

1

The Nameless Good

One cannot say of the Godhead that it is good since this sounds as if the “good” were supplementing its Being as something distinct. But the good is its being *per se*. It is essentially good and not so much something good as the Good itself.

—Schelling, *The Ages of the World* (1815 version)¹

Wie soll denn der Mensch der gegenwärtigen Weltgeschichte auch nur ernst und streng fragen können, ob der Gott sich nahe oder entziehe, wenn der Mensch unterläßt, allererst in die Dimension hineinzudenken, in der jene Frage allein gefragt werden kann? Das aber ist die Dimension des Heiligen. . . .

How should the human of contemporary world history be able to ask at all seriously and rigorously if the god nears or withdraws when the human above all neglects to think into the dimension in which the question alone can be asked? But this is the dimension of the Holy. . . .

—Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* (1946)²

In a striking passage in the *Freedom* essay, Schelling argued that the human is “formed in the mother’s love” and that “the light of thought first grows out of the darkness of the incomprehensible (out of feeling, *Sehnsucht*, the sovereign mother of knowledge)” (I/7, 361). In this dark longing, in the paradoxically object-free striving of *Sehnsucht*, one finds, as the dark, concealed origin of the understanding, the “desire for the unknown, nameless Good” (I/7, 361). We are confronted with two aporias. In the first, the aporia of desire, *Sehnsucht*

strives, but it does not have a specific object towards which it strives. *Sehnsucht* is a ceaseless striving without a clearly delineated desideratum. In the second, the aporia of naming, in so far as this desire can be spoken of as having an object (which, *strictu sensu*, it does not), Schelling named this quasi object the “nameless Good.” But what manner of name is the “nameless Good”? On the one hand, this quasi object is named the Good, and on the other hand, this Good is qualified as being nameless. What manner of naming is this that names without naming and, without naming, nonetheless names?

Furthermore, the desire for the nameless Good, *Sehnsucht* as the sovereign mother of knowledge, places the drive towards knowledge as more fundamentally the longing for the Good. The Good precedes the true and it is in such a priority that Schelling agreed with his Munich colleague Franz von Baader that the drive to knowledge is analogous to the procreative drive (I/7, 414). It is the production or birthing of truth as the aporetic longing for the nameless Good. The generation of truth, it must be here emphasized, is born from the primacy of the call of the Good.

When Levinas charged occidental philosophy for betraying the primacy of the Good by insisting on the primacy of the True (the Good as resolved or *aufgehoben* into thinking), thinking was brought back to the site of its founding crisis. In his genealogical critique of the value of values, Nietzsche also had a somewhat similar concern, namely that the reactive mode of thinking sought to make all that is outside a normative community into something compatible with that community and, to the extent that it could not do so, its *ressentiment* condemned the barbarian remainder to the category of evil.

Granted Levinas and Nietzsche’s provocation, is it the case that the nineteenth century did not provide us with other models of articulating the primacy of the Good over the True? Are there other thinkers that might aid us in articulating this Copernican revolution in thinking and ethics? I am arguing, both in this chapter and throughout this book, that Schelling, unduly overshadowed by Hegel, provided one of the first and most extensive (and not simply dialectical) models of the disequilibrium between the Good and the True. In this respect, Schelling emerges, almost a century and a half after his death, as a deeply contemporary figure in continental philosophy, contributing directly to the current debate about the primacy of the Good (beyond good and evil) in the wake of Nietzsche and Levinas. Schelling, like Levinas, puts “forth the Platonic word, Good beyond being. It excludes being from the Good, for how could one understand the *conatus* of being in the goodness of the Good?”³

In this chapter, I contextualize Schelling’s contribution by situating it in reference to the *System* fragment, Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will then turn to some critical texts in Schelling’s middle period, as he is negotiating the relationship between his earlier negative philosophy and his later positive philosophy, sometimes called the *Philos-*

ophy of Mythology and Revelation. Schelling's middle period, in the wake of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, straddles both the negative and positive directions of thinking and tries to reconstruct these parts into a sense of the Whole. Of the middle period texts, which I consider to be Schelling's most remarkable, I will concentrate primarily on the *Freedom* essay (1809), that strange and startling unfinished dialogue, the *Clara* (c. 1809–1812),⁴ and Schelling's never completed magnum opus, *The Ages of the World* (1811–1815).

I

The Oldest System Program fragment (c. 1797), written in Hegel's hand, but reflecting a complex cross-fertilization of the thinking of the Tübingen trio (Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin), immediately proclaims that the fundamental concern of German idealism is ethics. In fact, the very first words are simply the restatement of the title as “an Ethics [*eine Ethik*].” It is certainly not my concern here to ferret out whose voice, despite Hegel's physical writing of the fragment, predominates the fragment and hence which philosopher could lay claim to primary authorship. I find such a question of dubious value.⁵ Rather, I simply begin by noting that all three implicitly agree that in some way the primary concern of thinking, the question that births philosophy's noblest endeavors, is not the True, but the Good. Long before Levinas claimed that the “correlation between knowledge and being, or the thematics of contemplation, indicates both a difference and a difference that is *overcome* in the *true*,”⁶ one finds immediately in the *System* fragment a claim that implies that ethics, not epistemology or ontology, is first philosophy. “Inasmuch as the whole of metaphysics will in the future be subsumed under *moral philosophy* [*künftig in die Moral fällt*]—a matter in which Kant, with his two practical postulates, has merely provided an *example*, and has *exhausted* nothing—this ethics will be nothing else than a complete system of all ideas, or, what comes to the same, of all practical postulates” (OS, 8).

These claims are as straightforward as they are revolutionary. Following Kant, but claiming that Kant was only a beginning, that his thinking has not at all exhausted the matter at hand, the *System* fragment argues that all true ideas are fundamentally ethical statements and that this is so because the Good implicitly precedes the True. Indeed, in some way, one would only desire the true if somehow desire came to relate to the True as worthy of desire. For the True to become a desideratum, its goodness as such must already have announced itself. One values the True only insofar as it is good to do so; hence a relationship to the Good stands in advance of a relationship to the True.

Yet what does it mean to demand that the True follow from the Good? This is a question of decisive importance for all of German Idealism, indeed perhaps for all of thinking.

The fragment is quite clear about what this question does *not* mean. It is not a new state program, a new project for the civil servants of the truth. The idea of the Good is clearly equated with the idea of Freedom and this idea excludes the possibility of a mechanical conception of thinking. “I want to show that there is no idea of the *state*, because the state is something *mechanical*” (OS, 9).⁷ A machine—at least in the sense intended here—proceeds from a preordained and clearly discernible first principle. It is a closed, synchronic system and is hence, so to speak, always up to something. Its movement is always on the way to getting something done. It is the reduction of the movement of freedom to the movement of some species of *work*. But what if freedom were not a thing but, in some way still to be thought, the first principle? And what if this principle were a “barbarian” principle, always outside the wall of any system that it inaugurates? Then its primary law of movement could always contradict the laws that it inaugurated because it would remain aloof from that which it propagates. The idea of freedom is the idea of sovereignty, of that which remains free from what it engenders, of that whose *ideatum* always exceeds its *idea*.

The matter of this excess, as I shall soon argue, remains of critical importance, but for now it shall suffice to say, “Thus we must proceed beyond the state!” In fact, variations of this prepositional construction, *über etwas hinaus* (through x in order to get beyond x), are often found in the early writings of Schelling that comprise what he later referred to as his “negative philosophy.” In these texts, Schelling led each discursive project to the incomprehensible origin of its own discursivity, attempting to demonstrate that the first principle by which a discourse is founded cannot, in its turn, be founded. Hence, each and every one of these principles, themselves the progenitors of their respective systems, is brought face to face with the ruinous opacity of their own provenance, an opacity that evades all efforts at constituting it and which remains as the ground of all that exists. It is darkness as the ground of existence that disrupts all attempts at constituting it as, to borrow a phrase from the 1809 *Freedom* essay, *ein nie aufgehender Rest*, an indivisible remainder that cannot be resolved into the understanding but which, in contesting the understanding, remains the “incomprehensible ground of reality” (I/7, 360).

This excess, the incessant sovereignty of all beginnings, is, for Schelling, the power of life, the life of freedom, which, if subsumed by the machinery of the state and its bureaucrats of the truth (the Good whose *ideatum* is resolved in the idea), always leads to the necessity that the state “treat free human beings like mechanical cog wheels” (OS, 10). German Idealism, at least as expressed in this fragment, would be opposed to all totalitarian modes of thinking as an unacceptable betrayal of the Goodness that engenders thinking.

If the Good and the True resist—even contest—each other, how can they be brought into relationship with each other? In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant had named the space between the region [*Gebiet*] of the True,

that is, concepts of nature, and the region of the Good, that is, concepts of freedom, *eine unübersehbare Kluft*, an inestimable, even unsurpassable, gulf, and hence for Kant no transition [*Übergang*] between the two is possible.⁸ The Good and the True fundamentally oppose each other. Nonetheless, Kant goes on to argue, the region of the Good *should* have an influence on the region of the true. If the region of the Good is the region of ethical imperatives, this region commands reason to bring the True under the influence of the Good. Hence there must be a “ground of the unity [*Einheit*] of the supersensible that is at the ground of nature and with the supersensible that the concept of freedom contains in practical way” (KU, 11). This ground, shared by the supersensible origin of the sensible and the supersensible origin of the categorical imperative, does not produce knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] pertaining to either region and hence would have no region of its own, but rather roams between the Good and the True, and in its errancy rests in the region of neither.

Kant’s unified ground is the reflective faculty of aesthetic judgment. Insofar as the Good moves towards the True, judgment, proceeding without prior interest, finds pleasure in the grace or *Gunst* of the beautiful and the nonpurposive play of the purposive, that is, in the free play of form. It is not form [the True] *per se* that animates our delight and grounds taste, but form as an expression of freedom’s formlessness. Kant gave remarkable examples as evidence of this. Say that while one was wandering through the forest, taking delight in the spontaneous outbursts of bird song, “which we cannot bring under any rule of music” (KU, §22, 86), one learns that these songs had been mechanically created. What once was the source of pleasure becomes a source of irritation. Curiously, it is perhaps worth mentioning that such a problem confronted the designers of Disney World in Orlando. If they did not eradicate or at least control the mosquito problem, visitors would find their dream vacation ruinously harassed. But if they destroyed the mosquitoes, then there would be no food for the birds to eat. Without food, there would be no birds and without birds, Disney World would lose some of its magic. Not wanting either to make its visitors suffer the banes of nature or to lose the charms of nature, they decided to pipe in recorded bird songs. Little did Kant know that he had inadvertently anticipated the coming of the land of totalitarian kitsch, that is, the land in which nature is made to appear as if it had lost its sovereignty.

But why this insistence in reflective judgment that the reign of mechanized beauty, that is, kitsch, the denial of incomprehensible forces like death, is an assault on taste? Why not just say that if some people take pleasure in mechanized birds sounds, let them have their aesthetic druthers? Why does Kant insist that taste must refuse kitsch, much in the same way that the Tübingen trio refused the state’s totalitarian usurpation of freedom?

In the disinterested pleasures attending to aesthetic judgment, it is freedom at the ground of law, its “reference to the *free lawfulness* of the imagination [*die*

freie Gesetzmäßigkeit der Einbildungskraft]” (KU, §22, 82) that grounds taste. In another remarkable example, Kant takes exception to William Marsden’s claim in his *History of Sumatra* that when among the wild and opulent profusion of forms of “free beauties” in the Sumatran forests, he found them to be too much, too wild, too prodigal, but when he discovered, amidst this extravagance, an orderly pepper patch, it reminded him that orderliness was the key to aesthetic pleasure. To this Kant proposes the following thought experiment: if Marsden were to look at this pepper patch continuously, would he not become bored and would his eyes not eventually turn back to the opulent forest? Was not the pleasure of discovering a pepper patch in a forest not found in the pleasure that one takes in pepper patches or any other orderly arrangement *per se*, but in the surprise in having found such an oddity in the midst of such extravagance? That one could stumble upon a pepper patch in the middle of a Sumatran jungle attests to the extravagance of nature more broadly construed. Is not the pepper patch but another one of the innumerable mysterious forms found in the jungle and therefore itself not evidence that it is the prodigality of nature that produces pleasure, not the nature of any one of its possible forms considered in isolation from the jungle of Being? When one finds oneself attracted to a campfire or a babbling brook, is not the source of their attending pleasures based on the inability of the understanding to fix upon a principle governing their unpredictable array of forms (KU, §22, 85–86)? One has no idea what the next lick of flame will do, what it will look like, as if each of them were an expression of that which gave rise to form but which had no form of its own. As Nishida Kitarō, the seminal Japanese philosopher and patriarch of the Kyoto School, was later to argue, “When we feel beauty in a work of art, it is not merely that we have a pleasurable feeling with regard to it, but that we feel objective life in it.”

The pleasure specific to beauty reflects the movement of freedom within nature. When nature refers more directly to freedom, certain forms, viewed from a safe distance so that the issue at hand is not by default one’s own safety, suggest an indwelling freedom that contests its own dwelling place. Sublime forms verge on eclipsing their formality and assault any possible “interest” on the part of the observer. One might even say that, in assaulting interest, they take us beyond the pleasure principle and beyond our exclusive preoccupation with ourselves. Such contestation seizes one with “*die Verwunderung, die an Schreck grenzt, das Grausen und der heilige Schauer*,” “the amazement, which borders on terror, with horror, and with the holy shudder” (KU, §29, 116). Here freedom, wearing the mask of nature, reminds us of its proscription against graven images (KU, §29, 122). The sublime reminds us that the True was merely the proxy of the Good and that the latter is wholly otherwise than the former. Yet this shudder and awe, this *Schauer*, is holy, albeit not holy as measured by our interests. Our relationship to it is always a twofold attraction and repulsion, much like the horror that one might feel at one’s own desire to jump to one’s death.

This idea clearly informs the *System* fragment. After a discussion of the political threat to freedom, and implicitly its threat to the very possibility of art—for kitsch is to art what dogmatism is to truth, namely an unacceptable betrayal of the Good—the fragment turns to a discussion of art.

At the close, the idea that unifies all, the idea of beauty, the word taken in its higher, Platonic sense. For I am convinced that the supreme act of reason, because it embraces all ideas, is an aesthetic act; and that *only in beauty* are *truth and goodness* of the same flesh [*verschwistert*].—The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic force as the poet. Those human beings who are devoid of aesthetic sense are our pedantic philosophers. The philosophy of spirit is an aesthetic philosophy. . . . Poesy will thereby attain a higher dignity; in the end she will again become what she was in the beginning—the instructress of humanity. (OS, 10–11)

In beauty, the True and the Good somehow come together and in the above fragment this coming together, this being of the same flesh, is literally to be *verschwistert*, to be siblings, not to be the same, but to belong together by sharing blood and the same incomprehensible foundational principle. In beauty, the True and the Good are seen as animated by the same principle of life. Beauty, as we saw with Kant, brings together the ground of the True (what Schelling called the “indivisible remainder”) with the Good as ground (or even *Ungrund*, the nongrounding ground).

I turn now to two accounts of this ground, namely Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which, even by Schelling’s account, is a strong presentation of the negative philosophy and Schelling’s initial responses to his own as well as Hegel’s negative philosophy.

II

The enormous sweep of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (1807) defies any effort to arrive at quick generalizations and renders such attempts somewhat foolish. Rather than unduly caricature this odyssey of Spirit, I will attempt simply to locate a tension between Hegel and the Schelling of the middle period by taking note of a couple of important statements that Hegel makes about the relationship between the Good and the True.

In his justly celebrated introduction to the *Phenomenology*,¹⁰ Hegel notes that if consciousness “entrenches itself in sentimentality [*Empfindsamkeit*], which assures us that it finds everything to be *good in its kind*, then this assurance likewise suffers violence at the hands of Reason, for, precisely insofar as something is merely a *kind*, Reason finds it *not* to be good” (PG, §80). When

Empfindsamkeit shackles itself to the reduction of the Good to the True, that is, when the Good, which manifests in kinds, is limited to those very kinds, then the Good itself resists its own categorical delimitations. The Good can only be thought in kinds, but at the same time it also resists those very kinds. The Good and the True are in disequilibrium, with the Good resisting the very truth of its appearance. The True is the proxy of the absent Good but, as such, these proxies are also the life of the Good, its ceaseless dialectical display of progressing kinds.

It was in this sense then that Hegel claimed “The *living ethical* world is Spirit in its *truth* [*Die lebendige sittliche Welt ist der Geist in seiner Wahrheit*]” (PG, §442). The dialectical odyssey of the Good through the seas of the True continuously yields the stages of *Sittlichkeit*, a community’s historical relationship to the Good. An ethical relationship cannot be fixed because its expression is rife with the vital dialectical spark of its truth.

Yet, despite the vitality of the Good as the dialectical unfolding of the True, the latter always remains in a continuing relationship with the former. The Good, so to speak, is always *aufgehoben* as the True. The negative resistance of the Good never causes the True to collapse altogether, to shatter upon the Good, to die of its own antinomies. Spirit, with great cunning (the implacable movement of its Odyssean μῆτις), always finds a way to profit from its losses.

This is because something has happened and the journey home, the νόστος, has in some fashion been successful. Spirit has accomplished something, namely, the beauty of its own self-reflection, despite the fact that such a self-reflection does not allow the True to exhaust the Good. “The realm of spirits which is formed in this way in the outer world constitutes a succession in time in which one Spirit relieved another of its charge and each took over the empire of the world from its predecessor. Their *goal* is the revelation of the depth of Spirit and this is the *absolute concept*. . . . *The goal*, absolute knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection [*Erinnerung*] of Spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm” (PG, §808). These are the relics of the Good, preserved in the pantheon of the True. In the end, Spirit will have something to show for itself and truth will not have withered away altogether in the solar abundance of the Good. Spirit will have itself to show for itself. Spirit will not have died because it has an ongoing relationship with a Good that demands regeneration but never annihilation.

III

In the works that Schelling wrote in the immediate wake of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, one does not find Hegel’s name even mentioned, although there

is detectable some concern not only with the latter's implicit and perhaps inadvertent dismissal of Schelling ("the night when all cows are black"), but also with the result of the *Phenomenology* or—better put—with the Result *per se*. For what is a result if not also a clotting of the conspiracy of life? In *The Ages of the World* Schelling acknowledged that thinking begins with the dialectic but insists that it does not conclude with it. "Hence the view, harbored from age to age, that philosophy can be finally transformed into actual knowledge through the dialectic and to regard the most consummate dialectic as knowledge itself, betrays more than a little narrowness. The very existence and necessity of the dialectic proves that it is still in no way actual knowledge" (AW, 202).

What, if anything, results from dialectical thinking? Can the Good be co-opted to accompany the historical life of Reason and the natural history of the True? "Therefore all knowledge must pass through the dialectic. Yet it is another question as to whether the point will ever come where knowledge becomes free and lively, as the image of the ages is for the writer of history who no longer recalls their investigations in their presentation" (AW, 205). What then is the free or good use of one's own, to use Hölderlin's phrase, if, on the other hand, the Good transcends its historical availability? The idea of the Good demands that the Good itself transcend its own idea. No matter how necessary the idea may be, it nonetheless stalls the infinity of the Good itself.

Yet one does not simply leave Hegel behind, as if he could be refuted. As Schelling confessed, "All knowledge must pass through the dialectic" (AW, 205). Yet we must finally abandon everything, even the dialectic. Nonetheless, the success of this passage, the wealth of this poverty, assumes already the power of the dialectic. Simply to refuse Hegel is to vindicate Hegel, for the refusal of the dialectic is to take recourse in the negative moment that is the very engine of the dialectic. As Foucault, whose own discourse "was pretty disloyal to Hegel," argued:

But truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.¹¹

If I were to delineate the relationship between Hegel and Schelling from the perspective of the latter's thought, I would say that Schelling's critical relationship to Hegel is ultimately his critical relationship to the lopsidedness of his own early tendency to emphasize the whole of philosophy as if it were just

a negative philosophy. Schelling never outright dismissed Hegel but instead continually stressed the proximity of their projects. In fact, Schelling found himself so close to Hegel that not only did he sometimes praise Hegel's work, but also credited him with being among the best readers of Schelling's early negative philosophy. As Schelling commented on his predecessor in the 1841 inaugural Berlin lecture, "I see how Hegel alone had rescued the fundamental thoughts of my philosophy in the latter years; and these thoughts, as I have gathered from his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he knew until the end and he held to them in their purity."¹²

Hegel, however, completed Schelling's formal systematic model by allowing it to come to a conclusion. Despite the fact that the work of the dialectic is never done, it is done insofar as it has come to know itself as *work*, as the serious business of the life of the dialectic. The alterity of the Good, the inscrutable ground of historical existence, the irreducible remainder that evades all thinking, even dialectical thinking, becomes the negative moment of the dialectic and thereby diminishes the extent to which it can resist thinking. Hegel, Schelling charged, "made the *Identitätsphilosophie* itself to positive philosophy and with that elevated it to the absolute philosophy that leaves nothing outside of itself" (PO, 122). Hegel's negative or formal Good, despite touching the Good, nonetheless inhibits its barbarian life and continuously makes it labor in its sullen factories of the truth.

This, Schelling confessed, was a danger that he himself had not successfully avoided in avoiding in his own early writings. Reflecting in 1827 on his earlier Philosophy of Nature, Schelling confessed that

One can admittedly say: "God exposes Himself to Becoming precisely in order to posit Himself as such" and one really *must* say this. But as soon as this is said, one can also see that one must immediately either assume a time when God was not *as* such (but this again contradicts general religious consciousness), or one denies that there ever was such a *time*, i.e., that movement, that happening is explained as an *eternal happening*. But an eternal happening is no happening at all. Consequently the whole idea [*Vorstellung*] of that process and of that movement is itself illusory, nothing has really happened, *everything* happened only in thoughts and this whole movement was only a movement of thinking. [The *Naturphilosophie*] should have grasped this; it put itself beyond all contradiction thereby, but precisely because of this it also gave up its claim to objectivity, i.e., it had to confess to being a science in which there is no question of *existence* [*Existenz*], of that which *really exists*.¹³

Negative philosophy, despite its dialectical concept of history, is still blind to its own history. It curiously lacks the historical ingredient, the proximity to the

opacity of nonabstract existents, to historical singularities rather than abstract positions. In a sense the early Schelling and the mature Hegel had both attempted to make too much sense of the Good. Hegel, for example, could announce Spirit's self-recovery only by privileging the *idea* of Spirit itself. Hegel had decided to favor the moment of speech and hence was not silent enough about silence. This sovereign silence exceeds both image and word, and its history is not governed by any law but is, rather, if you will, in some way the "mystical foundation of law." The negative philosophy is what Schelling later renamed a poem about freedom. The positive philosophy, on the other hand, is reason growing silent before the mystery of its origin, contenting itself with the a posteriori transfigurations of divine silence. It is an absolute respect for the facts of history and a refusal to read history as a continuity, as governed by law. When "Hegel meant that the given system is philosophy" (PO, 122), philosophy consequently clotted, forgetting philosophy's relationship to the "true *prima materia* of thinking" that "cannot be a thought in the way that a single figure is a thought. It is simply the fundamental matter which relates to thinking only as 'that which is not-not-to-think' [*das Nicht-Nichtzudenkende*]" (PO, 122). The *prima materia* eludes all that it engenders.

As Schelling contended with the one-sidedness of his negative philosophy, he realized that a philosophy that leads all discourses back into the immense ocean of silence out of which they were generated loses a concrete sense of the specificity of things. One paradoxically loses the Good by sacrificing things back into the silence of the Good. The positive philosophy would move in the opposite direction, from the Good to the True, transfiguring the manner in which the True is affirmed. In other words, the silence of the Good is no longer silent when the din of generalities about silence silences its force. Schelling was clear about this in the justly celebrated 1809 *Freedom* essay. "If freedom is the positive concept of the In-itself over all, then the investigation of human freedom is again thrown back into the general, since the intelligible, upon which freedom alone was grounded, is also the being [*Wesen*] of the things-in-themselves. Hence, mere idealism is insufficient for indicating the specific difference, that is, the distinctness of human freedom" (I/7, 352). Simply to bring all things to the brink of silence, to raise all particulars to the highest and annihilating level of generality, sacrifices the specificity of things. There is something obstinately and singularly specific about human freedom.

In fact, it was Hegel who was too abstract, who did not account for the irreducible specificity of the Good. Schelling took this up by posing two rather terse questions in his 1827 lecture course, *The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*.

What this [Hegel's] argument concerns, it could be conceded, is that everything is in the logical idea and therefore the Meaningless [*das Sinnlose*] can exist nowhere; but

1. Is a necessary question: why is there meaning at all, why is there not meaninglessness instead of meaning? [*warum ist Sinn überhaupt, warum ist nicht Unsinn statt Sinn?*]
2. The logical represents itself as the negative, as that without which nothing could exist—but like in the sensuous world, for example, where everything can be comprehended in measure and number, yet certainly still not for this reason being the explanation of the world. The entire world, as it were, lies caught in reason, but the question is: How did it come into this net? (Therefore there is still in the world something other and something more than mere reason—even something that strives beyond these boundaries [*etwas über diese Schranken Hinausstrebendes*]).¹⁴

All beginnings, like all endings, resist the meanings that they produce. “The pure, abstract ‘that [*daß*]’ is not a synthetic axiom.” It allows for no result (II/1, 563). In the positive philosophy one hears the ringing of the silent Good in history’s discontinuities, of the *actus purus*, the *reines daß*, which originates in the inscrutability of the ground of existence.¹⁵ As Schelling commented on Hegel and the Hegelians at the end of his life:

Just as many people imagine a beginning without any presuppositions at all, they would also not be able to presuppose thinking itself and, for example, also not deduce the language in which they are expressing this. But since this itself could not happen without language, there would remain only the growing silent [*das Vermutmen*] that the helplessness and faint audibility of language really seek to approach. The beginning would have to be at the same time the end. (*Philosophical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, II/1, 312)

If Schelling’s reading of Hegel is at the same time a confrontation with his own negative philosophy, then it is, as we shall see in the next two chapters, in part a confrontation with his own elevation of Spinoza. “There was a time in which I dared to present this succession of possibilities of a Being that is from the outset still futural [*eines vorerst noch zukünftigen Seyns*] only in an image [*nur bildisch*] of another. But, as it appeared to me and still appears to me, there is a fully parallel succession” (II/1, 294).

Schelling cast this reading of Hegel around a figure that, as we shall see in the next chapter, had animated his own earlier work: a revitalized Spinoza. In claiming to be *the* work of philosophy from the standpoint of freedom, the reign of freedom articulated universally, Hegel did not have a rigorous enough sense of his own locality (a nineteenth-century German) and hence he inadvertently inverted Spinoza’s dogmatism. *The* philosophy of freedom

(Hegel had insisted that Schelling's philosophy was not universalizable because it was inherently elitist) is the universalization of freedom or Spinozism rewritten as idealism:

In the final idea all actual process resolves itself [*hebt sich auf*] and idealism in the last moment falls back quite obviously and without any inhibition into subjective idealism. We stand there at the end where we already stood with Spinoza. The entire system is Spinozism rewritten in the idealistic [*ein ins Idealische umgeschriebener Spinozismus*]. (GP, 234)

Hegel's negative philosophy is too concept-driven and too unaware of its own historical contingency to account for the possibility of a positive philosophy. In fact, Schelling claimed that Hegel, in pursuing a science of logic that leaves nothing outside of itself, ends up de facto pawning itself off as a positive philosophy. For Schelling, a positive philosophy has always left something outside of itself, some kind of untamable and barbarian remainder. This remainder leaves even the most successful accounts fundamentally incomplete. Hence, Schelling was to claim that Hegel "completely threw himself into the methodological discussion in such a way that he thereby completely forgot the questions which lay outside it" (HMP, 143/147). "What" lives outside the system, outside the logic, is precisely the question for Schelling. In the 1827 lectures on the *System of the Ages of the World*, Schelling argued that "everything is only the work of time and we do not know the absolutely true, but rather just what the time in which we are ensconced allows. We begin to conceive that the eternal truths are nothing but propositions abstracted from their contemporary situation. Basically there are no eternal truths in the sense that we formerly wanted to describe them."¹⁶ Not even the elastic truth of spirit's dialectical self-recognition would escape the simultaneous structures and strictures of time.

Hence, Schelling considered Hegel's philosophy to be an "episode" (HMP, 128/136) because in Hegel's *Logic* "one finds every concept which just happened to be accessible and available at his time taken up as a moment of the absolute Idea at a specific point" (HMP, 139/144). Schelling insisted on pressing the question of the irreducible barbarian remainder: "What if concepts can be shown which that system knows nothing about, or which it was able to take up into itself in a completely different sense from their real sense" (HMP, 139/144)? But this could not happen within Hegel's system, which drives to appropriate all difference, all alterity, within itself. As a result, God knows no Sabbath, and there is no discontinuous series of radically new beginnings, no natality, for God is perpetually occupied with the same activity. "He is the God who only ever does what He has always done, and who therefore cannot create anything new" (HMP, 160/160). Hence, Joseph

Lawrence argued with good reason that Hegel “yearned for that absolute reason which articulates and determines itself, but his own system was nonetheless precisely that, his own system and he himself remained blind to that fact.”¹⁷ Schelling, on the other hand, never argued that his articulations were the only way to articulate the relationship between thinking and the absolute. Nor did he claim that he was the first to speak to this relationship. In fact, the *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation* is, in part, an attempt to locate historically specific testimonies to this relationship, each in its singular way ensconced within the capabilities of the locality within which they were articulated.

For Schelling thinking is agonistic (*kämpfende* or *ringende*) and in this instance, Schelling’s struggle with Hegel is also the aporetic struggle that a revitalized Spinozism demands: the eternal oscillation between dispersal and gathering, the Many and the One, the Good and the True. There is no proper result, only the various potencies of the conspiracy of life. When the respiratory circulation stops, it becomes severed from the conspiracy, becomes sick, and eventually dies. Within Hegel’s negative (idealistic), and, by implication, within his own negative philosophy, Schelling struggled with such an inhibition. This struggle aimed not to destroy with polemic, but to unleash and heal sclerotic stoppages. This emancipatory task is the eternal dialogue with freedom and its self-multiplication into an infinity of new beginnings and endings.

Schelling’s confrontation with his former friend was conducted primarily through lectures in Munich and Berlin. His early essays were written before Hegel’s ascent to academic glory and the only text published in Schelling’s lifetime in which he explicitly spoke of Hegel was the so-called 1843 *Paulus-nachschrift*, a transcript of and polemical commentary on Schelling’s inaugural Berlin lectures (1841–1842). It was published against Schelling’s wishes and his attempts to suppress it failed.

At times, Schelling expressed rage at his former friend. Almost a year after Hegel’s death, for example, Schelling wrote in a letter to Christian Weiß (September 6, 1832) that “I can only consider the so-called Hegelian philosophy for what it really is: an episode in the history of modern philosophy and only a sad one at that.”¹⁸ At other times, however, Schelling confronted Hegel’s work with more composure. After meeting Schelling, Caroline had written to Friedrich Schlegel (October 14, 1798) that her future husband “is a person to break through walls. He is a real fundamental nature [*rechte Urnatur*]. Considered as a mineral, he is granite.”¹⁹ Schelling had something of Cato’s imperturbable stoicism and granite resoluteness that he had praised in the *Freedom* essay. Accordingly, he struggled to read Hegel’s work without polemic but rather with immanent critique: drawing attention to its power, its proximity to his own project, and to the points where the power of this discourse stall and threaten to ossify. His aim was not to dispense with Hegel but to loosen any sclerotic arteries. Schelling’s granite disposition

emerged from his philosophy of total affirmation and a joy that could not be altogether destroyed by its ineluctable implication with sadness. (At this point I would like to distance myself as far as possible from a long and silly tradition of interpreting the famous 1850 daguerreotype of Schelling as depicting a rancorous man destroyed by Hegel and unable to complete his system.) For Schelling, the movement of thinking has no One beginning and no One conclusion, just discontinuous and infinite series of potencies and valences, eternal beginnings and eternal endings.

Martin Heidegger, along with Walter Schultz, Paul Tillich, and Karl Jaspers, was among the first twentieth-century commentators to insist that Schelling, although overshadowed by Hegel, was not exhausted by the supposed triumph of the Hegelian dialectic. "Even today, the judgment of Schelling still stands under Hegel's shadow. Schelling himself suffered a great deal under this in his later life."²⁰ Heidegger claimed that for Schelling, freedom never allowed him to complete his thought but rather "supported, fulfilled and carried away this life again and again to new attempts" (SA, 8/7):

When Schelling's name is mentioned, people like to point out that this thinker constantly changed his standpoint, and one often designates this as a lack of character. But the truth is that there was seldom a thinker who struggled so passionately ever since his earliest periods for his one and unique standpoint. On the other hand, Hegel, the contemplative thinker, published his first great work when he was thirty-seven years old, and with its publication had gotten both his philosophy and standpoint straightened out. What followed was elaboration and application, although certainly in grand style and with a rich certainty. (SA 7/6)

For Hegel, Schelling's complication of ever new beginnings was not the mark of Schelling's strength, but his immaturity. Schelling had conducted his philosophical training in public. Hegel's efforts, despite their proximity to Schelling, found some measure of completion or reconciliation and hence universality:

Hegel . . . always acknowledged the great accomplishments of his former friend who was younger and had become famous before him. This was not difficult for him, either, for he knew that he was in possession of the absolute system of absolute knowledge and could easily allow those views validity, which he thought were subordinate from this standpoint of all standpoints. (SA, 15/13)

The crux of Hegel's tactical, perhaps even cunning, displacement of Schelling is found in paragraphs 15–19 of the Preface to the *Phenomenology* in which Hegel spoke of the "monochromatic formalism" (PG, §15) and "monotony

[*Eintönigkeit*]” (PG, §16) of the $A = A$ that confuses “an abstract universal for the absolute” (PG, §16). When one goes around applying the “One, immobile form of the knowing subject to everything at hand,” the brute facts lose their “self-originating richness and the self-determining differentiation of forms” (PG, §15). In this empty absolute, there is the “dissolution [*Auflösung*] of *differentia* and determination.” Everything is one (PG, §16). At first glance, any reader of Schelling would think that Hegel, at this point, is in full agreement with Schelling. Nowhere does Schelling ever argue for an empty absolute. He was, after all, a natural scientist and a student of medicine, and his work involved him in studies of the most detailed kind. Schelling was an ardent defender of the minutest details of nature. Like William Blake, infinity is not found in the flight to the heavens, but in the palm of your hand.

Yet, as one reads these four paragraphs, it seems that Hegel must have in some way wanted readers to associate this critique with Schelling. Although Hegel did not mention Schelling by name, the association of the intellectual intuition with “the night when all cows are black” (PG, §16) and a philosophy of identity in which “everything is the same in the absolute” (PG, §16), would have lead many readers to assume that Hegel had Schelling in mind. Second, Hegel speaks of the intellectual intuition by name when he then asks if it “does not again fall back into a lethargic simplicity and presents actuality itself in an ineffective way” (PG, §17)? The intellectual intuition is a “simple negativity,” lacking the “self-reproducing sameness [*sich wiederherstellende Gleichheit*]” within itself. It is not an “immediate unity” (PG, §18). Using another of Schelling’s symbols, Hegel claimed that “the life of God and divine knowledge may therefore well be expressed as a play of Love with itself; but when the seriousness, the pain, the patience and the work of the negative are lacking within it, this idea sinks down into devotionism [*Erbaulichkeit*] and even to insipidity” (PG, §19).

Hegel doubts the effectiveness of the philosophy of identity because it a) does not clearly articulate the relationship of the absolute to *differentia* and b) precedes with an immediate (intellectual) intuition and does follow the phenomenological labor of the Spirit’s self-revelation at the end of history.²¹ The absolute emerges in the intellectual intuition, as if shot out of a gun, lacking its slow journey, its piecemeal, dialectical trajectory towards self-discovery.

No serious reader of Schelling, however, could countenance such inferences. This is not to suggest that Schelling did not learn anything from Hegel and that Hegel in his brightest moments merely stole from Schelling. There were no doubt misunderstandings between the two, and Hegel’s sense of the daring developments in Schelling’s later thought is conspicuously absent.²² On the other hand, Schelling himself acknowledged a profound debt to Hegel. Schelling’s positive philosophy, chiefly the *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation*, emerged, in part, when Hegel’s work compelled Schelling to develop further his own sense of history. Without eliminating the force of negative

philosophy, Schelling also reversed the direction of philosophy, tracing the descent of the ideal into the real (positive philosophy). This is the discontinuous history of Truth as avatars, so to speak, of the Good.²³ These avatars are the discontinuous singularities of history. Just as a person with a proper name is not just a concrete example of an abstract idea, positive existents are non-substitutable events, not just concrete instantiations of abstract positions. Their concreteness also defies the abstraction that would sublimate them.²⁴

Nonetheless, Hegel's destructive critique crippled Schelling's career. Lev Shestov once called this assassination a "frightful treachery" and the "supreme crime . . . done quite openly in the light of day" as "Hegel, this dull and loose man, this thief and murderer, had conquered the whole world by treachery while noble Schelling was left to himself and the consolations of metaphysics."²⁵ Shestov's language is no doubt extreme, but Hegel's critique is nonetheless all the more curious when one reflects, as Karl Jaspers astutely noticed in his *Schelling: Größe und Verhängnis* (1955), that four years prior to the *Phenomenology*, Schelling had already made the exact same criticism: "Most people see in the being of the absolute nothing but a pure night and are unable to know anything in it; it dwindles away for them into a mere negation of multiplicity [*bloße Verneinung der Verschiedenheit*]."²⁶

Puzzlement over Hegel's inferences about the dark night of the intellectual intuition becomes even more pronounced when one examines the exchange of letters between Hegel and Schelling around the time of the publication of the *Phenomenology*. In a letter from Bamberg (May 1, 1807), Hegel is careful to mention that the criticisms in the Preface are not aimed at Schelling, but at the misappropriation of his ideas. "In the Preface you will not find that I have been too hard on the shallowness that makes so much mischief with your forms in particular and degrades your science into a bare formalism."²⁷ Schelling wrote back, asking that Hegel clarify in the next edition that he was not specifically criticizing Schelling.

Insofar as you yourself mention the polemical part of the Preface, given my own justly measured opinion of myself I would have to think too little of myself to apply this polemic to my own person. It must therefore, as you expressed in your letter, apply only to a further bad use of my ideas and to those who parrot them without understanding, although in this writing itself the distinction is not made. You may easily imagine how happy I would be to get these people once and for all off my back.²⁸

Hegel never responded to the letter and this "distinction" was not made in public.

Furthermore, for Schelling, the commitment to a science of absolute reason strips nature and art of their singularities and their magnificence. The

philosophy of nature can neither replace nature nor can it reduce nature to the “agony of the concept” because the philosophy of art cannot replace or sublimate art. Schelling explicitly took issue, for example, with Hegel’s aesthetics during his 1832–1833 winter semester course on the *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie* (*The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*):

Art only has meaning so long as people have to struggle with it. Spirit [*Geist*], conscious of itself through and through, can no longer “lower itself down” to art. Hegel, according to the assertion of his followers, has also ended the history of art. After him there can be no more poetry and no more art. Instead of all this magnificence in history and art, there is but only a single surrogate: this philosophy ends with the deification of the state. . . . In this deification of the state this philosophy shows itself as fully immersed in the great error of the time. The more the state includes the positive in itself, the more it belongs on the side of the most negative against everything positive, against all appearances of higher and spiritual and ethical life. The state is only a support of a higher life. . . . Therefore whoever makes the state the absolutely highest is one whose system, is already essentially illiberal because they subject everything that is higher to the state. (GP, 235)

Hegel, unlike Schelling, no longer attempted to abandon the mechanics of the state apparatus, although Schelling was careful not to argue that Hegel contended that a particular state is justified in arrogating all power and subjecting all of its members. Hegel’s Prussian State is not a figure of “servility.” The state, according to Schelling, is one of Hegel’s figures of the negative or formal structure of Spirit. As such it represents perhaps the greatest of negative philosophies as it claims to at last become aware of the formal structure or “logic” of the Absolute such that it returns to itself as “the self-possessing subject [*das sich selbst besitzende Subjekt*]” (PO, 128–29). Returned to itself, as Schelling elaborated in his inaugural lectures in Berlin (1841–1842), “it is from now on in process or is itself the process. It is the God of eternal doing, but It only always does what It had done; its life is in the circulation of figures in which it always alienates itself and comes back” (PO, 133). There is no absolute alterity in the dialectic. God, stripped of Its sovereignty, becomes the prisoner of the rule of its own logic, i.e., “that Reason [*Vernunft*] is becoming aware of its own content as the content of all Being” (PO, 122). In this sense, Hegel makes the same “mistake” with the state that he makes with language and with art: he claims to have located them in a triadic figure, and, in doing so, fails to realize that, in their irreducibly differential character, they are differential expressions of an absolute that exceeds them and which thereby is not exhausted in this result.²⁹ The absolute is a debt that cannot be

repaid. The “mistake” lies in the “deification” of or fixation with the state or any other figure. Schelling again made this point at the end of his life, succinctly alluding to Hegel without naming him, in a footnote at the beginning of his discussion of the state in the *Philosophical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*. Here the absolute, a “living law,” comes neither from this world nor from people and hence its “natural existence” is not, as in the *Recht-sphilosophie*, “in the family” (II/1, 533).

When, like Orpheus, Reason turns to the Absolute to gaze upon it as if it were Eurydice, it too loses her. As Schelling articulated this in the second version of *The Ages of the World*:

God is the begetter [*Zeugende*] as well as the begotten [*Gezeugte*], but one can stop nowhere and say, “Here is God in particular.” God is incomprehensible and inconceivable but not in the customary sense that no concept of it whatsoever would be possible (this itself is a concept of God: that it is eternal life, the eternal movement of self-production [*Selbsterzeugung*]). Rather only that there is no static [*stillstehend*] one. God is inconceivable in an actual sense, incoercible, indefinable, and not to be included in any determinate boundaries; like the wind that blows where it wants and you hear well its sigh—but you know not from where it comes and to where it goes. . . . It is the spirit of this eternal life and wherever you arrive, you find already only its footprints, not God itself because it is the most nimble and goes through everything on account of its purity.³⁰

Hegel’s God, having made it home to Ithaca, has become weary from the journey and thereby no longer nimble. Such a God is born of the Good, but it asserts itself by reacting to and refusing the Good. It does so by denying its own contingency. The dialectic is, in a way, the most cunning form of the *conatus*, consuming all that is not itself and is hence unable ever to perish. The immortalization of Spirit has everything to do with its systemic denial of what Hannah Arendt later called natality. Spirit moves to assimilate exceptions—indeed, the exceptional per se—within itself, thus barring the possibility of radically new beginnings. For Schelling, in contrast, history is not just the history of Spirit’s dialectical accomplishments. History also marks the discontinuity of new beginnings, of exceptions to the prevailing rules, of movements of freedom that emerge outside the range of any idea.

IV

Yet Schelling strained to hear these gifts as well as the “faint audibility of language,” neither allowing specificity to drown in the great sea of silence, nor

asserting that it could adequately account for itself. All things emerge from silence, but not in the same way. History does not in the end move in accordance with laws. It moves as mysteriously as the appearance of grace. It proceeds discontinuously by jumps and starts, reflecting the infinite amount of beginnings and the infinite amount of endings.

Hence, the very contradiction of the title of the *Freedom* essay, which speaks of the human freedom, speaks of a volatile antinomy.³¹ On the one hand, freedom itself, the great Ocean of the Good, is exhausted in no kind or no word. Yet the human embodies this Goodness in a specifically human way. There is a human truth about Goodness, even if human truth in its humanness is also as such a betrayal of Goodness.

So what is specifically human about human freedom? Schelling's answer is as elusive as it is startling. The "real and living concept of freedom," as opposed to the "on the one hand most general and on the other hand merely formal" freedom that idealism offers, the "point of profoundest difficulty," is that the concept of human freedom, the *Wesen* that holds together opposite forces, is the "faculty for good and evil" (I/7, 353). On the surface this seems like a collapse into nostalgic theology. What is this strange faculty or *Vermögen* that holds together the antinomy of the human and the free, the specific and the utterly and infinitely general? Schelling named this faculty the *Zertrennlichkeit der Prinzipien*, the divisibility of principles, the separability of forces (I/7, 364) or *die Scheidung der Kräfte*, the cision of forces (I/7, 361) or a *Zwietracht der beiden Prinzipien*, a discord between both principles (I/7, 392).

This faculty is specifically human, marking the *Wesen* of the human. "Blind obsession [*Sucht*] and desire," Schelling argued, govern other animals. Only the dark principle is in effect and they are not yet born into the light. Perhaps they are gods, but they are not philosophers and they are not self-consciously governed by ideas. This is not to say that animals are illogical and incapable of discernment. Rather, animals do not proceed from an idea of themselves. As such, the dark ones do not have the *faculty* for the Fall [*der Abfall*], that is, the specific force requisite for the separation of forces (I/7, 372). It is not that humans are born higher than animals, for there is advantage for the dark principle, for the Good, to hold sway. "Animals can never step out of the unity whereas the human can capriciously tear apart the eternal band of the forces. Hence Franz Baader correctly states that it would desirable that human depravity only go to the point of becoming animals; but unfortunately the human can only stand under or above animals" (I/7, 373).

Animals live in unity with the Good because, lacking understanding or *Verstand*, they cannot come to believe that they understand themselves and in having so constituted themselves remove themselves from continuity with the life of things and the band of the living, antinomic potencies of the Good and the True. The human, however, in attempting to know and preserve their own,