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The Appearance and Disappearance of Intellectual Intuition in Schelling's Philosophy

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Schelling scholars face an uphill battle. His confinement to the smallest circles of 'continental' thought puts him at the margins of what today counts as philosophy. His eclipse by Fichte and Hegel and inheritance by better-read thinkers like Kierkegaard and Heidegger tend to reduce him to a historical footnote. And the sometimes obscure formulations he uses makes the otherwise difficult writings of fellow post-Kantians seem comparatively more accessible.

For those seeking to widen these circles, see through this eclipse and elucidate these formulations, a deeper internal challenge is to make sense of the appearance and disappearance of intellectual intuition in Schelling's work. The term's apotheosis is often attributed to the height of German idealism and especially to Schelling's identity philosophy, outside which he subjects the term to a radical critique. The identity philosophy aims to cognize the absolute ground of the system of knowledge and the system of nature, for which cognition Schelling enlists intellectual intuition. While the identity philosophy falls between a Fichtean debut and a late attack on Hegel, it is difficult to determine its exact parameter.¹ I propose that a necessary condition for doing so is to clarify the explanatory role of intellectual intuition—that is, the specific problem to which it is the intended solution—on which the identity philosophy depends. To this end, I will trace a nexus of problems that Schelling's use of intellectual intuition is meant to solve. Doing so will not only help to delineate the identity philosophy, but show it to be continuous with Schelling's earlier and later periods.

¹ Bowie notes a tendency to date the identity philosophy from 1801 to 1808, but suggests 1800 to 1804. Snow dates the period from 1800 to around 1802, Beiser from 1799 to 1804, Kosch from 1801 to 1804, Shaw from 1801 to 1806, Whistler from 1801 to 1805 and Breazeale from 1798 to 1804. See Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Routledge, 1993); Dale Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996); Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge: HUP, 2002); Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006); Devin Zane Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010); Daniel Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: OUP, 2013); and Daniel Breazeale, "Men at Work: Philosophical Construction in Fichte and Schelling" (forthcoming).

In the first section of this paper, I account for the nexus of the problems of grounding, freedom and meaning. These problems demand, respectively, a principle by which cognition forms a system rather than an aggregate, a principle by which a system of cognition is compatible with freedom rather than incompatible and a principle by which a system of freedom can show why there is meaning rather than none. In the second section, I reconstruct Schelling's argument in the identity philosophy for why intellectual intuition can resolve this nexus of problems and, in the third section, his arguments during other periods of his thought for why it cannot. I conclude in the fourth section by suggesting why the identity philosophy is continuous with these periods. Beyond fulfilling the interpretive task of making sense of intellectual intuition in Schelling's sprawling corpus, my aim is thus to contribute to a unified reading of the latter.

1.

Early and continuously, Schelling is impressed by three problems that form a nexus or interconnected whole, one in which no member can be solved in isolation from the others. I will give a brief sketch of each problem before extracting them from Schelling's texts. They are the problems of how cognition can form a grounded system—the problem of grounding—how a system of cognition is compatible with freedom—the problem of freedom—and how a system of freedom can account for why there is meaning at all—the problem of meaning. For each problem, a principle is sought that can furnish a particular sort of unity.

In the case of grounding, the threat is skeptical. Assuming that we can enumerate the transcendental conditions on which cognition is possible, it is not sufficient if this yields a set with no unifying ground. Without a principle to serve as such a ground, the completeness and necessity of such conditions are open to doubt insofar as a more comprehensive or distinct set is conceivable. At stake here is whether cognition forms an aggregate or a system.

In the case of freedom, the threat is nihilistic. Assuming that we can ground a system of cognition, it is unacceptable if that system precludes the possibility of human freedom. A system is needed whose elements are, not only complete and necessary, but consistent with freedom. Without a principle to unify freedom with such a system, the normativity of belief and action is threatened with incoherence and the meaning of experience thereby undermined. At stake here is whether a system of cognition is one of determinism or one of freedom.

In the case of meaning, the threat is existential. Assuming that we can establish the compatibility of systematicity and freedom, we invite the question of why this compatibility matters, that is, why there is meaning. It is beside the point to show that meaning is structured or constituted by a system of freedom, for why there is meaning so constituted in the first place seems arbitrary. A system of freedom requires a principle that could unify it with an account of the

existence of meaning as such. At stake here is whether a system of freedom is merely critical or self-critical.

From a post-Kantian perspective, neither problem can be solved without solving the other. Were we dogmatically to posit an infinite substrate grounding a system of cognition—a substrate the positing of which is incompatible with human freedom—we could not explain how we are normatively responsible for our belief and action. We would at best explain away our feeling of normative responsibility as illusory, the disingenuousness of which would place a gap between systematicity and freedom where there should be unity. Solving the problem of grounding thus raises the problem of freedom, a solution to which demands an account of our normative capacity. Solving the latter in turn raises the problem of meaning, for to refuse to ask why meaning constituted by a system of freedom should exist is to assume that such a system is immune to critique. Confronting this question accepts the task of accounting for meaning as such, even if that proves to be endlessly self-critical.

The problems of grounding, freedom and meaning accordingly form a nexus. Regressively speaking, we can say that determining the unity of a system of freedom and an account of meaning presupposes determining that cognition forms a system, and a system of freedom at that. Progressively speaking, we can say that systematicity cannot be endorsed critically without integrating freedom, which, in turn, cannot be fully self-critical without subjecting the system of freedom to the question of why there is meaning. We will see that for Schelling, in the identity philosophy, there is a single solution to this nexus of problems—intellectual intuition—and that his critique of the solution outside this period transforms the nexus of problems from a conceptual conundrum to the predicament that inscribes the philosophical standpoint.

2.

I will now extract the nexus of problems sketched above from several of Schelling's texts in order, in this section, to reconstruct his argument in the identity philosophy that intellectual intuition resolves this nexus and, in the third section, his argument beyond the identity philosophy that it does not. In demarcating Schelling's positive and negative assessments of intellectual intuition's prospects, my broader aim will be to contribute to the delineation of this phase of his thought.

The skeptical threat posed by the problem of grounding impresses itself on Schelling in the early essay "Of the I as Principle of Philosophy" (1795). There, he says that, in the absence of a "principle of all knowledge," knowledge and its conditions lack a unifying "ground."² Either knowledge "has no reality at all and must be an eternal round of propositions, each dissolving in its opposite, a chaos in which no element can crystallize—or else there must be an ultimate

² Schelling, SW I/1, 163.

point ... from which all firmness and all form of our knowledge springs.”³ Without a first principle, any order we discern among the conditions of knowledge falls into an “eternal round” or circle of conditions, an arbitrary condition that is “dissolv[able] in its opposite” or a regress in which no ground can “crystallize.” In other words, we face the three horns of the Agrippan trilemma, according to which knowledge ultimately rests on circular, hypothetical or infinitely regressive justification. Schelling accordingly asserts that everyone “must be interested in the question of the highest principle of all knowledge because his own system, even if it is the system of skepticism, can be true only through its principles.”⁴ The possibility of systematicity—the possibility that knowledge and its conditions do not form a mere aggregate—depends on an “*unconditionable*”⁵ principle that can provide the unity threatened by Agrippan skepticism. Under Fichte’s influence, Schelling calls this unconditioned condition ‘the I’ and argues that it is apprehensible only by intellectual intuition.

Schelling proceeds by elimination to the conclusion that only intellectual intuition can solve the problem of grounding. The solution cannot lie in a concept, which can only represent an object of experience, where objectivity always “falls within the sphere of the knowable” and so “presupposes something in regard to which it is an object, that is, a subject.”⁶ Concepts are not adequate to apprehending the unconditioned if they represent objects conditioned by the subject’s sphere of knowledge. The I is unconditioned precisely by grounding this sphere. If the I cannot be conceived, then, it must be intuited. However, Schelling says, “since the I is I only because it can never become an object, it cannot occur in an intuition of sense, but only in an intuition which grasps no object at all and is in no way a sensation, in short, in an *intellectual* intuition.”⁷ Intuition is inadequate if, like concepts, it represents objects, as it does in sensation. This is why an intuition is needed whose goal “is identical with itself.”⁸ As Schelling says, the unconditioned must “realize itself.”⁹ In order to apprehend the first principle of knowledge and solve the problem of grounding,

³ Schelling, SW I/1, 162.

⁴ Schelling, SW I/1, 153.

⁵ Schelling, SW I/1, 164.

⁶ Schelling, SW I/1, 164-5.

⁷ Schelling, SW I/1, 182.

⁸ Schelling, SW I/1, 183.

⁹ Schelling, SW I/1, 164. Schelling’s early view that the I as unconditioned condition constitutes itself agrees with Fichte’s claim in the *Aenesidemus* review (GA I, 16, 22) and eventual argument in the 1797/8 presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I, 515). Beiser (*German Idealism*, 473), and Dalia Nassar (“Spinoza in Schelling’s Early Conception of Intellectual Intuition,” in *Spinoza and German Idealism* [eds. E. Förster and Y.Y. Melamed, Cambridge: CUP, 2012], 136-155 at 142), miss this point, attributing to Fichte the common misreading that for him, the I is unqualifiedly regulative. For a more accurate reading, see Sebastian Gardner, “The Status of the *Wissenschaftslehre*: Transcendental and Ontological Grounds in Fichte,” in *International Yearbook of German Idealism* 5 (2007): 90-125, at 18.

an intuition is required that is identical with its goal. Such an intuition must be non-sensible or intellectual.¹⁰

It is crucial, on Schelling's view, that a solution to the problem of grounding is inseparable from a solution to the problem of freedom. Where intuition is identical with its goal, as it is in the apprehension of the ground of knowledge, it is the cause of what it intuits. As we might say, it is that for the sake of which it intuits. The self-determining structure of such an intuition is definitive of freedom. Hence, Schelling claims: "The entirety of our knowledge has no stability if it has nothing to stabilize it.... And that is nothing else than that which is real through freedom."¹¹ This is not the freedom merely of an individual, but of the "*absolute I*," which is "not thinkable except inasmuch as it posits itself by its own absolute power."¹² Intellectual intuition of the I is the apprehension of the "*absolute freedom*" that is "necessary as a condition" of the freedom of any individual.¹³ It is an individual's pre-conscious commitment to the reality of freedom as such—an attitude on which freedom's reality is a foregone conclusion.¹⁴

The alternative to a system of cognition grounded on absolute freedom, Schelling notes, is a system whose first principle is "a *thing in itself*" and in which "there is no longer any pure I, any freedom."¹⁵ From the standpoint of post-Kantian idealism, this Spinozistic attitude is unacceptable because it denies our capacity for normative responsibility, thereby divesting experience of its obvious meaning for us. To determine that cognition forms a system grounded on a first principle is therefore to determine that such a system is compatible with freedom: it is to grasp a system that is constitutive of meaning. Intellectual intuition, then, solves the problem of grounding just if it solves that of freedom.

Such a solution is insufficient, however, if it cannot show why there is meaning in the first place. Schelling is moved by this question throughout his career and as early as the "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" (1795/6). There as elsewhere, he parses the question as asking why there is something rather than nothing. We can grasp his paraphrase if we hear the question as asking, not why any particular object exists, but why there is

¹⁰ It would beg the question against Schelling to infer from its mediation by neither concepts nor sensation that intellectual intuition is mystical or ineffable (see Whistler, *Schelling's Theory*, 72), for his argument is precisely in favour of a kind of knowing that is immediately related to its goal, the self-determining structure of which he detects, following Fichte, at the very heart of human freedom.

¹¹ Schelling, SW I/1, 177.

¹² Schelling, SW I/1, 179.

¹³ Schelling, SW I/1, 181. It would be a category mistake to demand of our apprehension of this unconditioned condition that it conform to "concepts and language" (see Whistler, *Schelling's Theory*, 132), for, as Schelling says, concepts "are possible only in the sphere of the conditional" (Schelling SW I/1, 181). It would make an object of the condition of the possibility of objectivity.

¹⁴ Compare Fichte, GA IV/2, 220: "[The I] is to be understood as reason as such or in general, which is something quite different from personal I-hood"; and Fichte GA III, 57: "One would hope that these two quite distinct concepts ['I' and 'person'], which are contrasted here with sufficient clarity, will no longer be confused with one another."

¹⁵ Schelling, SW I/1, 173.

objectivity as such.¹⁶ Schelling's solution to the problems of grounding and freedom showed that objectivity falls within a normative system whose structure constitutes the meaning that we derive from experience. To ask 'why something,' then, is just to ask 'why meaning': the former is no abstract inquiry, for it arises from having shown that cognition forms a system of freedom, that is, from having solved the problem of freedom. Schelling accordingly commends Spinoza in the "Letters" for confronting the ensuing problem of why there is not nothing, though he will offer a very different interpretation of the solution:

When Lessing asked Jacobi what he would consider the spirit of Spinozism to be, Jacobi replied: it could be nothing else than the old *a nihilo nihil fit*, which Spinoza contemplated according to concepts more abstract and pure than those of the philosophizing cabbalists or of others before him. According to these purer concepts he found that the notion of anything emerging within the non-finite posits *something from nothing* regardless of any support which images and words seem to furnish. 'Consequently, he rejected every transition of the non-finite into the finite,' all transitory causes whatsoever, and for the emanating principle he substituted an immanent principle, an indwelling cause of the world, eternally immutable in itself, a cause which would be one and the same as all its effects. I don't believe that the spirit of Spinozism could be better circumscribed. But I believe that the very transition from the non-finite to the finite is the problem of *all* philosophy, not only of one particular system. I even believe that Spinoza's solution is the only possible solution, though the interpretation it must have in his system can belong to that system alone and another system will offer another interpretation for the solution.¹⁷

The "problem of *all* philosophy" is to explain the transition from the non-finite to the finite. Since the non-finite is unconditioned (*Unbedingt*) and hence no thing

¹⁶ Marcela Garcia, "Schelling's Late Negative Philosophy: Crisis to Critique of Pure Reason," in *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, 5 (2) (2011), misplaces the problem: "Although Kant stresses the fact that actuality is not a conceptual content but must be grasped through experience, he still maintains a totality of possibilities, similar to the one that constitutes the Ideal, as a necessary condition for any particular experience. In this way, in order to be intelligible, any individual actuality must be connected to the totality of possible experience. Schelling means to be more critical than Kant by striving to consider *individual* actuality independent from any possibilities of thought. Actuality as mere position is in itself opaque and therefore completely determined through the concepts that are posited. Rather, it should be possible, according to Schelling, to consider an *individual's* 'being of its own' independently of the predicates that it instantiates" (150, my emphasis). Like Hegel, Schelling follows the maxim that no individual is actual outside of its determination within and negation of a totality. His charge is that Hegel fails to ask the question 'whence this totality,' that is, 'whence predication itself.' The being of an individual is rather the concern of Jacobi and of Pierce after him (on the latter, see Robert Stern, "Peirce, Hegel and the Category of Firstness," in *International Yearbook on German Idealism*, 5 (2007)).

¹⁷ Schelling, SW I/1, 313-4.

(*Ding*), whereas the finite, precisely by being conditioned (*bedingt*), is something,¹⁸ this problem raises the question of why there is something rather than nothing, which is none other than the question of why there is meaning. Philosophy's highest problem therefore bears directly on our answer to the problems of grounding and freedom—hence their nexus—to which intellectual intuition must accordingly provide a solution. Indeed, whereas Schelling sounds this problem in the “Letters,” he does not offer an answer to it until his endorsement of intellectual intuition in the identity philosophy.

My claim is that the identity philosophy is distinguished by Schelling's temporary view that intellectual intuition solves the nexus of problems that includes the problem of meaning. In the Würzburg lectures, published as *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* (1804), he revisits philosophy's highest problem and declares:

The absolute light, the idea of God, strikes reason like a flash of lightning, so to speak, and its luminosity endures in reason as an eternal affirmation of knowledge. By virtue of this affirmation, which is the essence of our soul, we recognize the *eternal impossibility of nonbeing* that can never be known nor comprehended; and the ultimate question posed by the vertiginous intellect hovering at the abyss of infinity: ‘Why something rather than nothing?’, this question will be swept aside forever by the necessity of Being, that is, by the absolute affirmation of Being in knowledge. The absolute *position* of the idea of God is indeed nothing but the absolute negation of nothingness, and the same certainty of reason that endures the negation of nothingness and thus the nullity of nothingness also affirms the totality and the eternity of God.¹⁹

As Schelling explains prior to this passage, the “light” that strikes us is intellectual intuition of the ground of knowledge.²⁰ Once it dawns, the very idea of nothing—of that the transition from which generates the question of why there is something or why there is meaning—is “swept aside,” for then we apprehend the “eternity of God.” “God” is one of Schelling's terms for the first principle or ground of knowledge, which he argues is indubitable if anything is knowable at all. Its eternal being removes the thought of non-being and, with it, any sense to the dizzying question.²¹ I turn now to reconstruct his argument that the ground of knowledge is indubitable and how intellectual intuition figures in this argument.

The Würzburg lectures begin with the claim that philosophy's first task is to prove that all knowledge presupposes as its ground “*that the knower and that*

¹⁸ See Schelling, SW I/1, 171. Compare Fichte, GA: “The absolute I of the first principle is not *something* (it has, and can have, no predicate)” (I, 109).

¹⁹ Schelling, SW I/6, 155.

²⁰ Schelling, SW I/6, 154.

²¹ This suggests that the problem of meaning poses a pseudo-question. It is anything but: silencing it requires no less than cognition of God, a “luminosity” whose achievement is only significant given the darkness it poses.

which is known are the same,”²² for which Schelling gives a four-step proof. First, assume the opposite of what it to be proved, namely, that knowledge presupposes that the knowing subject and the known object are really distinct. This is impossible since they are unintelligible independent of each other. Subject and object are mutually entailed—the former by the latter as knower, the latter by the former as known—such that neither affords any vantage on the ground of knowledge.²³ By impeding our apprehension of this ground, the assumption that that knower and known are really distinct is a threat to knowledge itself. As Schelling says: “If the knower and that which is known were to differ, knowledge would be inconceivable, and indeed impossible.”²⁴ Second, knower and known must be in some sense or “*generally* the same in all knowledge,”²⁵ lest there be a point in which they differ, at which point knowledge would be impossible. Third, it follows that they are the same when their identity in particular is known, in which case, this identity—the known—knows itself.²⁶ Schelling calls this self-knowing identity “*reason*” and concludes that it is the ground or “principle” of all knowledge.²⁷ If reason knows anything, it knows this identity, which is just to say that it knows this identity as itself.

The conclusion to this argument typifies the program of the identity philosophy.²⁸ Indeed, to grasp the identity that grounds knowledge is what Schelling calls “absolute knowledge.” Here, “it is not the *subject* as subject that knows, but reason.”²⁹ Whereas subjective knowledge is mediated by concepts and sensible intuitions, the identity in question is known by itself, that is, immediately. Such knowledge is “an intuition of reason or, as it is called

²² Schelling, SW I/6, 137. This agrees with Schelling’s position in “Of the I” that the proper model for conceiving the ground of knowledge is self-reflexive, as in an intuition that is identical with its goal.

²³ Schelling, SW I/6, 138. Schelling elaborates: “If knowledge is effected by that which is known, the latter will not be known as it is in itself but strictly *by virtue of its effect* [the opposite effect] proves no less incomprehensible. For either the [object] would be *absolutely* determined by the subject and, independent of the latter, would be nothing at all [or] it would be something *unknown*, [similar to] Kant’s *thing in itself*, something ineffable that, in turn, is but a mere thought” (SW I/6:139). Compare: “[S]ince the subject is thinkable only in regard to an object, and the object only in regard to a subject, neither of them can contain the unconditional because both are conditioned reciprocally, both are equally unserviceable” (SW I/1, 165).

²⁴ Schelling, SW I/6, 140.

²⁵ Schelling, SW I/6, 141, italics Schelling’s.

²⁶ See Schelling, SW I/6, 141: “This One, then, recurs as the One that knows and is known in general in each particular instance of knowledge, and as this One (which knows in general, etc.) it is self-identical.”

²⁷ Schelling, SW I/6, 141-2.

²⁸ According to Bowie, the Würzburg lectures are “the culmination of the identity philosophy” (Bowie, *Schelling*, 60).

²⁹ Schelling, SW I/6, 147. Compare Bowie’s account of “Of the I” in *Schelling*: “In *Of the I* Schelling extends the conception of intellectual intuition in such a way that it cannot be ‘present’ in individual consciousness, and actually requires the surrender of that consciousness if it is to play the grounding role it must for this conception of the absolute I to work. By trying to hang on to the identity of my individual consciousness, which is constituted by its experiences, I turn it into an object for itself and thus lose what is most fundamental about it, its freedom from being determined as a knowable identity, as an object” (Bowie, *Schelling*, 25).

otherwise, an *intellectual intuition*.³⁰ In accord with the self-determining structure isolated in “Of the I,” Schelling intends “intuition of reason” in a self-reflexive sense: in knowing the identity in question, reason knows itself.³¹ The subject *qua* subject is accordingly incidental.³² As Schelling says, “If someone should demand that we communicate the intellectual intuition to him, this would be the same as to demand that reason be communicated to him.”³³ If there is knowledge at all, there is no question of its ground because it is always already grounded in reason’s self-determination. This anti-skeptical strategy applies no less to the question Schelling says is swept aside by the light of intellectual intuition: if there is something at all, there is no question of why because it is always already grounded in God’s eternal being. And since the question “why something” paraphrases the question “why meaning,” the problem of meaning dissolves.

It is no accident that the identity philosophy dissolves the problem of meaning. It is the only period in which Schelling unequivocally espouses intellectual intuition, his solution to the two problems with which this third forms a nexus. The threat that the system that constitutes meaning cannot explain why there is meaning so constituted posits a gap between the *form* that absolute knowledge takes and the *essence* that it would know if this explanation were achieved. The identity philosophy precludes such a gap at its very ground. Hence, just prior to the Würzburg lectures in *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy* (1802), Schelling claims that intellectual intuition demonstrates the identity of the “form” and “essence” of absolute knowledge and, in so doing, “establishes *absolute idealism*.”³⁴ Moreover, reflecting the comparison in “Of the I” between failing to grasp intellectual intuition and failing to grasp reason, the *Presentations* compare the former with failing to grasp space.³⁵ In both cases, one

³⁰ Schelling, SW I/6, 153.

³¹ Thus, Schelling says that intellectual intuition “is necessarily an *absolutely free* intuition” (SW I/6, 154). While this does not support what Moltke Gram calls the “continuity thesis”—the false view that Kant’s idea of intellectual intuition is monolithic and uncritically adopted by Fichte and Schelling (Molke Gram, “Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42, 2 [1981]: 287-304)—Schelling’s idea of a knowing that is its own object surely echoes Kant’s third doctrine of intellectual intuition as the identity of an act of knowing and its object, on the one hand, and, on the other, does not count as an object’s creation by a knowing “subject,” as Gram suggests (Gram, “Intellectual Intuition,” 289). Estes argues that Kant’s doctrine is in fact fivefold and that Fichte’s own incorporates two of the doctrines outlined on Gram’s account. Yolanda Estes, “Intellectual Intuition: Reconsidering Continuity in Kant, Fichte and Schelling,” in *Fichte, German Idealism and Early Romanticism*, ed. D. Breazeale and T. Rockmore (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 165-78, at 170.

³² See Schelling, SW I/6: 143: “It is not *me* who recognizes this identity, but it recognizes itself, and I am merely its organ.”

³³ Schelling, SW I/6, 154.

³⁴ Schelling, SW I/4, 404. Schelling echoes the Würzburg lectures in Aphorism 159 the following year, claiming that the only reply to the question of why there is something rather than nothing is “the All or God. The All is that for which it is strictly impossible not to be, just as it is strictly impossible for the Nothing to be” (SW I/7, 174).

³⁵ Schelling, SW I/4, 369. Thus, contra Whistler and Tilliette, the *Presentations* do not mark a sharp break from the conception of intellectual intuition in “Of the I.” See Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory*,

lacks a fundamental orientation without which no particular course of action can be undertaken, an orientation Schelling there calls “*absolute freedom*.”³⁶ It is by dissolving the problem of meaning via intellectual intuition, then, that the identity philosophy secures the solutions to the problems of grounding and freedom.

We will now see that, when Schelling subjects intellectual intuition to critique before and after the identity philosophy, the problem of meaning emerges, raising the existential worry that any solution to the problems of grounding and freedom is arbitrary.

3.

Just as it is no accident that when Schelling espouses the doctrine of intellectual intuition he dissolves the problem of meaning, so, too, it is no accident that when he critiques the doctrine’s capacity to cognize anything *real* the problem resurfaces. Indeed, given the nexus that this problem forms with the problems of grounding and freedom, its renewal is entailed by the threat that intellectual intuition—the purported ground of a system of freedom—is *merely ideal*. I turn, now, to the critique that renews it.

Schelling’s critique of intellectual intuition in fact predates the identity philosophy. In “Anti-critique,” a response to Erhard’s negative review of “Of the I,” he argues that privileging any principle as solely capable of cognizing the absolute ground, as Fichte does in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, is “ill-fated”³⁷ since it restricts human freedom’s philosophical expression to one system. It is, in effect, to solve the problem of grounding by entrenching the problem of freedom.³⁸ That same year in the “Letters,” Schelling argues that intellectual intuition fails even to solve the problem of grounding because it purports to cognize a state we could never inhabit insofar as it effaces the difference between subject and object, a state he explicitly likens to death.³⁹ His critique of

133, and Xavier Tilliette, *L’absolu et la philosophie: Essais sur Schelling* (Paris: PUF, 1987), 117. The *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) is more difficult to assess. It elaborates the account of intellectual intuition’s self-determining structure in “Of the I”: “All philosophy would be unintelligible without intellectual intuition, since all its concepts are simply different delimitations of a *producing having itself as object*, that is, of intellectual intuition” (Schelling, SW I/3, 370). But it falls short of the impersonal account of absolute knowledge in the Würzburg lectures, arguing that while intellectual intuition cannot itself be objective on pain of being conditioned, it must “become objective” through art. See Schelling, SW I/3, 624. On this, see Snow, *Schelling*, 137-8; Beiser, *German Idealism*, 584-5; and Shaw, *Freedom and Nature*, 67-8.

³⁶ Schelling, SW I/4, 154.

³⁷ Schelling, SW I/1, 243.

³⁸ For an analysis of Schelling’s argument in the “Anti-critique” and its expansion in the “Letters”, see G. Anthony Bruno, “Freedom and Pluralism in Schelling’s Critique of Fichte’s Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*,” in *Idealistic Studies*, 43 (2014): 71-86.

³⁹ Schelling, SW I/1, 325. He continues: “Where sensuous intuition ceases, where everything objective vanishes, there is nothing but infinite expansion without a return into self. Should I maintain intellectual intuition I would cease to live: I would go ‘from time into eternity.’” For an account of the role of death in Schelling’s critique of Fichte’s Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, see G. Anthony Bruno, “‘As From a State of Death’: Schelling’s Idealism as Mortalism,” in *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* (forthcoming).

intellectual intuition after the identity philosophy coincides with his renewal of the question of why there is something, that is, why there is meaning. We will see that this is no mere coincidence and that intellectual intuition's failure, its philosophical desirability notwithstanding, finds philosophy living on the point of a nexus of problems.

In *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), the same year as the Würzburg lectures, Schelling signals his departure from the identity philosophy. Diverging from his view that intellectual intuition is a real cognition of the absolute, he claims that it is “not *real* at all,” but “only *ideal*,” never “*egressing from its ideality*.”⁴⁰ This is no small claim. In the “Letters,” Schelling asserts that “the very point from which the controversy of philosophy itself proceeded ... is nothing but the *egress from the absolute ... toward an opposite*.”⁴¹ This is to say, as he does in that text, that the problem of “*all philosophy*” is to explain the “transition from the non-finite to the finite.” We saw that such a problem expresses the question of why there is something or why there is meaning, which goes unanswered if our access to the absolute never egresses from mere “*ideality*.” It is no wonder, then, that, after casting intellectual intuition in just this way in *Philosophy and Religion*, Schelling says, “There is no continuous transition from the Absolute to the actual; the origin of the phenomenal world is conceivable only as a complete falling-away from absoluteness by means of a leap.... There is no positive effect coming out of the Absolute that creates a conduit or bridge between the infinite and the finite.”⁴² The question “why meaning” is left unanswered if, between the non-finite or absolute and the finite or phenomenal, we can posit no transition, but only a “leap.” But this should come as no surprise, for this question expresses the problem of meaning—a problem interconnected with the problem of grounding, which is insoluble if intellectual intuition cognizes nothing “*real*.”⁴³ Once the laudable (if not preferred) achievement of Spinoza, the transition from non-finite to finite is now rejected, along with the cognitive prospects of intellectual intuition.

The problem of meaning resurfaces in the third draft of the *Ages of the World* (1815)⁴⁴ and in the 1832/3 Munich lectures, published as *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie*, where Schelling asks, “Why is there meaning at all, why is

⁴⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* (trans. K. Ottmann, Putnam, Conn.: Spring Publications, 2010), 18-9, italics Schelling's.

⁴¹ Schelling, SW I/1, 294-5.

⁴² Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion*, 26. Prior to this passage, he says: “Countless attempts have been made to no avail to construct a continuity from the supreme principle of the intellectual world to the finite world” (Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion*, 24).

⁴³ While the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) does not mention intellectual intuition, it explicitly targets Fichte by reviving the criticism in the “Anti-critique” of those who would restrict philosophy to the cognition of one absolute ground or “root” (Schelling, SW I/7, 360).

⁴⁴ See F.W.J. Schelling, *Ages of the World (third draft)* (trans. J.M. Wirth, Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 255-6: “How the pure Godhead, in itself neither having being nor not having being, can have being is the question of all the ages. The other question, how the Godhead, not manifest in itself and engulfed in itself, can become manifest and external, is fundamentally only another expression of the same question.”

there not meaninglessness instead of meaning? ... The entire world, so to speak, lies caught in reason, but the question is: How did it come into this net?"⁴⁵ Here, the problem of meaning directly confronts any solution to the problem of freedom, for that there is a meaningful world constituted by a system of freedom—structured within the “net” of reason—raises the question of why such world is so constituted at all. Unlike the Würzburg lectures, the 1832/3 Munich lectures do not sweep aside the question. And in the 1833/4 Munich lectures, published as *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling follows the question’s revival with a sustained critique of intellectual intuition:

One does not even yet have [the existence of the universal subject-object in intellectual intuition] as something which is really thought, i.e., as something which has been logically realized; it is rather from the very beginning merely what is *wanted*; ‘the pistol from which it is fired’ is the mere wanting of that which is, which, though in contradiction with not being able to gain possession of that which is, with not being able to bring it to a halt, is immediately carried away into the progressing and pulling movement, in which being behaves until the end as that which is never realized, and must first be realized.⁴⁶

Faced with the problem of grounding, as captured by the Agrippan trilemma, we seek to grasp the absolute ground of cognition. But this ideal’s representation by intellectual intuition is merely logical: it is insufficient for grasping “*that which is*.”⁴⁷ Existence cannot be “really” thought by logic.⁴⁸ Intellectual intuition is therefore a “mere wanting”—a wish.⁴⁹ This argument is consistent, not only with Schelling’s critique of intellectual intuition in *Philosophy and Religion*, but with his view prior to the identity philosophy that intellectual intuition is “a mere *postulate*”⁵⁰ with “only a subjective value.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, *Grundlegung der positive Philosophie: Münchener Vorlesung* (ed. H. Furmans, Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1962), 222.

⁴⁶ F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (trans. A. Bowie, Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 151.

⁴⁷ See Schelling, *History*, 151.

⁴⁸ For an account of Maimon’s charge of empty formalism and its influence on the conception of real thought at the heart of Schelling’s positive philosophy, see G. Anthony Bruno, “Epistemic Reciprocity in Schelling’s Late Return to Kant,” in *Rethinking Kant*, vol. 4 (forthcoming).

⁴⁹ Compare Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (trans. W. Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1989), Part I, § 5: “[Philosophers] act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic (in contrast to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest than the philosophers and also sillier—they talk about ‘inspiration’—): while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an ‘inspiration’ or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract—and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact. They are all advocates who do not want to be seen as such; for the most part, in fact, they are sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as ‘truths.’”

⁵⁰ See Schelling, SW I/1, 243.

⁵¹ See Schelling, SW I/1, 313.

This is clearly at odds with Schelling's former project, which he admits "concerned itself with the pure *what* of things, without saying anything about real existence" and so "was not brought to a conclusion." He even offers to clarify his position in the identity philosophy, for which he says the absolute "is not something *of which* I have a concept, but is itself only the concept of all being as something which is to come."⁵² While this may too neatly align that project with the periods that flank it, its major consequence is to destabilize any purported solution to the problems of grounding and meaning: if, on the one hand, intellectual intuition merely conceives the absolute, it remains an open question whether cognition really forms a grounded system; if, on the other hand, intellectual intuition cannot explain the transition from the absolute to its phenomenal reality, it remains an open question why there is something and hence why there is meaning. As I have suggested, it is no accident that both questions remain open together.⁵³

It would be wrong to infer that Schelling abandons solving the threefold nexus of problems. He asserts in the 1833/4 Munich lectures that its solution—intellectual intuition—retains philosophical value: "In rejecting intellectual intuition in the sense in which *Hegel* wants to attribute it to me, it does not follow that it did not have another sense for me, and that I do now still hold it in this sense."⁵⁴ We can discern from the forgoing the sense that Schelling intends for intellectual intuition. It aims at the realization of "being," namely, the being of the absolute in virtue of which cognition forms a system compatible with freedom and capable of explaining the existence of meaning. Such is a being that "is to come"—not as the result of accidental thinking, but as the final cause of thought itself. Although it never grasps being, intellectual intuition signals our longing for philosophy's highest ideal: it symbolizes a striving. It is evidence, then, that the philosophical vocation is inscribed by a threefold problematic.

4.

I have aimed to clarify the explanatory role of intellectual intuition in order to shed light on its appearance and disappearance in Schelling's philosophy. I have

⁵² Schelling, *History*, 151n, 152. This dodges G.W.F. Hegel's famous bullet, intended for the identity philosophy: "This coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge* ... least of all will it be like the rapturous enthusiasm which, like a shot from a pistol, begins straight away with absolute knowledge." G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: OUP), § 27.

⁵³ Indeed, their being open is essential to Schelling's philosophy of revelation. See the discussion of the relation between the problem of grasping the absolute or '*prius*' and the problem of meaning in the 1841/2 Berlin lectures, published as *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*: "Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing? ... *What* exists, or more precisely, what will exist (for the being derived from the *prius* relates to the *prius* as a being yet to come; from the standpoint of the *prius*, therefore, I can ask what will be, what will exist, if anything at all exists) is the task of the science of reason, which allows itself to be realized *a priori*. But *that* it exists does not follow from this, for there could very well be nothing at all that exists. That something exists at all, and, particularly, that this determinate thing exists in the world, can never be realized *a priori* and claimed by reason without experience." Schelling, SW II/3, 7, 58-9.

⁵⁴ Schelling, *History*, 152.

been less intent on sharply delineating the identity philosophy that rests on it, though my hope is that the forgoing clarification is useful in this connection. I conclude now by suggesting how the identity philosophy, despite being the only period in which Schelling espouses intellectual intuition to solve the problems of grounding, freedom and meaning, is continuous with the rest of his work.

Schelling remains committed throughout his career to avoiding skepticism, nihilism and the existential threat that meaning is arbitrary. Nearly every text that he writes thematizes some combination of these concerns. Intellectual intuition does not abandon this three-part task. It is the identity philosophy's attempt to grasp the absolute ground in virtue of which cognition forms a system that is critical, insofar as it is compatible with freedom, and self-critical, insofar as it strives to account for the existence of meaning. Its critique is not the diagnosis of a misadventure, but a demotion of what illegitimately purports to satisfy philosophy's deepest desire. Indeed, intellectual intuition comes to represent an impossible satisfaction—to recover that which is lost by seeking it,⁵⁵ to name that which resists naming.⁵⁶ This is why intellectual intuition's ebb and flow unifies Schelling's work into a singular project, rather than fragmenting it into discontinuous projects: his relationship with it is fraught only because of his sustained obsession with the nexus of problems that it would solve, were we capable of it. The identity philosophy is accordingly not so much out of step with the periods that flank it as a stage in a process of coming to terms with the insuperable limitations on the philosophical vocation.

⁵⁵ See Schelling, *History*, 110: "Philosophy is, as such, nothing but an anamnesis, a remembrance for the I of what it has done and suffered in its general (its pre-individual) being."

⁵⁶ Compare Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (trans. J. Stambaugh, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1985), 127: "Longing is the nameless, but this always seeks precisely the word. The word is the elevation into what is illuminated, but thus related precisely to the darkness of longing."