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Schelling's Liberation of Reason from Itself: Response to Karen Ng and Markus Gabriel

Peter Dews

It would be an honour for any author to receive two such thoughtful and detailed responses to their published work. I feel particularly grateful because one of my aspirations, in writing *Schelling's Late Philosophy in Confrontation with Hegel*, was to encourage a more in-depth discussion of the whole range of Schelling's thinking than has been common until now in the English-speaking world. In developing their critiques, both Karen Ng and Markus Gabriel provide informative accounts of some of Schelling's main concerns, helping to make clear his achievements as a thinker, and his status as a challenging interlocutor for philosophers sympathetic to one or another form of Hegelianism.

I will begin by discussing Karen Ng's commentary, which focuses on crucial points of similarity and divergence between Schelling and Hegel. I will then respond to Markus Gabriel's critique of what he presents as my erroneously 'modernist' interpretation of Schelling's philosophy of history. In doing so, I will also have to consider Gabriel's alternative view of Schelling's *Grundoperation* (basic philosophical operation), which—as we both nonetheless agree—can be understood metaphorically as a 'decompression' of what Schelling refers to as 'un-pre-thinkable being' (*das unvordenkliche Seyn*).

I. Nature and the *a priori*

Karen Ng is sympathetic to the early phase of Schelling's work, during which he worked intensively on the philosophy of nature, and proposed a 'reciprocity', as she calls it, between nature and transcendental consciousness. In her account, this eventually led, in 1801, to the first statement of his 'identity philosophy', in which mind and nature are viewed as polarized expressions of the same ultimate principle. In contrast to the now receding wave of social pragmatist readings of Hegel, Ng appreciates that the genetic question concerning the emergence of beings who are both natural entities and capable of a conceptually structured self-consciousness, was a central issue for both Hegel and Schelling. Furthermore, seeking an answer to this question was important not simply for understanding

the status of human self-consciousness, but also for comprehending the very possibility of human beings coming to know the world in which they are embedded: mind and matter cannot be two radically distinct substances. Ng also stresses that Hegel and Schelling began their divergent philosophical developments from an initial standpoint which—during the period of their collaboration in Jena, at the dawn of the nineteenth century—was largely shared. She describes this common standpoint, without inhibition, as 'identity philosophy'.

However, Ng puts forward a critique of Schelling's trajectory which is based on the view that, neither in the case of Schelling nor in the case of Hegel, can the philosophy of nature be considered a purely *a priori* or conceptual exercise. On her account, it involves a certain interchange between conceptual determinations, on the one hand, and empirical discoveries regarding natural processes, including the results of experimentation, on the other. If this is the case, she argues, then Schelling's later turning away from the standpoint of *Identitätsphilosophie*, in the conviction that it consisted in a purely *a priori* form of thinking, which could not accommodate the contingent or non-rational aspects of the empirical world, was a mistake. There was no need for Schelling, in the final phase of his work, to take the drastic step of dividing philosophy into two distinct enterprises: a 'negative philosophy' concerned with the *a priori* determination of the structures of being, and a 'positive philosophy' operating in a hermeneutical and genealogical mode, and purportedly more open to the contingencies of the world process. Indeed, in Ng's view, Hegel's dialectical development of the philosophy of identity shows how Schelling's legitimate concerns—first among them, how human freedom can be accommodated within a philosophically systematic world view—can be addressed without any such bifurcation of philosophy.

In the case of Schelling, an important feature of his early development may have encouraged Ng to assume that his philosophy of nature is characterized by an interaction between the empirical and the conceptual levels. Schelling's first writings on the topic are filled with discussions of contemporary scientific experimental results, and of the theories devised to explain them. And, at certain points, he presents his task as being to correct the erroneous way in which scientists themselves frequently conceptualize their findings. Referring to Lichtenberg's suggestion that 'what we can say about light, heat, fire and matter is no more and no less than a picture language, which is valid only within its special limits', Schelling argues that

> The task of a philosophical science of nature largely consists in just this, to determine the admissibility as well as the limitations of such *fictions* in physics, which are absolutely necessary for the continued advance of investigations and observation, and only obstruct our scientific progress when we seek to use them outside their proper limits. (*Ideas*: 78/*SW* I/2: 100)[1]

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I readily admit that my use of the term 'reflective equilibrium' to describe this process, a use which Ng brings to attention, was not entirely appropriate, if taken to imply—as it often does in the work of Rawls and certain of his followers—that, in the search for a theory which coheres with some dimension of human experience, the initial principles are just as vulnerable to alteration in the light of judgements, as judgments in the light of principles. The polarity of opposing forces—expansive and contractive—which underpins Schelling's philosophy of nature cannot itself be put in doubt, since it is the objective correlate of the conflictual interdependence of subjectivity and objectivity which constitutes the human mind as such. However, in his work of the late 1790s, Schelling is still struggling to work out the character of the correspondence between nature as 'mind made visible' and mind as 'invisible nature', as he puts it at the close of the introduction to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (*Ideas*: 42/*SW* I/2: 56). And this may contribute to the impression that there is an epistemically isolable empirical input which helps to shape the principles guiding Schelling's conception of nature. With the emergence of the identity system, however, this impression completely vanishes. As Schelling states in the supplement to the introduction to *Ideas*, which was written for the second edition of 1803, *after* his shift to an 'identity philosophy' position:

> In the philosophy of nature, explanations take place as little as they do in mathematics; it proceeds from principles certain in themselves, without any direction prescribed to it, as it were, by the phenomena. (*Ideas*: 53/SW I/2: 70)

Of course, declarations such as this provoke the question: what role can experimental evidence play at all in Schelling's philosophy of nature? This issue is addressed in the *Introduction to an Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* of 1799. Indeed, the question becomes unavoidable in the wake of statements such as the following:

> We suggest that all phenomena are correlated in one absolute and *necessary* law, from which they can all be deduced; in short, that in natural science all that we know, we know absolutely *a priori*. Now, that experimentation never leads to such a knowing is plainly manifest from the fact that it can never get beyond the forces of nature, of which it makes use as a means. (*Introduction*: 197/*SW* I/3: 276–77)

Despite the apparent implication of this passage, Schelling dismisses as 'absurd' the conclusion that 'natural science must dispense with all experience, and, without any intervention of experience, be able to spin all its principles out of itself' (*Introduction*: 198/*SW* I/3: 278). He then seeks to reconcile his two lines of argument by proposing that, although we can be certain that every natural phenomenon

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'stands in connection with the ultimate conditions of nature', the discovery of the many intermediate links which establish this connection is the task of experimental research—a potentially endless task, since 'every new discovery throws us back upon a new ignorance' (*Introduction*: 199/*SW* I/3: 279). Schelling summarizes the double-sided character of his conception in the statement:

> *It is not, therefore*, that **we know** *nature* a priori, *but nature* **is** a priori; that is, everything individual in it is predetermined by the whole or by the idea of a nature generally. (*Introduction*: 198–99/*SW* I/3: 279)

He then goes on to make again his oft-repeated point that it is the 'fictions' which scientists unwittingly employ which impede insight into deep structure of nature.

In contrast to Ng's interpretation, I propose that Schelling's statement regarding the *a priori* status of nature itself *also* expresses the basic character of Hegel's philosophy of nature. As Hegel puts it:

> The philosophy of nature takes up the material which physics has prepared for it empirically, at the point to which physics has brought it, and reconstitutes it, so that experience is not its final warrant and base. (*PN*: §246R, 10)

In other words, in Hegel's view, although we may begin with experimental results, the basic task of the philosophy of nature is to identify *which* empirical phenomena correspond to the necessary determinations which philosophy establishes *a priori*. As he puts it at one point:

> The immanent philosophical element is here as everywhere the internal necessity of *some conceptual determination*, which must then be shown to be *some* natural existence. (*PN*: §276, 91–92)

These statements are entirely in line with the methodological principle which Hegel describes at the beginning of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*:

> Philosophy does owe its development to the empirical sciences, but it gives to their content the fully essential shape of the *freedom* of thinking (the *a priori*) as well as the *validation* of *necessity* (instead of the warranting of the content because it is simply found to be present and because it is a fact of experience). In its necessity the fact becomes the presentation and imitation of the activity of thinking that is original and completely independent. (*EL*: §12R, 37)

Both in the case of Schelling and that of Hegel, then, answering the question of which phenomena correspond to the *a priori* determinations, and of how they

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do so, requires observation and experimentation. But the results of experimentation have no impact on the *a priori* structure of the conception of nature as such.

In view of this, we may well wonder what basic change in Schelling's metaphysics is marked by his transition to the standpoint of 'identity philosophy'. Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to highlight a certain asymmetry which characterized his thinking during the relatively brief period when he pursued the strategy of developing *Naturphilosophie* and *Transzendentalphilosophie* in parallel, as alternative ways of presenting the same basic structure of reality. At this time, Schelling could not avoid attributing an unconditional status to the spontaneity of individual self-consciousness, since this is the principle of construction of a transcendental theory of reality. But this spontaneity, which appears only in the practical perspective of the agent (where the activity concerned may simply be thinking), did not fit well with the necessity of the order of nature theorized by the philosophy of nature. Indeed, in the preface to the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling states: 'if our whole enterprise were merely that of explaining nature, we should never have been driven into idealism' (*STI*: 3/*SW* I/3: 332). This suggests that the symmetry between *Naturphilosophie* and *Transzendentalphilosophie* is not as complete as Schelling elsewhere implies. However, in Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie* this inconsistency in his views is dissolved, since the principle of the new phase of his thought is impersonal reason as the self-cognition of absolute identity. As Schelling states in the first section of the *Würzburg System*, the most comprehensive statement of his views during this period, 'in reason all subjectivity ceases' (*SW* I/6: 152). Or, in other words, 'It is not I who know, but the universe knows in me', and 'I am the mere organ of knowledge' (*SW* I/6: 150, 153). It is hard to see how this conception of philosophical knowledge can be made compatible with the notion that a subjective responsiveness to empirical data, or—more generally—to worldly contingencies, might play a role in Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie*, as Ng suggests. Since, as I have tried to show, there was no feedback loop from experiment to basic principles in Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie*, it is hardly likely that such a loop would appear when he began to view the world as the manifestation of a rationally intelligible order, the supreme principle of which is absolute identity.

As one would expect, in the identity philosophy the individual is dissolved not only as a locus of genuine knowledge, but of agency, since '*we* do not act, but rather a divine necessity acts in us' (*SW* I/6: 554). With respect to Schelling's development, then, it is not hard to understand why, once he had rejected the quasi-Spinozist treatment of freedom in his identity philosophy—freedom as acquiescence in the world's divine order—his work began to probe the limits of rational explicability as such. But, of course, the burning question raised by Ng is whether Schelling was justified in extending his dissatisfaction with his own earlier conception of rational explanation—or, rather, explanation *in terms of* reason—into a critique of Hegel. During the period of their collaboration in

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Jena, Schelling and Hegel shared the key thought of the identity of identity and difference. They both understood that the absolute, the infinite, had to be grasped *in* the finite and not in opposition to it. But perhaps the problems which Schelling created for his later self were due to the *manner* in which he sought to construct a luminously rational metaphysics on this basis? From her Hegelian perspective, Ng argues that 'there are different paths to reconciling phenomenological and philosophical standpoints pertaining to freedom that allow us to approach and develop, rather than abandon, *Identitätsphilosophie*'. As she suggests, assessing what is at stake in the later divergence between Schelling and Hegel requires immersion in a complex of issues concerning potentiality and being, which stands at the centre of Schelling's late thinking.

II. Possibility and actuality

The major issue raised by Schelling's late philosophy is often described, in broad terms, as the contingency of being, regarded as marking a limit for reason. In considering this issue, Ng adopts an approach which has become popular among contemporary Hegel interpreters: we should not regard the contingency of being *as such* (or at least of a sizeable aspect of being) as posing a problem for Hegel. And nor should we assume that he aims to *derive* worldly existence from the Idea, or to make *everything* rationally intelligible. Hegel's concern is only with what he terms 'actuality' (*die Wirklichkeit*), that is to say, those worldly entities and processes which *can* be made transparent to reason. He is perfectly willing to accept that there is a large element of the subjective, arbitrary and contingent in the make-up of the world, which lies beyond the scope of conceptual necessity. Ng's question to Schelling therefore runs: what is the problem with this approach? Why make a song and dance about being as such? Why worry about the degree of its resistance to reason? Why go so far as to suggest that a complement to what Schelling terms 'negative' or 'purely rational' (*reinrationale*) philosophy is required —a complement which he first names 'historical philosophy' and, later, 'positive philosophy'?

An initial misunderstanding which often occurs in this context lies in the assumption that Schelling is preoccupied simply with the 'contingent fact of existence', as Ng puts it. The situation is rather that Schelling is concerned with being in its ineluctable primordiality. His terms for being is this sense, 'un-pre-thinkable being' (*das unvordenkliche Seyn*), 'blind existing-ness' (*das Blindexistierende*), and so forth, will doubtless strike many as exotic, if not mystifying, and it may therefore be helpful to consider the close similarities between the structure of Schelling's argument and that of Kant, in his much admired pre-critical essay on *The Only Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*. In this text Kant begins by

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rejecting the validity of the ontological argument, on grounds which he will repeat many years later in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: being is not a genuine predicate, since it does not add to the determination of thing. At the same time, Kant insists that the existence of a necessary being *can* be established. He argues that possibility has a material as well as a formal aspect (the formal or internal aspect being the non-contradictoriness of the material determinations concerned). Furthermore, Kant contends that there must be an ultimate actuality in which all material, and hence formal possibility, is grounded. As he puts it:

> There is a certain actuality whose annulment itself would totally annul all internal possibility. But that whose annulment or negation eradicates all possibility is absolutely necessary. Accordingly something exists in an absolutely necessary fashion. (*Beweisgrund*: 79)

Schelling's validation of the notion of 'un-pre-thinkable being' proceeds in a closely analogous fashion. However, Schelling adds an experiential element to the metaphysical assumption—which can be traced back to Aristotle—that all possibility must be grounded in an actuality. He elaborates a 'negative' or 'purely rational' philosophy which, in progressively dialectical process, removes or 'negates' every structure of being that can be conceptualized *a priori*. At the culminating point of negative philosophy, when the concept of all previously determined concepts (the 'Idea') is reached, the thinker—according to Schelling—is 'thunderstruck', confronted with what cannot be absorbed into conceptuality as such. However, in the final stage of his thinking, Schelling stresses that what is involved is not simply an intellectual realization, albeit experientially motivated. Human beings long for the ground of the world to be a freedom beyond conceptual necessity, for un-pre-thinkable being to turn out to be the possibility of—and beyond—all dialectically structured possibilities. It is this freedom which late Schelling calls 'God'.

Again, in this respect there are both similarities and divergences between Schelling's late philosophy and Kant's *Beweisgrund* essay.[2] As we have seen, Kant's initial proof of the existence of a necessary being is *a priori*. He then goes on to argue that the necessary being must be God, in view of its eternity, immutability and sufficiency with regard to everything possible and actual. Indeed, it must be the God of theism, a 'spirit' endowed with 'understanding and will', since unless 'understanding and will' are established as 'inherent determinations' of the necessary being, the latter could be

> only a blind necessary ground of other things and even of other minds, distinguished not at all from the eternal fate of some of the ancients except that it would be described more comprehensibly. (*Beweisgrund*: 91)

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However, this aspect of Kant's demonstration is *a posteriori*. It is based on what he presents, in the second part of *Beweisgrund* essay, as a version of the physico-theological argument, which 'cannot be brought to such distinctness as is demanded by logically perfect proofs' (*Beweisgrund*: 87). Kant does not regard his conjunction of two modes of demonstration, or their divergent levels of compellingness, as implying that the notions of God and of 'necessary being' cannot be directly equated. But this is the crucial move which Schelling makes. In Schelling's account, being is indeed originally blindly necessary (it is *das Blindexistierende*). It *may* have become the source of possibility, meaningful order and purposiveness in the world. But this would already involve a transformation of its status which can only be the object of a hypothesis requiring *a posteriori* validation. In other words, on Schelling's account, we cannot conclusively rule out the conjecture that we inhabit a Spinozistically determined universe. Furthermore, the evidence against this view must be supplied not—as in Kant—through a contemplation of the order and harmony of nature, but through an interpretation of the history of human consciousness. We seek for episodes in which blind existing-ness has been superseded by meaning and purpose—for historical repetitions of the inaugural metaphysical event in which blank, un-pre-thinkable being became the ground or source of possibility.

It should be clear that it would be a serious simplification to state that Schelling's central concern is simply with the resistance of the contingency of being to reason. What Schelling terms 'un-pre-thinkable being' is neither contingent nor necessary—it is pre-modal. In other words, as the 'ultimate which lies at the ground of the conceivable itself', as Kant puts it (*Beweisgrund*: 75), it is contingent with respect to logical necessity, but it is also necessary in the sense that it 'presupposes both its own and every other possibility' (*Beweisgrund*: 83). This is why Schelling also employs the phrase 'contingently necessary existing-ness' (*das zufällig notwendige Existieren*) to characterize un-pre-thinkable being (*PO*: 166). Being may be originally blind, but the possibility of a modally structured and purposeful world, in which empirical contingency and ideal necessity search for a reconciled mode of existence, is packed into it.

III. Hegel on modality

In my book, I compare the beginning of Schelling's 'negative philosophy' with the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*, and suggest that, whereas Hegel interprets pure being as 'indeterminate immediacy', Schelling regards it as the 'indeterminate'—in the sense of the potentiality of all determinate being. An obvious Hegelian objection to Schelling's move is to ask whence he derives the concept of possibility or potentiality—and the corresponding concept of actuality. Schelling seems to fall short of

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the radicality of Hegel's enterprise, if we take seriously the latter's claim to generate a complete system of the basic 'determinations of thinking' (*Denkbestimmungen*) from no more than an initial oscillation between being and nothing. In other words, if we find ourselves at the very beginning of pure thinking, of the process of self-determination of conceptuality, how can Schelling help himself to the concept of potentiality to characterize that beginning, which he refers to, in his work of the 1830s, as '*das Seyende selbst*' or '*das Subjekt des Seyns*'?

The answer to this objection is complex. We can begin by considering that it presupposes, for one thing, that Hegel *is able* to generate the concepts of possibility and actuality in the course of his *Logic* (that their justification does not lie elsewhere), and, for another, that his account of these concepts is a convincing one. There is reason to cast doubt on both these assumptions. Firstly, we can enquire why the concept of possibility (which Hegel discusses along with contingency and necessity, in the section of the Second Book of the *Science of Logic* titled 'Actuality') features in Hegel's *Logic* at all. The point is that possibility, along with contingency and necessity, are *modalities*, not categories. In the Western philosophical tradition going back to Porphyry and—beyond him—to Aristotle, a category is the concept of a genus which is not a species of some higher genus. But possibility is not a concept of this kind. It is an ontological status, for example that of a fictional entity, which could fall under a whole range of different categories. In his commentary on Hegel's *Logic*, J. M. E. McTaggart, who treats Hegel's procedures sympathetically yet critically, argues that the structuring of the section of *Science of Logic* where Hegel deals with modality reveals that something has gone wrong. The problem is that Hegel begins the third section of the *Doctrine of Essence*, which is termed 'Actuality', with a chapter on the category of 'the absolute'. Hegel treats this category as the concept of an absolute identity which cancels all multiplicity. In large part the chapter functions as a critique of Spinoza, whose conception of the absolute, according to Hegel, 'is only unmoved identity, [in which] the attribute, like the mode, is only as disappearing, not as becoming' (*SL*: 473/*TWA* 6: 197). But as McTaggart points out, the logic of essence had already reached a stage where inner and outer, substrate and surface, were identified with each other. Hence

> [t]he result ought to be a category which combines harmoniously the multiplicity and the unity—such a category as we shall find later in Substance—not a category which ignores the multiplicity in favour of the unity. (McTaggart 1910: 158)

In other words, the category of the absolute does not represent a dialectical advance, but rather a regression. In consequence, in the second chapter of the section of the Doctrine of Essence entitled 'Actuality', a chapter which is also entitled 'Actuality', Hegel re-enacts the progressive merging of inner and outer which had

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occurred earlier in the second book of the *Science of Logic*, but now employing modal concepts to describe the process involved. It is true that Hegel presents what he is doing as a kind of second-order reflection on the process. He says, for example, that 'the possible is *reflected immanent reflectedness*' (*SL*: 479/*TWA* 6: 204). But this does not answer the question of whether it is legitimate to treat modality in this way in the first place; whether, for example, possibility can initially be thought of as 'actuality reflected into itself' (*SL*: 278/*TWA* 6: 202).

The regression should already give us grounds for suspicion. And these suspicions are confirmed when we consider in more detail how Hegel treats his modalities. He begins with the concept of what he calls 'formal possibility', according to which '*everything is possible which does not contradict itself*' (*SL*: 479/*TWA* 6: 203). He then states that, formally speaking, if 'A is A' is possible, then so too is '–A is –A', and goes on to conclude that

> [t]his connection, in which the one possible also contains its other, is as such a contradiction that sublates itself. Now, since it is determined to be reflective, and, as we have just seen, reflectively self-sublating, it is also therefore an immediate and it consequently becomes actuality. (*SL*: 480/*TWA* 6: 204)

This argument seems to presuppose what it is intended to show—namely, that a possibility or its opposite might not each have a path to actualization, for example in the case of a human agent choosing between courses of action. There is no reason, in other words, to think that, formally speaking, the possibility of the non-occurrence of a state of affairs is 'contained' (*enthalten*) in the possibility of its occurrence in a self-contradictory manner unless one is already committed to actualism. That Hegel so inclined becomes clear as, in the course of his argument, abstract, formal possibility becomes 'real possibility', which '*constitutes* the *totality of conditions*' and is a 'dispersed actuality' (*SL*: 483/*TWA* 6: 209). He concludes that 'what is really possible can no longer be otherwise; and under given conditions and circumstances, nothing else can follow' (*SL*: 484/*TWA* 6: 211).

It is not obvious, in other words, that Schelling was in error in taking the duality of the possible and the actual to be primitive, just as Kant did in the *Beweisgrund* essay. If we ask *why* we might be justified in taking these modalities as primitive, I think the best answer would refer, as I have just hinted, to the question of human freedom. Arguably, such modal concepts must be other than what Hegel takes them to be, if human agents are not to be deluded, when they reflect on what they *could, might* or *should* do in a certain situation. In other words, in the case of human agents, possibility is real, but not in the Hegelian sense of consisting in the conditions of an actuality which cannot be otherwise. As the British philosopher Helen Steward, who defends a view she terms 'agency incompatibilism', has put the matter: 'any genuine agent constantly confronts a world of possibilities

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from which, by means of her agency, she moves ahead to forge the continuous path that constitutes actuality' (Steward 2012: 149). Schelling's positive philosophy, we can say, begins from such a conception of the modal situation of agency. It develops a theory concerning the structure of nature, and the evolving pattern of human history, intended to render such agency intelligible. In effect, it seeks to answer concretely the question posed by the existence of beings capable of moral responsibility—and hence free—which is central to the *Oldest System Programme of German Idealism*: 'How must a world be constituted for a moral being?' (*Wie muß eine Welt für ein moralisches Wesen beschaffen sein?*) (*OSP*: 199).

The question which remains is one which I left open earlier. Is there reason to think that Hegel, having decided to 'develop Schelling's identity philosophy in his own, unique direction', as Ng puts it—in other words, without relying on a distinction between 'negative' and 'positive' philosophy, though not between logic and *Realphilosophie*—was unable to develop a satisfactory theory of human freedom? In considering this question, it may be useful to recall a passage from the Remark of §45 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, where Hegel writes:

> It must certainly be maintained […] that the objects of which we have immediate knowledge are mere appearances, i.e., they do not have the ground of their being within themselves, but within something else […] the true situation is that the things of which we have immediate knowledge are mere appearances, not only for us, but also in-themselves, and that the proper determination of these things, which are in this sense 'finite', consists in having the ground of their being not within themselves but in the universal divine Idea. (*EL*: §45R, 88)

One striking feature of this sample of Hegel's mature thinking is how strongly it echoes Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie*. In one sense, it vindicates Ng's proposal that Hegel developed the identity philosophy in his own unique direction, although it undermines her claim that Hegel did not regard all finite things as having their ground in the Idea (if contingency is the necessary complement to logical necessity in Hegel, then it *also* has its ground in the Idea). However, if we enquire in what sense human beings, as beings capable of willing, are exceptions to the general characterization of finite things Hegel offers here, a concise answer would be that—as he puts it elsewhere—the will which is 'free for itself' is 'the Idea in its truth' (*EPR*: §21, 52). In other words, humans, when fully free agents in Hegel's sense (not swayed by merely contingent determinations of the will), are microcosmic embodiments of the Idea, rather than being simply grounded in it. However, the Idea unfolds with rational necessity: the course of the *Logic*, as Hegel puts it, is an 'unstoppable [*unaufhaltsam*] and pure progression that admits of nothing extraneous' (*SL*: 33/*TWA* 5: 49). Furthermore, the Idea 'expresses itself through the

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medium of the human will or human freedom' (ILPH: 71/VPG: 84). But does it make sense to think of freedom as a 'medium'? Not in the view of Schelling, who does not consider the Hegelian Idea as a suitable model for the free will, which is able to choose between alternative possibilities, and indeed to *refrain from* as well as carry out actions. This conception of agency as a 'two-way power', as Helen Steward has called it (see Steward 2020), is fundamental to Schelling's late thinking. To be an agent, one must be capable of *not doing* what one does—otherwise one is no more than a nodal point in a causal nexus, and not an *originator* of action.[3] Correspondingly, the impotence of reason to which Schelling refers, is not, in the first instance, a powerlessness to account for the supposed contingency of being. Rather it is the incapacity of reason in its pure, self-determining mode, to *stop itself*—its *lack of sovereignty* over its own immanent movement. To put the contrast between the two thinkers in the starkest terms: for Schelling potentiality, the power to be or not to be, is *higher* than the power that necessarily actualizes itself, which for Hegel belongs the concept as the '*universal absolute activity*' (*SL*: 737/*TWA* 6: 55), but which is simultaneously 'powerless to be a potentiality' (*impotent, Potenz zu sein*), to borrow a phrase from Schelling's first Berlin lecture course (see *PO*: 165).

IV. Positive philosophy

In view of this, it is hard to see why, according to Ng, the differences between the ways in which Hegel and Schelling interpret the phenomenon of religion, and the historical development of the consciousness of freedom more generally, seem to have no essential connection to the distinction between negative and positive philosophy. Like many defenders of Hegel, Ng responds to the criticism that Hegel's focus on the realization of reason in the world does not pay due regard to contingency by pointing out that Hegel does not equate actuality (*die Wirklichkeit*) with what merely exists. However, Hegel's famous *Doppelsatz*, in which he equates the actual and the rational, is a double-edged sword. In effect, Hegel is declaring that he has no interest, as a philosopher, in what cannot be understood as an aspect of the unfolding of the Idea; as he puts it, 'the sole aim of philosophical enquiry is to eliminate the contingent' (*ILPH*: 28/29). Philosophical science, according to the introduction to the *Encyclopaedia*, is concerned with the Idea, which is 'not so powerless that it merely ought to be, and is not actual—with an actuality of which [trivial, external and perishable] objects, institutions and situations are merely the superficial outer side' (*EL*: §6, 30). But how does one decide what is superficial and what is not? This question of the appropriate *application* of the logical Idea, or of the suitable *interpretation* of worldly processes in terms of it, cannot itself be resolved by means of a logical procedure, as Hegel implies when he

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states that it is 'judicious consideration of the world' (*sinnige Betrachtung der Welt*) which separates insignificant appearance and actuality (*EL*: §6, 29). Hegel is implicitly conceding that his construal of human history is driven hermeneutically by a selective interest in what is amenable to his form of rational explanation, which means: what can be viewed as the self-unfolding of reason itself. His declaration that what is actual is rational, then, looks close to turning into a tautology.

By contrast, Schelling's interpretation of history revolves around a recurrent conflict between compulsion—albeit compulsion which has a developmental rationale—and freedom. He constructs a narrative of the repeated emergence and consolidation of modes of thinking which inhibit the human capacity for self-reflection and agency. These eventually come be experienced as limiting, and an urge to dissolve and break out of them arises. Schelling does not suggest, of course, that this repeated process cannot be comprehended. But the use of reason involved is not comparable to the form of intelligibility which Hegel applies to the worldly domain, and in which—as he states in the preface to the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia*—'logical interconnection must remain the basis' (*der logische Zusammenhang die Grundlage bleiben muß*) (*EL*: 4/*TWA* 8: 14). In Schelling's late thinking, reason must 'free itself from itself' (*PO*: 157), in other words: escape from its exclusive equation with the logical. The conflict between necessity and freedom in Schelling's sense (freedom as the power to be *and* not to be), does not allow for Hegel's sharp distinction between the merely subjective and contingent, on the one hand, and the rational and necessary on the other. Consequently, it also does not permit an interpretation of history which purports to have achieved a definitive standpoint, and to be immune to shifts of perspective in response to future events. As Schelling states in his first Berlin lecture course: 'Positive philosophy is nothing other than the constantly advancing, constantly growing demonstration; just as reality is never closed, so neither is the demonstration' (*PO*: 147).

V. History and liberation

In contrast to Ng, who presses Hegelian objections to Schelling's views, and to his later thought in particular, Markus Gabriel highlights two issues which are internal to the interpretation of Schelling's late work. The first concerns Schelling's philosophy of history. Can it be understood as a narrative of liberation? And does Schelling conceive of the modern age as a period in which inherited forms of authority, formerly preponderant in the shaping of world views, can no longer be accepted simply because of their established status, or their venerability? The second issue goes to the metaphysical core of Schelling's late philosophy, and concerns the nature of the 'basic operation' (*Grundoperation*) which informs the way in which Schelling thinks about nature, and about the evolution of human consciousness in general.

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As regards the first issue, Gabriel tries to corral me into a Habermasian—or, more broadly, Frankfurt School—position on the nature of modernity, and then suggests that I falsely attribute such a view to Schelling. In fact, I agree with Gabriel that Schelling considers it a 'dangerous illusion' to believe that subjectivity can be grounded purely in itself. I also agree that Schelling does not, and cannot, endorse a post-Kantian conception of autonomy, if this is taken to mean the equation of freedom with self-legislation. Indeed, I make the so-called 'paradox of autonomy' (the conflict between selfhood and legislation) central to my reading of late Schelling—to an extent which Gabriel finds excessive. Unfortunately, he is only able to make the claim that I propose an implausible 'Critical Theory' interpretation of Schelling by taking quotations from *Schelling's Late Philosophy* out of context. Thus, quoting two phrases from the book, Gabriel states that Schelling's theory of history could not possibly have a 'place for social movements', or accommodate a Honnethian account of 'social change'. In fact, these two phrases occur in the course of my discussion of Hegel (Dews 2023: 259, 260), and I do not connect them with Schelling at all. Similarly, Gabriel cites my characterization of modernity as a historical situation in which human beings must 'develop the immanent logic of their practices to achieve normative orientation and the legitimation of their forms of life' (Dews 2023: 11). This makes it sound as though I think that the *internal* rationality of modern practices is, or could be, self-sufficient, or that I attribute such a view to Schelling. However, he fails to quote the *very next sentence*, in which I say:

> We should not jump to the conclusion, however, that the sole native resource of modernity is self-legislating reason—or, to be more precise, that there is no scope, within modernity, for a reasoned defense of sources of meaning and validation other than reason itself. (Dews 2023: 11)

I continue to think that this statement, when conjoined with the previous one, gives a fair indication of the complex character of Schelling's project. In other words, while Schelling certainly rejects the notion of self-grounding subjectivity, as this is found—paradigmatically—in the early work of Fichte, he simultaneously appreciates *both* that we moderns cannot simply shrug off the demand for rational justification of our worldview and moral orientation, *and* that we should not suppose there is no limit to what unaided reason can achieve. This double-sided position generates many of the basic problems with which Schelling grapples in his late period. However, I do not think that the complexity of his project entitles us to conclude that the concept of liberation (*Befreiung*) plays no significant role in Schelling's interpretation of the history of human consciousness, or in shaping his stance towards the future of humanity.

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I will now seek to substantiate this view by looking briefly at the opening sections of Schelling's last major project, the *Philosophische Einführung in die Philosophie der Mythologie, oder Darstellung der reinrationale Philosophie*, on which he worked between 1847 and 1852. Whereas Gabriel suggests that both Schelling and Hegel are engaged in a defence of authority which is simply antithetical to modern conceptions of autonomy, Schelling begins this text with an extended discussion of the obsolescence of Christianity. Just as Christianity, as the religion of 'revelation', was able to 'penetrate' mythological religion, to overcome it from within, and 'set consciousness in freedom over against it', so Christianity, as the 'religion of spirit', has set the stage for its own overcoming, in the form of what Schelling calls 'philosophical religion, whose nature is 'to be sought and to be found with freedom'—in other words, without submission to any supposedly superordinate source of truth (*SW* II/1: 255). A few pages later, Schelling summarizes this development in the following words:

> Through an unstoppable advance, to which Christianity itself contributed, consciousness, after becoming independent of the Church [i.e. the Catholic Church], had also to become independent of revelation itself. (*SW* II/1: 260)

It is important to note that Schelling characterizes the agent of this process of liberation as 'reason', and—in the opening sections of this text—allots a central role to Descartes in the process of emancipation which he describes. As he puts it, Descartes was destined 'to give the first impulse to the completed liberation (*vollendete Befreiung*) which even our time is only moving towards' (*SW* II/1: 264). Schelling describes this impulse as striving for a 'science generated by reason itself' and argues that Descartes aimed to construct such a science by finding 'a beginning which did not take the form of a presupposition, but transcended every presupposition' (*SW* II/1: 279).

At this point readers unfamiliar with Schelling's late philosophy may well begin to wonder in what sense his narrative of the modern age differs from the familiar Enlightenment story of the achievement of autonomy through the rational critique of inherited forms of authority, his puzzling invocation of 'philosophical religion' notwithstanding. Is there any basis at all for Gabriel's resistance to the interpretation of Schelling's philosophy of history as centred on successive episodes of the emancipation of consciousness? Undoubtedly there is, but only in the sense that Schelling's late philosophy revolves around a critique of modern reason, or of what he terms 'natural reason' (*SW* II/1: 260). The problem with natural reason, Schelling argues, is that it operates compulsively. If the telos of reason is to become fully self-grounding, as the dynamic of post-Kantian Idealism suggests, then the result is a tendency towards the occlusion of the reasoning subject: the very subject whom reason was supposed to emancipate. For Schelling, the way

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out of this situation is to show that self-grounding, systematic reason eventually runs up against, or is forced to confront, a limit. Reason, when fully unfolded in the mode which Schelling calls 'negative philosophy', having reflexively retrieved its own transcendental itinerary, will find itself—at least for a moment—humbled, as it were; confronted with a being-ness whose un-pre-thinkability has been disclosed by the exhaustion of the *a priori*, its rigidity will be broken. Thereafter reason can be deployed in a new form which no longer results in the alienation of the subject, since the use of reason in the 'positive philosophy' to frame a hypothesis concerning the history of consciousness is guided by the fundamental human interest in freedom. This, in a nutshell, is the project of Schelling's late philosophy. But because Schelling is a thinker of the most ambitious speculative kind, he strives to validate our interest in freedom through an insight into the fundamental structure of reality. And it is here that Gabriel's second major concern becomes relevant: the interpretation of what I call—borrowing the term Dieter Henrich applied to Hegel's concept of 'self-relating negativity'—Schelling's '*Grundoperation*', or basic operation.

VI. Schelling's 'basic operation'

What is Schelling's *Grundoperation*? As I suggested in responding to Ng, the starting point of Schelling's positive philosophy, which he sometimes characterizes as 'contingently necessary existing-ness' (*das zufällig notwendige Existieren*), bears an analogy to the necessary being of Kant's *Beweisgrund* essay. It is not the divine being of the ontological argument, whose existence follows from its very conceptualization, but is rather 'the ultimate which lies at the ground of the conceivable itself' (*Beweisgrund*: 75). Gabriel and I agree that the first stage of Schelling's basic operation consists in a 'decompression' of contingently necessary existing-ness, in which it is transformed into the panoply of modalities or potentialities implicit within it. In fact, we both hit on the metaphor of decompression independently, since I was not familiar with Gabriel's treatment of the topic when I wrote the book. However, Gabriel thinks that I use the concept of negation inappropriately to characterize this process.

In the passage to which he refers, I talk about 'the potentialization—*néantisation*—of un-pre-thinkable being' (Dews 2023: 287). *Néantisation* is precisely not negation, however. My use of the term refers back to the discussion of the ontological status of potentiality which occurs the central chapters of *Schelling's Late Philosophy*, and alludes to Sartre's discussion of 'nothingness' (*le néant*), Aristotle's characterization of potentiality in terms of the contrary rather than the contradictory negation of being (as *mē on* rather than *ouk on*), and Schelling's own translation of '*mē on*' as '*le néant*'. I do not think, though, that much of

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importance hangs on the terminological issue in the present context, although—as I discuss in the book—the distinction between contrary and contradiction negation, between 'non-being' and 'not being' is vital for understanding the divergent ways in which Schelling and Hegel launch their respective pure rational sciences (see Dews 2023: 126–32). The important point is that, in Schelling's late philosophy, un-pre-thinkable being becomes—instantaneously—the possibility or potentiality of a basic array of modalities, which he characterizes as '*das Seynkönnende*', '*das Seynmüssende*' and '*das Seynsollende*', and which function as the interdependent vectors of all concrete existence.

I will not try to explain the complexities of Schelling's dialectical derivation of the modalities here. What is significant is that Schelling develops an *a priori* science of the basic forms of being by following, in a type of transcendental reflection, the unfolding of their recursive interactions. This science constitutes what he calls his 'negative' or purely rational (*reinationale*) philosophy. In view of this, I find it hard to understand how Gabriel can write that 'there just is no "a priori dialectic of the potentialities"', for if this were the case, Schelling could draw no distinction between negative and positive philosophy, nor describe an emancipatory move from one to the other, as he does when he states that 'in positive philosophy negative philosophy triumphs; for negative philosophy is the science in which thinking sets itself free from all necessary content' (*PO*: 153). The explanation for Gabriel's view, I think, is that he assumes an *a priori* science to be a theory of the forms of thinking (of what Hegel calls '*Denkbestimmungen*'), which would then somehow have to be related to the world of nature and history. However, because for Schelling the immediate content of the 'infinite potentiality of knowing' *is* the 'infinite potentiality of being', and not the logical generation of a system of categories, his *a priori* science is already philosophy of nature and history. What should be borne in mind, however, is that, for Schelling, an *a priori* theory of the possibilities or forms of being is not already a theory of natural and historical *processes*. His interpretation of such processes is concerned with the ruptures which mark the emergence of agency and purpose, in more or less self-conscious, more or less alienated (or 'ecstatic', to use Schelling's term) modes—and not simply with basic ontological configurations.

But the distinctiveness of Schelling's negative philosophy is also important for methodological reasons. In Schelling's account, it is only when we push through to the end of negative philosophy, which culminates in the concept of rational philosophy itself as contemplative science, that what transcends such science comes into view. This is a vital part of Schelling's strategy for acknowledging the claims of reason, without arbitrarily positing the extra-rational, or alternatively lapsing into some form of rationalism. However, this feature of Schelling's strategy becomes unintelligible, if—like Gabriel—one does not draw a clear distinction between Schelling's *Vernunftwissenschaft*, on the one hand, and his positive interpretation of nature and history, on the other. Schelling's positive philosophy starts from

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a transcendent point of reference, from that which *is*—in a quasi-transitive sense—the system of concepts ('*das Seyende*') unfolded by negative philosophy. In his late work he calls this transcendence '*das, was das Seyende Ist*' (e.g., *SW* II/1: 563). Positive philosophy then seeks for breakthrough moments of this transcendence *in* the unfolding pattern of human history, in a hermeneutic enterprise which Schelling describes as '*a priori* empiricism' (*PO*: 147).

VII. Schelling and the paradox of autonomy

But if Gabriel misrepresents the character of Schelling's negative philosophy, on the one hand, by denying any role for a 'potency space', as he calls it, he also overstates the contingent dimension of Schelling's positive philosophy on the other, suggesting that it is '"historical" in a sense explicable with reference to Heidegger's notion of the event as a series of contingent shifts in our understanding of being from the standpoint of finite agents'. This characterization seriously underplays the extent to which Schelling's history of consciousness has a definite directionality and is structured by a series of emancipatory ruptures, which Schelling outlines—as we have seen—at the beginning of his *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*. Of course, Gabriel wants to contest the claim that the notion of liberation (*Befreiung*) is central Schelling's understanding of the dynamic of history, and—for presumably connected reasons—he also rejects my claim that Schelling's late philosophy can be seen as revolving around the paradox of autonomy (indeed, in a certain sense, can be seen as simply a playing-out of that paradox on a grand scale). At the same time, Gabriel does not claim that the paradox of autonomy is *entirely* alien to Schelling's concerns, and indeed generously concedes that 'Dews is largely on the right track in his attempt to identify a fundamental problem in Schelling to which he responds with a series of attempts at operationalizing the problem itself by turning it into a philosophical engine of setting up his system(s)'. Gabriel's objection, rather, is that the paradox is not Schelling's 'fundamental problem' and that 'the issues surrounding the paradox of autonomy and, therefore, of free will as self-determination are interwoven with the deeper ontological issue concerning the transition from the unconditional to the conditional'.

I agree with Gabriel that, in Schelling's thinking, these two questions are closely interrelated. In his late work Schelling struggles to formulate a conception of what he calls the 'prius', the ultimate source or beginning, in which the prius is unavoidably drawn into an articulation of its own rational structure, and yet is not entirely exhausted by that articulation. Here one finds a clear contrast with Hegel, for whom absolute spirit is nothing other than the process of its own self-unfolding. Sometimes Schelling *also* refers to 'absolute spirit'. But in the *Urfassung* (original draft) of the *Philosophy of Revelation* he states: 'Absolute spirit

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goes beyond all forms. It is the spirit which is free from its own being-spirit—for it, being-spirit is only a form of its being' (*UPO*: 78–79). It is not hard to see that, with this conception of absolute spirit, Schelling is trying to resolve the split within subjectivity—between selfhood as spontaneity and selfhood as reason's self-determination, between *Willkür* and *Wille*—which was bequeathed as a problem for the Idealists by Kant. In Schelling's late thought, the compulsion of 'blind existing-ness' is perpetuated in form of the *dialectic* of the potentialities which emerge from it. But because it is a dialectic of *potentialities*, the primordial possibility (*Urmöglichkeit*) which is their source, and which—we must hypothesize—blind existing-ness has become, can never be entirely extinguished by that compulsion.

Since Gabriel himself argues that Schelling's positive philosophy comes close to an 'existential-anthropological approach', it is hard to see why he insists that the ontological problem of the relation between the unconditioned and the conditioned should be seen as more fundamental for Schelling than the practical issue of the paradox of autonomy. The general question of the relation between the unconditioned and the conditioned is, of course, a theoretical cousin of the problem, raised by the paradox, of freedom as indeterminacy versus freedom as determination by reason. But it is from the 'existential' viewpoint of agents caught up in a history structured by the paradox (in other words by the conflict between spontaneity and contextually rational constraint) that Schelling elaborates what he terms his 'hypothesis' concerning the *Grundoperation*.

These remarks bring me back to the original question of the validity of an 'emancipatory' reading of Schelling's philosophy of history. There is no contesting the conservative, if not reactionary, character of Schelling's political attitudes later in life. As his diaries from the year 1848 reveal, he was a monarchist who feared the consequences of liberal-democratic revolution (see Schelling 1990). However, it is not unusual for a thinker's declared moral and political commitments to be in tension with the underlying thrust of his or her thinking. And, in the present case, Gabriel himself declares that 'Schelling's political and theological commitments are idiosyncrasies, which do not follow in any systematically interesting way from his idea that there is no rational transition from the indeterminateness of being to a decompressed modal architecture'. Somewhat surprisingly, Gabriel then suggests that I ignore Schelling's identification of breakthroughs from mythological consciousness in areas of the world other than those where Christianity originally achieved dominance. Here the boot seems to be on the other foot, and it is Gabriel who finds the narrative of a global emancipation of consciousness in Schelling, whereas he presents me as primarily concerned to label Schelling as 'unconscionably Eurocentric' in his commitment to the superiority of Christianity amongst world religions. In fact, I devote the final section of chapter 3 of *Schelling's Late Philosophy* to Schelling's foreshadowing of Jaspers's theory of a global 'axial age',

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dating back to the first millennium BCE, during which human beings broke out of the provincialism of one or another form of mythological consciousness and moved towards a religiously formulated universalistic ethics (see Dews 2023: 111–15). The fact that Schelling developed a theory of this global shift in human consciousness, a theory backed up by his immense scholarship in the history of mythology and religion, is not contradicted by the fact that he regarded Christianity as the paradigmatic example of such a breakthrough, while certainly not ignoring some of its predecessors (for example, in prophetic Judaism).

I hope I have said sufficient to explain that *Schelling's Late Philosophy in Confrontation with Hegel* does not propose a simplistic reading of Schelling as a kind of Critical Theorist *avant la lettre*, although I certainly think Critical Theory could learn from Schelling, as I suggest in my very last footnote (Dews 2023: 294n). Throughout the course of his philosophical development Schelling struggled to strike a balance between the claims of reason, on the one hand, and of 'revelation'—understood broadly as some mode of experiential access to truth—on the other. This effort went hand in hand with his refusal to equate freedom simply with rational necessity, not even when this necessity takes the form of reason's self-determination. But these basic features of his thinking do not invalidate the view that he was deeply interested in the process whereby human consciousness liberates itself from (unconsciously) self-imposed trammels. Nor the claim that Schelling hoped and anticipated that this process would continue into the future. His delicate sense of the dialectic of freedom and constraint is summed up in a statement from the final pages of the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*: 'the reality of a liberation is measured by the reality and power of that from which it liberates' (*HCI*: 172/*SW* II/1: 247).

Peter Dews
University of Essex, UK
peted@essex.ac.uk

Notes

[1] Abbreviations used:

Beweisgrund = Kant, *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, trans. G. Treash (Lincoln NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). This is a parallel text edition.

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EL = *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis IN/Cambridge: Hackett, 1991).

EPR = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

HCI = Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. M. Richey and M. Zisselberger (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).

Ideas = Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. E. E. Harris and P. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

ILPH = Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History. Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975)/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Band 1. Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1995).

Introduction = Schelling, *Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, in *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. K. R. Peterson (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).

OSP = [Anon.], 'The "Oldest System-Programme of German Idealism"', trans. T. Carman, *European Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1995): 199–200.

PN = Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

PO = Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. M. Frank (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977).

SL = Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

STI = Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. P. Heath (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 1978).

SW = Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A Schelling (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1856-1861).

TWA = Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

UPO = Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992).

Note: English translations of German texts have sometimes been amended.

[2] For a sophisticated treatment of this topic, see Gardner 2020.

[3] It should be noted that Helen Steward's conception of a 'two-way power' is distinct from Aristotle's account of the power of a rational agent to use knowledge to produce an effect or its contrary (see *Metaphysics* Aristotle 2016: 1046b). For Steward the 'two-way power' essential to agency as such is the capacity to do A or not-A (that is, to *hold back from* doing A). Doing not-A is not equivalent to not doing A. For example, refusing to salute is not the same act as keeping one's hand by one's side. On this view one can only abstain from doing what one *could* actually do, and *vice versa*.

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