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ARTICLE

THE LOGIC OF LONGING: SCHELLING'S PHILOSOPHY OF WILL

Judith Norman

INTRODUCTION

'*Wille ist Ursein*:' Will is primal being. Kant's three most significant immediate successors, Fichte, Schelling, and Schopenhauer, could each have said this. Indeed, it suggests a precise response to some of the reproaches the Critical Philosophy had made against metaphysics, responding specifically to the severe limitations Kant had established on the range of validity of the categories of substance and causality. After the Paralogisms, it was clear that whatever sort of metaphysics might conceivably describe reality, it could no longer be a substance metaphysics; moreover, only objects of possible experience could be called causal, and so any spontaneity attributed to a supersensible structure could not be described in causal terms.

Is metaphysics possible under such restrictions? Strictly in spite of himself, Kant provided hints on how to reconstruct one. For one thing, he had suggested a positive characterization of the noumena in terms of will in his practical philosophy, his metaphysics of morals. There, he considers intentional will to be an acceptable description of non-causal spontaneity, a response later echoed in the third critique, where he hints that teleology in nature might be intelligible to an intellect unfettered by the causal structure of our understanding. Elsewhere, Kant was laying the framework for a compelling alternative to a substance metaphysics; in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, Kant lays out the terms for a dynamic conception of matter. The idea of a dynamic metaphysics of will was not far from the Critical Philosophy, whatever Kant's own opinion might have been.

Fichte, Schelling, and Schopenhauer each constructed what might be described as a metaphysics of will; each saw will as a fundamental feature of reality, and described the action of the will ('striving', 'longing') as paradigmatic (within a broadly Kantian framework) of non-causal process and productivity. The similarities end there, however; the philosophies of Fichte and Schopenhauer followed radically different trajectories, the one in the direction of freedom, subjective idealism, and political nationalism, the other in the direction of pessimistic fatalism, artistic abnegation and Buddhist redemption. And they focussed on radically different features of

Kant's philosophy. Fichte's principle interest was with Kant's transcendental unity of apperception which he redescribed as will, making it into an ideal, productive, moral principle. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, focussed on Kant's notion of a noumenal real, and this is what *he* re-described it as will, making it into a material, productive principle. Where does Schelling fit into this intellectual landscape? The suggestive slogan: 'Will is primal being' is found in his 1809 treatise, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, where Schelling deploys the notion of will in a manner new to the idealist tradition. Against Fichte, Schelling suggests that a primal will composed of material, chaotic drives precedes and makes possible self-conscious subjectivity. And against Schopenhauer, Schelling is concerned not to exclude this primal will from the scope of the principle of sufficient reason. If the will falls outside traditional structures of intelligibility, Schelling is going to rewrite the rules and reconstruct a logic proper to this will.

Schelling's attempt to formulate a logic of the dynamic, material force of pre-personal will marks a distinctive and significant moment in the history of philosophy as well as a landmark of sorts in terms of his own philosophical development. The notion of a logic of will addressed a problem that had haunted Schelling from the beginning of his philosophical career, of how to integrate an account of the laws of material nature into a Fichtean system of transcendental idealism. Although he had originally formulated a *Naturphilosophie* (1797, 1803) as a counterpart to his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), he was ultimately unsatisfied with the manner in which the two systems were to be integrated, in an Absolute which was the highest principle of both subjectivity and objectivity. In his Spinozistic Identity System (articulated in a series of texts between 1801 and 1804) he conceives of the Absolute as a strict identity of ideal and real; finite things emerge as emanations or potencies grounded in the Absolute, which differentiates itself into objective and subjective poles. The question as to how or why this differentiation occurred was an open one, however, and Schelling could not see how to resolve it within the terms of the Identity System as it then stood. The philosophy of will represented an attempt to reconceptualize the logic of the identity at work in the Absolute (now openly called: God) to allow for a more satisfactory account of the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the production of finite things (including finite minds). Schelling developed his philosophy of will in a series of texts between 1809 and 1815: the *Freedom* essay (FS) mentioned above (1809), the *Stuttgart Private Lectures*, and the three fragments of the project *Ages of the World* (WA: written in 1811, 1813, and 1815). (I will concentrate my analysis on the third draft of the *Ages of the World* since it is the most richly detailed, and, to my mind, the most successfully worked-through account of these ideas Schelling was ever to write.)

In the *Freedom* essay Schelling writes: 'there is a system in the divine understanding but God himself is not a system but life'. This statement

reflects a fundamental re-thinking of the conception not just of God but of a proper philosophical system. God, for Schelling, will no longer be fully axiomatized, in the manner of Spinoza. If God is to embrace both material nature and rational subjectivity, in a way that simultaneously identifies and discriminates between these two poles and accounts for the dynamic development of finite natural and rational beings, then a more full-bodied conception of God is needed, God as dynamic 'life', as Schelling suggests in the quote above, rather than static nature or eternal intellect. Schelling brings in the concept of will to account for the necessary element of dynamism. But further, Schelling hints that the revised concept of God will involve an anti-systematic dimension, an element of unrepentant unreason, a 'real which is [not] merely rational', as one commentator aptly describes it.¹ Again, Schelling finds that the notion of will allows him to theorize not just a dynamism but an irrational one at that.

I believe that the principle interest in these texts lies in Schelling's attempt to somehow think through the notion of an irrational real. Against the tendency of the idealist tradition, Schelling is suggesting that material nature cannot ultimately be grounded in or referred to a self-consciousness subject or Absolute. As Manfred Frank writes, this represents 'nothing less than a break with the conceptual scheme which has anchored and moulded the entirety of European thought, from the Greeks up to Fichte and beyond'.² Another commentator, Wolfram Högbe, refers Schelling's description of material nature in the WA to current scientific theories on the self-organizational properties of matter, and the emergence of order out of chaos.³ Schelling's philosophy of will marks a historically significant attempt to establish a new and dynamic notion of the developmental logic of material force alongside a conception of the divine.

Schelling's account takes the form of a creation myth, appropriately enough. This metaphysical myth, as Schelling recounts it in the WA, is divided into two stages. The first stage (treated in section 1 below) is a description of the state of the world before creation, while the second stage describes the act of creation itself. The world before creation is characterized by primal chaos, a nexus of drives in unstable interaction. As Schelling describes it, this chaos can be seen as a sort of will, namely a will to exist. But is an inefficacious will, unable to achieve the goal of its longing. The interest in Schelling's description lies in his close analysis of this will and its failed logic, its inability to resolve the contradictions in which it is mired. Creation occurs when God decides to put chaos out of its misery, as it were, and grant it a relative stability; I discuss this in section 2 below. Schelling

¹ Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., 'Introduction' to Friedrich Schelling, *Ages of the World*, trans. by Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (Columbia University Press, 1942) p. 5.

² In Manfred Frank, 'Identity and Subjectivity' in *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, ed. by Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (SUNY Press, 1996) p. 144.

³ Wolfram Högbe, *Prädikation und Genesis: Metaphysik als Fundamentalheuristik im Ausgang von Schellings 'Die Weltalter'* (Suhrkamp, 1989) pp. 105–19.

describes divine freedom as a will to exist as well, but an efficacious will. Here we have an example of a successful logic of will, the rules desire must follow to realize its productive potential. Finally, in the third section, I discuss the novelty of Schelling's logic of will.⁴

1 METHOD IN THE MADNESS

Schelling's metaphysical narrative begins 'in eternity' with a nexus of forces Schelling describes as 'god's eternal nature' or 'necessary essence'. It is comprised, specifically, of three forces. First, a negative, contracting force (Schelling calls it $A = B$) pulls inward and resists all expansion and development. Second, an affirmative, expansive force (A^2) flows outward, overcoming the first force. Finally, the obvious antagonism between the two forces is overcome in the form of a third force (A^3), which is the unity of the first two. Yet this achieved unity is immediately negated by the first force, and the cycle begins again with a renewed antagonism. Schelling describes this as a nightmarish spiral of irreconcilable antagonism (he could well have called it the wheel of Ixion). He insists that these forces, only when taken together, compose the necessary nature of God, which I will refer to as primal nature or chaos.

Schelling calls the three forces that collectively comprise primal nature 'potencies'.⁵ He describes primal nature as the chaos from which the world

⁴ Throughout the paper, I will use the following convention to cite works by Schelling. Quotes from the second draft of the *Ages of the World* (WA II) are taken from: F. W. J. von Schelling, *Die Weltalter: Fragmente, in den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813* ed. by Manfred Schröter (Munich, C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1946). Translations are from *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World* with an introduction by Slavoj Žižek, trans. by Judith Norman (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997).

References to the third draft (WA III) from 1815 are from *Schellings Werke. Nach der Original Ausgabe in neuer Anordnung*. Edited by Manfred Schröter. vol. 8. (Munich, C. H. Beck and R. Oldenbourg, 1927–59). Translations are from *Schelling: The Ages of the World* trans. with an introduction by Frederick de Wolfe Bolman (New York, Columbia University Press, 1942).

References to the *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* (FS) are from the same edition of Schelling's works, vol. 7. Translations are by James Gutmann (La Salle, IL, Open Court, 1936).

⁵ This is a term of art from the heyday of *Naturphilosophie*. As Schelling describes them here, none of the potencies is simple, but each is already itself a complex of forces. The negating potency already contains in itself a relation between negative and positive forces; but it conceals its affirmative side (affirmation is 'posited as not-being', in Schelling's intentionally archaic vocabulary) while negativity is dominant and apparent. Similarly, the affirmative potency contains a negative force, which it has overcome. So, in a sense, the potencies really are identical, but appear under different powers (hence the term 'potency'); their differences consist not in their compositional structure so much as which aspect they manifest. (To state the case in terms of Schelling's formulae, the potencies are all A . The first potency, $A = B$, posits the one essence (A) in concealment; the second potency, (A^2), posits the essence (A) in expansion, and so forth.)

was created; indeed, the different potencies are fated to become the recognizable features of the created world:

If then the first ground of nature is to be discerned in that first potency, by virtue of which the necessary essence confined itself and denied itself externally, and if the spirit world is to be discerned in the second potency, opposed to the first, then we can scarcely have a doubt concerning the meaning of the third potency. It is that universal soul whereby the universe is animated.

(WA III, p. 252)

Given Schelling's claim that the first and second potencies bear the relation of real and ideal, it is odd to see him write: 'it is indeed *one and the same* which is the affirmation and the negation' (WA III, pp. 212–13). In fact, Schelling proudly affirms that, within his system, the real and ideal are identical; he even mentions, in passing, that a proper understanding of this identity will provide a solution to the mind/body problem (WA III; p. 284). The notion of identity Schelling introduces here is key to the logic of will he is developing throughout the text, and merits close analysis.

Schelling explains that an identity statement does not imply that the terms identified are actually the same, but rather that 'one and the same' essence is both: in this case, both negation and affirmation. In other words, 'X is Y' means that X and Y are both predicated of some third thing, which is contained in the copula.⁶ This circumvents possible contradiction, since X and Y, if they are opposed (as in the present case), are not equated but are rather both predicated of something else. Still, contradiction is not fully removed; it is just transferred to the copula that is both of two contradictory things. But Schelling further claims that, even then, contradiction need not result. Schelling believes opposites can be predicated of the same thing if, as he puts it, they are not both active, or, as he sometimes says, they do not both claim to be 'what is'. As an example, he discusses the fact that we can say a man is both good and evil if he has a good disposition but is performing an evil act. In this case, the evil is active – it claims to be 'what is' – while the good is passive, waiving the ontological claim; consequently, no contradiction arises.

But how is this ontological subordination to be understood? In his *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, Schelling appeals to a theory of logical relation to clarify further the identity relationship at stake in a claim such as 'nature is spirit'. In so doing, he explicitly calls into question the strict identity of God and nature that was the hallmark of his earlier (Spinozistic) philosophy. Here, Schelling writes 'the profound logic of the ancients distinguished subject and predicate as the antecedent and the consequent . . . and thus expressed the real meaning of the law of identity' (FS p. 342). So the proper way to cash out the identity relation is as a grounding relation, with the subject acting as the ground of the predicate.

⁶ For a formalization of this, see Högrefe (1989) p. 81.

This conception elides the grammatical notion of subject with the ontological notion of a substrate, the ground of properties. In the case of the claim 'nature is spirit,' nature provides the substrate on whose basis spirit exists. This conception of identity is not at odds with the notion of the identity of opposites in the copula; spirit and nature are both predicated of some third thing (God), but the one still grounds the other. So in the claim 'X is Y,' X is the ground, Y is the grounded, and the copula is the ungrounded. Or in theological terms, God is both nature and spirit, but his nature is the ground of his spirit.

The present case – the identity of negating and affirming potencies – must be understood in the same way. When Schelling asserts the identity of the negating and the affirming potencies, he is appealing to the 'ancient' meaning of the law of identity, which refers the identified subject and predicate to the relation of ground and consequent. In this case, negation plays the role of the subject, the ground, and precedes affirmation, which acts, accordingly, as the consequent. Furthermore, this grounding relation is reiterated on the next level: recall that the antagonism between the negating and affirming potencies gives rise to the third potency, which represents the unity of the affirmation and negation. Stated in terms of Schelling's new reading of the law of identity, antagonism is identical to unity, which is to say that it acts as the antecedent, providing the ground for unity, which acts as its consequent.

Schelling's insistence on the primacy of the identity relation is understandable: he is trying to formulate a non-reductive monism which does full justice to both nature and spirit, and hopes to achieve this by interpreting the identity of nature and spirit as an (ultimate) identity of ground and grounded. Moreover, the equation of the identity and grounding relations is Schelling's most important move in the development of a logic of dynamic process. For one thing, the notion of ground (or subject as substrate) signifies both a logical and causal foundation, and thus serves as a sort of bridge between logic and ontology, enabling Schelling to develop a logic of succession. In addition, this notion of the grounding relation also offers a model for self-production (which is not to be confused with self-positing): if an identical thing ('one and the same') is both ground and consequent, it is self-grounding.

To return to the discussion of the forces at work in primal nature, we find Schelling discussing at length the question of which force is to precede as the ground. He concludes that the grounding force – the one that begins the sequence of forces in primal nature – is the negative one; 'There can therefore be no doubt that, if there is to be a succession among the primordial powers of life, only that which encloses and forces back the essence can be the first' (WA III, p. 225). Development, for Schelling, is essentially an overcoming: and without a resistance at the onset, there would be nothing to overcome. Schelling makes ample use of the mythological resonance in the notion of darkness and the primal night from which the light arose, appealing frequently to familiar imagery to add the weight of long-standing metaphorical associations to his argument:

Darkness and concealment are the dominant characteristics of the primordial time. All life first becomes and develops in the night; for this reason, the ancients called night the fertile mother of things and indeed, together with chaos, the oldest of beings.

(WA II; pp. 134–5)

And elsewhere:

All birth is a birth out of darkness into light: the seed must be buried in the earth and die in darkness in order that the lovelier creature of light should rise and unfold itself in the rays of the sun. Man is formed in his mother's womb; and only out of the darkness of unreason (out of feeling, out of longing, the sublime mother of understanding) grow clear thoughts.

(FS p. 35)

These are clearly more than metaphors for Schelling.⁷ Human and botanical embryology are specific instances of a general pattern of development; Schelling believes he is giving us a logic that holds true for all forms of development from the conception of an idea to the growth of a seed to the creation of the world. There is a universal structure of natural succession: if a beginning point is to ground a sequence, it must be characterized by a fundamental negativity. Only then can it serve as a basis for a developmental sequence or ontological hierarchy.⁸

The last passage cited, with its reference to longing, suggests the principal reason why Schelling thinks the sequence of drives must begin with that one which is fundamentally negative: primal nature is best characterized as a form of will, and will must begin by lacking its object. Schelling writes: 'to will one's self and to negate one's self as being are one and the same thing. Thus the first beginning can also only be by negating self as being' (WA III, p. 224). The will in question is primal nature itself. It is important not to fall back onto the more grammatical locution: the will is *that of* primal nature. (Here Nietzsche's cautionary note on the seduction of grammar is in order: it encourages an illicit separation of the doer from the deed.) Primal nature *is* a will to exist (or better, as we will see, it is *God's* will to exist). As such, the first force, the ground, the beginning of the sequence, must be negative. Schelling writes:

⁷ David Farrell Krell explores not just the generally biological nature of these metaphors, but their specifically sexual significance in 'The Crisis of Reason in the Nineteenth Century: Schelling's Treatise on Human Freedom (1809)' in *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum*, J. C. Sallis, G. Moneta and J. Taminioux, eds, (Kluwer, 1985).

⁸ As such, Schelling's logic of succession can be equated with an organic theory of time. This thesis is developed by Peter Lothar Oesterreich in 'Schellings Weltalter und die Ausstehende Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus' in the *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung* 39 (1985) pp. 74–6.

beginning in any case lies only in negation. Every beginning is by nature only a desiring of the end or of what leads to the end, and thus negates itself as the end . . . [I]t is the ground that something be. In order that a movement may now begin or come to be, it is not sufficient for it merely not to be; it must explicitly be posited as not being. Thus a ground is given for it to be.

(WA III, p. 224)

Since will cannot, by definition, possess its goal at the outset, it provides a ground for the goal to exist; here, ground must be taken both in the sense of a cause of being as well as a *raison d'être*. In an odd sense (that Schelling does not fail to notice and make use of), will negates its goal: in order to posit itself as will, it must affirm its constitutive lack, the fact that it necessarily implies the non-existence (or non-presence) of that which it wills. This amounts to a negation of the thing lacked. At the same time, will posits what it lacks as its goal. Taken strongly, this means that the will produces its goal through self-negation; willing can thus be seen as the productive ground of existence. Indeed, Schelling often uses the vocabulary of production in discussing the development of the potencies. He says that the second potency 'is generated by' the negating action of the first (WA III; p. 225). Moreover, the first two potencies 'necessarily produce the third' (WA III; p. 228). Recalling the fact that Schelling developed this account of production from the logical notion of ground, which he referred to the principle of identity, we see that Schelling is in the process of reconfiguring logic in order better to incorporate the primary ontological category of will.⁹

Let us return to the issue of contradiction. As I mentioned above, Schelling has no problem with certain forms of contradiction; his analysis shows that the identity of opposites can be affirmed when the opposites are not both 'active', when they don't both claim to be 'what is'. (A negative force can claim to be 'what is' just as much as an affirmative force. When a negative force makes this claim, it is will that nothingness be 'what is'.) Now when two forces assume a relation of ground and consequent, they are not both active; the ground subordinates itself to the consequent. It relinquishes its claim to be 'what is' in order to serve as a condition for something else to be 'what is'. In other words, things exist only in so far as they have a ground of existence. So for something to be, it must have a ground which, necessarily, itself is not.

But primal nature is a contradiction: 'the first nature is of itself in contradiction' (WA III, p. 219). For one thing, the forces of primal nature are all active; they each claim to be 'what is'. But this means that they do not

⁹ This might be profitably compared to the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*; one of Schelling's later criticisms of Hegel's logic is that it lacked an internal dynamic principle; thought itself is unable to motivate succession. Schelling finds a dynamism built in to the structure of the will. For an account of the virtues of the WA in comparison with Hegel's *Logic*, see Manfred Frank, *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik* (Suhrkamp, 1975).

resolve themselves into the hierarchy necessary for a ground/consequent relation to obtain. Schelling describes the claustrophobic result: 'they [the forces] all try to be in one and the same place, namely, in the place of that which is, consequently in one point, as it were' (WA III, p. 232). There is nothing to reconcile the competing claims of the conflicting wills by instigating a priority schedule, and facilitating a subordination of one to another. Specifically, the failure lies with the negating force. Schelling writes:

That which could be the beginning in this movement does not recognize itself as beginning, and makes the same claim as the other principles to be what is. That is a true beginning which does not begin again and again but persists. A true beginning is that which is the ground of a continual progress, not of an alternately progressing and retrogressing movement.

(WA III, p. 229)

This, then, is why the logic of willing in primal nature fails; the force of negation never accepts the subordinate role of ground, never remains as the ground and (hence acting as a beginning), but challenges the force which succeeds it. The conditions under which contradiction can be resolved do not obtain. Primal nature is in a state of contradiction, because it is devoid of grounds; to put it colloquially, there is no reason to it; one commentator calls this a 'Heraclitean universe'.¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, in commenting on this issue, writes that primal nature is governed by a certain logic, but that it is a failed logic.¹¹ This is precisely right; there is a method in the madness of primal chaos, but not one that actually works. As we will see in the next section, what primal chaos lacks is temporality.

The description of these drives in terms of a failed logic helps clarify a key issue in Schelling scholarship: that of the intelligibility of this primal will. In 1809, Schelling describes primal nature somewhat dramatically as 'the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the irreducible remainder which cannot be resolved into reason by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depths' (FS p. 34). Many readings of Schelling (and in particular those with a deconstructive bent) stress the nature of the problem here, the fact that primal nature lies on the other side of a divide of ontological difference, and human understanding cannot describe or even name this primal event. But I believe that attention to Schelling's description shows that he does believe primal nature can be adequately explained.¹² Primal nature is irrational in that it fails to conform to the principle of succession that would resolve the various points of tension in the will; it is,

¹⁰ Högrefe (1989) p. 99.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: an Essay of Schelling and Related Matters*, (London, Verso, 1996) p. 28.

¹² An alternative way of making sense of primal nature is offered by Joseph Lawrence who states that 'Schelling was able to incorporate nature into his system, because he maintained the Aristotelian sense that nature is itself implicitly rational'. Joseph Lawrence, 'Schelling: A New Beginning' in *Idealistic Studies*, 19 (3): 200 (n. 8).

as I said, a failed logic. But this falls somewhat short of calling primal nature blankly inexpressible or attributing the strategy of a negative theology to Schelling's attempts to name it.¹³ The clear (if cautious) manner in which Schelling has been describing primal nature, at least by 1811, belies any such theory.

2 THE OBJECT OF DESIRE

Schelling describes primal nature as an ontological, as well as a logical failure:

only together do the three potencies fulfill the concept of the divine nature, and only that this divine nature be, is necessary. Since there thus is an incessant urge to be, and that primal essence nevertheless cannot be, it remains in a state of perpetual desire, as an incessant seeking, an eternal, never quieted passion to be.
(WA III, p. 231)

Primal nature is the will to be. But since its existence depends on three inconsistent components, it cannot realize its desire as things now stand; it is a failed will. Moreover, since existence requires a ground and there are no grounds in primal nature, it cannot really exist. With respect to its ontological status, it is a non-being [*Nichtsein*].

But a will to be is itself a non-being, and so posits being as its goal. Primal nature itself, in its entirety, acts as a will to be, and one that posits what it lacks as its object. Against its own endless becoming, it desires stable being; against its own restless, dynamic character, it desires a static state of rest. It wants, simply, to stop wanting: 'In the greatest unrest of life, in the most

¹³ As does David Clark in 'The Necessary Heritage of Darkness': Tropics of Negativity in Schelling, Derrida, and de Man' in *Intersections: Nineteenth Century Philosophy and Contemporary Theory*, ed. by Tilottama Rajan and David L. Clark (SUNY, 1995) 119–40. Like other commentators who stress the radical unknowability of the will in Schelling, Clark is concentrating on the *FS*, where the will is not given the attention it is in the *WA*. But in his otherwise perceptive study, even Andrew Bowie suggests this view to a certain extent when he writes: 'Schelling deliberately uses the metaphor of "longing" . . . to suggest that this is not a causal or logical move. The "lack of being" in the ground, that leads nature beyond itself into articulated self-revelation, cannot finally be understood' in *Schelling and European Philosophy: An Introduction* (Routledge, 1993) p. 121; see also p. 140. Against Bowie's contention, I believe that longing is not a metaphor that serves as a placeholder for an incomprehensible alternative to logical succession. I have been concerned to argue that Schelling uses the term longing to help extend the notion of the comprehensible by suggesting a new logic of succession, one based on the relation between ground and consequent. Similarly, Lanfranchi argues against Habermas' attempt to read the *WA* in metaphorical terms; in Jürgen Habermas, *Das Absolute und die Geschichte: Von der Zwiespältigkeit in Schellings Denken* (Ph.D. diss., Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms Universität, 1954) p. 373; see Aldo Lanfranchi, *Krisis: Eine Lektüre der 'Weltalter' – Texte F. W. J. Schellings* (Frommann-Holzboog, 1992) pp. 96–7.

violent movement of all powers, the will which wills nothing is always the real goal' (WA III, p. 235). The will that wills nothing is Schelling's description of absolute stasis, of eternal immobility. It is not an active willing of nothingness; it is not a negative will. Rather, it wills nothing in the sense of not willing at all. Some sort of lack or desire is responsible for activity, and the will that wills nothing is utterly complete. As Schelling describes it, the will that wills nothing is composed of two wills: the will to exist and the will not to exist. (Sometimes he adds a third, the unity of the two; but this plays no role in the story.) Unlike primal nature, however, these wills are not in contradiction. As mentioned before, contradictory things can (without contradiction) be predicated of a unitary subject if they are not both active. Here, in Schelling's description, neither one of these wills is active. Both are present in a state of mutual disregard, a state that Schelling describes as indifference or equipollence. He also calls it freedom; namely, freedom to exist or not to exist. If primal chaos is God's necessary nature, this absolute indifference is God's eternal freedom; I will refer to it as the free (or divine) essence. To summarize: over and above the chaotic, primal nature that 'exists' prior to the creation of the world arises a free, divine essence. Both are complementary aspects of God.

With the appearance of this divine essence, the nature of the chaotic cycle of drives is completely changed. Specifically, they assume the relation of longing to this, their goal. The potencies of primal nature long for this divine essence, they desire that their turmoil come to an end so that they might also participate in the quiet stillness of the unmoving ideal. Their lack (of being) becomes clear to them and, given the structure I outlined above, in positing themselves as not being, they posit themselves as a will to a goal, specifically a will to the divine indifference of wills.

(The difference between Schelling's concept of will and Nietzsche's is perhaps most striking at this point; Nietzsche would clearly consider Schelling's conception nihilistic, to the extent that primal nature is driven by emptiness and self-negation rather than the super-abundance and self-affirmation Nietzsche considers characteristic of noble will, at least. It is not the theological context *per se* that distances Schelling from Nietzsche; the conception of a nihilistic, hungry, exhausted will would make even a secularized version of Schelling's theory theological – which is to say, reactive and driven by *ressentiment* – in Nietzsche's eyes.)¹⁴

To return to Schelling's account: as a result of the appearance of the divine essence, the potencies of nature 'separate', forming what Schelling describes as essentially a chain of longing. In other words, the effect of

¹⁴ This, then, would be Nietzsche's response to the debate in the literature concerning the degree to which the WA admits of a secular reading. For a strong account of Schelling's theological import, see Horst Fuhrmans, 'III: Der Ausgangspunkt der Schellingschen Spätphilosophie (Dokumente zur Schellingforschung)' in *Kant-Studien* 48 (1956/57), pp. 302–23. For a strong secular reading of the WA see Bowie (1993).

longing is to confer relative independence on the primal forces, so they might coexist without antagonism. They no longer demand to be 'at the same point' (as in the previous stage) because separation has eased the tension and ordered them in harmony. Although Schelling does not fill out the suggestion, he hints that this 'separation' (which, strictly speaking is all occurring before creation) is the blueprint for spatiality once creation has occurred. (This is the moment, Schelling says, when the heavens separate from the earth; WA III, p. 241) The potencies fall into a natural hierarchy, with the third potency (the future world soul) 'on top', closest to the divine indifference which it most closely resembles. The second potency, as the next most similar subordinates itself directly below, with the first potency willingly serving as a ground, so that this chain might reach the divine essence. The productions of nature ascend to this highest ideal in the form of visions of future possible creations, and tempt the divine essence to confer recognition on the chain of the nature potencies below. In the absence of this recognition, nature reverts back to its chaotic cycle, only to rise up again to re-petition the highest for recognition. If it were to gain this recognition, the potencies of nature would assume some lasting stability as the ground of God, and the cycle would be broken. It is important at this point to recall the fact that the chain of longing and the divine essence are both 'identical' in the special sense of the term Schelling has defined; they are both aspects of God, and Schelling calls them God's nature and God's freedom or essence. So the longing, looked at with this in mind, is really God longing for himself, for his own organic wholeness or living existence: 'It is the longing which the eternal One feels to give birth to itself' (FS p. 359). This is why God's acknowledgment would be a form of recognition; God would recognize his own desire in nature.

The chain of longing inspires some reaction from the divine indifference. (Schelling cannot say that primal nature causes a reaction in the divine essence, since this latter is supposed to be free. Nature motivates but does not determine the divine essence.) Since primal nature has assumed a passive relation to this divine, the divine becomes relatively active. (Although, Schelling insists, any change in the divine is only relational: it itself it is immutable.) The activity of this divine essence consists, in the first instance, of negatively distinguishing itself from nature; that is, of assuming a negative relation towards primal nature. Yet since the divine essence is composed of two, equipollent forces (which, until now, have been in a state of indifference or inactivity), its negative side cannot be activated without the affirmative side being activated as well; in a sense, nature would wake God up. The situation is now critical, since the activation of both opposing forces would force the divine essence into a state of contradiction. (To recall: the divine essence was only safeguarded from contradiction because its negating will and affirming will were not in active opposition.) This means that the divine essence would end up in the same crisis as primal nature – it would be both negation and affirmation (and perhaps their

unity). Consequently, the divine essence is summoned to resolve the tension. Schelling describes this as a decision; the divine can either turn away from the situation and return to a state of indifference, forcing the chain of longing to decompose into chaos once again; or, it can confirm the relationship with the chain, recognizing the longing as its own longing to exist, know itself, and reveal itself in the world. We obviously know that God ended up deciding in favor of existence and revelation; but because the decision was free, we only know it empirically, by the present fact of a created world. (At this juncture, Schelling departs from the spirit of a priori – transcendental – speculation that has characterized his account so far. The fact of existence, the fact that the divine essence decided to ground itself in a free act that cannot be deduced.)

But how precisely does the divine essence's decision solve the problem? How does it resolve the crisis? As I mentioned earlier, Schelling proposes the idea that the principle of contradiction is really only a special case of the principle of sufficient reason. Predicates cannot contradict each other – unless they are in the relation of ground and consequent; then, Schelling suggests, they are required to be in contradiction. His example is that of positive and negative forces, where the negative is the ground of the positive for all the reasons apparent in the dynamic of primal nature. Although this is Schelling's one example, the rule is not, for that reason, of limited application; Schelling believes that everything is composed of the relation of positive and negative forces. The negating force of gravity grounds the expansive light, the jealous God of the Old Testament is the basis for the loving God of the New Testament, the inward opacity of matter allows for the ideal realm of spirit, life derives its joy from an constant overcoming of melancholy. Schelling deploys the model in an improbably wide array of specific cases, and commentators have brought in additional examples. The most striking, perhaps, is the Freudian slogan, cited by Bowie: '*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.*' Bowie writes 'In the FS the id is the equivalent of the ground and the ego is God, who develops beyond the id', adding 'id and ego, like subject and object, demand a whole of which they are aspects. The id is, as such, "identical" . . . with the ego'.¹⁵

So one and the same thing can be both negating, rejecting existence as well as affirming, willing development, if the negating force grounds the affirming one. If God is to will existence while avoiding the pitfalls of contradiction, he must put the negative force, the rejection of primal nature, at the ground of the affirmative force, the recognition of primal nature. But this cannot be the whole story. In primal nature, this logic failed because the ground did not remain as the ground; that is, it gave *rise* to its affirming consequent, but did not give *way* to this follower. What we can learn from this, Schelling says, is that the successful grounding relation

¹⁵ Bowie (1993) pp. 96–7.

cannot be of the sort where the predecessor [*vorangehende*] is sublated when the successor [*folgende*] is posited. Rather, it is of the sort where, when the successor is posited, the predecessor is as well, although it remains only as a predecessor.

(WA II, p. 121)

To *remain as a predecessor* means to be *present as a past*, and that is exactly what happens to the negative component of the divine essence, the will not to exist: it becomes the past. Schelling states the problem in terms of the principle of contradiction; although two contradictory predicates cannot hold true (or in Schelling's language: be active) *in* the same time, they can both be active in different times, at the same time. Schelling writes:

The past clearly cannot be a present at the same time as the present; but as past, it is certainly simultaneous with the present, and it is easy to see that the same holds true of the future.

(WA II, pp. 122–3)

This, then, is the key. The two forces that make up the divine essence can both be active without contradiction if the negative force is the ground of the positive force. What the negative force negates, Schelling explains, is the chain of longing. Put simply, God answers 'no' to nature's request to exist, and so primal longing reverts to the chaos of primal nature. But what the positive force affirms is the chain of longing; God also answers 'yes' to primal nature, and confers upon it the being it longs for. But the only way the no and the yes can co-exist is for one to ground the other; and what this means, we now see, is for one to act as the eternal past of the other (as always already past). So the chaos of drives is our past, and the open chain of longing is our present, and by so dividing the present from the past, and positing the past as the ground of the present, God creates the world, not *ex nihilo*, but from the chaos of primal nature, at the request of longing.

God's decision, then, accomplishes what primal nature could not: it posits an enduring ground, the past. The will of primal nature is stabilized; it is no longer an ontological failure, but achieves being by being temporalized.¹⁶

We can note the distinctiveness of Schelling's logic of succession in comparison with Hegel's dialectic. Schelling explains:

¹⁶ For a different account of this aspect of Schelling's thought, see Fiona Steinkamp, 'Primal Nature in *The Ages of the World*', *Idealistic Studies* 24 no. 2 (Spring, 1994). Steinkamp argues that primal nature has no contradiction but rather the *possibility* of contradiction. As I have tried to demonstrate, this is neither what Schelling said (as Steinkamp admits) nor what he thought; I believe her notion of primal nature as *possibility* falls short of Schelling's rather more Kantian notion of primal nature as *ground*. As a ground, primal nature is distinct from the existence it grounds, but its status is that of transcendental condition rather than possible being.

It is a founding and principle rule of science (though few know it) that what is posited once is posited forever and cannot be sublated [*aufgehoben*] again, since otherwise it might just as well not have been posited at all. If one does not remain steadfastly by what one has once posited, then everything will become fluid as it progresses, and everything will wear away again, so that in the end nothing really was posited. True progress, which is equivalent to an elevation, only takes place when something is posited permanently and immutably, and becomes the ground of elevation and progression.

[WA II, p. 52]

The negative force needs to remain in the role of ground. This is clear from the theory I have outlined: if the negative force were to assert itself positively (cease to act as ground), there would be a return to chaos. From Schelling's perspective, a Hegelian dialectic involves just this chaotic abandonment of the ground. Edward Allen Beach usefully terms Schelling's method an *Erzeugungsdialektik* over and against Hegel's *Aufhebungsdialektik*.¹⁷ In keeping with his fundamental affirmation of identity, Schelling's developmental narrative does not concern the production of novel forms (as does Hegel's) but rather of new structures that emerge from the change in relationships between the existing elements (primal nature and the divine essence).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Schelling's theory is that it suggests what has been called a 'qualitative' theory of time. The past 'never happened,' was never a 'now' – it was always already past. The condition for something to be present is that it have a past (as a ground), so to avoid regress (and thereby affirm creation) there must have been a past which was never a present. As Schelling puts it, the dimensions of time are not strictly 'different parts' of time, but more accurately are in fact different times. As such, chronological succession acquires a new meaning; the past is the ground of the present, but is not temporally prior. Temporality arises as a result of God's decisive act, which cannot itself be said to have occurred in time. At the end of Schelling's elaborate explanation, we finally learn that the linear narrative structure has been somewhat deceptive. We have been treating a pre-temporal structure as historical; what we were told had already happened turns out to have *always* already happened – again, it is *eternally* past. (The divine essence, on the other hand, is simply eternal; it is outside of *any* sort of time – it never falls into time, as it were.)

Schelling writes:

In the cycle whence all things come,¹⁸ it is no contradiction to say that that which gives birth to the one is, in its turn, produced by it. There is here no first and no

¹⁷ See Edward Allen Beach, *The Potencies of God(s)* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1994).

¹⁸ By 'cycle' in this passage Schelling does not mean primal nature – he had yet to really theorize it in 1809 (see note 1) – but rather the larger cycle of divine self-grounding, God's choice to reveal himself in time.

last, since everything mutually implies everything else, nothing being the 'other' and yet no being being without the other. God contains himself in an inner basis of his existence, which, to this extent, precedes him as to his existence, but similarly God is prior to the basis as this basis, as such, could not be if God did not exist in actuality.

(FS p. 358)

We are now in a position to fully realize why Schelling manifests such a blithe lack of concern at this seeming paradox. Priority itself is one of the things being produced 'in the cycle whence all things come'. Schelling's account attempts to explain how the ground comes to be the ground in the first place. God 'gives birth to himself' by positing the ground as the ground, which is to say making it his past and the cause of his coming to be. And, as Schelling indicates, God is actually prior to his ground; although God exists only on the basis the ground, the ground only becomes the ground – which is to say: it only attains its identity – by virtue of God's existence. The cause is responsible for its effect, but the effect makes the cause a *cause*.

As such, Schelling has given us an account of God's self-production as a type of self-grounding. Contrary to the Fichtean notion of the I as self-positing, Schelling's self-grounding God does not produce himself *ex nihilo*, but out of chaos, the primal forces I have been describing. In this way, Schelling attempts to show how, contra Fichte and the tendency of the idealist tradition, subjectivity is grounded in a primal set of material drives. And contrary to Hegel's characterization of the development of absolute subjectivity, these drives are never sublated; they remain at the ground as 'a real which is [not] merely rational'. But unlike Schopenhauer, their irrationality does not put them beyond the principle of sufficient reason, what in German is called the 'principle of the ground' [*Satz vom Grund*]. They not only obey the principle of the ground, they *are* the ground.¹⁹

But the originary character of the events Schelling describes, the fact that the story of the grounding relation precedes all time (as its condition) makes the text a somewhat fantastic one. Schelling calls attention to this quality of

¹⁹ For this reason, I do not entirely agree with the tendency of recent Schelling scholarship that, as Beach writes, 'celebrated him for pointing beyond the ideal of a philosophy modeled on logic', Beach (1994) p. 100. (Representatives of this tendency include Alan White, *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom* (Yale University Press, 1983) pp. 134 ff., as well as Habermas (1954) and Walter Kasper, *Das Absolute in der Geschichte: Philosophie und Theologie der Geschichte in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Matthias-Grunewald, 1965) – who, as the title of his book suggests, believes Schelling pushed back the bounds of logic to make way, not for historically contingent acts of freedom, as Habermas thought, but rather for theology.) Contrary to these interpretations, I believe that in the WA at least, Schelling does not abandon logic so much as reconfigure it to respond to the challenge of thinking the will. Schulz gives a strongly rationalistic account of the later Schelling, although he aims to recuperate the freedom of the divine essence for thought more than the notion of primal chaos, to which he pays insufficient attention; see Walter Schulz, *Die Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*, second, expanded edn (Neske, 1975). For an insightful discussion of Schulz, see Beach (1994) pp. 169–75.

the narrative, its resemblance to fiction – or rather, to myth – and regrets that the WA did not more closely resemble an epic poem. Any account of the emergence of time must paradoxically presuppose temporality (and transcendental philosophy since Kant had tried to give a genetic account of our experience of time). But isn't the function of myth precisely to reconstruct and recount a necessarily fantastic origin?²⁰

3 THE LOGIC OF LONGING

For Schelling, the past does not 'precede' the present in the sense of linear temporality; rather, it grounds the present. Past and present are not separated by a chronological difference, but rather by ontological difference. That is, the past does not precede the present *within* time: rather, time itself is produced when the past is made the ground of the present. And this grounding relation, Schelling has argued, is ultimately reducible to a sort of logical identity.

Schelling's innovation in this text clearly lies in putting logic to work, making logical principles ontological and, ultimately, chronological. Kant had set the terms for this project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* with his notion of a transcendental logic, a study of the concepts whose syntheses produce objects of possible experience. Still, Kant was ultimately concerned to keep analytic and synthetic logics distinct, by finding that they appealed to different highest principles. The highest principle of all analytic judgments is the principle of contradiction and Kant was concerned to give this a rigorously analytic formulation: 'the principle of contradiction . . . as a merely logical principle, must not in any way limit its assertions to time-relations' [A152/B192].²¹ In other words, it cannot state that two contradictory states both obtain 'at one and the same time', since this appeals to a type of sensibility, namely the form of inner intuition. Kant's solution is to reformulate the principle to read: 'no predicate contradictory of a thing can belong to it' [A151/B190] and gives the example: 'no learned man is ignorant'²² which, clearly, makes no reference to time. With this new locution, Kant hopes to seal the principle of contradiction from ontological (specifically chronological) determinations.

²⁰ The notion of a retroactive constitution of a cause has resonance with the psychoanalytic notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, which involves the reconstitution of some hitherto innocuous past event as the traumatic cause of present neurotic symptoms. In *The Indivisible Remainder*, Žižek gives a fascinating account of some of the many homologies between Schelling's narrative and (Lacanian) psychoanalysis, with occasional reference to mythologizing. The function of Schelling's theory of temporality specifically in relation to myth is given by Beach (1994). The mythic and epic context of the WA is explored in Oesterreich (1985) pp. 70–85.

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York, St. Martins Press, 1956).

²² I have altered Kemp Smith's translation of *ungelehrt* to allow for terminological continuity with Schelling's text.

Clearly, Schelling sees this formulation as false, and the ambition to seal off logic from time determination as misguided. Predicates can contradict if they are in a relation of ground and grounded. As a counter to Kant's example he might suggest that Socrates was both learned and ignorant;²³ indeed, he writes:

A being cannot negate itself without thereby turning in upon itself, thus making itself the object of its own willing and desire. The beginning of all knowledge lies in the recognition of one's ignorance; but it is impossible for man to posit himself as ignorant without thereby inwardly making knowledge into an object of his desire. To posit one's self as not being, and to will one's self, are therefore one and the same.

(WA III, pp. 223–4)

In other words, will is inherently contradictory. Janus-like, it has two faces: it both negates its object (by positing itself as lack) and affirms its object as the goal of its desire, and the negation acts as ground of the affirmation; ignorance is the beginning of wisdom.

Now Kant would certainly find this argument unthreatening, a dynamic subject (like the will) can clearly possess one predicate actually and another potentially without violating his formula (and the apparent paradox of Socratic ignorance, for that matter, rests on a fallacy of equivocation). Or, we can say without contradiction that the will negates the object inside itself while positing the object outside itself (producing it). In Schelling's terms, this is to distinguish between the negative first potency and the affirmative second potency, and it is no contradiction to say that different states (potencies) have contradictory predicates. In order to avoid contradiction, we must treat the potencies of the will in isolation, considering the negative and affirmative potencies as different things. But then there would no longer be a will, since will depends on a unity of these moments. The contradiction is resolved at the cost of destroying the object of analysis. For this reason, Schelling insists that the potencies are identical. For him, this means they both belong to the same substrate or subject which, in this case, is God. And the only way their contradiction can be resolved is in time(s); the will must become in order to be.²⁴

Schelling would agree with Hegel that Kant showed 'too great a tenderness for this world' by removing contradiction from it. Schelling writes that 'life itself is in contradiction. Without contradiction there would be no life, no movement, no progress; [instead, there would be] a deadly slumber of all forces. Only contradiction drives us – indeed, forces us – to action' (WA II, p. 31). In fact, since absolute stasis is the only non-contradictory state,

²³ Indeed, he uses this example: see WA III, p. 223–4.

²⁴ In the theological terms of the text, that identity is that of the God of Judaism and the God of the Christianity, and the temporal resolution stipulates that the Old Testament precedes the New. The living word exists only through progressive revelation.

the will that wills nothing – whose very formula is a paradox – is the only thing that is not in contradiction. Schelling gives it a paradoxical formulation to show that it escapes understanding. 'We cannot revert to that abstraction [of the divine essence] with our thoughts. We do not know God at all other than in that relation to an eternal nature subordinated to him' (WA III, p. 259). Oddly, everything intelligible is suffused with contradiction, but this makes it all the more imperative for Schelling to find structures of thought to accommodate the contradictory nature of the will, a logic of longing.

Schelling's attempt distinguishes him from the rest of the first generation Kantian thinkers. In opposition to idealism, Schelling maintained a keen sense of the grounding role played by tumultuous, material drives. But unlike Schopenhauer, who shared this insight, Schelling believed the will could be *thought* (without being mortified). In order to thoughtfully negotiate the competing, reductive programs of idealism and materialism, Schelling developed what might be called a 'conflictual monism'.²⁵ Against dualism, he asserted identity, but a polychromatic identity rife with conflict, opposition, contradiction.

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²⁵ A term aptly applied to Deleuze by Alistair Welchman, 'Deleuze' in *The Edinburgh Encyclopedia of Continental Philosophy* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998).