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The Law of Insuperable Environment: What is Exhibited in the *Exhibition of the Process of Nature?*¹

Iain Hamilton Grant

“What am I thinking when I think what exists?”²

Once something is said of something else, this “what it is that exists” or X of which what is said is said, is augmented, however minimally, by its expression. Due to the resulting progressive series, asking after what it is of which what is said is said, cannot be answered by withdrawing what is said of it, by the *ungeschenmachen* of predication, but only by further augmentation, even if this consists in adding predicates that negate their predecessors. On the one hand, it may be said that here, yet again, philosophy finds the world well lost, for what is as it is remains unrecoverable once subject to augmentation. Yet what would this unaugmented X be? It cannot be said to enjoy any character whatever, since if it did, it would be self-evident that insufficient predicates had been pared away from it. Therefore, the unaugmented is just that: that after which nothing, the denatured inconsequential. Moreover, since nothing is after the inconsequential, neither can it be after anything, since if it were, it would not be the object of our inquiry but rather an elimination candidate obstructing it. If this is the world unadorned, it is a world without consequents, a nature without history or beginning. Such a world is not ‘lost,’ since if ‘world’ is defined as “all that is” or “the totality of facts” it is not yet a ‘world’ because there is no ‘all’ nor ‘totality’ nor ‘fact,’ since each would be *ex hypothesi* consequent upon that which has no consequents. Subject to this deflationary absolute, it is at most an extensionless point. Yet a point entails its environment, however undetermined, save as not-that-point, an environment the inconsequentialist is sworn to eliminate. The elimination is possible only consequently upon that environment’s obtaining, which it does just when there is a point. Accordingly, the inconsequentialist’s eliminata are consequents, and their negation consequent again upon them.

¹ A first version of this paper was presented at the First Annual Meeting of the North American Schelling Society (NASS), Seattle University, August 30-September 1, 2012. I am deeply indebted to Jason Wirth and Sean McGrath for organizing that excellent event, and to the glacial ascent that (still) follows it.

² F.W.J. Schelling, *Exhibition of the Process of Nature*, SW I/10, 303-390, here 303; trans. I.H. Grant, forthcoming in *On the World Soul and Other Naturephilosophical Writings* (Albany: SUNY).

Since therefore deflation unavoidably inflates on that side of the world's axis that is "not-world," inflation entails that a world is augmented just if the line dividing the unadorned world from its augmentations is itself of a worldly kind. Strikingly, this applies to what is said of something else and what is said *not to be* of something else: since the world is not of one kind prior to its consequents but only in consequence of them, the kind to which the world belongs is forged by its corona, not determined by its core. The world is thus the reiterated operation of augmentation *regardless* of what the augmentation is; it is less 'spurious infinite' than lacking the conditions for completeness, or essential limitation. But since each reduction is consequent upon a "not-X" that is to be stripped from the world, it is also the operation of augmentation augmented by a negation of that augmentation that is, accordingly, consequent upon it. The termini of neither series are exhibitable.

The foregoing is a partial exhibition of what is exhibited in Schelling's *Exhibition of the Process of Nature* (DATE), in the sense that it sets out a rough homology of a process exhibited in that work. In what sense, however, could it, or some more elaborate version of it, be affirmed to *be* the titular 'process of nature'? In one sense, given the irreducible surd consequent upon the above formulation, it is *of nature* just when it is not sufficiently grounded in it. In consequence, this renders the affirmation insecure. In another, it is 'of nature' in the sense that its exhibition counts amongst world-augmentors. Yet the entailed locality of the process thus exhibited as *in nature* cannot therefore deliver on the title's promise—namely, to exhibit *the*—not 'a'—process of nature or, as the *Exhibition* calls it, the *uni-versio*. Yet what is being thought when there is thinking of nature? How does this thinking differ from an exhibition that is 'of' nature in both the senses described? And if it does so differ, to what extent is the process merely a nominal belonging? By contrast, if it does not so differ, to what extent is it therefore that mode of operation by which nature is actualized in its exhibition? Answering these questions, and noting the irreducible *positionality* or *locality* of the problem of nature's self-augmentation by rational exhibition of its process, will take us some way to locating the position of *Naturphilosophie* in Schelling's late philosophy.

Yet the question of whether nature is exhibited, modelled, in an exhibition is not a narrow concern for Schelling scholarship. If a modelling or exhibition of nature is not itself, *qua* model, issuant from the nature it is of, then epistemology does not merely supplant ontology as first philosophy, but yields therefore a specious naturalism that, insofar as it seeks only epistemological guidance, has no concern with nature beyond what can be reduced to what is I of it by the deliverances of the natural sciences. Here, there are two possibilities. First, the exhibition is *of nature* because nature, according to epistemic primacy, is not until so exhibited. In this case, there is no egress problem from knowledge of nature to nature as such because nature as such is nature as presented. Second, the modelling is not of nature since it is just a model that, as such, eliminates nature as either object or locus (subject, in this sense) of that model. To cast this as an instance of the epistemic problem of realism and antirealism regarding theorizations of nature is not only oversimplified, it ignores the upheaval that presents what

ontology there can be as the fruit of whatever can be justified epistemologically. The first option renders Schelling's "exhibition" equivalent to Kant's "representation," such that nature is *nothing other* than "the whole of all appearances,"³ so that nature is not *an* appearance, but rather the total *series* of epistemically 'cooked' issuances. While nature's being and appearing are the same on this account, the asymmetry between the whole and the series constituting it prevents the sameness from exhibition, such that the idea will always exceed the actuality in extension, while remaining a thin and one-sidedly 'thoughtish' element of that actuality itself. The second option oscillates inconsistently between conceiving construction as "exhibition in pure intuition"⁴ and, in consequence, the relegation of what is not so exhibited to a *pure externality* that, whether consequently disavowed or not, remains. If Schelling's exhibition of natural process, of the *uni-versio*, is to offer a corrective for this, it must therefore encompass both mono-phasic construction and externality without falling victim to the reduction of ontology to the logic of knowing.

Whatever it is that nature includes those sciences (epistemology, physics, etc.) amongst its deliverances, and is only therefore reducible to their content on pain of the segregation of what is *not* their content into some extra-natural domain. What such naturalism offers are therefore two forms of philosophical auto-amputation. Due to certain epistemic prejudices—that givenness is neither foundational nor consistent, the demonstration that being is not a real predicate—neither pre-rational access nor super-rational egress remain plausible, leaving reference to nature or grounding in it a problem. Assuming, then, neither an in nor an out of reason, to ask the question, as Schelling does, "How do we reach being outside the idea?"⁵ is either naïve or irresponsible, since it rejects sound philosophical progress. Yet if that question is not asked, it can only be because for responsibly progressive philosophy, there neither is nor can be anything outside reason.

First *Universio*: Extainment and the *Weltgesetz*

What then is exhibited in the *Exhibition of the Process of Nature*? If we take that work to exemplify Schelling's later *Naturphilosophie*, the latter consists, amongst other things, in an argument as to why nature does not satisfy *all* demands for grounding, since although once it exists, nature becomes the "ground of all consequent becomings"⁶ and "the nature that permeates everything,"⁷ nevertheless "all becoming in nature is the actualization of

³ Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in *Immanuel Kant. Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, trans. Michael Friedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 183; *Kants Werke*, ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Ak), 29 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902). Here Ak 4: 467.

⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929) A711/B739.

⁵ SW I/10, 306.

⁶ SW I/10, 324.

⁷ SW II/3, 6; trans. Bruce Matthews, *Grounding of Positive Philosophy. The Berlin Lectures* (hereafter *Grounding*) (Albany: SUNY, 2007), 92.

original being and what can *not* be.”⁸ The conjunction is important, in that it instantiates that model of distributive ontological justice⁹ Schelling states in the *Exhibition* and will later call the *Weltgesetz*.¹⁰ That law states that the environment of any existent give “full scope to all possibilities, without excluding a single one,”¹¹ amongst which possibilities not-being is ineliminably included.¹² Therefore, where grounds occur, they are envired, *inter alia*, by inexistence. Yet what has this to do with the “process of nature”? How does mere logic become ontology, how is the “leap into being”¹³ accomplished? Is the *Exhibition* itself an instance of the operation of the natural process, or is it only *about* that process? Since the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, the *Naturphilosophie* repeatedly and variously argues that thought is, if not *identical to*, then at least *envired in* a nature of which it is part. The *Dar-*, the *locality* in *Darstellung* suggests that the *Exhibition* is contributory to reconceiving this project in a manner that has consequences not only for the “point” at which “*Naturphilosophie* is once again taken up in the higher, positive system,”¹⁴ but for those points at which nature is

⁸ SW I/10, 387. See also Schelling’s comments, at SW I/10, 385n, concerning the “autonomy [*Selbständigkeit*]” of the “self-moving principle” in nature. This autonomy is premised, he argues at SW I/10, 348, on the not-being of what is autonomous.

⁹ Schelling makes a similar claim concerning the “equally valid claim of all systems” in “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science” (SW I/9, 211). The Schellingian concept of justice implicit in the *Weltgesetz* is cosmological, as is the Platonic, having to do with nature rather than with contract or convention. At *Republic* 443b-d, Socrates defines *dikaiosyne* as “a potency [*dunamin*] which provides . . . beautiful order [*kosmesanta*]” in men and cities. Such order is “cosmological” both in the sense of its beauty and “in accordance with nature [*kata physin*]” (*Republic* 444d), which phrase always accompanies Plato’s discussion of powers. Moreover, since order is instantiated in many and results in one, bringing unity from the “many-headed monster” (*Phaedrus* 230a), it consists not only in what Gadamer calls “self-accord” (*Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, 88). Owing to the “vast and hazardous” (*Parmenides* 137a) or “difficult waters” (*Republic* 441c) following which order is to be imposed, exactly as Schelling pursues the emergence of order from the “surging, billowing sea” of Platonic matter in the *Freiheitschrift* (SW I/7, 360), order is always order *in another*. Platonic justice is additionally pertinent owing, as Bernard Bosanquet points out, to the Platonic law of non-contradiction (*A Companion to Plato’s Republic* [London: Rivington’s, 1925], 158), which rather than eliminating one of two contrary possibilities from the same subject, states that “opposition of effects is not to be confused with self-modification of an effect.” Schelling, indeed, makes a compatible claim in the *Ages of the World*: “The correctly understood principle of contradiction actually says as much as that the same *as the same* could not be something and also the opposite of that something. But the principle of contradiction does not disallow that the same, which is A, can be another that is not-A.” (SW I/8: 214, trans. J.M. Wirth [Albany: SUNY, 2000]), 8. Like Schelling’s account of *intransitive* possibilities or *can-being*, this does not make emergent order eliminative of antecedent disorder but distributes the former amidst irreducible disorder.

¹⁰ In the *Darstellung der rein-rationalen Philosophie* (SW II/1, 492).

¹¹ SW I/10, 311.

¹² SW I/10, 303: “Now this subject, as capacity, considered as a *potency* of Being, can certainly be thought as raising itself from its sheer, pure subjectivity or potentiality (in transition *ad actum*), so as to be the existent for itself. But in this way the idea of the existent would be eliminated before it was thought. The Idea of what is, is that the subject of Being is precisely subject, intransitive (merely essential) capacity to be: *capacity* to be, not to be itself what exists, but to be what is able to be.”

¹³ SW II/3, 102; *Grounding*, 160.

¹⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie* (hereafter, *Grundlegung*), ed. Horst Fuhrmanns (Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1972), 365.

conceived according to universality. As Schelling defines it in the *Exhibition*, something is ‘universal’ not when it is maximally ubiquitous but when it is topologically complex and of one kind. Something is universal, that is, when its exhibition is *of a piece* with what is exhibited. The universal is therefore a version of the Empedoclean dictum that “like is known by like” or “like is produced by like,” which Schelling cites repeatedly between 1802 and 1809.¹⁵ As is familiar from the *Freiheitschrift*’s lessons in the “misunderstanding of the law of identity,”¹⁶ the first “like” is not the second; rather the one is the knowing or the producing of the other. Therefore the two likes fold around the action, such that the latter distends from their iteration. Hence the topological idea of the *uni-versio* of the subject of existence and existence entails no transition.¹⁷ The *Exhibition* thereafter consists in making the motions of the *universio* not merely apparent, but *palpable, provoking* motions in the conceptual space consequent upon thinking what exists. This sculptural union of sense and reason *in the concept* makes apparent the formal impoverishment and philosophical inadequacy of conceiving thought’s relation to reality as though two reciprocally exclusive planes are combined to form a single, laminar structure. The problem is not of a logical topography by means of which thought might be located at spatiotemporal points (in brains or as unextended acts), because thought does not move exclusively in its own space (the transcendental, the space of reasons, etc.), but always in another. Under constraint of sufficiency, yet insecure in its achievement, reason has therefore to think what is not it.

To return to its beginning, Schelling’s procedure is the following. I begin from what I must think. What am I thinking when I think what exists? When I think what exists, I must think the subject of existence itself. Not ‘the’ or ‘a’ subject *that* exists, but existence as the subject, in the sense of that of which what is said is said. The subject of existence is not itself an existent therefore, to achieve which that subject must be “directed away from infinite being.”¹⁸ As such, it cannot itself ‘exist’ without ceasing to be infinite being in the idea, or unlimited *capacity-to-be*. Nor can it make a transition from not-being to being, nor again from *potentia ad actum*, without entailing its elimination *as* that subject.¹⁹ The existent or ‘object’ is the consequent of the attractor that being is for what infinitely can-be. But not *infinite ability to be* is conjoined with an *infinite not-being* of that subject, i.e., precisely the

¹⁵ See, for example, SW I/4, 269 (*Bruno*); I/6, 326, 338 (*Würzburg System*); I/7, 337 (*Freiheitschrift*); I/7, 277, 281, 285 (*Naturephilosophical Aphorisms*); I/7, 481 (*Stuttgart Lectures*). It recurs in the *Weltalter* drafts and the Erlangen lectures.

¹⁶ SW I/7, 341.

¹⁷ The “*Universio*” is “the immediate result of the procedure is the inverted One—*Unum versum*, that is ‘universe.’” This ‘one’ is the first in the series $-A+A\pm A$, which is a series just when its elements are active. Therefore, there is no transition from, e.g., $-A+A$, rather each cedes its *position* to accommodate the existent (I/10, 310), which position is an inversion with respect to the consequent or *higher*, for which, in this newly *vertical* series, it serves as matter, ground or basis. Hence the *Weltgesetz*: “The broader this basis, the more it furnishes full scope to all possibilities, without excluding a single one” (SW I/10, 311).

¹⁸ SW I/10, 307.

¹⁹ SW I/10, 303: “Being, can certainly be thought as raising itself from its sheer, pure subjectivity or potentiality (in transition *ad actum*), so as to be the existent for itself. But in this way the idea of the existent would be eliminated before it was thought. The Idea of what is, is that the subject of Being is precisely subject, intransitive (merely essential) capacity to be.”

object's infinitely not being that infinite can-being that the subject is: "The infinity of Being in the one makes possible the abyss [*Abgrund*] of not-being in the other."²⁰ The *subject*, such as it is—the subject of existence that cannot itself exist since if it did, it would precisely thereby cease to be that infinite ability to be—"contains" no object, just as the object, which is precisely the infinite not-being that it must be if it is opposed to the existent, "contains" in turn no subject. Rather, the fault-line of this double non-containment, or *mutual extainment* (*Ausschließung*),²¹ forges the existent for the first time *in the idea* as what therefore consequently extains the reciprocal extainment of clashing infinities. The "convulsions" of Being²² consequent upon this clash are precisely consequents of the thinking of existents, catastrophes of dimension that *ek-sist* from what now becomes their ground or "matter," their subordinate or subject. If nature exists, it is in consequence of that nature that being becomes a catastrophic environment *for it*, the catastrophe of its ineliminable, environing *inexistence*.

Yet this existent remains the *idea* of the existent. The advantage of the idea is that it contains the totality; its condition, however, is that it does so punctually. It is therefore Kant's idea of reason at the same time as the Platonic attractor. As such, the idea of the existent itself exists no more than the subject of existence, which is the *Anfang* and therefore a *Potenz* of being, the "point-attractor" of the existent;²³ yet the idea of the existent, rather than the subject of being, is itself an additional potency, a "second element of being."²⁴ In consequence of this conjunction, dimensions emerge in the idea of the existent: potencies "by their nature" on the cusp of being, which thought thinks when there is an existent and there arises an attempt to think it. The incipient field for the exhibition of the natural process is therefore precisely that thinking insofar as it thinks what is, i.e., thinks *consequently upon* the subject of existence. Rather than confirming its givenness to the idea, this thinking entails the thinking of that subject's inexistence, the environment extaining its actuality.

In one sense, this territory is familiar from the identity philosophy: "being and thinking are the same" is not a statement of identity, but a

²⁰ SW I/10, 304.

²¹ "Extainment" (symbolised as $\succ\langle$) is the topological contrary of "containment" ($\langle\rangle$). Both are conjunctive (that is, one extainment can extain or be extained by another, just as one containment can be contained by or contain another) and co-implying, since the containment of containment entails that the contained is extained from the container. For further discussion, see my "How Nature comes to be Thought: Schelling's Paradox and the Problem of Location," in *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 44:1 (2013): 25-44, especially 29-30. See also Gilles Châtelet, *L'Enchantement du virtuel* (Paris: Editions Rue D'Ulm, 2010), 75-81. I use it to translate Schelling's *Ausschließung* to draw out the function of exclusion *in a* universe. Extainment is thus *Weltgesetz*-compliant.

²² SW I/10, 323. Since Schelling's catastrophism owes as much to, e.g., René Thom's mathematical catastrophe theory as to Cuvier's geology, it is "universal" in the sense specified at n8, above.

²³ SW I/10, 303: "The first that I have to think is indisputably the *subject of existence* which to that extent is not yet what exists, but the beginning of being [*Anfang zum Seyn*], its initial point attractor. Considered in itself, this subject of existence, still without being, is pure *capacity* [*Können*], something about which we cannot say that it is, precisely because it is itself the subject of existence. Now this subject, as capacity, considered as a *potency* of Being. . . ."

²⁴ SW I/10, 304.

potentiation of it. There is no judgment, in other words, that does not alter what it judges, no proposition that is not additionally predicated of its subject, thus enlarging not its extension but its *ipseity* or *sui generis* character. Since moreover identity simply is what is insofar as it is, any stipulated existent entails a differentiation of identity that, because only identity itself is identity, places it outside itself. Moreover, to the extent that differentiation potentiates identity, the extensional conception of identity as applying to two instances of a single state—as in “for all x , $x = x$,”²⁵ where both the subject’s iterations and the difference between subject and predicate are elided²⁶—is true only to the extent that what is essential in the existent is withdrawn and we are left only with “the desert of Being.” In another sense, however, what happens in thought appears in the later account of this identity to have acquired a structure recursive on itself, such that no matter what is thought, the thought of what is thought remains in thought. Thought, in other words, extains the existent that it thinks “when I think what exists.” But if I think what exists, the identity is reaffirmed as the *what* of the thinking and of the being, but it is not and cannot be thought as such, since thinking neither progressively nor regressively attains it.²⁷ It is not *regressively* attained because there is no point in thinking at which the difference between the thinking introduced into being and the being that is not being thought can be eliminated; and not *progressively* since even when the thinking thinks this difference, and thus contains it, such “derived absoluteness” remains insuperably derived. That is,

²⁵ The problem is not only that there is in the *datum* of Russell’s formulation of the law of identity (from *The Problems of Philosophy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912], 40) a distinct number of parts (three x ’s) and thus undermines the claim of their *mutual* identity, but rather that, in the elision of this fact, identity itself (rather than the identity of x , x) is considered satisfied just when the three x ’s have a restricted extension (namely, x). At issue is (a) whether “for all x , $x = x$ ” is an instance of *predication* rather than definition; and (b) whether therefore logical functions are themselves capable of being logical subjects. Schelling draws attention to (a) in the *Freiheitsschrift*, arguing that the propositions “this body is blue” and “a body is a body” are both instances of predication (SW I/7, 341-3) and therefore instances of the conjunction propositions express. Thus (b) is confirmed, since it can be said of a proposition that it instantiates but neither exhausts nor defines occurrent conjunction. Moreover, Schelling had already made it clear, in “On the Relation between the Real and the Ideal in Nature,” that the copula is not simply the conjunction of terms in a proposition but also the “connecting [of] the idea to actuality” (SW I/2, 359), a relation Schelling later cashes out by reviving the medieval logical rubric of “reduplication” or “reduplicative positing” (SW I/10, 103; trans. A. Bowie, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* [hereafter, *History*] [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 117). For further discussion of the role of this structure in Schelling, see my “Everything is Primal Germ or Nothing Is. Nonlocal Emergence and Natural Predication in Schelling’s ‘On the Real and Ideal in Nature,’” forthcoming in *Symposium* (Spring 2015). For an extraordinary discussion of this issue in contemporary philosophical logic, see Richard Gaskin, *The Unity of the Proposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 223-5 and 314ff, where he pursues this argument in support of what he calls “Bradley’s regress,” such that propositions are instances of the relations they instantiate, with the quantity of iterations non-finite in principle.

²⁶ Schelling analyses the “general misunderstanding of the law of identity,” such as we find in Russell’s formulation of it, in *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom and the Objects Connected Therewith*, trans. James Gutmann (Chicago: Open Court, 1936, 13-14); SW I/7, 340-342.

²⁷ In the antinomies, Kant demonstrates the necessary failure of the regressive series, which moves from consequent to ground, to exhibit the totality or the “cosmical concept [*Weltbegriff*],” but discounts the philosophical pertinence of the progressive series moving from ground to consequence. Cf. CPR A408-411/B435-8.

although any attempted recovery in thought of the ‘what’ it is thinking will necessarily issue not in an immediate, but rather in a mediate premise,²⁸ leaving the ‘what’ always subject to an irreducible surd, each attempted recovery is accordingly a progressive iteration of that surd-producing function.

Nor does this progressive iteration have an upper limit. Accordingly, in thinking identity thought is itself progressively differentiated while irreducibly differentiated from the environment within which it occurs. Even if the thought should recover this rule—a law of thought—rather than its subject (existence as such), the recovered rule thus remains environed, as therefore does the exhibition of nature’s process. The surd itself is not some void awaiting ideational population, but a surd that exists insofar as it is the thought of what is not-thought, both in the sense of a concept of the “not-thought” and the thinking of *what just is not thought*. While the former has the extension “ $\infty (-1)$,” because this concept conceives and contains the difference between the instances of the concept ‘not-thought’ (∞) and the concept itself (1); the latter has the extension “ $\infty (+1)$ ” because it conceives the difference between the concept (1) and what it is not, insofar as the concept is included amongst existents (∞). Not only therefore does “ $\infty (-1)$ ” \neq “ $\infty (+1)$,”²⁹ since the right hand side of the equation is the polar opposite of the left, but neither are the elements on either side reducible one to another, because the concept introduces precisely that asymmetry in being introduced by differentiators of identity. In other words, when there is existence, ‘all that is’ entails the differentiation of identity. Even if nothing were to exist, identity would not obtain, since it depends for its obtaining on the difference its formulation or instantiation entails, namely, that its assertion constitutes precisely an instance of its differentiation.

Yet to this extend, the surd becomes the matter for thinking, in that matter is not otherwise than as it is thought, especially insofar as thought retains the thought that thought precisely extains the matter that it does not think, that is not thought, but that nevertheless does the thinking in it.

Accordingly, the later *Naturphilosophie* aggravates the asymmetry that was there from the outset in Schelling’s account of nature thinking, or *Naturphilosophie*. The directional difference by means of which either *Naturphilosophie* or *Transcendental* philosophy were differentiated is now acknowledged to take place in the thinking of the reciprocal grounding of these two sciences. But this is not to say that grounding must henceforth be abandoned for the reason that, since no grounding is achieved that is not grounding in thought, therefore there is no grounding. Nor is it to say that the grounding that is not the operation of thought does not for that reason occur. Rather, since there is a point at which the *Naturphilosophie* “is once again taken up into the higher, positive system,”³⁰ and since the *Naturphilosophie* is the topic of the *Exhibition*, the question is, Why must it be taken up *again*? If grounding is to be sacrificed, then that operation is no longer thought in the

²⁸ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I 2, 72a8: An “immediate premise is one which has no other premise prior to it.”

²⁹ Nor again does $(-1) = (+1)$, where the units are unlimitedly environed; nor is “ $\infty = \infty$,” since the copula is additive, i.e., an instance of the relation it expresses (see note 25, above).

³⁰ *Grundlegung*, 365.

late philosophy as in the earlier, insofar as in the latter case it was not only one of the two “grounding sciences,”³¹ but also original, albeit an original idealism. “Is there,” Schelling stipulates . . .

. . . any means of philosophizing at all other than the idealistic? I want above all that this expression acquire greater determinacy than it currently has. There is an idealism of nature, and an idealism of the I. To me, the former is the original, and the *latter* the derivative.³²

Although this distributes two idealisms, rather than an idealism and an alternative, priority remains “by nature” insuperable.³³ Accordingly, what is important in this account is that primary and derivative, *proteron* and *hysteron*, *prius* and *posterius* constitute *irreversible* series. But if we rush to identify the structural homology between this and the equally irreversible moments in the construction of the idea that the *Exhibition* says are the means by which thought “reaches Being outside the idea,”³⁴ and claim therefore that nature really is nothing but its structures and their interrelations, so that when I think what exists, I think only structures; then directionality supersedes the moments themselves, and the resultant concepts of nature and of the concept are reciprocally impoverished, reduced to the outlines of the desert world of those who want that *only Being exist*. Moreover, the elimination this move entails with regard to the difference between the idea and its outside suggests these determinations are themselves only “ideal” in the pejorative sense that they do not add to being, but merely to seeming. In other words, there only *seems* to be a difference between thinking and being.

Even at this level, the *original-derivative* contrastive pair included in the structure-generating account in Schelling’s “true concept,” undermines a construal of the identity claim extensionally; if, that is, there is even in the ideal an irreversible sequential difference between nature and thinking, then the elimination of the *ideal-spatial* difference between thinking and being does not suffice to de-differentiate them to the point of identity. The reason the elimination fails is precisely because “nature first, thinking second” remains true whether the context in which this sequence runs be nature or a holodeck.

That insufficient dedifferentiation has occurred in order to establish the identity is because the desired extension is undermined by the both infinite and punctual extension of identity itself. In other words, regardless of the terms of the identity relation, the ‘is’ in it has no content but is rather an *operator* against which the extension demanded is measured as specific and relative difference. Thus, as Schelling argues in the *Freiheitsschrift*, “X = X” has exactly the same function as “this body is blue,” because it is precisely not a question of folding the extension around the copula, but rather of how

³¹ See e.g., *System of Transcendental Idealism* (hereafter, *System*), SW I/3: 341, trans. P. Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 6.

³² “On the True Concept of *Naturphilosophie* and the Correct Means of Resolving its problems,” SW I/4, 84.

³³ SW I/7: 340: “No kind of combination can transform that which is by nature derived into that which is by nature original.”

³⁴ SW I/10, 306.

the copula distributes differences. The point is not that all predication is in fact an identity claim, but that the identity claim is an instance of predication. Thus *S* and *p* are, when there is *p*, ground and consequent, such that not only is *p* an extension of *S*, but *once* there is *p*, *p* casts *S* as the ground upon which it is consequent.³⁵ The reason, that is, why sequence is the vital differentiator is that the difference between being (*Seyn*) and existent (*Seyende*), regardless of what the latter happens to be, is historical or genetic. Thus, the subject consequently antecedent to the predicate is not itself a predicate, but that of which the predicate is said, and any predication augments a subject in accordance with that predicate. By virtue of being a predicate, it is neither immediately a subject nor is it all of the subject of which it is predicated. Predication thus instantiates the structure of expression, of exhibition or *Darstellung*, i.e., showing, placing-*there* or locating *in*, such that, far from being recoverable in the exhibition, what exists does so only as its corona, not its core, without being reducible to it. The subject, that is, is not super-large, but expands only with its consequents, which it then environs. This means that a consequent only is when it is other than that on which it is consequent and on which it depends: were the dependent not something independent from that on which it is dependent, it would not be consequent at all.

Second *Universio*: “What thinks in me is what is outside me”³⁶

In this line from the *System der Weltalter*, Schelling rearticulates the identity thesis with which the *Naturphilosophie* began, in the *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, with this famous claim, “Nature should be Mind made visible, mind invisible nature.”³⁷ The claim for this “thoroughgoing identity” is not simple, not least because, despite the impression of a closing cycle, the asymmetry between the two parts of this claim remains evident: neither is nature exhausted in visible mind, nor mind in visible nature.

1) Nature “*should be*” mind made visible—and therefore *is* not. The same applies to mind and invisible nature.

2) The sense that mind might or might not be visible, intuitable as such, is *prima facie* strange.

3) In the event that the identity is judged to obtain, nevertheless the asymmetry between the two remains. We will address these points in order.

1. Does the non-obtaining of the identity vitiate the conception of identity at issue? In other words, does its non-obtaining entail the non-being of the identity at issue?

No. For the simple reason that the identity is not, even in the *Ideas*, articulated in extensional form ($X = Y$), but rather across the entirety of the claim, to what both *mind* and *nature* should be. If nature makes mind intuitable, this is in the sense, in other words, that mind’s following from

³⁵ SW I/7, 342.

³⁶ *System der Weltalter*, ed. Siegbert Peetz, second edition (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1998), 147.

³⁷ *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (hereafter, *Ideas*), SW I/2, 56; trans. E.E. Harris and P. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 42.

nature's production of it will be confirmed in intuition. Yet the identity is precisely not intuitable in the sense that observing it in another or in oneself would reveal that what I think when I think what I am thinking is not the I that thinks it but rather the thinking from which this I issues. The sensible intuition of the identity is "of" nature not merely as mind, but as intuition insofar as neither does intuition belong to the subject position alone. If it did, intuition would be insuperably mine but therefore of nothing at all, or of only and always my intuitions. What these local convulsions in the phase space of intuition might be if they are not *of* something—whatever this something is—is incomprehensible. They must therefore be of something, and to the extent that they are, it is completely irrelevant whether we say what they are of comes from one source or another. The thought "I am having an intuition of nature" remains true, in other words, whether or not the nature in question *is* nature in itself or nature insofar as it is presented by and for intuition. In other words, if Kant is right about nature as the totality of phenomena, there is no room left over for nature to be anything else, which is what point (3) in fact means: mind made visible is precisely nature's operation insofar as this is realised in intuition. Of course, neither then is intuited mind simultaneously the intuiting owing to the insuperable asymmetry between the two acts. Thus, intelligence "appears to itself as limited through productive intuition,"³⁸ which productive intuition it does not, insofar as it is this producing, intuit.

Thus (4) there remains the asymmetry. Schelling in fact claims that *not all nature is visible* or manifest in intuition.³⁹ This applies paradigmatically to mind for the following reason. If nature *should be* mind made visible, what this demands is that the means whereby mind comes to be intuitable as nature should themselves be intuited in the nature that so intuit. Because these means do not become so intuitable, however, we learn that intuition does not intuit precisely the coming into being of intuition or the appearance of appearance, just as the emergence of the universe is not a part, but rather the limit, of intuition (even if the emergence of the universe itself was intuited *in* that universe). There is in both cases an irresolvably inaccessible overhang. This surd—nature before mind precisely self-intuits to the extent that in this intuition the nature that it continues to be in intuition does not reduce the before to the after.

In what sense, then, is visible nature/invisible mind an identity claim at all? The conclusion that identity is not a Rorschach fold around a midpoint follows from the maintained asymmetry evident in the form of the claim. Accordingly, the claim does not flatten the two into one but maintains both, mutually irreducible operations simultaneously. But it also follows from this that at no point is there a departure from the register of the limited intuitability of nature's involving or evolving of mind. It is precisely in the production of mind that nature is what it is insofar as it is a nature in which

³⁸ SW I/3, 525; *System*, 149. As Schelling graphically puts it elsewhere in that same work, "Self-consciousness is the lamp of the whole system of knowledge, but casts its light ahead only, not behind" (SW I/3, 347; *System*, 18).

³⁹ Hence his claim, in the *Ideas*, that "a universe exists; this proposition is the limit of experience itself. Or rather, that a universe exists is only an *idea*" (SW I/2, 24; *Ideas*, 18). He adds the contextualizing point in the *System*: "That a universe . . . is at all, is necessary if the I as such is originally restricted" (SW I/3, 481; *System*, 115).

mindedness is occurrent, but precisely here also that the incompleteness of the program entails a local convulsion *in it* that shows features precisely insofar as intuition is not qua intuition mistaken about what is intuited.

Nor, however, is any concession made as to a local source of intuition or psychogenesis, just as we find in the claim, almost 30 years later, that “What thinks in me is what is outside me.”

If we take this claim to parse the *Ideas*’ identity proposition, the theory of space from the *Exhibition* emerges: according to the claim as to the external source of thinking, it is not an I that thinks nor to which thinking appears. The space that would be occupied by such a subject shrinks, in this claim as in the above, to near zero. Nevertheless, it is not quite zero, as the minimal spatial, external division between inside and out overlaps but does not meet. It would be in the complete extensional coincidence of the overlapping that a subject position would be expelled from the thinking. Here, however, no such coincidence arises except insofar as the claim stipulates that thinking occurs in one space that folds to articulate the specific difference that makes the subject space non-isomorphic with that of thinking. This is no zero point (thinking, after all, is occurrent) but rather a line following precisely the manner in which “when I think what exists,” what exists articulates the thinking in me precisely as the line it draws through the line by which “In me” and “outside me” are articulated. Yet the thinking that makes space precisely cannot be thought as the closing of that space; *my* thought cannot close the loop by which inside and out are articulated by what is outside me because it is what is outside me that is the agent of this. If it is objected that this “outside me” is not necessarily nature because nothing has been stipulated regarding what this outside is, I reply that it is necessarily not not-nature, precisely because, as Schelling argues at length against Kant in the *Exhibition of the Natural Process*, space simply is the form of externality, and externality articulates my inside insofar as the latter is in the former. Hence Châtelet’s important claim that “Schelling perhaps saw it most clearly: he knew that thought was not in every case encapsulated in a brain; that it could be everywhere ... outside.”⁴⁰ Schelling’s theory of space, that is, is not simply what thought extains, but rather a theory of the complex environments of thoughts, which environments are, firstly, irreducible to thought (even when environments are conceived), and secondly therefore, insuperable by it. Thus the outside in which thought occurs is precisely what it is that erupts in the thinking that, leaving the outside outside itself, is not only situated in, but also articulated by it.

What then is the identity common to both claims (“What am I thinking?” and “What thinks in me?”)? It is the identity of the operation by which what articulates what is thought (it is precisely as operation that identity is thought in the *Freiheitsschrift*). This is, I claim, one of the functions of the *Exhibition of the Natural Process*: the thereness or positioning that is the function of the natural process, which occurs *specifically* when it *is* there, when it, the *Naturprozess*, exists, *and* when it is

⁴⁰ Châtelet, Gilles, *Les enjeux du mobile. Mathématique, physique, philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 39.

exhibited. The position exhibited in the exhibition attests to the indifference of locus with respect to thought and nature.

Of course, the identity formulation of the 1801 *Darstellung meines Systems* makes it clear that identity is what is insofar as it is. This univocity is differentially articulated by existence, such that each existent introduces a tension from the zero difference midpoint from which it stands out or ek-sists. The 1844 *Exhibition* complicates but does not destroy this model insofar as being is a moment in the content or process of the thought of what exists, that moment, namely, that Schelling calls the “subject of existence.” As such, this is similarly void of content (it has no object in it) and precedes judgment. When Being is therefore being thought—always as desert, says Schelling⁴¹—it becomes an object not to itself but in itself, an object that is as subjectless as the subject is objectless. To the endless desert surface is added an infinite abyss,⁴² a conjunction of the groundless depths of non-being and *superficially* infinite can-being. This copulation of being and ungrounding is not however barren, it is precisely the pressure of the attraction between them from which issues the “efflorescence of being”, the locus of the existent that is not yet the existent as such.

Copulative reproduction is central also to the *Freiheitsschrift*'s account of identity: the relation of ground and consequent evident in the propositions A is A or the body is blue, is such a relation just when a consequent is a consequent. That is, without a genuine consequent, without something independent issuing from that on which it is dependent, no consequence has in fact occurred. A child, that is, is a child precisely to the extent that it is not its parent, and while to be that child ‘it’ depends on parents, this dependence is insufficient to determine the child as other than consequent, both in the sense of ‘following’ and ‘issuing’ from. The copula in the identity claim, therefore, is not the fold around which the terms’ extensions are coincident, but the operation by which identity—being—is differentially distributed.

So if identity, which Schelling called, in the *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, “the discovery of my youth,”⁴³ is consistently interrogated throughout the work, its basic formula consists not in the translation of all objects one into the other, such that, in the end, identity returns existence to the infinite desert of Being—that is, it is not an extensional account—but rather an *extensity* account in the following sense: identity is the ongoing operation of differentiation, a creation of consequents that, insofar as it is copulative, has surface and depth but no final ground. This is the law of insuperable environment.

If then we turn to the later philosophy, as here considered in the *Exhibition*, and ask in what form identity may, as it were, survive, my claim is that it survives in the copulative process, in the quantitative mixture of

⁴¹ SW I/10, 312.

⁴² SW I/10, 304.

⁴³ Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/2*, ed. M. Frank (Third edition. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1993), 95. The discovery is not identity *per se*, but the identity *system*, as Schelling confirms in *History*: “Identity system” indicates “that neither a one-sided real nor a one-sided ideal” but rather “one ultimate subject was being thought in ... the real and the ideal” (SW I/10, 107; *History*, 120).

Being and not-Being familiar from Plato's *Sophist*. This process is logically the making of judgments: "S is p", where the copula does not reward its terms either with Being or identity, but rather makes them moments in a process. Ontologically, it is the intimacy of Being and not-Being, of the subject of being and the object it becomes *towards* itself. If, however, we ask this question in terms of existence, we are thrown back to two questions:

- 1) Does Schelling's claim that the "moments" of the Idea are as such "outside the idea"⁴⁴ amount to the claim that these moments are "existents"? In other words, does the positivity of the positive philosophy reside in the externality of these moments to the negative, or is this outside itself reducibly negative?
- 2) Is the *Exhibition* itself the operation of the nature-process or is it *about* that process? In other words, how is the externality of the moments of the idea related to the process of nature, on the one hand, and thought, on the other? What, that is, operates the *Darstellung* as a process internal and external to the Idea, while the Idea remains external to the external; or *how strained is identity here?*

If the negative philosophy is taken to entail the *complete environing*, the containment or "*Begriffensein*"⁴⁵ of the conceived in the conceiving (without which there would *be* no conceiving) *of its items in thought alone*—as the containing of content as conceived—and this containment is thought, rather than as impinged upon by an exteriority, incapable of achieving it, then although the process $\langle -A+A \pm A \rangle$ can never arrive at an existent outside it, it is entirely consonant with the abrupt, anti-deflationary and asymmetrical identity claims Schelling makes, that nevertheless an existent occurs in this containment, since in order that it be a containing, there must exist something that it contains. In other words, the thought of the existent is itself an existent, even if it is not the existent that thought has as its attractor.

If this is taken to mean that therefore only intelligence, thought, call it what you will, ek-sists in the negative philosophy, the following problems arise:

- 1) How does the maximal containment thesis get round the problem of the environment of intelligence stipulated in the asymmetry of both identity accounts above? The thinkability, after all, of the desert of being is itself consequent upon the Being that cannot be pre-thought in that thinking as precisely what is antecedent to that thinking and therefore environs it. "It is not because there is thinking that there is Being, but because there is Being that there is thinking," as the *Grounding of Positive Philosophy* puts it.⁴⁶
- 2) By what is thinking environed? Provided only that it does so against the subject of existence and its "self-objectivisation" ($-A+A$), or from

⁴⁴ SW I/10, 306.

⁴⁵ Schelling's phrase "*Begriffenseyn in einem andern*" (SW I/7: 346) concisely names environmental insuperability.

⁴⁶ SW II/1, 161n; *Grounding* 203n.

the collision of the infinite surface with infinite depths, then this is the environment from which the thinking stands out and of which the thinking is consequent. Even though the subject of existence itself does not exist, the thought “the subject of existence” does, and this thought is environed.

- 3) That the moments of the Idea are outside the Idea, taken alongside the critique of Kant’s concept of space as being reducibly subjective,⁴⁷ suggests that externality is necessary and sufficient to establish space not merely as thought, or as a subjective condition of experience: “With space, then, something completely extra-conceptual is posited, and it is nothing other than form i.e., *the universal and infinite possibility of extra-conceptual Being.*”⁴⁸

While there can be no difference in kind between the existence entailed for the thinking that arises in the negative and that entailed for externality as such, there is here a contrast between the *form and possibility of Being* that is now *extra-conceptual* according to Schelling, and the moments of the Idea that are outside the Idea, the powers immediately, i.e., “by nature,” environing and exhibiting it. Minimally, it may be said that the externality at issue is *externality*, and that therefore we may discount the hypothesis that *only thought ek-sists in or for the negative philosophy*.

So if thought, dimensionalising the collision of surface and depth in not-being, exists, maximal containment is necessarily limited. Thought has Being as its content just when it exists, when thought thinks the unconditioned or absolute as the abyss or is ungrounded. Thought does not *get* outside the Idea, but nor does it arise only in it. To think “what am I thinking when I think what exists?” requires a *descendental* or “regressive” strategy with respect to the existents that environ it and on which the subject of existence is consequent. Thus the beginning made in thought is already consequent upon the descent whose trajectory opens beneath the desert and reduces the surface dimension to a point. The exhaustion of negation is dependent upon the negation from which it starts. In this sense, “what am I thinking when I think what exists” is a negative identity hypothesis and an attempt absolutely to extract thought from its environment, or to realize the idea. That nothing can be extensionally identified with being we know from the identity theses set out above, and from those set out in the 1801 *System*. Since thinking and Being fall into precisely this class of extensions, the negative philosophy’s experiment therefore demonstrates the necessary failure of spontaneous human cognition as consequent upon the incomplete extantment of thought and environment. My thesis is that the failure of the negative cannot but culminate in the presentation of the process of nature, but also that the lessons of the negative philosophy are requisite if this presentation is to be achieved.

⁴⁷ SW I/10, 315-7.

⁴⁸ SW I/10, 314-5, emphasis mine.

Third *Universio*: The Nature of Nature

To illustrate this, I will look at two problems—that of the nature of nature and, finally, that of matter.

Just as in the *Universal Deduction of the Dynamic Process* of 1800 Schelling argued that not only must the concept of matter be constructed, but so too matter itself,⁴⁹ and therefore that matter is not first given either as concept or as such, so in the *Exhibition* the problem of matter is treated not primitively, but consequently: “Matter cannot be posited as original ... but only as already consequent upon a becoming.”⁵⁰ Thus matter *is not* but becomes by way of the subjugation of the start to the process, because whatever is consequent is consequent upon something to which it relates as its ground or material. The beginnings of matter, Schelling argues, consist in the *uni-versio*, the inversion of the existent or the “one that exists” to “become matter for the higher.”⁵¹ Motion (rotation), dimension (surface and depth, raising and subordination) and operation (antecedence and consequence) are thus established in a non-authochthonous, that is, a consequent universe (“valid only in the negative”⁵²), the universe *for* such operations as existence supplies the matter on which to perform them.

Although Schelling is clear that the condition under which the One inverts or partially rotates is that it be thought negatively, since we know that thought, regardless of its content, exists, the process it exhibits *is* externality insofar as matter is in space. Thus the *line* introduced into not-being is not a posit, but the consequent of the non-being of the surface as the point of its conjunction with depth, just as matter is consequent on both what has not yet become it and upon the operations oriented through its position.

Although therefore the *Exhibition* presents matter as “self-actualising,”⁵³ either its consequent nature makes this false, in which case it does not self-actualise but is merely and permanently matter (so that Being and matter have identical extensions); or, if its consequent nature is true, it is precisely not self-actualising insofar as it is consequent upon another that is, to that extent, not matter. If matter therefore is process-regional, a turning point in the production of existents, this is because the process conjoins matter and thought, not as *of equal extension*, but as *of varying and asymmetrical extent* without which we have desert or no matter at all. The concept ‘matter’ is therefore a discriminatory one, preventing saturation of all states (Being is matter) just as it prevents the emptying of all but one (matter is a body). As such, it demonstrates that the *uni-versum* hypothesis proper to the negative philosophy, is not a universe but is in one on which it is consequent. Nor is this the all-the-way-down *emboîtement* of preformationism, since the universe the universe is in is, by definition, not extensionally identical with the universe in it. As a result of this, however, the thinking that exists in consequence of the collision of infinite Being and infinite not-being, of deserted surface and groundless depths, exists not *in* but

⁴⁹ SW I/4, 3-4.

⁵⁰ SW I/10, 310.

⁵¹ SW I/10, 311.

⁵² SW I/10, 311.

⁵³ SW I/10, 324.

from the negative, and limns precisely the space into which all the dimensions and motions of the *universio*, spill. Otherwise, thinking takes place in another environment than does what thinks, on the one hand, and what is thought, on the other.

Negative philosophy seeks to constitute its autochthony, as the self-grounding universe, from the *thought* of the subject of existence that does not itself exist. But this thought being consequent by nature entails that the universe so constructed is *inverted* with respect to the antecedence it cannot think without thinking it consequently. The conditions, therefore, for the self-construction of the existent are therefore the presupposition of the extensional identity of thought and being, and the inversion thereby of the *extending* of identity that existence is, completed by the symmetrical cognition of the “nature of nature.” In nature thinking—“what thinks in me is what is outside me”—identity precisely differentiates or evolves by virtue of the asymmetry of environment with respect to consequent. In negative thinking, by contrast—“what am I thinking when I think what exists”—the failure of internal closure—the fact that I cannot think what exists, but only the existence of what exists—thereby demonstrated reveals, in the externality or consequence of the thought on what is thought, regardless of what this might be, that nature does not issue from it without having been antecedent to it. The exhibition of the nature-process is therefore an ethics of nature to the extent that it reveals the negative philosophy’s inversion of the relation of consequent to ground, the self-grounding, autochthonous *universio*, is conceptually evil precisely to the extent that its consequents—the concepts issuing from it—are subordinated to self-containment.

Accordingly, then, as the identity thesis is tested to the limit in the *universio* that cannot contain all its consequents just as it cannot be its own antecedent, the *moments of the* process of its environment are exhibited. The question therefore is not whether this is a nature merely of, in or from thought, but rather of the universe in which thought takes place, on the one hand, and the motions created by it, on the other. Concepts do not only *take place*, as Gilles Châtelet says, in brains, but are “outside ... everywhere.”⁵⁴ This does not mean that thoughts are not dependent upon brains or some other functionally equivalent apparatus; nor that these are themselves somehow independent of 14 billion years of evolution; quite the contrary: it rather means that thinking is done in a nature whose nature is not boxed in, but boxed out. Exhibition, therefore, is the exhibition of precisely what is thought when what is doing the thinking is outside, everywhere.

⁵⁴ Gilles Châtelet, *Les enjeux du mobile. Mathématique, physique, philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 39.