirely different nature than a mere copula which *links* a subject and a predicate that logically precede their

³³ *SW* I/7: 412; *Freedom*, p. 93. My emphasis.

union. Because identity involves the unfolding of predicate *from* subject, it is erroneous to think of the copula as a linguistic or conceptual device for binding pre-existing terms to one another. In a sense, then, the copula, although a third feature of predication, is entirely immanent to the terms in a given judgment.

Heidegger is helpful in describing the idealist conception of a ‘belonging-together’ that is not external to the subject and predicate.

[The German idealist conception of absolute identity is] not just the belonging-together of subject and object, but making this belonging-together *possible*; the absolute has its actuality *precisely* in this *making-possible*. The *becoming* of what is, in the whole of its Being, and according to the essential laws of becoming that belong to its essence.³⁴

Because the copula is nothing other than the ‘becoming of what is’, it is not a third *thing* but only the coming-to-be *of* subject and predicate themselves, and more specifically, in the mode of explication (the unfolding of predicate from subject). Identity names this very activity of explication or evolution (*evolvere*). And while we can understand this ‘becoming’ as immanent to subject and predicate, the reverse is perhaps more accurate: as the very becoming of beings, copulation is the essential ontological activity which makes subjects and predicates possible at all. Without it, there would be no antecedent or consequent, no ground or existence. And it is in *this* sense that Schelling can say that subject and predicate *emerge* from the copula, since the latter is ‘the source from which everything flows’.³⁵ The the copula is therefore *being itself*—not being understood as individuated existence nor being understood as the *ground* of such existence, but that which makes ground and existence possible in the first place. Because the subject and predicate, ground and

³⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, trans. by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 60. My emphasis. Heidegger is in fact describing Hegel’s conception of absolute identity in this passage, but the interpretation stands for Schelling as well. As Heidegger puts it in his lecture course on the *Freedom* essay, ‘With respect to [the] higher concept of identity, Schelling can say...that identity is truly not a dead relation of indifferent and sterile identicalness, but “unity” is directly productive, “creative,” and progressing toward others...Externally viewed, the proposition [“the body is a body”] looks as if the predicate simply returned to the subject. But in truth a progression and a bringing forth is contained here.’ *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, pp.78-79.

³⁵ *SW* I/2: 374.

existence, are bonded to one another only insofar as they *are*, the copula is the ‘bond’ (*Band*) which logically precedes the ‘bonded’ (*Verbundene*).³⁶

For this reason, Schelling writes, ‘As [the copula] precedes all antitheses [ground and existence] cannot be distinguishable in it or be present in any way at all. It cannot then be called the identity of both, but only the absolute *indifference* as to both.’³⁷ From a Hegelian perspective, absolute identity characterised as *indifference* looks suspiciously like an ‘essentialist’ conception of the absolute, since it implies that the absolute *precedes* difference as its a selfsame origin. As I briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Hegel famously criticises this conception of the absolute as ‘the night in which all cows are black’ in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*.³⁸ According to Hegel, an absolute which somehow precedes determinate difference is an ‘essentialist’ notion, because it reifies an abstract *identity* and thereby abandons the difference at the heart of being, as if there were an indeterminate realm of identity ‘uncorrupted’ by difference.

While these criticisms are convincing with respect to Schelling’s *Presentation* of 1801, it cannot be applied to Schelling’s conception of indifference in the *Freedom* essay. To be sure, Schelling conceives difference *differently* than Hegel, and in particular, he seeks a conception of difference that logically precedes determinate negation. For Schelling, difference is, at bottom, a *productive activity* which does not so much proceed ‘from’ the absolute but is nothing other than the absolute itself.³⁹ From a Schellingian perspective, then, the absolute is a ‘primordial night’ not on account of some implicit *opposition* to difference, as if ‘indifference’ to difference held within it a secret antithetical relation to difference. On the contrary, such an *opposition* to difference could only belong to a ‘relative identity,’ which, for Schelling, would certainly be caught up in the dialectic of identity and difference on account of its intrinsic *difference from* difference. *Absolute* identity, on the

³⁶ *SWI*/2: 361.

³⁷ *SWI*/7: 406; *Freedom*, p. 87. My emphasis.

³⁸ *W* 3: 22; *Phenomenology*, p. 9.

³⁹ Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), p. 240.

other hand, is *indifferent*, because it is *not* opposed to difference, nor is it opposed to any other category for that matter. And it is precisely *because* indifference is unopposed to difference (as well as identity in the restricted sense) that this primordial night is productive of—or rather, is nothing but than the production of—all that is determinate, a cosmos inclusive of real identity and real difference. Thus, for Schelling, absolute identity is not some selfsame being, the glory of which could be experienced in a mystical variant of intellectual intuition, because the absolute is as indifferent to identity as it is to difference. Indeed, as the ‘mother of all things,’ the absolute is itself *no-thing*.⁴⁰ The essential ‘indifference’ of the absolute, therefore, is not some *being* in which all determinacy is subdued; it is rather the very coming-into-being of determinacy. In the words of Grant, ‘identity differentiates rather than integrates.’⁴¹ The various terms that may be predicated of one another in judgment are not swallowed up by some indeterminate ‘totality’, but are determinate thanks to the originary *activity* which is nothing other than the explication or evolution of difference.⁴²

There is a second way in which the Hegelian critique of Schelling can help us to draw out the specificity of Schelling’s conception of absolute identity as indifference. From the perspective considered above, Hegel rejects the ‘absolute night’ because it seems that such an absolute excludes real difference. But bound up with this objection is the notion that an absolute which *grounds* the dialectic of identity and difference is an *essentialist* absolute, an absolute which *appears* or *shines* as determinacy (i.e. within the realm of difference) but is *in itself* an essence that withdraws from such shining. To understand this criticism involves some knowledge of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, and in Chapter 4 I describe Hegel’s conception of ‘essentialist’ thought in more detail. Suffice it so say that from the perspective

⁴⁰ *SW I/4: 278; Bruno*, p. 176. Note that in this passage from the identity system where Schelling describes the ‘primordial night’ as the ‘mother of all things’, he identifies it with the ‘ground of existence’. It is only with the *Freedom* essay that Schelling clearly distinguishes between ground of individual existence and the *primordial* origin, i.e. indifference or the abyssal ground.

⁴¹ Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, p. 174.

⁴² As Manfred Buhr puts it, the essence of the Schellingian absolute, insofar as the absolute is ‘pure identity’, is pure *productivity*. Manfred Buhr, ‘Geschichtliche Vernunft und Naturgeschichte: “Neue” Anmerkungen zur Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie’ in *Natur und geschichtlicher Prozeß: Studien zur Naturphilosophie F.W.J. Schellings*, ed. by Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), p. 229.

of Hegelian logic, the relation between ground and existence central to Schelling's essay is an *essentialist* relation, and as such, the ground/existence relation has not achieved the ontological structure of the concept, the higher and more dynamic determination of being. That Schelling understands the *unity* of ground and existence to reside in a third term (indifference) in no way brings him closer to a logic of the concept. For in a logic of the concept, being proves to be 'mediated *immediacy*', or *self-determination*, no longer the reflexion of one term into its intrinsic other. In other words, the most truthful expression of ontological development, for Hegel, is *self-development* as opposed to a development in which various terms are *intrinsically* related to one another as positing, grounding, or producing one another. To seek the unity of ground and existence in a *third* term is, from a Hegelian perspective, to continue to think along 'essentialist' lines.

Another way to put this is that for Hegel, Schelling's conception of indifference is a *foundationalist* conception. We must ask, then, is Schelling's absolute identity a *foundation* from which ground and existence derive? Is absolute identity an 'essence' which merely 'appears' in the form of ground and existence? Or is Schelling's entire project in fact dedicated to a complete destruction of foundationalism and the particular conception of essence that accompanies it? In the *Presentation* of 1801, there is no question that Schelling describes the relationship between indifference and its appearance as nature and spirit in an 'essentialist' manner. Although indifference is not, strictly speaking, a foundation in that text, there is nonetheless an attempt on Schelling's part to distinguish the *truly* indifferent from its mere appearance as nature, on the one hand, and spirit, on the other.⁴³ In the *Freedom* essay, however, Schelling leaves behind this 'essentialist' logic; indifference is not *selfsame ground* of a merely apparent nature and spirit, because it is neither *selfsame* (it is as indifferent to identity as it is to difference) nor is it a *ground*. Indeed, Schelling claims that this 'originary ground' (*Urgrund*) of ground and existence as a *non-ground* (*Ungrund*). Indifference is therefore no *foundation*, but an utter abyss from which both the ground of existence and existence itself emerge. And why is the 'originary ground' *abyssal*? Precisely because it is not a ground at all, but is that which is neither *ground* nor *existence* but the

⁴³ See Chapter 2 above.

coming-to-be of both. The *Ungrund* is therefore nothing beyond the becoming of 1) *ground* as ground and 2) that which *exists* thanks to the grounding activity of ground. In other words, the Schellingian absolute is simply the process of coming-into-being which is itself, as process, neither the ground of existence nor existence, hence Schelling's identification of this absolute as 'indifference'. Indifference does not, therefore, lie behind or beneath what appears; it is the productive activity that is *nothing other than* the appearing, or the becoming, of what is.

To my knowledge, Hegel never commented on Schelling's conception of indifference as an *Ungrund*, but it is hard to imagine Hegel would have been satisfied with Schelling's reformulation of absolute identity as *Ungrund*. Although the originary ground is nothing other than the coming-to-presence of what is, there remains a sense in which this coming-to-presence is distinct from what is, and from a Hegelian perspective, this indicates that Schelling remains caught up in an essentialist logic. Indeed, from this Hegelian perspective, Schelling's conception of the absolute in terms of *production* (*Erzeugung*) and *creation* (*Schöpfung*) signal an ontological *gap* between that which is generated, on the one hand, and the processes of generation—genesis itself—on the other. For Hegel, only a process of *self-development* (which corresponds to the logic of the concept) expresses the true movement of being and thereby overcomes the essentialist logics of positing, grounding, and generation. In support of Hegel's view, one could note that beginning in the 1820s, Schelling did emphasise the ontological gap between production and product as he turned to a conception of God as transcendent creator. And even in the *Freedom* essay and the *Ages of the World* where Schelling's Christian metaphysics is at its most 'immanentist', there is a logical or structural distinction between what there is and the coming-to-be of what there is. In fact, from a Hegelian perspective, Schelling's 'genetic' terminology, already central to the early nature philosophy, goes against the rationalist aims of Schelling's own philosophy, i.e. to derive the *ahistorical* sequence of nature's stages. For Hegel, Schelling's rationalism is compromised by such an 'essentialist' concern with creation, origins, and the primordial 'source' of what is. I will return these issues in Chapter 7.

3.6. Freedom for Evil

Up to this point, I have primarily focused on the logic of identity in Schelling's *Freedom* essay. I have argued that Schelling's conception of identity, with its key components, ground, existence, and indifference, is meant to overcome the central fault of Spinozism, i.e. the eradication of human freedom from nature. By conceiving identity as a process of differentiation, Schelling understands the identity between nature and spirit in terms of the emergence of spirit from nature as the latter's ontological consequence, 'indifference' signifying the essential genetic activity that makes such emergence possible. For Schelling, therefore, human freedom emerges as *ontologically distinct* from its natural ground.

But what features of human freedom distinguish it from nature? If spirit is indeed ontologically distinct from nature, how are to we understand the ontological specificity of spirit? Yet again, the conceptual pair ground/existence plays a critical role, for Schelling's entire understanding of the ontological specificity of spirit depends upon what happens to this pair when the graduated sequence of nature's stages culminates in the freedom of human subjectivity. In human freedom, the relation between the ground of existence and existence itself becomes open to reconfiguration such that *evil* and *goodness* become genuine possibilities for human activity. But in order to understand the possibilities of goodness and evil upon which 'the real and vital conception of freedom' rests,⁴⁴ we need to consider the general relationship between ground and existence in more detail.

Above, I argued that ground and existence correspond, in a significant sense, to nature and spirit, since Schelling claims that nature is the ground of God external to his existence—an essential difference within being which sets into motion spirit's emergence from nature. However, as we have already seen, ground and existence constitute a *conceptual* pair, and as such, they apply to all beings encountered in the world: 'Every being which has arisen in nature [...] contains a double principle,' i.e. a principle of ground and a principle of existence.⁴⁵ It is in this latter, more general sense that I now discuss ground and existence in order to elucidate the distinctive ontological character of human freedom.

⁴⁴ *SW I/7*: 352; *Freedom*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ *SW I/7*: 362; *Freedom* (Gutmann), p. 37.

We have already seen that Schelling understands the *ground* of beings and their *existence* in terms of an identity of *becoming*. The existence of particular beings depends in some manner upon their ground, a ground which logically precedes existence but does not itself ‘exist’. Yet how does a being emerge from a ground that doesn’t ‘exist’? Schelling attempts to clarify his conceptions of ground and existence with an analogy to two features of the natural world, gravity and light: ‘Gravitation precedes light as its eternally dark basis which is itself not *actual* and flees into the night when light (which truly exists) appears.’⁴⁶ This analogy should not be interpreted as some arbitrary comparison between the nature-philosophical pair gravity/light, on the one hand, and the metaphysical pair ground/existence, on the other. On the contrary, the analogy is possible, for Schelling, because all that *is* expresses, in one manner or another, the essential unity of being (i.e. indifference) that is the *source* of all that is. The relationship between gravity and light *in nature*, therefore, is an expression of the more fundamental, ontological relationship between ground and existence. Three years prior to the *Freedom* essay, Schelling writes,

Gravity acts on the core of things; by contrast, the light-essence strives to unfold the bud in order to behold itself, since, as the all-in-one, or the absolute identity, it can only recognise itself in the completed totality.⁴⁷

Hence Schelling’s description of ground and existence as two ‘principles’. While the principle associated with gravity is responsible for ‘weighing down’ a being towards a singular point, *individuating* it as the being it is; the principle associated with light extends that individual outward to ‘the all’ such that it can become one with all that exists.

In Schelling’s dynamical terminology, ground is a principle of self-contraction, and it logically precedes existence because its contractive activity is required for there to be any individuals *in the first place* which can subsequently *show* themselves, to shine in the light of day by stepping *beyond* themselves in communion with all that exists. Again, this is not a historical process but an atemporal, *rational* development: there must be a process of self-contracting individuation for there to be the ontologically derivative process of existing

⁴⁶ *SW* I/7: 358; *Freedom*, p. 32.

⁴⁷ *SW* I/2: 371.

—‘existence’ thought in its etymological sense as *existere*, stepping forth. The *ground* of existence, therefore, doesn't itself exist because it is the principle responsible for individuated existence in the first place. The beings which *do* exist, on the other hand, do so as essentially *one* being—the natural world in which all beings step forth into unity with all. Schelling's point here is continuous with his claim in the *First Outline* that non-human organisms are not *free* individuals.⁴⁸ To be sure, animals are more than lifeless machines, but they are free only insofar as their *particularity*, i.e. their individuated existence, allows them to occupy a position within the *total* organisation of nature. What is necessary to keep in mind is that the self-contraction or ‘withdrawal’ of the ground of existence plays a central role in the subsequent unity of all with all: for it is only by contracting or ‘withdrawing’ from existence that ground individuates natural entities that are united as parts of a greater whole. The identity between ground and existence should therefore be understood as follows: the self-contraction (i.e. non-existence) of ground makes possible, and necessary, the expansion of existence.⁴⁹

All of this applies to each and every stage of nature's self-potentiating activity, until that process culminates in the emergence of spiritual freedom. Once the organism raises itself to the non-natural potency of *spirit*, the relationship between the ground of existence and existence itself becomes open to rearrangement. For in human freedom, the unity between ground and existence can be perverted: ground can be *actualised* and thereby eclipse what is really meant to exist, the expansive principle of light. And if the *ground* of a being comes to *exist*, then the principle of individuation takes over and evil ensues, the evil to affirm oneself above all the others, to tear oneself away from the whole, to destroy alterity

⁴⁸ *SW* I/3: 189-190; *First Outline*, p. 137.

⁴⁹ In an effort to focus on the topic at hand, namely, the relationship between nature and human spirit, I have not described the relationship between ground and existence in theological language—although to do so would be in no way incompatible with the topic of this thesis. Briefly, Schelling argues that God's will to love (the principle of existence) cannot destroy the will at the ground, for this would contradict the character of the will to love which longs to let others *be*. Likewise, God's will at the ground cannot destroy the will to love, for the will at the ground is a self-contracting, self-affirming will that is completely indifferent to its others in its self-directed activity. See *SW* I/7: 375; *Freedom*, pp. 51-52.

in an act of ontological egotism.⁵⁰ Evil is thus a perversion of the unity of ground and existence. Schelling understands goodness, on the other hand, as the human individual's affirmation of the healthy unity of ground and existence, i.e. an affirmation of the ground-existence identity described in the paragraph above. In a *good* moral character, an individual affirms the universal will of nature by aligning his or her *personal* will with the will of the all. 'If the spirit of love rules in place of the spirit of dissension which wishes to divorce its own principle from the general principle, then the will exists in divine manner and condition.'⁵¹ Whether the human individual chooses to pervert the relationship between ground and existence or to affirm their healthy unity is entirely dependent upon an act of *freedom*.

According to Schelling, with this freedom to rearrange or affirm the unity of the principles, 'something higher, the *spirit*, arises in man'.⁵² Schelling goes on to say that it is only with this emergence of spirit in man that 'the eternal spirit pronounces unity, or the Word, in nature'.⁵³ That is to say, it is only with the emergence of the human being as spirit that the *unity* of ground and existence is made manifest in the world. But how is this so? Haven't we already seen that *all* creatures express the unity of ground and existence?

Now these two principles do indeed exist in all things, but without complete consonance because of the inadequacy of that which has been raised from the depths. Only in man, then, is the Word completely articulate, which in all other creatures was held back and left unfinished.⁵⁴

To be sure, unity between ground and existence is present throughout the whole of nature, but only in the human spirit—'the articulate Word'—is this unity wholly manifest, for ground and existence come into full view in man's free decision to either invert or affirm the

⁵⁰ 'Self-will may seek to be as a particular will...Thus there takes place in man's will a division of his spiritualized selfhood from light' (*SW I/7*: 365; *Freedom*, p. 40).

⁵¹ *SW I/7*: 365; *Freedom*, p. 41.

⁵² *SW I/7*: 363; *Freedom*, p. 39.

⁵³ *SW I/7*: 363; *Freedom*, p. 39.

⁵⁴ *SW I/7*: 363-364; *Freedom*, p. 39.

unity of ground and existence. And it is this unique expression of the ground/existence relation that distinguishes human existence from everything which precedes it in nature.

According to Schelling, then, the human being is the being through which evil and good deeds are possible, because only through human action does the *creature* become capable of fully expressing ‘the deepest pit’ and ‘the highest heaven’, i.e. the principle of gravity and the principle of light.⁵⁵ Not only is the human spirit a non-natural *product* of nature, but spirit is the product of nature that creatively engages with its *existence* and the *ground* of its existence. Spirit, therefore, is not a mere creature, but the creature whereby nature’s self-differentiating power becomes wholly manifest as essentially creative. Thus, in the life of spirit, nature’s primordial creativity is potentiated in an utterly novel manner. And this culmination of the essential creativity of nature appears as the ethico-ontological possibilities for goodness (active affirmation of the ground/existence relation) and evil (perversion of the ground/existence relation).

It is worth noting that Schelling devotes far more attention to the latter of these possibilities, i.e. evil, in the *Freedom* essay. We first catch sight of the specificity of human freedom in the essay when Schelling attends to the possibility of evil, i.e. the possibility of inverting the relationship between the ground of our existence and the drive towards existential unity. And the fact that Schelling spends far more time elucidating his conception of evil than he does on the concept of goodness results in the appearance that the *Freedom* essay establishes something of a ‘metaphysics of evil’.⁵⁶ However, in noting the central role of evil in the *Freedom* essay, it is important to emphasise that Schelling does not understand the human to be *essentially* evil. Although the *capacity* for evil is essential to human freedom, we should not understand Schelling’s anthropology to be diabolical by any means. The capacity for *goodness* is equally unique to human freedom. For only the human can *affirm* the universal will that identifies all with all. To whatever extent rocks, plants, and

⁵⁵ *SW I/7*: 363; *Freedom*, p. 38 ‘That dark principle is indeed effective in animals too, as in every other natural being; but in them it has not yet been born to light as in man, it is not *spirit* and understanding but blind passion and desire; in short no degeneration, no division of principles is possible here where there is as yet no absolute or personal unity’ (*SW I/7*: 372; *Freedom*, pp. 48-49).

⁵⁶ Cf. Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 104.

animals contribute to the universal will as parts of the total organisation of nature, none of these beings takes up the standpoint of an ethical *decision* such that being one with alterity is freely affirmed. Such a free affirmation of the relationship between ground and existence is only a possibility for human spirit. Nonetheless, the possibility for evil allows Schelling to further differentiate the human from the non-human being, and thus our interpretation of Schelling's philosophy of spirit must attend to his unique conception of evil. Let us, therefore, consider Schelling's concept of evil in further detail, keeping in mind that the possibility for evil plays only one part, however integral, in Schelling's overall conception of human existence.

It is central to Schelling's conception of evil that to invert the relationship between the *ground* of spiritual existence and spiritual existence itself does *not* mean to privilege the natural, sensuous drives of animal life over some extra-sensuous, moral desire. Schelling is absolutely clear that evil is in no way analogous to animality and is not to be located at the level of passions or 'flesh and blood'.⁵⁷ The ground that becomes brought to actuality in evil, therefore, is not to be conceived in terms of bodily instinct; it is not *this* sense of nature that Schelling means when he says that the ground of God's existence is nature. Rather, ground here signifies the *contracting force of particularisation*, which, when actualised, expresses itself as the power of *egoity*. For this reason, moral action is always *higher* or *lower* than the activity of the animal. In theological language, Heaven should be contrasted with *Hell*, not with Earth.⁵⁸

From this we can see that Schelling's conception of freedom depends upon the notion that the possibility for evil is a possibility for some *real activity*, an activity with an ethico-ontological content that distinguishes it from both goodness and animal instinct. Because evil is *actual*, it is a mistake, according to Schelling, to interpret evil along Augustinian lines as the privation of goodness, a position Schelling attributes to nearly the entirety of Western thought. If evil were merely a privation of the good, it would not have

⁵⁷ *SW I/7*: 388; *Freedom*, pp. 66-67.

⁵⁸ *SW I/7*: 371; *Freedom*, p. 47. And yet, because of everything Schelling has already argued in the essay, heaven and hell must have the Earth as their *origin*!

any actuality *of its own*; it would merely be ‘less goodness’. Theories of evil as privative turn evil into ‘something merely passive—limitation, insufficiency, deprivation—concepts which are completely at odds with the actual nature of evil’.⁵⁹ For Schelling, evil must be *actual* because its source is the *activity* of human subjectivity, the products of which cannot possibly be lacking in actuality. It is also misleading, according to Schelling, to conceive of evil as a complete annihilation of the unity of ground and existence: ‘If unity is completely dissolved, then conflict is thereby dissolved too.’⁶⁰ In evil, there is not *pure* discord, but a discord that maintains a connection, albeit a *perverted* connection, between the self-will of the creature and the general will of the all. It is therefore not only mistaken to understand evil as a privation of the good, but it is equally mistaken to understand the *perversion* of the ground/existence relation as a *privation* of their unity.

Throughout the *Freedom* essay, Schelling aims to shed light on the character of evil’s actuality through medical analogies, since disease is, like evil, an actual existence which is *negative* without being a mere privation of the positive (i.e. health or goodness). Schelling is directly inspired by Baader in his use of such analogies, and he claims that Baader’s elucidation of the conception of evil through ‘profound physical analogies, especially those of disease’ allowed Baader to develop the ‘only correct conception of evil as consisting of a positive perversion or reversal of the principles [of ground and existence]’.⁶¹ According to Schelling, these comparisons between evil and disease are not meant to reduce our conception of an evil moral character to a pathological nature that might be made intelligible to biological science. Rather, such comparisons are ‘the most appropriate’ because disease ‘occurs when the irritable principle which ought to rule as the innermost tie of forces in the quiet deep, activates itself’.⁶²

In order to make sense of this idea, let’s consider a passage in which Schelling himself describes the relationship between freedom and disease:

⁵⁹ *SW I/7*: 368; *Freedom*, p. 44.

⁶⁰ *SW I/7*: 371; *Freedom*, p. 47.

⁶¹ *SW I/7*: 366; *Freedom*, p. 42.

⁶² *SW I/7*: 366; *Freedom*, pp. 41-42.

A single organ, like the eye, is possible only in the organism as a whole; nevertheless it has a life of its own, indeed a kind of freedom, as is manifestly proved through those diseases to which it is subject.⁶³

Although only the human spirit achieves genuine freedom, an individual eye proves its limited form of freedom insofar as it has the capacity to become diseased. For the disease of the individual organ cannot be accounted for with reference to the organ's function or purpose within the organism. On the contrary, the purpose of the eye's existence—its role within the animal's total organisation as an instrument for visual perception—is incapacitated in the case of ocular disease. The diseased eye thus no longer exists for the sake of the organism, and the organ's individuality—its *being independent* of the organism—can be grasped by simply considering the fact that any organ can fail to function. Something similar is at work in human evil. The decision to affirm *oneself* at the expense of all others is to prove one's individuality, but it is to do so by *severing* the unity between oneself and all others. Indeed, in evil, what should be only the *ground* of unity—the principle of individuality—is made actual, thereby disrupting the unity that ought to exist. We can only understand disease and evil, then, with reference to the manner in which the capacity of an individual (an organ or a person) to tear itself away from the greater whole of which it is a part (the organism in the case of disease and the human community in the case of evil).

As I have already remarked, Schelling does not want to simply reduce evil to disease, and there are important differences between the two. Most importantly, an organ doesn't *decide* to become diseased, and the individuality it expresses is not, properly speaking, freedom. Disease and evil are therefore ontologically distinct. Nevertheless, Schelling's analogy is highly instructive. For it helps us to see that just as disease is something *real*, evil has an ontological 'positivity'. This is not to say that either disease or evil have some ontological 'silver lining'. On the contrary, Schelling's thought here is that the human suffering which results from disease and evil is *actual* suffering, and any thoughtful philosophies of life and spirit must account for the actuality of disease and evil as

⁶³ *SW I/7*: 346; *Freedom*, p. 19.

two distinct, yet structurally analogous, phenomena. To conceive disease or evil as a mere lack of health or goodness is to refuse to comprehend the distinctive character of these phenomena.

While Schelling's discussion of evil owes a great deal to Baader's conception of evil, Baader is not the only philosopher who influences Schelling's thought on this topic. As Schelling himself notes, Kant's interpretation of 'radical evil' is decisive for the metaphysics of evil found in the *Freedom* essay.⁶⁴ Indeed, Schelling's critique of the naturalistic conception of evil, i.e. the notion that evil can be understood as reason's capitulation to the passions, is as Kantian as it is Baaderian. And the same goes for Schelling's rejection of the Augustinian account of evil as privation of the good. In *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason*, Kant situates radical evil outside nature and within the realm of rationality, albeit a *perverse* rationality. Thus, for Kant, evil and goodness do not have their origin in nature, but in human being insofar as the human is rational. Hence Kant's claim that 'the human being alone' is the 'author' of his moral character.⁶⁵ Kant understands the freedom for goodness and evil, therefore, in terms of authorship or self-determination. Consequently, freedom is not the capacity to commit this or that act, but the capacity to determine one's moral character as a 'good or evil heart', a moral disposition which is the atemporal (i.e. strictly rational) source of all moral deeds enacted in time.⁶⁶ As we will see in the following section, this conception of freedom as atemporal self-determination becomes central to Schelling's own account of human freedom.

However, before considering Schelling's conception of the self-determination of moral character, it is helpful to note an important difference between Kant's and Schelling's conceptions of evil. As far as Kant goes in liberating the concept of evil from Neoplatonism and naturalism, his commitment to the division between theoretical and practical knowledge

⁶⁴ *SW* I/7: 388; *Freedom*, p. 67. Interestingly, Schelling sees Fichte as reverting to a 'humanitarianism' (*Philanthropismus*) in which evil is interpreted in terms of inaction or 'inertia' and not, as Kant came to see it, as a true act of freedom (*SW* I/7: 388-389; *Freedom*, p. 67).

⁶⁵ Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. by George di Giovanni in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 71.

⁶⁶ Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, p. 77.

means that evil is an exclusively *moral* and that means merely *thinkable* idea. From a Schellingian perspective, Kant is right to see evil as a *perversion* of the good as opposed to its privation, and additionally, to locate this perversion within the realm of the human *as human* rather than as animal. But for Schelling, the problem of evil is not exclusively a practical problem but an *ontological* one, and if we are to comprehend the essence of human freedom we must, on Schelling's view, consider the actual *being* of evil. Thus, from a Schellingian perspective, the *perversion* of the good is a perversion of the relationship between ground and existence themselves, as they *really are*. With Schelling, then, goodness and evil exceed their limits within Kant's practical philosophy and become ethico-*ontological* concepts constitutive of the *being* of human freedom and, consequently, of the very structure of being itself. That being said, we should not lose sight of the fact that Schelling's conception of freedom is not only indebted to Kant, but is only intelligible from within the framework of the idealist philosophy of freedom.

3.7. The Eternity of Freedom

Above, I argued that Schelling criticises the modern philosophical tendency to focus exclusively upon subjectivity, but I also claimed that Schelling is fully committed to the modern celebration of the subject. In particular, Schelling champions the Kantian conception of subjective freedom, and he goes so far as to say that 'the true conception of freedom was lacking in all modern systems...until the discovery of *Idealism*.'⁶⁷ For it is only with Kantian idealism that the Cartesian subject comes to be understood in terms of *self-determination*.⁶⁸

In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling follows Kant's *Religion* book in its identification of human freedom with the self-determination of moral character. The freedom for goodness or evil discussed above is therefore not a decision to commit *this* or *that* good or evil act. As

⁶⁷ *SW I/7*: 345; *Freedom*, p. 17. My emphasis. 'It was, indeed, Idealism which first raised the doctrine of freedom into that realm in which it alone can be understood' (*SW I/7*: 383; *Freedom*, p. 61).

⁶⁸ *SW I/7*: 385; *Freedom*, p. 63.

Schelling puts it, ‘To be able to decide for A or — A without any motivating reasons would, to tell the truth, only be a privilege to act entirely *unreasonably*...If freedom cannot be saved except by making actions totally accidental’—that is, dependent on mere whim—‘then it cannot be saved at all.’⁶⁹ Freedom, therefore, must not be understood as *opposed* to necessity, but rather, as as expressing a particular kind of necessity. As Schelling writes, freedom is ‘that higher necessity which is equally removed from accident and from compulsion or external determination but which is, rather, an inner necessity which springs from the essence of the active agent itself.’⁷⁰ As one who *acts*, one is *free*—not free to do as one pleases, but free to *be* the active subject one *is*, to be one’s inner character. Schelling’s thought clearly provides little comfort to those who demand of philosophy the reassurance that this or that action is entirely undetermined, issuing from the contingency of a moment’s decision. But Schelling is concerned with a deeper sense of freedom, a conception of freedom he calls *personality*, again following Kant’s *Religion* book. Indeed, it is this personality or moral character which necessitates any given, empirical action.

Schelling understands freedom, therefore, as self-determination insofar as the human subject decides upon an evil or moral *life* which is subsequently expressed in the actions of historical subjectivity, and this self-determination of moral character differentiates the human from all other beings, since ‘[man] alone can determine himself.’⁷¹ But because this self-determination of moral character precedes all historical action, ‘this determination cannot occur in time; it occurs outside of time altogether.’⁷² Because the decision for goodness or evil determines empirical activity in advance, the act of self-determination must be an *eternal* act which can account for the entirety of one’s moral character. ‘The act which determines man’s life in time does not itself belong in time but in eternity.’⁷³ It would seem, therefore, that Schelling is, like Kant and Fichte, concerned with an absolutely *self-*

⁶⁹ *SW I/7*: 382-383; *Freedom*, p. 60. My emphasis.

⁷⁰ *SW I/7*: 383; *Freedom*, p. 61.

⁷¹ *SW I/7*: 385; *Freedom*, p. 63.

⁷² *SW I/7*: 385; *Freedom*, p. 63.

⁷³ *SW I/7*: 385; *Freedom*, p. 63.

determining freedom that is wholly detached from the natural order, a spiritual subjectivity preceding time itself, ‘a life before this life’.⁷⁴

But hasn’t Schelling’s meditation on the logic of identity already disclosed that all existence—human existence included—is ontologically dependent upon a ‘dark ground’? Indeed, for the human being to *reconfigure* the unity of ground and existence in a free act of decision, does there not need to be spiritual existence *in the first place*, such that ground and existence can be opened up to reconfiguration? What decision could be made for goodness or evil prior to any natural-historical processes of individuation? In other words, when and where is the ‘life before life’ in which man decides on his moral existence if spiritual life as such derives from nature’s potentiating activity?

First, we should recall that Schelling does not conceive spiritual freedom as *historically* emergent from nature—at least he doesn’t promote this view until he begins work on the *Ages of the World* in the 1810s. So the *Freedom* essay does not require that the self-determination of moral character is in any sense *historically* derivative. So long as Schelling conceives moral self-determination as *ontologically* dependent upon a non-spiritual process—namely, as the necessary rational outcome of the self-contraction of ground—his conception of freedom remains consistent. However, it isn’t clear from Schelling’s conception of an eternal ‘life before life’ that moral self-determination is indeed dependent upon nature as its ontological antecedent. It is necessary, therefore, to unpack how Schelling can claim that spirit is nature’s ontological consequence, on the one hand, and that spiritual self-determination is an *eternal* act, on the other.

Schelling is by no means clear regarding this issue, and it is my view that he unnecessarily complicates matters when he describes the eternal act of decision as ‘a life before this life’. But Schelling immediately goes on to argue that the eternal decision which determines empirical action cannot be thought of as taking place at some point ‘prior in time’.⁷⁵ Indeed, the act of freedom ‘does not *precede* life in time but occurs *throughout* time

⁷⁴ *SW I/7*: 387; *Freedom*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ *SW I/7*: 387; *Freedom*, p. 65.

(untouched by it) as an act eternal *by its own nature*'.⁷⁶ What might it mean to say that an eternal act is 'eternal by its own nature'? And how might such an eternal act occur 'throughout time'? As I understand him, Schelling does not conceive the eternal character of the freedom for goodness and evil as resting *outside* time. On the contrary, since this eternal character is expressed exclusively in *spiritual freedom*, and since spiritual freedom is structurally emergent from nature, this eternal character itself arises within the time of the world. As Schelling writes in the *Clara*, 'Even freedom rises up in this world from necessity's obscurity, bursting forth...as a flash of eternity that splits up the darkness of this world.'⁷⁷ Freedom is nothing less than the self-determination of character which 'flashes up' from *within* the temporal order as something decidedly *non-temporal*, i.e. as a freedom which is 'eternal by its own nature'. And in what sense might this freedom be 'eternal' if it appears, and only *is*, 'throughout time'? I believe the answer to this lies in Schelling insistence upon the ontological specificity of human freedom. Whether one affirms the unity of ground and existence in the self-determination of a good moral character or one perverts the unity of ground and existence in the self-determination of an evil moral character, one creatively engages with the very structure of being in a manner that is beyond the realm of possibility for any strictly spatiotemporal being. For natural beings, by definition, must give themselves over to the universal process as part of a greater whole. The human spirit, on the other hand, either freely *undermines* this universal order or freely *affirms* it; either way, the self-determination of moral character amounts to an ethico-ontological decision which radically alters the ordinary configuration of ground and existence as expressed in nature. The 'eternal' ontological status of this act of self-determination should not, therefore, be understood as an atemporal order above and beyond the world, but rather, a non-natural freedom at work *within* the natural world.

Because spiritual freedom emerges from nature's graduated sequence of stages, the freedom for goodness and evil depends upon a time in nature, a time in which the human expresses its *eternal* character. It is for this reason that despite Schelling's practical-idealist

⁷⁶ *SW I/7*: 385-386; *Freedom*, p. 64. My emphasis.

⁷⁷ *SW I/9*: 38; *Clara*, p. 28.

conception of human freedom in terms of self-determination, he is utterly opposed to the Fichtean language of self-*positing* subjectivity. That the Schellingian subject is not self-positing should come as no surprise at this point. But putting Schelling's position in these terms does raise the question as to how his conception of freedom fits with the ontological priority Schelling grants nature. There seems to be something paradoxical about Schelling's transcendental-idealist conception of freedom as self-determining and his dogmatic-realist conception of freedom as *dependent* upon a natural ground. How exactly can freedom be both self-determining and have its origin in nature?

Schelling is fully aware that his view may appear paradoxical, but he explains that ontological dependence not only doesn't *rule out* the freedom of that which is dependent, but dependence implicitly *necessitates* such freedom:

Dependence [*Abhängigkeit*] does not exclude independence [*Selbständigkeit*] or even freedom. Dependence does not determine the essential being [*Wesen*] of the dependent, and merely declares that the dependent entity, whatever else it may be, can only be as a consequence of that upon which it is dependent; it does not declare what this dependent entity *is* or *is not*.⁷⁸

That human freedom originates in nature, therefore, does not determine the moral character of that freedom. On the contrary, spiritual subjectivity is *self*-determining, precisely because it is generated *as* free existence by the natural ground of spirit. This logic of 'dependent independence' is not limited to the sphere of spiritual freedom, but can also be seen in organic life. As Schelling writes, 'Every organic individual, insofar as it has come into being, is dependent upon another organism with respect to its genesis but not at all with regard to its essential being.'⁷⁹ And although human freedom achieves an independence that exceeds that of the merely organic being, this nature-philosophical distinction between dependence with respect to *origination* and independence with respect to *essential being* (*Wesen*) is crucial for understanding Schelling's departure from the Kantian and Fichtean conceptions of self-determining freedom. For it is only possible, on Schelling's view, to

⁷⁸ *SW I/7: 346; Freedom*, p. 18. Translation modified; my emphasis.

⁷⁹ *SW I/7: 346; Freedom*, p. 18.

account for the self-determining freedom of subjectivity if one understands this freedom in light of nature's own self-determining activity.

3.8. Freedom and Necessity

In order to see how Schelling's logic of 'dependent independence' sets his conception of freedom apart from his idealist forebears, we might turn to the relation between another conceptual pair: freedom and necessity, the pair of concepts 'in which alone the innermost center of philosophy comes to view'.⁸⁰ To be sure, Schelling takes his cues from the idealist understanding of the freedom-necessity relation. Freedom—for Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel—is bound to the self-determining necessity of reason, and thus freedom is no way *opposed* to necessity. Yet Schelling's interest in the natural conditions which make this freedom possible lead him—and Hegel soon follows—to conceive the relationship between freedom and necessity as emergent from *nature's own* form of self-determining necessity.

As I argued in Chapter 1, Schelling initiated his speculative physics at the end of the eighteenth century by transposing Kant's conception of the subject onto nature itself. By interpreting nature as an impersonal, non-spiritual subject, Schelling overcomes what he sees as the subjectivism of Kantian-Fichtean idealism. In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling continues this 'absolutisation' of the structure of subjectivity. In order to truly understand the inner unity of necessity and freedom, Schelling argues, we must consider their absolute, and not merely practical, connection. That is to say, we cannot be satisfied with understanding the self-determination of moral character as grounded in practical reason but must provide a *theoretical* basis for this practical perspective. This means that spiritual freedom must not only be shown to be necessary *from the perspective of freedom*, but that nature *itself* must be shown to *necessitate* the existence of human freedom. And as we have seen, this is only possible, according to Schelling, if we consider how nature itself is an active, self-determining process.

⁸⁰ *SW* I/7: 333; *Freedom*, p. 3.

It is for this reason that Schelling continually draws inspiration from Spinoza. For Spinoza's system symbolises, for Schelling, an unapologetic turn to *nature itself*. And yet, appearances to the contrary, the *Freedom* essay is fundamentally *opposed* to Spinozism insofar as Schelling champions the idealist conception of human freedom. Schelling's *Auseinandersetzung* with Spinoza thus results from his enthusiasm for Spinoza's rationalist *realism*, on the one hand, and his dissatisfaction with the lack of *self-determination* in Spinoza's system, on the other. Schelling is entirely clear, then, that Spinoza *rightly* understood nature in terms of rational *necessity*, but what Spinoza failed to see is that this necessity is itself a form of *freedom*. As Schelling puts it, 'Spinozism does not err at all in asserting...an inviolable necessity in God, but only in taking this in a lifeless and impersonal way.'⁸¹ Schelling's rejection of Spinoza as a 'fatalist' therefore has nothing to do with a dismissal of all necessitarian conceptions of nature. Rather, Spinoza's system is '*lifeless*' on account of its Cartesian physics and '*impersonal*' since God's necessary activity remains operative *only* within nature and does not become the equally necessary 'love and goodness' of a personal God.⁸² Indeed, just as for Hegel Spinoza fails to see that substance *becomes subject*, for Schelling, the living God does not remain brute nature but becomes spirit and personality. Thus, Spinozism is not 'fatalistic' on account of its pantheism, but rather, because there is not enough *theos* in Spinoza's *pan*.

According to Schelling, in order for human freedom to be necessitated (yet undetermined) by nature, then nature must be understood as *positing* self-determining freedom *as* independent. And as we have seen, for Schelling, dependent existence is by necessity autonomous, for without autonomy, a dependent *could not depend*; it would have no self-identity that would *be* dependent in the first place. Indeed, for Schelling *only God* is entirely self-dependent, 'for he alone is "self-born"'.⁸³ As I briefly mentioned above, the ground of God's existence, although *external* to his existence, is not external *to God*, and

⁸¹ *SW I/7*: 397; *Freedom*, p. 77.

⁸² *SW I/7*: 397; *Freedom*, p. 77.

⁸³ *SW I/7*: 360; *Freedom*, pp. 34-36.

this differentiates God from all other beings (i.e. all beings contained within God).⁸⁴ To be sure, when a human individual determines himself as evil this actualises the ground of his individual existence, but the ground actualised as his own nonetheless remains an external ground: ‘Man never gains control over the condition [of his existence] even though in evil he strives to do so; it is only loaned to him independent of him; hence his personality and selfhood can never be raised to complete actuality.’⁸⁵ Only God achieves complete actuality, and this is thanks to the fact that God is self-born, i.e. the ground of God, although not yet divine personality, is nevertheless divine.

Since this thesis is exclusively concerned with the relationship between nature and human spirit, I have abstained from considering in any detail the relationship between human and divine spirit. However, it becomes clear with the foregoing description of the difference between human and divine autonomy that in order to comprehend the relationship between nature and spirit in the *Freedom* essay, we cannot avoid a discussion of God. For human freedom occupies an intermediary position between God as nature and God as infinite spirit. Moreover, since determining necessity applies to nature *and* spirit—and because the former is nothing other than God’s internal yet impersonal ground—it will be helpful to consider the free and necessary development that proceeds from God as ground to God as existence.

How does God’s activity as natural ground become personal, spiritual existence? To answer this question, we need to consider in more detail the form of ontological development at work in, or rather as, the divine life. We know that all beings encountered in experience will be implicated in the divine life, for Schelling’s conception of God during this period is explicitly pantheistic. However, Schelling is intent on differentiating his conception of the way God’s creatures are ‘in God’ from those false pantheisms that do not properly comprehend the creative nature of the principle of identity:

⁸⁴ ‘All existence must be conditioned in order that it may be actual, that is, personal, existence. God’s existence, too, could not be personal if it were not conditioned, except that he has the conditioning factor *within* himself and not outside himself’ (*SW I/7*: 399; *Freedom*, p. 79).

⁸⁵ *SW I/7*: 399; *Freedom*, p. 79.

No matter how one pictures to oneself the procession of creatures from God, it can never be a mechanical production, no mere construction or setting up, in which the construct is naught in itself. Just as certainly, it cannot be an emanation in which that which has flowed forth remains the same as its source, thus lacking individuality and independence.⁸⁶

Instead, the production must be a living production of individual and autonomous beings.⁸⁷ With such a description of the production of individuality, Schelling believes pantheism is not only *unopposed* to freedom, but *requires* freedom. For God is not a ‘mere being’⁸⁸ or a ‘system’, but a ‘life’,⁸⁹ and as such, God is developmental through and through, passing from nature to human spirit in order to know himself and become truly absolute. In Schelling’s words, ‘being is only aware of itself in becoming.’⁹⁰ That God does not *begin* as absolute ‘in the basis,’ but *becomes* absolute through his necessary development in nature and spirit is certainly unorthodox, since it implies that the *absolute* character of divinity is ontologically derivative. But for Schelling, ‘the concept of a derivative absoluteness or divinity is so little a contradiction that it is actually the central concept of all philosophy.’⁹¹

The question ‘How does God’s activity in the ground become personal?’ can now be phrased in the following manner: ‘From whence does God’s absoluteness derive?’ The answer resides in Schelling’s insistence that *from the beginning*, God is a dynamic life. As I argued with respect to the early nature philosophy, we should not take such descriptions as indicative of the idea that the most basic stages of ontological development are *organic*, but rather, that even the *least* organic features of nature are intrinsically *active, powerful*, and, in an important sense, *self-determining*. With respect to the *Freedom* essay, Schelling’s conception of God as a ‘life’ should be understood as a claim regarding the unique form of

⁸⁶ *SW I/7*: 346-347; *Freedom*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ Note that Schelling is clearly distancing himself from his earlier, Neoplatonist conception of ontological development. See Chapter 2.3 above.

⁸⁸ *SW I/7*: 403; *Freedom*, p. 84.

⁸⁹ *SW I/7*: 399; *Freedom*, p. 78.

⁹⁰ *SW I/7*: 403; *Freedom*, p. 84.

⁹¹ *SW I/7*: 347; *Freedom*, p. 20.

necessity at work in God's development: the necessity of God's self-revelation from mere nature to spiritual existence is a *free activity* on the part of God's dark ground. It is thus the freedom of *nature* that potentiates itself—through its own *inner necessity*—as the freedom for goodness and evil in human personality. Indeed, although the particular capacities of human spirit distinguish the being of spirit from all other beings, human freedom emerges from a more fundamental freedom: the freedom of being itself in its primary form: nature. Hence Schelling's notion that even self-determining freedom is loaned to man from outside and before him.⁹² In Heidegger words, 'freedom is not the property of man, but the other way around: Man is at best the property of freedom. Freedom is the encompassing and penetrating nature, in which man becomes man only when he is anchored there...the nature of man is grounded in freedom.'⁹³ The human spirit is free, therefore, because it is caught up in the freedom of *being*.

3.9. Being as Longing

Insofar as spiritual existence is 'taken up' by the freedom of being, freedom is not an individual capacity that might be implemented in an otherwise mechanically determined universe. The dichotomy between spontaneity and deterministic necessity is replaced here with a more robust conception of freedom in which the human spirit is seen as a distinct kind of necessity, namely, the necessity which results from the self-determination of moral character. And because this latter form of self-determining necessity emerges from nature's own form of self-determining necessity, the latter can be conceived as a '*will* of the depths'. Since both nature and spirit are conceived in terms of will, Schelling claims that 'in the final and highest instance there is no other Being than Will. Will is primordial Being.'⁹⁴ In this section, I will consider the implications of this interpretation of being as regards the nature-spirit relation.

⁹² *SW I/7*: 399; *Freedom*, p. 79.

⁹³ Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ *SW I/7*: 350; *Freedom*, p. 24.

In theological language, being is ‘primordial will’ because God is driven to reveal himself as an other, to become the world and, eventually, Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is important to recognise, however, that at this stage in Schelling’s thought, he has not yet taken on the more traditional conception of the Christian God that will play a role in his Berlin lectures on positive philosophy. In that later work, Schelling’s notion that God is pure *actus* leads him to a conception of God whose personality does not *depend* upon the creation of the world but is entirely self-sufficient, freely creating a world which is in no way necessary for God to be divine. But for the Schelling of 1809, God’s personality is entirely dependent upon the ground of his existence; indeed, God as personality is a ‘derivative absoluteness’. Thus, in the *Freedom* essay Schelling writes, ‘Nothing can be achieved at all by such attenuated conceptions of God as *actus purissimus*.’⁹⁵ Schelling’s 1809 conception of God’s primordial will is therefore not the will of personal *volition* but the will of a base and natural *drive*. Indeed, God is not fully realised as divine personality until he creates himself as *other* and reveals himself to that other, and God’s free creation of the world is an immanent and necessary process which allows God to become the divine personality he only is implicitly as nature.⁹⁶ Thus, will is better understood, insofar as it is a ‘will of the depths’, as *longing* (*Sehnsucht*)—a longing for existence, revelation, and self-knowledge.

[The ground of God’s existence] is the longing which the eternal One feels to give birth to itself. This is not the One itself, but is co-eternal with it. This longing seeks to give birth to God...but to this extent it has not yet the unity in its own self. Therefore, regarded in itself, it is also will: but a will within which there is no understanding.⁹⁷

That this will is without understanding does not imply that Schelling has come to embrace a volitional conception of God at the expense of a rationalism; that there is no understanding

⁹⁵ *SW I/7*: 356; *Freedom*, p. 30.

⁹⁶ For a compelling defence of Schelling’s transition from his immanentist, necessitarian conception of God in the *Freedom* essay to his later, more orthodox conception of God as self-sufficient person, see McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit*, pp. 151-167. As I suggest in Chapter 7, while Schelling’s late turn to Christian orthodoxy allows him to see the limits of an ahistorical logic of emergence, this discovery comes at the price of forgoing his more profound conception of God’s personal existence as ontologically derivative.

⁹⁷ *SW I/7*: 359; *Freedom*, p. 34.

in the primal will does not imply that this will is *irrational*. On the contrary, this will is a rationally necessitated process which has not yet *become conscious* of itself, a will whose rationality must be made fully explicit in the divine process of revelation.

However difficult it is to comprehend the non-spiritual process of nature's gradual development into spiritual personality, this process is nonetheless intelligible. It is for this reason that Schelling argues that a philosophical consideration of God's activity 'in the ground' must be a rationalist philosophy of *nature*.⁹⁸ For a study of God's personality requires a foundational investigation into the preconscious nature from which personality emerges:

We have an earlier revelation than any written one—nature. It contains archetypes which no one has yet interpreted, whereas the written ones have long since received their fulfilment and exegesis. If the understanding of that unwritten revelation were inaugurated, the only true system of religion and science would appear, not in the miserable garb pieced together out of a few philosophical and critical conceptions, but at once in the full significance of truth and of nature.⁹⁹

The notion that a study of nature is central to an investigation of the divine life is directly inspired by the theosophy of Jakob Boehme, whose mystical thought Schelling insists in his Berlin lectures is implicitly rationalist even if presented in an unscientific manner.¹⁰⁰ As S. J. McGrath has shown, many of the key elements of the *Freedom* essay are inspired by the esoteric tradition—Paracelsian alchemy, Lurianic Kabbalah, and most importantly, their synthesis in Boehme's theosophy. For example, it is no coincidence that Schelling's conception of ground and existence resonates with the Kabbalistic notion of *tzimtzum*, God's contraction and expansion that is to account for the creation of the universe.

⁹⁸ I therefore disagree with Brown, who argues that Schelling 'turned away from the objective idealism of his youth' in the 'metaphysical voluntarism' of the *Freedom* essay and the *Ages of the World* (Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling*, p. 14). As I understand Schelling, the will of the ground is nothing less than the will of *nature*, and it is only through a consideration of nature's will—which philosophical thought can indeed comprehend, despite its ontological obscurity—that God's personal existence becomes intelligible.

⁹⁹ *SW* I/7: 415-416; *Freedom*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁰ *SW* II/3: 124; *Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 177. Schelling's association of Boehme's theosophy with rationalism is meant pejoratively in the Berlin lectures, but this nevertheless allows us to understand how Boehme's mystical vision is in principle compatible with a rationalist philosophy of nature.

McGrath convincingly traces this thought through Boehme and his influence on Schelling's *Freedom* essay, making the essay the most Boehmean work in Schelling's oeuvre. I raise these points because McGrath also locates the inspiration for Schelling's interpretation of being as *Sehnsucht* squarely within Boehme's theosophy, and McGrath is convincing on this connection as well. However, McGrath's focus on the esoteric tradition obscures the fact that there is a second, although not altogether separate, influence at work here, and it is an influence that has consequences for *all* of German idealism, and that is the metaphysics of Leibniz.¹⁰¹ *The Monadology*—which Schelling studied intently as a youth and which never ceased playing an inspirational role in his intellectual development—defines substance in terms of perception and appetite, and Leibniz's conception of monadological appetite in particular leads to a new conception of subjectivity in German philosophy as subjective *willing*.

By drawing attention to the idealist reception of Leibnizian *appetitus* and interpreting Schelling's role in this reception as part of a larger history of a 'metaphysics of the will', I am influenced by Heidegger's reading of German idealism. According to Heidegger, 'Leibniz established the position for the idealistic concept of Being', and this is in part due to Leibniz's conception of substance as *appetitus*.¹⁰² Although Heidegger himself traces this development in order to finally put it into question, it remains profoundly helpful for elucidating the unique standpoint of Schelling's idealism. Bracketing Heidegger's attempt to twist free from (*verwinden*) the metaphysical tradition, his interpretation of idealism as conceiving being itself as *will* allows us to see how Schelling overcomes the one-sidedness of both dogmatic realism and subjective idealism by articulating a philosophy of freedom of

¹⁰¹ As Hegel remarks in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 'Leibniz thought very highly' of Boehme (*W* 20: 91; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, p. 188). It is a curious feature of McGrath's genealogy of the notion of the Schellingian 'unconscious will' that Leibniz is understood as formulating, along with Kant, a less significant conception of the unconscious—an '*epistemic* "dark side of the mind"' (*The Dark Ground of Spirit*, p. 46, my emphasis)—as if the notion of minute perceptions exhausted Leibniz's contribution to the conception of the unconscious. Instead, Leibniz should be considered, alongside Boehme and Schelling, as conceiving mind as unconsciously *driven*, even if this only remains an implicit concept in Leibniz.

¹⁰² Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 95.

the highest order.¹⁰³ But in order to recognise this significance, we must set aside any assumptions about the supposedly negative character of the metaphysics of the will. Doing so will allow us to see that the interpretation of being as will leads Schelling to conceive a profound unity of nature and spirit.

Schelling's conception of nature as an expression of self-determining reason places him squarely within the idealist tradition. Although 'nature as subject' is fundamentally distinct from the transcendental subject of Kantian and Fichtean idealism, it nevertheless plays a structurally analogous role in that nature, conceived as subject, grounds the possibility of objective experience. Central to this idealist notion is that subjectivity—be it Kantian, Fichtean, or Schellingian—is not *a* being but an *activity*. Hence Fichte's conception of the 'I' as perpetual striving—and here is where the *appetitus* of substance (Leibniz) becomes explicitly conceived as the *Streben* of subjectivity (Fichte). It is this conception of striving which Schelling adopts and reformulates in the *Freedom* essay. The ground of existence is a *longing* for existence; God longs to reveal himself and to know himself in the life of the human spirit. But as we have seen, this divine ground is not the *spiritual* subject for Schelling, but *nature* as subject. Indeed, the primary grammatical and ontological subject of the Schellingian system is wholly otherwise than the *subiectum* of Cartesianism. The positing of the not-I by the I in Fichte's idealism is therefore reversed such that it is nature which grounds *spirit*. Schellingian idealism thus remains a 'metaphysics of subjectivity' insofar as the being of beings is interpreted as the self-determining striving of subjectivity. And yet this primordial subjectivity is nothing human, but a striving logically antecedent to all human life. This is why Schelling can describe will as 'primordial Being'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ On my view, Heidegger's error is to see the 'limit' of idealism as its presupposition about man as 'the rational ego' and the 'impossibility' of raising the question of a 'real and thus alive concept of human freedom' that results from this presupposition (*Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 96). Heidegger's claim here draws out an essential difference between his own thought and German idealism. In seeking a conception of the human that would be 'more essential' than the modern conception *humanitas*, Heidegger calls for a return to the inception of philosophy before its 'distortion' by Christianity. Schelling and Hegel, on the other hand, return to the origins of philosophy—conceiving nature as *physis*—and subsequently *affirm* the development of that thought in the intellectual, political, and religious history of Europe. Rather than deconstructing the history of modern thought to lay the groundwork for an essential encounter with ancient thinking, Schelling and Hegel *retrieve* ancient philosophy and unite it with the philosophy of modernity, affirming the emergence of spiritual subjectivity in both its ontological and political-theological forms.

¹⁰⁴ *SW* I/7: 350; *Freedom*, p. 24.

But if being is will and nature is subject, how are we to understand the ontological specificity of spirit? Does Schelling not understand spirit, too, as subjective willing? Indeed, we saw that the self-determination of moral character was the essential feature of Schelling's conception of *human* freedom; to will goodness or evil is what distinguishes the human spirit from all other forms of being. But if nature is also self-determining subjectivity, does this not obscure the difference between nature and spirit? Does this not make nature and spirit merely different expressions of the same being, namely, will?

Although Schelling's *Freedom* essay is meant to develop a third way beyond dualism and reductionism, he certainly looks at times to be of a more reductionist mindset: 'The supreme aim of the dynamic mode of explanation is nothing else than [the] reduction of the laws of nature to mind, spirit and will.'¹⁰⁵ If the 'laws of nature' are reduced to 'mind, spirit and will', then how can mind, spirit and will as we know them be ontologically distinct? As I understand Schelling, there is only one way to make sense of this passage, and that is if the mind, spirit, and will to which nature is reduced are themselves distinct from the mind, spirit, and will associated with human existence. Indeed, this is the only way to interpret this passage in light of Schelling's logic of identity as presented in the *Freedom* essay. What is necessary, therefore, is to distinguish the 'mind, spirit and will' of *nature* from the manner in which 'the whole of nature found its *transfiguration* in feeling, in intelligence, and, ultimately, in will.'¹⁰⁶ 'Will' must therefore define the being of both nature *and* that 'transfiguration' of nature Schelling ordinarily identifies as 'spirit'. But 'will' cannot have the *same* significance in these instances if nature and spirit are to be *properly* identical, i.e. united in their *difference*.

Schelling himself distinguishes between two types of willing: 'the longing of the One to give birth to itself, or the will of the depths' and 'the will of love through which the Word is pronounced in nature and through which God first makes himself personal'.¹⁰⁷ The two kinds of will correspond to the will of God as *ground* and the will of God as *existence*,

¹⁰⁵ *SW I/7*: 396; *Freedom*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁶ *SW I/7*: 350; *Freedom*, p. 24. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ *SW I/7*: 395; *Freedom*, p. 74.

the latter being dependent upon the emergence of human spirit for its realisation. There is thus a longing of nature to become spiritual ('the will of the depths'), and there is a longing of spiritual existence to unite with the all ('the will of love'). Nature and spirit are therefore continuous insofar as both are activities of *willing*; however, the manner in which nature and spirit *will* distinguishes the one from the other. As Schelling writes, the will of the depths is *unconscious* will, 'like desire or passion, and most readily comparable to the beautiful urge of a developing being striving to unfold itself'.¹⁰⁸ The will of love, on the other hand, is particular to personality—human and divine—and does not seek to unfold *itself* but to unite with its *other*.

With this distinction between the will of the depths and the will of love, we see that Schelling's unique form of idealism cannot be reduced to a transposition of the transcendental subject onto nature itself as a longing for spiritual existence. Rather, *because* Schelling interprets nature as real, subjective *longing*, he understands nature to give rise to a distinctive *spiritual* existence which nature itself *is not*. In this way, spirit is both continuous with and distinct from the nature that willed it into existence. In the language of the potencies which continue to be essential to Schelling's conception of nature's immanent development, nature *potentiates* itself as human freedom such that the human spirit constitutes *more* self-determination (quantitative intensification) and *more than* self-determination (qualitative differentiation). For the will of spiritual existence does not only determine *itself* as a self-contracting will of egoity; spiritual existence becomes an other-regarding will, a will capable of affirming the intrinsic unity of all. And this is the case whether an individual affirms the will of love or perverts the ground/existence relation: in both goodness and evil, the self-determination of moral character is a *decision* made by an individual who relates to the whole of being in a novel manner, rather than simply striving to *be* in an instinctive fashion. For Schelling, 'The self-will of creatures' is a 'mere craving or desire, that is blind will' because it is a darkness that has not yet been raised to light *as such*, i.e. the light of divine love.¹⁰⁹ Yet it is only through the self-potentiating process of this

¹⁰⁸ *SW I/7*: 395; *Freedom*, pp. 74-75. Translation modified.

¹⁰⁹ *SW I/7*: 363; *Freedom*, p. 38.

blind, self-will of nature that the human spirit emerges, a creature within which blind will becomes conscious volition. In other words, the *appetition* of being itself becomes *volition* when nature becomes spirit. The freedom of individual, spiritual existence is thus entirely dependent upon a pre-volitional appetite within nature itself, a nature which ‘blindly’—and that is not to say without reason—longs to become aware of itself.

3.10. The Emergence of Originary Identity

Schelling doesn’t explicitly identify the two kinds of will with natural appetite and spiritual volition. But there is no question that with the emergence of human freedom, the productivity of nature generates a product that is fundamentally distinct from everything which has come before:

It can readily be seen that in the tension of longing necessary to bring things completely to birth the innermost nexus of the forces can only be released in a graded evolution, and at every stage in the division of forces there is developed out of nature a new being whose soul must be all the more perfect the more differentiatedly it contains what was left undifferentiated in the others. It is the task of a complete philosophy of nature to show how each successive process more closely approaches the essence of nature, until in the highest division of forces the innermost center is disclosed.¹¹⁰

This highest stage of nature’s ahistorical evolution is the human spirit, the form of life which is no longer mere nature since nature has differentiated itself so drastically in the emergence of human freedom. But as Schelling remarks here, this self-differentiation of nature as spirit also consists in a *return* to the ‘innermost centre’ of nature. What might this ‘innermost centre’ be? In what sense is the emergence of spirit as the ‘highest division of [nature’s] forces’ disclosive of *nature’s* essence? Again, on appearance it looks as though Schelling conceives nature and spirit as identical in the sense of ‘coincidence’. For if nature’s developmental process culminates in the emergence of a being which discloses *nature’s* true

¹¹⁰ *SW I/7*: 362; *Freedom*, p. 37.

core, isn't nature 'spiritual' all along? And isn't spirit a more 'essentially natural' form of being than any other?

On my view, this passage does help us to understand how Schelling conceives the 'originary' identity between nature and spirit, but it does not express the idea that nature and spirit merely coincide as two aspects of the same being. On the contrary, with the notion that the emergence of spirit discloses the 'inner centre' of nature, I believe Schelling finally unifies the two conceptions of nature-spirit identity at work in his early philosophy of nature. To see this, let's first consider the question, what is the 'innermost centre of nature' which the emergence of spirit discloses? It is nothing less than the *creative* relationship between ground and existence. Spiritual freedom is not some contingent phenomenon that emerges from a non-intelligible ground; rather, spiritual freedom emerges as distinct from nature insofar as spiritual existence expresses more essentially than any merely *natural* product the *creative capacities of nature itself*. Indeed, individuated human existence exemplifies the creative power of nature in a manner unparalleled in organic life. For the spiritual creature is nothing less than the power for 'goodness' and 'evil', which Schelling defines ontologically as the power to affirm the relationship between ground and existence and the power to pervert that relationship. The will of the spirit, which actively engages with the relationship between ground and existence, repeats—at a higher and therefore ontologically distinct level—the originary will of nature through which all of nature's products are generated.

As I argued in Chapters 1 and 2, Schelling's earlier work operates with two conceptions of nature-spirit identity: an identity of emergence (the theme of the early nature philosophy) and an 'originary identity' or an identity of coincidence (largely implicit in the nature philosophy and thematised in the identity philosophy). I described these 'models' of nature-spirit identity as incompatible since it isn't clear how an *already spiritual* nature can give rise to an ontologically distinct spiritual existence, or how a basically natural spirit (e.g. spirit as 'visible nature') can emerge as ontologically distinct from nature. The idealist logic of emergence requires that what is unified through the process of emergence involves *ontological difference* and is, in fact, nothing other than a process of *ontological*

differentiation. From this perspective, it looks as though the idealist logic of emergence simply has no room for an ‘originary identity’ of nature and spirit.

But with the *Freedom* essay’s description of the emergence of spirit as potentiating nature’s intrinsic productivity through a creative engagement with ground and existence, Schelling is able to bring together his two conceptions of nature-spirit identity. Whereas in the identity philosophy (and certain passages from the early nature philosophy), nature and spirit are understood as two aspects of the same being, the *Freedom* essay presents spirit as emergent from nature in such a manner as to activate nature’s inner creative power in a novel manner, thereby expressing a primordial identity between natural production (the will of the depths) and spiritual self-determination (the will of love and its potential perversion). In this way, the *processual* identity of nature and spirit paradoxically *achieves* a ‘primordial’ identity. For in the potentiation of nature as spirit, a form of being emerges which expresses the essential character of nature’s own potentiating process, i.e. its creative will. Thus, nature and spirit are not only ‘identical’ insofar as spirit emerges from nature as its ontological consequent, but they are identical because this spiritual consequent of nature’s activity discloses the inner unity of that activity with the freedom of spirit. The ‘originary identity’ of nature and spirit, therefore, does not preexist—logically speaking—the emergence of spirit from nature; on the contrary, it is only through the ontological (yet ahistorical) process of emergence that the primordial unity of nature and spirit itself emerges.

Another way to see this is to consider the fact that, for Schelling, ‘indifference’ names the originary identity of nature and spirit in the system of identity. But as we saw above, in the *Freedom* essay Schelling reinterprets the logic of identity as ‘intrinsically creative’¹¹¹ and consequently conceives ‘indifference’—the copula in judgment—as nothing other than the ‘becoming’ of ground and existence. The natural ground of spiritual existence *becomes* ground insofar as it grounds spiritual freedom, and spiritual freedom *becomes* the spirit it is insofar as nature grounds that existence. Nature and spirit *are*, and are intrinsically united as ground and consequent, only because they *become* what they are through their inner unity—the copula. But with this reformulation of the logic of indifference, Schelling

¹¹¹ *SW I/7*: 345; *Freedom*, p. 18. My emphasis.

argues that there could *be* no ‘indifference’ *without* the emergence of spirit from nature. We can see that Schelling was already onto this thought before the *Freedom* essay. In the 1806 edition of the *World-Soul* (a text which was published a third time with the *Freedom* essay), Schelling argues that the bond (i.e. the copula) between nature and spirit *is only as bond*—is only the indifference *it is*—when it in fact *unites* nature and spirit (that which is bonded).¹¹² And as we have seen, it is entirely clear in the *Freedom* essay that this unification of nature and spirit is a necessarily creative unification, an identity in which nature contracts as ground in order to allow spiritual existence to *become*. Indifference, then, the originary identity of nature and spirit, *is* only insofar as nature becomes spirit, for indifference is nothing other than this becoming.

In Chapter 7, I will argue that in the *Freedom* essay Schelling is already on his way to conceiving the generation of spiritual existence from nature as a historical event. By understanding absolute identity in terms of genesis, it is no surprise that Schelling soon turns his attention to *historical* creation and the ontological character of the pre-spiritual past. Yet in the *Freedom* essay, Schelling continues to insist upon the atemporal character of the nature-spirit relation, hence my identification of Schelling’s thought, up to and including the *Freedom* essay, as presenting us with a *logic* of emergence. In Part II of this thesis, I turn to Hegel’s version of this idealist logic.

¹¹² *SW* I/2: 361.

Part II: Hegel

Chapter 4: The Idea as Nature

4.1. Introduction

By the twenty-first century, it has finally come to be accepted within relatively wide philosophical circles that Hegel had a deep knowledge about the natural world, and that his philosophy of nature, even when it ‘backed the wrong horse’ in the history of scientific theory,¹ is rich in philosophical analyses that could only have been pursued by a philosopher well acquainted with the details of the empirical sciences of his time. But that Hegel is now largely recognised amongst Anglophone scholars as having impressive knowledge about the empirical sciences does not always translate into an appreciation of the *place* of nature in Hegel’s system.² On the contrary, one can easily defend Hegel against charges of being ‘anti-science’ and still dismiss his philosophy of nature as irrelevant to his fundamental philosophical project. It is this latter dismissal of Hegel’s nature philosophy, prevalent in the recent neo-pragmatist Hegel renaissance, that I want to put into question.³ On my reading, Hegel is not only knowledgeable about the empirical sciences of his day, but the ontology of nature is, for Hegel, utterly indispensable for accomplishing the aims of philosophical science. As Beiser puts it, ‘*Naturphilosophie* belongs to the very heart and soul of Hegel’s philosophy.’⁴

¹ Errol E. Harris, *The Spirit of Hegel*, p. 116. Harris does not only claim that Hegel was well versed in the sciences of his day, but that Hegel’s philosophy of nature has often proved prescient in light of more recent natural-scientific developments.

² Unlike Anglophone scholarship, the German and Italian reception of Hegel’s nature philosophy has been far more consistent in its recognition of Hegel’s knowledge of the natural sciences. This is one of many signs that the Anglophone philosophical tradition is still in the beginning stages of overcoming the prejudices regarding idealism that dominated Anglophone discourse in the early twentieth century.

³ McDowell’s insistence upon conceiving nature from within the framework of ‘second nature’ (or mind) displays, I take it, an interest not in nature itself but nature as perceived by minded beings. See Dunham, Grant, and Watson: ‘In effect, McDowell resituates “nature” as consequent on rather than prior to experience.’ Jeremy Dunham, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Sean Watson, *Idealism: The History of a Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 261.

⁴ Beiser, ‘Hegel and Naturphilosophie’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, p. 137.

Defending this view is difficult for a number of reasons, one of which is the mere fact that Hegel's enormous influence in other areas of philosophy overshadows his systematic ambitions regarding nature, the effect of which is that he is simply assumed to be, first and foremost, a philosopher of consciousness.⁵ The reception of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in particular has not only eclipsed the significance of his great work of metaphysics, the *Science of Logic*, but it has made his philosophies of nature and subjective spirit utterly incomprehensible to those exclusively familiar with the *Phenomenology*. This is somewhat ironic, since Hegel's *Phenomenology* was never meant to present his philosophical perspective, but was intended to clear a path for ordinary thought such that it could arrive at the standpoint of philosophical science (absolute knowing) and from that standpoint *begin* the task of philosophy proper, within which nature occupies a central place.⁶ It is somewhat unfortunate, then, that undergraduate students have so often been introduced to Hegel's *introduction* to philosophy but have not been given the opportunity to follow up and begin a guided study of Hegel's speculative philosophy proper.

Throughout this second part of the thesis (Chapters 3-6), I aim to show how Hegel's philosophy of nature is indeed central to his philosophical project. I argue that Hegel is not only deeply interested in the ontological diversity of the natural world, but that it is only through a consideration of nature that we come to understand the ontological specificity of human freedom. For it is only through nature's immanent dialectic, according to Hegel, that spirit can be shown to be necessary and therefore ontologically dependent upon the natural world.

In this way, Hegel's conception of the relationship between nature and spirit is extraordinarily close to that of Schelling. For both philosophers, nature is the *primary* (i.e. systematically first) expression of the Idea—an Idea that simply has no being *without* its

⁵ In this respect, we can simply note that, despite the profound efforts of philosophers such as Hyppolite (and his students) to understand Hegel's system on its own terms, i.e., as a system of ontology, Kojève's idiosyncratic, anthropological reading remains canonical. Cf. Jacques Derrida, 'The Ends of Man' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 111-136.

⁶ For a comprehensive account of the various interpretations of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the system, see Ardis B. Collins, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Dialectical Justification of Philosophy's First Principles* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

natural manifestation—and it is this natural manifestation of reason which makes possible, and necessary, spiritual freedom. As such, nature and spirit are both ontologically *continuous* and *distinct*. For nature, on this view, leads not only to the emergence of organic, self-determining *life*, but also to the freedom of *spirit*, a being that ‘transcends’ nature as an ontologically unique form of existence.⁷ One of the central aims of the following four chapters is therefore to defend the view that Hegel is entirely committed to a version of metaphysical idealism in which the objective, impersonal, and finite make possible the more complex ontological determinations associated with subjectivity, personality, and infinite being.

Critics of Hegel often assume that he simply begins with concepts such as ‘spirit’ and ‘subject’ and only understands the natural or objective in light of the former. On this reading, Hegel is something of a ‘subjective idealist’. But Hegel is adamant that idealism must shed its subjective character and become an *absolute* idealism. Indeed, Hegel’s turn to absolute idealism was meant to overcome the subjectivist metaphysical standpoint Hegel understood to characterise Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. Any conception of Hegel beginning with the subject—be it empirical or transcendental—is therefore entirely misguided.

But Fichte’s ‘subjective idealism’ was not the only form of idealism from which Hegel sought to distinguish his own system. Hegel also took his project to be an advance upon Schelling’s so-called ‘objective idealism’, and it is this latter move away from Schelling that has too often been taken at face value by commentators on Hegel. When Hegel distinguishes himself from both Fichte and Schelling, we are often told, he is developing a dialectical conception of the relationship between ‘object’ and ‘subject’ in which neither is given pride of place. On this view, the absolute identity of nature and spirit is an incomplete ‘absolute’ if it is achieved via one path alone, be it the Fichtean path wherein the subject posits the object or the Schellingian path wherein the object raises itself to the subject. Hegel, so the story goes, seeks to sublimate these one-sided approaches to the

⁷ As will become clear in Chapter 6, this spiritual ‘transcendence’ of nature is in fact an immanent inwardness expressed *within* nature as ontologically distinct from that nature.

nature-spirit identity by conceiving the mutual determining elements of the objective and subjective and thereby arrive at a truly *absolute* conception of nature-spirit identity.

This story is confused for a number of reasons. First, as we have already seen in Chapter 2, it was Schelling who first pointed out the limited standpoint of both ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ idealism and called for an ‘absolute idealism’ which would disclose the fundamental identity of nature and spirit. But as I argued throughout Part I, while Schelling does not privilege the *objective*, he does identify nature as the conceptual *topos* from which nature and spirit reveal their absolute unity. Perhaps, then, Hegel was onto something in distinguishing *his* ‘absolute idealism’ from Schelling’s cosmocentric idealism? For Hegel’s absolute idealism is meant to privilege neither nature nor spirit, but to simply disclose their fundamental unity and difference.

While Hegel does, in many places, present his system in this light, we should not take his word for it. Or rather, the words we should take to be more telling of Hegel’s project are those that describe the actual, systematic, dialectical movement by which nature and spirit are shown to be identical. That is, we should look to the details of the system itself in order to get a sense of how nature and spirit are in fact related. Bracketing what Hegel says when he is describing his own uniqueness with respect to previous forms of idealism, we see almost immediately that despite all of his originality, Hegel is committed to elucidating how the ‘objective’ gives way to the ‘subjective’, and not vice versa. Indeed, at every turn in his system, it is the objective which precedes the subjective: In the *Phenomenology*, consciousness *first* seeks the truth of being in the objective world, and is only subsequently driven to seek the truth of being in consciousness itself; in the *Science of Logic*, the doctrines of being and essence, which make up the objective logic, precede the doctrine of the concept, the subjective logic; in the *Philosophy of Nature*, mechanical motion precedes the activity of organic development; and, as I will explore in detail in the following three chapters, nature *as such* precedes spirit in *all* of its forms. Indeed, it is only once *spirit* emerges in the system that we begin to see the ‘subjective’ determinations of being give way to ‘objective’ determinations, such that the finite or individual subject precedes the objective political community in the philosophy of spirit. But up until Hegel derives the life of

subjective spirit from nature, it is the objective element with which Hegel begins in every area of philosophical science. All of this is to say that when we look to the details of the dialectic, Hegel is much more of an ‘objective idealist’ than he himself acknowledges, if by ‘objective idealism’ we mean the idealism which seeks to unify subject and object by beginning with the ‘objective’. It is quite interesting, then, that both Hegel and Schelling begin their respective versions of ‘*absolute* idealism’ with considerations of *nature*, and never the subjective *spirit*.⁸

Of course this does not mean that Hegel is any less committed to the philosophy of subjectivity. But Hegel’s systematic ontology of subjective freedom is characterised at every turn by the primacy of the impersonal. And it is important that this primacy of the impersonal not be taken to exclusively signify Hegel’s determination to understand spiritual freedom in light of nature. Were this the case, then Hegel’s philosophy of nature would be grounded exclusively in *practical interests*, to *secure* the being and reality of freedom in such manner as to make the philosophy of nature into a strictly instrumental programme. Hegel, like Plato and Aristotle before him, is concerned with the *being* of nature; and this concern is separate from the fact that, according to Hegel, nature *turns out* to develop into organic life which ultimately paves the way for the emergence of spiritual freedom. This is why I refrain from describing Hegel’s interest in nature as an instrumental one. For Hegel’s immanent method demands that we let go of all our presuppositions—including our practical desire to justify an ontology of freedom—and simply let nature reveal its being to thought. Indeed, it is only such a method that will allow us to properly answer the question which has animated the philosophy of nature since the philosophy of the Greeks: What is nature?⁹

Hegel’s answer to this question can be stated quite briefly and it is fundamentally distinct from that offered by Schelling. Nature, for Hegel, is the Idea as *alienated* from itself. However, the meaning of this answer is in no way straightforward. In this chapter, I aim to

⁸ Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* is an exception to the rule, but as I argue above (Chapter 1), this work should be read in light of the *General Deduction* of the same year, which makes it fully clear that transcendental idealism is systematically derivative and that nature philosophy is first philosophy.

⁹ *W* 9: Introductory Addition, 2; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 3-4.

clarify Hegel's conception of nature as the 'self-external Idea'. In doing so, I hope to shed some light on the project of Hegel's philosophy of nature. This will allow me to elucidate, in Chapters 5 and 6, the process whereby nature gradually develops nascent forms of interiority and finally necessitates the existence of spiritual freedom.

4.2. Objective Idealism in the *Differenzschrift*

Hegel's earliest intellectual passions were not in natural philosophy or even metaphysics more generally. In his intellectual youth, Hegel was primarily dedicated to interpreting various forms of political and religious life and defending a conception of an organic, political-theological community in which the alienation endemic to the modern world would be overcome.¹⁰ But Hegel soon developed a great interest in metaphysics and natural philosophy, and in large part this development was thanks to Hegel's friendship with Schelling. By 1801, Hegel was fully committed to understanding social-philosophical issues in light of a metaphysical system in which speculative physics plays a fundamental role. In that year, Hegel moved to Jena (briefly living with Schelling) in order to take up a position as an unpaid private lecturer. In Jena, Hegel taught courses with Schelling and replaced Fichte as Schelling's co-editor for the short-lived *Critical Journal of Philosophy*.¹¹ In order to take up the position of *Privatdozent*, Hegel defended twelve 'theses' on his thirty-first

¹⁰ See, for example, the Tübingen 'Fragment on *Volksreligion* and Christianity' (*W I*: pp. 9-103; *Miscellaneous Writings of G. W. F. Hegel*, pp. 44-71); 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion' (*W I*: 104-233; *Early Theological Writings*, pp. 67-181) and 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate' (*W I*: 274-418; *Early Theological Writings*, pp. 182-301), none of which were published during Hegel's lifetime. On the 'Tübingen Fragment', see Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 39-44; on 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion', see Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 62-68. Cf. H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962).

¹¹ For a concise summary of the works authored by Hegel in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* (1801-1803), see Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), pp. 65-68.

birthday against Schelling and Niethammer, and subsequently submitted his Latin dissertation, *On the Orbits of the Planets*, his first nature-philosophical work.¹²

It is clear even from these biographical remarks that during this period, Hegel's intellectual friendship and collaboration with Schelling intensified in 1801. What is of central importance for this study is that during this period, Hegel followed Schelling's lead in promoting the idea of a philosophy of nature that would not only supplement Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, but transform critical philosophy into a truly all-encompassing system of philosophy wherein the objective, natural world would be presented as real in itself and, therefore, as an expression of the absolute Idea. As I argued in Part I, Schelling's system of identity directly challenged Fichte's idealism in two interrelated ways: 1) in the system of identity, nature is taken to be primary in a significant sense, and 2) this primacy of nature makes it possible to develop a system of *absolute*, as opposed to merely subject-dependent, identity. It is this topic that occupies Hegel in the first publication to which he attaches his name: *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*.

According to the young Hegel, Schelling located a profound problem within Fichte's *Wissenschaftselhre*. For the latter aimed at a philosophy of unity in which nature and spirit would be presented as identical, but this identity exclusively depended upon subjective or spiritual activity, i.e. on the activity of the 'I'. In the idealists' more technical language, Fichte only granted subject-object identity to the *subject* (subjective subject-object identity) and did not extend this subject-object identity to the *object* (objective subject-object identity). Subjective spirit and objective nature were shown to be identical in Fichte's system only insofar as the 'I' *posits* nature as its limit, as the 'Not-I', and this act of positing is necessarily one-sided since the identity of nature and spirit only goes one way: from spirit to nature. To move 'from nature to spirit', then, would make a significant advance upon Fichte's idealism insofar as 1) it would be shown that nature *itself* is intrinsically connected

¹² For Pierre Adler's translation of Hegel's theses and dissertation, see *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, pp. 170-206. Hegel defended these theses against Schelling, Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, and Thomas Schwarzott. Schelling's brother, Karl Eberhard Schelling, defended Hegel as the 'respondent'. See *Hegel: The Letters*, p. 86; Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 106-107 and H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Night Thoughts (1801-1806)*, pp. xxv-xxxi. For Schelling's remarks on Hegel's theses, see Hegel, *Dissertatio Philosophica De Orbitis Planetarum*, ed. and trans. by Wolfgang Neuser (Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, 1986), pp. 144-145.

to the subject it generates, namely as its ontological source; and consequently 2) the identity that characterises the being of beings would be an *absolute* identity, and not an identity merely relative to subjectivity. As Hegel writes, ‘In the philosophy of nature Schelling sets the objective Subject-Object beside the subjective Subject-Object and presents both as united in something higher than the subject.’¹³ In order to accomplish this higher metaphysical standpoint, the ‘subjectivism’ of Fichte’s idealism would have to be bracketed as a limited standpoint such that nature itself could be shown to determine *itself* as subject-object identity (or an expression of absolute reason). Thus, as Hegel says, ‘abstraction from what is subjective in the transcendental intuition is the basic formal character (*der formelle Grundcharakter*) of Schelling’s philosophy.’¹⁴

According to Hegel, this unique non-subjectivism of Schelling’s was lost on its audience. In particular, Hegel believed that Reinhold had failed to see the difference between Fichte’s subjective idealism and Schelling’s absolute idealism.¹⁵ Thus, Hegel’s *Difference* essay is meant to clarify this difference between Fichte and Schelling and to defend a generally Schellingian position—despite the fact that even here Hegel already has his own, distinct ideas as to how such a system of identity ought to be presented.

Following Schelling, Hegel sees Fichte’s conception of the ‘Not-I’ to be utterly devoid of freedom. ‘*Nature* is something essentially determined and lifeless’, Hegel writes of Fichte’s doctrine.¹⁶ But even more significant than the fact that Fichte fails to grant nature intrinsic autonomy is the *reason* for this failure. According to Hegel, Fichte *had* to see nature as simply opposed to freedom, because, for Fichte, ‘nature is simply something that

¹³ *W 2*: 12; *Difference*, p. 82.

¹⁴ *W 2*: 118; *Difference*, p. 176. Translation modified.

¹⁵ According to Hegel, Reinhold also misunderstood Fichte’s idealism. ‘Some of the forms in which Fichte has presented his system might mislead one into believing that it is a system of dogmatic idealism denying the opposite principle. Indeed, Reinhold overlooks the transcendental significance of the Fichtean principle which requires one to posit the difference of subject and object in Ego = Ego at the same time as their identity’ (*W 2*: 62; *Difference*, p. 127).

¹⁶ *W 2*: 76; *Difference*, p. 139.

reflection posits for the sake of the explanation, it is a [merely] ideal result.¹⁷ Thus, on Hegel's view:

[Fichte's] system itself is a consistent product of the intellect, a mass of finitudes, which the original identity cannot draw together into the focus of totality... The Subject-Object, therefore, turns itself into a subjective Subject-Object and it does not succeed in suspending this subjectivity and positing itself objectively.¹⁸

The goal, therefore, of discovering an absolute principle of identity can only be achieved by interpreting nature as something *other than* a mere, lifeless posit.

In the *Difference* essay, Hegel is as enthusiastic as Schelling about a magnetic 'indifference point' in which the polarities of subjective spirit and objective nature would be shown to be essentially identical, different 'poles' of the absolute 'magnet', as it were.¹⁹ As is well known, Hegel soon abandons this notion of an indifference point, and this becomes a central area of contention between Schelling and Hegel in 1807. The ordinary interpretation of Hegel's dissatisfaction with this concept of indifference is that it is insufficiently determinate to be genuinely 'absolute'. Indeed, if an *indifferent* absolute lacks determinate *difference*, then this raises the question as to how an undifferentiated absolute becomes determinate without relinquishing its character as absolute or self-sufficient. This criticism certainly plays a role in Hegel's later rejection of 'indifference' as a name for the absolute, but the issue is by no means this straightforward.²⁰ In order to understand the fundamental reason behind Hegel's rejection of Schellingian indifference, we must first note that, at least in the *Difference* essay, Hegel saw Schelling's absolute indifference point to be inclusive of

¹⁷ *W 2*: 76; *Difference*, p. 139.

¹⁸ *W 2*: 94; *Difference*, p. 155.

¹⁹ The implicit Spinozism in this viewpoint is made more explicit further on in the *Difference* essay: 'Because of this inner identity, the two sciences [i.e., the science of consciousness and the science of nature] are equal as to their coherence and their sequence of stages [*Stufenfolge*]. They corroborate each other. One of the older philosophers put it somewhat like this: the order and coherence of ideas (the subjective) is the same as the coherence and order of things (the objective)' (*W 2*: 106; *Difference*, p. 166). Cf. Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part II, Proposition 7.

²⁰ For the mature Hegel's most detailed account of the logic of 'indifference', see the *Science of Logic*, where measure is determined as indifference prior to the logical transition to the doctrine of essence (*W 5*: 445-457; *Science of Logic* [Miller] pp. 375-385).

and dependent upon *real difference*: ‘Philosophy must give the separation into subject and object its due...Hence, the Absolute itself is the identity of identity and non-identity; being opposed and being one are both together in it.’²¹ Indifference in the *Difference* essay is not some abstract being detached from its expression as objective nature and subjective spirit. Rather, this ‘absolute identity’ is necessarily an identity of identity *and* difference.²²

On my view, since Hegel already recognised the necessary *unity* of identity and difference within the Schellingian point of indifference, the oft-held interpretation of Hegel’s Schelling critique is insufficient. When Hegel leaves behind the concept of ‘indifference’, it cannot simply be because indifference lacks determinacy as ‘the night in which all cows are black’. Rather, as Hegel works out his philosophical view in Jena, he comes to see that the magnetic indifference point fails to account for the *becoming* determinate of the absolute—rather than determinacy *as such*. In other words, it is the *developmental process* that is lacking in the magnetic identity of ‘indifference’ and, more specifically, the impossibility of moving from nature to spirit from within the magnetic schema. In other words, nature and spirit are distinguished from one another even in the point of indifference, but for this determinacy to be adequate to being itself that determinacy must be conceived as an active *distinguishing*, a process whereby the objective determines itself *as* subjective.

I highlight this point because it shows that, from the start, Schelling and Hegel were equally committed to discovering a term that would announce the *inner unity* of identity and difference. Indeed, *true* identity, for both Schelling and Hegel, involves real difference, and this demand for an identity of identity and difference is of central importance for the absolute idealists’ interpretations of the nature-spirit relation. For it is this concept of an *absolute* identity which opens the way to conceiving nature and spirit as ontologically continuous *in their difference*.

²¹ *W 2*: 96; *Difference*, p. 156. Compare this to Hegel’s critique of ‘indifference’ in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: ‘But the expression “indifference” is ambiguous, for it means indifference in regard to both the one and the other; and thus it appears as if the content of indifference, the only thing which makes it concrete, were indifferent (*W 20*: 439; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, p. 529).

²² Note, also, that following Schelling’s *Presentation*, Hegel understands this absolute ‘indifference point’ as *reason*, and reason thereby becomes identified as the inner essence and *identity* of nature and spirit (*W 2*: 100-101; *Difference*, pp. 160-161).

As Schelling and Hegel diverge from their respective 1801 presentations of the metaphysics of identity, each develops a more *processual* account of absolute identity. And it is this processual character of identity that allows both Schelling and Hegel to conceive of the continuity and distinctness of nature and spirit as proceeding *from nature itself*. As I argued in Part I, Schelling expresses this idea in its clearest form in the *Freedom* essay. Here, in Part II, I argue that Hegel presents his own version of this idea in his ‘mature’ system.

4.3. The ‘Mature’ Hegel

By Hegel’s ‘mature’ system, I mean to refer to the Hegel of 1807 onwards, i.e. from the publication of the *Phenomenology* through Hegel’s appointments in Heidelberg and Berlin. While at Heidelberg, Hegel published the outline to his system, including the philosophy of nature, in encyclopaedic form in 1817, and he lectures on nature philosophy in 1818. In Berlin, Hegel lectured on the philosophy of nature in 1819/20, 1821/22, 1823/24, 1825/26, 1828, and 1830.²³ He published revised versions of his *Encyclopaedia* in 1827 and 1830.

Throughout this thesis, I focus primarily on the 1830 *Encyclopaedia*. Such a strategy will certainly limit my account of Hegel’s position to his latest period of thought. However, I am not convinced that Hegel’s intellectual development from 1817 to 1830 constitutes a significant alteration of philosophical perspective. Hegel never calls into question his general programme, wherein nature is shown to turn more and more inward through a gradual process that leads, finally, to the logical emergence of spiritual freedom. Indeed, once he arrives at his *Encyclopaedia* system, Hegel remains committed to the same basic philosophical stance and merely seeks to perfect the details of that system until the end of his life, hence the significant continuity between all of Hegel’s output from 1817 onwards. Moreover, it is not entirely insignificant that the 1830 outline of this basic philosophical position was the one Hegel himself understood to be the most perfect outline of his

²³ *W* 10: 426.

philosophical vision. Whether it could have been further perfected in Hegel's eyes is a matter I will consider at the end of this chapter.

But what about Hegel's development *prior* to his 'mature' period? My comments on Hegel thus far might imply that Hegel remained committed to a Schellingian metaphysics prior to his philosophical departure from Schelling in 1807 when Hegel expressed in no uncertain terms his distaste for a metaphysics of indifference. But after the publication of the *Difference* essay in 1801, Hegel immediately began to distance himself from Schelling's metaphysics. Indeed, between the *Difference* essay and the *Phenomenology* lies an entire philosophical development in which Hegel attempted to work out his own distinctive system of logic, metaphysics, and reality. Hegel's Jena years are therefore of great importance for a full appreciation of post-Kantian idealism, and the absence of a close analysis of Hegel's development in Jena is a weakness of the present study. To note just one feature of Hegel's development which is significant for the present thesis: This period includes Hegel's first works of nature philosophy (after the 1801 dissertation), and although Hegel's Jena system is in some respects Schellingian (specifically regarding the technical role played by the 'potencies'), it is also clearly distinct from Schelling's system in its thematisation of logic, on which Hegel was already lecturing in the winter semester 1801/1802. Had it been possible to do so here, I would have addressed in detail how Hegel gradually moves from his more Schellingian sympathies to the position articulated in his mature philosophy, with Hegel's developing interest in logic and its relation to metaphysics as a central theme.

That being said, there is simply too great a difference between the early and mature Hegel to treat both 'Hegels' here. With Schelling, it was necessary to trace a development of thought from 1797 to 1809, for it was within this very development, I argued, that Schelling's distinctive philosophical vision regarding the nature-spirit relation comes to the fore. With Hegel, the situation is different. While Hegel's development from his Jena years to his mature system should not be ignored, I do not believe it is necessary in order to understand Hegel's 'mature' perspective regarding the nature-spirit relation. On the contrary, Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* system is self-standing in a way that Schelling's *Freedom* essay is

not, and it is therefore possible to enter straightaway into the mature Hegel's conception of the nature-spirit relation.²⁴

As I argued above, Hegel's *Difference* essay was Schellingian not only in its endorsement of Schelling's turn to nature in order to overcome Fichte's supposed subjectivism. The *Difference* essay also insisted, in a Schellingian manner, upon discovering a principle of identity that would include and be dependent upon *real difference*. It wasn't until 1809 that Schelling conceived this identity as fully and necessarily developmental, as an 'identity' in which nature *differentiates* itself as spirit, albeit atemporally. In Part I, I called this conception of identity an 'emergentist' conception of identity, since nature is 'identical' to spirit on this account precisely insofar as the latter emerges from the former. Hegel wanted nothing to do with Schelling's intellectual development after the system of identity and, although recognising in the *Freedom* essay a 'deep, speculative content', Hegel read this work as being exclusively concerned with freedom and thus disconnected from systematic concerns.²⁵ And yet, Hegel also came to an 'emergentist' conception of the nature-spirit relation in the following years. In the *Encyclopaedia*, nature and spirit do not find their identity in an originary point of indifference; rather, nature and spirit are shown to be 'identical' insofar as spirit is logically generated by the immanent dialectic of nature itself.

It is for this reason that I concentrate exclusively on the 'mature' Hegel throughout the remainder of this thesis. But in order to understand Hegel's distinctive conception of 'emergence', it is necessary to see just how far Hegel goes in differentiating himself from Schelling. Central to his departure from Schelling's metaphysics is Hegel's rejection of the Schellingian language of potencies (*Potenzen*). Indeed, in his 'mature' thought, Hegel is fully committed to a developmental ontology of nature that does away entirely with natural powers.

²⁴ The fact that there is a 20-30 year gap between the philosophical systems I am considering should not signal that there is some fundamental difference in the empirical-scientific sources Schelling and Hegel draw upon. As Petry notes, 'the bulk of [Hegel's] reading in the natural sciences and the formation of many of his distinctive views took place between 1800 and 1815' even though Hegel 'also quotes many books and articles published later than this' (Petry, Introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 48-49).

²⁵ *W 20*: 453; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, pp. 541-542.

4.4. From Nature's Powers to its Logical Process

My claim is not that Hegel abandons the language of *Potenzen* completely, but rather that the *Potenzen* no longer play a technical, critical role—or, at the very least, are not meant to play such a role—in the *Encyclopaedia* system. On rare occasions, Hegel does describe features of nature and spirit in terms of potencies, but there is a marked shift away from his earlier, Schellingian utilisation of this term, where reality itself is understood as a self-potentiating system composed of oppositional powers. This shift in terminological preference involves Hegel's growing suspicion that a term taken over from a formalist discipline such as mathematics does insufficient justice to the determinacy of reality. For Hegel, nature's determinacy is better understood as a logical *process* which unfolds as the interconnectedness of its ontologically distinct *moments*.

Thus, rather than conceiving the fundamental features of nature in terms of immanently powerful (*mächtig*) potencies, the mature Hegel understands nature to be essentially *powerless* (*ohnmächtig*).²⁶ This is of the utmost importance for understanding Hegel's unique conception of nature and its immanent development into spiritual freedom. Not only does Hegel conceive dialectical movement to be motivated by something other than powers, but nature is the *least* powerful moment in the tripartite system of ontological development. This means that, for Hegel, spirit does not emerge from nature as a higher *power* of nature's productivity, but as the outcome of nature's *impotence*.

But without granting nature intrinsic powers for self-transformation, how does Hegel understand spirit to emerge from nature? In other words, how can something such as freedom be born of a being lacking in all causal efficacy? Surely, one might think, if nature is utterly impotent, then nothing so powerful as human freedom can come of it! But this is to misunderstand Hegel's conception of nature's impotence. As Hegel writes in the *Science of Logic*, nature's impotence determines nature as something that runs wild or goes off course (*sich verlaufen*) into 'blind irrational [*begrifflos*] multiplicity'.²⁷ This means that the

²⁶ *W* 9: § 250, 34; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 23.

²⁷ *W* 6: 282; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 607.

‘powerlessness of nature’ describes nature’s deficiency in the power of *logos*. Indeed, the very powerlessness which makes nature ‘go off course’ into ‘blind irrational multiplicity’ is nature’s inability to be purely *logical*: ‘This is the *impotence* of Nature, that it preserves the determinations of the Notion only *abstractly*, and leaves their detailed specification to external determination.’²⁸

As the realm of irrationality, nature is *lacking* in the full self-determining activity of reason. As a result, nature is brimming with an ‘infinite wealth and variety of forms and, what is most irrational, the contingency which enters into the external arrangement of natural things.’²⁹ The much criticised Hegelian idea of the ‘impotence of nature’ (*Ohnmacht der Natur*) is thus what determines nature, according to Hegel, as the realm of contingency (*Zufälligkeit*), caprice (*Willkür*), and disorder (*Ordnungslosigkeit*).³⁰ It is quite ironic, then, that so many of Hegel’s critics have taken him to task for ‘forcing’ nature into a rational structure, when Hegel’s rationalist philosophy of nature emphasises so strongly the *irrationality* and *contingency* at work in the natural world. David Farrell Krell epitomises this criticism of Hegel’s philosophy of nature when he says that Hegel’s approach, in contradistinction to that of Schelling or Novalis, is to violently compel nature to give up its rational core:

Only the use of such violence or force (*Gewalt antun*) will enable the philosopher to wrest the truth from nature: only if the philosopher refuses to gaze on nature with the sensuous eyes, only if he diverts her mesmerizing influence with the mirror of philosophical speculation and strikes with the word of logic, will philosophy prevail.³¹

There is truth to Krell’s interpretation, insofar as 1) Hegel disparages the empiricist approach to nature, demanding that philosophy attend to nature through reason; and 2)

²⁸ *W 9*: § 250, 34; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 23.

²⁹ *W 9*: Remark to § 250, 34-35; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 23.

³⁰ *W 9*: Remark to § 250, 35; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 23. On contingency in Hegel generally and the philosophy of nature in particular, see John Burbidge, *Hegel’s Systematic Contingency* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³¹ David Farrell Krell, *Contagion: Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 119.

Hegel distinguishes himself from Schelling and Novalis by conceiving all rationality in terms of *logical* development.³² However, the problem with Krell's reading and those like it is that they seem to presuppose that reason must necessarily be *fundamentally alien* to nature. For one can only understand the rational *comprehension* of nature as a violence *against* nature if nature is understood as lacking *all* rationality. This, it strikes me, is to decide from the start that nature is simply other than reason.³³

What makes Hegel so interesting on this topic is that he is *also* committed to the idea that nature is, in some sense (which I will explore in detail below), 'other than' reason. But rather than take the irrationality of nature as given, Hegel aims to show how nature is *necessarily* irrational.³⁴ Hegel therefore offers a rational derivation of the very *irrationality* and *contingency* that define nature's being. And this goes a long way in explaining why thought encounters a range of difficulties in comprehending nature. But it follows from Hegel's procedure that we cannot depict the difficulty of comprehending nature as resulting from a simple opposition between thought and nature. On the contrary, it is nature's intrinsic structure which contends *with itself*, for it is, paradoxically, nature's own *logic* that makes it the realm of irrationality. In other words, nature is irrational because this is the rationale at work in nature itself. Of course, one need not grant Hegel that irrationality and contingency

³² Note, however, that one can consider nature *rationally* without understanding reason as logic. A rationalist philosophy of nature, in other words, need not be an explicitly logical philosophy of nature. As I argued in Part I, I take Schelling's nature philosophy to be of this kind.

³³ It is true that Hegel at times uses the language of violence to describe the relationship between thought and nature. For example, in the addition to § 246, we find: 'Not until one does violence to Proteus—that is not until one turns one's back on the sensuous appearance of Nature—is he compelled to speak the truth. The inscription of the veil of Isis, "I am that which was, is, and will be, and my veil no mortal hath lifted", melts away before thought' (*W* 9: Addition to § 246, 19; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 9-10). But as I see it, this violence *only* makes sense within the framework of a nature philosophy of the understanding, wherein subjective thought is *opposed* to an objective nature. From the perspective of *reason* or a truly speculative nature philosophy, nature is nothing other than the irrational expression of the Idea, and thus nature is necessarily implicated in its own unveiling. Isis melts her own veil since she is implicitly rational and, moreover, she is *correct* in claiming no *mortal* can lift her veil, since the thought which melts the veil of Isis is the impersonal rational thought of *logos* itself. A more telling description of the method of Hegel's nature philosophy is therefore found in the addition to § 381 in the philosophy of spirit: 'philosophy has, as it were, only to watch how Nature itself overcomes its externality, how it takes back what is self-external into the centre of the Idea, or causes this centre to show forth in the external, how it liberates the Notion concealed in Nature from the covering of externality and thereby overcomes external necessity' (*W* 10: Addition to § 381, 24; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 13).

³⁴ Krell is of course well aware of Hegel's interest in 'the necessity of contingency', but he seems to take little interest in this *systematic* feature of Hegel's philosophy of nature. Instead, Krell focuses upon the 'details of the system of nature [...which] are far more intriguing than any overarching aspect of the system itself' (*Contagion*, p. 27).

are indeed nature's defining characteristics. But to oppose Hegel's view one must understand nature to be either *absolutely* rational, i.e. lacking all contingency, or only *contingently* irrational, such that nature could be or could have been absolutely rational. What some have interpreted as a Hegelian 'violence' to nature is therefore nothing other than a philosophical articulation of the quite ordinary view that nature is full of contingencies—and cannot be otherwise.³⁵

To summarise: that Hegel conceives nature as *powerless* does not mean that nature is a realm of 'non-being' for Hegel. On the contrary, Hegel's identification of nature as powerless is meant to express something essential about the *being* of nature. For Hegel, nature is both brimming with contingencies and lacking in a robust expression of rational self-determination, and these characteristics owe themselves to the fact that nature is lacking the full force of *logos*. Below, I will consider how this conception of nature leads Hegel to a distinctive conception of spiritual freedom and its relation to nature. First, I want to consider how Hegel's conception of nature's impotence with respect to *logos* distinguishes his system from Schelling's system of potencies.

In order to see how Hegel's turn away from the potencies intimates a fundamental difference between his philosophy of nature and that of Schelling, we must first recognise that Hegel's conception of nature's powerlessness is inseparable from his commitment to a *logical* explication of the fundamental determinations of being. Indeed, Hegel sees his own philosophy of nature to be superior to Schelling's in large part thanks to his unique logical *method*. For Hegel, '*logical necessity*...is the rational element and the rhythm of the organic whole.'³⁶ Now, for Hegel, to think *logically* is to think *immanently*, to unfold the necessary determinations of *die Sache selbst*. When we consider space, for example, it becomes clear that the logical structure of space necessitates a further logical structure, namely, that of time, and this logical *explication* is immanent, for Hegel, precisely because it is the explication of logical content (the structure of time) that is *implicit* in the logical structure of

³⁵ For a compelling critique of Hegel's conception of nature as the realm of contingency, see W. T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel: A Systematic Exposition* (Chicago: Library Licensing, 2013), pp. 307-311. I draw upon Stace's critique in the conclusion to this thesis.

³⁶ *W 3: 55; Phenomenology*, p. 34.

the previous determination (space). For this reason, Hegel's turn from nature's potencies to nature's logical process should be understood in light of Hegel's newfound commitment to a certain type of immanent thinking.

From a Hegelian perspective, however far Schelling goes in constructing a speculative philosophy of nature, his ontology is never properly immanent on account of its esotericism. According to Hegel, Schelling's flirtations with various philosophical methods—quasi-transcendental, intellectually intuitive, 'depotentiative'—cannot be justified to ordinary consciousness.³⁷ In other words, Schelling fails to rationally justify his philosophical standpoint, despite the fact that this standpoint is itself the standpoint of reason ($A = A$).³⁸ Schelling's utilisation of algebraic symbols, from this perspective, only serves to further dissociate his system from immanent thinking. According to Hegel, a truly immanent or exoteric method cannot appeal to algebraic symbols as these are taken over from a theoretical domain with its own metaphysical presuppositions. If philosophical thought is to be properly immanent to nature itself, and if it is to be open to all who are willing to think immanently, then this thinking must be pursued through nature's *logic*. Again, this does not mean that Hegel 'forces' nature into a logical framework, but rather that he insists that philosophy come to terms with the logic intrinsic to nature which makes it the irrational being that it is.

It is important to note here that Hegel does not understand Schelling's system to be entirely lacking in rationality. Indeed, according to Hegel, Schelling not only understands the absolute to be reason itself ($A = A$), but he also rightly insists upon explicating the rational connections between the whole nature-spirit system. In these ways, Schelling and Hegel are equally committed to the task of presenting the rationally necessary structures of nature and spirit. Where Schelling doesn't go far enough, according to Hegel, is in explicating the dialectical manner in which this rational necessity progresses. Thus, although

³⁷ 'Schelling, indeed, had this conception in a general way, but he did not follow it out in a definite logical method, for with him it remained an immediate truth, which can only be verified by means of intellectual intuition' (*W* 20: 436; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, pp. 526-527).

³⁸ As Schelling says in his lectures *On University Studies*, 'Those who do not have intellectual intuition cannot understand what is said of it, and for this reason it cannot be communicated to them' (*SW* I/5: 256; *On University Studies*, p. 49). On why Schelling conceives reason as $A = A$, see Chapter 2 above.

Schelling ‘introduced forms of Reason, and applied them [to nature] in place of the categories of the understanding’ he did not show how these forms of reason (i.e. nature’s rational structure) are logically entailed by one another.³⁹ ‘The logical point of view was what Schelling never arrived at in his presentation of things.’⁴⁰ By failing to consider the logic of nature’s rational structure, Schelling did not rise far enough to the heights of fully self-transparent reason. As a result, Schelling’s system of nature remains, according to Hegel, esoteric and, while disclosive of important rational truths, fails to present such truths in fully rational *form*, since for Hegel—and unlike for Schelling—logic is the paragon of rationality.

This is the first and most important sense in which Hegel’s logical philosophy of nature is meant to achieve the methodological immanence lacking in Schelling’s system. In fact, it will become apparent throughout the following three chapters that the Hegelian counterpart to what I have called Schelling’s ‘logic of emergence’ is an *explicitly* logical idea. For in Hegel, the ontological dependence of one form of being upon another is explicitly conceived as a *logical* relation, whereas for Schelling, such relations of ontological dependence are certainly *rational* but are not, for that matter, ‘logical’. Below I consider in detail how Hegel’s logic of nature can be an ontology of nature and in what sense particular forms of nature in Hegel’s system might be understood as ‘emergent’. At this stage, I simply want to note that with Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*, logic becomes an explicit theme of the philosophy of nature, and in Hegel’s view, this is the single most significant difference between his system and Schelling’s. In Hegel’s words, the absence of a logical method is ‘*the great difficulty* in the philosophy of Schelling’.⁴¹

Hegel’s move from conceiving reality as a series of powers to attending to nature’s logical process therefore plays a fundamental role in distinguishing Hegel from Schelling.

³⁹ W 20: 444; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, pp. 535-536.

⁴⁰ W 20: 435; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 518. See also W 20: 436; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, pp. 526-527: ‘Schelling, indeed, had this conception in a general way, but he did not follow it out in a definite logical method, for with him it remained an immediate truth, which can only be verified by means of intellectual intuition.’

⁴¹ W 20, p. 436; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, pp. 526-527, My emphasis.

Logic is, on Hegel's view, the only *immanent* way to philosophise about nature, since it is only with logic that thought can sink into the being of nature and show how nature's rational structure unfolds in a necessary progression. Schelling's system of powers, therefore, lacks immanence in part because it is not presented as a logical development of nature. However, there is a second sense in which Schellingian nature philosophy appears to Hegel as lacking immanence. If we focus not upon the logic which is *lacking* in Schelling's philosophy, but upon Schelling's utilisation of algebraic symbols, we can understand a second sense in which Hegel's turn to the immanent movement of logic is meant to outstrip the supposedly *formalist* tendencies of Schelling's philosophy of nature.

According to Hegel, the idea that nature's fundamental being could be grasped in algebraic presentation and, moreover, as a process of exponential growth, implies that nature is only quantitatively differentiated. Not only does Schelling lack a logical conception of nature's rational structure, then, but he imports into philosophical science a particularly ill-equipped set of symbols in order to elucidate nature's rational structure, since nature involves not only quantitative but qualitative determinacy. Thus, from a Hegelian perspective, Schelling's philosophy of powers is insufficiently determinate thanks to its algebraic origins.⁴² And this is no insignificant matter for a philosophical science that aims to present the emergence of spirit from nature. Indeed, if Schelling's interpretation of nature is lacking in determinacy, then it is no wonder that, at times, Schelling's system of identity looks as if it reduces the *difference* between nature and spirit to their originary *identity*. As I argued in Chapter 2, this is precisely what Schelling does in the *Presentation* of 1801. In that work, only quantitative difference was said to obtain between nature and spirit; all qualitative difference was 'mere appearance'. And as Hegel rightly notes, quantitative difference, when it is the only difference, makes no difference at all.⁴³

However, as I also argued in Part I, Schelling's nature philosophy prior to the *Presentation* is fully committed to conceiving nature as qualitatively differentiated. In 'On

⁴² *W 20*: 437-438; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, p. 529.

⁴³ *W 20*: 440; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 530-531. I do not mean to imply that Hegel doesn't understand quantitative difference as real difference *at all*, but only that if such difference is the *only* difference, then difference *proper*, i.e. the difference that ensues from the activity of negation, is left out of the picture.

the True Concept’, for example, Schelling explicitly distinguishes *his* utilisation of the *Potenzen* from Eschenmayer’s. And after the *Presentation*—the text which Hegel bases far too much of his Schelling interpretation—Schelling leaves behind his conception of the absolute as lacking all qualitative difference. Indeed, by the *Freedom* essay of 1809, it is entirely clear that Schelling understands nature and spirit to be far more than quantitatively differentiated from one another, since the entire essay turns on the notion that nature grounds spirit’s distinctive ontological structure as the freedom for goodness and evil.⁴⁴ As I read him, Hegel would have granted Schelling this much: at the very least, Schelling *aimed* to understand nature’s internal structure as qualitatively differentiated and its relation to spirit as a relation between qualitatively distinct spheres of reality. This is why, whenever Hegel criticises Schellingian formalism, he is sure to distinguish *Schelling’s* philosophy of nature—which in fact ‘made progress’ via the conceptual employment of the potencies—from the work produced by Schelling’s followers, such as Oken, who go ‘almost mad’ in their ‘miserable formalism’ and use of ‘superficial analogy’.⁴⁵

For this reason, it is important to distinguish Hegel’s critique of Schelling’s esotericism—which is unquestionably aimed at Schelling himself—from Hegel’s critique of Schellingian formalism. Regarding the latter, Hegel’s main insight is that importing any schema, be it exponentiation from mathematics or the magnetic line from physics, is to force

⁴⁴ See Chapter 3 above.

⁴⁵ *W* 20: 445, 451-452; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, pp. 543-544. In the addition which opens the *Encyclopaedia* Philosophy of Nature, Hegel claims that the philosophy of nature ‘has in many respects, in fact for the most part, been *transformed* [my emphasis] into an external formalism and perverted into a thoughtless instrument for superficial thinking and fanciful imagination...I said more about this some while ago in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*...It is on account of such charlatanism that the Philosophy of Nature, especially Schelling’s has become discredited’ (*W* 9: Introductory Addition, 9; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 1). For the passage in the *Phenomenology* Hegel references here, see *W* 3: 49-51; *Phenomenology*, pp. 30-31. See also *W* 8: Remark to § 12, 57; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 37. Of course, these statements do not imply that there isn’t *any* continuity between Schelling’s own philosophy of nature and its ‘Schellingian’ offshoots. Although ‘Oken, Troxler, and other lapse completely into an empty formalism’ according to Hegel, such formalism ‘plays a part even in Schelling’s philosophy, in that he often carries his parallels too far’ (*W* 9: Addition to § 359, 472; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 388). That being said, these remarks should all be taken to substantiate what Hegel states in his personal correspondence with Schelling regarding the difference between Schelling’s own philosophy and his followers: ‘In the Preface [to the *Phenomenology*] you will not find that I have been too hard on the shallowness that makes so much mischief with your forms in particular and degrades your science into a bare formalism. I need not tell you, by the way, that your approval of a few pages would be worth more to me than the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of others with the whole’ (Hegel to Schelling, Bamberg, May 1, 1807, *Hegel: The Letters*, p. 80).

nature into a structure other than its rational core, i.e. its immanent logic.⁴⁶ Taking heed of nature's immanent logic is the only way, according to Hegel to ensure that the philosophy of nature remain content-rich.⁴⁷ For nature is not a formal schema, but a rational structure inseparable from its material diversity.⁴⁸ I therefore understand Hegel's turn to nature's logical process to be an implicit critique of Schelling's conception of potencies, only insofar as the latter *tends* towards formalism. That Schelling himself—bracketing the *Presentation* of 1801—typically avoids this formalism does not alter the fact that any mathematical philosophy of nature will have difficulty discriminating between the qualitative differences in nature. We should therefore read Hegel's critique of 'Schellingian formalism' not as aimed at Schelling himself so much as a certain tendency at work in Schellingian thinking generally—a manner of thinking exemplified at times by Schelling, but more often in the work of his followers.⁴⁹

On my reading, then, the fundamental difference between Schelling's and Hegel's philosophies of nature has very little to do with the idea that Schelling champions a quantitative conception of difference. *Pace* Whistler, I believe Schelling and Hegel are both committed to conceiving nature as qualitatively differentiated.⁵⁰ One might expect,

⁴⁶ *W* 9: Remark to § 359, 471; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 387.

⁴⁷ Hegel makes this point clear in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*: 'Even when the specific determinateness—say one like Magnetism, for example—is in itself concrete or real, the Understanding degrades it into something lifeless, merely predicating it of another existent thing, rather than cognizing it as the immanent life of the thing, or cognizing its native and unique way of generating and expressing itself in that thing. The formal Understanding leaves it to others to add this principal feature. Instead of entering into the immanent content of the thing, it is forever surveying the whole and standing above the particular existence of which it is speaking, i.e., it does not see it at all. Scientific cognition, on the contrary, demands surrender to the life of the object, or, what amounts to the same thing, confronting and expressing its inner necessity' (*W* 3: 52; *Phenomenology*, p. 32). I think it is clear from Hegel's identification of this schematic procedure as one of the *understanding* (and his identification of Schelling elsewhere as a speculative philosopher of *reason*) that he doesn't have Schelling in mind in this passage.

⁴⁸ This does not mean, however, that nature's rational structure is inseparable from material *contingency*.

⁴⁹ It is also worth noting that Hegel can himself appear just as formalistic as Schelling with his perpetual application of the *sylogism* to features of nature, a tendency which is no less formalistic on account of its logical, as opposed to mathematical or physical, origins. That being said, I believe Hegel can be defended from this view as can Schelling. Both philosophers reject any formalisation of nature which would obscure the essential differences that structure the natural world, and it is almost always the case that what appear to be formalist applications of logic, mathematics, or physics to the whole range of natural phenomena should be interpreted charitably, i.e. as hasty presentations of what is in fact a complex, rational organisation meant to account precisely for the ontological diversity of nature.

⁵⁰ Cf. Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language*, pp. 94-116.

therefore, that I would return to the first difference I mentioned regarding Hegel's attention to nature's logical process, namely, Hegel's commitment to an exoteric, *logical* explication of the fundamental features of nature. This difference between Schellingian and Hegelian method is no doubt something which sets Schelling and Hegel apart as philosophers. There would be good reason, then, to focus a substantial portion of this thesis on methodology in the philosophy of nature. It would certainly be consistent with the way Hegel saw the difference between Schelling and himself. But I believe that to take our cue from Hegel on this matter would be to privilege a certain conception of philosophical practice, a conception that is profoundly Cartesian in spirit in that it takes the question of method to be fundamental. To pursue the Schelling-Hegel relation from the perspective of method, then, is to side with Hegel from the start. In what follows, I will continue to bracket questions about method and concentrate, instead, on elucidating Hegel's ideas about the *being* of nature.⁵¹ None of this is to say that I will ignore Hegel's method of nature philosophy. To do so would be near impossible, since everything Hegel conceives about nature is dependent upon his particular dialectical method. Nevertheless, I will neither thematise Hegel's method, nor will I offer extended reflections on the differences between Schelling and Hegel regarding methodology.

That being said, I do believe that Hegel's turn to nature's logical process leads to distinctive *ontological* differences between Hegel's and Schelling's systems of nature. To see this, it is necessary to consider in more detail why Hegel thinks his own logical method can guarantee the kind of qualitative determinacy that appears to be lacking in philosophies of nature wherein nature is presented as a *potentiation* of rational stages culminating in the emergence of *spiritual* potencies. For Hegel, qualitative determinacy always requires negation.⁵² And, according to Hegel, this notion is best expressed in the history of

⁵¹ One could argue that by bracketing the question of method and focusing upon the philosophical *vision* of each philosopher, I am implicitly privileging Schelling's relationship to philosophical systematisation as a creative-intuitive (although no less rational) enterprise. Such an assessment of my approach would not be unfounded.

⁵² This is first apparent at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, (*W* 5: 117-122; *Science of Logic* [Miller], pp. 111-114). Cf. Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2006), pp. 303-308.

philosophy by Spinoza, for whom *omnis determinatio est negatio*.⁵³ Insofar as any given moment within Hegel's system is determinate (and is not absolute in itself), that moment is characterised by a certain *negative* being; being determinate means *not* being everything else, and this *not* being must be conceived as an active *negation* of being.⁵⁴ It follows from this that if nature constitutes a process inclusive of real differences and, at its apex, the ontologically distinctive determination of *spirit*, then nature must be characterised by an activity of *negation*. We can now look back to Schelling's conception of nature's development and see that such negation is entirely lacking in Schelling's conception of potentiation. To be sure, Schelling insists upon the self-*contraction* of ground which is necessary in order for the higher potencies to emerge. But Schelling does not understand this self-contraction of ground in terms of ontological *negativity*. At work in Schelling's logic of emergence is a *productive* activity which, unlike sublation (*Aufhebung*), does not result from an active *negation* of being.⁵⁵

As I suggested above, for Hegel, to conceive nature's development otherwise than as a process of potentiation is in part an attempt to understand nature's development as *necessarily* involving qualitative difference. Now we learn that, for Hegel, qualitative difference is propelled by negation. With this, we have finally hit upon a fundamental difference between Schelling's and Hegel's *ontologies*. Each philosopher insists upon the ontological determinacy of nature which not only makes that nature full of qualitative diversity but makes possible the ontologically distinct realm of spiritual freedom through nature's self-driven development. For Hegel, however, this process of nature's development

⁵³ *W* 5: 121; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 113. For a close reading of the idealist reception of this Spinozist principle, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, 'Omnis Determinatio Est Negatio: Determination, Negation, and Self-Negation in Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel' in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. by Eckhart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 175-197

⁵⁴ This is a simplification of the far more nuanced logic in the beginning of the *Science of Logic*. Since it is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will not elucidate the manner in which determinacy is propelled by 'not-being' and the dialectic that subsequently leads from determinate being to quality, something, and the first element of finitude, namely, something and an other. See *W* 5: 115-131; *Science of Logic* (Miller), pp. 109-122.

⁵⁵ Cf. Edward Allen Beach, 'The Later Schelling's Conception of Dialectical Method, in Contradistinction to Hegel', *Owl of Minerva*, 22 (1990), pp. 35-54 and *Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), pp. 85-91, 113-114. For my comments on Beach's distinction between what he calls Schelling's *Erzeugungsdialektik* and Hegel's *Aufhebungsdialektik*, see note 31 in Chapter 7 below.

is fundamentally distinct from the one we find in any of Schelling's texts. In order to clarify this difference, I will once again consider Hegel's conception of nature as 'impotent'.

I have already argued that when Hegel describes nature as impotent, he does not intend to strip nature of any ontological weight. Rather, Hegel is making a technical point as to the *being* of nature, namely, that nature lacks the full force of rationality in such a manner as to be rife with contingency. But there is another sense in which nature is powerless regarding rationality, for Hegel, and that is insofar as the absolute Idea (or self-determining reason) is, at its highest stage, characterised by *freedom*. As we will see throughout the remainder of this study, nature is *powerless*, for Hegel, because freedom is lacking in the fundamental stages of nature, and it is only with the emergence of *spirit* that freedom is expressed in its full reality.⁵⁶ Since nature is powerless in *this* sense, it would be a mistake to understand Hegel's dismissal of the language of potencies as signalling a rejection of the idea that nature is immanently active and, indeed, 'generative' in some sense of the spiritual freedom which follows it in the system. Hegel does not understand nature to be the efficient *cause* of spirit, but there is an important sense in which nature's impotence is precisely the feature of nature which allows spirit *to be*, i.e. to determine itself as real, free being. As should now be clear, the key to understanding nature's impotence, for Hegel, is that the development of nature is one that gets underway through nature's intrinsic *negativity*. Indeed, 'nature is the negative because it is the negative of the Idea'⁵⁷ and this should be understood as an active *negation* of the Idea. Nature is not, therefore, a system of powers that raises itself to the heights of spiritual freedom through sheer willing, as it is for Schelling; and yet nature does raise itself beyond its unfree, inorganic existence. For Hegel, this process is possible thanks to nature's intrinsic negativity.

In the introduction to this thesis, I claimed that Schelling and Hegel are united in the task of conceiving nature and spirit as identical without sacrificing the ontological

⁵⁶ 'Nature exhibits no freedom in its existence, but only *necessity* and *contingency*' (*W 9*: § 248, 27; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 17). As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, nature does in fact exhibit some kind of freedom, for Hegel, but this freedom is not the robust freedom exhibited in spiritual life.

⁵⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 248, 30; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 19. Petry's translation of this addition, while more creative, makes this philosophical point well: 'Nature is the negative because it negates the Idea' (*Philosophy of Nature*, Volume I, p. 211).

specificity of either. I also claimed that both philosophers turn to nature's own, inner structure in order to understand the ontological continuity and distinctness between nature and spirit. Thus, Schelling and Hegel both understand nature to immanently transform itself into spiritual freedom and, in this way, their speculative philosophies of nature are meant to account for the emergence of spirit from nature. But why does nature transform itself? Why does nature develop into spiritual freedom? To these questions, Schelling and Hegel offer fundamentally distinct answers. And this is precisely where Hegel's turn from nature's powers to its immanent logical process makes all the difference. Whereas for Schelling spirit 'bursts forth' from nature as the highest potentiation of reason, for Hegel nature is determined as the negative of reason and subsequently negates its own negative character in the emergence of spirit (the self-negating negativity that is freedom). The Schellingian and Hegelian logics of emergence therefore provide very different accounts of the development from nature to spirit, and this is precisely because the former conceives the development of nature in terms of self-potentiating powers while the latter conceives the same development in terms of self-negating negativity. It is therefore not enough to say that Hegel, unlike Schelling, focuses on the logical process at work in nature, or even that Hegel's dialectical logic gets underway thanks to the immanent activity of 'negativity'. The point I want to emphasise is that the 'negativity' at work in Hegel's conception of being, and particularly in *nature*, is not only central to the methodological question as to *how* Hegel presents his system, but is essential to the *ontological* status Hegel grants nature and, consequently, the relationship between nature and spirit.

These remarks are meant to simply highlight an essential difference between Schelling and Hegel, a difference that will not become clear until we have worked through significant parts of Hegel's philosophy of nature. For we have yet to see how nature might be the 'negative' of reason or how spirit 'negates' this negativity. Throughout the following three chapters, I aim to clarify these ideas.

4.5. An Ontology of Movement

It should be clear from the preceding that even though Hegel leaves behind the language of potencies in his *Encyclopaedia* system, he does not by any means depart from the more fundamental Schellingian commitments championed in the *Difference* essay, namely, that absolute idealism must present the series of *nature's* immanent and necessary determinations as graduated expressions of reason. Critics of Hegel who see in his system a disregard for 'reality' are therefore entirely confused about the manner in which Hegel remains committed to a rationalist ontology throughout his intellectual development. The confusion, I believe, stems in large part from a misidentification of Hegel's newfound *logical* method with a supposed 'anti-realism', logic being taken to signify some formal laws of mind that are only superficially related to the world.

Significantly, the later Schelling was one such critic of Hegel's system. In his Munich lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling derides Hegel's system for being bound up in 'mere thought'. In these lectures, Schelling describes the beginning of Hegel's logic as propelled by a 'thinking' that is ordinarily accustomed to more concrete being than the abstract *thought* of being:

The fact that [Hegel] nevertheless attributes an immanent movement to pure being means no more, then, than that the *thought* which begins with pure being feels it is impossible for it to stop at this most abstract and most empty thing of all, which Hegel himself declares is pure being. The compulsion to move on from this has its basis only in the fact that thought is already used to a more concrete being, a being more full of content, and thus cannot be satisfied with that meager diet of pure being in which only content in the abstract but no determinate content is thought.⁵⁸

On this reading of Hegel's *Logic*, we make our way from one logical determination to another thanks to the restlessness of *thought*, and in this way, the very activity of the dialectic is divorced from—but seeks to return to—real being. According to the late Schelling, Hegel never acknowledges this underlying fact about his logical philosophy. Thus, Hegel deceives himself and his audience about a logical concept which '*moves itself*'.

⁵⁸ *SW* I/10: 131; *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 138-139.

Underlying the ‘supposedly necessary movement’ of logic is the fact that ‘the concept for its part would lie completely immobile if it were not the concept of a thinking *subject*, i.e. if it were not thought (*Gedanke*).’⁵⁹ The implication, in other words, is that the dialectic of being *would not be* were there no subjects to think it. In this way, the late Schelling argues, ‘thought’—and not *being*—‘is the animating principle of this movement.’⁶⁰

As I will argue in the concluding chapter to this thesis, there lies within the late Schelling’s interpretation of Hegelian movement a profound critique of Hegel’s logic of emergence. However, as we have considered it thus far, Schelling’s critique is fundamentally misguided and, unfortunately, has been repeated in one way or another throughout the reception of Hegel’s thought in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. It is assumed, according to these critics of Hegel, that when Hegel insists that ‘[philosophical] science exists solely in the self-movement of the concept’,⁶¹ that this movement is separate from the movement of *being itself*. But this is precisely the assumption of modern philosophy that Hegel’s logical method was meant to overcome. In order to call into question the presuppositions of modernity, Hegel draws inspiration from the Greeks’ ‘higher conception of thinking’:

This metaphysics believed that thinking (and its determinations) is not anything alien to the object, but rather is its essential nature, or that things and the thinking of them [*die Dinge und das Denken derselben*]—our language too expresses their kinship—are explicitly in full agreement, thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things forming one and the same content.⁶²

⁵⁹ Connected to this deception is a second deception, according to Schelling, whereby the *telos* of the logical movement is ignored as driving that movement forwards. This *telos* is the real, positive existence in which the thinking subjective philosophises (*SW I/10: 132; On the History of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 138-139).

⁶⁰ *SW I/10: 138; On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 142.

⁶¹ *W 3: 65; Phenomenology*, p. 44. Translation modified.

⁶² *W 5: 38; Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 45. It is significant to note that although Hegel’s rationalism is, like Schelling’s, profoundly influenced by Spinozism, Hegel insists—as does the early Schelling—that one must return to *ancient* metaphysics in order to revitalise contemporary philosophy. For Greek metaphysics not only takes conceptual thought to be disclosive of being (as do the pre-Kantian rationalists), but it understands the very *movement* of thought to be nothing other than the dialectical movement of *being itself*.

Hegel's own *Logic*, therefore, is meant to return to this ancient manner of thinking. 'Thus *logic* coincides with *metaphysics*, with the science of *things* grasped in *thoughts* that used to be taken to express the *essentialities of the things*.'⁶³

The critics of Hegel who see his logic to be wrapped up in 'mere thought' and thereby detached from being *as such* have therefore entirely missed out on the uniqueness of Hegelian logic. For Hegel's logic is a logic *of being*; it is a content-rich ontology. And while Schelling rightly perceives that Hegel's system is a system of movement, this movement does not have its source in a subjective familiarity with worldly concreteness. On the contrary, Hegel's system is an ontology of movement, because, according to Hegel, being is a *process* that explicates its moments according to its own, immanent, rational necessity. The movement of thought as articulated in the *Logic* is thus the presentation of the movement of being as such, the dialectical process whereby the fundamental determinations of *what is* show themselves to necessitate one another in a conceptually—and therefore ontologically—necessary progression. Being, in other words, just *is* a rational process that unfolds 'dialectically' in logic.

4.6. The 'Release' of the Absolute Idea

Hegel's *Science of Logic* is therefore meant to present the fundamental determinations of being as an immanent explication of being's rational structure. It is only through this logical movement that we come to learn, at the end of the *Logic*, that being does not, in fact, 'have' a rational structure, but is nothing less than self-determining reason itself, what Hegel calls 'the absolute Idea'. But Hegel's system does not end here, with the concluding chapter of the *Logic*. For logic only comprises the first part of Hegel's tripartite system. The latter two parts are the philosophies of nature and spirit, which together constitute the 'real' counterpart to the 'ideal' logic. This distinction between the 'ideal' and the 'real' parts of Hegel's system is perhaps one reason why critics have taken Hegel's *Logic* to be about something 'detached' from actual being, a system of 'mere thought' and not a system of

⁶³ *W 8*: Vorbegriff, § 24, 81; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 56.

being itself. But never in German idealist philosophy does the term ‘ideal’ signify a lack of *actuality* (Wirklichkeit). Something else, therefore, must be at work in the distinction between ideal logic, on the one hand, and the *Realphilosophie* on the other.

The difference between the ideal and real is better understood as a difference of ‘degree’, and more specifically, degree of ontological determinacy. Logic, for its part, unpacks the more *abstract* features of being, while the philosophies of nature and spirit unpack the more *concrete* features of being. In other words, the *Logic* presents the necessary determinations of being in abstraction from the reality in which those determinations are found. Logic is therefore ontology, but not an ontology of the most concrete forms of being; it is an ontology of the ‘bare essentials’.⁶⁴ What makes Hegel’s system unique, however, is not that it contains an account of the ‘bare essentials’ of being, but that the system begins with this abstract logic and only accumulates concreteness through an immanent, dialectical development of those ‘bare essentials’. This is why the ontological determinations found in the logic are not, from a methodological perspective, abstracted away from concrete reality; on the contrary, reality—in all its concreteness—is shown to be the logical consequence of pure reason!⁶⁵

The systematic transition from logic to the philosophy of nature is meant to capture this logical necessity which brings us from the abstract ontology of the *Logic* to the concrete ontology of the *Realphilosophie*. It is without a doubt one of the most difficult and frustrating transitions in Hegel’s system for both critics and proponents of Hegel’s thought. In this transition, reason ‘lets go’ of (*entläßt*) its purity or abstractness and thereby lets itself go *into* concreteness. We have already seen one sense in which this is the case, namely, insofar as nature is ‘irrational’ and rife with contingency. In this way, reason has ‘loosened up’ as it were, allowing for a rational progression of ontological determinations to proceed

⁶⁴ ‘The system of logic is the realm of shadows, the world of simple essentialities [*einfachen Wesenheiten*] freed from all sensuous concreteness’ (*W* 5: 55; *Science of Logic* [Miller], p. 58).

⁶⁵ Hegel is fully aware of how counterintuitive this appears: ‘When contrasted with the wealth of the world as pictorially conceived, with the apparently real content of the other sciences, and compared with the promise of absolute science to unveil the essential being of this wealth, the inner nature of mind and the world, the truth, then this science in its abstract shape, in the colourless, cold simplicity of its pure determinations looks as if it could achieve anything sooner than the fulfilment of its promise and seems to confront that richness as an empty, insubstantial form’ (*W* 5: 54; *Science of Logic* [Miller], pp. 57-58).

beyond the bounds of pure reason and into the domain of nature. But we misunderstand the significance of this transition if we interpret it as a transition *from* reason *to* an irrational nature. For nature is in no straightforward sense the *other* of reason. Nature, rather, is reason *itself* in its ‘self-external being’ (*Außersichsein*). This is how Hegel describes nature in the Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia* Philosophy of Nature:

Nature has presented itself as the Idea in the form of *otherness*. Since therefore the Idea is the negative of itself, or is *external to itself*, Nature is not merely external in relation to this Idea [...] the truth is rather that *externality* constitutes the specific character in which Nature, as Nature, exists.⁶⁶

In order to make sense of this passage, we need to consider the transition from logic to nature in some detail.

The first thing we must keep in mind is that the transition from logic to nature is not a historical occurrence, as if logic ‘became’ nature *in time*. We must rule out this idea for the simple reason that the transitions in Hegel’s system describe *logical* transitions, even in the philosophy of nature (more on this below). Moreover, space and time are the primary ontological determinations of nature’s self-external being, and it would therefore be incomprehensible, according to Hegel, were space and time to be generated in time.⁶⁷

The transition from the Idea to nature is not, therefore, an actual, historical event. There is good reason, however, for one to *represent* the passage from logic to nature in this manner. While such thinking is not philosophical, set in the right context it can nonetheless help to paint a picture of what is in truth a strictly onto-logical feature of being, namely, the atemporal accumulation of concreteness. The sphere of human thinking that does this kind of image-thinking best, according to Hegel, is religion, and Hegel himself relies heavily upon theological language in order to flesh out the conceptual transition from logic to nature:

If God is all self-sufficient and lacks nothing, why does He disclose Himself in a sheer Other of Himself? The divine Idea is just this: to disclose itself, to posit this Other outside itself and to take it back again into itself, in order to

⁶⁶ *W 9*: § 247, 24; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 247, 26-27; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 15-16.

be subjectivity and Spirit [...] God, therefore, in determining Himself, remains equal to Himself; each of these moments is itself the whole Idea and must be posited as the divine totality.⁶⁸

Throughout the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel describes the relationship between logic, nature, and spirit in terms of this divine, processual totality. The Christian God is truly divine only insofar as He is triune, and Hegel understands the Trinity as a process of God's self-externalisation (*Entäußerung*) and return-to-self. In both of these moments, *revelation* is inseparable from God's being. Indeed, Hegel goes so far as to say that 'revelation [*Offenbarung*], manifestation [*Manifestation*] is itself [the Christian religion's] character and content.'⁶⁹

Insofar as the Holy Trinity corresponds to the three parts of Hegel's system, Hegel's interpretation of the relationship between God and his creation sheds light on his conception of the relationship between logic and nature. God is, according to Hegel, utterly self-sufficient, and yet he must *necessarily* create a world; indeed, God cannot *be* the truly divine being he is unless he 'empties himself out' into existence and subsequently returns to himself in the life of the Christian community (the Holy Spirit). That God is only truly divine insofar as he *differs* from himself in creation is the central 'paradox' of both Hegel's interpretation of the Trinity and his conception of the logic-nature relationship. But for Hegel, such a logic is only paradoxical if one presupposes that an *absolutely* free and self-sufficient being should remain shut up within itself, 'absolute' in distinction from anything 'other'. Such a presupposition leads both religious and philosophical consciousness astray. For if God remained within Himself and never revealed Himself (*as* a world and *in* the world), then God would lack truly infinite being. Indeed, the true infinite for Hegel is not an infinite above and beyond the finite, but the ontological *process* whereby finitude comes to be united with its other and thereby achieves unbounded (and yet fully differentiated) presence-to-self.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *W* 9: Addition to § 247, 24; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 14.

⁶⁹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III*, p. 63.

⁷⁰ *W* 5: 163-164; *Science of Logic* (Miller), pp. 148-149.

Thus, according to Hegel, the absolute cannot be truly absolute unless it lets itself go into otherness. This is the philosophical truth behind the image of God's *Entäußerung*: reason necessarily makes itself manifest as a world. 'The divine Idea *is just this*: to disclose itself.'⁷¹ Note, however, this initial moment of revelation or disclosure is one in which God reveals himself as *other* than himself. 'God is *only* manifest as one who particularizes himself and becomes objective, *initially in the mode of finitude*.'⁷² Prior to becoming fully divine in the life of the Holy Spirit, God creates a world and does not remain outside this creation but become creaturely himself, namely, in Christ.⁷³ That God *initially* reveals himself in the mode of finitude is significant, for this corresponds, in the conceptual realm, to the externalisation of the Idea as *nature*, i.e. as an *irrational* manifestation of reason.

Now, for Hegel, the theological narratives of genesis and incarnation are representational and, as such, do not correspond to actual, historical events. Rather, such images tell a story that intimates what is going on within the rational *structure* of being. Thus, the manifestation of the Idea does not 'take place', but is rather an eternal 'occurrence' or, more precisely, an atemporal *feature* of being: the Idea must be *manifest, finite, and carnal* in order for it to be the truly absolute being that it is. The Idea does not, therefore, *become* natural in any historical sense, but the Idea is logically required to *be* nature. Thus, just as God *necessarily* reveals himself through an act of creation, so too the absolute Idea must *necessarily* present itself in the form of *otherness*. This does not simply mean that there must be a natural world, but that the Idea *itself* must manifest itself *as* nature. As Hegel says, nature is 'the *Idea as being*,' 'the Idea that *is*'.⁷⁴

The pantheistic necessity at work in the transition from logic to nature should not, however, be taken to signify any lack of freedom on the part of the Idea. For just as God's

⁷¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 247, 24; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 14.

⁷² *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III*, p. 63.

⁷³ 'The appearance of God in nature [occurs as]: (α) nature, (β) the Son of Man' (*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III*, p. 77).

⁷⁴ *W 8*: Addition to § 244, 393; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 307. My emphasis. The full passage reads: 'We have now returned to the Concept of the Idea with which we began [at the beginning of the Logic]. At the same time this return to the beginning is an advance. What we began with was being, abstract being, while now we have the Idea as being; and this Idea that is, is Nature.'

Entäußerung is a *free* act, ‘the Idea *freely releases* itself in its absolute self-assurance and inner poise’ into ‘the externality of space and time’.⁷⁵ Indeed, the necessity at the heart of the Idea’s manifestation is owed entirely to the freedom and ‘inner resolve’ of the absolute Idea itself.

Few readers of Hegel have been enthusiastic about his conception of the Idea’s ‘inner resolve’ to ‘freely release itself’ into nature. For his part, the late Schelling found these passages in Hegel’s *Logic* ambiguous at best. In the Munich lectures of the 1830s, Schelling asks how we should understand the transition from logic to nature in Hegel’s system:

‘The Idea’, says Hegel...the Idea in the infinite freedom, in the ‘truth of itself, *resolves* to release itself as nature, or in the form of being-other, from itself’. This expression ‘release’ – the Idea releases nature – is one of the strangest, most ambiguous and thus also timid expressions behind which this philosophy retreats at difficult points. Jacob Böhme says: divine freedom vomits itself into nature. Hegel says: divine freedom releases nature. What is one to think in this notion of releasing?⁷⁶

And in his later Berlin lectures Schelling continues his assault:

[Hegel] helps himself to such expressions—for example, the idea *resolves* itself [*entschliesst sich*]; nature is a *fall* [*Abfall*] from the idea—that either say nothing, or...should be *explanatory* and thus include something real, an actual process, a happening.⁷⁷

According to the late Schelling, there are two ways of understanding notions such as the ‘free release of the Idea’: Either they describe nothing at all and are, therefore, philosophically insignificant; or they explain the real, historical event of genesis, such that the idea *actually* releases itself into the exteriority of space and time—or what is the same thing, a transcendent God literally empties himself out into the world in an historical act of creation. Thus, on the late Schelling’s view, the category of ‘self-release’ should describe an

⁷⁵ *W 6: 573; Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 843. Emphasis modified.

⁷⁶ *SW I/10: 153; On the History of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 154-155. At this stage in Schelling’s intellectual development, he has distanced himself from Boehme’s theosophy, although he continues to have far more appreciation for Boehme’s ideas than he does for Hegel. On Schelling’s view, Boehme’s failures are largely due to his lack of philosophical rigour, whereas Hegel exemplifies all the rigour required of philosophy and yet still ‘says nothing’ with his metaphorical language.

⁷⁷ *SW II/3: 89; Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 151.

actual, historical creation if it is to explain anything at all. And since the ‘release’ of the Idea is absolutely *not* an historical event for Hegel, Schelling tells us that this ‘astounding category of the release [*Entlassens*]’ can be nothing other than a ‘figurative expression.’⁷⁸

In rejecting the Idea’s self-release as figurative, the late Schelling gets to the heart of the peculiarity of the transition to nature in Hegel’s system. But on my view, we need not denounce Hegel for this employment of figurative language. What if, when we turn to the concrete existence of nature, speculative thought cannot help but generate imagistic concepts? For Boehme, God vomits himself into nature; for Hegel, the idea freely releases itself into externality. Schelling’s own *Ages of the World*, as it happens, describes ‘God self-referentially [*fürsichtig*] shroud[ing] the point of departure for the past beginning in dark night.’⁷⁹ We might acknowledge the figurative language in these descriptions of ideational manifestation, and yet we need not follow the late Schelling’s assessment of such language as non-explanatory. On the contrary, it may be the case that the figurative nature of these phrases speaks precisely to *the extra-logical character of nature itself*.

My suggestion is that, even if Hegel is using imagistic language here, this is absolutely consistent with how he understands the transition from logic to nature, so long as the figurative or imagistic language he employs is demanded *by reason itself*.⁸⁰ For the ‘release’ is meant to describe the transition from *pure* logic to *concrete* logic, where philosophy must begin to incorporate aspects of knowledge that are external to abstract logic (e.g. knowledge attained in the history of science, religion, and philosophy, all of which, it should be said, *will have been* moments within a strictly logical development). The transition from logic to nature therefore reveals the logical necessity of the extra-logical, the irreducible fact that despite its rational organisation, the natural world is alien to pure logic for Hegel. As I see it, then, Hegel’s use of the figurative category of the ‘release’ draws our attention to the necessity for conceptual thought to move outwards towards another manner

⁷⁸ *SW* II/3: 121-122; *Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 175.

⁷⁹ *SW* I/8: 207; *Ages of the World* (1815), p. 3.

⁸⁰ Indeed, such figurative or metaphorical expressions might be interpreted as announcing the ‘*mythology of reason*’ promised in the ‘Earliest System-Program of German Idealism’ (*W* 1: 236; ‘Earliest System-Program’, p. 111).

of thinking. For the ‘free release’ is a concept which is no longer a fully self-transparent, logical concept, but breaks with pure conceptuality. In this way, we can better grasp what Hegel means when he says that ‘Nature has unfolded itself [*sich ergeben*] as the Idea in the form of *otherness*.’⁸¹ In the transition to nature we see how *logos* is *real* only insofar as it is *other than itself*, brimming with the irrationality of the natural world. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that Hegel’s descriptions of nature’s emergence are metaphorical—God’s creation of the world, the free release of the absolute Idea. For this figurative language does not merely point to the *fact* of nature’s irrationality or externality in relation to the Idea. As figurative, this language attests to the *necessity* of moving partially *outside* the logical concept in order to broach the being of nature.

There is no question that Hegel himself would never have endorsed an interpretation of his system such as the one I am advancing here. While it is perfectly acceptable, from a Hegelian perspective, to represent the transition to nature figuratively, *philosophy proper* must elucidate this transition in a strictly logical fashion. Indeed, for Hegel, every ontological determination is rational and logically emergent from other rational determinations, including the sheer manifestness of the irrational, natural world. The notion that one might require figurative language to account for a fundamental feature of reality—even its primordial, irrational manifestation—is far too romantic a notion for Hegel.

Therefore, I want to consider how we might interpret the Idea’s ‘free release’ if not as a figurative expression. Like many commentators on Hegel’s nature philosophy, I cannot provide a completely satisfactory account of this transition as a strictly logical development. I do think, however, that Hegel’s basic ideas regarding this matter are relatively clear. Throughout the rest of this thesis, therefore, I set aside my own preference for emphasising a metaphorical description of the Idea’s manifestation and attempt to make sense of the transition to nature in a strictly logical fashion. To do so, I will first consider the general role played by logical transitions in the *Science of Logic*.

Hegel’s *Logic* is divided into three major sections, the doctrines of being, essence, and the concept. Each of these parts of logic is characterised by a certain *type* of logical

⁸¹ *W 9*: § 247, 24; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 14. Translation modified.

movement. In the doctrine of being, a selfsame category immediately passes over into another selfsame category, each of which has the character of immediate presence-to-self, and it is this sheer immediacy of being that forces the slippage from one category to the other. In the doctrine of essence, logical determinations are immanently entangled with others, and thus one determination only ever is what it is in its relation to its other. In the doctrine of the concept, the dialectic is characterised by autonomous self-development, such that the immediacy of being that was lost in the doctrine of essence is regained, but now *through* the reflexive moment of difference and relationality that characterised the logic of essence. This means that conceptual movement is the kind of movement wherein a logical term develops itself as *different* from itself and in doing so remains itself. All of this is extremely schematic and is only meant to be an overview of the major transition-types in Hegel's *Logic*. Such an overview allows us to read the final paragraph of the *Logic*, where Hegel tells us that in the 'free release' of the Idea 'no transition [Übergang] takes place'.⁸²

We already know that the 'release' of the Idea into nature is not a *historical* transition. What might Hegel mean, then, by his explicit characterisation of this particular movement as one in which 'no transition takes place'? On first blush, it looks as though Hegel may be confirming my suggestion above, namely, that there is no *logical* transition from the Idea to nature and that, consequently, the manifestation of the Idea as an existent reality cannot be accounted for in strictly logical terminology. As an extra-logical transition, this development from nature to spirit would necessarily, on this view, have little in common with any of the three forms of logical movement that animate the rest of the *Logic*. However, as I have already noted, Hegel is committed to a strictly logical derivation of reality. We must therefore interpret Hegel's claim that 'no transition takes place' otherwise.

Stace interprets this remark as indicative of the logical *novelty* of the transition from logic to nature. He suggests that 'possibly Hegel means that the transition from the Idea to nature is a fourth kind of logical deduction,' while excluding the language of 'free release' as

⁸² *W 6: 573; Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 843. Emphasis modified.

merely figurative and unexplanatory.⁸³ On this view, the transition to nature is a further *type* of transition, one that is structurally distinct from any of the three fundamental transition-types in the *Logic*, and yet it is also distinct from what Stace takes to be Hegel's inappropriate use of figurative language such as the Idea's 'inner resolve' to 'release itself' into nature. In this way, whatever logical movement is expressed in the 'release' of the Idea, it is absolutely irreducible to anything that came before in the *Logic*.

Stace is right to draw attention to the logical novelty that Hegel thinks is at work in the transition to nature, but I believe he overstates this novelty. According to Stace, the 'release' into nature is an *entirely* new kind of logical development. On my reading, Hegel's claim about there being no 'transition' to nature is far less extensive, and once we acknowledge this, it becomes clear why Hegel uses some of the apparently figurative language that he uses in these passages. In particular, Hegel is making the more restricted claim that the Idea does not become its absolute *other* (as it might in the doctrine of being) nor does it *ground* nature in such a way as to allow it, i.e. the Idea, to become a ground (as it might in the doctrine of essence). Rather, the Idea freely releases *itself* into exteriority, because the Idea moves in a *self*-developmental manner, the type of movement exemplified in the doctrine of the concept. Hegel's point, then, is that the Idea's movement *into* nature should be understood as a movement *within itself*, as a fully autonomous development of the concept.

Here is the relevant passage in full:

The idea, namely, in positing itself as the absolute *unity* of the pure concept and its reality and thus collecting itself in the immediacy of *being*, is in this form as *totality - nature*. - This determination, however, is nothing that *has become*, is not a *transition*, as was the case above when the subjective concept in its totality *becomes objectivity*, or the *subjective purpose becomes*

⁸³ Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 306. As Stace writes, the 'free release' of the idea into nature is 'clearly poetic [metaphor] and no more' (*The Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 305). Drees also argues that 'the logical structure of the Idea's progress to nature is independent of the meta-theoretical and meta-logical description employed by Hegel in sketching the form of the advance' ('The Logic of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature', *Hegel and Newtonianism*, ed. by Michael Petry [Dordrecht: Springer, 1993], p. 95). *Pace* the critics of Hegel (such as Schelling) and the defenders (such as Stace and Drees), I see the figurative character of the 'release' to be the strength of this strange transition from logic to nature—even if Hegel himself would never have recognised it as such. But for the sake of hermeneutic charity, it is worth thinking through what Hegel himself thought to be the strictly logical transition from the Idea to nature.

life. The pure idea into which the determinateness or reality of the concept is itself raised into concept is rather an absolute *liberation* for which there is no longer an immediate determination which is not equally *posited* and is not concept; in this freedom, therefore, there is no transition that takes place; the simple being to which the idea determines itself remains perfectly transparent to it: it is the idea that in its determination remains with itself. The transition is to be grasped, therefore, in the sense that the idea *freely discharges* itself, absolutely certain of itself and internally at rest.⁸⁴

Stace is right to note that this non-transitional ‘release’ is still meant to be a transition of some kind (*‘Das Übergehen ist also hier vielmehr so zu fassen...’*). But, as I understand this passage, Hegel is differentiating the logical movement of the Idea from the more *abstract* forms of logical movement that are found in the earlier parts of the *Logic*: the transitions characteristic of the doctrines of being and essence. This is why Hegel insists that ‘there is no longer any *immediate* determination [being] which is not equally *posited* [essence] and is not *concept*.’ For the movement characteristic of the concept is the *unity* of the immediacy of being and the mediation of essence. This interpretation also makes it clear why Hegel consistently describes the Idea’s manifestation as nature in terms of freedom or ‘absolute liberation’ (*‘absolute Befreiung’*). For the conceptual structure which *freely moves itself* is that described in the third and final part of the *Logic*. Thus, in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel can describe the movement of the ‘free release’ as conceptual movement *in contradistinction* to the movement of mere being and the movement of essence:

The absolute *freedom* of the Idea, however, is that it does not merely *pass over* into *life*, nor that it lets *life shine* within itself as finite cognition, but that, in the absolute truth of itself, it *resolves to release out of itself* into freedom the moment of its particularity.⁸⁵

We should ignore Hegel’s replacement of ‘nature’ here with ‘life’. The significant point is that the Idea’s movement into nature is nothing other than the movement of the concept, wherein the immediacy of being and its mediated positing by essence are united in fully self-developmental, *autonomous* movement.

⁸⁴ *W* 6: 573; *Science of Logic* (Giovanni), pp. 752-753.

⁸⁵ *W* 8: § 244, 393; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 307.

But it would be strange if the free release of the Idea were simply more of the same conceptual development that Hegel has already described throughout the doctrine of the concept. By the end of the *Logic*, Hegel has already worked through an astoundingly complicated dialectic of the concept's self-development, from the concept proper, to judgment, syllogism, and so on. How can I claim, then, that the Idea's free release is simply the movement of the concept and nothing further? If the transition from logic to nature is nothing but conceptual self-determination, why would this development close the *Logic* and lead to a philosophy of *nature* as a distinct branch of philosophical science? Why, in other words, would the self-determination of the concept now suddenly require a *Realphilosophie*?

To complicate matters further, in the very passage from the greater *Logic* I am now considering Hegel distinguishes the 'free release' of the Idea from the logical movement found in the doctrine of the concept: 'This determination [of the release] is not a *transition*, as was the case above when the subjective concept in its totality *becomes objectivity*, or the *subjective purpose becomes life*.'⁸⁶ Since these transitions take place in the third part of the *Logic*, it is curious that I would now identify the transition from logic to nature as nothing more than a concept-style transition.

But it is in fact with this very claim of Hegel's that, I believe, everything comes together. Indeed, it is here that we can begin to see why Hegel takes the transition from the Idea to nature to be driven by strict, logical necessity. In order to see this, we must consider how the following two claims of Hegel's might fit together: 1) the 'free release' is a *self-developmental* movement, a manifestation of the Idea as *self-determination*; and 2) this 'free release' is *unlike* the transitions of *becoming* at work *in the doctrine of the concept*. What I want to suggest is the following: Up until the Idea determines itself as *nature*, i.e. as manifest *reality*, it is not in fact the Idea or, for that matter, genuinely 'conceptual'. To be sure, the transitions in the doctrine of the concept have come a long way in shedding their abstract immediacy and reflexive structures; within this part of the *Logic* a novel form of logical movement has indeed emerged, namely, self-development. But as we can see from

⁸⁶ *W* 6: 573; *Science of Logic* (Giovanni), p. 752.

the closing passage of the *Logic*, the development of the concept *prior to* the transition to nature remains plagued by residual abstractness. This is why Hegel can describe the transition from ‘subjective purpose’ to ‘life’ as a *becoming*, a transition from something *to something other*. There is, in other words, a minimal gap between the various stages of the concept’s development in the subjective logic. And it is with the self-determination of the Idea *as nature* that this ‘gap’ is finally *closed*. The ‘gap’, in other words, between the Idea and its ‘other’ is *wholly overcome*; there is no difference *between* the Idea and nature. Nature just is the Idea *in its self-development*, its *differentiation from itself*.⁸⁷ Why then is the ‘free release’ of the Idea necessary? Because only with the ‘free release’ into nature does the Idea determine itself as *other* and yet wholly remain what it is, ‘absolutely certain of itself and internally at rest’.⁸⁸ Indeed, the ‘repose’ or ‘rest’ achieved by the Idea in its ‘self release’ is nothing other than the ontological structure of *remaining oneself* in one’s *own* otherness. Thus, the *true* Idea, the Idea that is no longer held back by its abstractness, is the Idea *as manifest*. This is why nature’s externality is the mode ‘in which the Concept first *is*’.⁸⁹

With this notion Hegel arrives at the fundamental ontological strangeness of nature. For nature is, on the one hand, the Idea itself: ‘In nature, it is not something-other than the Idea that is known, but the Idea is in the form of externalisation [*Entäußerung*].’⁹⁰ But on the other hand, nature is the Idea insofar as the Idea is *other* than itself, is *irrational* and determined, in large part, by contingency—hence the *external* character of nature as opposed to the inwardness of the Idea. It follows from this that nature is the self-determining Idea which is not explicitly self-determining but, on the contrary, irrational and ‘other’ than

⁸⁷ My interpretation of this passage owes a great deal to discussions with Richard Lambert.

⁸⁸ *W 6: 573; Science of Logic* (Giovanni), p. 753.

⁸⁹ *W 9: Addition to § 251, 37; Philosophy of Nature*, p. 25. My emphasis, translation modified.

⁹⁰ *W 8: Remark to § 18, 64; Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 42. Translation modified.

itself.⁹¹ This is why, in the transition from logic to nature, the extraordinary complexity of the abstract Idea ‘collapses’ into itself as an ontologically *impoverished* reality. For in being *other* than itself, the Idea finally becomes what it has been implicitly all along in the *Logic*: an absolute which is absolute even in its own ontological poverty (nature).

In addition to clarifying the ontological status of nature, this interpretation of the transition from logic to nature sheds some light on the relationship between logic and the *Realphilosophie* more generally. There is nothing that is *not* Idea, for Hegel, since even the contingencies of nature are made necessary by *logos* as such, i.e. the *logos* that determines itself *as* an irrational nature. And since ‘The Idea is the One Totality,’⁹² the *philosophical* engagement with reality is in fact a philosophical presentation of the self-determination of the Idea as existent reality. The philosophies *of* reality then, i.e. the philosophies of nature ad spirit, are systematically necessary if philosophical science is to grasp the Idea in its truth. For the *Realphilosophie* is an explication of the Idea itself, insofar as it *is*. We leave behind the abstract logic of the *Science of Logic*, then, in order to understand the logic of the Idea as a concrete *reality*. As Drees puts it, ‘Abstract thought, thinking simply in abstract determinations, is incapable of analyzing the Idea’s *existent being*. Consequently, within the medium of the *Logic*, the *absolute Idea* is still in a mode of under-determination.’⁹³

⁹¹ A further way to consider the relationship between logic, nature, and spirit is to remain within the realm of purely conceptual thought and describe how logic, nature, and spirit relate not to the imagistic Trinity but to the logical determinations of being, essence, and the concept. Although I will not entertain a lengthy consideration of this here, one could understand the unique ontological character of nature with reference to the various ways in which nature can be seen to express the logics of being, essence, and the concept. In an important sense, mediation or ‘essence’ is the principal logical determination at work *throughout* the philosophy of nature (the abstract logic remaining fundamentally expressive of immediacy or ‘being’ and the philosophy of spirit expressing the most explicit form of self-development of ‘conceptual’ movement). But this claim would have to be qualified with reference to the manner in which 1) nature is considered at the beginning of the philosophy of nature in its *immediacy* (as self-external *being*) and, in this way, involves fundamental features from the logic of being; and 2) nature is *the Idea*, and thus, whatever is ‘essentialist’, logically speaking, about nature must be seen as an ‘essentialist’ manifestation of the *Idea*’s self-developing freedom. My view is that, in nature, the self-determining activity of the Idea manifests itself *as divorced from itself*, and in this way, the Idea *appears* as other than its *essence*; it *appears* as irrational even though it is in fact implicitly self-determining reason. This means that nature is nothing other than the Idea, but the Idea as concretely expressing itself in an ‘essentialist’ mode. Cf. Wandschneider, according to whom the ‘essence’ of nature is the inner idea which ‘*appears* as a not-ideal’ such that ‘in nature, essence and appearance fall apart’ (Wandschneider, ‘The Philosophy of Nature of Kant, Schelling and Hegel’, p. 88).

⁹² *W* 8: § 242, 392; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 307.

⁹³ Drees, ‘The Logic of Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature’, p. 93.

It is thus through this self-development of the Idea that the abstract logic proves, through its own dialectic, to require a concrete logic, i.e. a logic that attends to reason as it manifests itself in, or rather *as*, a reality. And because the Idea first manifests itself as *real*, and is not, therefore, purely ideal, the philosophical *method* of elucidating the Idea's necessary, inherent structure will have to be modified. Hence the systematic distinction between pure logic and the *Realphilosophie*, the latter of which incorporates empirical knowledge into the logical derivation of the Idea's real structure. I will consider the methodology that makes this possible below. At this stage, I want to simply emphasise the following: the key to the transition from logic to nature is that, for Hegel, there is no logic historically *prior* to nature. Logic initially manifests itself as nature. And, moreover, *because* of the strange manner in which the Idea freely determines itself to become manifest as *other* than itself, this primary manifestation of reason is lacking the inwardness, freedom, and subjectivity that characterise the absolute Idea.⁹⁴ The primary expression of the Idea, then, is an utterly impersonal, natural world—the absolute Idea which is not (yet) itself.

4.7. *Logos* and *Physis* in Idealism

According to Hegel, the absolute Idea *is* only insofar as it manifests itself as a spatiotemporal world; and the spatiotemporal world is, fundamentally, an expression of self-determining reason, albeit in alienated form. Consequently, there is no Idea without nature, and there is no nature without the Idea. This thought is fundamental to Hegel's logical idealism, and it is absolutely central to my interpretation of Hegel that this relationship between the *Idea* and nature not be confused with the relationship between *spirit* and nature.

Now, there is good reason that critics of Hegel throughout the last two hundred years have conceived the transition from logic to nature in a more subjectivist vein and thereby ignored what I have called 'the primacy of the impersonal' in Hegel's system. For we

⁹⁴ 'By reason of this freedom, the form of [the Idea's] determinateness is also utterly free—the *externality of space and time* existing absolutely on its own account without the moment of subjectivity' (*W* 6: 573; *Science of Logic* [Miller], p. 843).

ordinarily associate ‘logic’, ‘reason’, ‘thought’, and ‘ideas’ (or even an ‘Idea’) with either individually existing human beings or communities of such individuals who actively think, reason, and so on. Why would Hegel use such terms if he really understood nature to be ontologically more fundamental than spiritual subjectivity? It may be helpful to see that Hegel is by no means the first philosopher to conceive logic or reason as impersonal. Indeed, *logos* is, from the origins of Western philosophical thinking, something far more expansive in its significance than the mere logic or reason ordinarily associated with the human subject.

The philosopher who, according to Hegel, first thematises *logos* and raises it to a philosophical concept is Heraclitus, and Hegel held Heraclitus’ thought in the highest esteem. In Hegel’s own words, ‘There is no proposition of Heraclitus which I have not adopted in my Logic.’⁹⁵ Thus, for Hegel, the philosophy of Heraclitus is ‘not one past and gone, [but] its principle is essential.’⁹⁶ What principle is this? The principle of the *movement* of *logos*, the discovery of which constitutes a watershed moment in Hegel’s logical history of philosophy.⁹⁷ For with Heraclitus, the movement of thought, which was taken to be merely subjective in the Eleatic philosophy, was for the first time taken to be ‘the measure, the rhythm, that runs through the Being of everything.’⁹⁸ We therefore learn from Heraclitus that ‘we are wrong in representing the speculative to be something existent only in thought

⁹⁵ ‘Here we see land; there is no proposition of Heraclitus which I have not adopted in my Logic.’ *W* 18: 320; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 279.

⁹⁶ I reject, therefore, the following claim of J. Glenn Gray: ‘Hegel, unlike many German historians who were to follow him, did not set too high a value on the contributions of the pre-Socratics. He knew that the originality and greatness of a thinker lay more in the use and application of the materials at hand than in the discovery of new and isolated truths. These early philosophers had after all, he concluded, accomplished little—except to furnish the material and a tradition for the greater thinkers who were to come after them’ (*Hegel and Greek Thought* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968] p. 77). Of course, the significance of the Presocratics for Hegel can also be seen as a reflection of his Aristotelianism, since both Aristotle and Hegel seek to extract the fundamental insights of the philosophical endeavours which precede true science (be it Aristotelian or Hegelian). Nevertheless, I take it that Hegel’s interpretation of all of Greek philosophy should be seen as central to his own philosophical standpoint.

⁹⁷ This is a logical history, because it need not follow a perfect chronological order, but is rather a logic expressed *in* history in a roughly chronological manner.

⁹⁸ *W* 18: 338-339; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 294.

or inwardly, which is no one knows where. It is really present.’⁹⁹ Hence Heraclitus’ insistence that we learn that ‘all things are one’ by ‘listening not to me, but to the logos’.¹⁰⁰

For our purposes, it is significant that Heraclitus’ conception of an impersonal *logos* is expressed in a discourse on being as *physis*.¹⁰¹ Central to Hegel’s reading of Heraclitus is the fact that Heraclitus remained committed to the nature-philosophical conception of *physis* as *elemental*, but that he did not, as Thales, posit a *substantial* element as primary, since *physis* is necessarily processual and becomes *other* than itself.¹⁰² To be sure, Heraclitus interprets the nature-process as essentially ‘pyrological’, but fire is ‘essential’ precisely because it is *insubstantial* and not selfsame; Heraclitean *pyros* is self-overcoming as the conflagration of self. The crucial point here is that *logos* is not only distinct from individual subjectivity, but is a *naturally* objective process.

According to Hegel, what is lacking in Heraclitus, despite his ‘speculative depth’,¹⁰³ is an understanding of the the *logos* as at *rest* with itself *in* its movement. To be sure, for Heraclitus, the movement of nature returns to itself, such that becoming is conceived cyclically. But this cyclical becoming never achieves selfhood *in* its activity: the becoming of *logos* ‘is certainly also a circle and a return...but the principle does not retain itself in its determinateness as the universal.’¹⁰⁴ The logos, while infinite becoming, does not come to rest with itself as the *universal* absolute which only comes about with self-determining activity, becoming that *remains* itself in its infinite becoming. According to Hegel, this latter and more concrete form of becoming (or ontological movement) only arises with Anaxagoras’ conception of *nous*, with which ‘a light...begins to dawn’.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ *W* 18: 335; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁰ Heraclitus B50.

¹⁰¹ ‘In his system Heraclitus did not rest content with thus expressing himself in Notions, or with what is purely logical. But in addition to this universal form in which he advanced his principle, he gave his idea a real and more natural form, and hence he is still reckoned as belonging to the Ionic school of natural philosophers’ (*W* 18: 328; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume*, p. 285).

¹⁰² *W* 18: 328; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, pp. 285-286.

¹⁰³ *W* 18: 346; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 313.

¹⁰⁴ *W* 18: 382; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, pp. 331-332.

¹⁰⁵ *W* 18: 369; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 319.

Anaxagoras accomplishes what was lacking in Heraclitus' (and Empedocles') understanding of the principle of ontological development: a principle that is universal insofar as it remains at peace with itself in its activity, thereby prefiguring Aristotelian *energeia* and announcing, for the first time in world history, that the becoming of being is essentially *nous* (mind), 'the simple, absolute essence of the world.'¹⁰⁶ Hegel's point is not that *nous* is *different* from *logos*, but rather that *nous* explicates what was implicit in Heraclitus' word all along: the becoming of being is not only *processual* but a *self-determining* process, a process in which being achieves repose, and thus a form of selfhood, *in* its perpetual movement.

At first blush, it looks as though Hegel's progressivist reading of the history of philosophy involves a certain 'subjectivism'. For Anaxagoras *raises* Heraclitus' *logos* to a higher and more truthful stage of its conceptual development in its expression as *nous*. Hasn't Anaxagoras broken with the nature-philosophical conception of *physis* as the movement of an impersonal *logos* by conceiving *nous* as the 'essence of the world'? And hasn't Hegel shown himself to be committed to a subjectivist metaphysics by championing this development from Heraclitus to Anaxagoras?

If by 'subjectivism' one has in mind anything to do with the ontological priority of spiritual subjectivity, then these assumptions would be entirely misguided. Indeed, if we look closer at Hegel's reading of Anaxagoras, we see that Anaxagoras has in no way conceived *nous* as 'subjective' in this sense, and it is precisely Anaxagoras' conception of *nous* as *objective* selfhood that Hegel praises:

The *nous* is thus not a thinking existence from without which regulates the world; by such the meaning present to Anaxagoras would be quite destroyed and all its philosophic interest taken away.¹⁰⁷

We must not represent to ourselves subjective thought; in thinking we think immediately of our thought as it is in consciousness. Here, on the contrary, quite objective thought is meant, active understanding — as we say, there is

¹⁰⁶ *W* 18: 380; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 329. See also *W* 3: 54; *Phenomenology*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ *W* 18: 370; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 331.

reason in the world, or we speak of genera in nature which are the universal.¹⁰⁸

That *logos* achieves a certain unity-with-self *in* its perpetual movement does not make *logos*—now conceived as *nous*—any more ‘spiritual’ than ‘natural’. Anaxagoras’ conception of *nous* is just as much the *nous* of the objective world as Heraclitus’ conception of *logos* is the *logos* of the world. The difference, however, is that with Anaxagoras, the *nous* of the world achieves ‘selfhood’ in its activity. And we can now recall that, in Hegel’s system, it is only through the ‘repose’ achieved in the self-movement of the Idea that logic ‘releases itself’ into *nature*. Indeed, the *logos* of the world only expresses itself *as* a world, for Hegel, insofar as *logos* is *self*-moving, that is, insofar as *logos* is *nous*. Such *nous*, however, is not the actually existing, thinking mind of a transcendent God or a human individual, but the *nous* that expresses itself, first and foremost, as *cosmos*. In this way, Hegel returns philosophy to its Greek origins not only in developing a logic of *being* or ‘things themselves’, but, in conceiving the *cosmos* as the ontologically primary expression of *logos* or *nous*.

4.8. The Place of Spirit in the System

My aim in the preceding section was to emphasise the fact that the relationship between the Idea and nature should not be confused with the relationship between subjective spirit and nature. I considered Hegel’s reading of the Presocratics, because the non-subjectivist origins of Western philosophy help us to see that Hegel’s notion of an impersonal Idea expressed as a world is not some idiosyncratic notion but deeply consistent with the origins of philosophical thinking about reason and mind.

That being said, Hegel’s ‘return’ to certain aspects of Greek thinking is by no means aimed at leaving behind our modern conceptions of nature and human freedom. Unlike the Presocratics, Hegel conceives nature as an *impoverished*, *negative* expression of *logos*. As

¹⁰⁸ *W* 18: 382-383; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 331.

we saw above, nature is the primary expression of the self-movement of the Idea, but in such a manner as to be lacking actual selfhood. Nature is, in other words, self-development without an explicit self. And this means that the self-assurance achieved in Anaxagorean *nous* will require something other than nature in order to become fully manifest in reality. This ‘other’ is what Hegel calls ‘spirit’.

Unlike Hegel’s conception of logic, his conception of spirit, at least at its highest stages of development, has very little in common with Greek thinking, despite Hegel’s self-identification as an Aristotelian.¹⁰⁹ For Hegel’s conception of spirit is decidedly modern, a return to Greek metaphysics only through the lens of Kantian philosophy and, most importantly, the Christian religion.¹¹⁰ I will not consider Hegel’s conception of spirit in detail here (See Chapter 6). But in order to throw further light upon the relationship between reason and nature, I want to consider yet again Hegel’s theological description of the relationship between logic, nature, and spirit.

In the following passage, Hegel describes how God reveals himself first in the finite, carnal form of world and Christ, and only subsequently in the *subjective* life of spirit:

God reveals Himself in two different ways: as Nature and as Spirit. Both manifestations are temples of God which He fills, and in which He is present. God, as an abstraction, is not the true God, but only as the living process of positing His Other, the world, which, comprehended in its divine form is His Son; and it is only in unity with His Other, in Spirit, that God is Subject.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ The Anthropology, on the other hand, where spirit is determined as soul (its most abstract stage), is profoundly influenced by Aristotle’s *De Anima*.

¹¹⁰ As Hegel says, spirit is ‘the most sublime Notion and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion’ (*W* 3: 28; *Phenomenology*, p. 14). See Alan M. Olson, *Hegel and the Spirit: Philosophy as Pneumatology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) for a discussion of the Christian origins of Hegel’s conception of spirit. Such a study is absolutely central to understanding Hegel’s philosophy of spirit and helps to show up the deficiencies in the neo-Aristotelian interpretation of Hegel that has become so fashionable in recent years. That being said, it would also be an error to see Hegel’s Christian conception of spirit as entirely separate from Hegel’s Aristotelianism. As Ferrarin argues, ‘What needs to be emphasized here is that, in Hegel’s judgment, the concept of subjectivity as the actuation of its own end and self puts Aristotle above the modern philosophies of reflection. True, Aristotle did not know the infinite value of particular subjectivity affirmed by modern philosophy, from Descartes to Kant and Fichte, in religion by Christianity (Lutheranism in particular), and in history of by the French revolution. However, the structure of a teleological subjectivity, which is an end to itself, is Aristotle’s greatest merit in Hegel’s eyes’ (Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001] p. 145).

¹¹¹ *W* 9: Addition to § 246, 23; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 13.

What I want to emphasise here is that God is logically distinct not only from his creation but from the Holy Spirit, wherein God becomes truly subjective or personal in the Christian community. It is clear from this that, insofar as God the Father is a theological representation of the absolute Idea, then Hegel understands the Idea as notionally separate from its expression as spirit, even though the Idea must manifest itself *as* spirit in order to achieve its full realisation. This distinction between the Idea and spirit is necessary if we are to understand nature as the logically *primary* manifestation of the Idea and not as a posit of spiritual subjectivity. Hegel's interpretation of the Trinity is therefore quite helpful in elucidating his conception of the relationship between logic and nature, since in the Trinity, God the Father and the Holy Ghost are clearly distinguished, albeit in their unity.¹¹²

But when Hegel turns his attention back to a philosophical, as opposed to theological, presentation of the Idea's triplicity, he often fails to properly distinguish reason from spirit. Indeed, at times Hegel appears to conflate the two, for example, when he describes nature not as the *Idea* in the form of otherness, but as self-estranged *spirit*: 'Nature is spirit estranged from itself; in nature, spirit lets itself go (*ausgelassen*).'¹¹³ In another addition—and it is worth noting that such remarks are by and large found in the additions to the *Encyclopaedia* rather than the *Encyclopaedia* proper—we read the following:

¹¹² That Hegel turns explicitly to Christian thinking when he develops his ontology of spirit should not imply a stark division between Greek and Christian thought for Hegel. Rather, according to Hegel, Greek thought simply remains too abstract to conceive the ontological specificity of spirit—a spirit which can only be conceived concretely once it *becomes* concrete in history. Nevertheless, Greek metaphysics already indicates the direction in which history is headed with respect to spirit, and this is not exclusively applicable to Aristotle. The divine *logos* of Heraclitus, for example, is *implicitly* the self-negating negativity of spiritual, self-determination. Take, for instance, the following fragment which Gadamer argues should be attributed to Heraclitus: 'The father himself only *becomes* a father in that he produces a son.' While Gadamer is intent on emphasising the interpretive task of discovering 'an original Heraclitean meaning' which might be 'guessed at behind the Christian veneer' of this fragment from Hippolytus (*The Beginning of Knowledge*, trans. by Rod Coltman [New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002] p. 29), one might *also* attempt to see how the Heraclitean conception of becoming is already on its way to taking on a Christian sense. From a Hegelian perspective, the continuity between Greek and Christian thinking can also be seen if we reflect on the central role of *logos* in Christian esotericism. As Glenn Alexander Magee has argued, Hegel's conception of logic is closely related to the German mystical tradition which conceives *logos* as the eternal essence of God that flows forth from his being. Although the mystical tradition failed, on Hegel's view, to arrive at a rational *explication* of this process, that tradition rightly saw that *logos* is only genuinely divine insofar as it 'flows forth' as a world. The divine truth, for the mystic, is an eternal truth that is *made manifest* and in this manifestation *achieves* its eternal character. See Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) and 'Hegel and Mysticism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, pp. 253-280.

¹¹³ *W*9: Addition to § 247, 25; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 14. Translation modified.

The procession [*Hervorgehen*] of spirit from nature must not be understood as if nature were the absolutely immediate and the *prius*, and the original positing agent, spirit, on the contrary, were only something posited by nature; rather it is nature which is posited by spirit, and the latter is the absolute *prius*.¹¹⁴

With remarks such as these, it looks as though the ‘release’ of the Idea into nature in fact presupposes that being is *already* spiritual within the strictly logical domain of the Idea and that nature can only be understood from the standpoint of spirit, as spirit’s ‘other’ structurally analogous to the not-‘I’ posited by the ‘I’ in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. For this reason, such remarks are extraordinarily misleading. But rather than dismiss them as mere slips of Hegel’s tongue, it is worth attempting to understand why Hegel may have had good reason to describe nature in this manner.

In order to make sense of such remarks, let us consider the place of spirit in Hegel’s system as a whole. According to Hegel, spirit is the immanent *return* of the absolute Idea to itself through the otherness of nature. Why is spirit a ‘return’ to the Idea? Precisely because, as we have seen, nature is the primary manifestation of the Idea, but the Idea in alienated form. But for Hegel, nature is not *only* alienated reason but also a process in which natural forms become progressively more ‘involved’. In other words, as nature makes its inner rational core gradually more explicit, nature proves to express more ‘inward’ forms of being and, eventually, the inwardness of spiritual life. ‘Evolution is thus also an involution, in that matter interiorizes [*involviert*] itself to become life.’¹¹⁵ How does this process of ‘involution’ or ‘inwardisation’ constitute a ‘return’ to the Idea? The absolute Idea, we recall, is at rest with itself in its movement, and the active repose achieved by the Idea is an expression of its inner freedom. When Hegel describes spirit as a ‘return’ of the Idea to itself, we should

¹¹⁴ *W* 10: Addition to § 381, 24; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 14. Translation modified. Another damning instance is found in the addition which concludes the philosophy of nature: ‘The aim of these lectures has been to give a picture of Nature in order to subdue this Proteus: to find in this externality only the mirror of ourselves, to see in Nature a free reflex of spirit’ (*W* 9: Addition to § 376, 539; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 445). The key to my interpretation is to attend to precisely how Hegel unpacks this thought further, which again, he does in theological as opposed to philosophical language: ‘The aim of these lectures has been to give a picture of Nature in order to subdue this Proteus: to find in this externality only the mirror of ourselves, to see in Nature a free reflex of spirit: to know God, *not in the contemplation of him as spirit, but in this his immediate existence* [my emphasis]’, an immediacy which *is not spirit* and is, as immediate, logically *prior* to spirit.

¹¹⁵ *W* 9: Addition to § 252, 38; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 26.

interpret this as a claim regarding spirit's achievement, in concrete reality, of the formal inwardness and self-determination that had previously only been explicated in the pure logic of the Idea. The Idea, therefore, 'returns' to itself with the logical emergence of spiritual freedom, because it is in spirit that inner, rational self-determination becomes explicit once again in Hegel's system. Thus, the becoming 'inner' of nature's self-external being is the 'return' of the Idea to itself from out of its sojourn in the externality of the natural world.

But all of this makes it look as though Hegel's system is one of exodus and homecoming, as if selfhood were there from the start, then 'lost' itself in nature, and through an immense struggle *regained* its selfhood in the activity of the human spirit. This view certainly allows us to see how nature could be understood as 'self-estranged spirit', since it implies that nature is nothing other than the mediation between spirit and its *return-to-self*. It is this language of 'return' which, in my view, obscures Hegel's emergentist ontology. From the perspective of the system as a whole, spiritual subjectivity is certainly a 'return' to the inward selfhood described at the end of the *Logic*. But interpreting the 'return' of the Idea in this way ignores the fundamental difference between what precedes and what follows the transition from logic to nature. As we have already seen, Hegel understands the self-estranged form of the Idea, i.e. nature, to be the *onto-logically primary form of reality*, hence its place in the system as the first part of *Realphilosophie*. And this means that the 'return' of the Idea to itself that occurs in the transition from nature to spirit is a *novel achievement within reality*.

I suggest, therefore, that we understand the 'return' of spirit as more of a 'turning back' of nature upon itself—a self that *was not* until this act *of* turning back. That is to say, the 'return' of the Idea to itself is not a return to a *pre-existing* self, but the turning-back of nature in such a manner as to achieve 'inwardness', in concrete reality, *for the first time*. On my reading, then, spirit is certainly a return-to-self, but this return is nothing other than being's immanent achievement of selfhood in reality, the development of being as 'subjective' precisely through the onto-logical movement of inwardisation.

Thus, even though nature and spirit are each manifestations of the Idea, they are quite distinct in the way they each make manifest self-determining reason. In spirit, the Idea

is what it is; it is identical to itself. In nature, on the other hand, the Idea is outside itself. But because Hegel rejects the metaphysics of unmediated immediacy, he also rejects the notion that spirit, wherein the Idea exists *as it is*, could come before nature. On the contrary, it is only through the alienated Idea, or nature, that self-determining reason comes to be expressed as itself in spiritual freedom.¹¹⁶ In this way, emergent *Geist* in all of its configurations (anthropological, phenomenological, psychological, political, aesthetic, religious, and philosophical) is nothing other than concrete and explicit *selfhood*, the achievement *in reality* of the strictly abstract and impersonal *nous* described at the end of the *Logic*.

Since spirit is the manifestation of explicitly self-determining reason in concrete reality, it is simultaneously identical to and distinct from the Idea in the latter's abstraction. Recognising this puts us in a position to interpret Hegel's misleading description of nature as 'spirit estranged from itself'. On my interpretation, Hegel makes these remarks *from the standpoint of spirit*. Once spirit knows that it is nothing other than reason come into its own, the 'self-release' of the Idea into nature can *retrospectively* be understood as the 'externalisation of spirit', but only insofar as this misleading articulation signifies the externalisation of spirit's fundamental ontological structure, i.e. autonomous, self-determining reason, and not the externalisation of subjective 'thoughts' or 'ideas'. In other words, nature is not the self-externalisation of emergent spirit, but the externalisation of that spirit's fundamental character as self-determining freedom. In this way, Hegel can retrospectively interpret nature as 'self-estranged spirit', even though this is by no means the proper ontological determination of nature.

We should not, therefore, interpret Hegel's retrospective description of nature as self-estranged spirit to indicate any ontological dependence of nature upon spirit. For nature is only dependent upon spirit insofar as 1) spiritual freedom is the material presupposition for the philosophical *cognition* of nature to get underway (nature must have become spirit and spirit must have, through its own history, achieved the free standpoint of science if there is to

¹¹⁶ As Hegel says in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*: 'Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself—not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such—is the True' (*W* 3: 23; *Phenomenology*, p. 10).

be a speculative *philosophy of nature*); and 2) this speculative philosophising—as the highest expression of spiritual freedom—is the *end* of the whole system, and as end, is nature’s final cause.

It is this latter sense of spirit as *telos* that has often supported an interpretation of Hegel as *privileging* spirit and making nature a mere fall away *from* spirit, as if spirit is directing the whole dialectic of nature from on high. But this is to misconstrue the significance of teleology for Hegel. Spirit certainly plays a role in the development of nature, but this *telos* does not *draw* nature in ever increasing stages *to* itself. On the contrary, it is *nature* which immanently strives to become *spiritual*, positing spirit as its immanent end; nature itself seeks to overcome its self-external character and become explicitly self-determining freedom.¹¹⁷ Thus, when Hegel says ‘*nous*, and more profoundly, *the spirit*, is the cause of the world’,¹¹⁸ we must take note of his *differentiation* between the causality of *nous* (logic or ‘thought thinking itself’) and *spirit* (emergent *Geist*). Whereas *nous* is the rational character of being itself which necessitates that there be a spatiotemporal world in the first place, spirit is the end towards which being immanently strives. This is why Hegel can say spirit is the ‘more profound’ cause of the world, since it is the *purpose*, the *energeia* towards which nature is moving. As John Burbidge writes, ‘Rather than being the presupposition of the philosophy of nature, then, in Hegel’s mature system absolute spirit would be its final consummation.’¹¹⁹ And Hegel can therefore describe this ‘final consummation’ of his system as the absolute *prius* only in the sense that spirit is the immanent *telos* of nature.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ ‘The notion of end [*Zweckbegriff*] as immanent in natural objects is their simple determinateness, e.g. the seed of a plant, which contains the real possibility of all that is to exist in the tree... This notion of end was already recognized by Aristotle, too, and he called this activity the nature of a thing; the true teleological method [*die wahre teleologische Betrachtung*]—and this is the highest—consists, therefore, in the method of regarding Nature as free in her own peculiar vital activity’ (*W* 9: Addition to § 245, 14; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 5-6).

¹¹⁸ *W* 8: Remark to § 8, 52; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 32.

¹¹⁹ John Burbidge, *Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry Combine in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 24.

¹²⁰ I propose, therefore, that we read ‘the Idea’ in the following passage as ‘the Idea made *spiritually manifest*’: ‘Nature is the first in point of time, but the absolute *prius* is the Idea [*made spiritually manifest*]; this absolute *prius* is the last, the true beginning, Alpha is Omega’ (*W* 9: Addition to § 248, 30; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 19).

All of this being said, I think it is clear that Hegel does more harm than good to his conception of the nature-spirit relation when he speaks of nature as ‘self-estranged spirit’.¹²¹ In light of such remarks, it is completely understandable that readers of Hegel for nearly two hundred years have taken him to conceive nature as ‘fallen spirit’. On this view, ‘nature appears as the purely *exterior* and *extrinsic* into which spirit has unaccountably *fallen*; nature is the *downfall* or *dejection* of spirit.’¹²² I have attempted to show how this interpretation, while understandable, overlooks Hegel’s essential Heracliteanism. On this misguided view, Hegel is seen as just another step along the way in a history of subjectivist metaphysics—the very metaphysics Hegel’s absolute idealism explicitly aims to overcome by returning to a Greek conception of being and its immanent *eidōs*. But not only does reading Hegel in this subjectivist vein get Hegel wrong; it also obscures his thought in such a manner as to conceal the *real* limits of his system. For, as I will argue below (See Chapter 7), it is precisely Hegel’s commitment to Heraclitean movement—the becoming of *logos*—that makes Hegel’s ontology of nature an ahistorical ontology unconcerned with a second sense of becoming, namely, becoming as natural-historical genesis. It is central, therefore, that we get Hegel’s commitment to objective idealism right, for it is only then that we can see where this objective idealism falls short, and where Schellingian idealism indicates a new direction for a rationalist-*historicist* philosophy of nature.

So much for pointing ahead to the conclusion of this thesis. At this stage, I want to focus exclusively on Hegel’s compelling interpretation of nature’s development towards its immanent, yet non-natural, *telos*. But before I attempt to elucidate the details of this logic whereby nature raises itself towards spiritual freedom (Chapters 5 and 6), it is important to

¹²¹ A sign of this harm is that even Hegel’s defenders—many of whom, ironically, read Hegel as more ‘naturalistic’ than I do—conflate the absolute Idea with spirit. For example, Willem deVries disregards their difference when he interprets the Addition to § 247, where we learn that nature is ‘the Idea in the form of otherness’, as follows: ‘[Nature] must, according to Hegel, be conceived of as pointing to spirit, working toward its own fulfilment in the complete actuality of spirit. Nature as a whole is itself a spiritual phenomenon; the existence and structure of nature cannot be understood solely on natural principles but must be referred to spirit. In that the very being of nature is realized only through spirit, nature is self-external.’ Willem A. deVries, *Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity: An Introduction to Theoretical Spirit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 47.

¹²² Krell, *Contagion*, p. 120.

clarify what precisely this immanent process *is* and how this process is *presented* in Hegel's system.

4.9. Nature's System of Stages

That spirit is the *telos* of nature has significant consequences for how Hegel understands the project of the philosophy of nature. 'A rational consideration of Nature must consider how Nature is in its own self this process of becoming Spirit, of sublating its otherness.'¹²³ However, it would be a misunderstanding of Hegel's conception of spirit if one were to interpret spirit as guiding nature towards it from on high. The *telos* of nature is nature's own, *immanent* telos. What ensues in the philosophy of nature, then, is a presentation of the immanent *stages* or *levels* (*Stufe*) of nature whereby nature raises itself to progressively higher ontological determinations, culminating in the stages of organic life and, ultimately, spiritual freedom. As Hegel says, 'God does not remain petrified and dead; the very stones cry out and raise themselves to Spirit. God is subjectivity, activity, infinite actuality, in which otherness has only a transient being.'¹²⁴ Nature, therefore, *will not remain* nature, but will lead to its own sublation in the spiritual life of the human.

Since 'nature is to be regarded as a *system of stages* [System von Stufen], one arising necessarily from the other',¹²⁵ it is tempting to understand this system as one of natural *evolution*. Indeed, at first blush, one might think that when Hegel describes nature as a 'system of stages' he has in mind some kind of natural-historical development by which simple physical processes evolve into more complex processes and, ultimately, into human being. Interpreting Hegel in this way is appealing for many reasons, not least of which because it strikes the contemporary reader as sharing in our post-Darwinian worldview. However, as far as Hegel's system is concerned, such an evolution of natural forms is entirely out of the question. 'A thinking consideration must reject such nebulous, at bottom,

¹²³ *W 9*: Addition to § 247, 25; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 14.

¹²⁴ *W 9*: Addition to § 247, p. 25; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 15.

¹²⁵ *W 9*: § 249, 31; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20.

sensuous ideas, as in particular the so-called origination of the more highly developed animal organisms from the lower, and so on.¹²⁶

Now, it is important to distinguish between two different ways in which Hegel is opposed to conceiving nature in terms of natural-historical evolution. It is true that Hegel rejected the natural scientific conception of an origin of species, and this is one sense in which Hegel can be described as opposed to conceiving nature as ‘evolutionary’.¹²⁷ However, this first sense of Hegel’s opposition to evolutionary theory is somewhat insignificant. In order to see this, we can note that Hegel’s opposition to evolutionary biological theory depends in large part upon the empirical support, or lack thereof, for this theory at the time of his engagement with the biological sciences. Just as Kant rejected the notion that chemistry could be a genuine science prior to his discovery of Lavoisier,¹²⁸ so too Hegel’s rejection of evolutionary theory prior to the discoveries of Darwin can be read as part of a praiseworthy conservatism within Hegel’s speculative philosophy. One could go on to argue that insofar as Hegel rejects evolution as an *empirical-scientific* theory of the origination of species, his system is not necessarily *incompatible* with evolutionary theory.¹²⁹

And yet there is a second sense in which Hegel is opposed to the idea of natural-historical evolution, and this is absolutely central to Hegel’s entire nature-philosophical project. In fact, this more fundamental aspect of Hegel’s anti-evolutionism goes a long way in distinguishing Hegel’s philosophy of nature from his philosophy of spirit. Unlike the philosophy of spirit, which pays close attention to the *historical* unfolding of spirit’s necessary stages, the philosophy of nature is in no way concerned with nature’s history.

¹²⁶ *W 9*: Remark to § 249, 31-32; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20.

¹²⁷ ‘Even *if* the earth was once in a state where it had no living things but only the chemical process, and so on, yet the moment the lightning of life strikes into matter, at once there is present a determinate, complete creature, as Minerva fully armed springs forth from the head of Jupiter. The Mosaic story of creation is still the best in its quite naïve statement that on this day plants came into being, on another day the animals, and on another day man. Man has not developed himself out of the animal, nor the animal out of the plant; each is at a single stroke what it is’ (*W 9*: Addition to § 339, 349, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 284).

¹²⁸ On Kant’s subsequent reconsideration of the scientific potential of chemistry, see Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences*, pp. 264-290.

¹²⁹ For a compelling argument regarding the compatibility of Hegel’s nature philosophy with Darwinian evolution, see Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, pp. 173-175.

According to Hegel, it is mistaken to understand nature's system of stages as an *evolutionary* system, because this system is a *strictly* rational or logical system of stages. As such, Hegel's philosophy of nature is not simply opposed to the theory of evolution with respect to the origin of species, but much more fundamentally, Hegel sets his project apart from all historical considerations of nature. Thus, when Hegel claims that one stage of nature 'is not generated *naturally* out of the other',¹³⁰ he does not simply mean to reject some ontic theory pertaining to organic life. On the contrary, Hegel is rejecting any philosophical attempt to grasp nature's fundamental structure in terms of natural-historical development. Instead, according to Hegel, 'the dialectical Notion [...] leads forward the stages [of nature]', for this Notion is their 'inner side'.¹³¹

However, that nature is not a historically progressive system does not mean progress is lacking in nature. On the contrary, genuine progress for Hegel is *logical* or *rational* progress as opposed to the mere historical evolution with which a *wesenslogische Naturphilosophie* concerns itself. Far more important, from a Hegelian perspective, than the development of one being from another *in time*, is the rational development that makes every necessary form of nature *necessary*.¹³² Nature's system of stages is therefore the necessary progression that leads from the most basic or general determinations of nature as self-external reason to the most concrete determinations of nature wherein nature achieves 'inwardness'. At times, this progression may appear to reflect nature's 'history' in some vague sense. Plant life, for example, 'precedes' animal life in nature's dialectic. But the only *philosophical* or *speculative* sense in which plant life precedes animal life is in the sense that the logico-natural determination of plant life is what necessitates, through its own internal rational structure, the logico-natural determination of animal life. This means that the existence of plants necessitates the existence of animals, but it does *not* mean that plants

¹³⁰ *W 9*: § 249, 31; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20.

¹³¹ *W 9*: Remark to § 249, 31; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20. Emphasis modified.

¹³² Note, however, that Hegel himself reserves the language of 'progress' for rational development that is also expressed historically. Thus nature's system of stages is not, strictly speaking, 'progressive' in this technical sense (see Chapter 7.3. below). Yet Hegel does understand there to be an atemporal, rational *development* from abstraction to concreteness in nature, and it is therefore helpful to use the language of 'progress' here.

evolve *into* animals nor does it mean that animals must necessarily appear on Earth at a later stage of nature's historical development. Thus, that 'light' emerges at the end of Hegel's speculative mechanics does not mean that Hegel understands light to emerge from sheer mechanical phenomena at some point in time. Rather, light emerges *logically* from the rational structure of mechanical motion within a strictly rational development. The nature-philosophical sequence of stages, therefore, is a strictly *logical* sequence. 'It is the necessity of the Idea which causes each stage to complete itself by passing into another higher one, and the variety of forms must be considered as necessary and determinate.'¹³³

We can now see that whether or not species evolve from one another simply doesn't matter for Hegel, and his 'rejection' of biological evolution doesn't necessarily make his conception of nature 'outdated'. For the system of stages in Hegel's nature philosophy is a system of nature's gradual yet atemporal rational progression. From a Hegelian standpoint, it is of no consequence, philosophically speaking, when and how different forms of nature arise in a physical sense. Most likely there was a time before spirit *actually* emerged on the Earth. But whether or not such emergence 'happened' does not matter for Hegel. For philosophy concerns itself exclusively with *ontologico-rational necessity*, i.e. the *logic* of emergence. 'Chronological difference [*Zeitunterschied*] has no interest whatsoever for thought.'¹³⁴

Milič Čapek has it wrong, then, when he says that 'Nature is devoid of history' for Hegel, simply because Hegel isn't particularly interested in palaeontology or the history of

¹³³ *W 9*: Addition to § 249, 32; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 21, translation modified. In addition to conceiving nature's development as an ahistorical, logical explication of nature's fundamental stages, Hegel also sees the *historical* progress of *individuals* to be philosophically significant. The idea Hegel opposes is that individuals metamorphose into *other* individuals and that the whole of nature is a system of one individual 'becoming' something other than itself (*W 9*: § 249, 31; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20). Thus, Hegel says that metamorphosis is a concept which pertains exclusively to the individual (e.g. in the metamorphoses a caterpillar as pupa and butterfly) and to the absolute Idea *as a whole* and, in this latter case, metamorphosis is an ahistorical feature reality (Addition to § 249, 33; p. 22).

¹³⁴ *W 9*: Addition to § 249, 32; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20.

the Earth as discussed by Cuvier and Lamarck.¹³⁵ It is not that nature has no history, for Hegel, but rather that the history of nature simply doesn't *matter* to him. Whether the ontological structures of the natural world become instantiated over a drawn-out period or emerge instantaneously has no *rational* significance. Another way to put this is that reason cannot tell us when plant-life emerges in the history of the Earth or whether it emerges in time at all. What reason can tell us, according to Hegel, is *that* such forms must necessarily be instantiated (and are nothing beyond their necessary instantiation in reality) and *why* such forms must be instantiated.

In the conclusion to this thesis (Chapter 7), I will question this limit Hegel places on the philosophy of nature. As we will see, this limitation is closely related to Hegel's distinction between natural and spiritual *temporality*. For the time of spirit—unlike the time of nature—involves a philosophically significant *past*, and this is connected to Hegel's conception of spirit itself as being structurally analogous to his conception of time (and space being structurally analogous to nature). My intention here is therefore not to defend Hegel's conception of an ahistorical *Stufenfolge*, but to simply point out that from Hegel's perspective, nothing philosophically significant is *lost* in such a conception. On the contrary, because genuine freedom only expresses itself in *spiritual* life, it is only *spirit's* history that matters for philosophy. That is to say, from the perspective of philosophical reason, nature may just as well have always been the way it is.

4.10. Emergentism contra Organicism

Hegel understands his account of nature to be a *philosophical* account precisely insofar as it focuses exclusively upon the *rational* progression of nature's stages. Because Hegel describes his own project in this way, many contemporary scholars see in Hegel's

¹³⁵ Milič Čapek, 'Hegel and the Organic View of Nature' in *Hegel and the Sciences*, ed. by Robert S. Cohen and Marx W. Wartofsky (Dordrecht: Springer, 1984), p. 112. In fact, Hegel is entirely sensitive to Cuvier's paleontological research, and Hegel's rejection of the idea of epigenesis (what we now call evolution) is of a piece with his sympathies with Cuvier, who also rejected the theory and conceives the organism as morphologically static. For an excellent account of the significance of Cuvier's comparative anatomy for Hegel's philosophy, see Henry Somers-Hall, *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation: Dialectics of Negation and Difference* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), pp. 221-224.

philosophy of nature a more conservative project than in the philosophies of nature pursued by Schelling and his followers. More specifically, it looks as though Hegel limits himself to articulating the *concepts* we employ in the various ways we come to understand the natural world and the rational structure ('normativity') within which these concepts and the concepts they imply are embedded. I take it that, on this interpretation, the reason Hegel doesn't attend to natural-historical development is because his philosophy of nature issues from a relatively humble aim: to explicate the implicit rational structure at work in our understanding of the natural world.¹³⁶ Hegel's philosophy of nature, on this view, appears to have more in common with Kant's philosophy of science than Schelling's speculative physics.

It should be clear by now that I wholly reject this Kantian reading of Hegel. Hegel, on my interpretation, is far closer to Schelling than the above paragraph suggests. To be sure, Hegel sees himself as pursuing a profoundly different project than Schelling, but the reason for this self-conception must be made clear: first and foremost, it is Schelling's *methodology* which Hegel explicitly opposes, i.e. the *way* Schelling seeks to disclose his ontology of nature. From a Hegelian perspective, Schelling's method of intellectual intuition, his use of analogies, and his general disregard for specifying the *logical* development of nature amounts to a failure on Schelling's part to think *immanently*, to allow nature's ontological determinations to show themselves without smuggling in any preconceptions as to what those ontological determinations will be. To be sure, Hegel believes that this failure to think immanently leads Schelling, at times, to conceive of the absolute as improperly differentiated, and thus Hegel takes issue with aspects of Schellingian ontology as such. But Hegel is in no way critical of Schelling's intention to construct a speculative ontology of nature. We must keep in mind, then, that when Hegel insists upon the strictly *rational* relationship between the stages of his philosophy of nature,

¹³⁶ See, for example, Sebastian Rand, 'The Importance and Relevance of Hegel's "Philosophy of Nature"', *Review of Metaphysics* 61 (2007), pp. 379-400. According to Rand, 'an adequate study of the *Philosophy of Nature* yields results for the problem of the rationality of scientific theory change, as well as yielding results in philosophy of mind and epistemology' (*ibid.*, p. 382). The same epistemologically-oriented tendency can be found in Petry's interpretation of the philosophy of nature as a 'structuralization of the natural sciences [which] has much in common with medieval scholasticism'. Perry's Introduction to his translation of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 21.

he is in no way limiting the philosopher's access to the actual *being* of nature. On the contrary, these comments indicate precisely how Hegel conceives the fundamental being of nature, namely, as an intrinsically rational (albeit self-alienated or 'negatively rational') domain, the being of which can only be properly grasped by allowing nature's intrinsic rationality to unfold dialectically in thought. In other words, according to Hegel, it is the rational structure of *nature itself* which must be considered in a properly speculative physics, and such a speculative thinking ought not to get bogged down in the sensuous history of nature lest it divert the philosopher's attention from nature's essential being.

There are at least two ways that Hegel's philosophy of nature can be understood to be a strictly rationalist project, with no concern for historical development, and yet fully ontological in its aims. I will call these ways of interpreting Hegel's philosophy of nature the 'emergentist' and 'organicist' interpretations. Both interpretations can be legitimately argued for with reference to Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*. However, the 'emergentist' view is both more convincing with respect to Hegel's claims about the ontological status of logical categories and more compelling as a nature-philosophical perspective. For these reasons, I defend the 'emergentist' interpretation against what I am calling 'organicism'.

On both the emergentist and organicist interpretations, Hegel's philosophy of nature progresses rationally from one stage to another, and this rational derivation of stages presents us with the fundamental structure of the natural world as it is in itself. The fundamental difference between these interpretations lies in the ontological priority attributed to various features of nature. On the organicist interpretation of Hegel, nature is fundamentally *living*, a self-organising totality rightly understood as analogous to the organism described at the end of the philosophy of nature in the section entitled 'organics'. According to this view, Hegel begins with the most abstract forms of nature and shows that they imply successively more concrete forms. The philosophy of nature thus begins with a consideration of sheer matter-in-motion in order to show that this mechanical realm proves to be an abstraction from a more ontologically robust natural world involving the kind of self-development for which a speculative mechanics cannot account. On this view, the philosophy of nature works its way through a gradual, rational progression until it finally

becomes apparent that the inorganic, selfless stages of nature had *presupposed* an organic ontological framework all along.

It follows from this that the only sense in which nature can be said to be ‘mechanical’ or ‘chemical’, on the organicist interpretation, is insofar as natural phenomena are *misunderstood* as being distinct from the organic *unity* of nature. This does not mean that the organicist denies any explanatory power to mechanist or physicalist ways of conceiving nature. But it does mean that, from the organicist’s point of view, natural phenomena are abstracted away from their *true* being if they are not recognised as part of a *whole*, i.e. a self-organising, living, and free nature within which abstract phenomena have their place *as* mechanical, chemical, and so on. It is important to recognise that, on this view, natural phenomena such as mechanical motion are possible only because nature is always already a self-determining organism in which certain ‘parts’ can be seen—from a limited perspective—to interact mechanically. I want to reiterate here that one can make a compelling argument for reading Hegel in this manner. But for reasons that I explain below, I believe this interpretation misses out on the ontological integrity retained by the more abstract stages of nature and, related to this, inverts the ontological dependence of concrete phenomena upon abstract phenomena.

As I see it, there are three interrelated problems with the organicist interpretation:

- (1) The organicist reading of Hegel interprets nature to be, first and foremost, a self-organising *whole* (even if this supposed originary wholeness of nature is only discovered systematically through the immanent self-sublation of nature’s inorganic stages).
- (2) Because nature is understood to be a self-organising whole, organic *life* is taken to be the truth of nature in such a manner as to overshadow Hegel’s thoughtful consideration of inorganic material processes and their *real* being.
- (3) By understanding nature as something of a ‘giant organism’, the inorganic features of nature lose not only their ontological integrity and relative autonomy, but also their ontological *priority* as *conditioning* organic life (3.1) and, moreover, *nature’s wholeness itself* (3.2).

For the time being, I will bracket issues regarding nature's organic wholeness and focus on the relationship between the inorganic and organic features *of* nature.

Čapek's paper, 'Hegel and the Organic View of Nature' helps to shed some light on the relation between the organic and inorganic as conceived by the organicist. According to Čapek, the question with which the organicist grapples is how to understand the being of inorganic matter, and the organicist answer to this question is that the inorganic should be understood as 'a very rudimentary form of life or proto-life'.¹³⁷ Thus, unlike the mechanist, who must explain *life* as 'a peculiarly complex case of lifelessness',¹³⁸ the organicist need only explain what appears to be *other* than life. Although largely critical of Hegel, Čapek sees this 'organic view of nature' as a promising feature of Hegel's system. As I see it, Hegel is neither an organicist in this sense nor is such a view promising for the philosophy of nature more generally. In fact, Hegel's distinctive views regarding the relationship between the organic and inorganic go a long way in showing up the limits of this organicist perspective.

Now, if 'mechanism' and 'organicism' are the only two options for a philosophy of nature, then surely Hegel is an organicist. Inorganic nature is, in an important sense for Hegel, proto-organic. But the 'organic view of nature' secures the integrity of the organic at the expense of the inorganic and in so doing interprets 'life' as nature's fundamental framework. Indeed, Čapek describes the organic view of nature as holding that 'life is the *primary* category.'¹³⁹ Hence, the organicist only asks the question as to how *inorganic* nature is possible and does not stop to ask how *life* is possible. In my view, Hegel's philosophy of nature presents a third option, beyond mechanism and organicism. Put simply: on Hegel's view, mechanical nature makes necessary organic nature, or, as Hegel says, life has its '*condition* in inorganic nature'.¹⁴⁰ In this way, Hegel is not opposed to mechanism *per se* (as is the organicist), but only to the mechanist philosopher who fails to recognise within

¹³⁷ Čapek, 'Hegel and the Organic View of Nature', p. 118.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

¹⁴⁰ *W* 6: 471; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 762.

mechanical nature itself the onto-logical source of more complex and self-determining forms of nature. But one cannot come to this realisation if one simply *begins* with life, as does the organicist. Indeed, as soon as one takes life to be ‘the *primary* category’ of the philosophy of nature, one has ruled out from the start the possibility of deriving the necessity of organic life from the primary manifestation of sheer reason, i.e. inorganic nature, wherein the Idea is most estranged from itself and freedom is most lacking. Hegel’s distinctive notion is that nature is utterly *inorganic*, *selfless* being which *achieves* organic selfhood through the activity—still strictly logical—of self-sublation: ‘In nature life appears as the *highest* stage, a stage that nature’s externality *attains* by withdrawing into itself and sublating itself in subjectivity.’¹⁴¹ The organicist interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of nature simply cannot account for this *achievement* of organic selfhood.

Just how inorganic nature sublates itself and leads to the emergence of various forms of subjectivity will be covered in the following chapters. Here, I want to focus on how the emergentist reading generally differs from the organicist reading. On the emergentist view, the ‘lower’ stages of nature retain their ontological integrity and are, therefore, irreducible to the higher forms that come later. Moreover, these ‘lower’ stages are not only ontologically distinct from the higher or more concrete forms of nature, but are the very phenomena which *necessitate* that there *be* more complex, concrete, and, indeed, organic forms of nature.

This latter claim of mine is by far the more contentious of the two and so I will consider it first. The idea I am defending is that Hegel’s logical philosophy of nature describes the ontological dependence of more complex stages of nature upon more simple stages. This should not be understood as a claim to the *physical* dependence of certain phenomena upon other phenomena. Of course, to a contemporary naturalist, distinguishing between ontological and physical dependence is outrageous, since it implies a non-physicalist ontology. But Hegel is an idealist precisely because he interprets being as *idea*, and in doing so, he can ascribe relations of ontological dependence to various features of nature without implying that such features of nature involve any kind of physical

¹⁴¹ *W 6*: 471; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 762, my emphasis. Hegel goes on: ‘Nature, having reached this Idea [of life] from the starting point of externality, transcends itself; its end does not appear as its beginning, but as its limit, in which it sublates itself.’

dependence. Thus, Hegel's philosophy of nature can posit the ontological dependence of light upon gravitational motion without making any absurd claims as to the physical dependence of light upon gravity. This is closely related to the fact that, even on the emergentist interpretation of Hegel, particular forms of nature do not emerge from other forms in time. This would be to mistake logical emergence for natural-historical emergence, and as I have already argued, Hegel is in no way interested in the latter. Nevertheless, if we understand logical emergence to be disclosive of ontological relations, as Hegel insists, then we should understand the logical emergence of light from gravitational motion to describe a relation of ontological dependence.

Now, in order for the abstract stages of nature to necessitate more complex logico-natural stages, the abstract stages must retain their ontological integrity. And this means that such determinations must not only have *real being* (Hegel's logic of nature is an ontology of nature), but such real being must be *actually* abstract and inorganic being. As Hegel says, 'it is characteristic of Nature to...let an abstract, separate moment exist independently.'¹⁴² In other words, abstract determinations of nature *really exist*, for Hegel, and they do not just exist as *proto-organic*. If this were the case, then Hegel would have very little to say about the wealth of natural phenomena he discusses in his nature philosophy (e.g. thrust, pressure, magnetism, sound, heat, crystallisation, colour). To see in these features of nature a mere wash of 'proto-life' is to *reduce* the ontological specificity of nature's stages to their quasi-organic features and thereby strip each stage of its relative autonomy. Indeed, it is to conceive nature as the night in which all cows are black.¹⁴³

My opposition to the organicist interpretation should not be understood as a denial that Hegel understands matter to be proto-organic. On the contrary, as I will go on to argue in the following chapter, sheer mechanical motion shows the first signs of self-determining freedom in nature, prior to the emergence of self-determining, individual organisms, and in this way, the mechanical realm is certainly proto-organic. But one risks obscuring the ontological distinctness of inorganic nature if it is *exclusively* understood as an anticipation

¹⁴² *W 9*: Addition to § 268, 81; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 61.

¹⁴³ Or the cow in which all nights are bovine?

of life. As James Kreines has argued, emphasising Hegel's conception of nature as a system of stages is helpful in combating the 'organic monist' interpretation of Hegel, since it is this system of stages that presents 'the whole of reality [as] structured into different "levels"'.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the rational *stratification* of nature is precisely what ensures the ontological integrity—and yet interconnectedness—of nature's fundamental features.¹⁴⁵

In my view, the organicist interpretation stems, in part, from a certain reading of Hegel's identification of the higher stages of reality as concrete and the lower stages as abstract. From the organicist perspective, abstract stages are abstract insofar as they are abstractions *from* the concrete determinacy of the organic. I argue that we must understand the relationship between the 'abstract' and 'concrete' stages of Hegel's system otherwise. Any given stage of Hegel's system is 'abstract' so long as it *necessitates* further ontological determinations, which it cannot, according to its own explicit logic, express. For example, mechanical nature simply cannot *express* the qualitative determinacy of light or the elements, but it is the *being* of mechanical nature that requires nature to express itself *as* qualitatively distinct. Thus, abstract determinations *necessitate* concrete determinations. If we interpret the abstractness of the mechanical stages of nature as abstractions *from* an organic, concrete totality, we miss out on Hegel's unique conception of the great chain of being, i.e. a chain that is expressed in reality 'from the bottom up'. As I see it, Hegel's *Realphilosophie* describes an ontological movement akin to an inversion of Neoplatonist emanation: the stages in which the Idea is most depleted in its oneness *raise themselves* to

¹⁴⁴ James Kreines, 'The Logic of Life: Hegel's Defense of Teleological Explanation of Living Beings' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, p. 375. Note, however, that Kreines also claims that the higher stages or *Stufen* of nature are more intelligible than the lower stages, and it isn't clear to me in what sense Kreines wants to grant different stages of nature various levels of intelligibility. I would prefer to put it the following way: the higher stages are more concrete and therefore ontologically rich expressions *of* intelligibility than the lower stages of nature. But we, as fully rational beings, can grasp the intelligible structure of mechanical nature just as much as we can grasp the intelligible structure of organic life and, moreover, our own spiritual freedom. It just so happens that there isn't as much explicit rationality to grasp *in* mechanical phenomena as there is in organic phenomena. Compare this to Kreines: 'mechanistic phenomena are perfectly real but only imperfectly intelligible. Living beings are more completely intelligible. And, ultimately, the only thing that is perfectly intelligible is us - or, more precisely, the general kind or *Gattung* whose instances are thinking and self-conscious beings' (*ibid.*, p. 376).

¹⁴⁵ Although it isn't clear to me whether Kreines would agree that the lower stages make the higher stages possible, his emphasis on nature as a *Stufenfolge* helps point out the problems with what he calls the 'organic monist' reading.

higher stages until, ultimately, the Idea achieves its unity-with-self in spiritual freedom. The process from nature to spirit is not an overflowing of ontological plentitude (procession from the One), but an activity of generating complexity through vacuity, from an originally impoverished reality which, thanks to its intrinsic activity of negation, fills itself with content and thereby becomes a unified reality.¹⁴⁶ Thus, on the emergentist reading, inertia in the domain of nature and habit in the domain of spirit *really exist*, and it is only *through* their existence that higher levels of natural and spiritual determinacy arise, that is, are made necessary.

I now want to refer back to the three features of the organicist interpretation of Hegel which I claimed make that interpretation problematic. It looks as though the emergentist interpretation resolves points (2) and (3.1) by establishing the ontological integrity of the inorganic stages of nature and locating the ontological necessity of organic life within the rational structure, and therefore being, of inorganic phenomena themselves. But the crux of privileging the organism in a philosophy of nature is in the equation of nature's *total* structure with the self-organising individuality of animal life. How, then, does emergentism resolve point (1), namely, that the organicist interpretation conceives nature as, first and foremost, a self-organising whole characterised by life and freedom?

There is no question that, for Hegel, 'Nature is, in itself, a living Whole.'¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Hegel's conception of nature's wholeness certainly draws upon Kant's conception of the organism's activity of self-organisation, and in this way Hegel is undoubtedly an organicist of some kind. However, I believe Hegel's view is misconstrued when he is taken

¹⁴⁶ Martin Drees, rightly in my view, suggests that Hegel's philosophy of nature can be read as an 'inverted emanationism' but he means something entirely different by this term, namely, a philosophy of nature which is pursued from the perspective of the higher form of reality, i.e. spirit ('Evolution and Emanation in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature', *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 13 [1992], p. 58). On my view, Hegel's nature philosophy is an 'inverted emanationism' because it proceeds from a systematically initial stage of ontological impoverishment (nature) to one of plentitude (spirit). (If we begin with the *Logic*, the same kind of accumulation of determinacy takes place). But this reading is only possible if we refuse Drees's presumption that 'it is essentially spirit which sets forth the progress from materiality to immateriality' (p. 59). We need not grant spirit ontological priority in order to account for Hegel's remarks against evolution. What I am calling Hegel's 'inverted emanationism' is distinct from a certain form of evolutionary thinking insofar as, in Hegel's system, every stage of nature's development is an expression of the absolute Idea or self-determining reason—hence its resemblance to Neoplatonism, albeit in inverted form.

¹⁴⁷ *W* 9: § 251, 36; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 24.

to conceive nature as a whole *first and foremost*, as though the abstract features of nature acquire their ontological determinacy from the self-organising activity of nature's overall structure.

When I claim that, for the organicist, nature is 'first and foremost' a 'living Whole', I do not mean to restrict the field of 'organicist interpretations' to those commentators who take Hegel to *presuppose* that nature is a whole. On the strongest organicist reading of Hegel, we *learn* that nature is a whole only through the dialectic of nature presented in the *Encyclopaedia*. But in doing so, we come to discover that the abstract stages of nature with which the philosophy of nature begins are granted their ontological sense by their place in nature's overall system (nature's organic unity).¹⁴⁸ It is in this sense that the organicist interpretation, even at its strongest, takes nature's wholeness to precede its abstract stages. The fundamental question, then, is not whether Hegel presupposes organic life as the framework of nature, but whether he understands nature to *be* fundamentally whole and only *derivatively* mechanical, chemical, and so on, or whether there is not an alternative ontology at work in Hegel's conception of nature's organic wholeness. The question is therefore one of ontological priority: Is nature's wholeness 'there from the start' (even if this fact only comes to light through a presuppositionless logic of nature) or is nature's wholeness *achieved*—logically but therefore ontologically—once the system of stages has reached its natural apex in animal life?

¹⁴⁸ I take Beiser to be a representative of this strong version of organicism. According to Beiser, one of the significant developments in Hegel's thought is from his early, theological conception of life as organic unity to the scientific notion that the organic unity of life must be made intelligible and not merely 'experienced'. Beiser, 'Hegel and Naturphilosophie', p. 138. See also Beiser, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 88-89. This, of course, has a great deal to do with Hegel's attempt to distance himself from the esotericism of romanticism and his commitment to justifying a quasi-romantic 'worldview' from the standpoint of rational phenomenology and logic. On my reading, Beiser rightly locates a shift in Hegel's thought *away* from the immediate, intuited organic unity of life. But that Hegel leaves behind his earlier conception of the absolute as life is not reducible to Hegel's newfound commitment to a logical method. More significantly for Hegel's ontology is that the mature Hegel realises that organic life is made possible only in an ontological process of abstract and, indeed, *mechanical* self-negation. With this, Hegel does not only leave behind the non-discursive, intuitionist conception of the absolute as life, but he abandons the ontology that accompanied this earlier conception of life. For if life is *immediate* and not arrived at through the logic of the *non-living*, then life is not truly absolute from the perspective of the mature Hegel, for whom the absolute is always a *mediated* immediacy—or what Schelling calls a 'derivative absoluteness'. I take Beiser to be a representative of the organicist interpretation of Hegel, then, insofar as he sees Hegel to champion an 'organic concept of nature' (Cf. Beiser, 'Hegel and Naturphilosophie'), even while recognising that Hegel doesn't presuppose such a concept.

On my view, the latter is not only a more compelling conception of nature, but it draws out key insights of Hegel's philosophy of nature which are lost on the organicist interpretation. I take Kenneth Westphal to take a similar view in his own defense of an emergentist interpretation of Hegel: 'To say that Hegel is an emergentist is to reject strongly holistic interpretations of Hegel's views, according to which "the whole" has ontological priority over its parts and determines their characteristics, or at least, more so than vice versa.'¹⁴⁹ As Westphal acknowledges, Hegel is certainly a holist of some kind. Nature is a *system*, and, moreover, the manifestation of the absolute Idea; thus nature's features must certainly be related to one another in some intrinsic sense, necessitating a certain holism. But Hegel's holism is exaggerated when the wholeness of nature is taken to be more *fundamental* than its parts, as a natural 'self' which makes gravitational, magnetic, and chemical phenomena possible. What is necessary, then, is a conception of nature's wholeness wherein such wholeness is in some sense consequent upon the logic of nature's more abstract parts.

Yet again, Hegel's conception of nature as a system of stages is helpful in articulating the idea that nature's wholeness is dependent upon its 'parts'. What makes nature a 'whole' for Hegel? It is not that nature is an organic *individual* which internalises exteriority and returns to itself as a living process (as in animal life). Nature is a whole, rather, because it is a rationally progressive system of interconnected stages. It is thus only insofar as nature is a *Stufenfolge* that it can be said to be a self-organising whole.¹⁵⁰ To be sure, such a conception of nature's total structure is 'organicist' insofar as it emphasises the organic *unity* of nature's various features, and this emphasis on nature's intrinsic unity allows Hegel to reject any mechanistic conception of nature's total structure. But we must take note that mechanism, as regards nature's total structure, is misguided for a very particular reason: a mechanistic understanding of nature's total structure takes every feature of nature to be *contingently*

¹⁴⁹ Kenneth Westphal, 'Philosophizing about Nature: Hegel's Philosophical Project' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, p. 305n71.

¹⁵⁰ As Hegel puts it in the introduction to the philosophy of nature, nature 'present[s] itself as an organisation' to the philosopher of nature and the empirical physicist alike insofar as nature's content, i.e. its 'forces, laws and genera' are not presented as a 'simple aggregate' but as 'arranged in orders and classes' (*W* 9: § 246, 15; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 6, translation modified).

related to every other feature. Thus, it is the necessary, rational relationships *between* each of nature's ontologically distinct stages that requires us to dispense with our mechanical view of nature's total structure, where 'parts' (e.g. gravity, light, life) are only contingently related to one another. Hegel's fundamental opposition to mechanism regarding nature's totality, therefore, is not that it fails to comprehend nature as a 'giant organism', but that it fails to see the rational interconnectedness of the *various*—that is, living *and non-living*, physical *and mechanical*—stages of nature. From this strictly logical perspective, Čapek's Bergsonian, 'organic view of nature' is just as mechanistic as La Mettrie's *L'homme machine*, for each ignores the rationality threading together nature's ontological diversity.

It follows from Hegel's conception of nature's wholeness as the rational unity of various stages that mechanism *must* play a role in explaining some natural phenomena as they are in themselves. If this were not the case, then nature's *Stufenfolge*, as presented in the *Encyclopaedia*, would be exclusively heuristic, allowing the philosopher to see, as one does in the 1807 *Phenomenology*, the *inadequacy* of various ways of understanding nature before finally arriving at the true standpoint of nature-philosophical science with speculative biology (the 'organics'). But Hegel's philosophy of nature is, unlike the *Phenomenology*, part of his ontology, and thus every stage of the nature philosophy must be read as an *actual stage* of nature as it *really is*. Above, I argued that this can help us see how nature's more concrete stages are ontologically dependent upon its more abstract stages. Here I want to suggest that the abstract stages of nature make possible the very rational structure of nature as a totality. Abstract stages of nature are not abstracted away from a concrete whole; such stages rather make that whole *possible* through their very rational structure.

Although organicism interprets Hegel's nature philosophy as an ontology, it tends to make that ontology distinct from the logical process presented in the *Encyclopaedia* itself, since it takes the *end* of nature's logical process to be illustrative of the process as a

whole.¹⁵¹ But if we interpret Hegel's ontology of nature as an actual *Stufenfolge*—not a sequence of stages that unfolds over time, but one that nevertheless really *is*—then we cannot reduce its stages to mere abstractions from a whole. On the contrary, the stages of nature *make the whole possible and necessary*. Kreines puts the point well:

It is crucial that reality as a whole would not have a structure because it is really an organism, organic, or a *Naturzweck*. The point would be precisely the opposite: reality has a differentiated structure insofar as there are many different kinds or levels of phenomena which differ in real and important ways from biological phenomena and from one another.¹⁵²

The differences that make up the *Stufenfolge* are what allows that system to *be* a unified system at all, since genuine unity requires ontological differences which can be united via their distinctness. On the emergentist interpretation of Hegel, the whole does not precede its parts, but is made possible *by* those parts.¹⁵³ Indeed, nature only *proves* to be a whole in the rational progress it makes through its ontologically distinct stages, and this progress *towards* wholeness is just as much an ontological feature of nature itself as it is a feature of our comprehension of nature's being.

For Hegel, the natural *telos* towards which nature strives is posited *by nature itself*, and the *wholeness* that nature is only realises itself via an immanent process of self-negation.¹⁵⁴ That is to say, the whole of nature does not ontologically precede its stages, but

¹⁵¹ Depending on how one interprets the three syllogisms that close the *Encyclopaedia*, there may be good reason to distinguish Hegel's ontology from its logical presentation. According to Ferrarin, 'Hegel suggests that the order of the *Encyclopaedia* is that of a didactic exposition' presented in the form of immediacy. On Ferrarin's view, Hegel's ontology would only achieve full transparency if it were presented according to the third syllogism. Cf. Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, pp. 56-57. I follow Findlay, however, who sees the three syllogisms as far more compatible: 'The syllogism which is the Absolute can accordingly be read as the Idea perfecting itself in self-conscious Spirit by way of its self-alienation in Nature, but it can equally be read, Hegel tells us at the end of the *Encyclopaedia*...as Nature using conscious Spirit to bring out its inherent Idea, or as Spirit using the Idea to achieve theoretical and practical mastery over Nature. What these final *Encyclopaedia* passages tell us is that there is a place for Nature and naturalism in the philosophy of Hegel, just as there is a place for a dynamic Platonic realism and for a teleological, social subjectivism' (Findlay, Foreword to the *Philosophy of Nature*, p. xiii).

¹⁵² James Kreines, 'The Logic of Life: Hegel's Defense of Teleological Explanation of Living Beings', p. 376.

¹⁵³ Hegel himself uses the word 'emergiert' in this context in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*: 'The simple, self-surveying whole [of scientific cognition] itself emerges from the wealth in which its reflection', i.e. its attention to abstract stages 'seemed to be lost' (*W* 3: 53; *Phenomenology*, p. 33).

¹⁵⁴ I distinguish organic life and spiritual freedom from one another as the 'natural *telos* of nature' and the 'non-natural *telos* of nature'.

those stages, of their own immanent necessity, require further stages which, by the end of the philosophy of nature, prove to be connected in a quasi-organic sense. The organicist wrongly interprets this organic unity as ontologically primary. What comes to light, then, is that on the emergentist interpretation which emphasises nature's ontologically stratified character, the logic of inorganic nature is not only the condition of life, but equally conditions nature's *wholeness*. Thus, on my view, Hegel is committed to the emergence of *both* organic life as an ontic region of nature *and* nature's quasi-organic *wholeness*, both of which are ontological consequences of inorganic nature's intrinsic logic.

None of this is to say that Hegel privileges the inorganic or lacks interest in life. There is no question that Hegel is, as is Schelling, a 'philosopher of life' in an important sense. For life is a higher and more truthful expression of the Idea than the non-living. But that life is determined as *higher* in the system does not make it more *fundamental*. On the contrary, the higher and more truthful expressions of being, for Hegel, are always emergent from the lower and less truthful expressions of being.

And yet the absolute idealists are so often taken to be organicists. One reason they are interpreted as such is due to the practical aims of their systems. This is how Beiser describes the task of the philosophy of nature: 'If...it could be shown that nature were an organism, then it would be possible to make mind part of nature without embracing a crude materialism and determinism.'¹⁵⁵ And elsewhere Beiser writes:

The great attraction of the organic paradigm [to philosophers at the turn of the nineteenth century] is that it seemed to uphold the unity and continuity of nature by explaining both the mental and the physical according to a single paradigm. It seemed to realize that long-sought ideal of all science since the seventeenth century: a non-reductivistic yet naturalistic explanation of life and the mind.¹⁵⁶

On this view, Hegel and Schelling are seen as proponents of an 'organic concept of nature' because such a concept allows them to resolve a fundamental tension in our understanding of the world, a world which appears, on the one hand, mechanically deterministic, and on

¹⁵⁵ Beiser, 'Hegel and Naturphilosophie', p. 139.

¹⁵⁶ Beiser, *Hegel*, pp. 85-86.

the other, inclusive of self-determining, moral individuals. The ‘organic concept of nature’, in other words, is meant to resolve Kant’s third antinomy by conceiving both nature and freedom in terms of natural self-development, or life. On this view, ‘life’ is the key nature-philosophical concept because it allows one to conceive nature as *self-determining* and spiritual freedom as *natural*.

Beiser is no doubt correct to see in Hegel, as well as Schelling, a motivation to understand nature itself in terms of freedom such that human freedom could be shown to belong in the world. Moreover, Beiser is right to focus upon life as playing an essential role in *unifying* nature and spirit. What I reject is the notion—implicit in Beiser’s interpretation—that either philosopher accomplishes this unification of nature and spirit through a logic of *selfsame identity*. On Beiser’s reading, life becomes the ‘paradigm’ for both inorganic nature and spirit. In this way, the difference between the non-living and life, as well as that between life and spirit, is understood as a difference of degree.¹⁵⁷ The problem with this interpretation, then, is that life unifies nature and spirit by *levelling down* the *Stufengang* of reality into a relatively homogenous ‘living whole’.

As I see it, there is a second way of understanding life as unifying nature and spirit, and this is by conceiving the nature-spirit identity as being achieved *via* life. On the emergentist interpretation of Hegel, life *unifies* inorganic and spiritual reality by playing the role of their necessary mediation. In other words, inorganic nature passes *through* life in order to make spiritual freedom possible. The identity between nature and spirit, then, is not the living totality from which both nature and spirit are granted their ontological sense; the nature-spirit identity is a *processual* identity, an identity made possible through an activity of differentiation.

¹⁵⁷ Beiser acknowledges that spirit should be distinguished from nature, but then goes on to conceive spirit as a higher degree of *life*: ‘Of course, Hegel’s concept of spirit stands on a higher level than nature, and it is not reducible to it; but it is still based upon nature, given that Hegel understands spirit as the highest degree of organization and development *of life*.’ Beiser, ‘Hegel and Naturphilosophie’, p. 144, my emphasis. This is consistent with Beiser’s claim that absolute idealism is compatible with non-mechanistic naturalism, a claim which remains, on my view, too reductive of spirit’s ontological specificity. Beiser, *Hegel*, p. 69. Cf. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 2, in which Beiser subsequently argues for the continuity between Hegel and the early German romantics. See also Chapter 1.9 above.

And because this activity of differentiation is propelled by active *negation*, the consequent identity of nature and spirit involves robust qualitative difference. Thus, the stages of nature that culminate in organic life and the self-liberation of spirit are qualitatively distinct stages of reality. In Beiser's view, 'Hegel never understood spirit as something existing above and beyond nature but as the highest organization and development of its powers.'¹⁵⁸ While it is true that Hegel refuses the idea that spirit is something 'above and beyond' nature, Beiser's conception of the nature-spirit relation overlooks the qualitative difference inherent in this relation. Hegel conceives nature as the self-liberation *from* nature, an onto-logical *negation* of nature which, while made possible *by* nature, cannot be said to proceed from nature as a higher organisation of nature's *powers*. Such a description of the nature-spirit relation ignores Hegel's unique account of the *impotence* of nature and the self-negating negativity that is spiritual freedom, both of which, from a Hegelian perspective, ensure the qualitative distinctness of nature and spirit.

But doesn't the emergentist reading I am promoting turn Hegel into some sort of 'dualist'? If nature and spirit are so *different* from one another, has Hegel not simply sided with Descartes over Spinoza? By no means. Beiser is entirely correct to note that Hegel rejected the idea that the inorganic, organic, and spiritual are *substantially* distinct; there is no vital *substance* underlying organic life, nor is there a *spiritual* substance underlying human freedom.¹⁵⁹ But Hegel's rejection of substance dualism should not be read as an implicit acceptance of substance *monism*. What Hegel rejects is rather the limited philosophical standpoint which conceives being in terms of substance alone. Indeed, it is the *substance* metaphysics of pre-Kantian rationalism that places intrinsic limits on that philosophy with respect to the nature-spirit relation. That the inorganic, organic, and spiritual are not substantially distinct, therefore, does not mean they are ontologically indistinct. On the contrary, the inorganic, organic, and spiritual are expressions of distinctive ontological structures of reality that, it turns out, do not differ with respect to substance.

¹⁵⁸ Beiser, *Hegel*, p. 112.

¹⁵⁹ Hence Beiser's identification of Hegel's metaphysics as 'monist' (*Hegel*, p. 63-64).

With these remarks, it becomes apparent that the significance of the emergentist model I am endorsing extends beyond the inorganic-organic relationship and into the relationship between nature and spirit. To understand inorganic matter, organic life, and spiritual freedom as merely quantitatively distinct amounts to a reductionism that Hegel fought against tooth and nail. I agree with Thomas Posch, then, who claims that Hegel's version of the *scala naturae* constitutes an 'antireductionism' that is 'one of the chief strengths of Hegel's philosophy of nature - and moreover of his system in general.'¹⁶⁰

In our contemporary age, when reductionism is rejected it is usually due to the fact that reductionism threatens to gloss over the ontological specificity of life and freedom.¹⁶¹ In the early nineteenth century, Schelling and Hegel wanted to avoid a similar threat posed by mechanistic conceptions of nature. And this is how Beiser reads Schelling and Hegel as non-reductive naturalists. However, Schelling and Hegel were *also* opposed to reducing the ontological specificity of *inorganic* phenomena to life or spirit.¹⁶² Indeed, genuine anti-reductionism cuts both ways: the higher ontological determinations, such as life and spirit, are distinct and must not be reduced to inorganic and unfree natural processes (nor, as we shall see, should life and spirit be reduced to one another); but likewise the unfreedom encountered in inorganic nature must not be mistaken for merely *illusory* being hiding away

¹⁶⁰ Posch, 'Hegel and the Sciences', p. 190. According to Ferrarin, Hegel is opposed to the notion that nature *itself* is a *scala naturae*. Instead, Ferrarin sees the 'dialectical concept' as *guiding* 'the hierarchical structure of the whole of the Philosophy of Nature' (Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, p. 211). But I believe this makes the concept out to be something external to *nature*, as if the concept-nature relation should be understood in terms of either a logic of being or of essence. The 'dialectical concept' is immanent to nature, for nature just is the concept in its alienation-from-self. On my reading, the confusion that characterises Ferrarin's account of this issue is between a graduated onto-*logical* sequence of stages and a graduated *historical* sequence of stages. The latter is, without a doubt, antithetical to Hegel's project. But it isn't clear to me why Hegel's rejection of natural-historical metamorphosis would oppose him to the notion of the *scala naturae*, a concept which, at least until the eighteenth century, had always described an ahistorical system of being (Cf. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*). To conceive nature's system of stages as somehow being a *reconstruction* of nature implies that this system of stages is not, after all, the immanent sequence—albeit atemporal—of nature's own logic. Cf. Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, pp. 210-211.

¹⁶¹ Richard H. Jones, *Reductionism: Analysis and the Fullness of Reality* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000) pp. 14-16.

¹⁶² With respect to Hegel, Willem deVries makes this latter point well: 'I find no indication that Hegel thinks he is reducing mechanics to psychology, nor any indication that he intends to eliminate mechanics...reductionism is not an open possibility, because then the stages he discovers in nature and spirit—the whole complex articulation of his system—would collapse into one basic level' (deVries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, p. 42).

its true living nature. Inorganic nature *is not organic*, for Hegel, and, as I will argue below, spirit *is not natural*.

What makes this robust anti-reductionism especially compelling, however, is that it is premised upon the ontological *continuity* of the distinct stages of nature and spirit. The *difference* between inorganic matter and organic life, for example, in fact *unites* these two regions of nature. For the ontological specificity of organic life is made necessary by the logic of inorganic matter itself. Thus, Hegel's anti-reductionism is an emergentism in the following sense: the most basic ontological reality is inorganic nature, and the rational structure of this inorganic nature requires that there be *another* level of natural reality, namely, an *organic* reality in which nature proves to involve self-determining, autonomous individuals. And, as I will argue in Chapter 6, this emergence of organic life from the logic of inorganic matter anticipates the subsequent emergence of spirit, wherein autonomous *personhood* develops out of organic individuality as ontologically distinct from mere life.

4.11. Speculative Physics and Empirical Physics

As the above makes explicit, Hegel's notion that nature is rationally stratified is essential to his philosophical vision. It is this attention to nature's rational stratification which allows Hegel to distinguish his philosophical or speculative approach to nature from what we ordinarily take to be our primary theoretical access to nature, namely, natural science or what Hegel calls 'empirical physics'. In this section, I want to consider the relationship between Hegel's speculative physics and the natural sciences.

First, it is important to recognise that although the philosophy of nature is a rationalist enterprise, it does not have exclusive purchase upon a thinking relationship to the natural world. On the contrary, Hegel also understands empirical physics to be a 'thinking

apprehension of Nature'.¹⁶³ Thus, according to Hegel, empirical physics 'contains much more thought than it admits and is aware of [...] Physics and the Philosophy of Nature, therefore, are not distinguished from each other as perception and thought, but only by *the kind of manner of their thought*'.¹⁶⁴

That speculative and empirical physics are engaged in quite different forms of thought, however, makes all the difference. Whereas empirical physics simply utilises concepts to understand various natural phenomena under empirical observation, speculative physics considers these concepts explicitly and without reference to experience.¹⁶⁵ This *explicit* consideration of concepts requires the philosophy of nature, as we have already seen, to be presented as an immanent unfolding of conceptual stages which are rationally connected to one another. If we grant Hegel's rationalist starting point which claims strong ontological, consciousness-independent reality to concepts, then we can see the following: By attending to the necessary interconnections *between* all of the concepts that are utilised in our understanding of nature, speculative physics is able to present the immanent *unity* of all natural phenomena. According to Hegel, this makes the nature-philosophical 'thinking apprehension of nature' far more rational than the thinking at work in empirical physics. For

¹⁶³ *W 9*: Introductory Addition, 11; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 3. See also, the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: 'The opposition of physics and Natural Philosophy is therefore not the opposition of the unthinking and the thinking view of Nature; Natural Philosophy means, if we take it in its whole extent, nothing else than the thoughtful contemplation of Nature; but this is the work of ordinary physics also, since its determinations of forces, laws, etc., are thoughts' (*W 20*: 425-236; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, pp. 535-536).

¹⁶⁴ *W 9*: Introductory Addition, 11; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 3. Note that, according to Hegel, 'physics' isn't aware of its own rationality. Like the empiricist who models his philosophical activity on the same image of Baconian science, the empirical scientist doesn't recognise that experience is mediated by *conceptual thought*: 'All empiricists...believe themselves to be keeping to experience alone; it is to them an unknown fact that in receiving these perceptions they are indulging in metaphysics' (*W 20*: 84; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, p. 182). To drive home the point that empirical physicists are indeed rational, Hegel tells his audience that if physicists *didn't* utilise concepts but merely perceived the natural world, then animals would themselves be empirical physicists (*W 9*: Addition to § 246, 16; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 7). This comment is somewhat misleading, since Hegel doesn't in fact understand thought to be the *only* distinguishing feature of human existence. Non-human animals do not *perceive* for Hegel, and the perception discussed in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* phenomenology is therefore a unique feature of *consciousness*. That being said, Hegel's claim in this addition about non-human 'scientists' is helpful to make the point that empirical science requires *more* than perception for empirical knowledge and, as I will argue in Chapter 6, that it is through thought alone that human freedom achieves complete liberation from nature.

¹⁶⁵ 'As the Philosophy of Nature is a *comprehending (begreifend)* treatment, it has as its object the same *universal*, but *explicitly*, and it considers this universal in its *own immanent necessity* in accordance with the self-determination of the Notion' (*W 9*: § 246, 15; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 6).

the latter remains inattentive to the immanent movement of *logos* in nature and simply reflects upon nature without considering the logical structures of and relations between the concepts employed in this reflection.¹⁶⁶ As a result, empirical science has no sense of the *unity* of nature. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, then, the empirical scientist whose thought is directed explicitly to *experience* of the natural world is much further from grasping the *being* of nature than the speculative philosopher whose attention to nature's total rational structure melts the veil of Isis.¹⁶⁷

Getting to the heart of nature, then, doesn't seem to involve any experience of the natural world. Indeed, it looks as though speculative physics operates quite independently of empirical physics and the latter's experiential engagement with nature. For speculative physics sinks into the rational core of the natural world and allows its rational determinations to unfold logically as a system of stages. In this way, Hegel acknowledges the limited form of rationality in the natural sciences, but insists upon the self-sufficiency of the philosophy of nature as a strictly *rational* derivation of nature's fundamental features. This is what Hegel means when he says that the philosophy of nature, unlike empirical physics, considers nature 'in its *own immanent necessity* in accordance with the self-determination of the Notion'.¹⁶⁸

However, this is by no means Hegel's last word on the relationship between philosophy and the natural sciences. At times, Hegel describes the philosophy of nature as being *dependent* upon the discoveries of the empirical sciences. In fact, in the Remark to the very paragraph wherein Hegel defines nature philosophy as proceeding through the sheer 'self-determination of the Notion', we find the following: 'Not only must philosophy be in

¹⁶⁶ Another way to put this is that the thought of the natural scientist is characterised by *Verstand* rather than *Vernunft*. Against Stone, then, who argues that modern science 'embodies a problematic approach to the natural world' since it 'rests on inadequate metaphysical assumptions' (*Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005], p. xi.), I take Hegel's rationalist philosophy of nature to champion, rather than criticise, Baconian science. This does not mean that modern empirical science is without limitations, and metaphysical limitations at that. Rather, I think Hegel is of the view that such limitations are not to be overcome by empirical science itself. It is the task of philosophy—and to a limited extent the other two forms of absolute spirit, art and religion—to disclose the more fundamental, rational structure of the natural (and spiritual) world.

¹⁶⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 246, 19; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ *W 9*: § 246, 15; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 6.

agreement with our empirical knowledge of Nature, but the *origin* [*Entstehung*] and *formation* [*Bildung*] of the Philosophy of Nature presupposes and is conditioned by empirical physics.¹⁶⁹

There is, therefore, an apparent tension in Hegel's philosophy of nature. On the one hand, the philosophy of nature is meant to be an independent, rationalist derivation of the fundamental stages of nature. On the other hand, this philosophy must be in *agreement* with the empirical sciences and even draws upon the discoveries of those sciences, making them philosophy's presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) and condition (*Bedingung*) of possibility. If the philosophy of nature is wholly dependent upon empirical research in this way, it doesn't look as though philosophy is the unconditioned, rational science Hegel claims it is.

Sorting out Hegel's views about the relationship between philosophy and empirical science is one of the most contentious areas in scholarship on Hegel's philosophy of nature. Various interpretations have been proposed to resolve this apparent tension. However, as I see it, there really isn't much ambiguity here. Contrary to what Buchdahl claims, namely, that 'Hegel speaks and acts with a divided voice' regarding this matter,¹⁷⁰ I believe Hegel is in fact quite explicit about how he understands the relationship between his philosophy of nature and the empirical sciences. Just after his oft-quoted remark about philosophy presupposing and being conditioned by natural science, Hegel qualifies this claim:

The course of a [philosophical] science's origin and the preliminaries of its construction [*Vorarbeiten*] are one thing, while the [philosophical] science itself is another. In the latter, the former can no longer appear as its foundation [*Grundlage*]; here the foundation must be the necessity of the Notion.¹⁷¹

What Hegel seems to be saying is that the philosophy of nature must draw upon empirical knowledge for its historical genesis, but this empirical foundation has no significance whatsoever with regard to the system *as such*, i.e. the system which presents the strictly logical development of nature's necessary stages.

¹⁶⁹ *W 9*: Remark to § 246, 15; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ Buchdahl, 'Hegel on the Interaction Between Science and Philosophy' in *Hegel and Newtonianism*, p. 71.

¹⁷¹ *W 9*: Remark to § 246, 15; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 6. Translation modified.

In an addition to § 246, Hegel is even more explicit about the method involved in the philosophy of nature:

The Philosophy of Nature takes up the material which physics has prepared for it empirically, at the point to which physics has brought it, and reconstitutes it, so that experience is not its final warrant and base. Physics must therefore work into the hands of philosophy, in order that the latter may translate into the Notion the abstract universal transmitted to it, by showing how this universal, as an intrinsically necessary whole, proceeds from the Notion.¹⁷²

And in the Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, to which Hegel refers the reader, we read:

Thus, philosophy does owe its development to the empirical sciences, but it gives to their content the fully essential shape of the *freedom* of thinking (or of what is a priori) as well as the *validation* of *necessity* (instead of the content being warranted because it is simply found to be present, and because it is a fact of experience).¹⁷³

In these passages, it becomes apparent that Hegel's view depends upon an important distinction between the manner in which we first come to *comprehend* the logic of nature and that logic *itself* as an entirely self-sufficient system. Insofar as spiritual history has achieved a certain understanding about the world, namely through the modern, Baconian research program, the empirical knowledge obtained by natural science provides the philosopher of nature with the data necessary in order to uncover nature's inner logic. In this way, the philosophical system of nature is dependent in an important sense upon empirical knowledge, for this empirical knowledge was necessary in order for that logical system to be developed in the first place. It would not have been possible, for example, for Hegel to articulate the logic of chemistry as it is presented in the philosophy of nature had Hegel died before the chemical revolution at the turn of the century.¹⁷⁴ That Hegel lived through a major period of scientific discovery made it possible for him to include novel ideas about chemical

¹⁷² W 9: Addition to § 246, 20; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 10.

¹⁷³ W 8: Remark to § 12, 58; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 37.

¹⁷⁴ On the role of Lavoisier's caloric theory in Hegel's logic of combustion, see Burbidge, *Real Process*, pp. 151-156.

affinity within his system of nature.¹⁷⁵ However, this does not mean the system of nature *as such*, i.e. the inner logic of nature itself, is dependent upon empirical knowledge. On the contrary, the onto-logic which is presented in the *Encyclopaedia* is, from a systematic perspective, a wholly self-sufficient progression of nature's rationally necessary stages. The logic of chemistry found in the nature philosophy, therefore, stands on its own as a rational derivation of logico-natural determinations which justify *themselves* as necessary features of the natural world. And significantly, for Hegel, there is no philosophical significance in the genesis of the system, but only in the rational ontology it contains.¹⁷⁶

To put this another way: Hegel depends upon the natural sciences for a sufficient understanding of the natural world and *from* this understanding is first in a position to uncover the logical structures at work through the whole of nature. It is this latter system of structures which turns out to be wholly self-sufficient, i.e. an immanent rational development in the 'strong a priori' sense defended by Alison Stone, despite the fact that Hegel needed to be acquainted with the natural sciences in order to initially uncover nature's inner logic. Thus, where Stone goes wrong, in my opinion, is in her claim that Hegel 'does, indeed, use a priori reasoning to construct his basic theory of nature.'¹⁷⁷ *Pace* Stone, I believe Hegel's ontology of nature can be seen as strictly rationalist and self-justificatory, and yet its *construction* dependent upon the empirical knowledge of Hegel's day.¹⁷⁸ The central tenet of Hegel's ontology of nature is that there is a rationally necessary progression leading from the most abstract determinations of nature to its most concrete determinations. And this means that, as we work through nature's *Stufenfolge*, we move to successively concrete stages through the *logic* of former stages. That Hegel relied upon the natural

¹⁷⁵ On Hegel's reception of the concept of 'elective affinity' in particular, see H. A. M. Snelders, 'The Significance of Hegel's Treatment of Chemical Affinity' in *Hegel and Newtonianism*, pp. 631-643.

¹⁷⁶ A similar point is made in the Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, where Hegel insists that our *representations* of objects historically precede our *concepts* of them, but that we nonetheless must prove 'the very being, as well as the determinations', of that which we ordinarily represent, and this requires conceptual *necessity* (*W* 8: § 1, 41; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 24).

¹⁷⁷ Alison Stone, *Petrified Intelligence*, p. xii.

¹⁷⁸ Another way to say this is that I take Stone's mutually exclusive options of 'weak a priorism' and 'strong a priorism' to fit together quite well in Hegel's system, so long as we distinguish between the onto-logical progression of nature and the philosopher's historical discovery of that logical progression.

sciences when uncovering this rational progression for the first time does not make that rational progression any less self-sufficient—so long as that rational progression can be shown to proceed immanently, i.e. without reference to empirical justification.¹⁷⁹

In my view, this makes it clear that empirical science is only the presupposition and condition for philosophy in terms of the latter's initial construction or, better put, insofar as the empirical sciences provide Hegel with the knowledge necessary to work out the logical progression that makes up nature's *Stufenfolge*. This interpretation also goes some way in explaining Hegel's claim that philosophy must 'be in agreement with our empirical knowledge of Nature'.¹⁸⁰ Since the philosophy of nature is first developed by drawing upon the empirical sciences, then it will surely 'agree' with empirical science. However, there is an even more fundamental reason why the philosophy of nature must agree with the empirical sciences. We can recall here that the empirical sciences are a *thinking* apprehension of nature. But this does not only mean that the natural scientist employs concepts in understanding nature; it also means that nature's own conceptual structure is made visible by the work of the empirical scientist—despite the fact that the empirical scientist has no resources to reflect upon this becoming-visible of nature's rational structure. Why is this significant for the relationship between philosophy and natural science? Because it shows that, on Hegel's understanding, a speculative philosophy of nature will *necessarily* be in agreement with empirical science, since the rational *truth* of nature shows itself in both intellectual endeavours, albeit in an obscure and relatively unintelligible form in the empirical-scientific procedure. The discoveries made by the sciences are *rational discoveries*, discoveries made *by* rational beings *about* the rational world. This is why Hegel's philosophy of nature is not only unopposed to empirical science, but it requires the rationality the empirical sciences have to offer, since 'they contain the invitation for

¹⁷⁹ As Houlgate puts it, 'the logical connection between [...] aspects of nature [do] not depend upon [...] scientific discovery but [are] wholly *a priori*. The ability of the *philosopher* to recognize that *a priori* connection [...] however, [depends] on the disclosure of science.' See Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁸⁰ *W*9: Remark to § 246, 15; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 6.

thinking' by 'prepar[ing] the material for philosophy by finding universal determinations, genera, and laws.'¹⁸¹

I believe one reason that this interpretation of Hegel has not been taken up with frequency is because it limits the possibility of defending Hegel's philosophical perspective as somehow 'viable' in our contemporary age. Indeed, with the changes undergone by the empirical worldview in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Hegel's philosophy of nature is at risk of being seen as antiquated if its relationship to empirical science is the one which I support above. As I see it, commentators who defend an a posteriori reading of Hegel and even some who defend a rationalist reading do so, in part, with the intention of saving the philosophy of nature from becoming archaic as the natural sciences continue to develop a worldview of which Hegel couldn't have dreamed, let alone present in rigorous systematic detail.

Petry, for example, understands the philosophy of nature as a systematic task of epistemological reconstruction.¹⁸² On this interpretation, the philosopher of nature attends to the theories developed in the natural sciences and simply develops a rational reconstruction of that empirical knowledge. It is quite obvious why this is an attractive view. If the 'rationality' Hegel is concerned with is *exclusively* the rationality at work in the natural sciences, then the philosophy of nature is potentially revisable in light of developments in the sciences. Thus, when Hegel remarks that 'the dignity of [philosophical] science must not be held to consist in the comprehension and explanation of all the multiplicity of forms in Nature' and that 'we must be content with what we can, in fact, comprehend at present', it looks as though Hegel is fully open to the idea that the philosophy of nature might be substantially revised in the future.¹⁸³ Indeed, Hegel goes on to say that 'there is plenty that cannot be comprehended *yet*',¹⁸⁴ implying that a day may come when the empirical sciences discover more about the natural world which will, in turn, feed the rational restructuring-

¹⁸¹ *W* 8: Remark to § 12, 57-58; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 37.

¹⁸² Petry, Introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 21.

¹⁸³ *W* 9: Addition to § 268, 82; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 62.

¹⁸⁴ My emphasis.

process that is his philosophy of nature. On my view, this interpretation simply doesn't do justice to Hegel's rationalist ontology. It is absolutely central to Hegel's project that the philosophy of nature is to be read as a strictly rational derivation, and that the stages presented in this rational derivation have eternal, ontological significance. In other words, the fundamental structure of nature does not *change* for Hegel. And it follows from this that whatever Hegel's views on potential improvement to the philosophy of nature (more on this below), the *Encyclopaedia* lays out the ontologically necessary determinations of nature and not the rational systematisation of merely empirical knowledge.

Although it is not always as explicit, some rationalist interpretations of Hegel—with which I am generally sympathetic—also run into problems in an attempt to make Hegel's philosophy of nature relevant today. Stone, for example, who rightly defends a rationalist reading of Hegel, makes the case that an a priori philosophy of nature allows the empirical sciences to discover novel things about the natural world whilst the philosophy of nature retains its disciplinary integrity. According to Stone, the philosophy of nature requires the empirical sciences for the exclusive purpose of 'fleshing out' the purely rational progression of the philosophy of nature.¹⁸⁵ The problem with this view is that it opens up the possibility that when Hegel is describing *logical* determinations of nature, he does not have in mind the logical determinations *of natural phenomena themselves*. Hence, Stone can say the following:

As scientific knowledge develops, [Hegel's] reformulations of many scientific accounts will become implausible and so his rationale for including them in the *Philosophy of Nature* will disappear. The material that he includes could, in principle, be substituted for quite different material with no effect on his basic theory of nature.¹⁸⁶

On Stone's 'strong a priori' interpretation, then, Hegel's philosophy of nature isn't so much about the rational structure of space, light, and life so much as it is about metaphysical features of nature, such as 'self-externality', 'pure identity-with-self', and 'reproduction-of-self' that may *or may not* correspond to the natural-scientific *Vorstellungen* of space, light,

¹⁸⁵ Stone, *Petrified Intelligence*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁶ Stone, *Petrified Intelligence*, p. 11.

and life.¹⁸⁷ On Stone's view, if it turns out that the empirical sciences develop a representation of organic life that is radically distinct from those representations we find in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*—say, that the essence of life is understood without any reference to a self-organising whole—this doesn't affect Hegel's *metaphysical* claims about nature involving a certain self-reproductive 'selfhood'; it just means this metaphysical 'selfhood' might not map onto empirical representations of organic life after all. In this way, Stone's 'strong a priori' reading secures the possibility that any philosophical insights contained in Hegel's philosophy of nature are independent of the now outdated sciences with which Hegel was engaged.¹⁸⁸

Thus, Stone, whose 'strong a priori' reading is in many respects the hermeneutic antithesis of Petry's 'systematisation of the sciences' interpretation, shares something fundamental in common with Petry. As I see it, the debate between these two perspectives unfolds as a result of their shared interest in making Hegel's system of nature (potentially) viable today.¹⁸⁹ And while I too want to champion a certain return to the principles of

¹⁸⁷ Houlgate, like Stone, emphasises the distinction between logical determinations and empirical-scientific *Vorstellungen*, which opens up the possibility that the philosopher of nature can be confused about which empirical-scientific *Vorstellungen* correspond to philosophical concepts. Cf. Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, pp. 117-118. This view is supported by comments of Hegel's such as the following: 'Our procedure consists in first fixing the thought demanded by the necessity of the Notion and then in asking how this thought appears in our ordinary ideas. The further requirement is that in intuition, space shall correspond to the thought of pure self-externality. Even if we were mistaken in this, it would not affect the truth of our thought' (*W* 9: Addition to § 254, 42; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 29); '[Außersichsein] ist der Gedanke der festgesetzt ist durch unsere erste Idee der Natur. Wir fragen, wenn wir uns in der Natur umsehen, wie nennen wir das was diesem Gedanken in unserer Vorstellung entspricht da kommt die Behauptung, es ist der Raum. Wenn er es auch nicht wäre, so schadet dieß nicht dem Gedanken, dieser bleibt darum doch wahr' (*Vorlesung über Naturphilosophie 1823/1824*, ed. by Gilles Marmasse [Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000], p. 104, my emphasis). On my view, these passages are better understood as describing the relationship between philosophical concepts and our *non-theoretical* intuitions or, more precisely, our non-scientific representations of empirical phenomena, rather than the relationship between philosophical concepts and empirical-scientific representations. Moreover, nothing of this kind appears in either the *Encyclopaedia* paragraphs themselves or in the remarks. For these reasons, I take these offhand comments to be precisely that, comments Hegel made during his lectures which were simply meant to emphasise the fact that the philosophy of nature presents a strictly rational derivation of logico-natural determinations. But it is very difficult to imagine that Hegel ever seriously considered the possibility that he might be wrong about self-externality being the immanent logical structure of space itself.

¹⁸⁸ For a similar critique of Stone which also focuses on the division between logical concepts and natural-scientific representations, see Edward Halper, 'A Tale of Two Metaphysics: Alison Stone's Environmental Hegel', *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 26 (2005), pp. 5-6. See also Stone's 'Response to Halper and Dahlstrom' in the same issue, pp. 22-27.

¹⁸⁹ Although Stone does not defend Hegel's nature philosophy *tout court*—indeed, she takes issue with fundamental aspects of Hegel's project—she does defend the nature philosophy against criticisms regarding its supposed dependence on antiquated science.

idealist nature philosophy in contemporary metaphysics, there is an important sense in which the focus on justifying Hegel's philosophy of nature with respect to recent developments in the philosophical sciences obscures the relatively straightforward relationship between Hegel's philosophy and the empirical sciences of his time.¹⁹⁰ Again, on my reading, the empirical sciences make it possible for Hegel to uncover the strictly rational progression that nature is. What this means, of course, is that Hegel's system cannot simply be 'amended' over time, because Hegel believes that the sciences of his day provided philosophy with enough knowledge to understand the rational structure of the natural world in its totality. This does not mean that Hegel believed that the natural sciences would make no further progress in their understanding of nature after 1830. There is no doubt that Hegel thought the natural sciences would continue to shed light upon the structure of the natural world. But I take it that Hegel understood the future of natural-scientific work to be a further specification of empirical knowledge that had already been established by natural-scientific theories, theories which wouldn't ever be 'overturned'. In other words, Hegel didn't predict that there would be major revolutions or 'paradigm shifts' in the sciences. Thus, any revisions required of Hegel's philosophy of nature would be relatively minor, comparable to the revisions Hegel felt were necessary to carry out between the first, second, and third editions of his *Encyclopaedia*.

Since Hegel's system takes the natural sciences of his day to be relatively well-informed about how nature *really is*—despite, of course, their inability to reflect on nature's total structure—one might think the critics of Hegel's nature philosophy have been right all along, that Benedetto Croce was prudent to declare Hegel's philosophy of nature dead in the water.¹⁹¹ But I believe this instinct to reject Hegel's philosophy of nature on account of its

¹⁹⁰ My own interest in returning to idealist *Naturphilosophie* has more in common with Zammito's claim that 'shifts in our current problem constellations bring us nearer to or farther from constellations of other epochs, [making] these more or less urgent to appreciate and appropriate.' John Zammito, 'Reconstructing German Idealism and Romanticism: Historicism and Presentism', *Modern Intellectual History*, 3 (2004), p. 436.

¹⁹¹ Benedetto Croce, *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*, trans. by Douglas Ainslie (New York: Russell & Russell, 1915). Croce did see something of merit in Hegel's philosophy of nature, namely, the critique of the natural scientist's metaphysical presuppositions (*ibid.*, pp. 165-166). Nevertheless, he interprets Hegel's discussion of the relationship between the philosophy of nature and empirical science as disingenuous, for Croce takes the sciences to be either *fully* capable or utterly *incapable* of grasping nature's structure (*ibid.*, pp. 169-173).

acceptance of the sciences of his day is motivated by a fundamental philosophical prejudice. Such an instinct stems from the Baconian notion, prevalent in every corner of intellectual life today, that knowledge regarding nature comes exclusively through empirical science and its recent theoretical (and non-philosophical) offshoots, and, moreover, that this knowledge should be understood as accumulating in a linear fashion from past falsity to present truth. To hold this worldview is to presuppose that past philosophical engagements with nature are intrinsically limited. But this presupposition is entirely unfounded. Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *Physics*, for example, remain two of the most insightful investigations into the being of nature in the history of Western thought. That these texts cannot be 'updated' to include reference to modern scientific thinking says nothing about their profundity. On my view, then, we should not shy away from Hegel's philosophy of nature simply because it cannot be refurbished with either a new rational progression (incorporating, for example, logics of quantum mechanics and genetic biology) or 'fleshed out' with new empirical data, just as we shouldn't shy away from the Platonic, Aristotelian, Cartesian, or Leibnizian philosophies of nature on account of their being historically situated. Rather, we should remain open to Hegel's vision of nature and the thought that his vision might provoke today.

In the following two chapters, therefore, I want to closely follow the rational development Hegel says is at work from mechanical motion to the logical emergence of organic life and spirit. Because Hegel insists upon the immanent rationality at work in this process, I take Hegel at his word and attempt to the best of my ability to make explicit the immanent logic Hegel claims motivates the development of nature. I believe that in doing so we can not only better understand a most difficult part of Hegel's system, but we can begin to see how Hegel's philosophy of nature clears a path towards a far more promising conception of nature and its inner development than might be expected for the simplistic reason that the empirical science of Hegel's day is no longer 'our science'.

Chapter 5: The Self-Formation of Matter

5.1. Introduction

Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* Philosophy of Nature is divided into three sections: mechanics, physics, and organics. In this chapter, I consider the logical development of mechanical nature and the transition from mechanics to physics. Because the mechanics is the first section of Hegel's nature philosophy, my focus on the mechanics is meant to clarify both Hegel's general conception of nature as 'self-external being' and the particular logic at work in the mechanics which immanently drives self-external being beyond its mechanistic character.

In these first stages of nature's development, we discover that nature is, for Hegel, nothing less than matter-in-motion. And the logic of such matter-in-motion leads Hegel to the following five insights regarding the structure of the natural world:

- (1) Since motion is intrinsic to the logic, and therefore being, of matter itself, motion does not come to matter from without. On the contrary, motion is immanent to material nature.
- (2) Such immanent motion does not remain simply mechanical motion, but leads, through the dialectical logic of mechanics, to the formation of qualitatively determinate nature (i.e. nature which does not only involve quantitative determinacy such as mass, weight, and velocity, but also qualitative determinacy such that certain bodies and process prove to be *qualitatively* different from others).
- (3) With the logical emergence of qualitative determinacy in nature, the pure externality of nature begins to become more 'inwardised'.
- (4) As more 'inwardised', self-forming material nature begins to express the first signs of freedom, prior to the emergence of life and spirit.
- (5) And because this process of 'inwardisation' is an entirely immanent, self-directed process, strictly *mechanical* nature proves to involve nascent forms of autonomous self-development.

Thus, in this chapter, I will consider the logical development of Hegel's speculative mechanics in order to argue that, for Hegel, the gradual (yet ahistorical) emergence of self-determining natural beings is a process by which 'self-externality' turns inward.¹

Already with these introductory remarks, it becomes apparent that Hegel's conception of nature's graduated development differs significantly from that of Schelling. Both Schelling and Hegel are committed to critiquing the mechanistic conception of nature that dominated eighteenth-century science. Furthermore, neither Schelling nor Hegel pursues this critique by way of a vitalist conception of nature in which every natural entity and process is seen to express some *élan vital*. Both philosophers reject as one-sided the mechanist and vitalist conceptions of nature by conceiving nature as a system of ontologically distinct and yet immanently related stages. However, that Hegel's system of stages begins with a speculative *mechanics* shows him to be up to something quite different from Schelling.² Whereas Schelling overcomes the mechanistic conception of nature by positing a quasi-transcendental, dynamic field of forces from which mechanical motion is

¹ Throughout this chapter, I emphasise the notion that qualitative determinacy in nature only emerges with the transition to physics, the second part of Hegel's philosophy of nature. It is important to note, however, that although the Idea is, at its most abstract manifestation, strictly spatiotemporal matter-in-motion lacking qualitative determinacy, it is nevertheless *the Idea*, and as Idea (or self-determining reason), nature involves the negativity which allows qualitative determinacy to arise. In particular, this comes in the form of the *self-externality* of nature, i.e. the fact that nature is structured as the *negative* of itself. To complicate matters further: what I am describing as strictly quantitative determinacy in mechanical nature does rely upon logical developments from the logic of *quality* as presented in the *Science of Logic*. For example, repulsion and attraction are considered in the chapter on quality, which precedes the chapter on quantity, in the *Logic*; but these categories reappear in the mechanics as constitutive features of matter's quantitative determinacy. There is thus an important sense in which the strictly quantitative determinacy in mechanical nature already involves logical (although not therefore physical) features of quality. That being said, the logical elements of quality at work in Hegel's mechanics do not manifest themselves, in mechanical nature, as *qualitative determinacy*. Such qualitatively determinate *nature*, i.e. *physical* quality, only emerges with the transition from mechanics to physics. It is for this reason that I emphasise the manner in which nature's quantitative determinacy logically develops into qualitative determinacy without constantly referring back to the *Science of Logic*. Indeed, nature, for Hegel, only expresses its intrinsic qualitative determinacy through a logic of *mechanism* in which sheer matter-in-motion proves to necessitate qualitative determinacy and, moreover, a kind of qualitative determinacy that is lacking in the *Logic* since this qualitative determinacy is the determinacy of *physical nature*: the first *real* expression of qualitative determinacy in the system.

² Such an emphasise on mechanism also distinguishes Hegel's mature philosophy from his earlier philosophy of nature. As H. S. Harris argues, Hegel's earliest philosophical considerations of nature could not have included any account of mechanics (H.S. Harris, *Night Thoughts [Jena 1801-1806]*, pp. 79-80). Indeed, Harris goes so far as to say that Hegel 'found it harder to accommodate the concept of "mechanism" than Schelling did' (*ibid.*, p. 82).

derived, Hegel sees the Schellingian emphasis on forces to be insufficiently immanentist.³ For Hegel, philosophy must begin with sheer mechanical nature and show how mechanical nature is, *pace* the mechanist philosopher, *intrinsically* active.⁴

Before proceeding to elucidate the fundamental features of Hegel's mechanics, a note about my hermeneutic strategy regarding Hegel's mature system as presented in his *Encyclopaedia*: Since the paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia* are more historically reliable and are meant to comprise the essential framework of the system, I grant priority to the paragraphs themselves. Yet I do not dismiss the remarks or even the additions as 'unreliable'. To be sure, the additions in particular present serious interpretive difficulties, since Hegel himself was not responsible for their being appended to the paragraphs, and many of them originate from lectures Hegel delivered long before he devised the final version of his *Encyclopaedia*. In fact, a number of the additions were taken by Michelet from Hegel's Jena philosophy of nature and should therefore not be taken as representative of Hegel's mature view. That being said, Hegel's mature view did not emerge spontaneously with the publication of the first part of the *Science of Logic* in 1812, nor did Hegel's 1830 presentation of his mature system signal a radical departure from the earlier versions of the *Encyclopaedia*. Thus, while it is important to treat the additions to the 1830 *Encyclopaedia* as textually distinct from the paragraphs and remarks, they can also be enormously helpful in elucidating Hegel's thought. As Findlay says, 'Many scholars have written as if those who first published the *Zusätze* deserve blame, whereas they deserve boundless gratitude.'⁵ Indeed, when the additions do shed light on the highly convoluted logical development of

³ For Schelling's account of nature's fundamental forces, see Chapter 1.7 above.

⁴ As we saw in Chapter 1, Schelling also has a place for mechanism in nature, but its role is always derivative. Specifically, for Schelling, mechanical nature derives from the more fundamental dynamic activity of nature. That being said, we should not read too much into these differences. For as we will see below (5.5), what Schelling calls the 'dynamic' Hegel simply identifies as elements of the mechanical which precede ontological determinations such as inertia; and what Schelling calls 'mechanical' (namely, collision based motion) is for Hegel just one aspect (and indeed a derivative one) of the mechanical. Nevertheless, the terminological differences here signal a more profound difference regarding the *way* Schelling and Hegel each tend to conceive nature's fundamental activity: whereas for Schelling, nature is dynamic, powerful, and productive; for Hegel, nature is negative, impotent, and external to itself and therefore self-moving in a different manner.

⁵ Findlay, Foreword to the *Philosophy of Nature*, p. vii.

the *Encyclopaedia*—even when these are additions that come from the Jena period—they are invaluable interpretive resources.⁶

5.2. Space

The first logical stage of nature, according to Hegel, is space. But Hegel does not begin arbitrarily with this determination of nature. In order to understand why space constitutes the first stage of nature's dialectic, we must begin with the description of nature that emerges at the end of Hegel's logic.

In Chapter 4, we saw how Hegel's conception of nature as the externalisation of *logos* leads Hegel to conceive of nature as the 'absolutely powerless' in the sense that nature is the logical domain of unreason. But the 'externality' of nature does not exclusively signify its impotence with respect to reason. To be sure, nature is the domain in which irrationality reigns, but the 'self-externalisation of *logos*' additionally implies something deeply positive about the *being* of nature: nature is the Idea in its being-*outside-itself* or self-*externality* (*Außersichsein*), and this self-externality will define every stage of nature's development. Indeed, the development of nature will be driven *by* the logic of self-externality. As we will see, it is only with the emergence of free, spiritual existence that the externality of nature is fully overcome, and even this spiritual overcoming of externality is an arduous task propelled, again, by the logic of nature's self-externality. Throughout the following two chapters, therefore, my aim is to show how, according to Hegel, the internal life of spirit does not emerge spontaneously from an otherwise self-external natural world. On the contrary, nature is a 'system of stages' precisely insofar as nature's intrinsic self-externality necessitates a dialectical movement that gradually involves increasingly 'internal' forms of natural existence.

To begin with, however, the following is as far as Hegel is willing to go in describing nature's ontological status: nature is the Idea, or reason, in its self-externality. To take up this

⁶ In the Foreword to the 1830 *Encyclopaedia* Hegel himself remarks that the paragraphs comprise the merely formal, skeletal outline of the system, since the text was written as a compendium to his lectures, the latter of which are necessary to fully appreciate the logical development of the system (*W* 8: 32; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 18). See also *W* 8: § 16, 60; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 39.

notion of self-externality in its immediacy is to take up the concept of universal, self-external being. Why is this external being ‘universal’? Simply because it has not (yet) determined itself to be a *particular* natural being and is instead the *general* ontological determination of ‘being-outside-itself’. Indeed, ‘generality’ is a better translation of the *Allgemeinheit* of this stage of nature, because it drives home the point that we are dealing with nature at the highest level of abstraction as opposed to the concrete universality that will manifest itself in organic phenomena. At this stage, nothing concrete about nature presents itself to thought, nothing, that is, except for the mere fact that we are dealing with the Idea in its *general* concreteness, i.e. the Idea that *is*, nature as such. In other words, at the beginning of the philosophy of nature, we are concerned with nature in its immediate, abstract generality as concrete, self-external being.

According to Hegel, a tension presents itself as soon as we begin to unpack the notion of such immediately self-external being. On the one hand, we are considering being that is entirely outside itself and thereby *different* from itself. On the other hand, we have before us simply immediate self-externality, and as such, self-externality is not really external to itself or different from itself. Rather, such self-externality just is self-externality all the way down, fully *self-continuous* self-externality without determinate difference.⁷ Nature is, then, entirely outside itself, and yet in being outside itself, nature is just more of the same. This tension between self-externality, on the one hand, and continuity, on the other, allows Hegel to see, in the immediate being of the self-external Idea, the ontological form of space. Indeed, space, according to Hegel, just is self-externality that is wholly selfsame and continuous *in* its self-externality.

To make sense of this idea, we need only think of a point. Such a point is *discrete*, insofar as it is the point that it is, and yet it is entirely interchangeable in that, as an *abstract* point, nothing distinguishes *this* point from *that* point. More appropriately, however, since we have not yet arrived at the geometrical conception of ‘point’, we should say ‘this space is no different from that space’. And ordinary language confirms that it would indeed be strange to claim differences between this and that *space*. We commonly differentiate one

⁷ *W* 9: § 254, 41; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 28.

place from another, but, as Hegel shows at a further stage in the philosophy of nature, ‘place’ involves far more determinacy than mere space. Space is strictly quantitative externality, and thus any ‘part’ of space is entirely interchangeable with any other ‘part’. Space is, in other words, being-outside-itself that remains that same being-outside-itself throughout its infinite, continuous extension. Indeed, there is no end to the space through which nature manifests itself as other than itself. Thus, in the paragraph that begins the immanent dialectic of nature (§ 254), Hegel claims that *discreteness* and *continuity* are the essential determinations of space.⁸ For on the one hand, self-external being is external to itself, and this grants space *discreteness* precisely in being *other* than itself; and on the other hand, self-external being is *continuously* external to itself without any determination.⁹ In the words of Samuel Alexander, space is ‘juxtaposition pure and simple without a break’.¹⁰

In the following two paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia* (§§ 255-256), Hegel further unpacks the logic of space. Because space is the Idea in its self-externality, space must necessarily involve genuine difference.¹¹ Why *must* space involve genuine or ‘real’ difference and not simple self-externality ad infinitum? One way to see this necessity, according to Hegel, is simply to consider the fact that we are dealing here with the absolute Idea in its primary manifestation, and as we have already learned in the *Logic*, the absolute Idea is a *concrete* universal. As such, the Idea necessarily expresses itself in difference, specifically in the form of particular, determinate being.¹² However, I believe we can set this reference to the *Logic* aside and simply focus on the contradiction Hegel tells us is at work in spatial being: space is immediate self-externality, which means it must be both *different* from itself and *selfsame* insofar as nature is *endlessly* different from itself. If we focus on the

⁸ *W 9*: Addition to § 254, 43; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 30.

⁹ *W 9*: § 254, 41; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Samuel Alexander, ‘Hegel’s Conception of Nature’, *Mind*, 11 (1886), p. 506.

¹¹ ‘Space, as in itself the Notion as such, contains within itself the *differences* of the Notion’ (*W 9*: § 255, 44; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 30).

¹² ‘*Determinateness* as such belongs to being and the qualitative; as the determinateness of the concept, it is *particularity*. It is not a *limit*, as if it were related to an *other* beyond it, but is rather, as just shown, the universal’s own immanent moment; in particularity, therefore, the universal is not in an other but simply and solely with itself.’ (*W 6*: 280; *Science of Logic* [Giovanni], p. 534).

first feature of nature, then space—the Idea in its estrangement from self—must necessarily involve concrete *differences*. For space is the Idea in its self-*externality*, and thus it is necessarily an expression of the Idea’s *differentiation from self*. Such self-differentiation is only implicit self-differentiation so long as space is nothing but continuous self-externality. According to Hegel, the initially *explicit* differentiation of space is nothing other than the three-dimensionality of space. With three-dimensional extension, space can no longer be conceived as simply continuous self-externality, for space necessarily involves the real differences between length, breadth, and depth.

The details of Hegel's deduction of the three dimensions are difficult to follow, but I follow Houlgate in reading this deduction to be a strictly logical deduction.¹³ First, Hegel notes that insofar as space *does* include difference, then such difference is ‘the *negation* of space itself’.¹⁴ In other words, since space is *continuous* self-externality, to whatever extent such self-external being is in fact differentiated from itself, space is no longer continuous with itself, but is the immediate negation of that continuity. We are dealing, then, with something *non-spatial*, precisely insofar as the continuity of self-externality is punctured. What is a non-spatial, differential element of space? A point. Indeed, the first definition of Euclid’s *Elements* states that ‘a *point*, is that which has no part.’¹⁵ Since the point has no parts and cannot be divided, it is necessarily without extension. A point, in other words, is a *dimensionless* location in space. And from this dimensionless point (the negation of space), Hegel derives the three dimensions.

The first dimension of space, according to Hegel, is nothing other than the implicit truth of the point made explicit. For the point is the negation of space—it does not, in fact, have any spatial being or extension—and yet this negation of space is a *spatial* negation of space. How can the point be, at one and the same time, spatial and non-spatial? The point is non-spatial precisely because it cannot be located in space as *actually* extended; the

¹³ Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, p. 127.

¹⁴ *W 9*: § 256, 44; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 31.

¹⁵ Allen, John, *Euclid’s Elements of Geometry: The First Six Books* (Baltimore: Cushing and Jewett, 1822), Book I, Definition 1, p. 14.

infinitely small point is ‘purely ideal’. And yet this negation of space has been determined from within the logic *of space*. It remains bound, in this way, to spatiality, and is therefore rightly understood to be a fundamental principle of geometry. Indeed, points are not simply ‘non-spatial’, but they are implicitly *spatial* negations of space, since they are meant to point out distinct locations within space. The point therefore negates its limited character as *mere* negation and raises itself to the determination of its explicit truth: a negation of space that is *explicitly* spatial. In geometry, the line is such an explicitly spatial negation of space, for it cuts into the continuity of space through its own spatially extended being. As a truly spatial negation of space, the line effects a more determinate negation of space. In Houlgate’s words, ‘The line interrupts space not just by constituting a pure point of rupture but by actually stretching out and dividing space in two.’¹⁶ With such an explicitly spatial negation of space, nature proves to be extended in at least one dimension.

But very quickly, we learn that space cannot remain merely one-dimensional extension. In other words, space cannot remain the mere ‘spatial negation of space’, because the being of space is *self-externality* or *otherness-from-self*. And if space were one-dimensional length and nothing further, then space would remain *what it is* as the spatial negation of self. In other words, space wouldn’t be truly external to itself, because it would be its own negation pure and simple, without being differentiated from this negative relation-to-self. Truly self-external being, according to Hegel, must negate even the self-negation of space. That is, self-externality must sublimate simple length as its sole dimension and involve a second dimension, a dimension logically distinct from the first which simply *divides* space.¹⁷ The second dimension of space, then, does not simply negate space, but negates this divisive negation of space and thereby achieves a positive form of spatial extension: the geometrical plane. In other words, two-dimensionality affirms the self-externality of space as *positive being* via the process by which space negates its negative character.

¹⁶ Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, p. 124.

¹⁷ ‘The line consequently passes over into the plane’ (*W* 9: § 256, 45; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 31).

That space achieves an affirmative ontological status in two-dimensionality or planar being does not mean that space is now affirmative in the sense of simple continuity-with-self; space has not returned itself to its prior determination as immediate self-externality. Rather, space has raised this positive aspect of self-externality to a more concrete determination: no longer simply continuous self-externality, space now achieves *determinacy*—albeit, still *quantitative* determinacy—via the ‘spatial zone’ that is constructed in the plane. Whereas the line simply cuts into space as its spatial negation, the plane constitutes a distinctive region of two-dimensional extension.

We know that, from the perspective of Euclidean geometry, space is not two-dimensional but three-dimensional. In order to justify the necessity of three-dimensionality from the perspective of pure reason, however, Hegel says we must further unpack the logic of planar being. Planar extension is, according to its explicit logic, the negation of the negation of space, i.e. the sublation of length as two-dimensionality. But as we have seen, implicit in the negation of negation is the affirmative character of extension. There is a dual logic at work in planar extension: On the one hand, two-dimensional space requires that nature express itself in *determinate* surfaces (this determinacy being the explicit negation of linear negation); but on the other hand, this *determinacy* achieved via the negation of negation involves a return to the selfsame characteristic of space as continuity-with-self. This latter, affirmative feature of planar being is not separate from its determinate negation, yet it is not entirely explicit in mere two-dimensional extension. According to Hegel, if we emphasise the affirmative character of the plane, rather than focus on the negation of negation, then we move from the *plane* (Fläche) to an ‘*enclosing surface* [schließende Oberfläche] which separates off a *single* whole space.’¹⁸ Such a single, *whole* space is not merely affirmative via its negation of length, but is, rather, affirmative *as such*, *full of being* in a manner that is only hinted at in two-dimension extension. In other words, the planar negation of linear negation is, implicitly, a wholly affirmative, plentiful spatiality of an enclosing surface. And while Hegel does not believe we encounter purely geometrical objects in space, he does believe that nature is *necessarily* three-dimensional *being* in the

¹⁸ W 9: § 256, 45; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 31.

manner of a *schließende Oberfläche*, namely, as the fullness or presence of three-dimensionality. Indeed, the natural world comprises three, logically distinct dimensions which relate to one another in such a way that space is nothing less than three-dimensional extension. And thus we come to learn that points, lines, and planes are mere abstractions from three-dimensionality.

We can understand Hegel's deduction of the three dimensions from another perspective if we focus on the essential determination of nature as self-externality; unpack the notion that every feature of space is necessarily external to itself; and then imagine what this would mean once we grant Hegel that the nonbeing or negation of space is the point. I take Winfield to follow such a procedure when he explains that, insofar as the point is in fact a spatial negation of space, the point itself must be defined by self-externality and cannot, therefore, remain the point that it *is*, but necessitates point-being *outside* it.¹⁹ Thus, according to Winfield, we can imagine a point necessitating a point beyond it, which, in turn, necessitates a point beyond it, and so on to infinity. Such a series of points, infinitely extended in space, constitutes a line. And a line can only properly be the spatial feature it is if it, too, is characterised by an essential self-externality and in this way lies outside itself. Thus, we can envision a line necessitating a line next to it, which, in turn, necessitates a line next to it, and so on. Such an infinite series yields planar being. And, as Winfield writes, 'for its part, the plane is immediately self-external, yielding planes stacking continuously upon another other, producing a three-dimensional space, whose boundary can only be another volume in continuity with others without end.'²⁰ In this way, the fundamental determination of nature—the self-externality of logos—necessitates three-dimensional, spatial extension as the primary determination of nature and, moreover, reality. Winfield makes an important point, then, when he goes on to say that 'all of these determinations arise simply from the

¹⁹ Richard Dien Winfield, *Hegel and the Future of Systematic Metaphysics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) p. 113.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

self-externality of the totality of determinacy and enable space to have its rudimentary character without presupposing time, motion, or matter.²¹

On this final point, Winfield is absolutely right. But his account of the deduction of the three dimensions appears to be more ‘representational’ than strictly logical. Although there is an important sense in which Winfield’s explanation is indeed helpful—precisely through the images it evokes of parallel lines and stacked planes—it is also potentially misleading, if we think that the *only* logical feature of two-dimensionality is ‘infinitely parallel lines’, the *only* logical feature of three-dimensionality is ‘stacked two-dimensionality’, and so on. Indeed, while Winfield helps us picture just how self-externality is configured as three-dimensional being, something is lacking in his account of the logical *differences* between line, plane, and enclosing surface.

Such differences are brought out in other accounts of Hegel’s logic of space. Houlgate, for example, emphasises Hegel’s claim that ‘The difference of space is [...] essentially a determinate, *qualitative* difference.’²² I understand Houlgate to be stressing the fact that, for Hegel, with each stage of the logical deduction of three-dimensionality, something new is discovered to be essential to what space is, something implicit in the idea of ‘self-externality’ but only comprehended if line, plane, and encompassing surface are logically differentiated from one another. And yet despite the fact that the logic of space involves determinate differences between linear, planar, and voluminous being—namely, negation, negation of negation, and affirmation—Winfield’s account of this logic is helpful in driving home the point that *even with these differences made explicit*, space remains, essentially, merely *quantitative* extension. Indeed, Hegel’s own description of space as involving ‘qualitative difference’ runs the risk of implying that already at the stage of spatiality, nature involves *qualitative determinacy*. This would be a profound misunderstanding of how Hegel conceives the logical development of nature. For qualitative determinacy does not emerge until the end of the section on mechanics with the ‘absolute’ motion of the planets, and even then such qualitative determinacy is not made explicit until

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *W 9*: § 256, 44; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 31. My emphasis.

the transition to physics with the phenomenon of light. At this rudimentary stage of nature, we are only just beginning to unpack the logic of *mechanical* nature, and such a mechanics is ontologically distinct precisely insofar as qualitative determinacy is utterly lacking in mechanics. Indeed, the entirety of the mechanics is devoted to unfolding the *quantitative* determinacy of nature; and although line, plane, and encompassing surface involve ‘qualitative difference’, three-dimensional space as such is not qualitatively determinate. That Hegel calls the dimensions of space ‘qualitatively different’, therefore, must be understood to mean something other than the idea that sheer spatial extension explicitly involves qualitative determinacy.

On my reading, Hegel sees the dimensions of space as ontologically distinct insofar as the line, the plane, and the three-dimensional surface are logically distinguished from one another, namely, as negation, negation of negation, and affirmation. Winfield’s account misses this important aspect of the logic of space, but he rightly emphasises the fact that these three dimensions are merely quantitatively distinct expressions of self-externality. Hegel himself says that even though the three dimensions are logically distinct (or ‘qualitatively different’), they are also ‘merely *diverse* [*bloß verschieden*] and possess no determination whatever’.²³ In other words, the ‘being-outside-itself’ of space must be determined as genuine being-outside-itself (i.e. *three-dimensional* extension), but this ontological difference intrinsic to space will really be a mere diversity, a difference lacking in qualitative determinacy.²⁴ As I understand it, Hegel’s point here is not, as some have suggested, that the *signifiers* ‘length’, ‘breadth’, and ‘depth’ are arbitrary and are therefore interchangeable *terms*.²⁵ Hegel’s point is rather strictly ontological: any one of the three-dimensions is *ontologically* identical to any other dimension; the three dimensions themselves are not *different* from one another. On the contrary, the *difference* intrinsic to

²³ *W* 9: § 255: 44; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 30.

²⁴ For Hegel’s account of ‘diversity’, see *W* 6: 47-55; *Science of Logic* (Giovanni), pp. 362-367.

²⁵ See, for example, Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-examination* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 274-275: ‘Since Space is a form of mere Quantity, the difference between these moments becomes a *mere* difference, which is, in a sense, *no* difference. Obviously it makes no difference whether we call a distance one of length, breadth or depth.’

space is really nothing beyond the ontological extensity involved in *three*-dimensional being. Length, breadth, or depth, taken in themselves, are nothing but one-dimensional, and as such, are entirely interchangeable; there is no ontological difference between *this* and *that* direction.²⁶ The ontological difference constitutive of spatial extension, then, comes by way of the self-sublating character of one-dimensionality as two- and finally three-dimensionality. For three-dimensional being necessarily involves *three* dimensions which can in no way be reduced to *one*. In this way, space is not *simply* ‘diverse’ or composed of three, indifferent dimensions, but involves a self-externality that *affirms* its being as different from itself through three-dimensional extension.

It is important, for Hegel, that all of this can be derived from the sheer self-externality that nature is. Space is at once continuous with itself and yet its self-externality must break through: the first manner in which difference breaks through its immediacy and abstraction is in three-dimensionality that is no longer simple side-by-sideness, but expresses the *affirmative* moment of difference. The second manner in which difference begins to break through its abstract immediacy is through temporality, by which nature expresses the *negative* moment of self-external being.

5.3. Time

Hegel's deduction of time is even more daunting than his deduction of the three dimensions. In order to understand Hegel's logic of time, let us take a step back and consider the ‘motor’ that has been driving the dialectic of nature thus far.

As we saw, the self-externality or self-otherness of the Idea is nature itself. But this self-externality is only *abstractly* other than or outside itself when considered in its immediacy. For immediate self-externality is just externality that is outside itself ad infinitum, hence the infinite continuity of space. Yet insofar as this self-external being is *truly* differentiated from itself, such self-externality necessarily manifests itself in three dimensions. The deduction of nature's three-dimensionality results from taking seriously the

²⁶ *W 9*: Remark to § 255, 44; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 31.

negativity of nature inherent in the Idea, i.e. the *otherness* and *difference* that self-externality is. But as we saw above, the dialectic of space finally *affirms* this otherness in such a way that negativity seems to drop out of the picture. To be sure, the negative moment in nature is at work in the logic of space, but it is at work precisely as a *moment* of the fundamentally affirmative character of spatial extension.

When we turn our attention to time, we find that this affirmative character is entirely lacking. Time is the abstract form of nature in which negativity reigns *as negativity*.²⁷ In time, the self-externality of nature is not affirmed as *being*; instead, the negative and external character of self-externality comes into its own as truly negative, i.e. as *non-being*. But in order to see this, we cannot simply posit time as *opposed* to space, as a *second* form of nature unrelated to the first. On the contrary, the dialectic of time, for Hegel, is already implicit in the dialectic of space. In Hegel's words:

The truth of space is time, and thus space becomes time; the transition to time is not made subjectively by us, but made by space itself. In pictorial thought, space and time are taken to be quite separate: we have space and also time; philosophy fights against this 'also'.²⁸

Philosophy 'fights against' the 'also' of space and time by showing how the latter is necessitated by the former. In this way, there could be neither a spaceless time nor a timeless space; space and time require one another. Space and time should not, therefore, be conceived as two separate forms of nature, but rather as intrinsically connected. And yet, the two are logically distinguishable.

In order to understand Hegel's conception of time, we must begin where we left off. At the end of § 256, we are left with the affirmative being of space, which contains its negation in the point and in the line, but which is not fundamentally disturbed by this negation. Space is, even once differentiated via its three dimensions, a being characterised by *self-externality*, i.e. a being in which difference or otherness is subordinated to the generally affirmative being and continuity of extension. With this emphasis on space as

²⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 253, 41; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 28: 'Self-externality splits at once into two forms, positively as Space, and negatively as Time.'

²⁸ *W 9*: Addition to § 257, 48; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 34.

continuous *being*, we can understand that space is constituted by a fundamental presence (*praesentia*), it is ‘*here*’ not as a specific location but more generally as that which *is*. Indeed, the first dimension of space (the explicitly spatial negation of space) does not *actually* tear space into two, because length is sublated in two-dimensional and three-dimensional space. The truth of space, as we saw, is affirmative extension, and the negative moment of space is indeed merely a moment of this affirmative spatial presence.

But if space is in fact self-*external* being, it must *actually* negate itself, and not merely in order to reestablish its continuity-within-difference as three-dimensional extension. Insofar as nature *truly* negates itself, nature is *temporal*. For, according to Hegel, ‘time is precisely the existence [*Dasein*] of [the] perpetual self-sublation [of space].’²⁹ In what sense can time be said to sublata or negate space? Why would Hegel identify time as the negative of space? First, we should note that time differs from the negations of space we have already considered. Whereas the point is implicitly spatial and the line is an explicitly spatial negation of space, time is, to start with, entirely non-spatial. Although it is necessitated by space itself, time is something other than space, as opposed to being an ideal feature of space. In this way, time accomplishes the negation of space which the spatial negations of space—the point and the line—fail to accomplish: Time is not reincorporated into space as one of its dimensions, but remains utterly non-spatial so long as it is time. But that time simply ‘isn’t space’ or a feature of space is not enough for us to identify time as the *negation* of space. According to Hegel, time is the negation of space because time is the means by which spatial being *becomes absent*. For time is the coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be of self-external being. ‘Everything...comes to be and passes away in *time*.’³⁰

Hegel identifies time with the abstract, logical category of ‘becoming’.³¹ ‘Becoming’, according to Hegel’s *Logic*, has two senses. It is at one and the same time the transition from being to non-being and the transition from non-being to being.³² When

²⁹ *W* 9: Addition to § 257, 48; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 34.

³⁰ *W* 9: Remark to § 258, 49; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 35. Emphasis modified.

³¹ *W* 9: § 258, 48; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 34.

³² *W* 5: 83; *Science of Logic* (Giovanni), pp. 59-60.

thought concretely in the *Philosophy of Nature*, these two senses of becoming correspond to 1) the passage from the affirmative being of spatial extension to its negation (ceasing-to-be) and 2) the emergence of spatial presence from its non-being (coming-to-be).³³ What is presently extended in space will eventually recede into nothingness, the same non-being from which that spatial presence once emerged. The passage of time is therefore the necessary logico-natural determination in which spatial presence is negated. Without this reference to time, there can simply be no account of the concrete negativity at work in the process of becoming. For pure space does not allow for such coming-to-be and passing-away; space just *is*, and is infinitely continuous at that. The intrinsic negativity of space simply reaffirms such ontological presence via its three-dimensional extension. Insofar as nature is temporal, however, the presence of extended being is shot through with the negativity of its past and future, the nothingness from which everything emerges and to which everything returns. Thus, once the truly self-contradictory character of self-externality makes itself explicit, the affirmative being of space is negated in the form of temporal becoming—the passing from non-being to being and back again.

Because of the abstract nature of Hegel's discussion of time, we might be tempted to understand such temporal becoming as an ontological 'container' to which all beings owe their generation and destruction. But Hegel warns against conceiving the temporality of beings in this manner, as if 'things' were in some other 'thing' called 'time': 'it is not *in* time that everything comes to be and passes away, rather time itself is the *becoming*, this coming-to-be and passing away.'³⁴ Time, in other words, is just the becoming *of beings*, and is not some container *in* which beings come-to-be and cease-to-be:

Time is not, as it were, a receptacle in which everything is placed as in a flowing stream, which sweeps it away and engulfs it. Time is only this abstraction of destruction. It is because things are finite that they are in time;

³³ While it would be misguided to conceive the philosophy of nature as an *application* of the purely logical categories of the *Logic* to the domain of concrete existence, there is a sense in which logical determinations of the *Logic* become 'concretised' in the *Realphilosophie*. But this results from the fact that being has already proven itself to involve certain ontological determinations in the *Logic*—namely, the most general or abstract determinations—and it should therefore come as no surprise that such determinations reappear in the concrete philosophies of nature and spirit.

³⁴ *W 9*: Remark to § 258, 49; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 35.

it is not because they are in time that they perish; on the contrary, things themselves are the temporal, and to be so is their objective determination. It is therefore the process of actual things themselves which makes time.³⁵

Temporal duration is intrinsic to each and every being and is nothing other than *their* generation, endurance, and destruction.

The same point about the immanence of time also holds for space. Space is not an empty container within which beings appear. Beings just *are* extended—and three-dimensionally at that—because this is how the Idea determines itself. As Findlay writes, ‘pure Space is nothing real and substantial...things in Nature are in Space, merely because Space is the form of their universal externality and otherness.’³⁶ The difficulty, however, is that we are not considering the logic of *particular* beings at this stage in the philosophy of nature. On the contrary, at these initial stages of nature's development, Hegel is at pains to elucidate the most abstract determinations of the natural world. Thus, although spatial extension and temporal duration are nothing outside the becoming and abiding *of beings*, we must here remain with the general logic of space and time, without constantly referring to the concrete reality of those beings which persist and become.

We can better understand the abstractness of this stage of the philosophy of nature with reference to Kant. According to Hegel, Kant wasn't entirely wrong to identify space and time as forms of sensibility or intuition.³⁷ For Kant and Hegel alike, space and time are the fundamental forms through which objects appear in the world. Where Kant went wrong, according to Hegel, was in identifying space and time as our ‘subjective’ forms of intuition. For this led Kant to erroneously posit (1) that there are non-apparent things-in-themselves which make appearance possible (i.e. the ‘thing’ or ‘things’ behind spatiotemporal objects); and (2) that non-human rational beings could plausibly have *different* forms of intuition,

³⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 258, 50; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 35-36.

³⁶ Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, p. 274.

³⁷ See the Remark to § 258: ‘Time, like space, is a *pure form of sense or intuition*’ (*W 9*: 48; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 34); and the Remark to § 254: ‘Disregarding what belongs in the Kantian conception to subjective idealism and its determinations, there remains the correct definition that space is a mere form, i.e. an *abstraction*, that of immediate *externality*’ (*W 9*: 42; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 28-29).

leading to a distinctively *humanist* brand of subjectivism.³⁸ Both Kantian views follow from the notion that space and time are only *our* forms of intuition. Thus, while Hegel embraces Kant's idea that space and time are *forms* of sensible appearance and are therefore neither real independently of objects (Newton) nor reducible to object relations (Leibniz), Hegel rejects the Kantian notion that objects conform to forms of intuition *that are not their own*. Hegel therefore agrees with Kant that space and time are the forms through which the world becomes sensible, with the important caveat that these forms are not particular to our idiosyncratic way of intuiting but are intrinsic to objects themselves.

In order to make this point, Hegel argues that reason, or the absolute Idea, determines *itself* as spatial and temporal—a self-determination that, we should note, logically precedes any account of those beings capable of intuiting. As Karin de Boer writes, ‘Hegel thus seems to let the Kantian opposition between pure concept and pure intuition be preceded by a concept that of itself enacts this difference.’³⁹ If we set aside Hegel's insistence upon the conceptual or logical nature of this self-determination of reason as spatiotemporal, we can see that Hegel's general view is not so far from Schelling's. Hegel doesn't refer to Schelling in these sections of the philosophy of nature, but it is undeniable that Schelling is a major inspiration for Hegel's critical reinterpretation of the transcendental aesthetic. During their collaborative years in the early 1800s, Schelling and Hegel rejected the Kantian identification of space and time as merely subjective forms of experience, and both philosophers sought philosophical paths that could reveal the manner in which space and time are immanent to reason itself. For reason is the absolute which by its own internal necessity expresses itself as spatiotemporal extension. There is nothing contingent, on this view, about the fact that being is spatial and temporal, and thus there is nothing idiosyncratic about our human forms of intuition. Again, the philosophical methodology implemented in order to arrive at this conception of space and time varies from Schelling's to Hegel's

³⁸ ‘We cannot judge at all whether the intuitions of other thinking beings are bound to the same conditions that limit our intuition and that are universally valid for us.’ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 160 (A27/B43).

³⁹ Karin de Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger's Encounter with Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), p. 249.

systems. But this methodological divergence must be interpreted in light of their shared aim of overcoming Kant's subjectivism by drawing out the immanent spatiality and temporality of reason itself.

Thus, for Hegel, the forms of space and time are utterly objective, the forms immanent to objective reality itself, without any reference to a transcendental subject. The abstractness of space and time does not make them unreal, then, but means that space and time have no reality *beyond* the stuff—whatever this stuff turns out to be—extended in spacetime. This is one sense in which space and time are 'abstract' and yet fully real. There is, however, another sense in which space and time are abstract. In order to elucidate this second sense of abstractness, I will quickly review what has unfolded thus far in the dialectic of nature.

The self-externalisation of logos necessitated that being is outside itself, i.e. that concrete reality, or nature, is defined by nothing other than its self-externality, self-alienation, or self-otherness. Space is precisely this self-externality, and yet space fails to be the self-external being that it is; although space is externality in the form of extension, it is too continuous with itself and, even once dimensionally differentiated, affirms itself as fully *present*, three-dimensional extension.⁴⁰ As such fully present being, space never rids itself of its continuous nature, despite the fact that it is a being-outside-itself and therefore ought to be, by its own internal logic, fully differentiated from itself. To be *truly* outside itself, to be an *actual*, as opposed to merely 'ideal side-by-sidedness [*Nebeneinander*]',⁴¹ spatial being cannot remain continuous with itself; space must be evacuated of its affirmative presence in order to achieve genuine asunderness. This, as we have seen, is accomplished through what Brinkley calls 'the diremptive surge of time'.⁴²

But time, Hegel tells us, is just as *abstractly* self-external as space. As an abstract determination of self-externality, time is similar to space in being continuous with itself, 'for

⁴⁰ That is, space *is there* in the mode of *praesentia*, an immediacy of being which continues throughout the *three-dimensionality* of space.

⁴¹ *W 9*: § 254, 41; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 28. Emphasis modified.

⁴² Alan B. Brinkley, 'Time in Hegel's Phenomenology' 9: *Studies in Hegel* (1960), p. 7.

it is the negativity abstractly relating self to self, and in this abstraction there is as yet no real difference'.⁴³ But how can time, which is the explicit *negativity* of nature, not involve *real difference*, especially considering the fact that it is *through* time that space becomes actually differentiated? I believe Hegel's point here is the following: Time, considered in itself, is self-continuous in much the same way that space is; there are no gaps in time just as there are no gaps in space. In other words, time goes on ad infinitum as does space, and this is the second sense in which these forms of nature are abstract. Nature is infinite expansiveness in the form of spatial extension and endless becoming in the form of temporal duration. Every subsequent stage in Hegel's system of nature will involve more concrete determinations of being than these abstract and infinitely continuous determinations.

That being said, when we consider time in relation *to* space, there is indeed something more determinate going on. Insofar as time is the becoming *of space*, the differentiating activity of time is determinate precisely with respect to spatial extension, and nature is not so abstract or indeterminate after all. As we saw, space necessitates time in order to negate its affirmative presence-to-self, i.e. to make explicit the non-being at the heart of space. Insofar as time expresses the coming-to-be and passing-away of spatially extended being, one can see that time itself is divided between what *had* being, what *has* being, and what *will have* being. Indeed, on account of time's negating activity, Hegel tells us that the past, the present, and the future are necessary moments of temporal duration.⁴⁴ However, it would be a misunderstanding of the logic of time to assume that the three dimensions of time are analogous to the three dimensions of space. For Hegel, insofar as we remain focused on the self-externality of *nature*, each dimension of time is fundamentally a *present* moment. To be sure, when the present moment passes away, it is 'past' and therefore absent. But this pastness is nothing other than a past presence, a present moment that is presently *absent*. The same can be said of the future. What is to come is to come in the form of presence such that the future is nothing more than a presently absent presence. This is of the utmost importance to Hegel's logic of time: although time is the *negation* of spatial

⁴³ *W 9*: Remark to § 258, 49; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 35.

⁴⁴ *W 9*: § 259, 51; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 37.

presence, even in this negation the present *moment*, i.e. the ‘now’, remains the immanent truth of pastness and futurity.⁴⁵

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will consider more closely Hegel’s subsumption of pastness and futurity under temporal presence within the logic of nature. Suffice it to say that, despite Hegel’s conception of time as the coming-to-be (as well as ceasing-to-be) of spatial presence, this temporal becoming finally determines itself to be something more akin to temporal *flux* than coming-into-being or actual genesis. Although I will explore this in more detail below (Chapter 7), I want to simply note here that Hegel’s conception of time signals a more general commitment to conceive ‘becoming’ beyond what he sees as a logic of reflexion, wherein becoming is understood as an actual, historical coming-to-be along the lines of either efficient causation, grounding, or production. According to Hegel, so long as one insists on conceiving ‘becoming’ as the actual, historical coming-to-presence of something that previously was *not*, we fail to arrive at the ‘highest truth’ of becoming. And for Hegel, I will argue, the ‘highest truth’ of becoming is not genetic, but kinetic (in a non-mechanistic sense), distinguishing Hegel’s logic of emergence from Schelling’s in a significant manner.

So much for pointing ahead to the conclusions of this thesis. Up to this point, I have attempted to trace the dialectic of nature up to Hegel’s conception of time as pastness, presence, and futurity, each of which is finally determined as a ‘now’, a past, present, or future ‘presence’. From Hegel’s perspective, this determination of the dimensions of time as various expressions of presence is highly significant. Because the truth of time has proved to be *presence*, the affirmative being of nature has again announced itself, and *what is* yet again predominates over *what is not*. According to Hegel, this means that temporal becoming does not remain sheer flux, but logically becomes space.⁴⁶ And once we grasp that time determines itself as space, we arrive at the third and fourth stages of nature: place and matter-in-motion.

⁴⁵ *W 9*: § 259, 51-52; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 37.

⁴⁶ *W 9*: § 260, 55; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 40.

5.4. Matter in Motion

That the dimensions of time are finally reducible to different versions of presence indicates, according to Hegel, that time determines itself as space. In Hegel's words, 'time is the immediate *collapse* into indifference, into undifferentiated asunderness or *space*, because its opposed moments which are held together in unity, immediately sublate themselves.'⁴⁷ Since past, present, and future, as distinct logical moments, 'immediately sublate themselves', they become one, undifferentiated in the 'now'. Thus, despite the fact that time negates space through the *non-being* of the past and future, time subsequently determines itself as the present *being* of space. However, as is always the case with Hegel, the re-emergence of a logical form is never a simple return to that form. The 'collapse' of time into space in fact raises time to a more complex ontological determination. For once we understand the negativity of time to affirm itself in the present 'now', we do not simply have before us the logic of space as it unfolded prior to the emergence of time. On the contrary, we are now confronted with the affirmative and ontological continuity of spatial extension in a far more *concrete* sense than before, because we are no longer considering mere space, but the unity of space and time. That is to say, we are now considering the temporalisation of space and the spatialisation of time as *one* phenomenon in which spatial being and temporal becoming are united. Indeed, from this moment on, it is more appropriate to refer to 'spacetime' than to the two distinct logico-natural forms of 'space' and 'time'.

What does it mean that space and time are now intrinsically united, that nature is not simply spatially extended and temporally durational but involves the very identity of space and time? In order to answer this question, let us recall the first logical negation of space: the spatial point. The point differentiates one space from another insofar as *this* point is identified or 'pointed out' as somehow distinct, a point *other than* the rest of space. However, a mere spatial point only 'ideally' or abstractly differentiates space, for one point is identical to every other point, and each is just a failed attempt at distinguishing one part of space from any other. In other words, the point is an entirely abstract differentiation of

⁴⁷ *W 9*: § 260, 55; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 40. There is an echo here of the Idea's free release into nature. In both cases, self-negating negativity collapses into the immediacy of spatial extension.

spatial extension. However, once we understand that space is, in fact, not merely three-dimensional extension, but the unity of this extended being with its temporal *negation*, the logic of nature presents us with a more concrete version of the abstract point: the space that is here and *now*, at this spatial location *and* this moment in time. The temporal ‘now’ grants space what it did not have before: *determinate* presence or what Hegel calls ‘place’.⁴⁸ Unlike the abstractness and consequent interchangeability of this space ‘here’ and that space ‘there’, the spatiotemporal location in which a given ‘here’ is tied to a given ‘now’ achieves an ontological determinacy lacking in nature’s previous attempts to determine itself concretely. For with a spatiotemporal place, we have affirmative being that is explicitly involved in the activity of negation: one spatiotemporal location *is not* that place *there*, but *is* this place *here, now*, and this is so precisely because it is *not* another place. Note that despite time’s collapse into spatial presence, the negativity of time continues to play a crucial role in nature’s logical progression.

In § 261, Hegel unpacks this concept of place—again, with only a handful of sentences—to show that place itself involves two distinct aspects on account of the fact that place is the unity of space and time and that both of these forms of nature’s self-manifestation retain their unique logical characteristics even in their newfound unity. Insofar as place is spatial, therefore, place should be understood as ‘indifferent singularity’, a place that is undifferentiated from itself or continuous with itself, but is a unique or determinate place precisely in this ‘indifference’ since the negativity of time is intrinsic to this spatial indifference. In other words, place retains the affirmative character of space as extended being, but now as a concrete, particular extended region since place is ‘this space *now*’. And yet, because place is the unity of space *and* time, such a place would not be a true place if it did not express the full character of time as well, and not merely in the limited form through which the ‘now’ grants space ontological determinacy. Since time is the *negation* of space, the ‘indifferent singularity’ of place must be actively negated (and not just made concrete or determinate). That is to say, ‘this place’ that is ‘here’ and ‘now’ must be negated such that

⁴⁸ ‘The Here is at the same time a Now, for it is the point of duration. This unity of Here and Now is Place’ (*W* 9: Addition to § 260, 56; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 40).

‘this place’ no longer *is*. Thus, time does not only grant spatial extension determinacy but also negates that determinate being via the passage of time.

But what happens to ‘place’ when it is negated in this way? Does the determinate spatiotemporal location simply disappear with the passage of time? To be sure, ‘*this*’ place, ‘*here*’ and ‘*now*’ disappears. But place *as such* does not vanish, for we already know that nature necessarily involves determinate place, and the passage of time does not yield a return to either the undifferentiated extension of space or the nothingness of a non-extended future. Rather, with the negation of a particular place, *another* place arises in its stead.⁴⁹ In this way, place negates the place that it is, but place nevertheless endures, albeit as *another* place. Hegel calls this simultaneous negation of place and endurance of ‘having a place’ *motion*, for this logic describes a *change of place*. Thus, a specific place is negated and is replaced by a second place, which in turn is negated and itself replaced by a third place. As Thomas Posch says, ‘While time is a sequence of “now, now, now,” motion is a sequence of the form “now here, then there, then there.”’⁵⁰

Motion is only one of two logico-natural determinations necessitated by place, the second of these determinations being matter. Before proceeding to the deduction of matter, however, I want to note two things about the deduction of motion. First: although the deduction of matter occurs within the same logical stage as the deduction of motion (§ 261), the fact is that Hegel deduces motion prior to deducing matter from the sheer being of nature. We can take this to be the first of many signs in the philosophy of nature that, for Hegel, not only is matter inconceivable without motion—there is no simple, static matter—but that, in a significant sense, motion is the ‘essence’ of nature. As we will see, matter is in fact the ‘flip side’ of motion, and it is therefore questionable to attribute, as I do now,

⁴⁹ As Stephen Houlgate puts it, ‘logically, space and time must constitute *place that negates itself spatially as well as temporally* – place that, while retaining its identity, ceases to be *this* place and becomes *another* place.’ Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, p. 131.

⁵⁰ Thomas Posch, ‘Hegel and the Sciences’, p. 184.

ontological priority to motion.⁵¹ Within the realm of *nature*, there is certainly no motion outside of matter, just as there is no matter without motion. Nevertheless, I believe we are justified in reading a certain prioritisation of motion or movement (*Bewegung*) here as part of Hegel's more fundamental commitment to interpreting being in terms of becoming (*Werden*), activity (*Tätigkeit*), and process (*Prozess*)—as long as we acknowledge that, from Hegel's perspective, particular, finite beings are not 'swallowed up' in this process but, on the contrary, have their particular, finite being *within* this processual movement. As I argued in Chapter 4, Hegel's ontology is an 'ontology of movement', not merely in the limited sense that everything that *is* moves, but in the more fundamental sense that being itself is kinetic at its very core.⁵² To be sure, within the mechanics, *Bewegung* names a specific form of nature, namely, the 'change of place' of spatiotemporally extended being. I do not, therefore, mean to collapse the distinction between the specific logic of mechanical motion and Hegel's more general conception of dialectical movement. I merely want to point out the fact that movement is, at one and the same time, the central notion within the first part of Hegel's nature philosophy (mechanics) *and* a central aspect of Hegel's conception of being *as such*, namely, as the manner in which *logos* dialectically develops itself through the graduated sequence of nature's stages. The full significance of this point will not become clear until the concluding chapter of this thesis (Chapter 7), in which I reconsider Hegel's conceptions of time, becoming, and movement with the late Schelling's critique thereof in mind. At this point, I simply want to mark the significance of motion within Hegel's philosophy of nature and his system more generally.

The second issue I want to raise before continuing to elucidate the progress of nature in the *Encyclopaedia* is that Hegel's conception of motion appears to be fundamentally Aristotelian, despite the fact that Hegel is not explicitly concerned here with the activity of actualisation. In order to see this, we need only recognise that 'change of place' does not

⁵¹ Our first hint as to the priority of motion is in the title of this section. We are still unpacking the logic of Part A of the Mechanics, namely, 'Space and Time', which is itself divided into three parts: (a) Space; (b) Time; and (c) Place and Motion. There is no reference to matter in the title of the third part (c), even though the logical derivation of matter appears alongside the derivation of motion in § 261.

⁵² See Chapter 4.5 above.

exclusively signify the change of a place *here* to a place *there*, i.e. a change from one spatial location at t_1 to another spatial location at t_2 —although this type of motion certainly fits Hegel’s conception of motion. Since Hegel defines motion as the mere ‘change of place’, and place implicates both space and time, motion can *also* express itself in states of rest.⁵³ For a being at rest does not simply remain in the place it is; on the contrary, a resting being changes its place with respect to temporal duration: the being at rest is here at t_1 and still *here*, as opposed to *there*, at t_2 . In this latter situation, change of place occurs precisely insofar as this place *now* (t_1) vanishes and gives way to this place *now* (t_2). When we step outside of the pure logic of motion and consider such change of place representationally, we can ask: is this object before me, which appears to remain in its place after the passage of time, an object *in motion*? For Hegel, as for Aristotle, this is undoubtedly the case.

But whether we consider ‘change of place’ as movement from one spatial location to another or as a resting in one spatial location through time, something must be moving—not, necessarily, a something (*Etwas*) per se, or even a thing (*Ding*), but determinate *being* (*Dasein*) in some sense continues *to be* in motion. Indeed, there must be some determinate being, however vague at this point, that is *undergoing* the change of place that motion is. Matter, according to Hegel, is that which continues in the movement from one place to another. ‘Since there is motion, something moves; but this something which persists is matter.’⁵⁴ Now, this persistence within motion should not be understood as a material *substance* (*hypokeimenon*) underlying accidental change. It is central to Hegel’s thought that matter is just the ‘flip side’ of motion, the persistence of a determinate ‘place’ within the change of place, rather than the underlying *thing* somehow alien to the process of its becoming. Therefore, whenever Hegel speaks of matter in the philosophy of nature, we must read this as *matter-in-motion*. As Hegel says, ‘Just as there is no Motion without Matter, so

⁵³ Hegel does not make this argument himself, and in fact, further on in the mechanics he defines rest as ‘the negation of motion in body’ (*W* 9: § 264, 64; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 48). Nevertheless, from the context of § 264, we can see that such a ‘negation of motion’ is the negation of a distinctive *kind* of motion, namely, that activity we ordinarily associate with the term ‘motion’, i.e. the change of *spatial* location. Implicit in Hegel’s conception of place, however, is the notion that rest is also a form of motion, and the paragraphs on inertia (§§ 263-264) must be read in light of this more fundamental Hegelian commitment.

⁵⁴ *W* 9: Addition to § 261, 60; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

too, there is no Matter without Motion.⁵⁵ In order to understand this we must let go of our natural tendency to represent change as accidental to a substratum and enter into the speculative logic whereby place necessitates matter. According to Hegel, the reason that being continues through movement is derived from such a logic: whereas motion is made necessary by the asunderness of nature (spacetime *negating* its unity and thereby distinguishing itself between *this* and *that* place), matter is made necessary by nature's *continuity-with-self*. As Hegel says, matter is the 'peaceful identity [*ruhende Identität*]' of space and time, and by this Hegel means that matter is the place that *persists* in motion, the place that *moves* from one spatiotemporal location to another.⁵⁶

However, although matter is the 'peaceful identity' of space and time and thereby expresses nature's implicit continuity-with-self, it would be erroneous to see matter as simply inert or even exclusively expressive of nature's continuity-with-self. First and foremost, matter is, by its own logical necessity, perpetually in motion. But there is a further sense in which matter is intrinsically active. To see this, we need only turn to the next stage of nature's dialectic, the second section of the mechanics. Here, we learn that matter is more than mere continuity-in-change, but involves two further ontological features: impenetrability and extensive continuity. And just as all determinations of matter should be seen to involve some kind of activity on the part of matter, so too impenetrability and extensive continuity—the fundamental features of matter—are seen as the base-level *activities* of matter. Following Kant and Schelling, Hegel first considers these ontological features of matter in terms of the repulsive and attractive activities that make matter possible. However, Hegel departs from both Kant and Schelling insofar as he sees neither repulsion nor attraction as *forces* of nature. Rather, repulsion is simply matter's activity of repelling *other* matter from occupying its place in spacetime, and attraction is the same matter's intrinsic *unity* with all other matter. Repulsion and attraction, then, constitute the two fundamental features of matter: quantitative distinctness (or impenetrability) and

⁵⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 261, 60; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

⁵⁶ *W 9*: Addition to § 261, 60; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

extensive continuity.⁵⁷ The former develops from the moment of nature's negativity, 'its abstract *separation into parts*', and the latter develops from the moment of the sameness or indifference of these parts.⁵⁸

One reason that Hegel rejects the notion that repulsion and attraction are forces is that, for Hegel, these immanent activities are logically separable but are not, thereby, physically separate. On the contrary, repulsion and attraction are simply *moments* which pass over into one another.⁵⁹ By conceiving repulsion and attraction as moments constitutive of matter, as opposed to forces involved in the latter's dynamic construction, Hegel appears to distance himself from the Schellingian conception of matter. Yet despite rejecting the Schellingian language of force, Hegel does follow Schelling's Baaderian criticism of Kant by identifying *gravity* as a distinct determination of matter responsible for unifying the 'moments' of repulsion and attraction.⁶⁰ Below, I will consider the apparent difference between Schelling's and Hegel's conceptions of repulsive and attractive activity. First, it will be necessary to interpret Hegel's conception of their unity, namely the gravitational motion expressed in free fall.

Before considering Hegel's conception of gravity in detail, I want to make one final point concerning Hegel's conception of matter. Hegel makes it clear in the Remark to § 261 that the transition from space and time to place, motion, and matter is an utterly crucial step in the dialectic of nature, characterising it as 'the transition from ideality to reality, from abstraction to concrete existence (*konkreten Dasein*)'.⁶¹ I take Hegel's remark here to indicate the possibility that Hegel's ontology of nature properly begins here, with the concepts of motion and matter. To be sure, everything that Hegel unpacks from the beginning of § 254 (i.e. space) onwards is proper to Hegel's ontology of nature. Unlike the introductory remarks (§§ 245-253) which point ahead to what *will* be derived in the

⁵⁷ *W 9*: § 262, 60; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ *W 9*: § 262, 60; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

⁵⁹ *W 5*: 204; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 182.

⁶⁰ For Hegel's most detailed account of repulsion and attraction, see *W 5*: 190-208; *Science of Logic* (Miller), pp. 170-184.

⁶¹ *W 9*: Remark to § 261, 56; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 41.

philosophy of nature, § 254 and the subsequent paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia* are meant to unfold the immanent logic of nature and thereby justify Hegel's ontology of natural forms. But we recall that Hegel's logic of nature began with the absolute Idea in its *immediate* self-externality. Space and time, considered in themselves, remain abstract on account of the extreme immediacy with which the philosophy of nature must begin, and they are therefore nothing other than the forms *through* which all natural determinations make themselves manifest in concrete reality. With the logical emergence of matter, nature achieves a certain concreteness which it previously lacked. As Hegel says, 'Matter'—and here Hegel is discussing matter and its motion—'is the first reality, existent being-for-self; it is not merely the abstract being, but the positive existence of Space.'⁶²

This point is of the utmost importance for Hegel's philosophy of nature. Mobile matter is the fundamental or base level of reality—space, time, and place being the more abstract determinations that logically necessitate the first 'layer' of natural being as matter-in-motion. Whereas space and time are the abstract *forms* in which all subsequent logico-natural determinations will express themselves, mobile matter is the *content*, the 'stuff' of nature itself that will go on, in the subsequent stages of nature philosophy, to form *itself* into particular bodies with qualitative determinacy. Thus, for Hegel, there isn't anything that 'underlies' the material world, for matter is the primary manifestation of the Idea in its alienation-from-self. And this primary manifestation of the Idea is *concrete*, because it is genuinely differentiated. This differentiation is not yet on account of any qualitative determinacy inhering in matter, for this will only come with the logical transition from mechanics to physics. At this stage, matter is determinate in a 'mechanical' sense: any given part of matter is different from every other part with respect to spatiotemporal distinctness. But all of the more complex determinacy that will arise in the remainder of the philosophy of nature has mobile matter as its 'base' level. Or, to follow Hegel in his move away from the algebraic terminology of 'potentiation': everything that occurs within the philosophy of nature will be a *moment* within a *material process*. Therefore, *pace* Marx, there is nothing

⁶² W 9: Addition to § 261, 60; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

that exists for Hegel that is not in one way or another derivative of matter-in-motion.⁶³ Everything that we will consider, from immaterial light to human thought, are all made necessary by the immanent logic, and therefore being, of matter-in-motion. Thus, even the forms of subjectivity which emerge throughout the stages of nature will have an utterly non-subjective, selfless material nature as their source. In this way, even the least material of ontological determinations are dependent upon real, material being.

5.5. Falling Bodies

By §262 of the *Encyclopaedia*, nature has proven to be spatiotemporally extended matter-in-motion, matter which is, on the one hand, discrete or separated into impenetrable parts, and on the other hand, utterly continuous, i.e. without any immaterial ‘gaps’. But as we saw, discreteness and continuity are not unrelated features of matter, but two ‘moments’ that have their truth in their implicit unity, what Hegel calls singularity (*Einzelheit*) or subjectivity.⁶⁴ At this stage, such singularity—the unity of discreteness and continuity—has not determined itself as fully actualised being. Rather, according to Hegel, this singular being that is both *itself* (discrete) and *one with everything else* (continuous), is only posited by matter as an ‘ideal’ being in gravitational motion.⁶⁵

Before considering the logic of gravity in order to shed light upon why Hegel identifies gravity as a merely ‘ideal’ subjectivity, it is worth first considering why Hegel identifies the unity of discreteness and extensive continuity as ‘subjective’ in any sense whatsoever, for it is by no means immediately obvious. According to Hegel, subjectivity is a distinctive way of being in which an individual achieves distinct *selfhood* via a relationship to that which is *other* than the self. Unlike the sheer self-externality of spatial extension,

⁶³ Cf. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, Third Edition, ed. by Friedrich Engels, trans. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), p. 29.

⁶⁴ See the Remark to § 262 where Hegel describes ‘heavy matter’ as possessing ‘the ideal moments of the Notion, of singularity or subjectivity’. Hegel goes on: ‘Gravity...is the reduction of both discrete and continuous particularity to unity as a negative relation to self, to *singularity*, to a *subjectivity* which, however, is still quite abstract’ (*W 9*: 61; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 45).

⁶⁵ *W 9*: § 262, 60-61; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

then, subjectivity is an ‘inwardness’ that results from a unification with alterity. Now, it is in the logic of gravity that we discover the first signs that matter will express itself as ‘subjective’ in this technical sense, since gravity is the unity of material discreteness and continuity. Gravitational motion is therefore a profoundly important stage in Hegel’s philosophy of nature. Moreover, because Hegel sees gravitational motion as entirely immanent to matter itself (i.e. as the unity of material repulsion and attraction), this stage in nature’s logical development proves that inorganic matter *already*, long before the logical emergence of organic life, posits subjectivity as its ideal *telos*. For as we shall see in Chapter 6, organic and spiritual subjectivity are, for Hegel, more concrete forms of the logical structure of becoming oneself through a relation to what is other.

In order to show how Hegel understands gravity to be the ‘essential motion’⁶⁶ wherein subjectivity first reveals itself in nature, we must consider how Hegel derives gravity from sheer material being. As we have seen, nature achieves a certain amount of determinacy in matter, and this proves, according to Hegel, that matter is ‘the first reality’⁶⁷ or the first actual manifestation of spatiotemporal extension—what I have called, at the risk of making Hegel’s conception of nature out to be an aggregate of parts, the ‘first layer’ of being. But what *kind* of determinacy does matter have? At this stage, the only determinacy matter can possibly express is *quantitative*, for we are still working through the notion of nature as self-*externality* and thus a nature without any qualitative features that would distinguish one particular material place from another.⁶⁸ To be sure, places are different from one another, but Hegel has yet to deduce *particular* material places that are individuated according to their qualitative determinacy. Thus far, one material place is distinct from another with respect to quantitative determinacy alone. According to Hegel, this quantitative determinacy is expressed as ‘different quanta or *masses* which, in the superficial determination [*oberflächlichen Bestimmung*] of a whole or a One, are *bodies*.’⁶⁹ Thus, one

⁶⁶ W 9: § 266, 69; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ W 9: Addition to § 261, 60; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

⁶⁸ W 9: § 263, 64; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 47.

⁶⁹ W 9: § 263, 64; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 47.

material place is distinct from another insofar as that place is an individual body constituted by a specific quantum of material, namely, its mass.

Matter, for Hegel, necessarily takes on the form of individuated bodies. We should not, however, interpret this to mean that Hegel conceives matter as *corpuscular*. For matter as such has logical features distinct from and more fundamental than its somatic individuation, hence the antecedence of the deduction of matter to the deduction of material bodies in the philosophy of nature. Indeed, matter is, as Stone puts it, ‘the fundamental element that threads through all of nature’,⁷⁰ and is not, therefore, reducible to the individuated bodies through which matter expresses its quantitative determinacy or mass. Nevertheless, matter does express its quantitative determinacy in separating itself into individual bodies with distinct quanta of material.

The quantitative determinacy of matter, however, is not limited to its mass. In his logic of collision, Hegel aims to show that bodies which vie for the same position in spacetime are not exclusively determinate thanks to their mass, but involve a further ontological characteristic. In collision, material bodies achieve a ‘being-for-self against the other’ and this, Hegel argues, implies a second quantitatively determinate feature of material bodies, namely, ‘weight [*Gewicht*] as the heaviness [*Schwere*] of a quantitatively distinct mass.’⁷¹ The material body is thus differentiated from other bodies not only in being constituted by a determinate quantum of matter (i.e. by its mass), but by its weight. For weight is necessitated by the fact that a body is not only determinate with respect to its *own* material, but is determinate with respect to its intrinsic relation to *other* bodies (i.e. ‘being-for-self against the other’). In collision, this ‘being-for-self against the other’ is only implicit, but as weight or *heaviness*, matter explicitly manifests its quantitative determinacy as related to another body. But why does heaviness express an explicit relation of one body to another? According to Hegel, heaviness is nothing other than the tendency for a body to fall towards another body thanks to its own weight. For this reason, Hegel sees the weight intrinsic to any given body as the cause of gravitational motion. Or, more precisely, the

⁷⁰ Stone, *Petrified Intelligence*, p. 181n16.

⁷¹ *W 9*: § 265, 66; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 49.

weight or heaviness of a given body *just is* its inner movement towards a being beyond it. For gravity is nothing other than the striving of a material body to unite with a mass greater than it, the phenomenon wherein ‘matter strives to get away *out of itself* to an Other’.⁷²

Now that we have a sense of Hegel’s general conception of gravity and its logical necessity, we can gain clarity about why he identifies gravity as an ‘ideal subjectivity’ and as the unity of repulsion (discreteness) and attraction (continuity). Gravity is the *unity* of repulsion and attraction, because gravity is nothing other than the phenomenon wherein *discrete* material bodies seek *unity* or ontological continuity with *other* material bodies. It is important to note that gravity is not *mere* unity or ontological continuity (attraction) but *unity-in-difference*. It is in this way that gravity is the identity of attraction and repulsion, for it involves both the moment of continuity *and* discreteness. For only a discrete material body can fall towards *another* body, itself distinct, in search of material unity-in-difference. Another way to put this is that, when unified, discreteness and continuity constitute a more complex and higher logical determination: being-oneself-in-unity-with-another. When terrestrial bodies fall towards the earth on account of their heaviness, they express their yearning to achieve this new form of being.⁷³ Hegel identifies this being-oneself-in-unity-with-another as the basic form of ‘subjectivity’, and this notion of subjectivity will be at play throughout the remainder of Hegel’s system. As we will see, in Hegel’s organics, life will be differentiated from inorganic matter on account of the fact that life achieves a certain selfhood in its unity with otherness. And unsurprisingly, the same conception of subjectivity plays a crucial role in the transition from the philosophy of nature to the philosophy of spirit, wherein nature sheds its self-external character to such an extent that this emergent identity-in-difference can no longer be understood as ‘natural’.

However, unlike the animal organism and even less like the human spirit, gravity is only an ‘*ideal* subjectivity’. Indeed, because *self-externality* is still the dominant logical form in this ontological sphere, the unity sought in gravity is merely *sought*. Bodies *long* to unite with other bodies, but this is a *perpetual* longing; the inner unity of repulsion and

⁷² W 9: Remark to § 269, 83; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 63.

⁷³ W 9: Remark to § 262, 61; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 45.

attraction is never achieved. Gravity, then, is a limited subjectivity, and ‘falling is [only] *relatively* free motion’,⁷⁴ a ‘half-free motion [*halbfreien Bewegung*]’.⁷⁵ First and foremost, these descriptions of free fall are meant to point out the fact that a falling body does not raise *itself* to height in order for it to fall; the *freedom* of falling is only ‘relatively’ free because a body must be placed by something *external* to it in order for it to fall.⁷⁶ But there is a second sense in which the free fall is only a ‘half-free motion’, and that is connected to the very logic of what it means to seek a centre *beyond* oneself in order to achieve selfhood. In other words, falling is also ‘relatively’ free because it is a mere *striving* for subjectivity. *Were* falling bodies to accomplish their aim, then they would be united in their difference, and subjectivity would be achieved in mechanical nature. But since free fall is only a *striving* for such unity-in-difference, this form of gravitational motion can never arrive at its goal without ceasing to be the gravity that it is. In other words, the aim of unity-in-difference is by logical necessity unachievable through gravity, making gravitational motion a merely ‘ideal’ subjectivity.⁷⁷ This does not mean that gravity is a non-existent or ‘illusory’ being; it simply means that the logical telos of gravity—unity-in-difference—cannot be achieved by that phenomenon itself, at least insofar as gravity is the free fall of bodies towards a centre beyond them. Whether nature does achieve such unity by other means is yet to be seen. What is essential here is that matter is in a state of longing for freedom. On this point, it is worth noting how close Hegel is to Schelling. Both philosophers defend the Boehmean notion that nature longs to be other than it is, and it is striking that Hegel retains the emotive language of Boehme as much as Schelling does when describing this fully rational determination of nature. For example, in the Addition to § 262, we read: ‘The unity of gravity is only an Ought, a longing (*Sehnsucht*), the most unhappy *nisus* to which matter is

⁷⁴ W 9: § 267, 75; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 56. Emphasis modified.

⁷⁵ W 9: Remark to § 270, 93; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 71.

⁷⁶ W 9: § 267, 75; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 56.

⁷⁷ W 9: § 262, 61; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 44.

eternally condemned.⁷⁸ Gravity—for Schelling and Hegel—is nature’s way of expressing its melancholic (*schwermütig*) longing for ontological unity.

It is important to recognise, however, that despite the fact that falling bodies fail to achieve unity-in-difference, such unity is not entirely *external* to matter. On the contrary, in order for matter to *strive* for such unity, it must be immanently related to that unity for which it strives. Thus, even if selfhood is beyond the reach of falling bodies, ‘the striving to reach it...is immanent in matter.’⁷⁹ Melancholic fall is therefore not a state that *befalls* a body; bodies fall because they are intrinsically heavy.⁸⁰

This leads me to one of the most significant features of Hegel’s mechanics. As we have already seen, matter is immanently mobile for Hegel. Once we understand the immanent longing of bodies to unite with other bodies, matter and motion become all the more inseparable: matter is not only a ‘place’ that endures as the place it is through its motion (i.e. through its *change* of place), but matter is literally *self-moving*—with the important caveat that this ‘self-movement’ is, at this stage of nature, lacking explicit ‘selfhood’. Hegel’s point is not that a material body moves itself whenever it changes place. Rather, his point is the following: even in rectilinear motion, it is an abstraction from the concrete reality of matter to conceive a material body as inert *and nothing further*. To be sure, Hegel grants that, in collision, a body’s velocity changes thanks to impact with another body, and neither body moves *itself* in such an event. Matter, insofar as it expresses itself abstractly, allows itself to be moved from without, hence Hegel’s account of inertia and his subsequent discussion of pressure and thrust, ‘the two causes of external, mechanical motion’.⁸¹ However, because such inert matter is *ontologically* abstract, the philosopher of nature fails to grasp the concrete *truth* of matter if she reifies this abstract matter and conceives contact with an external body as the exclusive, or even fundamental, impetus for motion. In other words, we fail to comprehend the motion of a body in its full actuality if we

⁷⁸ W 9: Addition to § 262, 63; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 46.

⁷⁹ W 9: Remark to § 262, 62; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 46.

⁸⁰ As Hegel puts it, falling is ‘*immanent* in the body’ (W 9: § 267, 75; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 56).

⁸¹ W 9: Addition to § 265, 68; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 51. For Hegel’s account of inertia, see §§ 263-264; for his account of thrust, see §§ 265-266.

abstract the motion that derives from mechanical contact away from gravitational motion, the latter of which is always operative. For Hegel, material bodies are not simply inert, but intrinsically drive themselves beyond themselves in free fall. Moreover, this activity is not accidental or contingent; to be driven beyond oneself is what it is to be a heavy, material body. Thus, Hegel is critical—as are Kant and Schelling before him—of the Newtonian conception of gravity as contingent with respect to matter. And we can now see that matter is intrinsically mobile in two respects for Hegel: First, insofar as it is of the intrinsic nature of matter *to be moved* in collision; and second, insofar as no material body ever exists in a vacuum, and thus material bodies will always involves *immanent* changes in velocity, thanks to the fact that matter is heavy and gravitates towards a body outside it.⁸²

As I have mentioned, Hegel describes this latter type of motion as ‘the *essential* motion [wesentliche *Bewegung*]’ of matter.⁸³ I believe we can further unpack Hegel’s conception of gravity if we take Hegel to be alluding here to two distinct features of free fall pertaining to two senses of the term ‘essential’. On the one hand, falling is essential to what it means to be a material body; it is the *truth* of mechanical motion, its *Wesen*. But *as falling*, the truth or being (*Wesen*) of mechanical motion manifests itself as ‘essential’ (*wesentlich*) in the technical, logical sense of the term: subjectivity is *posited* (*gesetzt*) through matter’s *striving-for-subjectivity*, but this posited subjectivity is not identical with what does the positing. In other words, we have not yet arrived at a natural manifestation of *self-developmental* movement or the motion of the ‘concept’ as the explicitly free movement of self-determination. The proper systematic place in which this distinction is made, i.e. between ‘essential’ and ‘conceptual’ movement, is of course logic, ‘essence’ and ‘concept’ comprising the content of the second and third parts of that domain of philosophy. But the determinations of logic reappear at significant points in the philosophy of nature, in part to

⁸² Hegel does not only claim that a body is intrinsically heavy and therefore freely falling towards a centre beyond it; he also aims to show how this heaviness of matter follows a more determinate logical pattern, one that has yet to be explained philosophically but has indeed been discovered empirically, namely in Galileo’s law of fall and subsequently explained mathematically by Newton. Hegel’s explanation of Galileo’s law of fall is contained in the Remark to § 267. For an account of Hegel’s logical derivation of Galileo’s law of fall, see Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel*, pp. 138-144.

⁸³ *W 9*: § 266, 69; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 52.

elucidate the tortuous dialectic that is at work in the *Realphilosophie*, and in part simply because the *Realphilosophie* is the further unfolding of the ontological structures that have already been disclosed in the more abstract logic. Thus, I take it that Hegel's description of free fall as 'the essential motion' of finite mechanics is meant to drive home the point that at this stage of nature, the concept (or Idea) is alienated from its self-development and therefore expresses itself as less-than-conceptual in its motion. To be sure, nature explicitly *strives* for conceptual unity in the act of free fall, but this unity is forever beyond the finite body and is thus a selfhood that nature—the Idea in its self-externality—has yet to achieve in concrete form.

As I have described it, free fall is a *real* manifestation of essence that precedes any natural manifestation of subjectivity proper. But it is not enough to say that free fall is an 'ideal subjectivity', a 'mere positing' of selfhood, as if this ideal subjectivity had no relation to the forms of subjectivity that follow, viz. planetary motion, organic life, and spiritual freedom. To understand the connection between gravitational motion, on the one hand, and the more concrete, actualised forms of subjectivity on the other, let us consider more closely Hegel's conception of gravity. Hegel insists that the 'centre', i.e. the potential 'self' towards which bodies fall, does not preexist those material bodies, but is posited by them, at times even describing free fall as the *production* (*Erzeugung*) of the centre.⁸⁴ Hegel certainly does not mean that a falling body actually generates a body beyond it in the act of falling! But there is no question that, for Hegel, sheer materiality *logically* precedes the concrete 'selfhood' towards which bodies strive in gravitational motion. One might take this to simply mean the following: bodies which fall to the Earth posit *their* self outside themselves, but soon enough in Hegel's philosophy of nature a natural form will come along that requires no positing whatsoever. This would be a legitimate interpretation, but I take this view to downplay the significance of free fall. For it is only *through* the logic of free fall—wherein subjectivity is first posited as nature's *ideal*—that nature's logical progression *ever*

⁸⁴ 'The gravity of bodies generates [*erzeugt*] such a centre; material points in seeking each other have in so doing posited a common centre of gravity. Gravity is *the positing* of such a One; each particular mass is the positing of it, it seeks a One within itself and gathers its entire quantitative relationship to others into a single point' (*W* 9: Addition to § 266, 72; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 54, my emphasis).

arrives at a subjectivity which does in fact determine *itself* as free, subjective being. In other words, I am of the view that, for Hegel, the more ‘abstract’ forms of nature are not *simply* abstract or deficient forms of nature, but are, rather, the very forms which logically *necessitate* the more concrete forms of nature. And as I argued in Chapter 4, because logic is *ontology* for Hegel, *logical* relations signify *ontological* relations.⁸⁵ It is therefore a fundamental claim of this thesis that Hegel conceives inorganic, selfless matter as the very being that makes organic and spiritual subjectivity possible. And it is for this reason that, *pace* Robert Pippin, I see the philosophy of nature as absolutely central to Hegel’s philosophical enterprise and as a necessary propaedeutic to any philosophical investigation of human subjectivity.⁸⁶

These remarks should indicate yet again the proximity I see between Schelling’s and Hegel’s respective projects. On my reading, Schelling (up until the *Ages of the World*) and Hegel are committed to a shared philosophical task of articulating the atemporal process by which inorganic nature necessitates the existence of spirit. I now want to turn to a more specific topic that becomes important within this overarching project by briefly considering Hegel’s conception of gravity in relation to Schelling’s conception of the same. I have already noted the similarity between Schelling’s and Hegel’s conceptions of gravity as a longing for selfhood, and it is this conception of gravity which clearly shows Schelling and Hegel to be defending similar conceptions of matter as immanently striving for freedom. But I have also stated that Hegel rejects the idea that repulsion, attraction, and gravity are ‘forces’ of nature. One might think that this latter point signals an important difference between Hegel and Schelling, since Schelling conceives attraction and repulsion precisely as the ‘fundamental forces’ of nature. Appearances to the contrary, I hold that this difference in terminological preference is relatively insignificant. In order to make this clear, I will

⁸⁵ See Chapter 4.10.

⁸⁶ Pippin distinguishes Hegel from Schiller, Schelling, and Kant (in the third *Critique*) insofar as Hegel, on Pippin’s interpretation, isn’t very interested in nature. ‘There is, of course, a *Philosophy of Nature* in his *Encyclopedia*, but as anyone who has slogged through it knows, there is a lot there that seems to turn no other wheel elsewhere in what Hegel says, and very little in the *Philosophy of Spirit* seems to depend on it or refer back to it.’ Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 189.

consider the reasons behind Hegel's rejection of the language of force and then compare Hegel's position to that of Schelling.

According to Hegel, the central problem with conceiving material activity in terms of 'force' is that such a term implies that a given force is not only conceptually but physically distinct from the bodies upon which it acts. This is the case, on Hegel's view, whether the forces of repulsion and attraction are seen as external *or* internal to matter. For a matter that '*has these two forces in itself*'⁸⁷ is still in some sense distinct from the repulsive and attractive activity that dwell within it; matter is not seen—as it should be—as simply *being* the dual activity of repulsion and attraction. For Hegel, matter just is impenetrable and continuous: it occupies space and thereby repels other matter from its place; and it is simultaneously continuous with itself, for there is no immaterial space (at least thus far in the logic of nature). In this way, repulsion and attraction are not forces external *or* internal to matter, but the fundamental ontological activities of matter itself. Moreover, 'force' implies that one force is physically separate from another. As Hegel puts it, 'Regarded as forces, [repulsion and attraction] are treated as self-standing and therefore not as referring to each other by nature.'⁸⁸ But as we have seen, repulsion and attraction are not distinct physical *existences*, but are, rather, the immanent activity of matter itself, one and the same being. And the *identity* of repulsion and attraction is apparent in the free fall of terrestrial bodies that seek to *unite* with other matter (attraction) whilst remaining discrete and impenetrable (repulsion).

Hegel's discussion of repulsion and attraction is made with explicit reference to Kant's conception of matter. Despite Kant's commitment to providing a metaphysical grounding for Newtonian science, he already saw the limits of the Newtonian conception of attractive force as a contingent phenomenon with respect to matter. In the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant argued that attraction is necessary if matter is to fill space; for without attraction counteracting repulsion, matter would be repelled outward *ad infinitum*.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *W 5: 200; Science of Logic* (Giovanni), p. 146.

⁸⁸ *W 5: 200; Science of Logic* (Giovanni), p. 145.

⁸⁹ Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, pp. 56-57.

According to Hegel, this recognition of the immanence of attraction to matter is paramount, for it proves that attraction cannot be external to matter, as some physical *force*, but just is the activity whereby matter expresses its continuity-with-self. In Kant, then, the first problem with conceiving repulsion and attraction as forces is overcome: attraction is not physically separate from matter but is, along with repulsion, a fundamental feature of materiality, despite Kant's identification of these activities as dynamical or force-based. This is why Hegel says, 'the thought on which' Kant's construction of matter was based, 'namely that matter must be made out to be from these two opposing determinations as its fundamental forces, must always be highly esteemed.'⁹⁰

But what about Hegel's second criticism of the language of force? Does Kant also understand repulsion and attraction to be two aspects of an identical activity? Or does he not, *following* Newton, remain tied to the ontological *difference* between repulsion and attraction, as 'self-standing' forces? According to Hegel, 'While it is true that Kant sublates that externality by making attraction a *force of matter itself*...still, within matter, his two fundamental forces remain external, *independent of each other*'.⁹¹ Hegel's criticism of Kant is strikingly familiar, and although he does not mention either Baader or Schelling by name, it is hard to imagine that Hegel is not following their line of thought here. For Baader, Schelling, *and* Hegel, Kant's construction of matter, for all its merit, is fundamentally flawed insofar as it fails to see the *unity* of repulsion and attraction.⁹² And as we have seen (Chapter 1), Kant fails to see this unity because he identifies, in a Newtonian matter, attraction with *gravity*. But for Baader, Schelling, and Hegel, gravity is distinct from attraction, for it is the very phenomenon which proves the *identity* of repulsion and attraction. Indeed, for all three post-Kantian philosophers, heaviness is the essential truth of matter and it is in no way contingent to material reality. Material bodies are neither *pulled* by a gravitational force external to them, nor do they *have* gravitational force as a trait separate from their

⁹⁰ *W 5: 203; Science of Logic* (Giovanni), p. 148.

⁹¹ *W 5: 204; Science of Logic* (Giovanni), p. 148.

⁹² Hegel was impressed with Baader throughout his life, seemingly more so than Baader was with Hegel. Cf. Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', p. 262.

ontological discreteness. Gravity is, rather, the longing inherent in material bodies to unite with other bodies from which they are *distinct* (repulsive ‘force’) and with which they are *continuous* (attractive ‘force’).

As I understand it, then, Hegel is far closer to Schelling on this issue than it appears at first glance. For Schelling does not reify forces as either physically *external* to matter or even implicitly external to matter, as residing ‘within’ bodies. Rather, Schelling follows Kant in describing the dynamic *construction* of matter. But this construction does not involve the construction of *bodies* by underlying *forces*. Rather, the ‘dynamic construction of matter’ names the *logically* genetic process of deriving the necessary conditions for the possibility of materiality.⁹³ Thus, Schelling’s dynamic construction of matter is not meant to determine matter as lifeless stuff that is only animated by forces, either external or internal to such lifeless stuff. On the contrary, Schelling’s dynamic construction of matter is meant to show that matter is *self-forming*, that matter is immanently active, and not because forces simply reside *within* it. Matter, for Schelling, is the base-level of nature which potentiates *itself*, raises *itself* to higher forms of being. On my reading, the fundamental difference between the Schellingian and Hegelian conceptions of matter does not reside so much in the language of force (or absence thereof), but rather in the concept of *powers* (*Potenzen*), about which Hegel is explicitly critical with reference to Schelling.⁹⁴ The fact that Schelling uses the language of force to describe repulsion and attraction (and the fact that Hegel does not), is only philosophically significant to the extent that it indicates Schelling’s underlying interest in dynamism and powers, on the one hand, and Hegel’s reformulation of natural processes in terms of movement and negativity, on the other. For herein lies an essential difference between Schelling’s and Hegel’s philosophies of nature, i.e. the difference between material potentiation (*Potenzierung*) and sublation (*Aufhebung*).

But these more fundamental differences between Schelling and Hegel cannot be considered at this point. I will return to these issues regarding the Schelling-Hegel relationship in more detail below (Chapter 7). At this stage, I want to remain focused on

⁹³ See Chapter 1.7.

⁹⁴ *W 20*: 437-438; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, p. 529.

Hegel's philosophy of nature. As we have seen, the immanent fall of material bodies signals the intrinsic longing of nature to shed its sheer self-external being and become united in its differential character. However, because the subjectivity towards which bodies fall lies beyond those bodies, the activity of falling does not express the full freedom of self-determination. But not all material bodies fall towards a centre outside them. Some bodies gravitate continuously *around* their centres, and in doing so achieve the active being of 'subjectivity'. In the following section I will consider Hegel's discussion of such bodies.

5.6. Celestial Motion and the Mechanical Stirrings of Freedom

In the orbits of the planets around the sun, Hegel identifies the more robust expression of inorganic freedom that was only implicit in the logic of free fall. For the planets do not fall towards a centre outside them, but remain in perpetual motion around two centres (the foci of their elliptical orbits). In the third and final section of the mechanics, entitled 'infinite mechanics', Hegel considers the motion of the planets in detail.

By distinguishing between 'finite' and 'infinite' mechanics, Hegel follows the ancient cosmology, likewise embraced by Schelling in the *Bruno* and the *Further Presentations*,⁹⁵ which describes terrestrial motion as ontologically distinct from and less perfect than the motion of the celestial bodies. It is of the utmost importance to recognise, however, that Hegel's intention is not to claim that there are *two realms* of nature, an 'above' and a 'below'. This would be antithetical to everything Hegel fought for in the name of 'immanence'. Hegel's point is rather that we misunderstand the being of matter if we assume that all material bodies have their centre of gravity beyond themselves and always only *long* to unite with that centre, without ever achieving selfhood via self-determining motion. For Hegel, not all matter acts in this way, for at the macrocosmic level, material bodies are in fact self-determining such that they no longer seek a centre *beyond* themselves, but orbit freely in spacetime. It does not follow from this, however, that there is a line separating the celestial and terrestrial motions. Instead, Hegel aims to show that falling bodies play a role

⁹⁵ See *SW I/4*: 267- 280; *Bruno*, pp. 167-178 and *SW I/4*: 431-450.

in a larger mechanical structure, and we can differentiate the being of this larger structure as a whole (the solar system) from the terrestrial bodies which move *within* that structure. It is for this reason that Hegel praises Newton's law of universal gravitation, for it demands—even if it does not, according to Hegel, satisfy this demand—that free fall and the planetary orbits be conceived through gravity alone. Gravity, for Hegel—and note here Hegel's *anti-Aristotelianism*—can explain both terrestrial and celestial motion.⁹⁶ That being said, gravity expresses itself *differently* in earthly and celestial bodies. For, as the ancients saw, the celestial bodies 'turn back into themselves' and thereby achieve a certain degree of self-reference. Moreover, insofar as the planets perpetually remain in this self-referential motion, they express a certain self-sufficiency.

According to Hegel, the ontological specificity of the whole mechanical system is expressed clearly, and beautifully, in Kepler's laws of planetary motion, and from an early age Hegel was intent on elucidating the philosophical significance of these laws.⁹⁷ In particular, Hegel is intent to show how the elliptical orbits of the planets express the intrinsic freedom and individuality implicit in the self-externality of nature.⁹⁸ This should already signal that Hegel's identification of the planets as exhibiting freedom in their 'absolute motion' is not a simple return to ancient cosmology. Indeed, the freedom exhibited in planetary motion is not the perfect, selfsame freedom of *circular* motion, wherein a body returns to itself *undisturbed*. On the contrary, true freedom for Hegel—in its mechanical, organic, and spiritual forms—requires that free being *differentiate* itself from itself and only subsequently 'return' to or 'turn back' onto itself and *thereby* become a self. And whereas a circular orbit indeed 'turns back' onto itself, there is no geometrical moment of *difference* in such an orbit, since the radii of the circle are all of equal length. With an elliptical orbit, on the other hand, the trajectory of a body is geometrically differentiated. It is therefore,

⁹⁶ *W 9*: Remark to § 269, 82; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 63.

⁹⁷ For Hegel's first critique of Newton's mathematisation of Kepler's laws, see his 1801 dissertation *De Orbitis Planetarum*, translated into English by Pierre Adler in *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel* pp. 163-206.

⁹⁸ 'Everything turns on the proof that the path [of the planet] is an ellipse' (*W 9*: Addition to § 270, 99; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 76).

according to Hegel, only with the Keplerian discovery of the elliptical orbits of the planets that the celestial realm proves its genuine freedom, i.e. its freedom in *difference*.

But how does matter determine itself to move elliptically? According to Hegel's lengthy Remark to § 270, the elliptical orbits are necessitated by the fact that in gravitational motion, space and time become 'free' with respect to one another and thereby enter into a new relationship.⁹⁹ According to Hegel, if space and time are expressed as they *truly* are, namely, as a unity in which their distinctive logical characteristics are expressed, then even *space* must involve genuine difference.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the perfect motion is not the line simply turned back on itself in which all radii of the orbit are of equal length (circular motion). Rather, the perfect motion involves a 'turning back into oneself' through a spatially differentiated process, such that an orbiting body traverses an ellipse whose radii are of different lengths (elliptical motion).¹⁰¹ That the ellipse has two foci instead of one is further confirmation of the fact that the ellipse is a more differentiated and therefore concrete orbital path. Hence Kepler's first law of planetary motion.

But the elliptical orbits of the planets is not the only reason Hegel sees Kepler's laws of planetary motion to be so significant. Rather, Hegel is at pains to express the intrinsic rationality at work in the unity of Kepler's three laws. Kepler's second law states that in a planet's orbit, a line segment connecting the planet to the sun sweeps out equal areas in equal times. According to Hegel, this is made necessary by the fact that despite the ontological difference expressed in an ellipse, unity persists: for the planet sweeps conic sections of *equal areas* in *equal* quanta of *time*. And finally, Kepler's third law, which relates the cube of distance traveled in orbit to the square of the time traveled, is best understood as the unity of the first and second laws (the unity of difference and unity). For in the third law of planetary motion, it becomes clear that the differences between space and time are themselves fully united. On Hegel's view, this is seen in the notion that time freely relates to

⁹⁹ In what follows, I attempt to simplify what is an extremely complicated argument in the Remark to § 270. For a thorough account of this argument, and one which differs from mine in important respects, see Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 147-153.

¹⁰⁰ *W 9*: Remark to § 270, 91-92; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 70.

¹⁰¹ *W 9*: Remark to § 270, 91-92; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 70.

itself (self-relating negativity) and therefore *squares* itself, while space relates to *itself* (three-dimensionality) and therefore *cubes* itself. Space and time therefore don't only express their ontological distinctness, as they did at the beginning of the mechanics; nor do they simply take on the distinctness of one another, as they do in the first and second laws of planetary motion. Now space and time express their logical distinctness in relation *to themselves* and in relation *to one another*: time *squares* itself and space *cubes* itself and these two magnitudes are intrinsically related in the orbital path.

According to Hegel, the motion of the planets expresses the unity (or identity) of identity and difference. And as we know, this is the most basic definition of freedom; indeed, it is the logical form of self-determination that was posited by heavy bodies in their free fall. For a falling body seeks to become one with other matter whilst remaining the matter that it is. In a planet's orbit around the sun, this *logical* aim is actually accomplished albeit by other means, and this is why Hegel identifies the planets as the ontologically primary expression of freedom in concrete reality, 'the most perfect' of the celestial bodies.¹⁰² Planets move *towards* a centre beyond them (the sun) and yet do not simply fall towards that centre, but return to themselves. Because planets are both intrinsically related to their sun and self-sufficient in this very ontological dependence, planetary matter is 'an unresting whirlpool of self-relating motion'.¹⁰³ And such motion, according to Hegel, is nothing less than mechanical *subjectivity*. For subjectivity is an activity of *self-relation* which is made possible only through a process of *self-differentiation*. It is in this unique form of gravitational motion, then, that we first glimpse not only the 'ideal' of subjectivity (as in free fall) but actual, self-determination in the form of free motion.

I want to emphasise Hegel's insistence on the fact that freedom expresses itself here in *mechanical* nature, however rudimentary such freedom is at this stage. It is a prevalent view, held by both critics and defenders of Hegel's system, that Hegel is fundamentally opposed to mechanical explanations of nature and of being more generally. This common assumption goes hand in hand with a certain image of Hegel as an 'organicist'. But

¹⁰² *W 9*: Remark to § 270, 85-86; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 65.

¹⁰³ *W 9*: Addition to § 275, 111; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 87.

‘organicism’ can mean so many things that the label is more often misleading than elucidatory. To be sure, Hegel sees the mechanical features of nature to be less concrete instantiations of reason than the organic features of nature. Additionally, Hegel sees the whole of nature as a self-developing system which, as a totality, has more in *common* with an organism than it does with a mechanical aggregate of parts. But these are the only ways in which Hegel can rightly be described as an ‘organicist’. It is important to stress, therefore, that there is nothing *living* in nature’s fundamental stages of development, i.e. in the mechanics and physics. Moreover, even the first stirrings of freedom in nature appear as sheer matter-in-motion. In line with his commitment to ‘presuppositionlessness [*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*]’, Hegel rejects the notion that we should come to the philosophy of nature with the intention of championing some ‘organicist’ worldview. This is why Hegel insists that we come to the realisation that nature is a rational system of stages involving, at the highest levels, organic life *only* through a careful interpretation of *mechanical* nature. Indeed, we can only begin to understand the concrete reality of organic life if we attend to the manner in which nature *already* expresses the seeds of rational, self-determination in mechanical motion. This means that the mechanical is not simply denigrated in Hegel, but is identified as the very source of the organic forms of nature and spirit. That nature proves to be *more* than mechanical does not mean that mechanical nature is ‘written off’ or ‘negated’ in Hegel’s system. Rather, sheer matter-in-motion *sublates* itself in the emergence of life and spirit. And while this sublation certainly entails *negating* its limited character as sheer self-external, mechanical nature, it is mechanical nature *itself* that negates its own limited character and subsequently *raises* itself to more complex material structures.

But if matter expresses self-determining freedom prior to the appearance of life or human being, is nature free for Hegel? In other words, is nature simply identical to spirit? In Chapter 1, I raised similar questions with respect to Schelling’s claim in the *Ideas* that ‘Nature should be spirit made visible, spirit the invisible nature.’¹⁰⁴ Because Schelling continues to hold such a view of the nature-spirit identity in the *Identitätssystem* and, in particular, the reductive *Presentation* of 1801, it was necessary in Part I of this thesis to trace

¹⁰⁴ *SWI/2*: 56; *Ideas*, 42. Translation modified.

the manner in which Schelling finally came to see nature-spirit identity as one of processual differentiation (or emergence) as opposed to an identity of coincidence. With Hegel, the matter is less difficult. Nevertheless, the question remains of the utmost importance. For it is Hegel's intention to present the continuity of nature and spirit without sacrificing their ontological distinctness. What do we make, therefore, of the idea that the planets achieve genuine *subjectivity* in their *mechanical* activity? Doesn't attributing absolute freedom to the planets make them ontologically identical to human spirit? It seems that Hegel's turn to nature's intrinsic freedom in order to resolve Kant's third antinomy takes Hegel in a direction that comes dangerously close to Spinozist reductionism.

On my view, however, Hegel was as committed as Schelling to taking Spinozism beyond its reductive position with respect to human freedom.¹⁰⁵ Hegel is adamant that nature is not in itself spiritual and that it is only a primitive form of consciousness that sees the divine in natural forms.¹⁰⁶ But this does not mean that nature is wholly devoid of the signs of spiritual life prior to the emergence of spirit. For while 'the stars are only a gleaming leprosy in the sky',¹⁰⁷ the planets that orbit the sun—and as we will see below, particularly the Earth—express an intrinsic freedom and can therefore be called 'blessed

¹⁰⁵ For Hegel's most important critique of Spinozism, see the transition from the 'Doctrine of Essence' to the 'Doctrine of the Concept' in the *Science of Logic* (Cf. *W* 6: 246-253; *Science of Logic* [Miller], pp. 578-583). It is here that Hegel argues that Spinoza could not see that his own system necessitated a move to self-determining *subjectivity*, i.e. that substance negates itself and becomes spiritual freedom. As will become clear in Chapter 6, Hegel's conception of subjectivity as 'absolute negativity' is central to my interpretation of the self-liberation of spirit in Hegel's system.

¹⁰⁶ 'Nature in the determinate existence which makes it Nature, is not to be deified; nor are sun, moon, animals, plants, etc., to be regarded and cited as more excellent, as works of God, than human actions and events' (*W* 9: Remark to § 248, 27; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 17). See also the Addition to § 248, 31; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Heinrich Heine, *Geständnisse* (1854) quoting Hegel, cited in Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), p. 367. See also the Addition to § 268: 'The stars can be admired on account of their repose, but they are not to be reckoned as equal in dignity to the concrete individual bodies. Matter, in filling space, erupts into an infinite plurality of masses, but this, which may delight the eye, is only the first manifestation of matter. This eruption of light is as little worthy of wonderment as an eruption of the skin or a swarm of flies' (*W* 9: 81; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 62).

gods'.¹⁰⁸ We must, therefore, be sensitive to Hegel's ideas with regard to nature: on the one hand, it is foolish to see spirit *in* nature, as if natural forms achieved anything comparable to the form of human freedom. On the other hand, nature is the first expression of the absolute Idea or self-determining reason, and *as such*, nature will necessary manifest itself as self-determining *freedom*, however crude or nascent these expressions may be. Moreover, it is only *through* such primitive expressions of freedom within the realm of mechanical, physical, and organic nature that the highest expressions of freedom—those forms enjoyed by the life of *spirit*—are made possible and necessary. Indeed, as we will see in Chapter 6, Hegel is in agreement with Schelling that nature and spirit are *identical* only insofar as the latter is necessitated by the being of the former. But such a conception of nature-spirit identity is fundamentally opposed to the spiritualisation *of nature*, which would make the logical emergence of spirit nonsensical.

One way we can understand the freedom of the planets as genuine freedom and yet nothing close to the freedom enjoyed by human spirit is by recognising in Hegel's preference for Kepler over Newton an implicit critique of the idea that nature follows laws transcendent to it. Here is the passage in which Hegel describes the planets as 'blessed gods': 'The motion of the celestial bodies is not any such pulling this way and that but is free motion; they go on their way, as the ancients said, like blessed gods.'¹⁰⁹ Note that Hegel does not himself identify the planets as gods, but attempts to explain why the 'ancients' identified them as such. More importantly, the godly nature of the planets is due to the fact that the planets *move themselves* in their orbits. Hegel's point is the following: not only is the Newtonian confused when he attributes motion to a gravitational *pull* on material bodies; but the laws of motion *themselves* are entirely intrinsic to the planetary bodies, and this too the Newtonian fails to comprehend. Hegel's aim is to liberate nature from the oppression of

¹⁰⁸ *W 9*: Addition to § 269, 85; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 65. See also Schelling's similar comment in the *Bruno*: 'In short, [the heavenly bodies] are blessed animals and, compared to mortal men, undying gods' (*SW I/4*: 262; *Bruno*, p. 162). In the Addition to § 270, Hegel denounces sun-worship as misguided precisely because the planets are more concrete expressions of rational freedom than the abstract stars, the latter of which simply remain what they are without going out of themselves (and subsequently returning to themselves). In this same passage, Hegel claims that it is because of this concrete perfection expressed by the planets that organic life can emerge on planets *and planets alone* (*W 9*: 104; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 81).

¹⁰⁹ *W 9*: Addition to § 269, 85; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 65.

some external, ontological authority, be it a transcendent God or transcendent law of nature. The planets are *autonomous*, freely giving *themselves* their laws of motion, and even terrestrial matter is *intrinsically* self-determining insofar as it is the nature of matter itself which determines that it will be moved passively by other bodies in collision. As Hegel says, ‘The laws of nature are themselves nature’s immanent essence.’¹¹⁰ *In this way*, nature expresses a certain form of autonomy, namely, in that nature gives itself its own laws. But this does not mean that the *content* of these immanent laws is in any way analogous to that of human freedom. On the contrary, the determinacy involved in celestial autonomy doesn’t come close to the determinacy at work in *human* autonomy. For celestial autonomy is limited to *self-movement*—hence my repeated insistence upon the *mechanical* nature of this earliest expression of subjectivity. There is something vaguely divine in this self-movement, because it is absolutely autonomous motion. Truly concrete divinity, however, the divinity present in human history, will dwarf the divinity inherent in celestial mechanics, for the human spirit is self-determining not only with respect to movement but in feeling, thought, and ethical action.¹¹¹

That being said, the ‘higher’ and more complex forms of freedom enjoyed by the human spirit are only made possible by the self-movement of the planets. And thus, for Hegel, we must consider in more detail the manner in which celestial bodies express subjectivity. For it is through a consideration of this mechanical subjectivity that Hegel completes his account of mechanical nature and moves on to consider the physical qualities that constitute the natural world (physics), the life of the self-determining organism (organics) and, finally, the freedom of spirit (philosophy of spirit).

The question we must ask, therefore, is why the next stage of nature is not mechanical. In the self-determining motion of the planets, material bodies have proven that they are not only self-external beings, but self-*identical* beings, particular beings that are related to themselves as having some intrinsic unity. But in mechanics, nature is utterly

¹¹⁰ *W* 18: 370; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 370.

¹¹¹ ‘If the contingency of Spirit, the free will (Willkür) does evil, this is still infinitely superior to the regular motions of the celestial bodies, or to the innocence of plant life; for what thus errs is still Spirit’ (*W* 9: Remark to § 248, 29; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 18).

external to itself; there is no intrinsic nature, but extension pure and simple. Such extended being, however, does not only long for intrinsic selfhood (free fall) but achieves this selfhood in the motion of the planets. And in doing so, nature proves to be more than strictly mechanical motion. This ‘more’ is expressed, first and foremost, as a *solar system*, i.e. a systematic unity of individuated bodies.¹¹² This is how Hegel describes the necessity of a solar system in the *Encyclopaedia*: ‘Universal corporeality essentially sunders itself (*sich urteilt*) into *particular* bodies and achieves conclusion with itself in the moment of *individuality* or subjectivity as manifested existence in *motion* which thus is immediately a system of *several bodies*.’¹¹³

The first significant feature about the solar system is that it is a *system* of bodies—as opposed to being a mere aggregation of bodies—because these bodies ‘stand in relation to each other’.¹¹⁴ To ‘stand in relation’ is not to be related contingently, but to be related in a rational manner and hence systematically. The solar system is precisely a system insofar as it is composed of self-determining, self-moving individuals that are rationally related to one another, a fact expressed, according to Hegel, in Kepler’s third law of planetary motion. Thus, insofar as the solar system is a system of rationally related individuals, there is a rational structure within nature that is not reducible to nature’s sheer self-externality; such organisation cannot be reduced to mechanism.

The second significant feature about the solar system is that this system is one composed of *individual* bodies. As we have seen, the planets are self-determining individuals, but with Hegel’s description of the solar system we learn something further about the *particularity* of these individuals. As Hegel says, matter ‘*sunders* itself into particular bodies’. Unlike the local level of terrestrial mechanics in which material bodies are extensionally continuous with one another, the solar system forms itself in such a way as to create *empty spaces* and therefore *physically distinct*, individual bodies. The ontological continuity of matter is therefore interrupted in an important sense here. On the Earth, there

¹¹² *W 9*: § 269, 82; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 62.

¹¹³ *W 9*: § 269, 82; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 62. Emphasis modified.

¹¹⁴ *W 9*: Remark to § 269, 83; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 63.

are no immaterial ‘gaps’, space that hasn’t been ‘filled’ by matter. But things are different at the macrocosmic level of mechanical activity, where empty spaces are central to the motion of the individuated planets. Such ‘interstellar distances [...] have no filling, but are mere negations of union.’¹¹⁵ It is this feature of the planets that signals their *physical particularity* and necessitates the transition from speculative mechanics to speculative physics (in the limited sense), i.e. the part of the philosophy of nature that considers the *particular* natural processes that qualitatively distinguish one body from another.¹¹⁶

5.7. Self-Formation as Qualitative Differentiation

From the very first stages of nature, matter has shown itself to be immanently mobile in successively more impressive ways. Although material bodies express their ontological abstractness when they are ‘passively’ moved by other bodies, we recall that even this movement was in another respect expressive of an activity immanent to matter, since matter determines *itself* to be moved from without. Indeed, matter *just is* its movement from place to place. Then material bodies proved to explicitly long for selfhood as they fall towards the earth. And now we have seen that, in the planetary system, matter forms itself into bodies that are in fact ‘subjective’ insofar as they freely determine themselves in their movement. At the end of the mechanics, Hegel claims that when matter determines itself as genuinely free, such matter achieves ‘determinateness of form’.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 276, 120; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 94.

¹¹⁶ We are now in a position to see a paradox within the logic of free fall that prevents terrestrial bodies from becoming planets in their own right. On the one hand, subjectivity was always *beyond* the falling body, and as a result, matter remained *separate* from itself, lacking true unity. Matter remained, in other words, self-external being. On the other hand, terrestrial bodies only ever sought *one* centre. The implicit ‘dream’ of subjectivity, from the ‘perspective’ of rectilinear motion, is of a ‘one’ *that is not many*, a one pure and simple. Intrinsically at odds with its own aim of achieving unity-in-difference, the falling body implicitly longs for a one pure and simple. Now, with the formation of a solar system, matter forms itself by creating *empty spaces* and physically distinct material bodies. And it is only through this act of fully repulsive activity—where matter is not only discrete but repels other matter from space *near* it—that subjectivity can be achieved. Much like Kepler’s first law, then, self-external being achieves subjective, self-determining motion only by passing through *genuine difference*.

¹¹⁷ *W 9*: § 271, 107; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 83.

In what sense is the ‘free motion’ of the planets connected to the determinate *formation* of matter? According to Hegel, the freedom of the planets signals the self-formation of matter, because in this freedom we confront a new kind of ontological determinacy, namely ‘qualified matter’ or qualitatively distinct material.¹¹⁸ The logic here has resonances with Hegel’s logic of measure found in the *Logic*. In measure, an increase or decrease in quantity can give rise to qualitative change. For example, if chilled to zero degrees centigrade, the quality of water changes from a liquid to a solid.¹¹⁹ In Hegel’s absolute or celestial mechanics, what appear to be purely quantitative changes in motion—such as a planet’s acceleration as it nears the sun and deceleration as it gains distance from the sun—actually involve qualitative determinacy. For in the gravitational motion of a planet, the material body in question no longer seeks its identity *elsewhere*, but rather freely *remains what it is*, orbiting the sun as an embodiment of pre-spiritual freedom. In this ‘remaining what it is’, matter begins to sublimate its self-externality, turning inwards as a qualitatively distinct ‘self’.

As a ‘self’ distinct from but intrinsically connected to other ‘selves’, a planet is a determinate *being* which is in no sense interchangeable with other beings. Prior to this stage of nature, material determinacy was limited to spatiotemporal place, mass, weight, velocity, etc. In other words, material bodies were distinct from other bodies with respect to quantitative differences alone. But once the celestial bodies—and the planets in particular—form themselves into a system of individuals intrinsically related to one another, a new kind of ontological determinacy is at play. The ‘selfhood’ expressed in a planet’s orbit signifies that its being is ontologically unique and therefore ‘qualified matter’. Now, because Hegel rejects an ontological separation between celestial and terrestrial material, it becomes apparent that this newfound qualitative determinacy must be found throughout the natural world. In Hegel’s words, ‘The determinations of form which constitute the solar system are the determinations of matter itself and they constitute the being of matter.’¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *W 9*: § 271, 107; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 83.

¹¹⁹ *W 5*: 440; *Science of Logic* (Miller), pp. 369-370.

¹²⁰ *W 9*: Addition to § 271, 108; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 84.

The logic that has unfolded in celestial mechanics thus has important ramifications for the remainder of the philosophy of nature. For in the orbits of the planets, not only does matter *move* itself, but it also organises itself into material bodies Hegel terms ‘totalities’.¹²¹ And it is here, in a form of movement that is no longer mere change of place (motion) but the immanent organisation of matter into self-identical ‘totalities’, that Hegel sees the logical emergence of qualitatively distinct matter. By ‘totality’, Hegel does not mean that the planets each individually include *all that there is*; the planets cannot be all-encompassing beings, because there are of course multiple planets, as well as stars, moons, and comets. Instead, ‘totality’ is meant to signify the notion that the planets, while related to what is beyond them, are also self-sufficient; they do not depend for their motion upon a being beyond them, but simply ‘go on their way, like blessed gods’. Indeed, unlike the ‘half-free motion’ of free fall, wherein an object must be *placed* at a height in order to display its immanent longing for unity,¹²² the celestial bodies depend in no sense upon another body to place them in the heavens.

I believe there is another sense in which the planets and their more abstract counterparts (stars, moons, and comets) can be understood as ‘totalities’, and this latter meaning of ‘totality’ helps drive home the point that the uniqueness of the celestial bodies does not set them apart, above and beyond, terrestrial nature.¹²³ According to Hegel, everything that will emerge in the remainder of the philosophy of nature will appear within this system of bodies. ‘The deepening of Nature is nothing but the progressive transformation [*Umbildung*]’ of solar, lunar, planetary, and cometary bodies.¹²⁴ In other

¹²¹ Again, see Schelling: ‘Now the more the finite dimension of a being possesses the nature of the infinite, the more it takes on the imperishable character of the totality, the more it appears to be stable, enduring, and intrinsically perfect, and the less it seems to need anything outside of itself. The stars and the heavenly bodies are finite beings of this sort; their ideas are the most perfect of all those that are in God, since they best express this subsistence of the finite in and with the infinite in God’ (*SW* I/4: 261-262; *Bruno*, pp. 161-162).

¹²² *W* 9: § 267, 75; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 56.

¹²³ Hegel also conceives the non-planetary celestial bodies as ‘totalities’. Although planets are the most concrete expressions of celestial freedom, the other bodies of the solar system are also qualitatively distinct, even if not concretely subjective as are the planets. In order to understand this more general sense of the term ‘totality’, we need only recognise that, according to Hegel, nothing *posits* the celestial bodies in their place; rather, these bodies just freely exist where they are.

¹²⁴ *W* 9: Addition to § 270, 104; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 80.

words, while no one ‘totality’ is ‘all-encompassing’, the *totality* of celestial ‘totalities’ is, in a sense, all-encompassing matter. Sound, heat, life—everything that will emerge in nature from this point on—does so through the ‘progressive transformation’ of the celestial bodies themselves.

This is why the next stage of the philosophy of nature will not be a broadening of the scope of mechanical nature. Mechanics has taken us as far as it will go whilst still remaining sheer matter-in-motion. Now that matter proves to be in motion in such a manner as to be qualitatively distinct, we must consider nature from another perspective. Indeed, we must consider nature from the perspective of the particular qualities that distinguish one part of nature from another. Hegel calls this ‘physics’, and it comprises the second and largest part of his philosophy of nature. In physics ‘what matter is, it is only through its qualities.’¹²⁵ Every determination in the physics will be defined by certain qualitative distinctness. It is worth noting that the impetus for moving beyond a mechanical worldview is *not* the recognition that organic life eludes mechanical explanation. There is no appeal to life in the transition from mechanics to physics. Rather, it is qualitative particularity that signals the failure of the mechanical worldview to account for all of nature’s phenomena. For nature involves a plethora of qualitatively distinct processes—inorganic ‘selves’—all involving concrete logics to be outlined in the physics. And while there is nothing in nature’s wealth of particularity that will achieve the self-sufficiency of planetary motion (until we arrive at the proto-organic structure of geological development), matter has proven to necessarily involve qualitatively particularity and thereby raises itself above sheer motion.

To reiterate: the Hegelian cosmos does not begin, logically speaking, as qualitatively differentiated. Rather, such differentiation occurs, by necessity, thanks to the intrinsic motion of matter, a motion that is fundamentally characterised by a gradual process of turning-inward or ‘involution’. Matter has, Hegel says, ‘resolved itself into form.’¹²⁶ Of

¹²⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 274, 111; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 86.

¹²⁶ ‘The form is in this way materialised. Regarded from the opposite point of view matter, in this negation of its self-externality in the totality, has now acquired within itself what it previously only sought, namely, the centre, its self, determinateness of form. Its abstract, torpid being-within-self, as simply heavy, has resolved itself into form: it is *qualified matter*—the sphere of *Physics*’ (*W 9*: § 271, 106-107; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 83).

course, matter does not ‘resolve itself into form’ *in time*. Hegel is only interested in elucidating the *logic* of emergence and warns his audience not to confuse this logic of emergence with the ‘nebulous’ idea of historical metamorphosis.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the order of ontological dependence should be clear: matter is individuated as particular, determinate form because this is what it necessarily means to be *material*; matter *insists* on its immanent formation. For Hegel, then, natural qualities are ontologically dependent upon quantitative determinacy, material form upon formless matter.¹²⁸

Looking back on the entire development of the mechanics, it becomes clear that this entire sequence of stages has been an arduous process we might identify with the self-formation of matter. By the ‘self-formation of matter’, therefore, I mean both the immanent *formation* of matter, i.e. the fact that matter is actively involved in its achieving particular, qualitative form; and the material formation of *selfhood*.¹²⁹ It is essential, for Hegel, that this selfhood is achieved via a process of ‘turning-inward’. The planets move outwardly, towards the sun, and then return to themselves, and it is this second moment of the orbital process—the turn ‘inward’—that distinguishes celestial motion from the ‘half-free motion’ of falling. Nature, which is at bottom sheer self-externality, *turns back* upon itself in the planetary orbits and thereby becomes a ‘self’ for the first time. This ‘inwardising’ process is absolutely central to the remainder of Hegel’s philosophy of nature. As we will see in Chapter 6, it is this tendency of nature to turn back upon itself that allows for the emergence of organic life and, ultimately, human freedom.

¹²⁷ *W* 9: Remark to § 249, 31; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20. See also § 249 itself and the Addition. For my discussion of this topic, see Chapter 4.9 and Chapter 7.

¹²⁸ To be sure, matter is an expression of the Idea and, in this sense, is not entirely formless. But we have already seen that Hegel sees matter as 1) the first *real* appearance of the Idea; and 2) a ‘formless’ Idea in the sense that the Idea is *alienated* from itself in its primary manifestation. This means that the formation or individuation of material bodies as *determinate* beings is thanks to the immanent activity of matter itself—the ‘formless Idea’. In other words, it is because there is matter that there is *determinate*, as opposed to merely abstract, form.

¹²⁹ These two senses of ‘material self-formation’ are, in my view, what Hegel means in § 271 when he says that the realisation of form (the formation of *selfhood*) is, ‘regarded from the opposite point of view’, the becoming-form of matter (*W* 9: 107; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 83).

5.8. Emergent Immateriality: Light

The transition from mechanics to physics involves an important shift in logical focus. At the end of the mechanics Hegel considered the solar system as a whole, i.e. nature in its ultimate configuration as matter-in-motion. But because the solar system is constituted by material bodies that determine themselves as freely moving beings ('totalities'), we must now consider the qualitative determinacy that nature necessarily involves, thanks to the logic of planetary motion. In Hegel's words, 'what the solar system is as a whole, matter is now to be in detail.'¹³⁰

One might think that the first stage of physics, therefore, might unpack the logic of an even more concrete, self-determining being. But the dialectic of nature is more complicated than this. To cut a long and very complicated story short: Hegel will not consider a logico-natural determination that expresses a concreteness akin to that of celestial motion until he considers the Earth as the soil upon which organic life flourishes. Prior to this, Hegel unpacks the logic of a number of physical qualities that distinguish *individual* natural entities and processes from one another. The first of these—and the first stage of the Physics—is *light*.

One would be wrong to assume, therefore, that Hegel sees light as ontologically *higher* than the motion of the planets. Hegel is absolutely clear that the planets, as the highest and most concrete form of mechanical nature, are more expressive of rationality and freedom than light—in either its individuated forms (the sun and stars) or in its explicit truth (light as such).¹³¹ Implicit in this privilege of the planets over light is an important lesson regarding the *Stufenfolge* of nature: not every stage will be 'higher' or more expressive of

¹³⁰ *W 9*: Addition to § 271, 107; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 83.

¹³¹ 'The planetary bodies are, as the directly concrete ones, the most perfect in their existence. Usually, the sun is given pride of place, inasmuch as the Understanding prefers the abstract to the concrete, the fixed stars, for example, even being more esteemed than the bodies of the solar system' (*W 9*: Remark to § 270, 85-86; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 65); 'Light was one of the first objects of worship because it contains the moment of union-with-self, and in it the rift of finitude has vanished; light has therefore been seen as that in which man was conscious of the Absolute. The extreme oppositions of Thought and Being, Subject and Object, were not yet made; man had to reach the deepest self-consciousness to oppose himself to Nature. The religion of light is more sublime than that of the Indians and Greeks, but it is also the religion in which man has not yet risen to a consciousness of opposition, to self-knowing spirituality' (*W 9*: Addition to § 276, 119; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 93). On the distinction between concrete, individuated light (the sun and stars) and light *as such*, see the Addition to § 272, 109; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 85.

freedom than the one that precedes it. While light is *explicitly* qualitative nature, and in this way makes an advance upon the implicitly qualitative individuality of the celestial bodies, light is also qualitative nature *in its generality* and is therefore an utterly abstract stage of nature compared to the concreteness of the planets.

But as is always the case with Hegel, the abstractness of a logical determination is ontologically significant. The abstractness of light is therefore no reason to disparage the phenomenon! Light is yet another stage along the way to nature's full embodiment of rationality and freedom, and the particular way in which nature sublates its self-externality in the phenomenon of light is of great importance.¹³² In the mechanics, nature's self-external being gradually turned in upon itself, constructing mechanical 'subjectivities' or 'totalities'. As self-determining individuals with implicit qualitative determinacy, the nature of these celestial bodies demanded that the philosophy of nature now *explicitly* consider qualitative distinctness. *Außersichsein* has turned back upon itself and become *Insichsein*, and the first *explicit* being of this *Insichsein* is *light*. Thus, the immanent dialectic of physics begins with § 275: 'Matter in its first qualified state is *pure identity-with-self*, unity of *reflection-into-self*, and hence the first, still quite abstract *manifestation*.'¹³³ Indeed, 'light [...] is nothing but a *making manifest*.'¹³⁴

As I understand it, Hegel's argument goes as follows: nature determines itself as being-within-itself, as identity-with-self in such a manner as to involve particularity or qualitative determinacy. For being-within-self to genuinely express qualitative determinacy—determinacy that particularises such being-within-self—this determinacy of form must be made *manifest*, it must *appear*. And the most general way in which beings appear is in their being *shown*, in their simple shining (*scheinen*) in the light of day. The first and most basic physical quality of nature, therefore, is the light that makes such appearing possible, the making-manifest of matter.

¹³² Others have pointed to another, yet compatible, significance of Hegel's discussion of light, namely its relation to Einstein's theory of relativity. See Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-examination*, p. 279; Wandschneider, 'The Philosophy of Nature of Kant, Schelling and Hegel', p. 91.

¹³³ *W 9*: § 275, 111; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 87.

¹³⁴ *W 9*: Remark to § 276, 117; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 91.

We have already seen how ‘manifestation’ is an essential characteristic of nature as a whole. In Chapter 4, I interpreted nature in Hegel’s system as the fundamental or primary *manifestation* of the Idea (or reason). Now we arrive at a specific determination *within* nature that is distinctive on account of its activity of ‘making-manifest’. Thus, if matter is the fundamental manifestation of reason, light is the manifestation *of* this manifestation. Light is, in other words, ‘manifest manifestness’. Of course, the other logico-natural determinations which appear in the physics will also be manifestations of nature’s manifestness. Yet light is distinctive insofar as light is not only *a* manifestation of nature, but the phenomenality of manifestation *as such*. As Hegel says:

Gravity, acidity, sound are also manifestations of matter but not, like light, pure manifestations, for they contain specific modifications within themselves. We cannot hear sound as such, but only a specific tone, that is higher or lower; nor can we taste an acid as such, but only specific acids. Only light itself exists as this pure manifestation, as this abstract unindividualised universality.¹³⁵

Light, therefore, is ‘making-manifest’ plain and simple, a physical interiority or being-within-self that is nothing more than the phenomenon whereby matter is made manifest.

As the ‘pure manifestation’ of matter, light is in one respect distinct from the matter it brings to light. This is why light is unlike acidity, which cannot be tasted ‘as such’. An organism with the sense of sight can see not only visible objects but light *as such*, for light is phenomenal in itself, separate from the material bodies it shines upon. And yet there is no manifestation of matter *without* matter. Light fails at its making-manifest if there is nothing *there* to make manifest. ‘Pure light’ can be ‘seen’, but in such seeing nothing determinate is given to vision. Light therefore requires matter in order to be the manifesting activity that it is. Thus, light is at one and the same time distinct from and entirely one with material nature. In Hegel’s words, light ‘enters into community with all and yet abides in itself, so that the self-subsistence of objects is in no way affected by it.’¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 276, 119; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 93.

¹³⁶ *W 9*: Addition to § 275, 112; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 88.

In what sense is the self-subsistence of objects unaffected by light? Or put another way, in what sense is light *distinct* from matter? In order to fully understand Hegel's point here, we should recognise that Hegel opposed all corpuscular theories of light. This is one of various reasons why Hegel considers light to be a physical as opposed to mechanical phenomenon. For light can no more be conceived as divided into quantitatively distinct rays or bundles of rays than it can be 'packed into bags'.¹³⁷ According to Hegel, therefore, nature's being-within-self is first expressed as a certain *immateriality*: 'Light is incorporeal, in fact, immaterial matter; this seems a contradiction, but this can be of no consequence to us.'¹³⁸ Light is materially-dependent immateriality, the physical visibility or becoming-manifest of matter which is not itself material. According to Hegel, any description of light that depends on materialising it fails to explain anything.¹³⁹ Indeed, if light were material, 'a dense confused mass would be formed between the eye and the object, and from such a theory one ought rather to expect invisibility than an explanation of visibility.'¹⁴⁰ Light, therefore, is ontologically distinct from matter. As Hegel says: 'Matter is heavy in so far as it still seeks unity as Place; but light is matter which has found itself,'¹⁴¹ and thus, 'light is absolutely weightless'.¹⁴²

That light is a weightless and therefore 'immaterial matter'¹⁴³ does not, however, make light into something that floats away from nature into some supernatural realm. The

¹³⁷ *W 9*: Remark to § 276, 117; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 92. See also the Addition to the same paragraph: 'The physics of light as particles is no whit better than the efforts of a man who, having built a house without windows, wants to carry light into it in bags. The expression "bundles of rays" is merely one of convenience, it means nothing; the bundles are light in its entirety, which is only outwardly limited; it is no more divided into bundles of rays than is the Ego or pure self-consciousness. It is the same when I say: in my time, or in Caesar's time. This was also the time of everyone else; but here I am speaking of it in relation to Caesar, and restrict it to him without meaning that he really had a separate ray or parcel of time. The Newtonian theory according to which light is propagated in straight lines, or the wave theory which makes it travel in waves, are, like Euler's aether or the vibration of sound, materialistic representations quite useless for the comprehension of light.' (*W 9*: Addition to § 276, 119-120; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 93-94).

¹³⁸ *W 9*: Addition to § 276, 119; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 93.

¹³⁹ *W 9*: Remark to § 276, 118; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 93.

¹⁴⁰ *W 9*: Remark to § 276, 118; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 92.

¹⁴¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 276, 119; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 93.

¹⁴² *W 9*: § 276, 116; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 91.

¹⁴³ *W 9*: Addition to § 276, 119; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 93.

immateriality of light is not only a material, or better, physical immateriality, but it is also inseparable from the material bodies it makes visible. In fact, light is not only ‘bound’ to material bodies, but light is only *illuminating* insofar as it makes heavy, material bodies manifest. That light is, on the one hand immaterial, and on the other hand, the reflexion of material bodies from out of themselves into open visibility, is of the utmost importance for our study. For here, nature proves to not only involve the stirrings of self-determining freedom (planetary motion), but a natural analogue of thought. As we will see in Chapter 6, thought is an emergent immateriality that is nothing other than the means by which the *logos* of external being *shows* itself. Hegel goes so far as to say that light is ‘thought itself, present in natural mode.’¹⁴⁴

That being said, Hegel is also insistent upon the ontological difference between light and thought. This is why the additions to the philosophy of nature are filled with disparaging remarks about the ‘primitive’ forms of consciousness which see the divine in the natural phenomenon of light. Light is ‘an abstract appearing’ and does not enter the *depths* of the external world as thought does via its own internal determinacy.¹⁴⁵ Thus, light, as *pure* identity-with-self, is terribly abstract in comparison to the concrete determinacy of consciousness. Indeed, with the logical emergence of light ‘the hard One’, i.e. the concrete universal, ‘has melted and, as a continuity of manifestation lacking all determination, has lost its opposition.’¹⁴⁶ As a result, light ‘lacks the *concrete* unity with itself possessed by self-consciousness [...] and is consequently only a manifestation of Nature, not of spirit.’¹⁴⁷ Whereas thought enters into the depth of external being and thereby exposes its inner, rational core, light only makes manifest the *surface* of material bodies. Nevertheless, thought would not be possible were it not for the light that makes manifest the manifestness

¹⁴⁴ *W 9*: Addition to § 276, 119; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 93.

¹⁴⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 275, 113; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁶ *W 9*: Addition to § 275, 112; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 275, 113; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 88. My emphasis.

(i.e. nature) of *logos*: ‘Light brings us into the universal interrelation; everything exists for us in theoretical, unresistant fashion because it is in light.’¹⁴⁸

The significance of this stage of nature is not limited to the manner in which light prefigures the emergence of consciousness. I will conclude this chapter with two final points about the phenomenon of light and its significance for this thesis.

First, it is worth making the point yet again that Hegel derives the necessity of nature’s forms through a rational method. Hegel is often, and rightly, seen as a follower of Goethe’s theory of light and colour, especially insofar as Goethe set an example for a non-Newtonian philosophy of colour and its concrete reality. But it would be a mistake to see Hegel as straightforwardly Goethean in his account of the visible world. We have seen throughout our study of Hegel’s mechanics that Hegel is committed to articulating the *rational structure* of nature’s stages. In this way, Hegel is far afield from Goethe’s proto-phenomenological disposition. Indeed, the latter prefaces his *Farbenlehre* with the claim that colours, as perceptible and concrete, should be given pride of place, as opposed to the related but more abstract phenomenon of light, which has received far more attention in the history of natural philosophy. In Goethe’s words, ‘it is useless to attempt to express the nature of a thing abstractedly. Effects we can perceive, and a complete history of those effects would, in fact, sufficiently define the nature of the thing itself.’¹⁴⁹ From a Hegelian perspective, Goethe rightly disparages the modern tradition for mathematising nature and thereby evacuating it of concrete determinacy. But the justification for redressing this situation must be strictly philosophical, and it does not matter to *philosophy* that perception encounters colours and not light ‘as such’.¹⁵⁰ For philosophy begins with the most basic

¹⁴⁸ W 9: Addition to § 275, 112; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁹ *Goethe, Theory of Colours*, trans. by Charles L. Eastlake (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970) p. xxxvii.

¹⁵⁰ According to Hegel, the abstract thinking of which Newtonian science is guilty is not the abstraction from the empirical or the experiential, but rather the abstraction away from the concrete, determine, content-rich *logos* of being and into a mathematical formalism which strips reality of its onto-logical richness. For this reason, Hegel’s critique of Newtonian abstraction should not be seen as entirely consistent with Goethe’s philosophy of nature—despite the fact that Hegel defends Goethe’s theory of colour and reunited with Goethe in large part thanks to Goethe’s optics (see Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 376). From the perspective of Hegel’s system, the justification for a non-Newtonian theory of colour cannot be phenomenological experience, but must be grounded in an entirely rationalist derivation of the relationship between light, darkness, and colour. A consideration of this derivation is, however, beyond the scope of the present study.

logical structure of nature (self-externality) and works its way through the successive *concretisation* of nature through logical derivation.¹⁵¹ The uniqueness of Hegel's perspective—here with regard to light but also throughout his philosophy of nature—is that the concrete, qualitative determinacy of the natural world is ontologically dependent upon more abstract ontological determinations, and that philosophy must rise to the concrete only through a consideration of the abstract forms upon which the concrete forms are ontologically dependent.¹⁵²

The final point I will make regarding the self-formation of matter is connected to this insistence on Hegel's part to ignore the phenomenology of nature in favour of a thoroughgoing rationalism. As we have seen, the becoming-manifest of nature through qualitative determinacy precedes any consideration of the beings to which such manifestness might appear. A notion that has become popular in some circles today, namely, that manifestation or givenness requires some *recipient*, is therefore entirely misguided.¹⁵³ Hegel's point is that nature makes itself visible and, indeed, knowable long before there is an organism (let alone human being) to perceive the natural world. To be sure, Hegel is uninterested in the *historical* precedence of givenness to the beings that perceive nature—and I will come back to this point in Chapter 7. But Hegel is entirely committed to the notion that the manifestation of nature is ontologically more fundamental than the beings

¹⁵¹ In this regard, Hegel can be seen as much closer to Schelling than to Goethe in that both Schelling and Hegel share a rationalist sensibility opposed to the empiricism that Schelling only comes to embrace in his late philosophy of revelation. Hegel himself clearly thought that Schelling was more of a rationalist than Goethe as can be seen in Hegel's 1807 letter to Schelling: 'Out of hatred for the thought by which others have corrupted the question, [Goethe] adheres completely to the empirical, instead of going beyond that thought to the other side of the empirical, to the concept which will perhaps only get to shimmer through' (Letter from 23 February, 1807, *Hegel: The Letters*, p. 77).

¹⁵² For another view on the relationship between Goethe and Hegel, see Luca Illetterati, 'Hegel's Exposition of Goethe's Theory of Colour' in *Hegel and Newtonianism*, pp. 557-568.

¹⁵³ See, for example, Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Near the beginning of the essay Meillassoux presents a list of axioms which, he argues, must necessarily appear to the post-critical philosopher as 'a tissue of absurdities'. The first of these axioms—'that *being* is not co-extensive with *manifestation*, since events have occurred in the past which were not manifest to anyone'—reveals Meillassoux's refusal to conceive givenness (or manifestation) without a *recipient*, as if appearance (*Schein*) required some form of subjectivity *in order to shine*. All of the axioms that follow presuppose this identity of manifestation *for subjectivity* and givenness *as such*. Cf. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 14.

who perceive and cognise the natural world.¹⁵⁴ In the following chapters, I will turn to Hegel's treatment of life and spirit as ontologically dependent upon a qualitatively differentiated, manifest nature.

¹⁵⁴ One might ask whether there would be qualities, such as visibility, in the absence of forms of life with the capacity of vision. In general, can there be a *sensible* world without *sentient* beings? But the Hegelian answer to this question is straightforward: the question is confused, because there can be no utter absence of sentient life. The latter is ontologically *necessary*, meaning sentience *must be*. But this does *not* mean that the sensible world is ontologically *dependent* upon a sentient being or, moreover sentience *as such*. On the contrary, sentience is dependent upon the sensible world, since it is the inner logic of the sensible world which necessitates that there *be* sentient life. Thus, what is ordinarily thought of as a philosophical confrontation between 'realism' and 'anti-realism' is in fact a confrontation between a worldview which sees fundamental features of reality (such as sentience) as contingent and a worldview which sees such features of reality as necessary. It is this latter perspective which distinguishes Schellingian-Hegelian idealism from most forms of realism and anti-realism in contemporary philosophical debates.

Chapter 6: Life and the Self-Liberation of Spirit

6.1. Introduction

Light is by no means the last stage of Hegel's philosophy of nature prior to the appearance of life in the 'organics'. The 'physics'—the second and longest part of Hegel's nature philosophy—is filled with detailed discussions of natural phenomena and, more importantly from Hegel's perspective, their logical derivation. On Hegel's account, nature proves to not only involve general phenomenality or 'manifestness' in the form of light, but a plethora of other natural forms with distinctive logical determinations: darkness, air, fire, water, earth, shape, magnetism, specific gravity, cohesion, sound, heat, polarity, crystallisation, force, colour, odour, taste, electricity, and chemical processes. It is precisely because light is distinct from matter but is nothing other than the manifestation of matter that light requires something other than it for the appearance of physical qualities: 'In order, therefore, that something finally can appear, can be made visible, some further particularization must be physically present (e.g. roughness, colour, etc.).'¹ I have neither the space nor the technical knowledge necessary to elucidate every stage of the logical development from light to chemistry. For the purposes of this thesis, however, such a detailed discussion is unnecessary. I am interested first and foremost in the nature-spirit relation as conceived by Schelling and Hegel. In order to understand the nature-spirit relation in Hegel's mature philosophy, I have attempted to elucidate his conception of nature, focusing on the end of the logic (Chapter 4) and the beginning of the nature philosophy (Chapter 5). I will now turn to the final stages of nature's immanent development, Hegel's organics, which culminates in the logical emergence of spiritual freedom.

Although I will not consider the dialectic of Hegel's physics in any detail, it is important to simply note that throughout the physics Hegel elaborates on the idea, explored already in the logic of light, that nature determines itself as qualitatively distinct, and,

¹ *W 9*: § 277, 121; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 95.

moreover, as *particular* on account of this distinctness. According to Hegel, nature makes itself manifest in qualitatively distinct ways by necessity. Natural beings are not only visible, but sonorous, tactile, odorous, etc. This does not mean that any beings, natural or otherwise, exist such that the particular qualities of natural entities can in fact be seen, heard, or touched. The sensuousness of nature does not yet demand that there be sentience. More fundamental to the structure of nature is the simple fact that nature makes itself manifest and qualitatively distinct, that it particularises itself in the sensuous qualities which may or may not be sensed. To be sure, the way a specific region of space-time expresses its qualitative particularity is entirely contingent for Hegel. This is why Hegel finds Krug's challenge to Schelling's system so absurd: of course philosophy cannot deduce the existence of Krug's pen or any other particular entity, and it should never aim to do so.² What philosophy can and must illuminate, however, is the rational necessity by which nature determines itself as visible, sonorous, tactile, odorous, etc. Philosophy must derive particularity *in general*, but this has nothing to do with deriving the necessary existence of particular individuals.

6.2. Chemical Processes and 'The Chemical Process'

In the final stages of the physics, we learn that material nature is qualitatively distinct in such a manner as to be intrinsically related to *other* qualitatively distinct matter. This intrinsic, natural relationality is made increasingly more explicit, from the merely spatial relationality expressed in magnetism (§§ 312-314) to the more complex relationality expressed in electricity (§§ 323-325), until finally this relationality reaches its fullest expression in the chemical process (§§ 326-336). This so-called 'chemical process' is in fact nothing other than a proposed unity of various chemical *processes*, and it therefore refers both to processes of chemical combination (*Vereinigung*), including galvanism, combustion, and neutralisation, and to chemical separation (*Scheidung*), or to what Hegel describes as the 'positing of the differentiated as identical' (combination) and the 'differentiation of the

² *W* 2: 188-207; 'How the Ordinary Human Understanding Takes Philosophy', pp. 292-310.

identical' (separation).³ These chemical processes express the relational character of qualitative particularity, because it is with such processes that certain elements prove to interact in specific ways (associative or dissociative) with *other* elements, thanks precisely to their intrinsic nature as oxides, alkalis, acids, salts, etc.

In both chemical combination and dissociation, a material body undergoes radical transformation in such a manner as to negate the qualitative determinacy that had hitherto obtained. According to Hegel, this means that particular, qualitative features of the natural world are *destroyed* in the chemical process: 'In the chemical process, bodies alter not merely superficially but on all sides: every property is effaced, cohesion, colour, lustre, opacity, resonance, transparency.'⁴ It is necessary, according to Hegel, that we not interpret this process along essentialist lines by positing immutable chemical substances which, although they *appear* to have shed their qualitative specificity, remain essentially the same.⁵ In the chemical process, a body undergoes such radical transformation that it is no longer the body that it was previously. In other words, the natural being which, up until now, remained a distinctive, particular being loses itself in the chemical process; the particular is destroyed and thereby proves its essential finitude. 'It is precisely in the chemical process that...body reveals the transiency of its existence.'⁶

We can further unpack this finitude of substance if we consider the natural origin of qualitative determinacy. According to Hegel, qualitatively determinate particulars are themselves products of the same chemical process which destroys them. Here again, the chemical process is not simply generative of the qualitative specificity *of* a chemical substance—as if qualities were properties inhering in selfsame 'things'—but is generative of the qualitatively distinct chemical substance itself.⁷ The significance of Hegel's thought here is far-reaching, extending beyond his general opposition to fundamentalism or substance

³ *W 9*: § 326, 288; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 233. For the processes of combination (*Vereinung*), see §§ 330-333; for the process of separation or dissociation (*Scheidung*), see § 334.

⁴ *W 9*: Addition to § 336, 334; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 270.

⁵ *W 9*: Remark to § 334, 328-329; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 265.

⁶ *W 9*: Addition to § 336, 334-335; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 270.

⁷ *W 9*: Remark to § 334, 328-329; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 265.

ontology. For it is within this logic of the *generation* of chemical substances that Hegel understands nature's finitude to bare the seeds of infinite being.

While chemical processes of combination and separation destroy qualitatively determinate substances, these processes also leave something new in their place. Such newly generated substances can subsequently, thanks to their intrinsic, qualitatively determinate character, combine with other substances or be separated by substances, resulting in further destruction and generation, and so on *ad infinitum*. For Hegel, this indicates that despite the finitude of any given chemical process, there is an implicit *total* chemical process at work throughout the various processes of chemical combination and separation. Thus, although the distinctness of particular natural qualities is necessarily destroyed, further chemical processes are made possible through this act of destruction. If such chemical processes were not distinct from one another, but were rather moments of a *continuous* process of self-transformation, then the 'total chemical process' would sustain itself *through* the destruction of its various, particular instances. And it is in this notion of the continuation of a process through destruction that we first glimpse the possibility of concrete *life* in the logic of nature. According to Hegel, if the chemical process could explicitly sustain itself throughout its transformations, it would cease to be mere chemical process; such an infinite process would be organic life which perpetuates itself through difference.⁸

Hegel also puts this point as follows: 'If the products of [any particular] chemical process *spontaneously renewed their activity*, they would be Life.'⁹ Since this life would involve spontaneous regeneration, it would be far more self-determining than anything we have seen in nature thus far, including the self-determining motion of the planets.¹⁰ For in this 'living process', the self does not only determine itself freely with respect to its *place*,

⁸ The logic here is closely related to the more abstract dialectic of infinity in the *Logic*. The true infinite, for Hegel, is not infinite insofar as it goes on *ad infinitum* (a version of the 'bad infinite' [*das Schlecht-Unendliche*]), but is infinite in its self-perpetuation through its own finite moments. Cf. *W* 5: 163; *Science of Logic*, p. 148.

⁹ *W* 9: Addition to § 335, 333; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 269. My emphasis.

¹⁰ 'The solar system was the first organism; but it was only implicitly (*an sich*) organic, not yet an organic existence. These giant members are independent shapes, and the ideality of their independence is merely their motion; they form only a mechanical organism' (*W* 9: Addition to § 337, 339; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 275).

but ‘spontaneously *kindles* and *sustains* itself’.¹¹ And because ‘life is present *in principle* (*an sich*) in the chemical process’, organic self-determination proves to be a logically *necessary* stage of nature.¹² For Hegel, then, organic life is no contingent happening, but a necessary feature of reality. Thus, in the third and final section of Hegel’s philosophy of nature, he considers the necessary ontological structure of life as an ‘existent unity’,¹³ i.e. as an *explicitly* self-determining, self-generating, and self-sustaining process.

6.3. The Earth: Proto-Organism

With the emergence of life, Hegel moves on to the third and final part of his philosophy of nature, the ‘organics’. The section on organics is itself divided into three stages: the geological organism; the vegetable organism; and the animal organism. In each of these stages, the logic of the organism gradually becomes more and more concrete, until the processual life implicit in the chemical process finally becomes fully explicit in the individuality of the animal.

The first stage of the logic of the organism does not consider life as an actually existing organism, but as the concrete manifestation of the abstract *idea* of organic life. In Hegel’s words, ‘the first organism, just because it is at first determined as immediate organism or as only *implicitly* organism, does not exist as a *living creature* [*Lebendiges*].’¹⁴ Such an abstract ‘life’ that is not properly life and is certainly not a ‘living creature’ is, according to Hegel, the Earth upon which actual living creatures exist. Thus, ‘geological nature’, according to Hegel, ‘is only the ground, the basis (*Boden*) of life.’¹⁵

We have already seen one sense in which the Earth may be intimately connected to organic life. In Chapter 5, the Earth, along with the other planets of the solar system, were

¹¹ *W 9*: § 336, 334; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 270. My emphasis.

¹² *W 9*: Addition to § 335, 334; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 270. My emphasis.

¹³ *W 9*: Addition to § 335, 334; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 270.

¹⁴ *W 9*: § 338, 342; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 277.

¹⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 337, 340; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 275.

shown to express a freedom more absolute than any other celestial body on account of their self-determining motion.¹⁶ Throughout the philosophy of nature, Hegel remarks that only primitive forms of consciousness find the sun and stars expressive of ‘the absolute’, and that the planets are exceedingly more concrete and, indeed, proto-organic than are the stars in their tiring sublimity. Thus, in an addition to the celestial mechanics we find the remark that the sun remains too abstract a body to be populated by organisms, and that ‘it is only on the planet that life can appear.’¹⁷ The Earth is thus ‘superior [*höher*] to the stars and the sun’¹⁸ on account of its self-determining motion, and it is by virtue of such motion—a nascent form of freedom—that the planet becomes a potential basis for life.

But even if the Earth acts as the ground upon which life flourishes, it isn’t immediately clear why Hegel would place his consideration of the Earth within the ‘organics’. After all, organic life also requires chemical processes for its emergence, but the logic of chemistry is found in the ‘physics’ which precedes ‘organics’. Why, then, does Hegel interpret the geological *ground* of life as *itself* ‘organic’?

In Chapter 4, I argued against the view that Hegel is an organicist in any strong sense. Nature is not a ‘giant organism’ for Hegel, but a hierarchically structured system of stages culminating in an ontologically distinct set of organic forms. On my view, Hegel’s anti-organicism holds here as well, hence his rejection of the idea that the Earth is a ‘*living organism*’. However, Hegel does include his logic of the Earth within his speculative biology, and this means that the Earth is not only intimately connected to life but is itself, in some sense, organic. According to Hegel, geological nature is structurally distinct from every stage of nature which precedes it, and this is because the Earth is a *self-organising*

¹⁶ There is also a logical connection, according to Hegel, between the elliptical path traversed by the planets and the curved lines expressed throughout the body of the organism. The curved line (including the ellipse)—as opposed to both the angular line and the geometrically undifferentiated circle—is the most concrete and organic geometrical expression of rationality. See *W 9*: Addition to § 310, 200-201; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 161-162.

¹⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 270, 104; p. 81. See also the Addition to § 275: ‘It is therefore absurd to regard the stars as superior, e.g., to plants. The Sun is not yet anything concrete. Piety wants to populate the Sun and Moon with men, animals and plants, but only a planet can rise to this. Natures which have withdrawn into themselves, such concrete forms as preserve independence in face of the universal, are not yet to be found in the Sun’ (*W 9*: 114-115; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 90).

¹⁸ *W 9*: Addition to § 337, 338-339; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 274.

body. Note that the Earth is not simply a self-organising system, as one might interpret nature *as a whole*. Whereas nature as a whole can be said to be ‘organic’ only insofar as it is a unity of rationally connected stages, the Earth is a genuinely (proto-)organic form of nature, because it determines itself as a *body* which sustains itself *through* its qualitative transformations as the individual body that it *is*.¹⁹

This is also why the Earth, although not a proper organism, is ontologically distinct from inorganic, chemical processes, and therefore merits its place within the ‘organics’. For unlike the chemical process, where bodies prove their transience, the geological process consists of a body which retains its identity through its development. As I understand it, Hegel’s distinction between the chemical and geological process turns on the idea that chemical processes are only implicitly connected to one another (to the extent that one chemical process makes further chemical processes possible), but that geological processes are directly and explicitly related to other geological processes, such that we might speak of one single process of the Earth’s hydro-meteoro-geological development. The Earth, therefore, is not only a ‘self’ in its free orbit around the sun, but determines its qualitative distinctness and *retains* its selfhood through its own activity of qualitative differentiation. Such sustenance of selfhood through difference is, we recall, an essential feature of ‘subjectivity’ for Hegel. And this is why Hegel can hold that the absolute Idea, i.e. freely self-determining reason, is no longer self-estranged once the gradation of nature’s stages has reached the life-process of the Earth.

Another way Hegel describes the difference between the chemical and the organic is that the chemical process, unlike the organic, does not have its end *within* itself. This is why ‘the individual of the chemical body can fall victim to an alien power’,²⁰ for the destruction

¹⁹ In the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel clarifies this distinction between the physical and organic: ‘Each atom of gold...contains all the determinations or properties of the whole lump of gold, and matter is immanently specified and particularized...[but] individuality is still bound to definite exclusive specific properties, does not yet exist as totality. If such a body enters into a process in which it loses such properties, then it ceases to be what it is; the qualitative determinateness is therefore affirmatively posited, but not at the same time also negatively. The organic being is totality as found in Nature, an individuality which is for itself and which internally develops into its differences’ (*W 9*: Addition to § 252, 39; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 27). Below I will consider why Hegel thinks ‘negativity’ plays such a central role in distinguishing the organism from the inorganic.

²⁰ *W 9*: Addition to § 337, 339; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 275.

of the chemical substance is not a *self-determining* transformation; the generation of new substances constitutes a *break* between distinctive chemical processes. And since the chemical body does not retain itself *through* its transformations, there is no sense in which we might say the chemical body purposively seeks its own destruction and subsequent development into something new. Life, on the other hand, ‘has its other within itself, is in its own self a single rounded totality—or it is its *own end (Selbstzweck)*.’²¹ We should note that Hegel explicitly draws upon Kant here when he conceives the organism as ‘an end for itself’.²² A logic of chemical relationality has given way to teleological self-determination or, as Engelhardt says, ‘the final cause is added to the efficient cause’ in the transition from chemistry to biology.²³

According to Hegel, the most basic or primitive way a body can have its end in itself is insofar as a body’s transformation of shape is directed towards an end immanent to that body.²⁴ And this is why Hegel begins the organics with a consideration of the ‘geological organism’, for the Earth *is what it is* only through its immanent development, resulting in a material body defined by a determinate arrangement of landmasses and bodies of water, a

²¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 337, 339; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 275.

²² *W 9*: Addition to § 337, 339; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 275. See also Hegel’s remark on Kant’s revival of Aristotelian teleology with respect to the animal organism (*W 9*: Remark to § 360, 473; pp. 388-389).

²³ Dietrich von Engelhardt, ‘Hegel on Chemistry and the Organic Sciences’ in *Hegel and Newtonianism*, p. 661. Perhaps a more accurate description of the transition to teleology is that life becomes *its own cause*. See *W 9*: Addition to § 343, 372; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 303.

²⁴ It is worth noting here that mechanism is still at play in nature in a significant sense. As Hegel says in his discussion of ‘shape’ in general (in the ‘physics’), shape is, first and foremost, *mechanistic*, since shape concerns strictly quantitative, spatial relations. However, Hegel goes on: in shape, ‘form manifests itself *through its own activity*, and does not show itself merely as a characteristic mode of *resistance to outside force*’ (*W 9*: § 310, 199; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 160). The contrast described here is, I take it, one between a qualitatively distinct particular with a quantitative shape *of its own* (i.e. ‘physical’ shape) and the quantitative determinacy that results from collision. In the latter case, a material body allows itself to become ‘quantitatively’ differentiated in its change of velocity, but it allows itself to become differentiated in this manner entirely *from without*. In the realm of ‘organics’, the logico-natural determination of shape is raised to an even higher and therefore ontologically distinct level, because now shape is *fully* self-determining in that it is only the shape that it is through a *process* of sustenance in transformation. In other words, it is only via a perpetual self-transformation of shape that the Earth is the being that it is. Moreover, the self-development of the Earth’s shape involves, I take it, the magnetic, electrical, and chemical processes that have been sublated in organic life, making the ‘shape’ of the Earth one which involves qualitative determinacy and not mere quantitative particularity. Were this not the case, then it wouldn’t matter that the geological process carved out places for organic life to exist. For it is only with the geological production of *qualitatively distinct* places that *habitat* is generated.

determinate set of atmospheric conditions, and so on. The Earth, therefore, is the process *and* product of its distinctive shape:

We must not, therefore, explain the origin of inexhaustible springs by mechanically and quite superficially attributing them to percolation; any more than we must use a similar kind of explanation, on the other side, to account for volcanoes and hot springs. On the contrary, just as springs are the lungs and secretory glands for the earth's process of evaporation (*für die Ausdünstung der Erde*) so are volcanoes the earth's liver, in that they represent the earth's spontaneous generation of heat within itself.²⁵

The shape of the Earth is *purposively* developed through the geological process itself. In this way, the Earth is 'organic' and properly belongs in the third part of the philosophy of nature.

And yet, as we have seen, Hegel insists that the organism is *not* a living creature. For this reason, we should read the Addition to § 341 quoted above as an analogical description, one which is meant to draw our attention to the ontological *proximity* of the Earth's self-organisation to organic life proper, but not as a philosophically accurate description of geological nature.²⁶ In order to draw out the ontological specificity of the Earth, we might ask the following: why *isn't* volcanism—despite Hegel's use of the analogy—an actually hepatic phenomenon? Why would it be a category error to conceive the 'geological organism' as a 'living creature'? Why, in other words, *doesn't* the Earth achieve genuine, organic subjectivity?²⁷

The geological process determines its shape through hydrological, meteorological, and geological events, and because the Earth only becomes what it is *through* this development, the Earth achieves some kind of 'organic selfhood'. Volcanic activity is a

²⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 341, 363; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 296.

²⁶ It is worth noting that in the Addition to § 354, which considers in detail the nervous, circulatory, and digestive systems of the animal organism, Hegel inverts this metaphor by conceiving the liver *volcanically*, resulting in a geological metaphor for animal life as opposed to an organic metaphor for geological processes (*W 9*: Addition to § 354, 449; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 368). Again, the point is not that organic processes should be understood in terms of geology (or vice versa), but that there is an ontological proximity between the inorganic and organic, a proximity which comes to its most ambivalent expression—that is, *ontologically* ambivalent expression—in the self-determination of the Earth, a midway point between inorganic and organic nature.

²⁷ According to Hegel, the geological organism is 'only potentially (*an sich*) alive, not in present existence' (*W 9*: Addition to § 343, 372; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 303).

purposive, spontaneous generation of heat, and this activity plays an indispensable role in the self-perpetuation of the Earth as Earth. Implicit in the geological process, however, are ends which are quite distinct from the Earth's morphology. In particular, the geological process makes possible the sustenance of plant and animal life. The *telos* of the Earth, therefore, is not reducible to its shape, but involves the propagation of non-geological bodies, in particular, more explicitly *organic* bodies which can only thrive *within* the qualitatively distinct places carved out by the self-determining activity of the Earth. The purposive activity of the geological process, in other words, is implicitly directed towards developing habitats within which living organisms can exist and reproduce. That this purpose, although connected to the Earth's shape, is also distinct from it, signals the ontologically limited nature of the planet. The Earth doesn't properly assimilate difference, 'it does not *bring back* its different members (*Gegliedrung*) into unity,'²⁸ because the organisms which exist upon it 'subsist formally on their own', making the Earth a 'skeleton'²⁹ or mere 'crystal of life'.³⁰ And yet this skeleton is 'fertile—fertile simply as the ground and basis (*Boden*) of the individual vitality upon it'.³¹ By engendering the conditions for organic life to flourish, the Earth makes *actual* life possible.

6.4. The Plant: The Emergence of Life as Such

As a self-organising system productive of habitable places, the Earth makes life possible, but it is not itself a 'vivified organism'.³² Vegetal life, however, is precisely this; life is *actual* in the plant. Yet plants, it turns out, aren't very good at being the infinite life that they are. As

²⁸ *W 9*: Addition to § 337, 340; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 275-276. My emphasis.

²⁹ *W 9*: Addition to § 337, 340; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 276.

³⁰ *W 9*: § 341, 360; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 293. Hegel's conception of the Earth's self-organisation echoes his conception of the crystallisation process, the latter of which can appear as a 'dumb life [*stummes Leben*]' (*W 9*: Addition to § 310, 200; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 161).

³¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 341, 361; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 294. See also Remark to § 369 (§ 368 in Michelet's edition which Miller retains): 'The fecundity of the Earth causes life to break forth *everywhere* and in every way' (*W 9*: 502; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 416).

³² *W 9*: § 342, 367; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 299.

Hegel puts it, although plant life constitutes ‘the beginning of subjective vitality’, this ontological beginning of actual life is in fact ‘external to itself’.³³

This way of describing the ontological character of plants is perhaps misleading. For plant life is not ‘external to itself’ in the way that space and the abstract forms of nature are self-external. On the contrary, vegetal life is one of the most concrete forms of nature precisely because it achieves a form of subjectivity that had only been hinted at in Hegel’s mechanics. In what sense, then, is plant life ‘external to itself’? According to Hegel, the plant is a ‘self’ which has not *returned* to itself, a self that does not *relate* to itself *as* a self. Consequently, the plant can neither move itself from its place nor can it experience its worldliness through sensation.³⁴ Indeed, both movement and sensuous feeling are lacking in vegetal life on account of the abstract nature of the plant’s selfhood. However, since the plant is indeed an *actual*, living self, it must, in some sense, ‘find’ itself through an activity of differentiation. For the plant is a form of *life*, and, as such, it necessarily *becomes itself* through a process of self-relation. In what sense, then, is the plant both ‘external’ to itself and a subjective relation to itself? The key to understanding the particular logic of plant life is in its unique form of self-relation. The ‘self’ to which the plant relates is not so much its *own* objectified self, as is the case in the self-movement and feeling of the animal, but a ‘self’ *outside* it.³⁵ And it is in this sense that Hegel understands the life of the plant as actual and yet ‘external to itself’.

But what is this ‘self’ outside the plant? It is certainly not another individual organism of the same genus, such that the plant would enter into a sexual relationship and thereby achieve selfhood via a primitive form of intersubjectivity (again, as is the case in animal life). Rather, the plant ‘becomes itself’ or ‘finds itself’ through its relation to amorphous, elemental nature: in water, air, and, most importantly, light.³⁶ Insofar as the

³³ *W 9*: § 337, 337; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 273.

³⁴ *W 9*: § 344, 373-374; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 305.

³⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 344, 375; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 306. See also Addition to § 347, 412; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 337.

³⁶ *W 9*: Addition to § 347, 413; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 338.

plant can be understood to *move* itself, then, it does not change its *place* but simply grows *towards* light, the selfhood which lies beyond it:

Potato-plants sprouting in a cellar creep from distances of several yards across the floor to the side where light enters through a hole in the wall and they climb up the wall as if they knew the way, in order to reach the opening where they can enjoy the light. Sunflowers and a host of other flowers follow the motion of the sun in the sky and turn towards it.³⁷

The plant is therefore a living creature because it seeks what is *different* from it, assimilates this difference, and, in so doing, transforms this difference for its own, immanent end, namely, to sustain its activity and perpetuate its species.³⁸ But rather than assimilating what is ‘other’ and resting within itself, the plant endlessly grows or ‘goes out of itself’ (*Außersichkommen*) in search of *more* light, the source of its selfhood. The individuality of the plant, then, is not characterised by an inner freedom to determine itself, but a freedom to seek its inwardness *elsewhere*.

There are logical echoes here of the dialectic of free fall, wherein a material body posits its ‘self’ beyond it and in so doing merely *strives* for subjectivity (Chapter 5.5). In each case, fully realised subjectivity, i.e. becoming at home with oneself through difference, remains beyond reach. However, the plant’s distinctive relationship to light leads the plant to express this striving for subjectivity in a unique manner, namely, as a ‘progress to infinity’: because the plant is utterly dependent upon a feature of nature which is itself expressive of a logic of ‘bad infinity’ (Chapter 5.8), the plant is perpetually *on its way to* the infinite, growing without intrinsic, determinate end, progressing *ad infinitum* until it is without further resources to sustain its vital processes.³⁹ Plants are therefore, much like the light

³⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 344, 375; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 306.

³⁸ ‘The process with the air, therefore, must certainly not be represented as an appropriation by the plant of something already formed which it increases only mechanically. Such a mechanical representation is altogether to be rejected; what occurs is a complete transformation [*vollkommene Verwandlung*], an operation [*Fertigmachen*] accomplished by the majesty of the living organism, for organic life is just this power over the inorganic to transform it’ (*W 9*: Addition to § 347, 416; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 339).

³⁹ Hegel makes the connection between free fall, light, and plant life explicit in the Addition to § 344: ‘The plant has an essential, infinite relationship with light; but at first it is a quest for this its self, like heavy matter. This simple principle of selfhood (*einfache Selbstichkeit*) which is outside of the plant is the supreme power over it’ (*W 9*: 373; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 306).

upon which they depend, natural manifestations of the category of ‘bad infinity’ in the *Logic*.

As we will see, this process of endless striving distinguishes the logic of the plant from that of the animal. Of course, Hegel does not understand the animal to be utterly independent of its elemental environment, for this would simply be another form of bad infinity, a life *set apart* from inorganic nature. But unlike the plant, the animal utilises its environment in order to *maintain* its character, turn inward, and thereby relate to *itself* as ontologically distinct from its environment. Through this objectification of self, the animal is able to determine its motion and experience its world through inner sensation. By contrast, the plant ‘lacks the inwardness which would be free from the relationship to the outer world’.⁴⁰ The plant thus takes in air, water, and light in order to grow outwards for the sake of further assimilation, which, in turn, allows for further growth, and so on ad infinitum. It is as if the plant ‘refuses’ to distinguish itself from its environment—for example, in its inability to interrupt its nutritive process⁴¹—a ‘refusal’ which logically *necessitates* that the plant have an impoverished relationship to both its environment and itself. The truly infinite life, for Hegel, will distinguish itself from its world in order to relate *to* that world and to *itself* as ontologically distinct. But such infinite life is only achieved by organisms which turn *into* themselves, unconsciously recognising that the infinite does not lie above and beyond, but within the inner activity and self-feeling of life itself.

That Hegel sees vegetal life as not ‘truly infinite’ should not, however, indicate that this form of life is insignificant on Hegel’s view. On the contrary, just as the true infinite emerges from the bad infinite in the *Science of Logic*, so too is the truly infinite life of the animal logically dependent upon the rational structure of the spuriously infinite vegetal organism. In order to fully grasp this, however, we need to consider the manner in which the plant’s very activity of *Außersichgehen* demonstrates its distinctive vitality. For the plant’s activity of ‘going forth from itself’ sets this form of nature apart as a unique kind of organism which subsequently leads to a higher form of organic life.

⁴⁰ *W 9*: Addition to § 344, 377; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 308.

⁴¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 344, 377; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 308.

Let us therefore consider more closely how Hegel conceives the plant's self-determining *Außersichgehen*:

The return-into-self which assimilation terminates, does not have for result the *self* as inner, subjective universality over against externality, does not result in self-feeling. Rather is the plant drawn out of itself by light, by its self which is external to it, and climbs towards it, *ramifying into a plurality of individuals*.⁴²

While the plant's *Außersichgehen* never culminates in a total plant-light union, this process nevertheless allows the plant to achieve a unique form of selfhood, namely in its 'ramifying into a plurality of individuals'. The infinite growth of the plant, therefore, is nothing other than the *multiplication of its parts*, and these parts are understood as 'individuals' in their own right. As Hegel says, 'Any part of the plant can exist immediately as a complete individual.'⁴³ Hegel's idea, taken over from Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants*, is that the individual parts of the plant do not have a function in relation to *other* parts, but are rather, under the right circumstances, capable of all plant functions.⁴⁴ For example, 'the leaf is the principal seat of the action of the vital sap: but it absorbs, just as well as the root and the bark, since it already stands in a reciprocal relation with the air.' Thus, Hegel goes on, 'each member does not have a special function as is the case in the animal',⁴⁵ but is, instead, 'self-subsistent'.⁴⁶ This is why, in growth, the plant ramifies into a 'plurality of individuals'. Such a process defines the specific vital subjectivity of the plant, which 'preserves itself by multiplying itself.'⁴⁷

⁴² *W 9*: § 347, 412; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 336. Emphasis modified.

⁴³ *W 9*: Addition to § 345, 385; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 314.

⁴⁴ 'The difference of the organic parts is only a superficial metamorphosis and one part can easily assume the function of the other' (*W 9*: § 343, 371; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 303). As Goethe says, 'certain external parts of the plant undergo frequent change and take on the shape of the adjacent parts—sometimes fully, sometimes more, and sometimes less' (Goethe, *Metamorphosis of Plants*, trans. by Douglas Miller and ed. by Gordon L. Miller [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009], p. 5).

⁴⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 346, 403; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 329. (In Miller's translation, as in Michelet's edition, this addition is found in § 346a, so that the two additions to § 346 are split between § 346 and § 346a.)

⁴⁶ *W 9*: Addition to § 345, 385; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 314.

⁴⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 344, 374; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 306.

Thus, according to Hegel, the plant is a uniquely structured organism on account of the fact that it is a multiplicity of parts which are themselves ‘individuals’. It is perhaps helpful if we take a step back from the logic of the vegetal organism and consider its structure as occupying a mediating position between the geological and animal organism. Much like the Earth which logically precedes it, the plant acts as a *basis (Boden)* for individuality to thrive.⁴⁸ However, the plant is a *living* basis, unlike the Earth, because the plant, as basis, is *inseparable* from the individuals it grounds; the plant *just is* its multiplicity of individuals. On the other end of the ‘organics’ spectrum, we have the animal, which would be wrongly conceived as a ‘basis’ for individuality. The animal self is rather the organic *wholeness* which results from the interrelation between its function-specific parts. If the Earth is a whole which fails to take in its parts (the organisms which live upon its surface), and the animal is a whole characterised by the determinate relationships between its parts, the plant is a whole composed of *part-wholes*, i.e. parts that are themselves self-subsistent and capable of metamorphosis. But since its parts are in fact wholes unto themselves, the wholeness of the plant gets lost in its parts; there is no unique wholeness that results from the interaction *between* distinctive parts. As Michael Marder puts it, ‘the independent strength of individual parts is won at the expense of the whole’, since the whole *just is* its parts.⁴⁹

There is one ‘part’ of the vegetal organism, however, which stands out from the rest as *uniquely* individual and therefore intimates what is to come in the dialectic of life with respect to the wholeness of the animal organism. According to Hegel, the plant’s flower expresses a limited form of the kind of selfhood characteristic of animal life. For the flower

⁴⁸ *W9*: § 343, 371; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 303.

⁴⁹ Michael Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 160-161. Recently, Hegel’s ‘dialectical botany’, as Marder calls it (*Ibid.*, p. 158), has come under heavy criticism for its apparent disparagement of non-animal forms of life. Cf. Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant*; Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); and Elaine P. Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*. Elsewhere, I intend to defend Hegel’s view of plant life against these criticisms. Suffice it to say that both Marder and Miller refuse to accept the idealist logic which celebrates the ontological specificity and superiority of animality and humanity, and this leads these philosophical investigations of vegetal life, as interesting as they are, to reduce rather than appreciate the ontological differences between the vegetal and animal kingdoms. On my view, as soon as we refuse to conceive natural differences in terms of a hierarchical system, we forfeit the possibility of conceiving the inner *unity* between the higher and lower forms of inorganic and organic nature.

is, unlike the other part-wholes of the plant, expressive of a certain *inwardness*. In the blossom, ‘the plant takes hold of itself, returns into itself’.⁵⁰ Rather than assimilating difference for the sake of endless growth, the plant achieves, in the flower, an expression of individuality in its colour (no longer a ‘neutral’ green) and scent (which is sensible at all times, not only when the flower is damaged).⁵¹ Even more important, however, is the genital differentiation within the flower. Although Hegel understands this sexual feature of plant life to be superfluous for the reproduction *of the plant*,⁵² it indicates the implicit *truth* of life: that genuine inwardness can only be achieved through an active relationship to other—and here this means sexually different—*individuals*. The flower thus attests to the fact that life is not yet fully developed when it seeks its selfhood in elemental nature. Life will have to be related *to life*, to return to *itself* through *other* living creatures. This logic of life’s self-relation through sexual difference, however, only becomes explicit—and therefore physically necessary for reproduction, according to Hegel—in the animal organism, the final stage of Hegel’s philosophy of nature.

Before we move on to the logic of animal life, it is worth noting that in the transitions from the chemical process to the Earth and from the Earth to the plant, no vital *force* has emerged in nature so as to distinguish the organism from inorganic matter. Beiser is therefore entirely correct to state that Hegel does not grant organic beings a mysterious *élan vital* that would distinguish them from the rest of nature.⁵³ The organic realm is differentiated from the inorganic realm on account of its *rational structure alone*. However, as I argued in Chapter 4, the structure of the organism is nonetheless *qualitatively distinct* from the structure of inorganic phenomena; Hegel refuses the notion that merely quantitative differences obtain between chemical processes and life. Instead, Hegel understands the living and non-living to be qualitatively distinct on account of the fact that the logical structure of the organism is entirely novel. By the time we reach the logic of the organism,

⁵⁰ *W 9*: Addition to § 347, 419; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 342.

⁵¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 347, 419; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 342. See also § 348, p. 419; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 342-343.

⁵² *W 9*: Addition to § 348, 423; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 345-346.

⁵³ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, pp. 162, 168-170.

nature has proven to involve not only self-movement (as in celestial mechanics) and qualitative particularity (as in the ‘physics’), but also the kind of self-development that is realised only through a transformative relationship with self-externality itself. Organic existence is therefore achieved via a concrete *modification* of self-external nature. And Hegel is absolutely clear that this modification cannot be understood as a mere quantitative intensification of nature’s chemical processes.⁵⁴ On the contrary, life is a self-sustaining, self-perpetuating activity which acts *upon* the world in such a way as to serve its own immanent purpose of self-preservation through change.⁵⁵ And when this teleological transformation of the natural world becomes fully explicit in the life of the animal, the engine behind the organism’s activity of qualitative differentiation becomes explicit: organic life achieves its self-determining, purpose-directed existence through an active *negation* of self-external being.

6.5. The Animal: Life Coming Into Its Own

In order to understand why Hegel conceives organic life as a negation of self-external being, we must consider the life of the animal which is, according to Hegel, an *explicit* negation of self-external nature and consequently the highest form of organism. There are a range of phenomena associated with animal life that Hegel interprets in terms of negativity, but the most basic feature of animal life which connects all of these phenomena is that the animal ‘exists for itself over against [*für sich dagegen*]...non-organic nature’,⁵⁶ and this oppositional relation to the natural world is accomplished through an active *negation* of that world. Such a negation is apparent in, for example, the digestive process. Whereas the plant

⁵⁴ ‘The living creature is a being, stable and determined in and for itself. Anything from outside acting chemically on it is immediately transformed by this contact. The living creature, therefore, directly overcomes the presumptuous chemical action and in being brought into contact with an other, preserves itself’ (*W* 9: Addition to § 346, 402; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 328).

⁵⁵ *W* 9: § 363 and the Addition, 479-480; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 393-394. Also, see the Addition to § 364 which contains a discussion of how the animal’s digestive process is wrongly understood as a mechanical or chemical process, but must rather be understood in terms of the teleological vitality of the organism (*W* 9: 483-494; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 397-406).

⁵⁶ *W* 9: Addition 1 to § 357, 464; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 381.

endlessly takes in nutrients from an undifferentiated, elemental nature with which it wholly identifies, the animal isolates individual natural objects (including plants⁵⁷) and *destroys* those objects for the sake of sustaining its own, distinctive life. The animal, therefore, exists *for* itself precisely in opposing itself to an objective (*gegenständlich*) nature—a nature that, we should note, only takes on the character of objectivity once it enters into this oppositional (*gegensätzlich*) relation. Thus, in opposing itself to its environment, i.e. in relating to nature as objective, the animal achieves a certain *subjective* being which was lacking in plant life. For the animal develops a relation to itself as distinct from and, indeed, *other than* the world it opposes. In doing so, the animal lives a life of *inwardness*.

This animal ‘inwardness’ is expressed in various ways, but above all it is expressed as sentience.⁵⁸ To feel, according to Hegel, is to live out a certain interiority. As Pinkard notes, this is not the interiority of the body, as if there were objective nature beyond the epidermis and subjective life within.⁵⁹ Corporeal internality is just as spatially extended as any other natural *topos*, and it is precisely this extended materiality which is sublated in the ‘inwardness’ of life.⁶⁰ Organic inwardness must therefore be understood as an actual negation of spatial extension, such that the inner life of the animal is grasped not as a spatial ‘inner’, but as an *activity* which is, in an important sense, immaterial. Sentience is the most basic expression of this immaterial inwardness, since sensations are not spatially extended, but are rather felt *by* a being which, in its sentience, relates to itself as differentiated from its world. Such a relation-to-self is therefore strictly ‘ideal’ or formal—an immaterial, structural feature of life.

⁵⁷ ‘But what has been posited in the Notion is that the process displays the return into itself of the individuality, and shows that the parts—which in the first instance are individuals—belong also to the mediation, and are transient moments in it, and consequently that the immediate singularity and externality of plant life are sublated. This moment of negative determination is the basis for the transition to the veritable organism, in which the outer formation accords with the Notion, so that the parts are essentially members, and subjectivity exists as the One which pervades the whole’ (*W 9*: § 349, 429; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 350). And: ‘The plant is a subordinate organism whose destiny is to sacrifice itself to the higher organism and to be consumed by it’ (Addition to § 349, 429; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 350).

⁵⁸ *W 9*: § 351, 432; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 353.

⁵⁹ Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 24.

⁶⁰ As Hegel says, the animal soul is ‘finer than a point’, the first negation of space (*W 9*: Addition to § 350, 431; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 352).

But in what sense is this non-spatial, immaterial feature of life a *negation* of extended materiality? According to Hegel, in relating to itself *as a self*, the animal organism negates the self-external character of nature, and it does so despite its own naturalness (and herein lies the contradiction at the heart of life, to which we will return below). The animal feels *its* pain, *its* hunger, *its* reproductive drive, and these sensations are *its own*. In feeling the warmth of the sun, the animal negates the sensuous quality of heat as being simply ‘out there’ and draws it into the interiority of its life as *its* sensation. The heat of the sun is thus negated as simply objective and made to be something felt by a subject. Consequently, in sensation (*Empfindung*), the organism finds itself (*findet sich*) as the ontologically distinct being it is. For this reason, with the emergence of sentience, life comes into its own as active self-relation, sublating nature’s essential characteristic of being *outside* itself. Although Hegel reserves the concept of ‘experience’ (*Erfahrung*) for far more complex phenomena associated with spiritual freedom, we might say that with animal feeling, the organism ‘experiences’ the world in a non-conscious manner. Such an ‘experience’ or feeling of the world is central to what it means to be truly alive, hence the impoverished character of non-sentient life (i.e. vegetation). It is essential to Hegel, then, that mere sensation is in fact a form of freedom. It is only through *pathos*, through passive suffering, that the animal enters into a relation *to* itself as distinct from the external world. Life is thus a relation-to-self in which the self-externality of nature is overcome. As Hegel puts it, in life the Idea ‘burst[s] the shell of [its] outer existence and [becomes] for itself’,⁶¹ an ontological accomplishment which nature has striven for since its logical beginning with the material longing-for-selfhood expressed in gravitational motion.

It is worth emphasising that Hegel understands this organic self-relation to proceed from the life of the animal itself. As Hegel says, ‘the subjectivity of the animal is not simply distinguished from external Nature, but the animal distinguishes itself from it; and this is an extremely important distinction.’⁶² Life, therefore, is not only structurally distinct from inorganic nature, but its ontological structure is achieved by a natural entity that actively

⁶¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 251, 37; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 25.

⁶² *W 9*: Addition to § 351, 433; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 354.

overcomes, at least in part, its naturalness. Below, we will see how this achievement of life prefigures the more radical self-liberation of spirit from nature. At this stage, we need only focus on Hegel's idea that life is an ontological accomplishment, that life is only possible through an immense struggle on the part of the animal whose feeling is by and large one of suffering.

That the sensations associated with animal life are fundamentally negative—pain, hunger, the sexual drive—is central to Hegel's conception of the animal organism as the sublation of nature's self-external character. According to Hegel, it is only insofar as the animal is lacking that it can relate to itself, in the mode of feeling, as a distinctive being. For the animal does not simply 'feel itself', but it feels itself *as lacking* something *other* than it. 'What is primary, therefore, in animal appetite is [that it] stands in need of an other which is its negative', an appetite which manifests itself as 'the unpleasant feeling of need'.⁶³ It is thus thanks to privation that the animal feels itself and is consequently driven towards ends which will rid it of this constitutive privation. To be driven in this teleological fashion is to have an urge (*Trieb*) to *overcome* 'the feeling of lack [*Gefühl des Mangels*]', to *negate* the negative existence of need.⁶⁴ But precisely because the feeling of lack is accompanied by a drive to sublimate it, the negative character of animal existence is fundamentally productive, or, in Hegel's technical language, the animal's negativity is, implicitly, a 'self-negating negativity'. Hegel describes this doubly negative character of animality as an 'immanent and explicitly present contradiction' which is precisely what allows the animal to relate to itself *as a self*. As Hegel puts it: 'A being which is capable of containing and enduring its own contradiction is a *subject*.'⁶⁵

Such self-relation allows the animal to perform a number of feats which nature has hitherto been powerless to perform. For example, the animal can move itself in order to seek out its desired ends. In doing so, the animal does not only 'spontaneously determine its

⁶³ *W 9*: Addition to § 359, 472; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 387.

⁶⁴ *W 9*: § 359, 468; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 384-385.

⁶⁵ *W 9*: Remark to § 359, 469; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 385. See also the Addition to § 359, 472; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 387-388.

place⁶⁶—as do the planets in orbiting the sun—but the animal moves itself to qualitatively distinct places which suit its immanent ends, determining its ‘place for resting, sleeping, and bearing its young’.⁶⁷ Such determination of place is far more autonomous than the merely mechanical expression of freedom which Hegel considers in his celestial mechanics, for in this case self-movement is a *purposive* activity aimed at the maintenance of the individual’s life and that of its genus (*Gattung*). Another sign of the animal’s ontological distinctness, according to Hegel, is that it can give immaterial expression to its feeling, spontaneously giving voice to its interior life. Unlike metals and other natural entities which produce sound only when struck, the animal ‘utters itself [*sich so selbst äußert*]’, producing sound ‘of its own accord’.⁶⁸ Thus, whether seeking a place to rest or crying out in pain, the animal spontaneously determines itself as an individual life-process, a process characterised by an immanent aim to sustain itself beyond its ‘negative’ or privative existence (exhaustion, pain, hunger, etc.).

Because the animal’s active self-determination is dependent upon its need for something external to it, the animal is entirely dependent upon the objective world in which it finds itself. Thus, we should note that animal life is *not* differentiated from vegetal life on account of some absolute independence of the animal; on the contrary, the animal organism is just as dependent upon its environment as is the plant. The difference, according to Hegel, is that the animal depends upon the inorganic as *other* than it, as a being which *it is not*. And this means that the dependence of animal life upon its natural environment is a dependence which makes the freedom or self-determination of animal existence possible. Self-determining subjectivity is not, therefore, cut off from its ‘other’; freedom is a relation to self *via* alterity.

This logic of organic self-relation culminates in the reproductive process, where sentience doubles back on itself and an organism feels an urge to feel itself in *another* individual organism, and yet an organism with which it is already implicitly identical, since

⁶⁶ *W 9*: § 351, 431; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 352.

⁶⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 362, 476; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 391.

⁶⁸ *W 9*: Addition to § 351, 433-434; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 354.

it belongs to the same genus.⁶⁹ According to Hegel, the reproductive drive is therefore nothing other than the sentient expression of the fundamental contradiction of life: on the one hand, the organism is a member of a genus and is, as such, nothing *other than* its genus; yet on the other hand, the organism is indeed a *particular* individual and feels only *itself* such that its selfhood is limited to its particularity. The reproductive drive is the urge to sublimate this difference between the organism as instance of its genus (i.e. the organism as universal) and the organism as particular individual. In seeking out its sexual other, the animal organism implicitly seeks to *identify* with its genus, to shed its limited perspective as a particular organism by feeling itself through *another* life which is in fact not *other* than it:

The genus is therefore present in the individual as a straining against the inadequacy of its single actuality, as the urge to obtain its self-feeling in the other of its genus, to integrate itself through union with it and through its mediation to close the genus with itself and bring it into existence—*copulation*.⁷⁰

In copulation, sexually differentiated organisms ‘become in reality what they are in themselves, namely, one genus, the same subjective vitality’, by entering into a sensuous relation productive of the genus itself, albeit in the form of another sexed individual.⁷¹

The animal thus undergoes the ‘feeling of *universality*’.⁷² But precisely because the animal only ever *feels* this belonging to its genus, this universality remains, for the animal, at the level of particularity. The universal selfhood of the genus is always felt by *this* particular animal, in *this* particular place.⁷³ And after the organism has served its reproductive purpose, it immediately returns to a state of need.⁷⁴ It is for this reason that,

⁶⁹ *W 9*: § 355 and the Addition, 455, 459; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 373, 376-377.

⁷⁰ *W 9*: § 369, 516; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 411 (§ 368 in Michelet’s edition and Miller’s translation).

⁷¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 369, 517; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 412 (§ 368 in Michelet’s edition and Miller’s translation).

⁷² *W 9*: Addition to § 369, 517; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 412 (§ 368 in Michelet’s edition and Miller’s translation). My emphasis.

⁷³ *W 9*: Addition to § 350, 431; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 352. Also, see the Addition to § 351, 433; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 354.

⁷⁴ *W 9*: § 362, 475; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 390-391.

according to Hegel, the animal is intrinsically limited and the reproductive process, despite its perpetuation of the universal (i.e. the propagation of the genus), is not a ‘truly infinite’ process of absolute subjectivity. In the following section, I will consider in more detail why Hegel believes the reproductive process to be a failed attempt, on the part of life, to achieve truly universal selfhood. Before doing so, it is worth briefly reflecting upon the nature of the reproductive process as part of the overall logic of animality.

Organic life is an ‘inner’ life because the organism sets itself apart as an individual intrinsically related to its inorganic and organic ‘others’. From digestion to reproduction, organic ‘inwardness’ negates the strictly self-external being of nature, for the individual is not *outside* itself but, on the contrary, becomes the individual it is through its relation to alterity. Thus, Hegel says, ‘it is only in *life* that we meet with subjectivity and the counter to externality.’⁷⁵ However, the animal remains a *natural* subjectivity, because it only ever *feels* itself and is therefore caught up in the immediacy of its spatially extended existence. This places an unsurpassable limit upon any life which remains strictly biological. And yet, through the logic of the organism we learn that the Idea does not remain external to itself in its real manifestation as nature. On the contrary, the Idea overcomes its expression as inorganic, self-external being and begins to show itself as the self-determining activity it is implicitly. Thus, although animal life remains intrinsically limited on account of its natural particularity, it also necessitates the transition to a *fully* interior life, a life no longer plagued by the self-externality of nature. In other words, the logic of animal life necessitates that there be a self-developing life which is no longer natural. This non-natural life is spirit.

6.6. Death and the Spirit as Phoenix

Animals are heavy. If an animal resting atop a cliff loses its balance, it plunges to the Earth below. And even when animals spontaneously determine their place, as they ordinarily do, they remain grounded in the particular place they freely occupy, weighed down by their materiality. On Hegel’s view, this is a sign that the animal never fully overcomes the logic of

⁷⁵ W 9: Addition to § 248, 29; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 18.

gravitational motion, i.e. the striving *for* subjectivity, since the organism is a *spatially extended* existence.⁷⁶ As such, the animal remains an expression of the Idea as *externally* manifest. The inner freedom that we have seen develop in nature, therefore, is always a limited form of freedom, a freedom which is ultimately subject *to* nature,⁷⁷ precisely since this ‘subjectivity is still a *natural* one’.⁷⁸

Yet as we saw above, the fundamental feature of animal life is not some material or substantial characteristic, but a strictly formal or structural relation-to-self. This is why, according to Hegel, every material aspect of the animal is replaced over time, a regenerative activity of being-for-self through which the animal expresses itself as an activity of self-maintenance through change.⁷⁹ The animal organism is therefore not essentially its material substance—which is replaced every ‘five, ten, or twenty years’—but its subjective activity, the very activity of self-relation which makes organic regeneration possible. Thus, even if the individual animal remains weighed down by its materiality, the logic of life *as such* promises a free existence which rises above materiality altogether. In order to understand how such transcendence is possible, and in what sense Hegel understands spirit to be a non-material reality emergent from animality, we must consider more closely the final stages of the organics.

In the reproductive process, the organism feels itself at home in its universality, i.e. in the genus of which it is an instance. The sexual relation results in the generation of another individual, and with this generation of *another* organism, the paternal organism has arrived at its immanent *telos*: to sustain its genus through differentiation, achieving universal

⁷⁶ *W 9*: Addition to § 351, 432-433; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 354.

⁷⁷ *W 9*: Addition to § 369, 502; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 417 (Addition to § 368 in Michelet’s edition and Miller’s translation).

⁷⁸ *W 9*: Remark to § 358, 466; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 383.

⁷⁹ ‘Nothing in the organism endures, but everything is reproduced, not excepting the bones... It is said that after five, ten, or twenty years the organism no longer contains its former substance, everything material has been consumed, and only the substantial form persists’ (*W 9*: Addition to § 356, 460-461; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 378). We can see in this active *reproduction* of material the movement from substance to subjectivity. It is worth mentioning in this regard that the organic reproduction of form is ontologically higher, for Hegel, than immaterial light. Whereas light is an emergent immateriality, organic life is a more concrete, ‘immateriality’, not because life is more *ethereal* than light but because life is a formal, teleological process constituted by determinate aims.

selfhood through the reproduction of a distinct individual. But in realising its *telos*, the organism no longer need sustain its *own* life for the sake of the genus.⁸⁰ And because self-sustenance is an essential feature *of life*, after the sexual act the organism ceases to *be* life (although not all organisms come to their end immediately following copulation).⁸¹ In giving itself over to the life of its *kind*, sustaining the process of the *universal* self or genus, the individual proves that its individual life is not in fact the truth or ultimate aim of its individual existence. As Hegel puts it, after reproduction the organic individuals ‘have no higher destiny’ and must eventually, therefore, ‘meet their death’.⁸² Death is thus an ontologically necessary feature of the life-process, finitude being immanent to the animal itself. Certainly, the empirical cause of an individual organism’s death is contingent and ordinarily has little to do with the animal’s self-determining existence.⁸³ But *that* the animal dies of contingent causes is necessitated by the intrinsic logic—and therefore being—of animal life itself.⁸⁴ The life of the individual organism is thus finite by its very nature.

But what of the infinite life process, that life which is made possible by the reproductive activity of finite, individual organisms? How does Hegel understand the universal life of the genus which is sustained over generations of individuals? Has this process not achieved truly infinite existence?

⁸⁰ There is undoubtedly a difficulty in Hegel’s account of the finitude of life in that he conceives life almost exclusively from the perspective of the male animal and can therefore identify death as the stage which, logically speaking, immediately follows copulation. Hegel’s account of organic finitude therefore ignores the logic of incubation or gestation and its role in the more general logic of the genus process.

⁸¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 370, 519-520; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 414 (Addition to § 369 in Michelet’s edition and Miller’s translation).

⁸² *W 9*: § 370, 519; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 414 (§ 369 in Michelet’s edition and Miller’s translation).

⁸³ Hegel’s attention to the ontological necessity of disease and death at the end of the nature philosophy drives home the notion that organic life is utterly dependent upon the inorganic from which it emerges, and at any moment, a particular life can be reduced to sheer chemical processes. As Engelhardt writes, ‘In disease, the organism is overpowered by inorganic nature’ (Engelhardt, ‘Hegel on Chemistry and the Organic Sciences’, p. 662). This is a central feature of many stages of Hegel’s nature-spirit system: an instance of certain ontological stages (such as life and spiritual freedom) can lose its determinacy and sink back into a more basic stage. Life can become diseased and lead to the death of the organism; thought can become deranged and allow the more basic forms of anthropological existence, such as madness, to take over the mind. And although individual cases of such degeneration are always contingent with respect to their particular circumstances, it is logically *necessary* that this always remain a possibility, for each and every instance of life, mind, political institution, and so on.

⁸⁴ *W 9*: Addition to § 374, 534-535; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 441.

The genus, which produces itself through negation of its differences, does not, however, exist in and for itself but only in a series of single living beings: and thus the sublation of the contradiction is always the beginning of a fresh one.⁸⁵

The contradiction of life, we recall, is that life is on the one hand individual, and on the other hand, an instance of the universal, its genus. In reproduction, this contradiction is momentarily overcome for the paternal organism, but the contradiction reemerges with the generation of *another* individual which is itself a particular life and an instance of its genus. This is the means by which life continues itself through difference, by momentarily overcoming its contradictory nature and subsequently falling back into contradiction. For this reason, Hegel understands the reproductive process to signal not only the death of the individual organism, whose self-sustenance becomes superfluous after reproduction, but the intrinsically limited character of life *as such*. On Hegel's view, the total life process is a spuriously infinite process of reproduction. One organism, whose end is the perpetuation of the genus, generates another organism which in turn seeks to overcome its contradictory nature through reproduction, and so on ad infinitum.

Life is therefore an infinite process of self-determination through death—and this is why life is the highest form of nature—but *as a whole*, this life process is never *lived* by a single organism, it never ‘exists in and for itself’. Thus, although the life process explicitly overcomes its own contradiction, it does not live out that contradiction and *explicitly* sustain itself throughout its development, for example, as feeling, the mode by which the individual animal relates to itself. Indeed, because the genus is a universal self, and not a particular individual, the genus is onto-logically incapable of relating to itself through sensation, which is bound up with a particular spatiotemporal existence. We can see from this that, sensation, which defines the self-relation of animality, will never achieve the universal selfhood promised by the logic of life. An activity far more detached from material particularity will be required in order for truly infinite subjectivity to be realised as a lived self-relation.

⁸⁵ *W 9*: Addition to § 370, 520; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 414 (Addition to § 369 in Miller's translation).

It is here that spirit first makes its appearance in Hegel's system. Spirit emerges from nature as the *explicit* universal selfhood that determines itself through difference, and comes to know itself as an activity that is ontologically distinct from self-external, material nature. Whereas life was the natural *telos* of nature, spirit is its *non-natural telos*, an emergent life which, while physically and ontologically dependent upon animal life, is utterly incomprehensible from the perspective of speculative biology.

Spirit has thus proceeded from Nature. The goal of Nature is to destroy itself and to break through its husk of immediate, sensuous existence, to consume itself like the phoenix in order to come forth from this externality rejuvenated as spirit. Nature has become an other to itself in order to recognize itself again as Idea and to reconcile itself with itself.⁸⁶

The systematic transition from nature to spirit is not the only place we find Hegel describing spirit as an emergent phoenix. Hegel also invokes the phoenician image in his 1831 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* where he claims that the 'representation of the phoenix, a death that is the reentry into a rejuvenated life...*this is what spirit is*.⁸⁷ Hegel's identification of spirit as a phoenix rising from its own ruin is central to his logic of emergence, and yet this image is far more ambiguous than it appears at first glance. By elucidating Hegel's conception of spirit as phoenix, I aim to shed some light upon the transition in Hegel's system from nature to spirit.

In order to make sense of Hegel's identification of spirit as phoenix, let us turn again to Hegel's philosophy of religion, this time as presented in the 1824 lectures. There, we find the following: 'The eternal nature of spirit is to die to itself, to make itself finite in natural life, but through the annihilation of its natural state it comes to itself.'⁸⁸ There are many passages in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* and lectures which resonate with this passage, and the general idea which Hegel articulates here has often been read as though spirit *becomes* nature, as though it releases itself into exteriority in order to raise itself beyond that derivative, finite state. On this interpretation, the phoenix represents spirit precisely because

⁸⁶ *W9*: Addition to § 376, 538; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 444.

⁸⁷ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume II*, 1831 Excerpts, p. 743. Emphasis modified.

⁸⁸ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume II*, 1824, p. 453.

the phoenix annihilates itself and through this self-annihilation *reemerges* from its ashes. The phoenician image, in other words, illustrates the idea that spirit's self-destruction makes possible spirit's return to itself. It is this interpretation of spirit that I have called into question throughout the last three chapters of this thesis, since it makes of Hegel's system an anthropocentric, or at the very least pneumatocentric, system in which nature is ontologically derivative. Since I defend the view that nature is ontologically more fundamental than spirit for Hegel, it is necessary that I offer an alternative interpretation of Hegel's identification of spirit as self-annihilating phoenix.

As I argued in Chapter 4, the reading of Hegel which interprets nature as self-external spirit fails to distinguish between the ontological structure and significance of the Idea, on the one hand, and that of spirit, on the other. Distinguishing between the Idea and spirit is of course no easy task, since spirit is in some important sense identical to the Idea. But the identity of the Idea and spirit is not one of *sameness*. Rather, their identity is one made possible by *difference*, and more specifically, through the differentiated existence of *nature*, the Idea's initial form of manifestation. Since nature is indeed the onto-logically initial manifestation of the Idea, we cannot simply conceive spirit as a return to the Idea as it was 'prior' to its self-external manifestation; there is no stage of the Idea's reality which is more basic than nature. The Idea is simply *what there is*; being is Idea or self-determining reason. This Idea, however, only *is* insofar as it manifests itself. At its most basic, the Idea expresses itself as *other* than itself, as *not* being what it is (nature). And it is only at a logically, and therefore ontologically, subsequent stage that this Idea begins to express itself *as* itself, at peace with itself in its real, worldly activity (spirit). The emergence of the phoenix from its ashes must therefore be read as a novel event within Hegel's system, exclusively descriptive of spiritual—and not merely ideal—being. There is thus good reason that Hegel doesn't describe the abstract *Idea* of the *Logic* as emergent from its ruin, for it is only with the unique ontological structure of spirit that self-determining freedom comes on the scene as an ontological *reality*.

That being said, the phoenix is an image of eternal or cyclical emergence, a symbol of *regeneration* and *rebirth*, not of natality. It is understandable, then, that interpreters of

Hegel have often understood spirit to undergo *its own* annihilation in a transition to nature and, subsequently, to *reemerge* as spirit rejuvenated. But there is more than one way to understand the cyclical character of spirit's emergence. To be sure, one can envision this as a process wherein spirit returns to itself after releasing itself into exteriority. But such an interpretation makes Hegel's system far too 'representational', as if there were an actual, historical process in which 'spirit' actively released itself into nature and subsequently emerged from that exteriority. On my view, this cannot be Hegel's intention. As I understand it, the cyclical character of phoenician emergence speaks rather to the eternal character of the logic or ontological structure *of* the nature-spirit relation. So long as we remain focused on the logical development of Hegel's system, as Hegel himself demands of his readers, spirit doesn't emerge *in time* any more than the Idea *annihilates* itself in time. The transitions from logic to nature and from nature to spirit do not describe historical *events*, but ontological structures which are intrinsically dynamic and yet, precisely through this dynamism, are of eternal significance. Spirit is an ever emerging—and therefore one can visualise or represent (*vorstellen*) this as a 'reemerging'—process through which self-external nature turns back upon itself and dispenses with its material, spatially extended existence. The phoenix, then, is an appropriate image for spirit because it is the image of a life which perpetually emerges through negativity.

On my view, there is indeed an intrinsic limit to Hegel's conception of spirit as phoenix, but it has nothing to do with the idea that the phoenician image makes of nature a merely derivative existence. As I will argue in the conclusion to this thesis, Hegel's Heraclitean conception of spirit as self-consuming fire rules out the compelling possibility that spirit emerges *in time*, as a consequence of a *rationally explicable* natural history. Although Hegel is not opposed to the idea that spirit arises in the world at some point in time, he refuses to conceive of any natural-historical emergence of spirit as philosophically significant. However, such a critique of Hegel can only be made once we acknowledge that spirit, for Hegel, is indeed *logically emergent*, which means it is ontologically *dependent* upon nature. That is to say, it is only because the onto-logical structure of nature necessitates the existence of spirit that there *is* spirit at all. To acknowledge this is to acknowledge that

the Hegelian phoenix in no way precedes (onto-logically speaking) the negative existence from which it perpetually arises.

But how does spirit perpetually arise from the self-external being of nature? Much like the active negation of inorganic nature which distinguished the animal from its environment, spirit emerges from nature through an *active negation* of nature: ‘spirit... *distinguishes itself* from nature, so that this distinguishing is not merely the act of an external reflection about the essence of spirit’ but is accomplished *through* spiritual activity itself.⁸⁹ However, unlike the animal which effects only a *sensuous*, and therefore particular, negation of nature, spirit accomplishes a far more radical *break* with nature, a break accomplished by an activity that allows the spiritual existence to ‘withdraw itself from everything external *and from its own* externality’.⁹⁰ Thus, although dependent upon sensuous existence for its activity, spirit freely determines itself in abstraction from its immediate desires in the transcendence of its sensuous existence. This is why Hegel reserves the concept of ‘*absolute* negativity’ for the activity of spirit.⁹¹ In this absolute negativity, the self-negating negativity of organic life becomes fully explicit as a total negation of nature, and in this way, spirit differentiates itself as qualitatively distinct from organic life. The most straightforward way in which this is apparent in Hegel’s system is that spirit *liberates* itself from nature, an activity of self-emancipation which has not one analogue in the progression of nature from the mechanics to the organics. For this reason, spirit should be seen not as the highest stage of nature, but as an utterly novel ontological stage within Hegel’s *Realphilosophie* requiring a distinctive speculative account of its reality. Such an account is found in the third and final part of Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*, the philosophy of spirit.

⁸⁹ *W 10*: Addition to § 381, 21; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 11.

⁹⁰ *W 10*: § 382, 25; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 15. My emphasis.

⁹¹ *W 10*: § 381 and § 382, 17, 25; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 8, 15.

6.7. The Inner Unity of Spirit

Up to this point, I have made little reference to human existence in Hegel's system. But this should not imply that Hegel has nothing to say about human life in the philosophy of nature. The human is an animal, and for this reason everything Hegel describes in the dialectic of animal life pertains to the human *as* animal.⁹² But Hegel has good reason not to emphasise the organic dimension of human life, postponing his explicit consideration of the human until the final part of his system. For the human is not simply *more* than organic, as if spiritual freedom were merely predicated of a particular animal life. If this were the case, then perhaps the organic human form would receive a more detailed consideration in the nature philosophy. But for Hegel, the properly human dimension of humanity is precisely its *spiritual* activity. Thus, the philosophy of spirit—and not the philosophy of nature—is the sole domain of Hegel's ontology which inquires into the being of 'man as man, and, that always must be, as spirit'.⁹³

Spirit is the real negation of nature, the negation not only of 'negativity' in general, but the negation of negativity expressed as a *world*, the negation of self-externality. Thus, spirit is a concrete being not simply because it is the determinate activity of self-determining reason (it is not simply 'the Idea' as self-negating negativity), but spirit is rather the *most* determinate form of being as the concrete, or real, *worldly* negation of the spatiotemporal world. Below, I will consider how it is that spirit is meant to *negate* nature, since, significantly, it is spirit's very activity which effects its liberation from nature. Here, I want to consider Hegel's formal definition of spirit as 'absolute negativity'. For it is this *absolute* negativity that allows spirit to achieve the total inwardness which was still only implicit in animal life. Indeed, it is this absolute negativity that makes spirit qualitatively distinct not only from inorganic nature, but from the natural subjectivity of the organism. As absolute

⁹² *W* 9: Addition to § 352, 436; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 357.

⁹³ *W* 10: § 377, 9; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 1, translation modified. As I understand it, this is also why Hegel is far more interested in the aesthetic *expression* of the human form (e.g. in sculpture) than he is in the human form *au naturel*.

negativity, spirit is the inward existence which transcends the lesser forms of inwardness we have seen throughout nature's rational progression (in gravity, light, and life).

These remarks should not, however, indicate that with the transition to the philosophy of spirit we finally have before us the ontological structure of a fully self-sufficient, inner being. If that were the case, then the philosophy of spirit would require a rather brief exposition in the *Encyclopaedia*. But as is always the case with Hegel, ontological determinations unravel through a laborious development, and even with the emergence of spirit at the end of the nature philosophy we have yet to arrive at Hegel's account of spirit *as such*.⁹⁴ The account of 'spirit as such' is found near the end of the first part of Hegel's philosophy of spirit, i.e. the philosophy of subjective spirit, which includes Hegel's speculative anthropology, phenomenology, and psychology. As Murray Greene remarks, the entire logical development contained in the dialectic of subjective spirit is a *Befreiungskampf* or 'liberation struggle', indicating that even once we have transitioned from mere animal nature to human spirit with Hegel's anthropology, spirit has not fully liberated itself from the self-externality of nature.⁹⁵ Such liberation only comes about with the logical emergence of thought, near the end of the psychology—a rational liberation which prefigures the final and highest stage of the *Encyclopaedia* as a whole: philosophy and its history.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ That spirit is, on the one hand, an inward, self-identical 'unity', and on the other, a complex, internally differentiated process, is precisely why spirit is ontologically higher than the selfsame reality of 'light'. Spirit is differentiated from itself *in* its internal unity and simple nature, unlike light which is utterly undifferentiated. See Chapter 5.8 above. 'Spirit is not merely this abstractly simple being equivalent to light... Spirit in spite of its simplicity is distinguished from itself; for the "I" sets itself over against itself, makes itself its own object and returns from this difference' (*W* 10: Addition to § 381, 21; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 11, translation modified).

⁹⁵ Murray Greene, *Hegel on the Soul: A Speculative Anthropology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1972), pp. 48-49, 170; and Greene, 'Hegel's Conception of Psychology' in *Hegel and the Sciences*, p. 189. Note also that this 'liberation struggle' does not have the significance, first and foremost, of historical *Bildung*. As Greene rightly emphasises, despite the philosophical significance of *Bildung* for Hegel, 'in philosophical science, Spirit is viewed in its self-formation according to the necessity of its *notion* as Spirit' (*Hegel on the Soul*, p. 52, my emphasis). See *W* 10: Addition to § 382, 27; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 16.

⁹⁶ One might think that 'reason' (§§ 438-439), the last stage of the *Encyclopaedia* phenomenology, is where spirit determines itself *as spirit*, since it is with reason that we transition into psychology, the domain of spiritual activity wherein consciousness has realised that the world is in fact rational. However, at this stage, the 'I' only knows that the world *must* be rational; it hasn't yet confirmed that this is in fact the case. It is only through the psychological dialectic that the intelligence *proves* its knowledge of the world's rationality, and it does so with completeness (at least regarding its theoretical relationship to the world) in thought.

There would be good reason, then, to continue tracing the logic of emergence through the entire development of subjective spirit, at least up until the appearance of thought in § 465. For although spirit logically emerges from nature as the explicitly subjective reality implicit in organic life, it first does so only as soul (*Seele*), or what Hegel also calls ‘natural spirit’ (*Naturgeist*). The philosophy of spirit therefore begins with a stage of spirit ‘which is still in the grip of nature and connected with its corporeity, spirit which is...not yet free’.⁹⁷ I will not, however, provide an account of spirit’s *Befreiungskampf* from soul to consciousness to thought. Instead, I will consider straightaway the defining activity of spirit, i.e. thought, which most explicitly distinguishes the life of spirit from that of the animal and thereby accounts for the ontological difference between human and animal.

Above, we considered how the animal organism spontaneously determines its own life thanks to its self-relation in the form of sensation. And yet despite this subjective, self-relation, the animal organism only ever feels its *particular* self. Consequently, animal subjectivity remains tied to its spatiotemporal idiosyncrasy. The human is distinct from the animal insofar as the human spirit relates to itself *not only* via sensation, but via thought:

The animal, the most perfect form of [the inwardisation of nature], represents only the non-spiritual dialectic of transition from one single sensation filling its whole soul to another single sensation which equally exclusively dominates it; it is man who first raises himself above the singleness of sensation to the universality of thought, to self-knowledge, to the grasp of his subjectivity, of his ‘I’ in a word, it is only man who is thinking mind and by this, and by this alone, is essentially distinguished from Nature.⁹⁸

It is this thinking activity that allows spirit to liberate itself from the natural world by *negating* its self-externality and thereby constituting itself as a truly ‘inner’ existence. Again, exactly *how* thought ‘negates’ self-externality will not become clear until we look more closely at Hegel’s account of thought in the psychology. What is essential to grasp at this stage is that spirit is an *inner* being that is fundamentally different from the nascent forms of subjective inwardness found in nature. And spirit is different from or other than these forms

⁹⁷ *W* 10: Addition to § 387, 40; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 27.

⁹⁸ *W* 10: Addition to § 381, 25; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 14.

of natural selfhood insofar as spirit is in no way *external* to itself but is instead utterly ‘one’ with itself. It is helpful to begin with this basic structure of spirit, as outlined at the beginning of the philosophy of spirit, in order to understand why Hegel subsequently identifies thinking as the spiritual activity par excellence.

Because nature is *other* than itself, and spirit is the *negation* of this self-otherness, spirit is intrinsically *unified* with itself. This does not imply that spirit is a selfsame reality. On the contrary, spirit is unified with itself *through* its internal differentiation. And this has important systematic implications for Hegel’s *account* of spirit in the *Encyclopaedia*. To the extent that spirit is indeed differentiated from itself, the philosophy of spirit will resemble the graduated sequence of stages in the philosophy of nature. Indeed, Hegel’s philosophy of spirit must take into account the various forms of theoretical and practical activities that define the life of spirit, and these forms are to be shown as rationally connected in a logically progressive system of ‘stages’. But precisely because these theoretical and practical activities are the activities *of a unified spirit*, they are not *autonomous zones* of spiritual life. And it is here that nature’s self-externality and spirit’s inwardness lead to significant differences between the dialectics of nature and spirit.

In nature, gravitational motion is ontologically distinct from chemical processes, even though there is an underlying, rational connection between these features of nature. But when we turn to the real manifestation of *inner, subjective* activity, this stratified character of reality is overcome. ‘The determinations and stages of spirit...are only essential as *moments, states, and determinations* in the higher stages of development.’⁹⁹ Thus, according to Hegel, the lower stages of spirit do not exist separately from the higher stages as do the lower stages of nature.¹⁰⁰ Whereas inorganic processes can be found existing on their own, untouched by any organic life; and non-human animals are sentient without being sapient; lower-level forms of *spiritual* existence such as dreaming and intuiting take place within a more robust life of the mind, a life which itself unfolds historically, within an ethical

⁹⁹ *W* 10: § 380, 16-17; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 7. Translation modified.

¹⁰⁰ That is, excluding space and time which also only exist as the immanent forms through which more concrete natural entities and processes manifest themselves.

community of individuals. This is why Hegel dismisses empirical psychology and all other conceptions of mind which depend upon separating mental activity into ontologically distinct *faculties*. Spirit is better understood as a self-differentiated, processual whole composed of moments, as opposed to nature which is rightly conceived as a system of stages only implicitly connected to one another. Thus, if Hegel is to be seen as a ‘strong organicist’ in the *Realphilosophie*, then this organicism pertains exclusively to *spirit*’s organic unity.¹⁰¹

Hegel notes that because the lower stages of subjective spirit are explicitly connected to the higher stages, it is tempting to *reduce* the higher stages to the lower stages.¹⁰² But if the idealist logic of emergence has taught us anything, it is that higher stages of ontological reality, despite their ontological dependence upon lower stages, are utterly irreducible to those lower stages. And this remains the case whether we are considering the ontological structure of a stratified, self-external nature or a unified, self-differentiated spirit. The particular spiritual activities Hegel has in mind when he notes the reductionist temptation with regard to human life are thought and feeling. For if thought always appears in conjunction *with* feeling (thanks to the unified character of spiritual life), then it is relatively easy for a philosopher to interpret thought on the basis of feeling.¹⁰³ But Hegel insists that thought is notionally separable from the feeling that accompanies it, hence the separate accounts of feeling and thought we find in the *Encyclopaedia*. Hegel acknowledges and, indeed, drives home the point that thought is pursued by particular human beings who *feel* themselves thinking ‘especially in the head, in the brain, in general in the system of sensibility’.¹⁰⁴ But what those thoughts consist in is, according to Hegel, in no way particular in the way feeling is particular, i.e. as felt by a *particular* being. And this is why,

¹⁰¹ This is of course somewhat ironic given the prevalent view that Hegel promotes an organic conception of nature (see Chapter 4.10 above). On my view, just as the Idea fails to achieve *truly* self-determining, ‘conceptual’ development until it ‘releases’ itself into nature (Chapter 4.6), so too life only becomes *truly* organic in the non-natural, *non-biological* life of spirit.

¹⁰² Note that reduction is particularly tempting with regard to *spiritual* life. This can easily be seen in our contemporary age of philosophical naturalism. Where one can nowadays dispute, with relative ease, physical reductionism by arguing for the relative autonomy of organic phenomena, it is far more controversial to defend the notion that conceptual thought—and by this I mean a content-rich logic—should be treated as independent of intuitions, perceptions, and so on.

¹⁰³ *W* 10: § 380, 17; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ *W* 10: Addition to § 401, 113; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 85.

as we will see, ‘the universality of the “I” enables it to abstract from everything, *even from its life*.’¹⁰⁵

Abstracting from the particular is one of two defining features of thought, and one which can be misleading if it is not understood in conjunction with thought’s second defining feature. I will therefore consider abstraction in more detail in the following section. My aim here is to argue that spirit’s self-identity does not rule out the idea that certain spiritual activities are notionally distinct from other activities and that, consequently, the intrinsic unity of spirit is entirely of a piece with Hegel’s anti-reductionism. Indeed, once we begin to consider Hegel’s conception of spirit as a self-differentiated unity, we see that Hegel’s anti-reductionism extends beyond the physical-organic realm and into the realm of spirit itself. Moreover, just as Hegel’s anti-reductionism regarding natural diversity turned on a logic of emergence, the same should be said of Hegel’s conception of the inwardly unified yet differentiated structure of spirit. To see this, we need only acknowledge that thought—the very feature of spiritual life which distinguishes it absolutely from the life of the animal—emerges at a relatively late stage in the dialectic of spirit.

Considered in its ontological distinctness, thought is structurally dependent upon the pre-conceptual, proto-cognitive forms of spiritual activity which precede it in the logic of subjective spirit. Thought is therefore ontologically dependent not only upon nature, but a vast array of spiritual activities, some of which, namely habit and mechanical memory (*Gedächtnis*), hark back to the mechanical, inorganic stages of nature discussed in Chapter 5.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore important to emphasise, along with Houlgate, that Hegel doesn’t ‘guarantee’ thought from the beginning of the philosophy of spirit, as if thought merely ‘passed through’ its mechanical and inorganic stages on the way to its preordained self-

¹⁰⁵ *W* 10: Addition to § 381, 21; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Habit is the mechanism of self-feeling, as memory is the mechanism of intelligence’ (*W* 10: Remark to § 410, 184; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 141). On habit, see Simon Lumsden, ‘Between Nature and Spirit: Hegel’s Account of Habit’, in *Essays on Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. David S. Stern (Albany: State University of New York, 2013), pp. 121-137. For an account of thought’s dependence upon mechanical memory, see Houlgate, ‘Hegel, Derrida, and Restricted Economy: The Case of Mechanical Memory’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34 (1996), pp. 79-93.

fulfilment.¹⁰⁷ On the contrary, the distinctive activity of thinking is possible only through the rational unfolding or explication of pre-conceptual spiritual activity.

And yet the emergence of thought within the philosophy of spirit should be distinguished from the emergence of natural forms in the philosophy of nature. Once we learn that thought is indeed the *truth* of spirit—i.e. spirit ‘as such’—we *retrospectively* discover that all of spirit's activities are intrinsically united with the activity of thinking and are, in fact, abstract expressions *of* thought. In other words, human feeling, perception, imagination, all of these spiritual activities are, in a sense, activities of thought, yet thought which has not fully liberated itself from its material situatedness.¹⁰⁸ As with nature, then, Hegel intends to distinguish the logical structures of various spiritual activities and show how the higher, more complex structures are dependent upon the lower, more abstract structures. But unlike nature, where distinctive logical structures are typically expressed, in reality, as *separate* from one another, distinctive logical structures of spiritual life are found within one and the same individual as lesser and greater expressions *of that individual's rational life*. It is for this reason that Hegel can unparadoxically claim, on the one hand, that thought distinguishes the human spirit from the animal organism, and on the other hand, that thought is ontologically dependent upon non-biological, *spiritual* activities which are themselves only implicitly cognitive. For these pre-conceptual activities of spirit should be understood, retrospectively, as abstract expressions of thought writ large.

6.8. Thought

For Hegel, the human spirit is not endowed with a ‘capacity’ for thinking, since spirit is precisely an inwardly unified existence and the mind cannot, therefore, be divided up into ‘this’ and ‘that’ faculty. Moreover, thought would be the moment of spiritual life *least*

¹⁰⁷ Houlgate, ‘Hegel, Derrida, and Restricted Economy’, p. 91.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Hegel describes human sensation as the immediate manifestation of thought: ‘Everything is in sensation...if you will, everything that emerges in conscious intelligence and in reason has its source and origin in sensation; for source and origin just means the first immediate manner in which a thing appears’ (*W* 10: Remark to § 400, 97-98; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 73).

analogous to a psychological ‘faculty’, since *all* of spirit’s activities—including sensation,¹⁰⁹ habit, perception, desire, intuition, and imagination, to name a few—are lesser or greater expressions of thought writ large. Thought is therefore far too central to the total ontological structure of spirit for it to be a mere capacity or faculty of human nature. According to Hegel, the ‘principle’ of spirit, ‘its unadulterated selfhood, is thinking’.¹¹⁰

In what sense, then, can the pre-conceptual moments of spiritual activity be understood as thoughtful? To answer this question, we must consider what unifies the various moments of spirit. Bracketing those peculiar and yet necessary moments of radically self-*external* spirit such as mechanical memory, the logical development of spirit, up to and including thought, can be characterised as a process of ‘internalisation’ or ‘incorporation’.¹¹¹ Thus, whereas nature is a process of ‘involution’ or ‘turning back’ upon itself, spirit is a process of assimilating what is *external* and bringing it *into* the selfhood of spirit. According to Hegel, ‘Every activity of spirit is nothing but a distinct mode of reducing what is external to inwardness which spirit itself is, and it is only by this reduction [*Zurückführung*], by this idealisation or assimilation, of what is external that it becomes and is spirit.’¹¹²

Note that the procedure of ‘internalising’ the external is not performed by an already existing spiritual life. Rather, spirit *becomes* a self in bringing the external *into* itself. We have, of course, already seen this logic at work in the dialectic of the animal organism, hence the ontological continuity between life and spirit. And just as life remains weighed down by its own materiality, so too do the lower stages of spiritual activity fail to internalise the external absolutely. Thus, the more abstract activities of spirit, such as intuition, only ever get so far in ‘idealising’ or ‘assimilating’ external difference; a minimal quantum of

¹⁰⁹ That sensation is considered in both the organics and the anthropology signals a profound hermeneutic difficulty regarding the transition from nature to spirit, but I will not focus on it here. Suffice it to say, the sensation experienced by the spiritual subject is distinct from its merely animal sensations insofar as ‘spiritual sensations’ draw the human beyond its spatiotemporal immediacy and into its *whole* life, a life beyond the instant of sensation and into the past and future. I intend to explore this in detail elsewhere.

¹¹⁰ *W* 8: § 11, 55; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 35.

¹¹¹ This ‘incorporation’ also involves a process of ‘externalisation’, e.g. in the production of linguistic signs (*W* 10: §§ 457-459, 267-277; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 210-218).

¹¹² *W* 10: Addition to § 381, 21; *Philosophy of Mind*, p.11. Translation modified.

materiality always remains unassimilated in the pre-conceptual activity of spirit.¹¹³ As Greene puts it, spirit is, in its anthropological, phenomenological, and psychological development ‘still engaged in overcoming its spatially and temporally conditioned modes of “pictorial thinking” just prior to its attainment of notional thinking (*begreifendes Denken*).’¹¹⁴ With thought, however, which ‘internalises’ the external as rational structures or forms (as opposed to sensuous impressions, images, and so on), spirit shows its true character as the *absolute* idealisation of the external:

Thought alone is able to experience what is highest, or what is true [...] Thought says farewell even to this last element of the sensible, and is free, at home with itself; it renounces external and internal sensibility, and distances itself from all particular concerns and inclinations.¹¹⁵

Thought is therefore the highest and least ‘subjective’ form of subjectivity, insofar as it gives up its particularity in order to become a *true* self by taking up the demands of conceptual thinking. It is in this sense that thought is an ‘*unadulterated* selfhood’.¹¹⁶ For thought is unaffected by the feelings, perceptions, and generally sensuous existence which make it possible.¹¹⁷ As we saw above, Hegel conceives thought as an *abstraction* from the particular. Now we can see that thought is an abstraction insofar as it is a ‘letting go’ of its immediate circumstances.¹¹⁸ ‘When I think, I give up my subjective particularity, sink

¹¹³ The difference between life and the early stages of spirit is, however, not one of mere quantitative difference. For as we have already seen, these early stages of spirit subsequently prove to be abstract expressions of thought, and in this way even human sensation, as described in the anthropology, is ontologically distinct from merely organic sensation.

¹¹⁴ Murray Greene, *Hegel on the Soul*, p. 51.

¹¹⁵ *W 8*: Addition 2 to § 19, 70; *Vorbegriff* to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 48.

¹¹⁶ *W 8*: § 11, 55; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 35. My emphasis.

¹¹⁷ Note that Hegel does not hold the view that *all* thought is radically dissociated from sensuous existence. Thought can form both pure and *empirical* concepts, and the latter are far more indebted to perceptual experience than are the former. Nevertheless, insofar as thought opens the human onto the universal *logos*, the activity of thinking distinguishes it from sensation, perception, and so on precisely in this universality.

¹¹⁸ Houlgate has emphasised the significance of ‘letting go’ throughout Hegel’s system. See, for example, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, pp. 60-63.

myself in the matter, let thought follow its own course: and I think badly whenever I add something of my own.’¹¹⁹

But if the individual lets go of its immediate particularity, in what sense is this individual a ‘self’? Haven’t we seen throughout the development of nature that selfhood is precisely achieved in the unique, particular existence which qualifies a being as different from all others? And at the higher levels of natural organisation, isn’t the feeling of oneself as a particular individual necessary for the achievement of organic subjectivity? Certainly, selfhood must pass through a logic of particularity in order to separate itself from what is *other* than it. This was key to the transition from mechanics to physics. And to relate to oneself *as* a self, one must indeed relate to oneself as particular, hence the necessity of sensation in life. But we have also seen that, for Hegel, ‘selfhood’ always signifies *self-determination*, be this the self-determination of the planets in their elliptical orbits or the self-determination of life as the maintenance of self through suffering. It is this notion of self as self-determining which Hegel identifies as the ‘unadulterated selfhood’ of thought.¹²⁰

That thinking is a process of self-determination is absolutely central to Hegel’s conception of spirit, for it is through the self-determination of thought that spirit manifests itself as a free existence. Thinking is a free activity, according to Hegel, for two interrelated reasons. First, the movement of thought is *immanent*. As we have seen, thought determines *itself* and thus gives itself its own law (rational thought is autonomous). And second, because this immanent activity allows an individual to withdraw from his particular circumstances, thought opens the human onto a truth *beyond* the here and now. Thus, not only does the thinking individual conceive spatiotemporal places which are beyond its surrounding environment (e.g. in recollection and imagination), but that individual thinks beyond its own existence entirely, abstracting from its *own* particularity in order to contemplate the movement of *logos* as such—a free or self-determining movement in which

¹¹⁹ *W* 8: Addition 2 to § 23, 84; *Vorbegriff* to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 58.

¹²⁰ We can also understand the ‘selfhood’ of universal thought if we consider the difference between particularity, on the one hand, and individuality or singularity, on the other. For Hegel, the thinking ‘I’ is at one and the same time universal and *singular*. In fact, the ‘I’ is not only simultaneously *this* singular ‘I’ and *every* (universal) ‘I’, but the ‘I’ is *this* ‘I’ (as singular) precisely in its being *every* ‘I’.

the participating individual himself becomes liberated from the self-externality of his sensuous existence.¹²¹

It is this abstraction from the particular that signals the ontological difference between the self-determination of thought, on the one hand, and that of life, on the other. To be sure, life is a freely self-determining activity through which an individual sustains itself through change. This sets life apart from inorganic nature, which ceases to be the qualitatively particular being it is as soon as its qualities undergo transformation.¹²² But spirit is even more plastic than life, since spirit—in the form of thought—continues to sustain itself, and *explicitly* so, through the death of the individual. For the movement of thought continues to relate to itself no matter *who* is doing the thinking. This is why thought is explicitly universal, unlike the merely implicit universality in the life-process of the genus. Hegel's idea is provocative in our contemporary landscape where life is the horizon of all value, but it is a clear continuation of Kantian rationalism: when I am thinking, I am indeed thinking *my* thought, but this thought is not *exclusively* mine; *my* thinking—the thinking in which I participate and to which I fundamentally belong—is nothing other than the thought of *all* rational beings.¹²³ Thought is in this way structurally distinct from the feeling of animal life, since feeling is always specified within a particular lived experience. The particularity which thus prevents mere life from becoming truly universal is overcome

¹²¹ As Hegel puts it, in thought, spirit 'may withdraw from everything external and from its own externality, its very existence' (*W* 10: § 382, 25-26; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 15, emphasis modified).

¹²² 'What belongs to external Nature is destroyed by contradiction; if, for example, gold were given a different specific gravity from what it has, it would cease to be gold. But mind has power to preserve itself in contradiction' (*W* 10: Addition to § 382, 26-27; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 15-16).

¹²³ For a very different account of Hegel's distinction between man and animal—but an account which has convincingly shown 'plasticity' to be an implicit yet essential Hegelian concept—see Catharine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. by Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 73-74: 'What is exemplary about man is less human-ness than his status as an *insistent accident*. If the animal is not able fully to present the genus, the flaw is not in the genus, because the genus will always be in excess over its individual way of being: rather it is due to the accidental nature of the example. Because the individual animal is nothing but a natural accident it can only respond to the genus in its substance by means of another accident: the generation of another animal... In contrast, the "plastic individual" has the power to add to the accidental the very integrity and ontological constancy of a genus. This power is the power of habit. "Plastic individuals" are those who synthesize in their very "style" the essence of the genus and the accident which has become habitual. What in the beginning was merely an accidental fact - Plato's commitment to philosophy, Pericles' to politics, Phidias' to sculpture - is changed through continual repetition of the same gestures, through practice, achieving the integrity of a "form" (*eidōs*). Effected by habit, the singularity of the "plastic individual" becomes an *essence a posteriori*.'

in the universal movement of thought. And seen from this vantage point, the nature of life proves to be an intermediary stage between inorganic nature, which cannot sustain contradiction but simply falls apart into asunderness, and spiritual freedom, which achieves self-identity through the differentiated history of thinking.

To reiterate: Hegel recognises that thought is experienced by finite individuals—hence its location within the philosophy of *subjective* spirit. Thinking ‘takes place’ in time and is, therefore, particular regarding its historical determinateness. But the being of thought, unlike the being of sensation, transcends that particularity. The activity of thinking is therefore the felt, particular, historical expression of the *absolute, universal, and atemporal movement of logos* to which all beings—thoughtful and otherwise—belong. Thus, whereas nature is the onto-logically primary expression of *logos*, it is not until we arrive at the logical emergence of spirit that reality sheds its self-external character and determines itself explicitly as the movement of reason.

In order for spirit to achieve this standpoint of universal thought, however, the manner in which it ‘internalises’ external nature must be modified. So long as spirit relates to nature as *other* than it, as a nature *opposed to* spirit, the ‘assimilation’ and ‘idealisation’ of nature will remain incomplete. For any opposition *to* nature as simply ‘other’ than the ‘I’ harbours the practical assumption that what is external to spirit requires transformation in order to be assimilated, to be moulded into an intelligible form. And it is this practical assumption that nature must be idealised by something *other* than it which thought overcomes. We would be wrong to assume, therefore, that thought acts *upon* the external world in this oppositional fashion. To be sure, thought, according to Hegel, ‘negates the externality of Nature, assimilates Nature to itself and thereby idealizes it.’¹²⁴ Yet since thought does not *oppose* itself to the material world, but rather *lets go* of its particular, embodied worldview, thought ‘idealises’ nature in a very important way: by letting the external show *itself* to be *intrinsically* rational.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ *W* 10: Addition to § 381, 23; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 13.

¹²⁵ This is distinct from the imagination, for example, which acts *on* nature (or the sensuous) rather than letting nature itself divulge its intrinsic rationality.

As we have already seen, Hegel conceives nature as ‘outside itself’, but he *also* understands this very ontological determination to be a *rational* determination, one which is intrinsic to nature itself and can potentially be grasped by thought. And this has significant implications for the manner in which thought can be said to be ‘free from externality’. According to Hegel, the inner freedom of thought is not, at its highest and most truthful expression, in *opposition* to externality, since nothing lies *beyond* rational thought such that it could possibly be determined by something radically ‘other’ than it. When thought appears to be determined by ‘external’ circumstances such as particular feelings or habits of mind—as happens in ‘bad thinking’—then thought isn’t properly rational.¹²⁶ In fully rational thought, one closes the gap between the external and the internal by entering into a thoughtful consideration of the inner, rational truth *of* the external.¹²⁷ Thought, according to Hegel, ‘is a plain [*einfache*] identity of subjective and objective. It knows that what is *thought, is*, and that what *is*, only *is* in so far as it is a thought [*Gedanke*].’¹²⁸ Note that Hegel does *not* say that what *is*, only *is* in so far as it is thought (*gedacht*), i.e. in so far as it is in fact contemplated. The point is rather that the being of beings is rational and is therefore in principle ‘thinkable’. The emergence of spirit is thus nothing other than the gradual, ontological—yet non-historical—recognition of the identity of thought and its ‘content’, the unity of subjective activity and objective being.

This form of inwardness is different from the forms of inwardness we have considered up to this point, and yet it is the explicit manifestation of what was implicit in those more basic forms. Recall that the self always achieves its self-identity, or at the very least strives to do so, through *difference*. In thought, this identity in difference becomes absolutised, no longer clinging to a kind of residual selfsameness set apart from its other. In

¹²⁶ *W* 8: Addition 2 to § 24, 84; *Vorbegriff* to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 58.

¹²⁷ The difference between reason and thought is important in this regard. Reason, the final stage of phenomenological development, is already the identity of consciousness and its object, and in reason, spirit knows that the world is rational. However, at this stage of the dialectic, consciousness only knows that the world *ought* to be rational, that the world is, *in principle*, rational. It is only through the dialectic of psychology which follows, however, that this worldly rationality is *achieved*, through an active engagement—first theoretical, then practical—with the world. See note 96 above.

¹²⁸ *W* 10: § 465, 283; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 224.

thinking, spirit does not set itself over against the objective world, but rather proves its ability to ‘be at home’—i.e. to be *itself*—even within the nature which it *is not*. Thought is therefore universal not only because it is common to all who think rationally, but because it is in communion with all beings as rationally structured, with each and every expression of the absolute ‘Idea’, however self-external. Spirit is thus at home with itself even where it is least familiar, in nature. From this perspective, we can see that thought is structurally similar to love in Schelling’s *Freedom* essay (and elsewhere in Hegel’s system): it is becoming at home with self in difference.

Above (Chapter 6.7), I claimed that thought’s abstraction from the particular can be misunderstood if it is not conceived along with a second defining feature of thought. This second feature is what we have just seen, namely, that spirit achieves its universal selfhood *within* nature. On Hegel’s view, this is precisely what is lost on the ‘subjective idealists’ who conceive thought as in some sense limited by its other, be it the Kantian thing-in-itself or the Fichtean not-I.¹²⁹ To insist upon such an external limit to thought is to refuse thought the status of robust inwardness and reduce subjectivity to an activity set apart from, or outside, that which it thinks.¹³⁰ In this way, pre-Schellingian idealism is, from a Hegelian perspective, an impoverished form of abstraction. By contrast, the absolute idealist abstraction from the particular is a most concrete activity, since it goes hand in hand with the realisation that thought is entirely at home with itself in the impersonal, sensuous world, rationality being at work in even the most irrational of phenomena.

At its highest stage of ontological development, thought is philosophical, and Hegel mentions the philosophy of nature in particular when discussing spirit’s rational activity as

¹²⁹ This is why Hegel can agree, albeit sarcastically, with Reinhold’s characterisation of Kant as a philosopher of consciousness, since consciousness, for Hegel, always presupposes an ineliminable separation between subject and object (*W* 10: Remark to § 415, 202-203; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 156).

¹³⁰ Of course, from a Kantian perspective, the thing-in-itself is not an *external* limit but a limit posited by thought itself. As Kant says, ‘when [the understanding] calls an object in a relation mere phenomenon [it] simultaneously *makes for itself*, beyond this relation, another representation of an object *in itself*’ (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B306 p. 360). The positing of the not-I in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* is a further elaboration of this logic.

an expression of freedom.¹³¹ From this perspective we arrive at a higher-level justification for the philosophy of nature as a legitimate scientific program, since spirit proves that it is indeed capable of grasping the rational forms which appear within the realm of irrationality. But more importantly, this allows us to understand in more detail how the philosophy of nature was possible in the first place. Were the human spirit not at home in nature, then the philosophy of nature could not have been pursued by a human mind. It follows that the theoretical practice of nature philosophy should be understood as a unique instance of spirit's liberation from nature.¹³²

Thought thus opens the human up to the entire cosmos of the self-external. Of course, this need not—and ordinarily does not—take the form of philosophical knowing. At a more basic level, the human simply thinks conceptually, and not systematically, about the world. And it is this which, as we have seen, distinguishes the human from other forms of life. ‘Man, as the universal thinking animal, has a much more extensive environment and makes *all* objects his non-organic nature and objects for his knowing.’¹³³ Here, Hegel articulates the Herderian notion that the place of the human is the *whole* of nature, and not a particular locale.¹³⁴ Yet *pace* Herder, Hegel understands the essential feature of this global humanity to be its more-than-linguistic *logos*, i.e. a *logos* expressed in language but

¹³¹ Hegel discusses the identity and difference of philosophical thought and thought in general in the Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*: ‘To begin with, philosophy can be determined in general terms as a *thinking consideration* of ob-jects. But if it is correct (and indeed it is), that the *human being* distinguishes itself from the *animals* by thinking, then everything human is human because it is brought about through thinking, and for that reason alone. Now, since philosophy is a peculiar mode of thinking—a mode by which thinking becomes cognition, and conceptually comprehensive cognition at that—philosophical thinking will also be *diverse* from the thinking that is active in everything human and brings about the very humanity of what is human, even though it is also identical with this thinking, and *in-itself* there is only *One* thinking’ (*W* 8: § 2, 41-42; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, pp. 24-25). See also *W* 10: Addition to § 406, 146-147; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 112: ‘The human spirit is, of course, able to rise above the knowing which is occupied exclusively with sensibly present particulars; but the absolute elevation over them only takes place in the conceptual cognition of the eternal’ (translation modified).

¹³² *W* 9: Addition to § 376, 549; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 444-445.

¹³³ *W* 9: Addition to § 361, 475; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 390. My emphasis.

¹³⁴ Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, pp. 177-180; *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, p. 105.

irreducible to its sensuous expression.¹³⁵ For thought is not reducible to the linguistic particularities of this or that people (*Volk*) any more than it is reducible to the experiences of this or that individual. When one thinks, and most of all when one thinks philosophically, the human spirit transcends its spatiotemporal particularity and allows universal thought to unfold *itself* and thereby disclose the structure of both nature and spirit as the concrete manifestation of reason. Thinking thus rids itself of the particularity of the individual standpoint, precisely in the act of a subjective, individual thought-process.

6.9. Nature-Spirit Identity: Continuity and Emergence

It should be clear from the preceding that Hegel's conception of spirit has nothing in common with a 'spiritualism' that posits the existence of immaterial, spiritual entities populating a 'spirit-world'.¹³⁶ There is no spirit-world in Hegel's system, because there is just one world: the world of nature in which spiritual activity determines itself as non-natural freedom. As Angelica Nuzzo writes, 'spirit's liberation *from* nature is more precisely its liberation *within* (and *with*) nature.'¹³⁷ However, some commentators have taken Hegel's anti-spiritualism too far and interpreted it as a form of non-reductive naturalism, as if Hegel's 'one world metaphysics' were logically consistent with and useful for contemporary work in naturalist philosophy.¹³⁸ On my view, whatever the merits this naturalist reading of

¹³⁵ For Hegel's critique of Herder's philosophy of language, see Jere O'Neill Surber, 'Hegel's Linguistic Thought in the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*: Between Kant and the "Metacritics"' in *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, pp. 181-200.

¹³⁶ See Appendix to this thesis for a discussion of Schelling's conception of the spirit-world as presented in his *Clara* and *Private Stuttgart Lectures*.

¹³⁷ Angelica Nuzzo, 'Anthropology, *Geist*, and the Soul-Body Relation: The Systematic Beginning of Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit*' in *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Pinkard, like Nuzzo, interprets spirit as a freedom *within* nature rather than a freedom *from* nature. But Pinkard's formulation of this naturalist interpretation speaks to how confused it is, as an interpretation of Hegel, by overemphasising the continuity between nature and spirit. Pinkard writes, 'The freedom [spirit] embodies is, as Hegel puts it, both a "freedom from and a freedom in" the natural world, not a dualist account of freedom as involving nonnatural powers' (*Hegel's Naturalism*, p. 30). But isn't having 'nonnatural powers' precisely what 'freedom from nature' means? Indeed, spirit is a freedom *within* the world precisely because it has—or, more appropriately, *is*—the power to act in utterly non-natural ways. What Hegel requires of us, then, is to conceive a non-natural freedom that doesn't exist somewhere above and beyond nature, but is nevertheless non-natural.

Hegel has for those already committed to a naturalist worldview, it obscures Hegel's actual thought. Hegel is an unabashed proponent of the idea that 'spirit is not a natural being and is rather the opposite of nature.'¹³⁹ Thus, reading Hegel as a naturalist prevents us from interpreting spirit—the highest and most important determination of Hegel's system—as ontologically distinct from nature.

But how is spirit, for Hegel, neither other-worldly nor a natural reality? By what means does Hegel circumvent the binary opposition of supernaturalism and naturalism? As I see it, Hegel identifies a third conception of spirit by noting the similarities between the 'supernaturalist' and 'naturalist' standpoint, which both effectively *reduce* spirit to nature, and insisting upon the difference between nature and spirit. For Hegel, a conception of spirit as truly *non-natural* will not, in fact, be a *super-natural* spirit but rather a spirit that is at home with itself *in* nature. To conceive spirit as some obscure 'stuff' lying above and beyond is to implicitly determine spirit as simply *another* spatially extended, material being. This kind of 'transcendent' spirit lacks the very inwardness which Hegel claims defines spiritual existence, since this spirit 'above and beyond', in a 'place' all its own, would be subject to the same ontological tensions which motivated the logical progression of nature's self-external being (with the dialectic of place, matter-in-motion, etc.).¹⁴⁰ For Hegel, spirit is a non-localisable being; it is 'inner' insofar as it cannot be found *here* or *there*, but constitutes an ontological presence that is fundamentally non-spatial. Thus, spirit is properly differentiated from nature only when we let go of our conception of spirit as in *any* sense

¹³⁹ *W* 6: 471; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 762.

¹⁴⁰ As far as I am aware, Hegel himself never puts it this way. Nevertheless, I believe this interpretation is justified, and Hegel's conception of the limits of polytheism and Judaism help to make this clear. Regarding the latter, Hegel holds that the Jewish conception of God as 'above and beyond' makes God—despite his personality or subjectivity—into a limited or finite divinity. For Hegel, the *truly* infinite God is not a *finite* infinite (or 'bad infinite') over and above the here and now, but a fully *present* divinity. And yet this present divinity is not a *natural* or *substantial* divinity, but a *subjective* divinity as is the God of Judaism. Thus, if polytheist religions are too naturalistic for Hegel, Judaism is too supernaturalistic, and it is only with Christianity that God is comprehended as both *present* (i.e. non-transcendent) and *personal* (i.e. non-natural). Spirit, then, is *immanent* to nature without thereby *being* nature.

‘natural’, as spatially extended, occupying a specific place, and so on.¹⁴¹ Conceiving spirit as the negation of nature therefore allows Hegel to identify spirit as absolutely *immanent*, as an activity at work *within* the spatiotemporal world. Spirit is not, therefore, a supernatural entity any more than it is explicable in terms of mechanical motion, chemical process, or biological development; it is the immanent actuality which has sublated nature and thereby found true freedom within nature. Central to Hegel’s conception of spirit, therefore, is the logic whereby spirit proves to be immanent to nature through its ontological difference from nature. It is this identity and difference between nature and spirit with which I will conclude this chapter.

Recall that spirit is not a disembodied ‘thing’ for Hegel; spiritual activity—including thought—manifests itself in particular, embodied individuals and the communities they comprise. But Hegel’s point is not that thought *is* its embodiment. To reduce thought to the organic vehicle by which it manifests itself is to miss out on the more fundamental feature of Hegel’s critique of spirit as ‘disembodied thing’. First and foremost, spirit is not a disembodied thing, for Hegel, because spirit is not a *thing* at all. Indeed, according to Hegel, it is the determination of spirit as *res cogitans* which signals the fundamental confusion of pre-Kantian rationalism regarding the nature-spirit relation. In its most straightforward form, this rationalist conception of spirit leads to Cartesian dualism, in which nature and spirit are determined as substantial ‘things’ of fundamentally different orders. We should take note that Hegel does not object to Descartes’s insistence upon the *difference* between thought and

¹⁴¹ It is worth noting here that spirit does not sublimate temporality in the same way that it sublimes spatial extension. To be sure, spirit sublimes time, but it does so by granting the past and future ontological distinctness (*W* 9: Remark to § 259, 52; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 37), and this is fundamentally distinct from the manner in which spirit sublimes space, namely, by turning inward in such a manner as to no longer be spatially extended. Thus, spirit is intrinsically temporal, and this is largely due to the fact that spirit and time are both negations of self-external being. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 7 below). This is why Edward Casey identifies Hegel as one of a number of ‘temporocentrists’ for whom time is more fundamental than space (*The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998], p. x). This interpretation of Hegel is absolutely right, so long as we limit the identification of Hegel as a ‘temporocentrist’ to Hegel’s conception of *spirit*. For history is far more central to spirit’s essential character than is geography—and we would do well to agree with Hegel on this point! Place, in comparison to human history, is far less significant for the development of subjectivity. That being said, Hegel is certainly no ‘temporocentrist’ with respect to *nature*; in fact, it is my view that far more than the ‘concealed’ philosophy of place with which Casey concerns himself in *The Fate of Place*, it is *pre-spiritual temporality* that has been covered over in the history of philosophy. I will return to this idea in the conclusion to this thesis (Chapter 7).

extension, but rather to his determination of spirit as *res cogitans*. For it is this conception of nature and spirit as substantial in themselves which necessitates their irreparable disunity.¹⁴²

It would therefore be misleading to see Hegel's solution to this modern problem to be a Spinozist one, as if interpreting nature and spirit as attributes of the *same* substance (e.g. the Idea) would successfully dissolve Cartesian dualism. For in Spinoza as well, spirit is conceived as substantial—not, to be sure, as substantial in itself, but as an attribute *of substance*, a substance that lacks the character of self-relating negativity which would allow spirit, in a properly dialectical logic, to distinguish itself *from* nature, i.e. to *emerge* from nature as ontologically distinct. Consequently, Spinoza leaves us with a parallelism in which the relation between nature and spirit is one of an improperly differentiated identity. And, on Hegel's account, this substantial identity between nature and spirit means nature and spirit are not properly *identical* in Spinoza, as the ontological unity of nature and spirit can only be justified from the standpoint of their difference (i.e., via negation).

Whether one follows Descartes or Spinoza, then, the same difficulty prevails: the impossibility of uncovering the necessary, logical connection between the ontologically distinct spheres of nature and spirit. As we have seen, Hegel understands this difference to be achieved by spirit itself, namely, as its self-liberation from nature. By actively *negating* nature's extended, impersonal being, spirit proves that it is neither substantial nor an attribute of substance. And this is why Hegel's critique of Spinoza always turns on the glaring absence in Spinoza's philosophy of a self-determining freedom which realises the ontological transition from sheer substance to subjectivity. 'Against Spinozism', Hegel says,

¹⁴² 'This mode of treatment also prevailed in former metaphysics. This metaphysics, however, though firmly holding the opposition between the material and the immaterial to be insuperable, yet, on the other hand, unwittingly resolved it again by making the soul a *thing*, consequently, something which, though quite abstract, was for all that sensuously determined. This it did by its inquiry into the seat of the soul: thereby placing this in space; similarly by its inquiry into the origin and decease of the soul: thereby placing it in time; and thirdly, by inquiring into the properties of the soul, for soul was thereby treated as something quiescent, stable, as the focal point of these determinations. Even Leibniz treated soul as a *thing* in making it, like all else, into a monad; the monad is equally quiescent as is a *thing*, and the entire difference between soul and a material thing, according to Leibniz, consists only in soul being a somewhat more distinct, more developed, monad than the rest of matter; a conception whereby matter is doubtless exalted, but soul is degraded to, rather than distinguished from, a material thing' (*W* 10: Addition to § 389, 46-47; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 32).

‘spirit...has emerged from substance.’¹⁴³ The crucial step beyond pre-Kantian rationalism, then, is not only the Kantian conception of subjectivity as pure activity, but the Hegelian notion that this subjectivity is an *achievement* articulated in the processual movement *from* substance *to* subjectivity.

In recent years, Hegel has been championed by a number of philosophers precisely for this conception of spirit as ‘achievement’, but there is an overwhelming refusal on the part of these contemporary philosophers to conceive the self-liberation of spirit as an *ontological* achievement, i.e. as the ahistorical emergence of a non-natural way of *being*. Pippin, for example, interprets the Hegelian notion of the ‘achievement’ of spirit to be *antithetical* to the idea that spirit is a ‘new ontological type’.¹⁴⁴ And Pippin’s anti-metaphysical, neo-Kantian reading of Hegel is not alone in this regard. From the naturalist perspective, John McDowell and Terry Pinkard have both argued that spirit is a ‘second nature’ achieved through a process of *Bildung*. What Pippin, McDowell, and Pinkard all have in common is an interpretation of spirit’s self-liberating activity as exclusively historical (i.e. not metaphysical). But for Hegel, the self-liberation of spirit is, first and foremost, an *onto-logical* achievement which does not simply correspond to a historical event but is rather the metaphysical condition for the possibility of any history whatsoever, insofar as ‘history’ signifies the history of human freedom.¹⁴⁵ For Hegel, then, spirit just *is* its active liberation from nature, and the *Bildung* which is indeed central to the life of fully actualised spirit must be understood as a historical manifestation *of* that ontological achievement. *Pace* McDowell, then, I understand Hegelian spirit to certainly be animated by its ‘non-animal constitution’, but this is a constitution which spirit gives itself. Hegel’s system consequently contains far more than a ‘whiff’ of the idea that ‘we [have] a foothold

¹⁴³ *W* 10: Remark to § 415, 203; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 156, translation modified. It is important to note, however, that Hegel believes the concept of subjectivity is already implicit in Spinoza’s thought and one need only render this implicit freedom explicit by drawing out the self-negating negativity in the *Ethics* which Spinoza himself didn’t thematise. As Hegel writes in the *Science of Logic*, ‘The only possible refutation of Spinozism must therefore consist, in the first place, in recognizing its standpoint as essential and necessary and then going on to raise that standpoint to the higher one through its own immanent dialectic’ (*W* 6: 250; *Science of Logic* [Miller], 581).

¹⁴⁴ Pippin, ‘Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel’s Compatibilism’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1999), pp. 197-198.

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of why history is always spiritual history for Hegel, see Chapter 7 below.

outside the animal kingdom’—although this ‘outside’ need not be understood as a ‘splendidly non-*human* realm of ideality’ so long as we understand the human as essentially *geistig*, as opposed to natural, in its contemplation of *logos*.¹⁴⁶

In both its neo-Kantian and naturalist varieties, then, the mainstream, contemporary American interpretations of Hegel refuse the notion, absolutely central to Hegelian idealism, that spirit is ontologically distinct from nature. For Hegel, the being of spirit is *not the being of nature*, and it is therefore entirely confused to conceive spiritual freedom as ‘natural’. To be sure, the most basic manifestation of spirit, prior to the logical emergence of thought, can be seen as a ‘second nature’, primarily in the phenomenon of habit.¹⁴⁷ But for Hegel this ‘second nature’ only becomes spirit *as such* once it gives way to the more concrete achievement of *thought* which is in no way natural or ‘external to itself’.¹⁴⁸ This is why I have argued that spirit is not only qualitatively distinct from nature, but even from life which remains, on Hegel’s view, intrinsically limited by its materiality.

I want to suggest that the decision to ignore Hegel’s insistence upon spirit’s metaphysical distinctness is in large part made possible by the systematic dismissal within this trend of Hegel scholarship of Hegel’s concern with the intrinsically rational structure of nature, a structure which must be understood as ontologically more fundamental than any spiritual cognition *of nature*. For once we turn to nature’s immanent development *into* spirit, it becomes absolutely clear that spiritual freedom is an ontological activity towards which nature immanently strives and yet perpetually fails to realise insofar as it is *nature*. Spirit’s self-liberating activity, from the perspective of the philosophy of nature, cannot be

¹⁴⁶ John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 88, my emphasis. As Sebastian Gardner puts it, what these naturalist interpretations of idealism propose is that ‘we should think...not that our normativity emerges out of nature in a “metaphysical” manner, on the basis of any ontological grounds, but that it comes forth as a historical, normative-developmental achievement - this achievement being, again, no alteration in the ontological fabric of the universe, but a matter internal to our thinking’ (Gardner, ‘The Limits of Naturalism and the Metaphysics of German Idealism’, p. 37).

¹⁴⁷ *W 10*: Remark to § 410, 184; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 141.

¹⁴⁸ Note that habit does not only lead to thought but thought itself must become a cultivated habit if it is not to lead to headaches (*W 10*: Remark to § 410, 186; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 143). Nevertheless, once one becomes habituated to thought, habit is in an important respect sublated. This is not to say that habit or ‘second nature’ does not *reappear* at higher stages of spirit’s development. Indeed, there is a certain echo of *Naturgeist* in the ‘soul of custom (*Sitte*)’ in ethical life (*W 7*: § 151, 301; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 195). But again, this ethics of habit simply paves the way for more autonomous and thoughtful forms of political spirit.

understood as a non-metaphysical achievement, since Hegel is clear throughout the philosophy of nature, including the transition to spirit, that nothing unfolds *historically* in nature's immanent development. Once we recognise that nature's development is non-historical and that nature itself—even in the life of the animal—cannot break free from its self-external existence, it becomes clear that the 'self-liberation of spirit' constitutes an ontological *break* with nature.

With these remarks, it becomes apparent that we can understand the processual differentiation of nature and spirit from two perspectives. On the one hand, spirit liberates *itself* from nature, which means the freedom of spiritual existence does not befall the human from the outside as a transcendent gift granted a particular animal genus (*Homo sapiens*); spiritual freedom is *self*-actualised. On the other hand, this self-liberation from nature is made possible and, in fact, *necessary* by the more fundamental logic of *nature*. We misunderstand the self-liberation of spirit, therefore, if we do not interpret this moment of self-liberation as necessitated by the impersonal, natural world from which spirit frees itself. This is why Hegel's conception of human freedom is presented as derivable from the logic of nature which gradually '*rids itself* of its externality by stages.'¹⁴⁹ That nature is unable, as nature, to rid itself entirely of its externality does not mean that nature is any less 'generative' of spiritual inwardness. For it is precisely the rational structure of nature's being which necessitates that there *be spirit*, that an activity emerge which extricates itself *from* nature's self-externality and, in so doing, returns to nature's stratified rational structures as concepts to be cognised. Were nature not, at bottom, self-external being, then there is no way—on Hegel's view—to account for the ontological specificity of spiritual subjectivity.

Because Hegel derives the necessity of spiritual freedom from the being of nature itself, one would be confused to take the ontological 'break' between nature and spirit to be an abyssal gap in his ontology. On the contrary, since spirit is logically derivable from nature, the difference between nature and spirit is only explicable in terms of a certain continuity. To understand how Hegel can see the nature-spirit relation as one of both

¹⁴⁹ *W* 10: Addition to § 389, 47; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 32, my emphasis. See also the Addition to § 381, 24; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 13.

ontological continuity and difference, it is helpful to consider Hegel's views about these concepts as they apply to the structure of nature.

According to Hegel, nature is stratified because it is a dirempt existence, a self-external being which necessitates not only that nature be spatially extended but that the various forms of inorganic and organic nature remain in important ways separate from one another. Were nature not shot through with negativity, it would be incapable of generating the kind of qualitative difference that is at work throughout nature's development, and the system of nature would consequently be one of sheer quantitative difference. We should note that this idea is central to Hegel's dismissal of evolution as both a theory of speciation and, more importantly, as a conception of nature's total development. For Hegel, differentiation *without* negation leads to differences of mere degree, and it is entirely misguided to conceive the variety of organic species—to say nothing about the differences between inorganic and organic nature—as different with respect to quantity alone. Thus, Hegel claims that 'the old saying, or so-called law, *non datur saltus in natura*, is altogether inadequate to the diremption of the concept', that is, to nature, the concept's primary manifestation.¹⁵⁰ Nature 'advances by leaps',¹⁵¹ according to Hegel, because nature is self-determining reason cast asunder, hence the stratified character of nature's rational wholeness. And yet these leaps throughout nature do not render it an *utterly* dirempt existence. On the contrary, nature's qualitative 'leaps' are made possible by the intrinsic, rational structure *of* nature *as* negative. Nature 'makes leaps', then, because this is what it means to be a rationally structured *system*. And with the transition from nature to spirit, one enormous leap is made: from self-external being to non-natural freedom. However, this 'leap' is made *necessary*; it is not some inexplicable 'gap' in reality but is rationally necessitated by nature's internal movement. As

¹⁵⁰ *W 9*: Addition to § 249, 34; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 22. Translation modified. See also Hegel's discussion of the notion that 'nature makes no leaps' in the Doctrine of Being (*W 5*: 440-441; *Science of Logic* [Miller], p. 370).

¹⁵¹ *W 9*: Addition to § 239, 34; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 22.

William Wallace succinctly puts it with regard to Hegel's system as a whole: 'all development is by breaks, and yet makes for continuity.'¹⁵²

To hold these two thoughts together, that nature and spirit are continuous with one another and yet distinct, is central to Hegel's conception of the nature-spirit identity. It is therefore curious that interpreters of Hegel, such as deVries, claim that Hegel is a 'great naturalist...one who saw man as arising out of and continuous with nature and capable of being understood only in this natural context' and that 'no ultimate break is to be found between nature and spirit in Hegel's system.'¹⁵³ As I have argued, if one fails to acknowledge the utter break between nature and spirit—most explicitly as the activity of thought—then one cannot properly account for the *continuity* between nature and spirit. For this continuity is one of qualitative distinctness, an identity of differentiation.

To conclude these chapters on Hegel, then, it might be helpful to recall that Schelling too conceives nature and spirit as both identical (or continuous with one another) and different. Certainly, from a Hegelian perspective, Schelling's refusal to conceive nature's development in terms of self-negating negation; his adherence to the Leibnizian notion that there are no leaps in nature;¹⁵⁴ and his utilisation of concepts (the potencies) taken over from mathematics prevent Schelling from ever properly differentiating spirit from nature. But Hegel recognised that this was indeed Schelling's aim. For the absolute idealist programme, initiated by Schelling and continued by Hegel, was to present the manner in which the unique character of spiritual freedom is made necessary by nature. As Schelling and Hegel

¹⁵² William Wallace, *The Logic of Hegel: Prolegomena to the Study of Hegel's Philosophy and Especially His Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), p. 476.

¹⁵³ deVries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, p. xii. Oddly, in this very passage deVries notes that Hegel is not a 'total naturalist', and yet deVries insists upon a naturalistic reading nonetheless. In defence of deVries's view, it is true that the self-liberation of spirit is *gradual* which means that the transition from nature to spirit does not take place in one single logical moment. However, as I have argued, Hegel clearly understands thought to essentially distinguish spirit from nature, and therefore 'thought' should be read not as a 'sudden' moment of spirit's liberation but a gradual explication of thought, as non-natural, through the pre-conceptual, proto-cognitive activities of spirit. See deVries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, p. 49: 'There is no clear break between nature and spirit; rather, these are two poles between which there is a complex series of intermediate stages. Hegel draws the line between nature and spirit where he does, not because there is some one clear mark of the spiritual that suddenly appears on the scene, but because at that point a sufficient number of the characteristics of the spiritual have appeared to justify a distinction. From this point on, the spiritual makes itself ever more evident'.

¹⁵⁴ *SW I/22*: 171-172; *Ideas*, pp. 133-134. See Chapter 1.9 above.

saw it, this was the only way one could legitimately defend the Kantian subject, i.e. as the crowning achievement of nature's impersonal, rational evolution. And they would have rightly criticised our contemporary compulsion to interpret the human spirit along strictly biological lines whilst refusing philosophy access to the *a priori* structure of nature which, were we capable of nature philosophy today, might further support the idealist notion that the human is more than sheer life.

Part III: Conclusion

7. The Logic of Emergence and Natural History

7.1. Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Schelling and Hegel are committed to the shared task of elucidating the manner in which spiritual freedom is made possible and necessary by the ontological structure of nature. For both philosophers, spiritual subjectivity is the crowning achievement of nature's inorganic, impersonal, non-spiritual activity. I have therefore argued that we should understand the spiritual freedom celebrated by Schelling and Hegel as emergent from nature, as an ontological consequence of nature's being.

I have attempted to highlight the distinctiveness of this standpoint by emphasising the *rational* necessity at work in this development from nature to spirit. On my view, the possibility opened up by idealist nature philosophy is that nature can be shown, through sheer reason, to necessarily lead to the emergence of spiritual life. Such rational necessity—what I have called the idealist 'logic of emergence'—sets Schelling and Hegel apart from the various philosophical positions that currently go under the banner of non-reductive naturalism.

Yet there is something deeply unsatisfying about this picture, for up until now I have bracketed any consideration of the *historical* emergence of spirit. That Schelling and Hegel defend a *logic* or ontology of emergence does not require that they understand this logic to express itself *in time*. On the contrary, as we have seen, both Schelling and Hegel insist upon elucidating the *ahistorical* development at work from the more basic to more complex stages of nature.

I therefore conclude this study with some reflections upon the potential, within the idealist framework, to conceive spirit as historically emergent from nature. In order to do so, I first turn to the late Schelling's critique of Hegel. My intention is not to defend the late Schelling's general philosophical perspective, but rather to isolate an insightful critique regarding the limits of the idealist logic of emergence. This will allow me to revisit Hegel's and the early Schelling's respective philosophies of nature in order to discover how far, if at

all, the project of speculative physics might go in attending to the historical emergence of freedom. In the final section of this conclusion, I suggest that it is only with Schelling's *Ages of the World* that idealism transforms itself into a project of elucidating the necessary stages of nature's immanent development as an essentially historical process.

7.2. The Late Schelling's Critique of Hegel

In Chapter 4, I considered the late Schelling's criticism of the transition from logic to nature in Hegel's system. Central to that criticism is the idea that thought supposedly remains bound up within itself in Hegel's system and therefore requires something real *outside* it to bring about the philosophical transition from pure logic to the concrete philosophy of nature. I argued that this criticism of Hegel, particularly as it is expressed in Schelling's Munich lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, grossly misrepresents Hegel's project. But as Markus Gabriel has noted, the late Schelling has more than one critique of Hegel, and the Berlin lectures in particular contain far more insightful criticisms of Hegel than does the 'admittedly superficial discussion of Hegel's system in his lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*.'¹

As in the Munich lectures, Schelling is at pains in the Berlin lectures to distinguish between the two essential parts of philosophical science: the 'negative' (i.e. rationalism) and the 'positive' (i.e. a 'metaphysical empiricism'). It is of the utmost importance to recognise that Schelling is fully committed to *both* negative and positive philosophy, since philosophy will only achieve scientific completeness when both avenues of philosophical inquiry are pursued. This is an essential point for analysing the late Schelling's critique of Hegel, since it helps us to see that Schelling remains, until the end of his life, entirely committed to the rationalist project of comprehending what there is through rational, as opposed to empirical, investigation. According to the late Schelling:

¹ Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), p. 20.

Reason is, properly speaking, concerned with nothing other than just being and with being according to its *matter* and *content*...What is real does not stand in opposition to our thinking as something foreign, inaccessible, and unreachable, but...the concept and the being are one.²

Note the proximity between Schelling's description of his own 'negative philosophy' here and Hegel's description of speculative logic as a return to the 'higher conception of thinking' found in ancient metaphysics, wherein 'thinking (and its determinations) is not anything alien to the object'.³

By acknowledging Schelling's and Hegel's *shared* view of the immanence of thought to being, we can set aside all of Schelling's comments regarding Hegel's system as 'merely' conceptual or 'merely' logical, as if the conceptual and logical were not immanent to being itself for Hegel. To be sure, Schelling himself continues to see Hegel's philosophy as 'empty, logical, a thinking that again has as its content *only* thinking',⁴ and Schelling holds this view until the end of his life, refusing to acknowledge that for Hegel too, 'the *truly* logical, the logical in real thought, has in itself a necessary relationship to being.'⁵ But this misrepresentation of Hegel's system works against Schelling, for it obscures Schelling's more profound insight regarding the limits of Hegel's system. In order to elucidate this more profound insight, we must first acknowledge Schelling's own commitment to unpacking the logical structures of reality through thought, and secondly grant Hegel what Schelling refuses to grant him, namely, that Hegel's logical system moves immanently through the determinations of being itself. On my view, Schelling could (and should) have granted *this* to Hegel without thereby giving up on his more insightful criticisms. My proposal, then, is to read Hegel's system as Schelling reads his own 'a priori philosophy', i.e. as necessarily *opposed* to a 'merely logical philosophy that would exclude being'.⁶

² *SW II/3: 60; Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 130.

³ *W 5: 38; Science of Logic*, (Miller) p. 45. See Chapter 4.5 above.

⁴ *SW II/3: 101; Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 160. My emphasis.

⁵ *SW II/3: 101; Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 160.

⁶ *SW II/3: 102; Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 160.

Thus, in order to understand what is involved in Schelling's more compelling, albeit implicit, critique of Hegel it is necessary to consider what the late Schelling sees as the limit of his *own* negative philosophy. According to Schelling, negative philosophy is the science of reason that discloses the essential truth of what is. The dialectical movement of thought unpacks how beings are necessarily structured; it tells us which 'essences' or universal categories will necessarily be exhibited by individuals in the world. In this way, thought discloses the *being* of individual entities and processes, viz., as expressions of certain categorial structures. But individuals are not reducible to their essential or categorial being. Here Schelling draws upon the scholastic distinction between *quidditas* and *quodditas*. Whereas the rationalist movement of thought discloses *what* individuals are (the *quid* or essential being of the individual), it is without the resources to contribute knowledge regarding the *quod* or *existence* of such individuals. Therefore, once one pursues the rationalist project of logically deriving the necessary features of reality, something further remains to be thought, namely, the *thatness* of individual being, the sheer fact that this *particular* expression of a universal, rational structure *is* or *exists*.

It is perhaps helpful to take one of Schelling's favourite examples: a plant. That there are plants *at all* or plants *in general* is no contingent fact. For if there are beings *at all*, Schelling tells us, there will be plants, and this knowledge is provided by a rational philosophy of nature. The late Schelling never gives up on the idea, therefore, that in principle 'a continuous progression is discoverable from the highest Idea of reason all the way down to the plant as a necessary moment of the same.'⁷ However, there are not, in fact, 'plants *in general*' but *plants*—actual, individual, and contingent plants 'at this point in space and in this moment in time.'⁸ And it is the *existence* of the particular, contingent plant that the late Schelling claims cannot be grasped by the movement of speculative thought.

Now, Schelling never defends the absurd view that speculative physics *ought* to derive the existence of individual plants through sheer reason. On this point, the late

⁷ *SW II/1*: 576-577; 'On the Source of the Eternal Truths', p. 57.

⁸ *SW II/3*: 59; *Grounding of Positive of Philosophy*, p. 130.

Schelling is in full agreement with Hegel, who rejects the same absurd notion in his defence of the early Schelling against Krug.⁹ However, Schelling's realisation—that the movement of reason only captures the 'what' and not the 'that' of beings—points to a real limit of rational thought as construed by both the late Schelling and Hegel. How might philosophical science attend to the *existence* of individuals qua individuals?

The late Schelling's answer to this question is on the whole unconvincing, but it nevertheless contains a profound insight. According to Schelling, it is only by turning to a far more orthodox conception of God that philosophy can begin to engage with the sheer existence of individuals. This is why the late Schelling's critique of Hegel's system is bound up with a critique of Hegel's conception of God (this latter conception, we should note, having a great deal in common with Schelling's own, *earlier* conception of God as presented in the *Freedom* essay). In the late Schelling's view, Hegel's conception of God has nothing to do with the 'free creation of the world [*freie Weltschöpfung*]' indispensable for Christianity, and this can be seen in three interrelated aspects of Hegel's conception of the divine manifestation of *logos* as nature. According to Schelling:

(1) If there is to be no enduring distinction between God as creator and God as created—if God is thought along utterly pantheistic lines—then God loses all independent identity. In other words, if the absolute Idea, for Hegel, *just is* nature (and spirit), then God's transcendence is forsaken.

(2) If God's actuality is understood in terms of infinite movement (i.e. the dynamic self-determination of the Idea), then he is not *free*, for he is *determined* by rational necessity to be in perpetual motion. In other words, if God never actually puts himself *into* motion—as pure *actus*—then God's self-revelation is not a free act; God cannot help but reveal himself.

(3) If the creation depicted in religious imagery represents a logical *cycle*, as it does for Hegel, so-called 'creation' must be without historical novelty, i.e. without the *actual* emergence of natural or spiritual entities.

⁹ *W* 2: 188-207; 'How the Ordinary Human Understanding Takes Philosophy (as displayed by the works of Mr. Krug)', pp. 292-310.

For these reasons, Schelling argues that God's self-revelation is entirely misconceived by Hegel. For Schelling, the God of revelation must in some sense be (1) *other than* and (2) *free from* the movement of being such that creation actually (3) *takes place*.¹⁰

Before we can understand how this critique is meant to clear a philosophical path towards engaging with the sheer existence of particular individuals, we must straightaway take note that Schelling is simply unconvincing with respect to points (1) and (2) above. In fact, Schelling's earlier, Boehmean conception of divinity as the entirely *immanent* process of God's free yet *necessary* self-manifestation is far more compelling than are points (1) and (2) and the orthodox theology which motivates them.¹¹ However, Schelling's point (3) regarding the absence of historical creation in Hegel's system gets to the heart of the idealist logic of emergence and discloses its essential limitation. Indeed, it is only (3) the critique of Hegel's conception of creation which addresses the problem of the existence of particular beings. For if there is utterly no room in philosophy for a consideration of historical creation, then philosophical science will necessarily miss out on something fundamental about being. In other words, being is *not only* the dynamic movement of one rational structure necessitating another in a continuous progression; being involves the actual *coming-to-be* of particular beings such that beings begin to 'stand out' in the light of existence. So long as rationalism is without the resources to account for the actual genesis of distinct individuals, there remains a highly significant aspect of reality that goes entirely unconsidered by philosophy. And it is for this reason that the late Schelling seeks to ground a 'positive philosophy' that would supplement the negative philosophy of essences with an empirical inquiry into how such essences are *actually exhibited* in reality; how, in other words, the logic of *what* there is becomes manifest in history.

¹⁰ We can already find this aspect of Schelling's Hegel critique in the lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (see, for example, *SW I/10*: 159-160; *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 159-160). I do not mean to imply, therefore, that Schelling only comes to his 'later philosophical vision' in Berlin. Rather, I take it that Schelling's Berlin lectures simply better articulate his more insightful criticisms of Hegel.

¹¹ Recall that in the *Freedom* essay, Schelling remarks that 'nothing can be achieved at all by such attenuated conceptions of God as *actus purissimus*' (*SW I/7*: 356; *Freedom*, p. 26—see Chapter 3.9 above). In the lectures in Berlin, on the other hand, the entire grounding of positive philosophy turns on the supposed necessity to conceive God as pure act. Cf. *SW II/3*: 160; *Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, pp. 201-202.

We can now bring this discussion back to the topic of the philosophy of nature: So long as the various stages of nature described by the idealist logic of emergence correspond to an *atemporal* (or *strictly* logical) hierarchical system of stages, something fundamental has been left out of that nature philosophy, namely, the actual historical emergence of various forms of nature and, ultimately, of spirit. It is perhaps helpful to note the terminological emphasis in Hegel's system upon activity (*Tätigkeit*) and movement (*Bewegung*) as defining features of the dialectic (including the dialectic of nature). Schelling himself is alive to this and is profoundly critical of Hegel's conception of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) as activity and movement, since such a conception obfuscates the *productive* dimension of *energeia*.¹² We can discern this productive dimension of actuality in the word *ergon*, work, from which *energeia* is derived.¹³ For Schelling, we must not only conceive *what* is actual, but *actuality as such*,¹⁴ i.e. the *coming into existence* of what is actual, and this latter task requires that we conceive *energeia* not as simple activity or movement but as an activity that engenders *products*—real, generative *action*. On this view, the atemporal activity of *logos* is only possible if beings have in fact emerged in the world, beings which are expressive *of* the rational structures that *logically* develop out of one another in an ahistorical fashion. What is necessary to comprehend, then, is not only the dialectical activity of the being of beings, but the genesis which makes such activity possible, hence Schelling's emphasis on *Erzeugung*, *Hervorbringen*, and *Schöpfung* over *Tätigkeit* and *Bewegung*.

It is with respect to this distinction between production and activity that we should read the late Schelling's interest in actual, historical events (*Geschehen*) as opposed to the merely 'eternal happening' of the rational, dialectical process. In Schelling's words, 'an eternal happening is no happening at all.'¹⁵ The late Schelling therefore seeks to ground a

¹² On Hegel's translation of Aristotelian *energeia*, see Ferrarin's masterly *Hegel and Aristotle*.

¹³ Aristotle draws attention to the etymological relation between *ergon* and *energeia* in *Metaphysics* Θ , 1050A.

¹⁴ 'Reason...comprehends what is *actual* [*Wirkliche*], but not, therefore, *actuality* [*Wirklichkeit*]' (*SW* II/3: 61; *Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, p. 131, translation modified).

¹⁵ *SW* I/10: 124; *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 133.

‘metaphysical empiricism’ which would go hand in hand with the negative philosophy, exhibiting how the rational potencies actually manifest themselves in history. We should not misread Schelling, then, when he says that, in the idealist philosophy of nature which preceded his positive philosophy, ‘everything happened only in *thoughts*’, that ‘this whole movement [of the philosophy of nature] was only a movement of thinking’.¹⁶ Schelling’s point—at least when he is describing his *own* nature philosophy—is that the dialectical movement of *being itself* occludes the actual coming *into* existence of the various forms of nature. And *this* insight regarding the limits of rationalism is just as applicable to *Hegel’s* nature philosophy as it is to the early Schelling. The crux of the Schellingian critique of Hegel, then, is the following: so long as philosophy refuses to consider the *generation* of beings, philosophy will fail to become a complete science of actuality.¹⁷ And while Hegel’s system certainly accounts for the fact *that* the universal particularises itself, namely, as a logically necessary feature of being, his system never aims to narrate the actual historicisation of any kind of natural-historical emergence.

From a Hegelian perspective, however, to insist upon conceiving the natural world in terms of historical generation or creation is to miss out on the more truthful sense of nature’s dialectical movement, which is precisely *not* a movement of creation, grounding, or production, but *self-development*, i.e. the dialectical activity characterised by the ‘concept’ (understood as the rational structure of being itself).¹⁸ In Hegel’s words, ‘Philosophy is not meant to be a narration [*Erzählen*] of happenings [*was gescheint*] but a cognition of what is *true* in them’¹⁹ and *this truth* is precisely the dialectical movement of

¹⁶ *SW* I/10: 125; *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 133. Emphasis modified.

¹⁷ In the 1821 Erlangen lecture ‘On the Nature of Philosophy as Science’, Schelling makes a similar point, distinguishing the movement of knowledge from objective movement. In doing so, Schelling is entirely clear that the movement of knowledge is not in any way divorced from the real being of things. But neither is this cognitive movement creative *of* the objective; it moves within what is its self-knowing, the ‘repetition of the process’ of the truly objective movement (*SW* I/9: 225; ‘On the Nature of Philosophy as Science’, p. 224).

¹⁸ Indeed, for Hegel, ‘creation’ is nothing other than the self-preservation of *logos* as the atemporal self-manifestation of reason as a world and as spiritual freedom: ‘Creating is the activity of the absolute Idea; the Idea of Nature, like the Idea as such, is eternal’ (*W* 9: Addition to § 247, 26; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 15).

¹⁹ *W* 6: 260; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 588. Hence Hegel’s insistence that philosophy not rely upon ‘expressions of sensuous conception like *going forth* [*herausgehen*]’ (*W* 5: 169; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 153).

the *conceptual* structures immanent to any ‘happening’. Hegel’s ‘preference’, then, for conceiving the dialectic of nature in terms of ‘movement’ or ‘activity’ is one which Hegel knowingly affirms as the only way to develop a proper ontology of nature. Indeed, for Hegel, it is only with ‘conceptual self-development’ that being proves to involve the self-relating negativity that allows being to manifest itself as a spatiotemporal *nature* (See Chapter 4.6); for nature to be intrinsically *differentiated* (Chapter 4.9); and, finally, for this spatiotemporal nature to develop into the fully realised manifestation of absolute negativity in *spiritual freedom* (Chapter 6.7). Why is ‘conceptual self-development’ so central for Hegel? Because without understanding nature’s process in this manner, the immanent development of *self-differentiation* is lost, i.e. the process which guarantees nature and spirit will be both *united* and yet *distinct* from one another. And why is ‘conceptual self-development’ necessary, on Hegel’s view, for guaranteeing this immanent differentiation of nature? Because *unlike* an ‘essentialist’ philosophy of nature which would describe various levels of reality as being *generated* or *grounded* by some *other* more *fundamental* reality, a ‘conceptual’ dialectic discloses how being’s development through *its own* difference leads from natural to spiritual determinacy. This is a technical point which risks appearing unnecessarily jargonistic, but it is absolutely central to Hegel’s difference from Schelling: For Hegel, so long as one insists upon conceiving natural development in terms of production, grounding, or creation, one will necessarily fail to account for the continuity as well as the difference between nature and spirit. And this is because, on Hegel’s view, the ontological continuity *and* difference between nature and spirit is secured *only* if the Idea (or self-determining reason) is shown to determine itself as *other* than itself (Chapter 4.6) and subsequently emerge from that self-alterity (Chapter 6.9). From this perspective, the late Schelling’s emphasis on historical genesis is not only ‘representational’ (thereby confusing strictly rational structures of reality for historical processes), but it makes utterly impossible a philosophical account of the immanent development *from nature to spirit*.

With these remarks we arrive a fundamental difference between Hegel’s thought and that of the late Schelling. Creation is either a mere representation of a strictly logical feature of reality, namely, the self-preservation of *logos* as nature and spirit (Hegel’s view) *or*

creation is a real 'happening' (*Geschehen*) essential to the being of beings insofar as all that is emerges historically (Schelling's view). Because the late Schelling comes to this view via an engagement with scholasticism, it is perhaps helpful to see this philosophical opposition as one between Greek and Christian ways of thinking. Doing so drives home the point that for both Hegel and the late Schelling, the philosophy of nature is an *ontology* of nature. But whereas Hegel conceives the immanent development of nature in terms of Heraclitean movement culminating in the structural emergence of spirit as self-consuming fire, Schelling

proposes a return to a decidedly Christian conception of nature as the creation of the Lord of being (*Herr des Seyns*).²⁰

But how does the early Schelling fit into this picture? Hegel's refusal to conceive the development of nature in terms of production, generation, or grounding indicates that Hegel would not only have been critical of the late Schelling's turn to Christian orthodoxy, but that, from a Hegelian perspective, Schelling was *always* on his way to conceiving nature in terms of historical genesis. Hence the 'great difficulty', on Hegel's view, of Schelling's

²⁰ In the Berlin lectures, Schelling himself highlights an essential connection between Heraclitus, Boehme (from whom Schelling now distances himself) and Hegel. In fact, Heraclitus is the first philosopher Schelling lists in his brief history of 'negative philosophy', since it is Heraclitus 'whose doctrine that nothing ever *is*, that nothing ever endures, but rather that everything only flows or moves like a river...basically describes nothing other than the science of reason that also abides by nothing' (*SW* II/3: 96; *Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 156). Schelling's point is profoundly compelling, as it brings to light how Heraclitean thinking is, perhaps ironically, bound up with a metaphysics of presence or eternal stasis, namely, in the form of ceaseless becoming without beginning or end. Hegel is alive to the same feature of Heraclitean thought, and it is noteworthy that Hegel is not, as is Schelling, critical of this aspect of Heraclitus: 'What Heraclitus is said to have spoken of as a conflagration of this world, was thought to be an imaginary idea that after a certain time - as, according to our ideas, at the end of the world - the world would disappear in flames. But we see at once from passages which are the most clear, that this conflagration is not meant, but that it is the perpetual burning up as the Becoming of friendship, the universal life and the universal process of the universe' (*W* 18: 333; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 290). Daniel Berthold-Bond is helpful in elucidating the essential connection between Heraclitus and Hegel: 'For both Hegel and Heraclitus, fire symbolizes the perpetual change and mutation of things, where they cease to be what they were and transform themselves into a new character. Continuous self-transcendence is thus the central character of existence which Hegel takes over from Heraclitus' (Daniel Berthold-Bond, *Hegel's Grand Synthesis*, p. 72). Berthold-Bond does not, however, see Hegel as simply Heraclitean, but locates a tension within Hegel's project in his reading of Heraclitus: 'It is precisely here, where Hegel both seeks to take over from Heraclitus his metaphysics of becoming *and* reject his idea that becoming never finds "repose," that the internal tension in Hegel's philosophy...arises, the tension which emerges as a result of his double commitment to a metaphysics of becoming, on the one hand, and on the other, to a final consummation of becoming in the "repose of being"' (*Hegel's Grand Synthesis*, p. 72). However, as I attempted to argue in Chapter 4 above, the transition in Hegel's logical history of philosophy from Heraclitean *logos* to Anaxagorean *nous* (and, although I have not considered it in this study, the further transition to Aristotelian *energeia*) is not meant to simply *negate* Heraclitean becoming and thereby replace *logos* with *nous* (or *energeia*). Rather, such transitions are meant to reveal that the becoming of *logos* implicitly remains with itself in its self-transformation. In other words, Hegel does not depart from Heraclitean becoming but simply renders explicit what is implicit in the metaphysical stance of Heraclitean thought, namely, that infinite movement is at peace with itself in its unlimited character as ceaseless becoming. And it is precisely *this* Heraclitean notion which Schelling rejects as insufficient, metaphysically speaking, since it fails to account for the primordial ontological event which sets the *logos* of the world into motion—the event of creation itself, wherein a rational world comes into being. Thus, taking my inspiration from the late Schelling's history of philosophy, I oppose the view held by Čapek (and others) that Hegel's profound Heracliteanism and 'dynamic view of reality' is 'counterbalanced by his strong Eleatic emphasis on the timeless character of the Absolute Idea' (Čapek, 'Hegel and the Organic View of Nature', pp. 112-113). On my view, both Parmenides *and* Heraclitus remain tied to an atemporal absolute, despite the latter's apparent concern for time and becoming. For one can conceive being dynamically without thereby understanding *genesis* as a philosophical topic of central importance. We should therefore interpret Schelling's turn to the Christian concept of creation in light of this limit of Heraclitean thinking in all its forms (Hegelian, Nietzschean, etc.).

philosophy, namely, its inability to proceed in a strictly logical, *conceptual* fashion.²¹ As I see it, Schelling was indeed already on his way to conceiving the philosophical significance of nature's history, despite the fact that nature's *Stufenfolge* is not understood in the early work as historically graduated.²² Bracketing the 1801 *Presentation* and a number of related *Identitätsphilosophie* texts, Schelling consistently interprets nature not as mere activity but as generative, as *grounding* the life of spirit, even when he insists on the atemporal character of nature's *Stufen*. Reading the late Schelling, then, allows us to return to the early Schelling and consider the manner in which there is perhaps a historical conception of natural development already at work in his early logic of emergence. In the following section, I want to consider this implicit conception of historical genesis before providing an interpretation of Hegel which might account in more detail for the latter's refusal to conceive nature's history as philosophically significant.

7.3. Two Senses of 'Becoming'

Drawing upon the late Schelling helps us to see that there are at least two distinct philosophical senses of 'becoming' (*Werden*), and any philosophical account of emergence must take into consideration the polysemy of this term. In Hegel, 'becoming' is properly speaking an ontologically primitive category, found at the very beginning of the *Science of Logic*, followed by many more concrete logical determinations. Nonetheless, the late Schelling makes a convincing case that the entirety of Hegel's system can be seen as one of Heraclitean 'becoming', so long as we interpret becoming not as the indeterminate flux which is found at the beginning of the *Logic*, but the dialectical *movement* (*Bewegung*) that characterises the being of beings, i.e. the immanent activity (*Tätigkeit*) which drives the

²¹ *W 20*: 436; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume III*, pp. 526-527.

²² On my reading, then, *pace* Grant, it is not clear that Schelling was always committed to a speculative philosophy of nature's nature. Cf. Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, pp. 26-58, 119-157. That being said, Grant's reading of Schelling has been highly influential on my interpretation of Schelling precisely by making explicit what I take to be largely implicit in Schelling's earlier thought, i.e. the necessity of conceiving nature's *Stufenfolge* historically.

whole system of self-differentiation. Indeed, it is this same onto-logical movement which is at work in the transition from nature to spirit, where spirit logically emerges from the dialectical activity of nature. The kind of ‘emergence’ at work in Hegel’s system, then, can be understood as ‘becoming’ in a dialectical-kinetic sense, i.e. an onto-logical development in which nothing *happens* in the historical sense of a ‘happening’.

Yet we can also interpret ‘becoming’ as coming-to-*be*, i.e. as the actual, historical emergence of a being or form of being. This is undoubtedly what the late Schelling has in mind with respect to God’s free creation of the world and the subsequent historical appearance of God in human history. But is this the only place where we might find a conception of becoming as historical genesis in Schelling’s thought? For the most part, Schelling is committed to the atemporal character of nature’s *Stufenfolge*. This is why I have emphasised the *logic* of emergence in both Schelling and Hegel, despite the absence in Schelling’s work of any thematisation of logic per se. Neither Schelling nor Hegel understands the dialectical transitions presented in the philosophy of nature to correspond to a natural history. And yet, Schelling’s nature philosophy—unlike Hegel’s—is full of passages that imply that the history of nature may indeed be philosophically significant. For example, in a note near the end of the *World-Soul*, Schelling expresses interest in the ‘entirely new natural history’ announced by Kiehmeyer,²³ and in the *First Outline*, Schelling suggests that there may come a day when natural history will become a genuine science precisely in the manner ruled out by Kant in the Preface to the *Metaphysical Foundations*.²⁴ ‘Natural history’ would signify not only a ‘*description of Nature*’ but ‘a *history of Nature itself*’.²⁵ Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 3, Schelling’s insistence in the *Freedom* essay upon the atemporal character of emergence was already in tension with his presentation of his ideas in decidedly genetic terminology. It appears, then, that despite the early Schelling’s

²³ *SW I/2*: 565n.

²⁴ Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, p. 4 and *SW I/3*: 68; *First Outline*, p. 53.

²⁵ *SW I/3*: 68; *First Outline*, p. 53. See note 36 in Chapter 1 above. Schelling’s interest in natural history is likely inspired, in part, by his interest in theories of epigenesis. In the *First Outline* Schelling claims that biological formation occurs not through preformation but through ‘metamorphosis’ or ‘dynamical evolution’ (*SW I/3*: 48 and 48n; *First Outline*, pp. 47-48 and 48n).

commitment to deriving the necessary stages of the *atemporal* sequence of natural forms, there is an implicit concern in Schelling's earlier writings, at least in the early works of nature philosophy and the *Freedom* essay, with historical genesis, as if the actual coming-into-existence of life and spirit were historical events worthy of philosophical consideration.

We can find further support for the idea that the early Schelling already wanted to conceive 'becoming' in terms of historical *genesis* (as opposed to dialectical *kinēsis*) if we consider how the late Schelling distinguishes his earlier philosophical endeavours from Hegel's. What is particularly interesting—and quite puzzling—is the late Schelling's ambiguity towards his own, earlier negative philosophy, particularly as articulated in the system of identity. In the lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling compares his own rationalist or negative philosophy of identity to Hegel's logical system, arguing that they are different not with respect to their rationalism—both seek to explain what there is through reason—but with respect to the fact that it is only in *Hegel's* system that the dialectical process is uneventful:

Hegel calls [the] progression of the *concept* a process...Only there is a difference between the imitation and the original. In the earlier philosophy [i.e. Schelling's own identity philosophy] the beginning point at which the subject intensifies or raises itself up to a higher subjectivity is a real opposition, a real dissonance, and in this way one understands an intensification [*Steigerung*]. In the Hegelian philosophy the beginning point behaves in relation to what follows it as a mere minus, as a lack, an emptiness, which is filled and is admittedly, as such, negated as emptiness, but in this there is as little to overcome as there is in filling an empty vessel; it all happens quite peacefully – there is no opposition between being and nothing, they do not do anything to each other. The translation of the concept of *process* onto the dialectical movement, where no struggle is possible, but only a monotonous, almost soporific progression, therefore belongs to that misuse of words which in Hegel is really a very great means of hiding the lack of *true life*.²⁶

In this passage, Schelling seems to imply that his earlier, 'negative' philosophy concerned itself with historical events, as if the processual 'intensification', 'struggle', and 'true life' at

²⁶ *SW I/10*: 137; *On History of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 142-143.

work in the identity philosophy were somehow more than merely onto-logical.²⁷ It isn't clear to me how we should read Schelling's retrospective account of his earlier system, but this need not concern us here.²⁸ Instead, it is worth simply noting that the late Schelling did, at times, see something far more 'real' in his own rationalist philosophy than in Hegel's. And this is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the late Schelling typically faults Hegel for supposedly thinking that the logical system of nature *is also positive*, as though Hegel were under the illusion that his system somehow engaged with the actual existence of beings as opposed to simply explicating their ontological structure. That is to say, Schelling more often criticises Hegel for not recognising the limits of rationalist philosophy as Schelling supposedly did in the *Identitätssystem*. But in the passage quoted above, the argument is reversed: Here, Hegel's rationalism is seen as not being positive enough! On this view, Hegel's system is flawed not because it supposedly oversteps the bounds of rationalist ontology, but rather, because no *real* process gets underway in the Hegelian dialectic, and this is interpreted as markedly different from the genuine struggle towards intensification that is at work in the identity philosophy. It therefore appears that, at least in this passage, the late Schelling hints that his earlier rationalist philosophy already contained the seeds of the positive. The second reason this passage is illuminating is that Schelling explicitly associates the ever-increasing *intensification* of reason in his own system with a 'real process' and identifies the self-negation of the concept in Hegel's system as lacking reality. If we bracket Schelling's ludicrous comments about the 'peaceful', 'monotonous', and 'soporific' nature of Hegel's logic, there is something profoundly insightful in this association of intensification with real production, on the one hand, and negativity with a

²⁷ In the *Private Stuttgart Lectures*, Schelling makes a similar point in differentiating *Aufhebung* (presumably a reference to Hegel) from *Steigerung*, the latter of which Schelling identifies as the kind of development at work in his own system (*SW* I/7: 424-425; *Stuttgart Seminars*, p. 200). Cf. Beach, 'The Later Schelling's Conception of Dialectical Method, in Contradistinction to Hegel's', pp. 40-41.

²⁸ It is important to not simply take the late Schelling at his word when attempting to understand his system. As Werner Marx suggests with respect to the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the late Schelling 'depicted his earlier position here in a manner that is not completely faithful to the text of the Transcendental System.' Werner Marx, *The Philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling: History, System, and Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984), p. 47. As Marx goes on to argue, the later Schelling 'insisted that his Transcendental System was the first to have had a "tendency toward the historical"', when in fact the system of 1800 does not describe a real history at all (*ibid.*, p. 52). Marx then opposes this ahistorical transcendental system to Hegel's *Phenomenology* which Marx does see as describing a 'real history' of some kind (*ibid.* pp. 52-53).

lack of real production, on the other, at least with respect to the different ways one might conceive the activity of nature. I will consider this idea in more detail below.

Aside from these various indications that Schelling's early nature philosophy may have already alluded to a conception of 'becoming' which would be more historical than the dialectical-kinetic 'becoming' of Hegel's system, there is the significant fact that Schelling emphasised the *productivity* of nature throughout his early nature philosophy.²⁹ Unlike Hegel, for whom natural history is contingent, the early Schelling conceives *all* of nature as a rationally structured whole, and this includes the emergence of particular 'products' which are generated by nature's intrinsic productivity. Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 1, Schelling's conception of reason is more extensive than Hegel's, since it involves not only the immanent rational structure of nature's graduated sequence of stages, but the actual production of particular products as *necessary* features of reality. Although Hegel understands nature to necessarily involve particulars, the production *of* particulars is a non-rational process with which philosophy need not concern itself. For the early Schelling, however, nature is *entirely* rational, and this rationality extends to each and every natural-historical production. This does not mean that the early Schelling held the view that we can deduce the existence *of* a particular being, but that the production of such particulars is in no way determined by *chance*.³⁰

Of course, because the early Schelling conceives natural production as rationally necessary and as wholly immanent to nature itself, we are in a certain respect far afield from the late Schelling's equation of history with contingency and his conception of genesis as dependent upon God's free—and here this means 'free from necessity'—decision to create the world. The implicit call for a philosophical natural history in the early nature philosophy

²⁹ Many interpreters have emphasised this connection between history and Schelling's conception of nature as *natura naturans*. Steffen Dietzsch, for example, rightly interprets history in Schelling's early philosophy as consequent upon nature's productivity. As Dietzsch argues, it is only because nature is a *naturing* nature that anything like history is possible. But Dietzsch does not make it explicit that this productivity must be a *historical* productivity if nature's dialectical-productive structure is not only to *ground* history, but to express *itself* as a natural-historical process. Instead, for Dietzsch, nature is 'natural history' only because the history of consciousness *mirrors* the productivity of nature. Cf. Steffen Dietzsch, 'Geschichtsphilosophische Dimensionen der Naturphilosophie Schellings' in *Natur und geschichtlicher Prozeß*, p. 248.

³⁰ *SW I/3*: 186; *First Outline*, p. 135 and *SW I/3*: 278; *Introduction to the Outline*, p. 198.

is therefore distinctive, and can be boiled down to the following thought: If the production of individual products is an entirely rational, immanent process, ought the philosophy of nature not to shed light upon this historical production? It is important to emphasise that this need not imply the possibility of deriving a priori the existence of particular natural entities, and Schelling never indicates that philosophy should engage in such an absurd task. All Schelling has indicated with his attention to the rational productivity of nature is that nature's history *may* involve philosophically significant events, since production is an entirely rational process.³¹ The most obvious way to construe this idea would be to interpret nature as a *historical Stufenfolge*, although this would of course only be applicable to the most general stages of inorganic nature, organic nature, and spiritual freedom, and could not possibly apply to the minor 'potentiations' within these more general stages. If this is a legitimate reading of Schelling's implicit thought, then a speculative-*historical* physics would not involve the rational derivation of the existence of particulars but would rather derive the most general forms of nature as originating in time. Arthur Lovejoy is not entirely wrong, then, to see in the early Schelling and especially in the *Freedom* essay a

³¹ My interpretation of Schelling here has been influenced by Beach's proposal to distinguish Hegel's *Aufhebungsdialektik* from Schelling's *Erzeugungsdialektik*. According to Beach, the latter is not a method per se but a model which 'pervades [Schelling's] thought and implicitly determines all his theories...[as a] general and lasting feature of his philosophical style' ('The Later Schelling's Conception of Dialectical Method, in *Contradistinction to Hegel*', p. 39). Beach characterises the general tendency of Schelling's thought as follows: 'At every stage the next succeeding level or principle of being is not just logically entailed but is actually caused (*verursacht*), by the preceding potencies of the system' (*ibid.*, p. 41). Schelling's dialectic is therefore a 'process of genesis' which is necessarily temporal (*ibid.*, p. 41). I take this to be convincing so long as we acknowledge that prior to the *Ages of the World*, Schelling himself remains explicitly committed to the atemporal character of this productive process. Where Beach is unconvincing, however, is in his emphasis on the *non-rational* character of production throughout Schelling's thought and the supposed interest, on Schelling's part, in non-rationalist forms of philosophical knowing. For example, Beach understands Schelling to already regard *volition* as separate from logical *necessity* in the *Freedom* essay (*ibid.*, p. 37), as if Schelling had in 1809 already come to distinguish existence from rational essence; and Beach likewise emphasises Schelling's supposed concern with *experience* as a distinguishing feature of his dialectic. Beach thus downplays what is so unique to Schelling's project prior to the late philosophy, namely, the insistence upon conceiving the *rational* potencies in terms of *productivity* and *willing*. That the early Schelling proposes that philosophy access the *rational* structure of being through intellectual intuition or *Selbstgefühl* (e.g. in the *Freedom* essay) does not signal anything akin to a turn away from rationalism. On the contrary, these are simply methods with which Schelling experiments in order to uncover the strictly rational structure of being. Of course, once Schelling comes to distinguish between negative and positive philosophy he gives up on his earlier, largely *implicit* conception of a rationalist ontology *of creation*. But what Beach identifies as a distinctively Schellingian dialectic of *Erzeugung* exclusively applies to the late Schelling so long as the productivity of being is understood to be separate from the rational structure of being.

‘temporalisation’ of the *scala naturae*.³² Although at the time Schelling explicitly conceived these texts as elucidating the atemporal logic of emergence, there is within this logic an implicit demand to go further, to conceive the immanent potentiation of nature as a historical process. We can therefore say that in his earlier texts Schelling was already working towards the thought, made explicit only later in his intellectual development, that the *becoming* of beings must be conceived as an actual *production*, a historical movement from non-being to being.³³

We are driven back, then, to the difference between the two senses of ‘becoming’ and their implications for an idealist logic of emergence. At this stage, I want to consider how it is that Schelling’s early logic of emergence involves an implicit connection to natural history while Hegel’s logic of emergence is necessarily opposed to such a connection. To do so, let us simply ask: does Hegel have good reasons for conceiving nature’s development in strictly logical, i.e. non-historical, terms? If we can trace the late Schelling’s interest in historical genesis back to implicit themes in his earlier philosophical works, can we also unpack why Hegel never came to view historical genesis as a philosophically significant topic as did Schelling?

First, we must note that Hegel didn’t ‘lack interest’ in natural history. He did not only insist that non-philosophical forms of thinking attend to nature’s history, but Hegel himself was deeply knowledgeable about the geological and biological sciences of his time. He was particularly sympathetic to the work of Cuvier’s comparative anatomy which draws heavily upon palaeontology, and Hegel’s organics was also profoundly indebted to the research of Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus who, unlike Cuvier, was a proponent of the theory of species

³² Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 317-326. As Lovejoy claims, ‘It is - as has too little been noted by historians - in this introduction of a radical evolutionism into metaphysics and theology, and in the attempt to revise even the principles of logic to make them harmonize with an evolutionary conception of reality, that the historical significance of Schelling chiefly consists’ (*The Great Chain of Being*, p. 325).

³³ Matt Ffychte also notes the ambiguity of Schelling’s early nature philosophy with respect to whether the *Stufenfolge* is a temporal or a strictly logical development from nature to spirit. See *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 86-89. Note also how Ffychte’s construal of this issue is bound up with the two conceptions of nature-spirit identity discussed in Part I of this thesis, i.e. an ‘emergent’ identity of nature and spirit and an identity of ‘coincidence’. It is important to keep in mind, however, that even the ‘emergent’ identity can be interpreted as strictly logical, as it certainly is in Hegel.

transmutation. To be sure, Hegel himself also rejected this theory, but his respect for Treviranus is just one of many examples of Hegel's indisputable acquaintance with the burgeoning discipline of the historical sciences at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We can thus dismiss the idea that Hegel simply had a distaste for nature or its history as non-philosophical explanations of the matter at hand. Our guiding question is whether Hegel recognises any *ontological* significance in nature's history and, if not, why this is the case. For it appears that, on Hegel's view, the age of the Earth and of the human species simply lacks import for a philosophical science which logically derives the necessary *structures* of nature but does not concern itself with the contingent history in which those structures first become manifest. But why does Hegel hold such a view? Why must natural history be determined by contingency? In order to answer these questions, we need to consider the ontological consequences of Hegel's conception of nature's immanent development as a process of self-negating negativity.

As we have seen, Hegel conceives nature as the ontologically primary manifestation of the Idea or self-determining reason. But because this primary manifestation of reason is a manifestation of reason as *external* to itself, the natural world is not *explicitly* rational until the logical emergence of organic life, and being only becomes *fully* rational with the logical emergence of spirit. In life and even more so in spiritual freedom, the externality or negativity of nature is negated by an active process of *inwardisation* which Hegel identifies as self-negating negativity. Now, all of this has important consequences for how Hegel conceives history. Once spiritual freedom is shown to be a necessary feature of reality, the absolute Idea (or self-determining reason) becomes *explicitly* and *concretely* self-determining. And this means that whatever it is that spirit accomplishes in reality—whatever spirit 'gets up to'—will by necessity express the genuine *freedom* of self-determination. In other words, the historical activity of spirit will prove to be nothing other than the worldly manifestation of self-determining reason, hence Hegel's unwavering attention to the manner in which reason expresses itself in the history of political institutions, aesthetic experience, religious consciousness, and philosophy itself. For the history of spirit is fully determined by

the free movement of reason itself, i.e. reason that has come into its own in the life of human thought and action.

The history of *nature*, on the other hand, is determined only in *part* by its implicit rationality, and more specifically, only insofar as the history of nature must involve the logically necessary forms of nature that we find in the *Encyclopaedia*. But the encyclopaedic sequence of these forms is a strictly onto-logical sequence that has no counterpart in the chronological development of nature. Instead, the historical appearance of those rationally necessary forms is determined exclusively ‘by *chance* and by a *play* [of circumstances], not by *reason*.’³⁴ Natural history is not, therefore, a rational history of self-determining freedom. On the contrary, natural history is the contingent history of reason’s intrinsic yet onto-logically primary *otherness*. Thus, whereas the history of spirit is an explicitly rational expression of freedom that demands philosophical attention, the history of nature is a contingently determined process with which philosophy need not concern itself.³⁵

Note that Hegel’s conception of a rational history of spirit doesn’t require that every last feature of spiritual life be rationally derivable. As Hegel remarks in the *Philosophy of Right*, Plato and Fichte overstep the bounds of rational philosophising when the former recommends particular nursing practices and the latter philosophically ‘constructs’ extraordinarily detailed passport requirements.³⁶ Yet *major* rational developments of spiritual freedom *are* historical for Hegel. For example, the transition from the Zoroastrian representation of divinity as light to the Hindu representation of divinity as distorted nature involves not only a logical development of aesthetic-religious sensibility but a chronological expression *of* that logic (even if Zoroastrianism doesn’t historically develop into Hinduism). And there is absolutely nothing analogous to this chronological dimension of rational

³⁴ *W* 8: Remark to § 16, 62; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 40, emphasis modified.

³⁵ Hegel’s Remark to § 260 makes fully explicit that it is the ‘impotence of nature’ which ‘sets limits to philosophy’, since this impotence of nature (i.e. nature’s being-outside-itself) is what makes it the domain of reality determined largely by contingency, and ‘it is quite improper’ to expect the philosophy of nature to ‘construe or deduce’ the ‘contingent products of nature’ (*W* 9: Remark to § 250, 35; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 23).

³⁶ *W* 7: Vorrede, 25; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 21.

development in Hegel's philosophy of nature. It is this difference between spiritual and natural history which, I believe, stems from Hegel's interpretation of nature as self-external reason.

I take it that this explanation for Hegel's refusal to historicise nature's *Stufenfolge* sheds some light on the more topical discussion of Hegel and evolutionary theory in the life sciences. It is entirely misguided, on my view, to focus upon whether Hegel might have endorsed an evolutionary theory were he alive today. Findlay suggests as much when he states that the 'only reason' Hegel was 'unprepared' to conceive nature historically was that 'he lived in a pre-Darwinian age, and was, moreover, a somewhat timid conservative in regard to the detail of science'.³⁷ A far more nuanced approach is taken by both Houlgate and Somers-Hall who concern themselves not with Hegel's own views about species evolution, but whether Hegel's ontology is logically compatible with Darwinian thought.³⁸ As I see it, however, the entire topic of Hegel and biological evolution must be considered in light of Hegel's more fundamental commitment to the asunderness of nature. For this allows us to see that whether or not Hegel's system is compatible with evolutionary theory—and Houlgate and Somers-Hall offer persuasive arguments from either side of this debate—the fact remains that nature's history *cannot be a self-determining history* for Hegel, and this includes the local histories of species origination. From a strictly metaphysical perspective, then, whether Hegel's ontology is compatible with the Darwinian life sciences is beside the point: nature's history, precisely thanks to its ontological status as self-external reason, is necessarily irrational. It is therefore helpful to emphasise, as Grant does, that Hegel's

³⁷ Findlay, Foreword to the *Philosophy of Nature*, p. xv.

³⁸ Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, p. 174; Henry Somers-Hall, *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation*, p. 215.

speculative geology is just as ahistorical as his speculative botany and zoology.³⁹ For life is just one stage of a fundamentally ahistorical ontological structure, and we get to the heart of Hegel's anti-evolutionism once we recognise that *all* natural history is irrelevant for Hegel's ontology of nature.⁴⁰

In Chapter 4, I suggested that a fundamental difference between Schelling's and Hegel's philosophies of nature involves the difference between conceiving nature's rational structure in terms of 'powers' or 'negativity'. I argued that, if we bracket the methodological differences between Schelling's and Hegel's systems, this crucial ontological difference comes to the fore: whereas for Schelling, nature raises itself to higher stages of complexity through a process of *potentiation*, for Hegel, nature makes possible the self-liberation of spirit through its *negative* character, such that spirit can *negate* this negativity and thereby achieve the inwardness of freedom. What I want to suggest now is that this difference between conceiving emergence along the lines of 'powers' or 'negativity' is not only a difference between the manner in which Schelling and Hegel conceive the immanent, atemporal development of nature, but it leads them to conceive nature's history in very different ways. As we have seen, Hegel does not just happen to find nature's history uninteresting; rather, his identification of nature as self-external reason leads him to the view that natural history is a contingent history (with the exception that the rationally necessary forms of nature must be instantiated at some point in time). Schelling, on the other hand, who conceives nature's development in terms of 'potentiation', does not conceive nature as rife with contingency. Indeed, as discussed above and in Chapter 1, the *whole* of nature—

³⁹ Grant, 'Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman' in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. by Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), p. 41. In discussing the logic of geological nature, Hegel remarks that 'mere succession in time has no philosophical significance whatever' (*W* 9: Addition to § 339, 348; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 283). While there is a *rational* connection between the strata of the Earth, one need not consider the succession of time in order to grasp this connection. Thus, 'nothing is added...by the succession of time. The general law of this sequence of formations can be recognized without any reference to the historical aspect' (*W* 9: Addition to § 339, 348; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 283).

⁴⁰ Although I am more sympathetic to Somers-Halls's argument against Hegel's system being compatible with biological evolution, Houlgate argues a similar point to the one I make here, namely, that from an ontological perspective, the origination of species simply *doesn't matter* to Hegel because his ontology of nature is a logic of nature. Cf. Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, p. 173-174.

including the production of individual natural products—is identified as utterly rational in Schelling’s early nature philosophy.

It should be clear by now that my intention is not to simply criticise Hegel for lacking enthusiasm about natural history, but to locate the logical structures within his system that determine natural history as having little philosophical significance. On my view, Hegel’s *philosophical* disregard for natural history is bound up with his conception of nature’s ontological status as self-external being. Consequently, only reason that has turned into itself and become fully self-determining (i.e. spirit) achieves the status of rational history. I now want to further support this interpretation of Hegel by considering how the relationship between nature and spirit repeats essential features of the relationship between space and time, yet at a more complex level.

Although it would be an utter misunderstanding to conceive nature, in Hegel’s system, as non-temporal, there is an important sense in which spatial extension is the fundamental determining structure of the whole of nature. For at every stage of the nature philosophy—in mechanics, physics, and organics—nature aims to rid itself of its constitutive *self-externality*. And as we saw in Chapter 5, this self-externality, in its most general expression, is nothing other than the three-dimensionality of spatial extension. I want to suggest that the transition which occurs at the beginning of the nature philosophy from self-external space to time prefigures the subsequent emergence of spirit at the end of the philosophy of nature. In both transitions, a self-external reality negates itself and thereby raises itself to the ontological status of self-negating negativity—although in the case of spirit, this is a far more explicit and therefore self-determining form of self-negating negativity. Nevertheless, there remains an important ontological connection between time and spirit, since the latter is a further explication of the originary, *temporal* negation of space.⁴¹ In other words, spirit and time each express a certain *interiority* or ‘non-extendedness’ that emerges from the externality of nature; both are active negations of nature’s negative or external being. This, I take it, is why time takes on a far more important

⁴¹ Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), pp. 484-485.

role in Hegel's philosophy of spirit—and particularly in objective and absolute spirit—than it does in Hegel's philosophy of nature, despite the fact that the proper consideration of time as an ontological determination of reality is found within the philosophy of nature.

Now, it is important not to overstate the relation between time, as described in the philosophy of nature, and spiritual freedom. For as we will see below, once spirit has liberated itself from nature, the ontological structure of time *itself* becomes reconfigured. By drawing attention to the structural similarities between time and spirit, then, I want to simply suggest an explanation as to why spirit, as the ultimate negation of self-external nature, *necessarily* manifests itself in a historical manner for Hegel. And in fact, it is precisely this *necessarily* historical character of spiritual freedom which proves that time itself undergoes an ontological transformation with the transition from nature to spirit. For whereas time, in the philosophy of nature, remains far too external-to-itself to truly express itself as the self-negating negativity of freedom, the history of spiritual freedom involves a far more complex temporality than that found in mere nature.

Alan B. Brinkley sheds light on this difference between the temporalities of nature and spirit by considering the destructive activity of a wild elephant:

A wild elephant may tear down trees in the forest and may transform limited aspects of the world which he inhabits, but he does so entirely naturally and without affecting things essentially. Man, acting in accord with an idea he has of the future, is capable of non-natural action, or action conceived for the sake of something not a part of the natural world. One could not say that being is altered by the rampage of a wild elephant. What is chiefly affected is a portion of space, but other trees will grow to replace those uprooted, and eventually other elephants may come to tear them up. When man creates, or destroys, out of allegiance to an idea of the future, the changes he makes are essential changes. It is these essential changes...which constitute the time of the world.⁴²

Brinkley goes too far, I believe, when he goes on to state that 'the natural world can be said to involve time only to the extent that it involves human reality'.⁴³ Nevertheless, his

⁴² Brinkley, 'Time in Hegel's Phenomenology', p. 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

illustration of the difference between nature and spirit makes the following point well: For Hegel, the temporality of spirit is ontologically distinct from the temporality of nature. Whereas in the former, real, ontologically significant development obtains; the latter is, regarded from the perspective of rational ontology alone, eternally ‘present’. Why is natural time eternally ‘present’? Because the time of nature is only ever a continuous stream of self-negating ‘now’ points, which means there is no rational progress in temporal duration; one natural moment is structurally interchangeable with another.⁴⁴ The temporality of *spirit*, however, necessarily includes a distinctive past, present, and future, and this is what Hegel claims, in the philosophy of nature, allows for the experiences of remembrance, fear, and hope.⁴⁵ It is also, I take it, what makes the histories of political institutions, aesthetic forms, religious cults, and philosophical ideas at once rational *and* chronological developments. For it is only with the logical emergence of spirit that time comes into its own as spiritual history, i.e. as self-negating negativity expressive of genuine freedom. This allows us to understand how Hegel can remark, in an addition to the *Encyclopaedia* logic, that whereas spirit makes progress, nature’s process of turning back upon itself (*Zurückkehren*) is not, strictly speaking, a progression (*Fortschreiten*).⁴⁶ Instead, the entire rational process of nature’s gradual ‘inwardisation’ is *necessarily* ahistorical, since nature doesn’t have the inner being or freedom to determine itself rationally *in time*. Indeed, because nature is constitutively *outside* itself, it will always fail (as nature) to turn inwards enough to *hold onto* itself, to carry itself forth in time *as a self* and thereby freely and rationally affect the

⁴⁴ ‘In time there is no past and future, but only the now, and this is, but is not as regards the past; and this non-being, as future, turns round into Being’ (*W* 18: 329; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume I*, p. 287).

⁴⁵ *W* 9: Remark to § 259, 52; *Philosophy of Nature*, 37.

⁴⁶ *W* 8: Addition to § 234, 387; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 303.

future. The asunderness of nature simply makes this kind of historical self-determination impossible.⁴⁷

It is therefore no coincidence that Hegel, unlike the early Schelling, refuses to conceive natural history as a rational process. Natural history is necessarily contingent, for Hegel, and this is thanks to the very being of nature. It is thus Hegel's and Schelling's respective conceptions of nature's immanent development that lead them to significantly different views regarding history.⁴⁸

Up to this point, I have not argued for the superiority of either Schelling's conception of nature's self-potentialiation or Hegel's conception of nature's self-sublation. My primary aim in this chapter is to simply elucidate the differences that result from these conceptions of nature's immanent development. But it strikes me that Hegel's disregard for natural history, despite his philosophical motivations, is fundamentally misguided. That Hegel has systematic reasons for rejecting nature philosophies concerned with historical origination

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that Brinkley's example of a wild elephant, while illustrative, does raise an important question regarding the inwardness of animal life and its potential to be historically productive. As we saw in Chapter 6, the animal is natural and yet it is a natural *subjectivity*. Hence Hegel can say that 'this independent subjectivity is, quite abstractly, the pure process of time' (*W* 9: Addition to § 351, 434; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 354). I take it that if one were exclusively concerned with the history of *animal life*, there is potentially more flexibility in Hegel's system of nature to conceive the animal historically. That being said, any interpretation of the animal genus as implicitly historical in Hegel's system must not lose sight of the fact that the fixity of species is essential to how Hegel conceives the morphology of animal life, thanks to his sympathies for Cuvier's comparative anatomy. Cf. Somers-Hall, *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation*, pp. 211-238.

⁴⁸ I take it that something analogous to this difference is at work in the productive realm of *spirit*. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt unearths an important ontological difference between labour, on the one hand, and work, on the other. She argues that these etymologically unrelated terms signal fundamentally different forms of human activity, and I take these differences to be instructive regarding the different ways Schelling and Hegel conceive the activity of *nature*. According to Arendt, labour is bound up with *suffering*, i.e. with the 'pain and trouble' of *undergoing* labour. (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second Edition [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958] pp. 79-81). Although this sense of negativity is now lost in both the French *travailler* and German *arbeiten*, it can still be traced etymologically, for example in the fact that both *Arbeit* and *Armut* are 'derived from German *arbma-*, meaning lonely and neglected, abandoned' (*ibid.*, p. 48n39). Work (*ouvrer*, *werken*), on the other hand, is *not* associated with such negativity, and it can be further distinguished from labour insofar as work is associated more explicitly with the material *products* of manufacture. Hence the nominal form, 'work' (which again is no longer in use in French or German), i.e. that which results *from* the activity of work. My intention is not to confuse these distinctively human activities of labour and work for natural processes. But I do think Arendt unintentionally articulates a more general, ontological distinction between two forms of activity, one involving *negativity* and a second, more creative or 'poietic' activity involving the production of *products*. In other words, human labour and work may be more complex, *spiritual* expressions of a primordial activity in nature itself. From this perspective, we might interpret Schelling's attention to the creative *work* of nature and Hegel's attention to the 'labour of the negative' (*W* 3: 24; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 10) as motivating factors behind the fundamental differences between their accounts of natural development.

does not alter the fact that Hegel's own philosophy of nature consequently lacks any attention to the manner in which rational forms of inorganic and organic nature emerge in time, as if the historical manifestation of non-spiritual forms of reality had nothing to do with the self-determination of reason.⁴⁹ For even if reason is not *fully* self-determining in inorganic and organic nature, haven't we seen that Hegel's nature philosophy identifies nascent forms of freedom in nature? And do these nascent forms of freedom not deserve to be considered in their historical actuality? At the very least, doesn't the self-liberation of spirit from nature call for a philosophical anthropology attentive to the emergence of prehistoric man?

These questions are not raised from a Darwinian perspective so much as from within the rationalist framework of idealist nature philosophy. My Schelling inspired suggestion is that Hegel's conception of *logos* isn't rationalist *enough*, since it fails to include an account of its own immanent, natural-historical unfolding. I think Stace is onto something, then, when he claims that, in the philosophy of nature, Hegel becomes 'seduced by a lingering trace of the idea which he had himself explicitly repudiated, that there is some mysterious entity in or behind things in addition to the universals which compose all we know of them.'⁵⁰ Although it would be wrong to say that the contingencies of natural history are 'mysterious' for Hegel, since these contingencies are indeed comprehensible to *empirical* understanding, the division in Hegel's system between the *rationally necessary forms of nature* and the *contingent historical emergence of these forms* does appear to be somewhat 'essentialist' in Hegel's technical, pejorative sense. But to overcome this issue, one would have to conceive nature otherwise than self-external being. That is to say, one would have to

⁴⁹ Cf. the Addition to § 270 where Hegel aligns any consideration of the natural origination of comets with an empirical approach to nature. According to Hegel, any 'explanation of origin', e.g. 'whether comets have been thrown out by the sun, or are atmospheric vapours and the like' is an entirely separate topic from the *being* of the entity under consideration (*W* 9: Addition to § 270: 102; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 79). But one need not conceive logical form or structure as separable from the historical genesis of that form, *especially* if one is committed—as is Hegel—upon the *immanence* of logical forms to beings themselves. At the very least, it seems that a complete philosophy of nature would provide insight into the conditions under which the existence of various natural forms (e.g. comets) occurs.

⁵⁰ Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 300.

reject the Hegelian insistence upon the powerlessness of nature. As I see it, Schelling's nature philosophy of powers does precisely this.

7.4. Nature's Past

At the beginning of this chapter, I considered the late Schelling's critique of Hegel in order to draw out a *genetic* sense of 'becoming' which is entirely absent in Hegel's philosophy of nature and remains only implicit in Schelling's work between the *Ideas* and the *Freedom* essay. I want to conclude by suggesting that during the interval between the publication of the *Freedom* essay and Schelling's turn to the positive philosophy, he pursued a project in which historical genesis was a central theme, yet he did so without referring to a transcendent creator whose creations might be seen as contingent. Although Schelling never completed the *Ages of the World*, the extant fragments indicate that Schelling was working out a philosophical cosmogony which simultaneously involved the rationalist derivation of the necessary features of reality and the presentation of those features as unfolding in a necessarily historical manner.⁵¹ It is for this reason that the *Ages of the World* identifies the self-revelation of the divine, as nature and then as spirit, in terms of the three *ages* of the past, present, and future.

Since this thesis is concerned exclusively with the development of nature and the emergence of spirit, I want to focus on the possibility of conceiving the pre-spiritual past as ontologically distinct from the present. The reason I have not considered Schelling's *Ages of the World* until now is that I believe this very idea of an ontologically distinct past is already implicit in the early Schelling's notion that nature is historically productive or generative of forms of being. Connected to the conception of 'becoming' as historical genesis, then, is the

⁵¹ The *Ages of the World* is therefore *fundamentally* distinct from the later philosophy in which Schelling claims that the philosophy of the potencies signals that 'in the science of reason, or, what is the same thing, the pure a priori science, only the possibility of things, not the reality, is comprehended' (*SW* II/3: 75; *Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 142). To be sure, the *Ages* is a kind of bridge between the earlier, rationalist philosophy and the later work, but this is the case only insofar as, in the *Ages*, Schelling comes to the view—further developed in the positive philosophy—that philosophical science must engage with history, but during this 'middle period' Schelling has yet to *separate* the negative from the positive. The question which demands consideration, although it is beyond the scope of the present study, is whether this separation of negative from positive was really ever necessary. Cf. Jürgen Habermas's doctoral dissertation, *Das Absolute und die Geschichte: Von der Zwiespältigkeit in Schellings Denken* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1954).

notion that nature has a philosophically significant or ontologically distinct past which requires a distinctive systematic treatment. Such a constellation of ideas is nowhere to be found in Hegel's philosophy of nature for reasons discussed above. Hegel is unequivocal that nature's past is a past present (a present that *is no longer*) and its future is a future present (a present that is *not yet*). To be sure, with respect to the life of spirit, the past takes on profound ontological specificity for Hegel. It is necessary to acknowledge, then, that Hegel is a philosopher of history in the strongest sense, and this means that his system is incomprehensible without attention to the ontological distinctness of bygone epochs. But the philosophically significant past is only ever the spiritual past for Hegel. With respect to nature, time remains in the mode of the 'now', be the 'now' under consideration the negated 'now' of the past or the soon to be negated 'now' of the present.⁵²

I am by no means the first to describe Hegel's conception of time in the philosophy of nature as 'presentist'. Perhaps the most influential criticism of Hegel's conception of time is found in Heidegger's deconstruction of the history of metaphysics. Although I believe Heidegger fails to fully appreciate Hegel's conception of human history,⁵³ there are important similarities between Heidegger's and Schelling's understanding of how 'presence' is possible thanks to an historical activity which is not itself present. And yet while Heidegger's views regarding the metaphysics of presence are better known than Schelling's, Heidegger's fundamental ties to phenomenology prevent him from going as far as Schelling does in the 1810s. Thus, briefly considering some of the fundamental elements of Heidegger's project will allow me to indicate the extraordinary novelty of Schelling's *Ages of the World*.

In his deconstruction of the dominant philosophical conception of time as 'presence', Heidegger does not seek to simply criticise this conception but to unpack a more primordial sense of time from within the dominant, metaphysical paradigm. Indeed, for Heidegger, thinking through this primordial sense of time opens up the possibility of interpreting being

⁵² *W* 9: § 259 and the Remark, 51-52; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 37.

⁵³ Cf. Karin de Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger's Encounter with Hegel*, particularly pp. 221-265.

itself *as* time. In pursuing this task, Heidegger came to emphasise the verbal sense of the presence (*Anwesenheit*) of that which is temporally present (*gegenwärtig*). In doing so, Heidegger eventually came to conceive being as *Anwesen*, as ‘presencing’ or ‘coming-to-presence’.⁵⁴ Heidegger’s fundamental gesture, then, was to interpret being as essentially historical and to demand that philosophy attend to being as ‘event’ (*Ereignis*).

I take Schelling’s *Ages of the World* to anticipate Heidegger’s deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence in important ways. In particular, the *past* (as well as the projected third book on the future) is given a distinct treatment which separates it from the ontological structure of the present, and in this way, time is liberated from the present. Moreover, the three ages of the world are the major structural features of Schelling’s philosophical cosmogony such that being is interpreted, more than a hundred years before the publication of *Being and Time*, as time itself.⁵⁵ Thus, like Heidegger, Schelling insists that in order to understand the being of beings we must consider the ontological event—however one is to flesh out the significance of this concept—which allows beings to ‘come to presence’.

But while Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of presence provides us with a familiar terminology with which to interpret Schelling’s distinctive project, their similarities should not be overstated. It is particularly important to note that Heidegger’s concern for the coming-to-presence of beings remains inextricably tied to *thinking* forms of existence. That is to say, Heidegger’s concern with the destiny or ‘sending’ (*Schicksal*) of being is limited to the *human* destiny of being, i.e. how beings ‘come-to-presence’ for historical *Dasein*. What Heidegger refuses to think in his interpretation of being as historical *Anwesen* is the prehuman history of *physis*—the same past which Hegel and nearly every philosopher of history since has entirely ignored. And it is here that, I believe, we arrive at the unique perspective opened up by Schelling’s *Ages of the World*. Unlike Heidegger’s attempt to

⁵⁴ Cf. Juan-Pablo Hernández, ‘How Presencing (Anwesen) Became Heidegger’s Concept of Being’, *Universitas Philosophica* 57 (2011), pp. 213-240.

⁵⁵ It is therefore curious that Bruce Matthews understands the *Ages* to present a ‘timeless succession’ of being’s self-revelation (Translator’s Introduction to *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 35). Perhaps when read from the perspective of the positive philosophy, the *Ages of the World* presents an ahistorical account of the *potencies* and, in focusing exclusively upon the potencies, fails to engage with actuality. But reading the *Ages* on its own terms, it becomes clear that the eternal, universal potencies are generated through *history*.

conceive the ‘coming-to-presence’ of being *for* a historical people, Schelling conceives the past as the ontological origin of thought itself. Indeed, from a Schellingian perspective, Heidegger’s fourfold of earth, sky, gods, and mortals is itself caught up in the metaphysics of *presence* so long as this fourfold is not understood as having been unfolded from the strictly natural twofold of earth and sky. For Schelling, we cannot account for the existence of either human or divine spirit if we do not consider the pre-spiritual history of *nature*.⁵⁶

What makes Schelling’s *Ages of the World* so radical, however, is not only its demand that philosophy attend to natural history, but that this work sought to bring together a consideration of natural history, on the one hand, with the more traditionally rationalist logic of emergence, on the other. Indeed, it is Schelling’s unique conception of creation as an entirely immanent, rational process of potentiation that distinguishes the *Ages of the World* from both Schelling’s earlier work, which only hints at the significance of natural history, and the late work, which distinguishes between rationalism and metaphysical empiricism.⁵⁷ It is therefore only in the *Ages of the World* that Schelling explicitly calls for a philosophical engagement with the ‘abysses [*Abgründe*] of [the] past’⁵⁸ in order to comprehend the rational potentiation of the divine, i.e. God’s self-revelation as nature and, ultimately, as the ‘generation of spirit’.⁵⁹ To be sure, the *Ages* is more of a philosophical poem than a scientific

⁵⁶ I therefore disagree with Ffychte’s claim that, in the *Ages of the World*, Schelling turns *away* from nature to the ‘unconscious’ and ‘the past’ as the themes of his philosophical investigations (Ffychte, *The Foundation of the Unconscious*, p. 94), as if Schelling’s conceptions of the unconscious and past were in any way separable from his philosophy of nature.

⁵⁷ I disagree with McGrath, then, who defends the late Schelling’s view that history and system require separate philosophical accounts. For McGrath, it is only in the late work that Schelling fully and explicitly overcomes the Hegelian position which ‘presumes to absorb history into metaphysics’ (Cf. *The Dark Ground of Spirit*, pp. 103-104). My suggestion is that in his philosophy of revelation, Schelling backed away from his more insightful critique of Hegel, implicit in the *Ages of the World*, that in order for a *rationalist* ontology to be complete it requires not only an account of the rational history of *spirit* but an account of nature’s temporal unfolding.

⁵⁸ *SW* I/8: 208; *Ages of the World* (1815), p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ages of the World* (1813), p. 144.

treatise,⁶⁰ and this gives the impression that Schelling has somehow turned away from the project of rationalism. But the style of this work must be read in light of Schelling's radical attempt to present the historical emergence of the rational forms of being itself. It is not, then, that the past is beyond the ken of reason; on the contrary, each of the extant fragments of the *Ages* begins with the assertion that 'the past is *known* [gewußt]'.⁶¹ But comprehending the past requires a distinctive form of *anamnesis* on account of the fact that the rational structure of nature and spirit *come to be in and as time*. Thus, no longer does the philosopher abstract from consciousness in order to retrace the *atemporal* rational development of nature, as in the early nature philosophy. Instead, the philosopher of nature attends to the *historical* dimension of nature's self-potentiating rational process by '[retracing] the long path of developments from the present back into the deepest night of the past.'⁶²

The point we've reached is relatively straightforward: if nature has a history, is that history of any consequence to philosophical thinking? Must philosophy merely explain *that* nature has a history, or ought philosophy not attend to that history in some detail? Should a philosophy of totality not concern itself with the actual evolution of the cosmos? My intuition is that, in the contemporary intellectual scene, those inclined to answer 'yes' to these questions would most likely do so in the name of contingency and a commitment to empiricism. According to this perspective, we cannot comprehend nature unless we attend to its contingent history, and we can only understand that contingent history through experience. But this is only one possible affirmative answer to the question about nature's history. The other answer is articulated implicitly throughout Schelling's early work and more explicitly in his *Ages of the World*: yes, nature has a philosophically significant history, but that does not mean that such a history is contingent. On the contrary, such a history is necessary, because nature is intrinsically rational and therefore raises itself to successively

⁶⁰ See Jason Wirth, 'Das Gewübte wird erzählt: Schelling on the relationship between art, mythology, and narrative' in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 26 *Schelling: Powers of the Idea* (2014), p. 118: 'With its novelistic narration of the history of the gods and the history of nature, the *Weltalter* experiment attempted to do what Parmenides and Lucretius had failed to do: to narrate an absolute *Lehrgedicht* of the genealogy of times as an absolute and dynamic *Urbild* of the universe.'

⁶¹ 'Das Vergangene wird gewußt, das Gegewärtige wird erkannt, das Zukünftige wird geahndet' (SW I/8: 199).

⁶² *Ages of the World* (1813), p. 114.

higher stages thanks to its immanent, rational powers. Moreover, this process of self-potentialiation is necessarily temporal because being itself is nothing less than time. From this perspective, nature's *Stufenfolge* is not so much expressed 'in time', but rather, time itself *just is* a graduated sequence of stages culminating in the emergence of freedom. Philosophers, then, do injustice to the being of nature when they ignore natural history in the name of *reason*, as does Hegel, or when they ignore nature's rationality in the name of *empiricism*. The strange yet compelling thought implicit in Schelling's logic of emergence is that nature's historical unfolding is absolutely essential to the rationality of nature. To take this idea seriously demands that we put into question all of our assumptions regarding reason, history, and contingency. Doing so, we may come to see our own philosophical activity as emergent from a dark yet intelligible past.

Appendix: Accounting for Schelling's Spiritualism

In the texts leading up to and including the *Freedom* essay, Schelling conceives 'spirit' as, primarily, a form of non-natural freedom for thought and action that is the essence of human existence. But this is by no means the only conception of 'spirit' at work in Schelling's philosophy, and I have said nothing in this thesis about the other appearances of this term in his thought. It is important, however, to recognise the polysemy of the German *Geist* not only in general but within the works associated with the idealist tradition. This appendix is meant to account for one particular use of the term which raises important questions for my interpretation of Schelling's logic of emergence.

Following the death of his wife Caroline, Schelling visited Stuttgart in January of 1810 where he delivered a series of private lectures that are in some respects closely related to the *Freedom* essay. And yet in these lectures Schelling uses the term *Geist* to describe not only the human freedom for goodness and evil, but additionally the individuated entity which lives on after the death of the body. In the following passage, Schelling distinguishes this individuated 'spirit' from the more generic conception of human spirit that I have focused on throughout my thesis:

That which is immortal in man is the demonic, [which is] not a negation of materiality but rather an essentiated [*essentificirte*] materiality. This demonic aspect thus constitutes a *most actual* essence, indeed it is far more actual than man in this life; it is what in the language of the common man (and here we may legitimately say *vox populi vox Dei*) is called—not *spirit*—but *a spirit*; such that when it is claimed that a spirit has appeared to someone we must understand such a spirit to be precisely this most authentic, essentiated being.¹

This is not the only instance where Schelling defines a certain kind of 'spirit' as a unique ontological presence that lingers after the death of an individual body. During this same period, Schelling was at work on a dialogue that was meant to present his views regarding nature's connection not to spiritual freedom but to the *spirit-world* (*Geisterwelt*).

¹ *SW I/7*: 476; *Stuttgart Seminars*, pp. 237-238.

It is therefore fitting that this work was first published in Schelling's *Sämmtliche Werke* under the title 'On Nature's Connection to the Spirit World: A Dialogue'.

The dialogue, since titled '*Clara*', is one of the strangest texts in Schelling's corpus, populated with references to and analyses of a variety of occult phenomena, from prophetic dreams to spectral haunting. To be sure, Schelling shows an interest in the occult throughout his philosophical development and is particularly impressed by the phenomena associated with animal magnetism (although the latter was much more of a scientifically valid theory at the time than we might prefer to think). Yet despite the fact that Schelling was perpetually interested in these topics, the *Clara* is unlike any other text in that Schelling's apparent spiritualism plays such a central role in his ontology.

By the term 'spiritualism' I refer to what Paul Redding has called 'spiritual realism', i.e. the ontological position which holds that spiritual *entities* exist.² The reason Schelling's apparent spiritualism poses a challenge to my interpretation of the philosopher is that it flies in the face of fundamental features of his logic of emergence. In particular, a conception of spirit as supernatural *entity* is at odds not only with the conception of spirit as a non-natural *activity*, but it raises important questions about just how extensively nature differentiates itself in the process of potentiation if the emergent 'spiritual life' is a spatially extended *thing*. In order to further clarify why Schelling's spiritualism poses a difficulty for my interpretation of the philosopher, and in order to briefly address this difficulty, it will be helpful to consider the *Clara* in some detail.

When reading the *Clara*, it is almost impossible to keep Kant's scathing critique of Emmanuel Swedenborg out of mind, particularly since we can assume Schelling was well aware of Kant's influential critique and yet became, in the years leading up to the *Clara*, profoundly interested in Swedenborg's mystical visions. As Friedemann Horn has persuasively argued, the whole of the *Clara* is deeply influenced by Swedenborgian mysticism.³ However, before considering this connection, it is important to first note the

² Paul Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 14.

³ Friedemann Horn, *Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism*, trans. by George F. Dole (Westchester: Swedenborg Foundation, 1997), pp. 35-43.

continuity between the *Clara* and other texts of the period and, especially, the *Freedom* essay. We should note, for example, that the *Clara* contains thoughtful descriptions of spirit as the human activity of freedom. As Schelling writes, ‘Freedom is the true and actual appearance of spirit’.⁴ Indeed, the majority of the second chapter of the dialogue constitutes a compelling argument—voiced by the character of the medical doctor—that philosophical thought must begin with *nature* in order to arrive at spiritual freedom, since we can only understand the latter if we first attend to the former. Such spiritual freedom, we are told, is free precisely in its *dependence* upon nature, as ‘everything that is high and divine can rise up out of the world as a flower rises up from the earth’.⁵

On the surface, all of this appears to be consistent with the metaphysics of the *Freedom* essay and Schelling’s logic of emergence more generally. But even here, where the *Clara* reads most like the *Freedom* essay, it becomes immediately clear that the *Clara* is a different text entirely. After describing spiritual freedom as emergent from nature, the doctor continues: ‘But freedom such as this *is not of this world*.’⁶ And it is this sentiment regarding the ‘other-worldliness’ of spirit that is echoed throughout the dialogue. Clara herself expresses the sentiment best when she describes her inability to comprehend ‘how so many people can faintheartedly doubt that consciousness doesn’t expire or dissipate after death.’ For, according to Clara, ‘death always seemed to be something that assembles rather than disperses.’⁷ The three interlocutors—the priest, the doctor, and Clara—all agree that there is an afterlife of consciousness, a life higher than this life on Earth, and it is this afterlife of consciousness that the three identify as *spiritual*. The central concern of the dialogue, then, becomes spirit as *afterlife*. And because the truly spiritual life occurs, from this perspective, after the death of man, man is not, properly speaking, spirit, but rather the *transition* from the realm of nature to the spirit-world.

⁴ *SW I/9*: 39; *Clara*, p. 28.

⁵ *SW I/9*: 37; *Clara*, p. 27.

⁶ *SW I/9*: 39 *Clara*, p. 28, my emphasis.

⁷ *SW I/9*: 67; *Clara*, p. 49.

Whilst acknowledging the outlandish nature of the *Clara*, Jason Wirth has suggested that we read the spirits in this text as some kind of present *absences*.⁸ On this reading, the spirits of the dead haunt the living precisely by *not* being there, by affecting the living or having power over the living *in their absence*. While I would certainly find Schelling's *Clara* far more consistent with his other works (and far more philosophically compelling in its own right) were this the case, it is simply undeniable that in the *Clara* (and in the *Stuttgart Lectures*), Schelling conceives individual spirits as being *actually present*, and not merely present in the mode of absence. Indeed, Schelling argues in the *Clara* that spirits are *more* present than man, who is ontologically deficient by comparison.

That being said, the precise ontological determination of this spiritual presence is far from straightforward in the dialogue. First and foremost, the individual which lives on after death does not immediately enter a purely spiritual realm, although this is indeed the individual's ultimate destination. As the priest remarks, it is only a select few who are transported at once to the heavenly sphere.⁹ I will return to the nature of this heavenly sphere (i.e. the 'spirit-world') below. First, it is worth dwelling on the fact that most 'spirits' remain, in some sense, bound to the material world. Thus, the interlocutors refer to spiritual presences *on Earth*, which, rather than achieving the purification of their bodily natures, remain caught within the realm of externality as *material* spirits. And while the interlocutors argue over whether these spirits of the dead truly haunt the living as in ghost stories, they all agree that such material spirits act on and in the natural world, trapped, as it were, between Heaven and Earth.

Near the end of the dialogue, Clara asks the following: 'Why, if our heart is indeed numb to everything external...why, even if we are firmly convinced that the other world far exceeds this present one in every way, is there nevertheless the sense that it's hard to part from this Earth...?'¹⁰ Why, in other words, do spirits linger? The answer to this question is fundamental to any interpretation of the conception of spirit at work in Schelling's *Clara*:

⁸ Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life*, p. 193.

⁹ *SW I/9*: 82-84; *Clara*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁰ *SW I/9*: 76; *Clara*, p. 76.

spirits remain on the Earth not because they have been insufficiently benevolent or pious in human life, but rather, because spirit is fundamentally melancholic. The heavy-heartedness of spiritual existence is such that spiritual being is intrinsically pulled towards the ground, *against* its ethereal disposition to rise to heaven. Taken together, the melancholic longing for nature and the process of ‘gradual spiritualisation’ (*stufenweise Vergeistigung*) define the being of spirit as a twofold longing:

On the one hand, we are drawn to the spirit realm insofar as we feel that true bliss can exist only in that greatest profundity of life; on the other hand, with its thousandfold magic, nature calls heart and senses alike back into the external life.¹¹

To *not* have a dual longing for one’s natural origin and a future world rid of exteriority is to be ‘like those delicate threads that float in the air in late summer [...] that are as incapable of touching heaven as they are of being pulled to the ground by their own weight.’¹² Such free-floating entities are the antithesis of spirit, for spirit is that being which simultaneously longs for its natural ground and a place rid of nature entirely.

But this very phrase—‘a “place” rid of nature’—raises further questions about the spirit world, questions which obsess Clara more than any other: where is the heavenly realm *located*; where is this purely *internal* and spiritual life? In the fifth chapter of the dialogue, Schelling becomes almost mad with this thought, renouncing, through the voice of the priest, his previously held Brunoian and Keplerian notions about the spatial organisation of the universe. All at once, the priest lets out a flood of intuitions regarding how the universe must be constituted by a true ‘above’ and a true ‘below’ as opposed to an infinite and ‘immeasurable abyss.’¹³ Indeed, the priest comes to the paradoxical conclusion that the universe is complete only if it is equal parts nature and spirit *in extension*, describing, in

¹¹ *Clara, oder Zusammenhang der Natur mit der Geisterwelt: ein Gespräch* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1862) pp. 175-176; *Clara*, p. 79. (The fragment quoted here and in note 16 below is not included in the *Sämtliche Werke*).

¹² *SW I/9*: 7; *Clara*, p. 5. This passage is taken from a different incomplete text which Schelling’s son, Karl Friedrich August Schelling, placed as the introduction to the dialogue. For his justification for this decision, see *SW I/9*: 3n; *Clara*, p. 3n.

¹³ *SW I/9*: 95-97; *Clara*, pp. 69-70.

Swedenborgian fashion, the places (*Stätten*) and homes (*Wohnungen*) of the heavenly realm.¹⁴ It is astonishing how close we are to Swedenborg in this passage, and in an entirely non-ironic manner. How has Schelling's system of nature and emergent freedom led to sincere reflection on the spatial configuration of the afterlife?

It is tempting to explain Schelling's thought here as an act of self-consolation regarding the grief he felt over his recently deceased wife. But I think something deeply philosophical is at work here, something which goes overlooked if we simply refer to the personal despair of the thinker. When Schelling turns his attention to the most supernatural of themes—the spirits of the afterlife—he still cannot fathom their utter divorce from nature, for nature is the origin of spiritual existence. Thus, he conceives spirit along Swedenborgian lines: spirit becomes a ghostly presence longing for the earth. And when this spirit becomes fully spiritualised and rises to Heaven, this too is conceived naturally, that is, as a *spatially extended* existence.

I suggest, therefore, that Schelling's spiritualism be read as consistent, in one respect, with his determination to conceive the *continuity* between nature and spirit. Indeed, this is why Schelling argues, in the *Clara*, that even the highest potency involves remnant forms of material and spatial being. As he has the doctor, the dialogue's representative *Naturphilosoph*, say, 'Locality [*Oertliche*] isn't as irrelevant to the higher as is generally supposed.'¹⁵ Thus, the spiritualism of this text—and this claim can be extended to the *Stuttgart Lectures*—is a consequence of the Schellingian idea that 'according to our first birth, we belong to [nature] and...we can never *wholly* dissociate ourselves from her'.¹⁶ From this perspective, it looks as though Schelling's spiritualism is, paradoxically, of a piece

¹⁴ *SW* I/9: 99; *Clara*, p. 71. See Kant on Swedenborg: '[Swedenborg] speaks of gardens, extensive objects, dwelling-places, galleries, and arcades of the spirits that he saw with his own eyes in the brightest light; and he assures us that he has on many occasions spoken with all his friends after their death, and he almost always found that those who had only recently died could scarcely be persuaded that they were dead, for they saw the same world around them.' *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, trans. by Gregory R. Johnson and Glenn Alexander Magee (Westchester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), pp. 53-54.

¹⁵ *SW* I/9: 105; *Clara*, p. 75.

¹⁶ *Clara, oder Zusammenhang der Natur mit der Geisterwelt*, p. 179; *Clara*, p. 80. My emphasis.

with what he says in the *General Deduction*, namely, that consciousness, despite being the highest form of reality, is not a 'pure spirit'.¹⁷

But doesn't this go against the very project of the logic of emergence which seeks the *continuity* between nature and spirit *in their difference*? Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Schelling and Hegel both defend the idea that nature *differentiates* itself as spirit, and in doing so, makes necessary a *non-natural* form of being. Indeed, the nature-spirit continuity sought by Schelling and Hegel begin *from nature*, but this does not mean that spirit is itself a spatially extended, material existence. On the contrary, the logic of identity as presented in both Schelling's *Freedom* essay and Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* requires that nature transform itself so radically as to necessitate an ontologically distinct spiritual existence. From this perspective, the spiritualist ontology of the *Clara* and *Stuttgart Lectures* appears to forget this crucial lesson of idealist emergentism. But why might this be the case?

If we reconsider Hegel's criticisms of Schelling's logic of potentiation, we may come to an answer. From a Hegelian perspective, so long as the philosopher of nature only ever conceives nature's development in terms of an *intensification of powers*, then the philosopher runs the risk of conceiving the various levels of nature's development as mere differences of *degree*. Indeed, for Hegel, in order to secure the *qualitative* difference between nature and spirit (as well as the qualitative determinacy at work throughout nature's various stages), one must come to see the development from nature to spirit as motivated by an immanent process of *negation*. Although counterintuitive, we can quite easily apply Hegel's critique of Schelling's Spinozism in the 1801 *Presentation* to Schelling's spiritualism in the *Clara*: in each case, Schelling's insistence upon the *continuity* between the various levels of reality lead him to diminish the *difference* between those levels. Schelling thus comes to conceive spirit as a spatially extended presence because he loses sight of the 'identity of emergence' that was at work in his early philosophy of nature and *Freedom* essay.

I do not think this indicates that Schellingian potentiation is a doomed way to think about the nature-spirit relation. Rather, I take it that Schelling's spiritualism attests to the

¹⁷ *SW* I/4: 77.

intellectual risk in the very attempt to explicate the ontological continuity between nature and spirit. For as soon as we begin to conceptualise the continuity between nature and spirit, there is always the possibility of neglecting the fact—so well argued by Schelling himself in the *Freedom* essay—that *genuine* identity is only possible through ontological difference. Indeed, it is only by losing sight of this fact that Schelling falls under the spell of Swedenborgian spiritualism.

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