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The Facticity of Time

Conceiving Schelling's Idealism of Ages

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In the 1830s, Schelling begins to attack Hegel's idea that reason can account for its own possibility through a science of logic. It is not an attack on Hegel's project of constructing a logical system, but rather on the pretense of doing so with total justification and thus without presuppositions, as if there were no need to explain why there is such a logical system or, indeed, why there is anything rational or meaningful at all.¹ The questions of why there is reason or meaning are, for Schelling, permutations of the question 'why is there something rather than nothing?'. Scholars accordingly cite this question as emblematic of Schelling's Hegel-critique and as a source of his claim against Hegel that reason is not self-justifying, but bounded by something other than itself.² But what sort of claim is this? If it is not simply an appeal to intuition or faith, for what sort of argument could it be the conclusion?

I propose that the question 'why something' motivates Schelling's claim against Hegel and that this claim is the conclusion to a transcendental argument that we can reconstruct from the *Ages of the World*, written two decades prior to his explicit attack on Hegel. Specifically, it is a transcendental argument to the conclusion that, suitably construed, the past and the future are conditions of the possibility of reason. As I reconstruct it, this argument represents the past as the free decision to construct a logical system and the future as the purpose that guides this construction.³ Insofar as reason understands itself through a system, Schelling's claim against Hegel that

¹ For discussions of Schelling's Hegel-critique, see Bowie 1993: 127–30, Bowie 2014, Matthews 2007: 57–60, McGrath 2012: ch. 1, and Rush 2014.

² See Snow 1996: 6, Franks 2005: 380–3, Matthews 2007: 67, Stern 2007: 13–14, Kosch 2010: 107–8 and Tritten 2012: 26.

³ Although the *Ages* were intended to cover the topics of past, present, and future, its extant drafts officially concern the past. Nevertheless, they provide a brief analysis of the future in its function as transcendental condition.

reason is bounded by something other is thus the result of a discovery of reason's own inescapable presuppositions.

Three features of my proposal bear noting. First, it may appear that transcendental arguments, by answering how-questions like 'how is experience possible', are ill-suited to answer why-questions like 'why something'. However, how-questions and why-questions share an assumption about actuality—that there is experience, that there is anything at all—and seek to grasp its possibility. In this respect, they contrast with whether-questions like 'is there an external world' or 'are there other minds', which assume something's possibility and seek to know if it is actual. Thus, how- and why-questions similarly demand an account of the possibility of the actuality that they assume. For Kant, transcendental arguments account for the possibility of human experience by identifying its forms and ends. Whereas space, time, and the categories of the understanding compose the forms that ground experience, the ideas of reason—particularly the idea of systematic knowledge—represent the end that guides experience. Following Kant, Schelling answers the question 'why something' with an eye toward reason's presupposed ground and end, construed transcendentially as its past and future, respectively.

Second, my proposal indicates that, like Kant, Schelling takes a long path to idealism, one whose starting point is the peculiar constitution of human experience. To be sure, whereas Kant's idealism seeks to establish the necessary conditions of experience and thereby secure reason's metaphysical claims, Schelling, like the other German idealists, at least initially aims to determine the system of such conditions and thereby provide absolute premises for Kant's conclusions. However, unlike the other German idealists, Schelling's path to idealism often begins with features of experience that are logically contingent, in that their denial respects the principle of non-contradiction, yet experientially necessary, in that experience would be impossible without them. Such features are peculiar facts about our sort of experience that cannot be derived from an absolute first principle. As I will suggest, Schelling's idealism originates chiefly with an argument for the brute factness or facticity of time.⁴ It is in order to avoid facticity that Hegel takes a shorter path to

⁴ It is crucial to distinguish the radical contingency of facticity from the empirical contingency of factuality. While it is empirically contingent that a body is blue, this fact obeys natural laws in virtue of which, given bodies of certain kinds in certain conditions, blueness necessarily follows. However, that nature is intelligible or meaningful at all is made possible by conditions that, while arbitrary vis-à-vis general logic, are unavoidable from the standpoint of human experience, as demonstrable by less abstract logics. Cf. Heidegger 1996: "*Facticity is not the factuality of the factum brutum of something objectively present, but is a characteristic of the being of Dasein taken on in existence, although initially thrust aside. The that of facticity is never to be found by looking*" (135).

idealism, one that begins with an analysis of thinking as such, free of brutally human peculiarities. Reason is thereby able to construct a logical system without presuppositions and thus without any sort of past or future to condition it. On this path, reason can be shown to be, at least in principle, fully transparent or present to itself. Against what I call Hegel's idealism of presence, I will contrast Schelling's idealism of ages in order to distinguish the latter's lengthier argumentative strategy, with its transcendental conceptions of past and future.

Third, my proposal shows that the question 'why something,' given its constancy in Schelling's corpus, not only motivates his Hegel-critique, but elicits a novel conception—viz., the facticity of time—that serves as one of his unifying philosophical commitments.

In section 1, I trace Schelling's sensitivity to the question 'why something' from the early *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* to the late Berlin lectures of 1841/42. In section 2, I locate his response to the question in a transcendental argument that I reconstruct from the second and third drafts of the *Ages*. In section 3, I show how Hegel's claim to a presupposition-less logic raises the question that inspires Schelling's argument, thereby isolating the core of his Hegel-critique. Finally, in section 4, I consider two Hegelian objections to Schelling's argument.

1. Why Something?

Karl Ameriks has shown how Reinhold's argument for the unknowability of the thing in itself sets a precedent for the German idealists' project of systematizing Kant's idealism.⁵ Reinhold pioneers a so-called short argument to idealism by starting from the abstract concept of "representation in general", from which it trivially follows that the thing in itself, which he defines as the unrepresentable, must be unknowable. He thus offers "a shorter route" to Kant's conclusion.⁶ It is shorter because it circumvents Kant's premise that space and time—forms of intuition to which appearances must conform—are brute facts of human sensibility.⁷ This inspires Fichte and Hegel to eliminate reason's presupposition of features of our sensibility by deriving them from an analysis of thinking in general.⁸ On this path, space and time are not factual, but are rather capable of a derivation immanent to thought. But for a brief

⁵ See Ameriks 2000: 125–35.

⁶ See Reinhold 2011: 114, 119.

⁷ See Kant A42/B59; cf. B145–6.

⁸ See Fichte 1994: 73; Hegel 1977: 58–9, 61.

period,⁹ Schelling diverges from Fichte and Hegel by taking a longer path to idealism, one that begins with a transcendental argument for the facticity of time, i.e., with the claim that reason presupposes past and future as its conditions of possibility. What inspires Schelling's departure?

The answer, I contend, is that acknowledging the facticity of time is Schelling's response to a question to which he returns his entire life and in various permutations, viz., why there is something rather than nothing. This is not the question of why some finite thing exists, but rather why there is finite existence at all. Given that, on a broadly idealist picture, finite existence is nothing apart from its possible cognitive significance for our standpoint, it is equally the question of why there is anything meaningful. Moreover, insofar as meaning for us must have an intelligible or rational form, it is as much the question of why there is reason.

Schelling explores all of these permutations of his driving question.¹⁰ The first occurs in the *Letters*, where he claims that the "transition from the non-finite to the finite is the problem of *all* philosophy". He describes this transition—"the notion of anything emerging within the non-finite"—as positing "*something from nothing*" (SW I/1: 313–14). We can see why this would be. The non-finite is tantamount to nothing insofar as it is unconditioned: a thing is defined by being conditioned, whereas the unconditioned has no limiting condition and so cannot be rendered a determinate thing, nor therefore could it be so differentiated as to contain a determinate condition for anything finite. It follows that the non-finite can no more give rise to anything finite than something can arise from nothing. This poses philosophy's highest problem, for an unconditioned condition is nevertheless needed to ground the finite existence of which we have experience, yet by itself is incapable of explaining the emergence of finite existence. The *Letters* paraphrase the problem thusly: "the very point from which the controversy of philosophy itself proceeded [...] is nothing but the *egress from the absolute* [...] *toward an opposite*", i.e., from the non-finite to finite objects of experience (SW I/1: 294).

⁹ This is the period of the philosophy of identity, in which Schelling champions intellectual intuition: "The unity of [space and time...] is just the principle of absolute science; it is the object of pure intellectual intuition and also intellectual intuition itself, since here intuition and object are identical" (SW I/4: 369n6). Not coincidentally, this is the only period in which Schelling dismisses the question 'why something'. For an account of the relation between intellectual intuition and this question throughout his career, see Bruno 2013.

¹⁰ As far as I know, Schelling only twice dismisses the question: in *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* (SW I/6: 155) and *Aphorisms as an Introduction to Naturphilosophie* (SW I/7: 174). The proximity of these texts to each other is no coincidence: they occur at the height of Schelling's confidence in reason's ability to cognize the absolute, whose necessary existence allegedly renders nothingness inconceivable.

Philosophy's highest problem is explaining the emergence or "egress" of finitude from its "absolute" opposite, which is no-thing. Repeating the question later in the *Letters*, Schelling asks: "why is there a realm of experience at all?" (SW I/1: 310).

In *Philosophy and Religion*, Schelling declares that this problem is not solvable by causal reasoning: "there is no continuous transition from the Absolute to the actual [...] There is no positive effect coming out of the Absolute that creates a conduit or bridge between the infinite and the finite" (SW I/6: 38). A transition from the infinite to the finite would require an intervening change—some "positive effect" of the former to occasion the latter's emergence. This would entail a limitation within the absolute, viz., between itself and some determinate and thus finite change. But this would assume the very transition to be explained.

In the third draft of the *Ages*, Schelling puts the question 'why something' in terms of existence and manifestation: "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 thing" (SW I/8: 255–6). The question of the ages is how that which lacks determinate being—and thus lacks determinate non-being relative to some other determinate being—can give rise to that which has determinate being. The former is tantamount to nothing, for it is indeterminable: it is not merely obscured, but is itself non-manifest. The problem is why it should manifest as determinate being at all.

Schelling restates his question with existential urgency in his Berlin lectures:

everything is vain, for vanity is everything that lacks a true purpose. Thus, far from man and his endeavors making the world comprehensible, it is man himself that is the most incomprehensible and who inexorably drives me [...] to the final desperate question: Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?— That there should be a science that responds to these questions, which would snatch us from this despair, is unquestionably a compelling, indeed a necessary, longing—a longing not of this or that individual person but of human nature itself. What other science should it be that is capable of this if not philosophy? For all other sciences known by man—invented or developed by him—each has its specific task and none responds to this final and most universal question. So there will be no doubt about this: philosophy is in itself and at all times the most longed for of sciences, since through it all other knowledge receives both its first highest

reference and its final support. If I cannot answer this final question, then for me everything else sinks into the abyss of a bottomless void

(SW II/3: 7–8).

At least by the 1840s, Schelling holds that the question ‘why something’ is not merely philosophy’s highest problem, but the “most universal question” of human nature, for an answer to it fulfills no less than the “true purpose” of our “endeavours” at “making the world comprehensible”. This is why philosophy is “the most longed for” science: in raising the “final desperate question” of why there is anything at all, it confronts us with the matter of who we are.

A decade prior, in the 1832/33 Munich lectures, Schelling asks this question in a criticism of Hegel that, as we will see in section 3, challenges the latter’s claim to a presuppositionless logic:

What [Hegel’s] argument concerns [...] is that everything is in the logical idea and therefore the meaningless can exist nowhere. But [...]: Why is there meaning at all, why is there not meaninglessness instead of meaning? [...] The logical represents itself as the negative, as that without which nothing could exist [...] The entire world, so to speak, lies caught in the nets of the understanding or reason, but the question is: How did it come into these nets? (SW I/10: 143)¹¹

If, as Hegel holds, meaning is ultimately bound by a logical system, then the idea of meaninglessness—a vantage from which meaning can be put into question—is incoherent.¹² This would imply that we cannot ask Schelling’s question “why is there not meaninglessness”. Yet we can, for although we inescapably find things to be meaningful, that we do so in our characteristic way is a brute fact, one ultimately without reason. The logical system that Hegel constructs in order to account for meaning cannot explain why, but must assume that, this account is meaningful in the first place. Similarly, his system

¹¹ Translation modified. Contrast Hegel 2004: “metaphysics is nothing else but the entire range of the universal determinations of thought, as it were, the diamond net into which everything is brought and thereby first made intelligible” (11). Cf. Hegel with Fichte 2000: “We cannot go outside the sphere of our reason; the case against the thing in itself has already been made, and philosophy aims only to inform us of it and keep us from believing that we have gone beyond the sphere of our reason, when in fact we are obviously still caught within it” (39).

¹² See Longuenesse 2007 on Hegel’s system: “reflection is the process by which thought as a ‘function of unity’ [...] brings to unity the multiple determinations it finds within itself, only to go beyond the unity thus found towards more determinations to be unified anew [...] Alterity is no longer the alterity of a given with respect to another given, but the alterity of thought with regard to itself” (51–2).

discloses a world “caught in reason”, but not why it lies so caught.¹³ This brute fact poses a limitation on reason’s logical self-understanding, a limitation to which we are drawn by a permutation of the question ‘why something’.

Schelling’s path to idealism begins by recognizing human experience’s peculiar constitution by meaning and reason, an insight into facticity that emerges from intensifying permutations of the question ‘why something’. As he claims against Hegel, explaining this constitution forces us to confront the bounds of reason—hence his assertion that “there is still in the world something Other and something more than mere reason” (SW I/10: 143–4). As we will see in section 2, Schelling conceives of reason’s “Other” in terms of the past and future that condition its possibility. After reconstructing his transcendental argument to this conclusion, in section 3 I will contrast Hegel’s denial that reason is conditioned by any past or future.

2. Past and Future

What is the time before a logical system? What can we make of a system’s origins in what Hegel, in the *Science of Logic*, calls our “resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering thinking as such”,¹⁴ i.e., of considering thinking without presuppositions? If philosophy is, strictly speaking, the unfolding of the logical structure that constitutes rationality and meaning, then, on pain of presupposition, we seem unable to inquire into this radically contingent resolve, this free decision to construct a logical system.¹⁵ Yet we must inquire into it if we are to know why there is a system in the first place. This is the question we ask when we ask why there is something rather than nothing, why there is meaning, why there is reason. Indeed, we raise this question precisely in deciding to take up a science of logic. As Schelling says in the 1833/34 Munich lectures: “I do not [...] underestimate the value of many uncommonly clever, particularly methodological remarks which are to be found in Hegel’s *Logic*. But Hegel threw himself into the methodological discussion in such a way that he thereby completely forgot the questions which lay outside it” (SW I/10: 143). One such question—the one that we

¹³ Hegel overlooks the senses of ‘something’ and ‘nothing’ that are relevant for Schelling’s question by explaining them in terms internal to his system: “[i]t is customary to oppose *nothing* to *something*. Something is however already a determinate existent that distinguishes itself from another something; consequently, the nothing which is being opposed to something is also the nothing of a certain something, a determinate nothing” (2010: 60).

¹⁴ Hegel 2010: 48.

¹⁵ Cf. Hegel 1977: 52–4.

raise about our arbitrary resolve to construct a logic—indicates that freedom has a certain priority over any system. As we will see, it has a uniquely temporal priority. I will illustrate this priority by reconstructing Schelling's argument in the *Ages* that the transcendental conditions of reason consist of the past decision on which a system's construction is grounded and the future purpose that guides its construction.

Before doing so, we must clarify the distinctive priority of a transcendental condition. Such a condition is not empirically prior to the experience that it makes possible. It precedes experience, not at some moment, but as that without which experience would not be possible. Neither is such a condition generally logically prior to what it makes possible, for its denial is thinkable. It is only given that we have a certain kind of experience and are invested in demonstrating its possibility via transcendental logic that the distinctive priority of such a condition emerges.¹⁶ But beyond this negative characterization of transcendental conditions' distinctive priority, more can be said.

Recall that Kant's transcendental arguments identify the form and ends of experience, i.e., the structural ground comprised of space, time, and the categories, and the guiding ideal denoted by the ideas of reason. In order to reconstruct Schelling's argument that past and future are transcendental conditions of reason, I want to suggest that transcendental conditions that function as structural grounds signify a non-empirical past, while those that function as guiding ideals signify a non-empirical future and, hence, that such conditions generally have a uniquely temporal priority.

On the one hand, the categories always already structure experience. Since they cannot be justified empirically, experience is belated with respect to them. They constitute a form that any experience cannot but have already exhibited. Just having experience presupposes that the categories have made it possible. Hence Kant asserts that the categories are "ancestral concepts".¹⁷ Along with space and time as forms of intuition, they are empirically irrecoverable and thus signify experience's immemorial past. On the other hand, the idea of a system of knowledge denotes an end that always lies beyond experience. Since no intuition is adequate to this idea, it is empirically unrealizable. Systematic knowledge is for experience a receding horizon, an impossible future for which it endlessly strives. Hence Kant claims that an idea of reason

¹⁶ For the distinction between general and transcendental logic, see Kant A55–7/B79–82.

¹⁷ Kant A13/B27, A81/B107. Contrasting a transcendental deduction of our ancestral concepts, Kant says that an empirical deduction secures merely an "ancestry from experiences" (A86/B119), whose very conditions the former deduction provides.

is “a problem without any solution,”¹⁸ a “heuristic” by which we “seek after” systematic unity.¹⁹

Notice that in neither case does a transcendental condition fail to coincide with what it conditions. Experience would lack unity and intelligibility without its characteristic forms and end. Nevertheless, each sort of transcendental condition exceeds what is empirically present, functioning as the immemorial past that grounds experience and the impossible future that guides experience. Past and future, in this sense, are not empirical, yet are simultaneous with the empirical. While Kant does not describe them in quite this way, the forms and ends conditioning the possibility of experience can be interpreted as signifying the non-empirical past and future of the empirically present—ages that make lived history possible. The priority of transcendental conditions can thereby be seen to be uniquely temporal.

Schelling has this kind of priority in mind in the *Ages*. I will demonstrate this by reconstructing his three-step argument that a free decision signifies the past that grounds the construction of any logical system,²⁰ turning thereafter to reconstruct his three-step argument that a system's construction is guided by the idea of its future completion.

First, Schelling says that if the past is strictly a phase in “a chain of causes and effects”, then we are committed to a “mechanistic system.”²¹ This is the thought of a homogeneous series of moments deterministically linked by efficient causation, i.e., the thought of empirical time, according to which the past is qualitatively identical to the present, prior to it merely in the order of succession. This raises questions about how experience is unified and intelligible rather than a meaningless aggregate of states, and how it is compatible with freedom rather than the property of a purposeless machine.²² To avoid this “mechanistic” predicament, Schelling implores us to “rise above” empirical time—above “time-parts flowing continuously into each other”—in order to grasp an “authentic past”. Indeed, he says, we cannot “recognize the present era [...] without a science of the past.”²³ The suggestion is that the “present era” is what we continuously experience and that we cannot comprehend its unity, intelligibility, and compatibility with freedom unless we discover its ground. This minimally requires that we grasp the past in a non-empirical register.

¹⁸ Kant A328/B384; cf. A323/B379, A498/B526.

¹⁹ Kant A671/B699; cf. A567–8/B595–6.

²⁰ A version of this reconstruction appears in Bruno 2017.

²¹ Schelling and Žižek 1997: 119.

²² See Jacobi 1994: 189.

²³ Schelling and Žižek 1997: 120–1.

Second, Schelling offers a description of a non-empirical past: “different times (a concept that, like many others, has gotten lost in modern philosophy) can certainly be, as different, at the same time, nay, to speak more accurately, they are necessarily at the same time [...] What has past certainly cannot be as something present, but it must be, as something past, at the same time with the present” (SW I/8: 302). Schelling envisions a past that is not present, yet is simultaneous with the present—one that is not empirical, yet coincides with the empirical. This is precisely the unique temporality of a grounding transcendental condition. Construed in this transcendental register, the past precedes experience by grounding its possibility. Yet such a past cannot fail to coincide with experience, for otherwise the latter would lack its ground and cease to be. In this sense, the empirical present is never without its transcendental past. After diagnosing the mechanistic threat of conceiving the past as homogeneous with the present, Schelling conceives the past in a transcendental register.

Third, Schelling casts freedom in the role of transcendental past. In the 1832/33 Munich lectures, he reports having to make “recourse to a transcendental past [...] that precedes our actual or empirical consciousness” (SW I/10: 93–4). In the *Ages*, he puts this past in terms of “freedom”, positing it as “a past that did not first become past, but which was the past from the primordial beginning and since all eternity” (SW I/8: 254). Such a past is qualitatively distinct from the present. It is not a phase otherwise identical with the present, but for having come earlier. As Schelling says, it “did not first become past”, but has been past from “eternity”. But if this past is eternal, it must precede the present at all times and so must in some sense be simultaneous with the present. Again, we find the distinctive temporal priority of a grounding transcendental condition. A consequence of this is that the free decision to construct a logical system—the freedom that Schelling casts as a transcendental past—functions as just this sort of condition. So long we pursue a systematic account of rationality and meaning, this has been made possible by the resolve to which Hegel himself draws our attention. Reason, in other words, presupposes the decisive freedom to value such an enterprise in the first place.

The importance of decision for Schelling cannot be overstated. In the *Letters*, he responds to the antinomy between Fichte’s idealism and Spinoza’s realism thusly: “[i]f we want to establish a system and, therefore, principles, we cannot do it except by an anticipation of the practical decision. We should not establish those principles unless our freedom had already decided about

them" (SW I/1: 312–13).²⁴ A system cannot be vindicated by professing to cognize the sole, correct first principle, whether Fichte's I or Spinoza's not-I. One can only freely decide to endorse its construction. Decision in this sense is the resolve to live a kind of life, whether one of Fichtean striving or Spinozistic equanimity. In the context of Schelling's Hegel-critique, decision is the resolve to construct the *Logic*—the past presupposed by reason's logical self-understanding.

I turn now to reconstruct Schelling's argument that reason equally presupposes a future, viz., the non-empirical time in which a logical system's construction would be complete. Again, I will do so in three steps.

First, in deciding whether to take up Hegel's *Logic*, I remove an opposition within myself. Schelling describes this opposition in the *Ages* as a "doubling of ourselves [...] in which there are two beings, a questioning being and an answering being" (SW I/8: 304). In asking myself whether to construct a logical system, I put myself into question. One of Schelling's innovations is to cast this question as a matter of character: "We say that the person who doubts whether they should be utterly one thing or the other is without character. We say that a decisive person, in whom something definitely expressive of the entire being is revealed, has character" (SW I/8: 304). I express a certain character by removing the opposition between my taking and leaving a system. However, I do not thereby express this character once and for all, for I may waver. I must strive endlessly to fully actualize my character, viz., by continuously constructing my system. Contingency, then, is not restricted to my resolve to take up the *Logic*, which Hegel calls "arbitrary", but extends to my pursuing its complete construction. I am driven by the idea of this future, even if satisfaction is impossible. Such a non-empirical time serves as a guiding ideal.²⁵

²⁴ On Schelling's early Fichte-critique, see Bruno 2014.

²⁵ A structural analogy to character actualization as system completion may lie in Schelling's late view that the basic concepts of 'negative philosophy' must be endlessly realized through the experience of 'positive philosophy' (on the late philosophy, see Buchheim 2001 and Bruno 2015). This would raise an ambiguity about whether past and future in the *Ages* belong to negative philosophy and how their challenge to Hegel coheres with Schelling's late charge that Hegel fails to offer a positive philosophy. We may begin to resolve this ambiguity by noting that the *Ages* do not distinguish negative from positive philosophy and by considering whether the *Ages* and the late philosophy jointly show that Hegel fails to offer either a negative or a positive philosophy, i.e., it may be that Schelling's considered view is that Hegel both illegitimately excludes facticity from the basic concepts of negative philosophy (ignoring their logical bruteness) and fails to secure their proof through positive philosophy (ignoring their potential emptiness). Thanks to Thimo Heisenberg for helping to bring this ambiguity to light.

Second, Schelling gives a description of a non-empirical future: “[w]hat is future is certainly not something that has being now, but it is a future [...] at the same time with the present” (SW I/8: 302). The future in which a system’s construction would be complete, and one’s character fully actualized, is an ideal lying beyond the present. Yet it is “at the same time” as the present, for unless it coincides with a system’s construction, the latter ceases to have any purpose. Construed in this register, the future exhibits the unique temporality of a guiding transcendental condition. In this sense, the empirical present is never without its transcendental future. After drawing out the importance of character for grasping the resolve to take up a logical system, Schelling conceives in a transcendental register the future at which this resolve aims.

Third, Schelling casts the realization of one’s character in the role of transcendental future. We saw that one who lacks resolve lacks character, whereas one expresses character by decisively resolving to construct a logical system. “Likewise”, Schelling adds, “everyone assesses this character as a work of freedom, as, so to speak, an eternal (incessant, constant) deed” (SW I/8: 304). In taking up a system, I display a certain character with the implicit desire that I fully actualize it. I thereby commit to pursuing an ideal self—one that can never come to be, as I can never claim to have fully exemplified my character, but that nonetheless retains a certain value. The future in which I would fully actualize my character is thus qualitatively distinct from the present. It is not a personal phase otherwise identical with my experience hitherto, but for having come later. As Schelling says, we seek this future in an “inexorable progression” toward an “eternal end”. To achieve it would be, *per impossibile*, to achieve a will “free of all desire”, one that is fully satisfied and so “does not will” (SW I/8: 234, 237).²⁶ Thus, like the transcendental past, the transcendental future coincides with yet transcends reason’s systematic activity. While the past grounds this activity, the future guides it. Construed transcendently, these times function as conditions of the possibility of reason itself.

I have reconstructed Schelling’s transcendental argument that reason, in its logical self-understanding, presupposes free decision as its grounding past, on the one hand, and the completion of systematic construction and actualization of character as its guiding future, on the other hand. I will now contrast

²⁶ Cf.: “every man in particular strives, in truth, only to return to the condition of non-willing; not only he who strips himself away from all desirable things, but—though unknowingly—also he who abandons himself to all desires. For this man, too, desires only the state in which he has nothing more to wish for, nothing more to want, even if that state retreats immediately from him; and the more zealously he pursues, the further away it is” (Schelling and Žižek 1997: 134).

Hegel's demand for a presuppositionless logic and his correlative denial that reason is conditioned by either a past or a future.

3. Intra-Logical and Extra-Logical Presuppositions

A defining mark of modernity is a commitment to critique, i.e., to exposing unquestioned assumptions in order to secure justification for our claims.²⁷ Descartes' suspension of belief for the sake of founding knowledge is paradigmatically modern, as is Kant's deduction of our right to the categories. Perhaps the apotheosis of modernity is Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which predicates a rigorous derivation of the categories on presuppositionlessness. As he says in the Doctrine of Being regarding the *Logic's* starting point: "[t]here is only present the resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering thinking as such. The beginning must then be *absolute* [...] so there is *nothing* that it may *presuppose*".²⁸ Similarly, in the Introduction to Volume One, he says: "it is not just the declaration of scientific method, but the *concept* itself of *science* as such that belongs to its content and even makes up its final result. Logic, therefore, cannot say what it is in advance, rather does this knowledge of itself only emerge as the final result and completion of its whole treatment".²⁹ By presupposing neither the concept nor the method of logic, Hegel can apparently lay claim to a thoroughgoing critique and thus to a thoroughgoing modernism.

Hegel's philosophy is particularly modern in that immediacy is its first casualty. Presuppositions are not mediated by deeper, justified claims, but are often held to be immediately certain. The allegedly immediate certainty of sensuous being at the start of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, like that of pure being at the start of the *Logic*, undermines itself on reflection. As Hegel reassures us, this failure is productive, for it dialectically reveals conceptual structures that move thought from earlier stages of unwitting presupposition to advanced stages of critical reflection.

There is a sense, however, in which earlier stages presuppose advanced ones. In the *Phenomenology*, sense-certainty is a stage of consciousness for

²⁷ See Pippin 1996: 253.

²⁸ Hegel 2010: 48. Cf. the *Encyclopedia Logic*: "All [...] presuppositions or assumptions must equally be given up when we enter into the Science, whether they are taken from representation or from thinking; for it is this Science, in which all determinations of this sort must first be investigated, and in which their meaning and validity like that of their antitheses must be [re]cognized [...] Science should be preceded by *universal doubt*, i.e., by total *presuppositionlessness*" (Hegel 1991: 124).

²⁹ Hegel 2010: 23.

which knowing consists in immediately grasping its object. But by using ‘this’ to refer to its object, sense-certainty betrays its possession of a universal that is indifferent to its referents.³⁰ Sense-certainty, it turns out, presupposes that knowing consists in grasping objects mediated by universals. Specifically, it presupposes that knowing involves perception of objects as bearing properties to which we refer using universals. This next stage of consciousness collapses under the tension of referring to an object’s unity via the plurality of its properties, ceding to the stage of understanding. Likewise, at the start of the *Logic*, the concept of “*pure being*—without further determination” is shown to contain no determinable content—lest it “fail to hold fast to its purity”—and thus to contain “as little” as the concept of nothing. The truth that it turns out is presupposed by these now indistinguishable concepts is the “movement of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: becoming”.³¹ Such intra-logical presuppositions are not uncritical, for they are entailed by self-contradictions in the unfolding structure of thought. Extra-logical presuppositions, by contrast, are those we harbor implicitly and uncritically.³²

For Hegel, then, no presupposition can precede philosophical thinking. That would require adopting a position prior to such thinking, assuming “rules and laws of thinking” in advance,³³ rather than discovering them through dialectical reflection. Presupposing rules and laws in this way would saddle reason with something that has already made it possible—an irrecoverable past. This is the sort of past invoked by the failed attempt to cast knowing as the immediate apprehension of sensible being or to grasp pure being prior to any determination by thought. Each attempt, were it successful, would isolate an entrenched background of rationality, a brute fact that would thwart the modern project of justification. If such extra-logical presuppositions collapse under critical scrutiny, then no such past outstrips reason.

So, too, for Hegel, no future outstrips reason. As Iain Macdonald argues, although philosophical thinking is always open to development, “*the future plays no special, positive role in Hegel’s thought*”.³⁴ We can see why this is so. If we posit the future as an unrealizable ideal, such as Kant represents by the idea of systematic knowledge, we do not posit anything that is entailed by a present failure of our thinking, i.e., we do not posit something that we have

³⁰ Hegel 1977: 60.

³¹ Hegel 2010: 59–60.

³² See Houlgate 2015: “My claim that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is not an essay in transcendental argument is thus not meant to suggest that nothing at all is said in that text about the presuppositions or conditions of consciousness and its objects. It suggests only that whatever understanding of the presuppositions of consciousness emerges does so in and through the experience of consciousness itself, not through the privileged insight (and due to the assumptions) of the philosopher” (189).

³³ Hegel 2010: 23.

³⁴ Macdonald (manuscript): 39–40.

discovered is intra-logically presupposed by a self-contradictory stage of thought. Instead, we posit an extra-logical presupposition of reason, assuming a law of thinking in violation of Hegel's modernism. But we cannot anticipate advanced stages of philosophical thought: we cannot demand understanding from sense-certainty or becoming from being. These thoughts must be timely or else never arise. As Hegel says in the *Phenomenology*: "it is the nature of truth to prevail when its time has come [...] and therefore never appears prematurely, nor finds a public not ripe to receive it".³⁵

The actuality of philosophical thought, for Hegel, is its own emerging future, as when it finds itself bound to rethink sense-certainty as perception or concede that being and nothing vanish into one another. The future, in other words, is inseparable from the collapsing present.³⁶ As Hegel says in his 1801/02 Jena lectures: "the present—insofar as, by sublating itself, the future arises in it—is itself this future; or, this future is itself in fact not future, but is that which sublates the present".³⁷ If the future is inseparable from the self-transformation of present philosophical thinking, then no future can outstrip reason. This contrasts with Schelling's claim that the future represents an ideal that transcends, even as it coincides with, the present. My suggestion is that, for Hegel, reason is a pure presence. On his view, reason is in principle capable of being transparent and intelligible to itself. And it is so because brute facts—in particular, brute facts about time—constitute extra-logical and therefore spurious presuppositions.³⁸

Hegel's idealism of presence differs markedly from Schelling's idealism of ages, which, not unlike Kant's transcendental idealism, begins by countenancing extra-logical presuppositions, viz., the past—reason's grounding transcendental condition as signified by free decision—and the future—reason's guiding

³⁵ Hegel 1977: 44.

³⁶ Cf. Russon 2008: "Until I became a driver, a quick trip to the grocery store in the mall was not a possibility, but it is now, in any situation where I run short on kitchen supplies. Being a driver does not make it be the case that going to the mall will happen; rather, it makes it the case that that future is on my horizon. *That ability being present—being my actuality—is the same reality as that future being on my horizon*" (63).

³⁷ Hegel 1923: 203.

³⁸ Houlgate 1996 defends Hegel from Derrida's related charge that Hegel is a philosopher of presence for whom consciousness grasps itself in itself, against which Derrida argues that consciousness bears the trace of an irredeemable past. Houlgate's defense is that, for Hegel, consciousness must lose itself to achieve absolute knowledge. But this downplays Hegel's insistence that reason is both "negative and *dialectical*" in that it discards collapsing shapes of consciousness to restore the unity of consciousness (2010: 10). As he says in the *Phenomenology*: "the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself" (1977: 19). While this neither entails a metaphysical substance abiding through dialectical change nor anticipates the particular form that spirit will take, it rejects the idea of an irrecoverable past in favor of a retrospective insight into consciousness' presence to itself.

transcendental condition as signified by system completion and character actualization. The grounding decision to take up the *Logic*—what Hegel calls “the resolve of *the will to think purely*”³⁹—and the ideal guiding its construction illustrate the facticity of time, i.e., the underivable ‘ages’ that condition reason’s possibility. My claim is that Schelling’s transcendental argument to this conclusion in the *Ages* supports his objection to Hegel that reason is bounded by something other. Reconstructing this argument allows us to make sense of, not only his charge in 1832/33 that Hegel fails to ask why the world “lies caught in reason”, but also his complaint, a year later, that Hegel “declares his *Logic* to be that science in which the divine Idea logically completes itself [...] before all actuality, nature, and time” (SW I/10: 146, emphasis added). The objection that Hegel subordinates time to logic can be seen as alluding to the thought that past and future are extra-logical presuppositions of reason, presuppositions that Schelling is drawn to identify through his continual engagement with permutations of the question ‘why something’.⁴⁰

4. Two Objections

I have argued that Schelling’s charge against Hegel—that reason is bound by something other than itself and so cannot account for its own possibility with total justification—is the conclusion to a transcendental argument that past and future are conditions of the possibility of reason. As I reconstruct this argument from the *Ages*, a system presupposes these conditions extra-logically, not intra-logically.⁴¹ I will now consider two Hegelian objections to my proposal.

First, a Hegelian may object that, by entertaining the question ‘why is there reason’ as a permutation of the question ‘why is there something rather than nothing’, Schelling indulges a question that cannot be answered and so is

³⁹ Hegel 1991:124.

⁴⁰ We may be tempted to view Schelling’s Hegel-critique as motivated principally by the question, which he raises in Munich and Berlin (SW I/10: 145–55; II/3: 88), of how there can be a transition from a science of logic to a philosophy of nature. On the one hand, Hegel can argue that this transition is necessitated by the internal structure of his system. On the other hand, the question ‘why something’ is deeper than this question (since the latter’s answer must face the former), better illuminates the overall development of Schelling’s thought, and, as I suggest in section 4, is not one to which Hegel has a ready-made answer or which he can easily dismiss.

⁴¹ See Nietzsche 2006: “Strictly speaking, there is no ‘presuppositionless’ science—the very idea is unthinkable, paralogical: a philosophy, a ‘faith’ must always be there first, so that from it science can acquire a direction, a sense, a limit, a method, a *right* to exist” (Third Essay, §24).

distracted by a pseudo-question. The objection is that simply posing the question guarantees that it cannot be answered since any rational answer will raise the question anew. This, the Hegelian will argue, dooms philosophy to limitations that bar it from the systematic rationality of a science. But this objection begs the question against Schelling, for it appeals to reason—specifically, reason's capacity for logical self-understanding—in order to dismiss the question, which only insists on what is in question. Schelling asks, not why there is some rational thing, but why there is rationality as such. Appealing to rationality to dissolve Schelling's question shows, not that it is a pseudo-question, but only that one does not find it pressing. At best, this leaves matters in a stalemate. At worst, it leaves a prejudice unconfessed.⁴²

Second, the Hegelian may object that asking the question 'why something' is useless because no answer to it can be definitive. Since any response—including, it must be granted, Schelling's own transcendental argument—will again raise the question, it is useless to raise it in the first place. The objection correctly assesses the endlessness of confronting the question. But it is misguided to infer that such a process is useless, for this neglects what is at stake in the asking, viz., the "true purpose" of our efforts in making sense of the world. As we see in its intensifying permutations, Schelling's question is not abstract, but bears existentially on one's character. That no response can legitimately prevent its return simply shows that the question cannot be evaded, but presents a permanent task. To be sure, Schelling's own response will embody the resolve by which the question is raised and thus, like any response to it, will defer a definitive answer.⁴³ Indeed, the act of responding is—we ourselves are—this question incarnate.⁴⁴ But this is why philosophy is "the most longed for of sciences", for it alone interrogates this question's "most incomprehensible" origin: ourselves.

⁴² See Nietzsche 1989: "[Philosophers] act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic [...] 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'" (Part I, §5).

⁴³ Accordingly, temporality is just one concept guiding Schelling's lifelong response to the question, alongside those of value, will, and the unconscious. His corpus exemplifies his commitment to live on the point of this question. As he says in the *Letters*, the question "necessarily becomes a practical postulate" (SW I/1:311).

⁴⁴ Cf. Tritten 2012: "The human being is not the answer to the question, what is assumed as comprehensible so that everything may be anthropomorphically interpreted from this firm basis, but the human being begs the very question, nay *is* the question, of why there should be something rather than nothing" (26).

What, then, do we make of an argument whose conclusion requires that argument's reformulation? What is an answer that unavoidably raises the very question at issue? We need look no further, I think, than the form that Schelling's corpus takes. It morphs through treatises, letters, dialogues, and myths, exchanging disparate representations of the same particular, viz., the peculiar constitution of human experience by rationality and meaning. I want to close by suggesting that his work as a whole consists of a reflective judgment in Kant's sense.⁴⁵ Schelling continually confronts a particular for which a definitive universal is ever to be sought. Human experience resists final determination by a universal because the activity of determining by universals—constitutive as it is of experience—is precisely the particular under judgment. The mutation of Schelling's texts can thus be seen as intentionally ceaseless exposure to the challenge posed by the object of an unparalleled reflective judgment. A consequence of this, and as his subsequent development suggests, would be that Schelling's transcendental argument in the *Ages* is a wittingly provisional answer to his driving question.

I noted at the outset that Schelling's path to idealism, since it starts with the peculiar constitution of our experience, is longer than that taken by Hegel. Given its starting point, we may also say that it is more modern. By neglecting the implications of our resolve to construct a presuppositionless logic, Hegel fails to investigate our commitment to thinking critically. Indeed, he neglects a critique of critique. This reveals the limits of Hegel's modernism, for a thoroughgoing modernity cannot shy from putting itself into question, but must interrogate even its own endorsement of presuppositionlessness. We presuppose something of value—something of ourselves—when we endorse presuppositionlessness.⁴⁶ It is beside the point to observe that Hegel's logic is coherent, for its coherence raises the question of its value.⁴⁷ It is equally irrelevant to observe that merely deciding to take up the *Logic* does not determine its structure,⁴⁸ for the issue is not what reason's logical structure is, but that it is—not its concept, but its existence.⁴⁹ Modernity must face the contingency

⁴⁵ See Kant AA 5: 179.

⁴⁶ See Nietzsche 2001: "*in order that this cultivation [of the scientific spirit] begin*, must there not be some prior conviction—and indeed one so authoritative and unconditional that it sacrifices all other convictions to itself? We see that science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no 'presuppositionless' science" (§344).

⁴⁷ For an example of this mistake, see Rush 2014: 225.

⁴⁸ Houlgate 2006 misses this point when rebutting Kierkegaard's Schellingian critique of Hegel: "the particular resolve or decision presupposed by the *Logic* is a free act of thought, not an act that interrupts thought from a position 'outside' thought" (90). This fails to see both that the question of why there is a logic is raised by the free act of thought that takes logic up and that this act is not external to but coincides with thought.

⁴⁹ Cf. Wittgenstein 1994: "It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists" (6.44).

of this existence, for it raises the question, not just which conditions underlie our claims, but for what purpose we deduce these conditions. Neglecting this question risks the delusion of having become post-critical. In this modern problematic, we find Kant's question *quid juris* as an interrogation of philosophical deduction itself. Schelling's guiding question accordingly inspires the project of subjecting critical philosophy to further, endless critique.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ Research for this chapter was supported by an Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. For helpful comments, my thanks to Martijn Buijs, Manfred Frank, Thimo Heisenberg, Jesper Lundsryd, Johannes-Georg Schüle, Tyler Tritten, and audiences at the North American Schelling Society and the Universities of Bonn, Florence, and Utrecht.

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