Schelling's Ontology of Powers

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN ONTOLOGY

CHARLOTTE ALDERWICK

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Abbreviations and Notes on Referencing

General note. All references which cite English translations of Schelling's work cite the page number of the English translation first followed by the page reference from the relevant volume of his *Sämtliche Werke*.

***Difference* Essay** – Hegel, G. W. F. (1977) (Harris, H. S. and Cerf, W. trans.) *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY Press

Ethics – Spinoza, B. (1994) (Curley, E. trans. and ed.) *Ethics*. London: Penguin.

References to Spinoza's *Ethics* follow the conventional format: Roman numerals refer to the parts of the *Ethics*, and Arabic numbers are used for the definitions, propositions, etc.

The following abbreviations are used:
App – appendix
D – definition
D (following P and an Arabic numeral) – demonstration
C – corollary
S – scholium

***Freedom* Essay** – Schelling, F. W. J. (2002) (Gutman, J. trans.) *Philosophical Investigations into the Nature of Human Freedom*. Shrewsbury: Living Time Press.

Further Presentations – Schelling, F. W. J. (2001b) (Vater, M. G. trans.) 'Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy (1802)', in *Philosophical Forum*, 32 (4).

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Ideas – Schelling, F. W. J. (1995) (Harris, E. E. and Heath, P. trans.) *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Introduction – (2004b) 'Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, or, On the Concept of Speculative Physics and the Internal Organization of a System of this Science' in Peterson, K. R. (trans.) *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*. New York: SUNY Press.

KrV – Kant, I. (2007) (Kemp Smith, N. trans.) *Critique of Pure Reason*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

All references to the first *Critique* cite the page numbers of the A and B editions.

KpV – Kant, I. (1997) (Gregor, M. trans. and ed.) *Critique of Practical Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

KdU – Kant, I. (1987) (Pluhar, W. S. trans.) *Critique of Judgment*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

All references to the second and third *Critiques* cite the page numbers from the Ak. V edition

Letters – Schelling, F. W. J. (1981) 'Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism', in (Marti, F. trans) *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays, 1794–96*. London: Associated University Press.

Of the I – Schelling, F. W. J. (1981) 'Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy or On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge', in Marti, F. (trans) *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays, 1794–96*. London: Associated University Press.

Outline **–** Schelling, F. W. J. (2004a) (Peterson, K. R. trans.) *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*. New York: SUNY Press.

Presentation – Schelling, F. W. J. (2001a) (Vater, M. G. trans.) 'Presentation of My System of Philosophy (1801)', in *Philosophical Forum*, 32 (4).

World-Soul – Schelling, F. W. J. (2010a) (Grant, I. H. trans.) 'On the World Soul', in *Collapse Vol. VI: Geo/Philosophy*, pp. 58–95.

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For my Grampy – one of nature's most formidable forces

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Introduction

This project has a number of overlapping aims. Perhaps the central aim is to provide a reading and interpretation of Schelling's philosophy (or rather, of his philosophy from the *Naturphilosophie* to the *Freedom* essay), and in particular of the conception of human freedom made possible by Schelling's metaphysical system. I will argue that we should understand Schelling's ontology as a power-based system: one which claims that the most basic building blocks of reality are powers or dispositions. Accordingly I present a reading of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as an articulation of this ontology of powers. Following this I give an account of Schelling's evolving philosophical project in the years between the *Naturphilosophie* and the *Freedom* essay; I then offer a novel interpretation of Schelling's account of freedom there. I want to show that this account gives us a way to make sense of the freedom of human agents within their day-to-day lives, and in a way that is continuous with the kinds of activity which exist elsewhere in the natural world. I also want to show that this conception of freedom is made possible by the ontology of powers which constitutes Schelling's metaphysics.

This indicates another central aim of this book: I want to draw parallels between Schelling's power-based ontology and recent work in the metaphysics of powers. One of the claims I will defend is that Schelling's work highlights an important set of problems for this kind of ontology; and in particular for attempts to argue for a libertarian conception of human freedom on the basis of a system of this sort. I argue that Schelling's particular treatment of these problems, and his approach to metaphysics more broadly, enables him to both recognise and solve these problems in a way which is not currently done in the contemporary literature.

Although I argue that Schelling's ontology of powers bears striking similarities to contemporary accounts, I also want to draw attention to the

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fact that Schelling's approach to the question of human freedom differs from the contemporary treatment of the problem: I demonstrate that, for Schelling, questions of the reality and nature of human freedom form just one aspect of a nexus of questions which surround the relationship between individual beings and the whole to which they belong. Therefore the answer to the former questions cannot simply lie in an analysis of the concept of agency; the question of human freedom is a question about the nature of reality as a whole, and the way that seemingly different aspects of this reality can exist alongside one another. Accordingly, looking at Schelling's account of human freedom will necessarily involve looking at (for example) his conceptions of nature, natural causality and the whole itself rather than simply focusing on the agent, and I will show that his unique answer to the question of human freedom depends on this holistic approach. One of the lessons that can be taken from Schelling's work, then, is of the necessity of holism – both as a methodological approach and a metaphysical commitment. I argue for this claim in detail in the final chapter.

I also want to show that, although there are important and undeniable changes in Schelling's system, his work (at least from the period beginning with the *Naturphilosophie* and ending with the *Freedom* essay[1]) displays a deep continuity, and that it is only through recognising this continuity that we can gain a proper understanding of his work as a whole, as an ongoing philosophical *project* rather than as a series of discrete and isolated systems. I argue that one source of this continuity is Schelling's enduring interest in a particular cluster of philosophical problems: problems surrounding the relationship between freedom and system, the absolute and the world, the infinite and the finite, the individual and the whole, the ground and the grounded. A central claim of this project is that we should read Schelling's philosophical project as a series of attempts at answers to this set of problems: the different systems that Schelling presents in the texts that I discuss represent attempts to think through the consequences of different ways of tackling the above set of problems.

I further argue that a second source of continuity is Schelling's commitment to an ontology of powers, and his use of the particular structure that this ontology affords throughout his work. This, I suggest, is one of the reasons that Schelling's philosophy, and in particular his power-based account of human freedom, should be of interest to contemporary philosophers working on similar issues. The changes in Schelling's system stem from his acute awareness of the problematic consequences of certain of his philosophical commitments; and these are problems which are likely to arise for any position which shares these commitments. Schelling's philosophy not only provides insight into the problems that arise from certain kinds of philosophical system but also provides a number of possible solutions and

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works out their consequences. I want to demonstrate that as well as isolating a number of problems for attempts to argue for human freedom on the basis of an ontology of powers, Schelling's philosophy also highlights a number of directions that one might take to attempt to deal with these problems.

For this reason, I hope that this project will be of contemporary as well as historical interest. I consider the project to be of scholarly importance as my reading of Schelling, and in particular his claims in the *Freedom* essay, provides a perspective on his work which is missing in the literature. Further, in addition to highlighting what I take to be a genuine set of worries for the contemporary pan-dispositionalist, I believe that there is much in Schelling's work that could be of interest to contemporary debates in metaphysics (for example, Schelling's essentialism and the account of natural kinds it entails and his account of the nature of the grounding process seem to me to be particularly relevant to debates in these areas). If this project contributes to the renewed interest in Schelling that has taken place in recent years then I will consider it to have been a great success.

As I emphasised above, Schelling is fundamentally a systematic philosopher: his philosophical ambitions are wide-ranging and his systems are characterised by his attempts to fully think through all of the aspects and implications of that system. Because of this, giving an account of Schelling's philosophy which manages to do all of its richness and complexity justice is incredibly difficult; it is much easier to focus on one particular dimension of his thinking to use as a lens through which to understand everything else. I am conscious of the fact that I have done that in this project: although I take the question of the relationship between system and freedom (and the nexus of problems of which it is part) to be one of Schelling's central concerns throughout his career, I am aware that choosing to focus solely on this line of thought may mean missing out or glossing over other interesting and important aspects of his philosophy. I have also chosen a particular set of texts to focus on for this reason – Schelling was a prolific author and to look at his entire *oeuvre* in one study would be a mammoth task. I am therefore focusing on the texts from the *Naturphilosophie* to the *Freedom* essay for two reasons: one, because it is in this period that Schelling's ontology of powers is articulated and developed; and two, because it is in this period that Schelling most clearly works out the implications of this ontology for individuality and freedom.

On the other hand, because of the systematic nature of Schelling's philosophy, even after choosing to focus on one aspect of his thought others will inevitably come back into view: certain concepts and claims are linked in Schelling's philosophy in such a way that to do justice to one means attempting to understand a good few more, and these in turn will throw up more that need to be considered, and so on. For this reason the range of

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concepts which I discuss in this book is rather broad. There are a number of strands of Schelling's thought which I have had to present briefly and have not been able to do justice to because they have not been integral to the claims I want to make, and because there is simply too much in Schelling's work to be able to do justice to all of it in a project of this scale. I have tried to include references to other work on Schelling where I have not been able to fully explore areas of his thought, and hope that even where I have not been able to spend the time I would have liked to on areas of his philosophy, I have not ended up misrepresenting him.

My approach to philosophy is what one might call 'big picture' – in this book I take a broad view of Schelling's philosophy and approach it as a whole. There is a lot of excellent and detailed scholarly analysis of Schelling being done by various individuals; this book is not an example of that. Rather what I am proposing is a particular way of reading Schelling which I argue fits with his overarching philosophical concerns and the spirit of his philosophy, as well as giving us a way to make sense of the particular texts I focus on here. I also want to show that the reading of Schelling that I argue for here is fruitful as it gives us a way to understand his different philosophical concerns as fitting together as a coherent whole, and allows us to approach his works as an ongoing philosophical project rather than as protean and piecemeal. I therefore think that this reading has implications for interpreting Schelling's works which I have not considered in this book; though I have not had the space to pursue them here I have tried to gesture towards them where I can. I also think that this holistic 'big picture' approach is appropriate for reading Schelling, because arguably this is the way that Schelling approaches philosophy: even in his analysis of particular specific phenomena, Schelling always keeps the whole in mind, always considering the ways that the elements of his system are connected, and the ways that different elements can help to shed light on or come into conflict with others. One reason I hope that this work will be of interest to philosophers working outside of classical German philosophy is that there is much to recommend this way of approaching philosophical problems, as I hope to demonstrate. I want to show that Schelling's way of doing philosophy, and his ongoing philosophical project itself, have much to offer contemporary debates.

I therefore begin by engaging with contemporary metaphysics, and in Chapter 1 I outline the central features of contemporary power-based ontologies. There are a number of reasons for this. First, I want to draw attention to the marked similarities between these accounts and Schelling's ontology in order to support my claim that the latter's system should be read as an ontology of powers. Second, I want to highlight these similarities as I will claim later in the project that the problems that emerge for

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Schelling's ontology will also arise for contemporary accounts of this kind. In Chapter 1 I say something about the contemporary motivations for adopting a power-based ontology, sketch the central features of this kind of ontology and briefly outline the ways that this type of system might be thought helpful in arguing for a libertarian conception of human freedom.

Chapter 2 turns back to Schelling's particular treatment of the question of human freedom, and I outline the relationships between freedom and system in Spinoza, Kant and Fichte, who I take to be three of Schelling's most important influences on the subject of freedom. I argue that it is the tensions which these three philosophical systems highlight (between certainty and autonomy and systematicity and freedom) which in part motivate Schelling's adoption of a power-based ontology: in order to posit a holist system (to ground certainty and avoid the problematic dualisms of Kant) which avoids the denial of freedom which Spinoza's monism seemed to entail, Schelling moves from a system based on substance to one founded on powers in process, as this kind of system is able to afford more space for the acts of free agents.

In Chapter 3 I present my account of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as a power-based ontology. One of the claims I defend throughout the project is that despite the changes in Schelling's system, the ontology of powers outlined in the *Naturphilosophie* remains central to his thought. This is especially true of his claims in the *Freedom* essay, which I argue in Chapter 5 depend on (as well as extend) the ontology outlined in the texts on *Naturphilosophie*. Chapter 3 therefore outlines the ontology which the *Naturphilosophie* presents, emphasising the importance of powers and process for Schelling's conception of nature. I finish the chapter by highlighting a problem which the *Naturphilosophie* entails: although the conceptions of causality, natural law and the openness of the future which the *Naturphilosophie*'s ontology of powers enables seem to be conducive for arguing for human freedom, nonetheless the account of objects and their relation to the whole which this ontology presents implies that agents themselves (or any individuals in nature) are not the causal source of their actions and further throws the very existence of genuine individuals into question. I argue that this problem has two aspects: a problem of individuation and a problem of control. It is these problems that I claim will also arise for contemporary power-based accounts.

Chapter 4 expands on these problems, and makes explicit why they arise as a consequence of the power-based ontology of the *Naturphilosophie*. In this chapter I argue that Schelling became aware of these problems and that this awareness was one of the driving forces behind the changes to his system that he made between the *Naturphilosophie* and the *Freedom* essay: I present the *Identitätssystem* as Schelling's attempt to work out the consequences of

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a system which denies the existence of individuality. This chapter follows Schelling's progression through the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the *Identitätssystem*, the dialogic text *Bruno*, and *Philosophy and Religion*, outlining his different attempts to make this kind of system consistent. I argue in this chapter that, because of Schelling's deep concern with the reality of human freedom as well as problems internal to the systems he presents in this period, he abandons the *Identitätssystem* and attempts a new answer to the problems entailed by the *Naturphilosophie*.

This new solution, I argue in Chapter 5, is found in the *Freedom* essay, which represents Schelling's renewed attempt to include a strong conception of freedom within his account of the whole. Schelling's previous attempts in the *Identitätssystem* prioritised the whole at the expense of the individual; after the failure of the *Identitätssystem* the Schelling of the *Freedom* essay places individuality and personality at the heart of his conception of system. I argue that in the *Freedom* essay Schelling builds on the power-based ontology of the *Naturphilosophie* in order to advance a conception of the whole as reciprocally dependent on the freedom of individuals: the kind of system which Schelling outlines here is *enabled* by the existence of genuinely free individuals rather than threatened by them. In this chapter I outline Schelling's account of the whole and conception of freedom from the *Freedom* essay, demonstrating that both of these depend on his ontology of powers.

In the final chapter I bring into sharper focus the problems which I argue that Schelling has been concerned with solving since the *Naturphilosophie*. In this chapter I make explicit why these problems will arise not only for Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, but for any similar power-based system. I draw attention to the features of Schelling's earlier systems which mean that he is unable to avoid these problems, and highlight the features of the ontology of the *Freedom* essay which enable him to provide a solution. I finish with some consideration of whether Schelling's solutions will be palatable to contemporary metaphysicians: it may be thought that a solution which involves the positing of an absolute is worse than no solution at all. However, I hope to show that, although some of his conceptual apparatus may seem alien to the contemporary philosopher, there is much to recommend Schelling's solution to these problems.

Note

1. In fact I think that this is true of Schelling's entire philosophical career; however, as I have only been able to focus on the texts including and between the *Naturphilosophie* and the *Freedom* essay in this project I restrict my claim to this period.

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Chapter 1

Powers: Contemporary Accounts

Introduction

For some time metaphysics in the Anglo-American tradition has been dominated by a way of thinking which takes the object as its fundamental explanatory paradigm. The object is understood as first and foremost an isolated individual, a discrete unit with clear and determinate boundaries; any relationships or connections that it has to other objects, or even to its own properties, are secondary. This paradigm also has a distinctly neo-Humean element: it is not just the case that the connections an object has to other things are secondary, but they are also contingent. Therefore they do not tell us anything of consequence about that object, or nature itself; they merely happen to be that way and could just as well have been otherwise without this entailing any interesting change to that object or to nature itself. This paradigm culminates in the doctrine of Humean Supervenience, notoriously summarised by Lewis: 'All there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another' (Lewis 1986: ix).

The picture entailed by this way of thinking is of a fundamentally disconnected world: objects are disconnected from their properties, causes from their effects, actors from their actions. Nothing is really connected to anything else, things just happen and could have happened any other way. That things happen in the way that they do, and that things are the way they are, is contingent: anything could have co-occurred with anything else; an object could have had fundamentally different properties; a particular cause could have had very different effects. It is important to note that this is not merely a counterfactual claim stating that the world *could* have been different *if* things had played out differently, but rather stems from the claim

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about disconnectedness: the properties something has have nothing to do with its nature; the things that happen to be causally connected bear no more important or different relationship to one another than to any other objects in the universe.

However, there has been a slow but growing tide of resistance against this way of thinking which questions the picture of nature I have been sketching above. Is it really the case that an object could have had any other properties and still been that same object? Is it not something in the nature of that object which makes it behave and exist in the way that it does? Surely there are certain objects in nature which are connected in particular meaningful ways, whether that be causes to effects, objects to properties or universals to particulars? There are also worries about the reductive implications of the neo-Humean picture: this view has difficulties with accounting for the role of not only human agency within nature, but any intentional action at all. I will have more to say about these worries in the course of this chapter. This tide of resistance has led to a move away from the ontology of disconnected objects and towards thinking in terms of dynamism and process towards an ontology which gives us a fundamentally more interconnected picture of the world. In this chapter I will be giving a detailed account of the motivations for this kind of view and sketching the central features of the account.

This shift in the contemporary debate – from thinking about nature on a mechanistic model in terms of discrete and disconnected particulars, connected only by external relations of causation, to conceiving of nature as a dynamic and interconnected whole composed of objects which are inherently active – parallels a shift that took place in the late eighteenth century. Schelling's development of his *Naturphilosophie* was part of this shift and, as I will outline in Chapter 3, this development was motivated by many of the same concerns which underlie the move towards a power-based metaphysics in contemporary debates. There is also a striking similarity in the hopes for the implications of this metaphysics for making sense of higher level phenomena: both Schelling and many contemporary pan-dispositionalists are committed to the thought that by shifting our metaphysical thinking from static objects to dynamic powers we thereby open up the prospect for making sense of phenomena such as human freedom, intentionality, subjectivity, etc., in a different way, and importantly in a way which is continuous with rather than opposed to our understanding of other natural products. Indeed, though both Schelling and the contemporary pan-dispositionalists are motivated to their views through concerns which we might describe as at the micro level of metaphysics (such as concerns about the nature of matter, properties and causation), arguably both are also motivated by the thought that this ontology offers the prospect of giving

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a different account of particular 'higher level' subjective phenomena. This account is naturalistic (in the sense that it offers explanations which take these phenomena to be part of nature) but is not reductive, and allows for explanations of these phenomena which are more continuous with our experience and pre-philosophical understanding of them than a mechanistic or neo-Humean account allows.

I give a detailed account of Schelling's motivations for adopting his power-based ontology, and an outline of the specific claims and implications of that ontology, in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I focus on summarising the central features of contemporary pan-dispositionalism and highlighting its implications for human freedom. I am starting with contemporary pan-dispositionalism rather than Schelling for a number of reasons. Firstly, because this will support my argument that Schelling is best understood as advocating an ontology of this kind. Secondly, I want to demonstrate that this ontology provides the best prospect for thinking about human freedom, as it allows for a conception of agents as having real causal efficacy and control over their actions, but does this in a way that does not render human freedom as transcendent or human agents as different from the rest of the natural world. Finally, however, I want to argue that there are particular areas in which the contemporary pan-dispositionalist ontology falls short, and show that this opens up problems not just for the account of human freedom made possible by this ontology, but for their ontology as a whole.

Specifically, I want to argue that these problems arise from the tendency of contemporary metaphysics to approach phenomena in a piecemeal, rather than holistic, way: although there is much work on thinking about properties as powers, about causation in terms of powers and about power-based accounts of human freedom, for example, there is very little work focusing on how these areas connect – in short, on what a power-based ontology as a whole would look like. (It is noteworthy that even Anjum and Mumford, two of the most prolific advocates of a power-based view, display this tendency. Although their work on powers spans a number of areas (such as causation, perception, ethics and human freedom), these areas are always taken as separate; there is no overarching account which explicates the connections between them (see Anjum and Mumford 2018 for example).) This leaves the pan-dispositionalist unable to tackle important questions such as what the relationship between powers and objects is like, or how agential powers relate to powers on the micro level. In the current literature a lot of work has been done on advancing an account of powers on the abstract, micro level in relation to specific areas of metaphysics and some work has been done on using power-based thinking to account for phenomena at the macro level, but this work remains unconnected. Without a

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full account of this ontology *as a whole*, which is able to explicitly connect the different work on the micro level and to connect the micro level to the macro level, the ontology remains incomplete, and the claims at the macro level therefore remain unclear and unjustified. This is a version of a concern that Bird (2016) has recently raised about contemporary power-based ontologies, which I return to in detail later in this chapter. I will also argue that Schelling's ontology is able to respond to this concern in a way that contemporary accounts cannot currently do.

This begins to make explicit one of the central claims of this book: that Schelling's metaphysics should be of essential interest to those working in the contemporary metaphysics of powers, in particular (but not limited to) those who are interested in this kind of metaphysics because of the possibilities that it affords for thinking about human freedom and other subjective, higher-level phenomena. As I will show, Schelling's account shares a number of strikingly similar features to contemporary pan-dispositionalism – indeed, some of his claims read as if they have come straight out of the contemporary literature – however, his ontology is developed and explicated *as a whole* in a way that contemporary accounts are not. Schelling's aim in the *Naturphilosophie* is to provide a full account of the process of nature, in its development through different levels and its manifestation in a diverse range of phenomena. Therefore Schelling provides a detailed account not just of the workings of powers at the micro level, but also of how these powers interact to give rise to higher levels and how they continue to manifest themselves in phenomena such as subjectivity, agency and human freedom. Schelling's metaphysics, I claim, provides the kind of fully worked out power-based ontology which is lacking in the contemporary literature, and is therefore able to provide or point the way to solutions to issues which current views fail to resolve. However, as I will argue later in this project, Schelling's ontology also gestures to a new set of problems which the current literature on pan-dispositionalism does not engage with because they only come into view when this kind of system is fully explicated. I will also argue that Schelling's ontology provides us with insight into possible ways to solve these problems. As these problems will only become apparent through my reading of Schelling's evolving philosophical project, I will not be able to make them fully explicit in this chapter, though I will gesture towards them when necessary.

As I mentioned above, the contemporary literature on powers tends to focus on causal powers and properties. These debates thus apply the concept of power in relation to specific areas of ontology. However, there is increasing interest in whether it is feasible to extend this power-based account to ontology as a whole, captured in the question '*Can there be a world of powers only*?' (Marmodoro 2010: 1). However, as I argue below, the

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question of what this 'world of powers only' would look like in practice is severely underdeveloped in the current literature.

If this kind of power-based ontology (understood as an ontology which posits powers as the fundamental unit of reality) is possible, this raises the question of whether accounts of this kind have any implications for human freedom: if the causal powers of agents are of the same kind as the causal powers which exist in the rest of nature, does this provide the space needed to argue for the reality of freedom? In this chapter I first give an account of the nature of powers before outlining the key features of a power-based ontology and the accounts of causation, the composition of objects and natural laws which this ontology makes possible. I finish with some considerations of how a powers-based account could have a bearing on debates surrounding human freedom.

The Nature of Powers

Although there are competing accounts of the ontological status of powers in the literature, there are certain characterisations of the nature of powers which are common to most accounts. Firstly, the terms power and disposition are generally used interchangeably, though Tugby (2012) argues that there is a distinction that should be made here. Bird (2016) also argues that the terms should be taken separately: because taking objects as having dispositions is not metaphysically loaded (even the neo-Humean can argue that certain objects have particular dispositions), whereas taking these to be synonymous with powers entails a metaphysical commitment to the existence of powers which ground these dispositions. In what follows I will be using these terms as interchangeable, firstly because this is the trend in the literature, and secondly because on the view that I am arguing for depositions *are* grounded in the existence of real irreducible powers. A power is thus understood as a disposition, a property of an object which disposes that object to behave in a certain way:

> Powers are properties like fragility and electric charge, whose possession disposes their bearer in a certain way. The instantiation of fragility in the glass disposes the glass to break if struck in appropriate circumstances. (Marmodoro 2010: 1)

The particular behaviour which a power disposes its bearer towards is referred to as a manifestation: the power of fragility in the glass is manifested when the glass breaks. Therefore powers are fundamentally directional by nature in that a particular power is directed towards a particular manifestation or set of manifestations: the power of fragility disposes its bearer to break when struck; the power of elasticity disposes its bearer to stretch, bounce

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or be flexible given the appropriate conditions. Powers thus dispose their bearers to behave in a certain way or a certain variety of ways in particular circumstances.

The example of fragility makes explicit a further aspect of the nature of powers: they can be possessed by an object whether or not they are ever manifested, just as the glass remains fragile even if it never breaks. Thus although a manifestation is ontologically dependent on the power, the power is ontologically independent of its manifestation and continues to exist even when the manifestation is not and never will be present:

> The occurrence of the manifestation of a power depends on the existence of the power, but not vice versa. Powers can exist in the absence of their manifestations and so are ontologically independent of their manifestations. (Molnar 2003: 82)

This draws attention to another feature of the nature of powers; that they are intrinsic properties of the objects which bear them:

> Things and materials have powers even when they are not exercising them, and that is a current fact about them, a way in which they are currently differentiated from other things [. . .] The difference between something which has the power to behave in a certain way and something which does not have that power is not a difference between what they will do, since it is contingently the case that their powers are, in fact, ever exercised, but it is a difference in what they themselves are. It is a difference in intrinsic nature. (Harré 1970: 84–5)

Thus to ascribe a disposition to an object is to make a claim about that object's nature, and to claim that when a particular kind of phenomenon occurs it is the natures of the objects or materials involved that are responsible for its occurrence. Powers should therefore be understood as immanent to the objects which bear them.

Although the above features of the nature of powers are widely accepted in the literature, accounts differ on the ontological status which they afford to powers. Some accounts argue that objects have causal powers but that these powers are reducible to or originate from properties of objects that are not dispositional; some argue that objects do have irreducible causal powers, but that they also have non-dispositional or categorical properties as well; and finally some argue that dispositional properties are irreducible and fundamental properties of objects, and therefore that all of an object's properties are reducible to their dispositional properties. It is this latter account, referred to as dispositional monism or pan-dispositionalism, which I am interested in here as it is most similar to the kind of ontological position which posits powers as the fundamental constituent of reality that I take Schelling to be advancing.

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Pan-dispositionalism

So far I have been giving an account of powers which remains neutral about their ontological status and outlining features common to both strong and weak power-based accounts. For example, retaining disposition-talk is an option on any ontology as this kind of talk does not entail a commitment to the metaphysical existence of dispositions or powers: the neo-Humean can hold that it is natural and useful to think about some properties as dispositional, even if she denies that this reflects the property's real metaphysical nature. There are also some accounts which accept the existence of dispositions in some areas – for example which hold that causation is best thought of in terms of the manifestation of dispositions – but which do not go as far as pan-dispositionalism in its claim that all properties are dispositional. I now want to advocate a particular position on the ontological status of powers, dispositional monism or pan-dispositionalism, and outline the central features of this position. Dispositional monism is defined by Mumford as: 'The ontological thesis that there is only one fundamental type of property. All properties are dispositional properties; categorical properties do not exist' (Mumford 1998a: 19, emphasis removed), and defined by Molnar, who prefers the term pan-dispositionalism, as: 'an ontological position according to which every genuine property (on a sparse theory of properties) is a power, and the same is true of every genuine (unfounded) relation' (Molnar 2003: 153). This position claims that dispositional properties are the fundamental properties of objects, and any other properties are ontologically dependent on these dispositional properties. I want to take pan-dispositionalism to be more than a theory of properties, however, and therefore will understand the term (which I will use interchangeably with power-based ontology/ontology of powers) in what follows as referring to an ontology which posits powers as the fundamental ontological constituents. On this account, the answer to the question: 'Of what does reality, at the basic level, consist?' will be powers, all the way down. This account therefore holds that all natural objects as well as properties are ontologically dependent on certain fundamental natural powers. If I understand him correctly, this is Mumford's view, although he does not explicitly discuss the relationship between powers and objects.[1] Although he advocates a strong realism about powers, Molnar cannot properly be called a pan-dispositionalist as he admits certain properties to his ontology ('S-properties' such as spatial location) which he claims are not reducible to dispositional properties. However, Molnar does seem to accept the existence of ungrounded dispositions and therefore seems to be committed to the claim that dispositions are more fundamental than objects. It is not always clear in the literature what the ontological status of dispositions is taken to be: although there are advocates

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of pan-dispositionalism about properties these accounts tend not to discuss the fundamentality of powers or the question of the relationship between powers and objects. The lack of discussion of this point is one of the issues with contemporary pan-dispositionalism which I return to below. However, there are accounts (such as Mumford's and Molnar's) which accept the existence of ungrounded powers. It seems to me that this entails the claim that these ungrounded powers are the basic ontological unit, and therefore that natural objects are ontologically dependent on powers.

Motivations for Pan-dispositionalism

I am advocating pan-dispositionalism for the purposes of this book as it is the kind of account which fits best with the power-based ontology which l argue is present in Schelling. I want to show that Schelling is a pan-dispositionalist in the sense outlined above (he takes powers to be the fundamental ontological unit) and will therefore be focusing on accounts of this kind from the contemporary literature.

Aside from these considerations I take a pan-dispositionalist account to be preferable both to accounts which accept dispositional properties but also claim that there are categorical properties (mixed views) and to accounts which deny the existence of dispositions and argue that only categorical properties exist. For reasons of space I will not be able to give a detailed account of the arguments against the coherence of the idea of a categorical property here, but I will give a brief summary of some of the central motivations for rejecting categoricalism in favour of a dispositional account. I also do not have space here to deal with all of the objections to the pan-dispositionalist view, but I am satisfied that most have been dealt with well in the literature.[2]

We can understand categoricalism as the claim that all (sparse/fundamental) properties are categorical, not dispositional, in nature. A mixed view will argue that both kinds of property exist or that all properties have both a categorical and a dispositional aspect, therefore if the notion of a categorical property is shown to be problematic this will count against the mixed view as well as the categoricalist view (Bird 2007b: 70). For categoricalism, the particular dispositions that a property has are neither intrinsic nor essential to that property; therefore whatever dispositions a property happens to have, it has these only contingently. Bird summarises categoricalism:

> Properties are categorical in the following sense: they have no essential or other non-trivial modal character. For example, and in particular, properties do not, essentially or necessarily, have or confer any dispositional character or power. Being made of rubber confers elasticity on an object, but does not do so necessarily. Being

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> negatively charged confers on objects the power to repel other negatively charged objects, but not necessarily. In other possible worlds rubber objects are not elastic, negatively charged objects attract rather than repel one another. The essential properties of a natural property are limited to its essentially being itself and not some distinct property. (Ibid. 67)

There are two problems which immediately arise from understanding properties as categorical. Firstly, if categorical properties have the particular dispositions that they do only contingently then it is difficult to give an account of how properties are individuated: although it may be the case that in the actual world being made of rubber is linked to the disposition to elasticity (and therefore instances of this property in the actual world are individuated by this disposition), the relationship between the property and the disposition is contingent: therefore in other possible worlds being made of rubber may be linked with the disposition to be brittle, to be negatively charged, to cry at sentimental films, or to any other disposition. Because there is no intrinsic or necessary relation between a property and its dispositions, the same property could look totally different in different possible worlds, as any property could be coupled with any disposition without affecting its status as that specific property. The individuation of properties across worlds can therefore be secured only by appeal to what Black (2000) calls 'quiddities': to some kind of intrinsic 'thisness' of the property that ensures that it remains the same property despite all of its dispositions being changed. Quidditism about properties is thus parallel to haecceitism about particulars, and subject to the same worries.[3]

The second problem concerns the relationship between categorical properties and the dispositions that they have: if there is no intrinsic or necessary relation between a property and its dispositions, then what grounds which properties have which dispositions? It is certainly the case in the actual world that the same property is always coupled with the same dispositions; however, if this is not due to any fundamental characteristics of the property (leaving aside the fact that on the categoricalist account it is hard to see what the fundamental characteristics of a property could be – as none of its dispositions are fundamental it is unclear what the property itself is supposed to consist in, aside from its mysterious quidditism which supposedly grounds its identity) the categoricalist must provide another account of why certain dispositions attach to certain properties. This question tends to be answered by an appeal to natural laws: the laws of the actual world are what ground the particular relationships of dispositions to properties (as well as of properties to other properties, and objects to other objects, etc.). This is why in other possible worlds the same property could be coupled with different dispositions to those it has in the actual world: because the dispositions of a property depend on the laws of nature, in a

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world where the laws of nature differ the dispositions which properties have will also differ.

Bird (2007b: 68–70) identifies two conceptions of natural laws which are compatible with categoricalism: a regularity theory (such as Lewis's) and a nomic necessitation theory (found in Armstrong, Tooley and Dretske), and argues that neither of these accounts is successful. Further, he demonstrates that the problems with quidditism remain on either account of natural laws. Briefly, the regularity theory argues that laws simply supervene on states of affairs in the world:

> Laws of nature are a subset of the contingent regularities (true generalisations) of the actual world. The subset is characterised by some further condition, such as the requirement that to be a law a generalization must be derivable from each optimal axiomatized system. (Ibid. 69)

On this account a law of nature is simply a generalisation that we make which tracks and states a particular regularity in nature, and which can be used as an axiom or theorem in our systematic picture of the world. This second requirement is added in an attempt to rule out accidental regularities being counted as laws; however, since on this account the existence of all regularity in nature is contingent, it is difficult to see how there could be any non-arbitrary way to distinguish between the regularities that we take to be laws and those which we take to be accidental. Further, this account of laws does not do the explanatory work required to make sense of why particular properties are coupled with the particular dispositions that they have: laws merely generalise from instances of regularity in nature, therefore they can tell us nothing new or deep about objects or their properties and dispositions and why these are related in the way that they are. This account of laws therefore renders the relationship between a property and the dispositions that it has mysterious: laws on the regularity theory can only tell us what dispositions properties happen to have but can shed no further light on this relation.

The nomic necessitation view sees laws as 'contingent relations among natural properties' (ibid. 70) and sees the particular relations that hold between properties and dispositions as grounded in a second-order set of relations between universals. Thus there are certain relations which hold between universals, and these relations determine the dispositions of and relations between instances of these properties in the natural world. This account is therefore able to provide the explanatory power that the regularity view lacks: the relationship between properties and dispositions is explained with reference to second-order relations between universals. Although this account introduces an element of necessity which is not present on the regularity account of laws (the relations between natural properties will hold

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by necessity as they are grounded on a set of second-order relations), it still entails that different properties could be coupled with different dispositions in other possible worlds, as the relations which hold between second-order universals could be different in different possible worlds. Bird raises a number of problems for this view (ibid. 91–7) but here I want to focus on the fact that the view posits a further set of relations over and above those that exist in the natural world in order to explain the latter, and it is not clear that this extra set of relations is necessary to play this role, even if it can be made coherent. In short, this account invokes an extra set of entities and relations over and above natural objects to explain the dispositions that these have, when a far simpler and more intuitive account can explain these dispositions just with reference to the objects themselves.

This indicates one of the central motivations for adopting a pan-dispositionalist account: the categoricalist presents a complicated and counter-intuitive picture of the world, requiring us to make sense of quiddities and nomic necessitation relations, and positing a world of bare particulars whose properties and interactions are either rendered mysterious (on the regularity view) or explained by appeal to a set of relations which exist over and above the objects themselves (the nomic necessitation view). The pan-dispositionalist account, in contrast, claims that the dispositional properties of objects are grounded in the objects themselves: to be a particular object simply is to have a particular set of dispositions, to behave in a particular set of ways in particular circumstances. Dispositional properties are intrinsic to objects, therefore there is no need to appeal to anything beyond objects to explain why they have the dispositions that they do. Further, this account entails a conception of nature as composed of active individuals with real causal powers; change and activity in the world is again grounded in the natures of objects themselves. I will return to this point in my discussion of Mumford's realist lawlessness later in this chapter.

Pan-dispositionalism: Central Claims

Pan-dispositionalism, as I am understanding it here, consists in the basic claim that reality, at the fundamental level, is composed of powers. These powers are both real and non-reducible. This leads to a conception of objects as possessing real and irreducible causal powers: 'properties whose causal nature is their (primary) essence' (Williams 2010: 84). I also want to argue that the most natural way to think about objects on this kind of account is as composed of and arising from the interactions of powers. I will sketch what this view of objects would look like on pages 24–6 at the end of this chapter.

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Because the nature of powers includes directionality (in that powers are always directed towards a particular manifestation or set of manifestations), a power always needs something to be directed towards, to act upon. Coupled with the reciprocity thesis (the fact that certain manifestations are only made possible when two objects manifest complementary powers – I discuss this claim in detail on pages 21–4 below) this implies that a pan-dispositionalist ontology must always posit more than one power: there must be multiple powers such that the powers have something else to act upon and to enter into reciprocal action with. Thus this kind of ontology posits a number of powers in different relationships with one another. As these relationships will be dynamic and subject to change rather than static and fixed, a power-based ontology will necessarily be a process ontology.[4] Thus reality, on this account, will be an evolving system which is continually in process, reflecting the activity of the fundamental powers of which it is composed. As I argue in detail in the later chapters of this project, this characterisation of reality also perfectly describes Schelling's ontology.

The pan-dispositionalist will characterise powers as having similar features to those outlined on pages 11–12 above, with a few additions. Following Molnar (2003) I identify five central characteristics of powers on a pan-dispositionalist account:

1. *Directionality*. 'A power has directionality, in the sense that it must be a power for, or to, some outcome' (ibid. 57). As outlined above, powers are inherently directional, in that they are always directed towards a particular manifestation or set of manifestations. Molnar argues that because of their directional natures powers should be understood as intentional, as they are always directed towards something beyond themselves: their manifestation is thus their intentional object (ibid. 62–3). This intentionality is different to simply having a direction as the power is always directed *towards* one or a set of *specific* manifestations. On a pan-dispositionalist ontology, this directedness of powers ensures both the inherent activity of powers and the fact that there must be more than one power in the system, as powers must have something outside of themselves to be directed towards. This also makes explicit the sense in which dispositional properties are inherently powerful: they are 'executable' properties as they tend towards producing particular manifestations.
2. *Independence*. The independence thesis refers to the fact that powers are ontologically independent of their manifestations – although the manifestation is ontologically dependent on the power, the power continues to exist even if the manifestation is never present. This does not mean that there is no necessary connection between a power and its

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manifestation (this connection is always present due to the intentionality of powers, the fact that they are always powers *for something*), just that the existence of the manifestation is not necessary for the existence of the power.

3. *Actuality*. The actuality criterion is tied to the independence thesis, and claims that powers are fully actual properties of their bearers. Thus powers are not simply potentialities for given manifestations; they are actual properties of their bearers which exist independently of any given manifestation. The pan-dispositionalist further claims that these powers are irreducible to other properties of objects.
4. *Objectivity*. The objectivity thesis is sometimes referred to as the mind-independence thesis, as it claims that powers have a real objective existence in the world and are not dependent on the activity of minds. This (coupled with the actuality criterion) gives rise to a conception of objects as having real and irreducible causal powers which exist objectively.
5. *Intrinsicality*. Finally, Molnar argues that powers are intrinsic properties of their bearers: they are an essential aspect of the nature of their bearers and do not depend on contingent relationships with other objects or powers. However, following Bostock (2008 and, to an extent, Mumford 2004) I would like to claim that although *most* powers are intrinsic to objects in this way there are also powers which should be thought of as *extrinsic*: as conferred on objects by virtue of their relationships to other objects. Allowing extrinsic powers means that properties such as spatial location and spatial relations to other objects (which clearly cannot be conceived of as intrinsic properties) can be characterised as dispositional properties. Because these properties can be causally relevant it seems fair to consider them as dispositional, and this allows us to dispense with the idea that we need to allow the existence of categorical properties (such as Molnar's 'S-properties') in our ontology.

One objection to pan-dispositionalism regards the question of how powers get their natures fixed – as the nature of a power becomes determinate by virtue of its possible manifestations (i.e. its relations to other objects) it seems that powers can only be determined relationally, which appears to lead to a regress as each power always owes its nature to another, which owes its nature to another, and so forth. One response to this objection is to argue that there is a circularity in the determination of the nature of powers, but that this circularity is not vicious (see, for example, Bostock 2008 and Mumford 2004). Rather, the natures of powers are fixed collectively in terms of their place within a system of powers, a web of mutually determining relations. Williams likens this to semantic holism, which holds

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that the specific determinate meaning of a word in a given language depends on the specific determinate meaning of the other words with which it is arranged in a whole system (Williams 2010: 96). That the words need the system, as well as the other words within the system, in order to fix their identity is not seen as problematic, and therefore we should not find it problematic that the natures of powers are fixed in a similar way.

These considerations indicate that a power-based ontology will necessarily be holistic – powers get their identities fixed by their relations to other powers within a holistic web of powers:

> A property cannot stand alone, unaffected by and unconnected with anything else. A world comes with a whole connected system of properties [. . .] The properties that are real in a world must, therefore, form an interconnected web: a system with no property standing alone or outside. (Mumford 2004: 182–3)

Mumford argues that this holistic conception of properties (understood as collections of powers) fits with our intuitive understanding of properties: we cannot conceive of how a property that was not a member of such a web could be a property at all, as it would be unable to have effects on anything and would therefore be unable to have any fixed determinate identity. This holism is also a central feature of Schelling's metaphysics and, as I will argue in Chapter 6, is one of the aspects of his view which enables him to solve certain issues which remain insoluble for views which do not accept this commitment.

It may at first seem that there is a tension between the claim that powers are intrinsic properties of their bearers and the claim that the identities of powers are fixed holistically by their relations to one another: how are we to understand the idea of a property that is both intrinsic and relational? The characterisation of powers as intentional helps to make this idea clearer: as a power is always directed towards a particular manifestation (or set of manifestations) its nature is always fixed by its possible relationship(s) to something outside of itself, namely its manifestation(s). Although dispositional properties are therefore relational in the sense that they always refer to something external to themselves, this does not entail that these properties are not intrinsic to the objects which bear them, as these objects continue to have these properties as part of their essential nature even when their manifestation has not and never will actually occur. The case of mental intentionality provides a good analogy here: my fear of a burglar downstairs is relational in that my intentional object is something external to me (the burglar); however, this does not entail that my intentional state is not a property that is intrinsic to me. Moreover, my intentional state remains one of my intrinsic properties even if there is not, and never was, a burglar downstairs.[5]

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To summarise, a power-based ontology consists in a view of reality as composed of a number of fundamental powers continually entering into relationships with one another as part of a holistic system, giving rise to a conception of reality as a process whose elements are fundamentally interconnected.

Powers and Causation

One well developed aspect of the pan-dispositionalist ontology is the dispositional account of causation. In the same way that there are certain views which do not subscribe to the pan-dispositionalist claim that all fundamental properties are powers, but which feature powers or dispositions in their ontologies, there are accounts which are not pan-dispositionalist but claim that some cases of causation are best thought of as dispositional. However, in this section I will be outlining this way of thinking about causation in the context of a pan-dispositionalist ontology, focusing on Mumford and Anjum's view as to my mind it is the most well developed in the literature, and because it comes closest to the kind of account which, I will argue in Chapter 3, Schelling advances in his *Naturphilosophie*.

Power-based accounts of causality claim that objects have particular causal powers and that it is these powers which are responsible for causing change in that object or in the world. The possession of these dispositional properties therefore leads to a conception of objects as intrinsically causally active, in that objects bear particular dispositional properties and it is the activity of these properties which leads to causal change in the world.

Causal powers thus spring from the basic natures of objects: objects have particular properties and it is these properties which dispose them to behave in certain ways in particular circumstances. Thus:

> [W]ithin this view one may see [the behaviour of objects] as flowing from their natures as constitutions or consequences of what they are [. . .] Being of the right nature endows a thing or material with the power to manifest itself in certain ways or to behave in certain ways in the appropriate circumstances. (Harré 1970: 88)

Because of this conception of the causal powers of objects springing from their properties, a power-based account of causation sees causality in terms of manifesting dispositions: an object has particular dispositional properties and a tendency to manifest these properties given particular external circumstances or stimuli,[6] and it is this manifestation which leads to change in the world. The dispositional properties of objects therefore fix which causal roles these objects are able to play: as a dispositional property is always directed towards a particular manifestation or set of manifestations,

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an object which has that dispositional property bears the causal powers to bring about these particular manifestations.

Mumford and Anjum argue that this account renders causality inherently dispositional, as rather than causes necessitating their effects they instead 'tend towards their effects' in an irreducibly dispositional way[7] (2010: 143); they make these effects *more likely* to occur without making it the case that they *must* occur. This claim entails two things. Firstly, in some cases it is not necessary that an object will manifest its disposition even if all of the conditions necessary for this manifestation to occur are in place. Therefore in these cases although all of the necessary conditions for a manifestation are in place these conditions are not sufficient to lead to the effect as this requires an additional factor, namely the object actually manifesting its disposition(s). Thus although the dispositions that an object possesses, coupled with the right environmental conditions, will raise the chances of an effect occurring, these dispositions and conditions alone are never enough to necessitate that the effect will occur, as another factor – namely the object actually manifesting its disposition(s) – is needed to bring about the effect.

Secondly, although a cause will tend towards the production of its effect, causes never necessitate their effects because there is always the possibility of additive or subtractive interference from external factors that could prevent the effect from obtaining. For example, when a match is struck it tends to light. However factors such as high winds or humidity could prevent the match from lighting, thus there is no guarantee that the striking of a match will lead to the match lighting in every situation (Anjum et al. 2012: 4). Mumford and Anjum argue that cases such as these, where interfering factors prevent the obtaining of an effect, demonstrate that causes do not necessitate their effects even in circumstances when these effects do in fact occur. They argue that a necessitating cause would, by its very nature as necessitating, produce its effect in *every* situation regardless of whatever other factors were present or absent. Therefore these cases where other factors prevent an effect from obtaining demonstrate that causes cannot necessitate their effects:

> [I]f we could have the typical cause for an effect but without the effect, due to the presence also of a further interfering factor, then that cause does not necessitate its effect even on occasions where it successfully produces it . . . [Causes] nevertheless can succeed and in such cases they have indeed produced their effects but not by necessitating them. (Ibid.)

Mumford and Anjum argue that because this account does not entail that causes necessitate their effects in all circumstances it is better able to deal with problems for traditional accounts of causality such as overdetermination, and provides a more intuitive conception of causality which can

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fully account for the interaction of a number of environmental factors in particular situations: because a cause merely tends towards its effect this makes it easier to account for how one particular causal power can either cause or fail to cause a given effect in the light of different external situations (Mumford and Anjum 2010).

On this view the causal powers of an object will increase the likelihood of a particular effect being manifested (to varying degrees, depending on the causal powers of that object as well as external circumstances), but do not necessitate that this effect will occur. Whether or not a power will give rise to a manifestation is therefore seen probabilistically: an object will have a particular probability of manifesting its dispositions and this probability may rise or fall depending on external factors. Some manifestations will have a probability of 1, and therefore will always occur, whereas some will have a lower probability and therefore will not necessarily occur in all circumstances.

It is important to note a distinction here between a conception of causes as *raising the probability of an event occurring*, as opposed to a conception of the *activity of causes themselves as probabilistic*.[8] On the first kind of account causes are always efficacious; however, they do not always produce their effects but rather increase the probability that these effects will obtain, therefore the cause does not actually bring about its effect on this account, but merely raises the probability that the effect will occur. This account is problematic as it renders mysterious how exactly these events occur. The second kind of account, which I argue for here, claims that causes are always efficacious (in the absence of interfering factors) in bringing out their effects, but that they *need not* have brought about these effects: causes are propensities towards a number of possible effects, and may not always manifest their dispositions to bring about these effects. Thus causes are efficacious (but not necessitating) *when they do* act, but it is not necessary that they in fact *will* act, even when all of the conditions for them to do so are in place. What this account is meant to capture is the fact that particular antecedent conditions are never enough to necessitate that a particular effect will arise: in order for this effect to come about the object must actually manifest its dispositions and this manifestation is always and only brought about by the activity of the object itself, regardless of antecedent conditions.

The account of causation as dispositional implies a reciprocal relationship between the objects involved in causal relations with one another, as it will take two objects manifesting complementary powers in order to produce an effect. In order to smash a glass it is not enough to have a glass which has the power of fragility (i.e. a disposition to break): one must also be in possession of an object which has the power to break things, and it will take these two objects manifesting their powers together in order that the effect (the glass

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smashing) occurs. Thus 'when manifestations are produced that involve two or more objects, the powers of the objects involved must cohere. Each must manifest powers that are for an identical manifestation' (Williams 2010: 87). This indicates that the conception of the relationship between causes and effects on a power-based account is different from traditional accounts which see causes as fully active and effects as merely passive: a dispositional account of causality conceives of effects as arising from interactions between objects which are both equally active members of the causal process.

It is important to note that a dispositional account of causality does not on its own have any implications for our conception of natural laws, and further has no implications for whether or not causation is conceived of deterministically. Although on this account causal powers do not necessitate their effects it is easy to see how the account coupled with a deterministic account of natural laws is compatible with the thesis of universal determinism: on this kind of view although causes do not necessitate their effects, this necessitation enters the account because the laws of nature determine that certain effects will always follow certain causes. Indeterminacy, however, understood as randomness, is ruled out on this account: as powers are directed towards a particular set of manifestations this entails that they are only able to produce a particular set of effects. To return to the example of the fragile glass, when struck with a hard object it is simply not possible that the glass will bounce off or catch fire as these manifestations are ruled out by its nature as fragile. This makes explicit the fundamental connection between activities, properties and objects which this view entails – what an object is or is not able to do depends on the dispositional properties which it possesses, which in turn stem from its intrinsic nature as an object.

Powers and Objects

Having outlined the basic metaphysical claims of a power-based ontology, it remains to be seen how these ontological commitments give rise to the world of objects that we experience. Although a power-based ontology will claim that powers are more ontologically basic than objects, this kind of account will not look to deny the existence of objects but rather to argue that objects are ontologically dependent on and composed of powers. In fact this is a bit of a simplification, as on Schelling's view the relationship between powers and objects is reciprocal. Although powers are more fundamental in the sense that they are what objects are composed of, there is also an important sense in which powers are dependent on objects, as it is only through objects that they are manifested. However, an account of the relationship between powers and objects is notably absent in the contemporary literature – which

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is particularly surprising given that the account I argue for below seems like a very natural fit with pan-dispositionalism. I want to demonstrate that this absence is one of the central omissions which causes problems for this view, as making sense of how micro-level powers manifest and interact with macro-level objects is central to bridging the gap between the structure and operation of powers at the micro level and the structure and operation of powers at the macro level. Therefore the absence of an account of this relationship is not merely surprising but deeply problematic for any power-based view which hopes to use powers to understand macro-level phenomena such as human freedom.

Given the absence of an account of the relationship between powers and objects in the literature, in this section I am drawing on Schelling's ontology to construct an account of the relationship between objects and properties which I believe to be consistent with the central claims of pan-dispositionalism, but which is not explicitly found in any of the current literature. For now this is only an outline, as I give a detailed overview of Schelling's account of the construction of objects in Chapter 3.

In the picture that I have been sketching, the fundamental ontological constituents are powers, which because of their active and directional natures will necessarily enter into relations with one another. Some of these relationships will be more stable than others, and we can argue that when these relationships become stable the powers manifest themselves as concrete objects. These objects will have then have dispositional properties based on the powers that they are composed of.

On this account the dispositional properties of objects are to be understood in terms of the dispositions of their parts. This provides a simple account of why some objects are far more complex than others: less complex objects are composed of fewer powers, which means that they possess less complex dispositional properties and are therefore capable of fewer manifestations. Cartwright argues that this is why some objects have highly generalised properties, which are capable of many possible manifestations, and some have highly specialised properties, which have very few possible manifestations (1999: 59 and 64). These differences should therefore be understood as differences in the number and combination of powers which compose these objects.

This conception of properties as composed of multiple powers also provides an explanation of why particular properties (such as elasticity or solubility) are found in many objects throughout nature. Mumford argues that it seems to be the case that certain groupings of powers are common throughout nature, and these particular combinations of powers give rise to particular natural properties. This also gives an account of why different natural properties resemble one another to varying degrees: if two properties

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are composed of a similar combination of powers, these properties will be more alike than two properties which are composed of wholly different powers (Mumford 2004: 173).

Thus objects, on this account, are to be understood as manifestations of powers in stable relations with one another, and these powers confer dispositional properties on the object which they compose. The properties of objects are therefore composed of the properties of their parts, which are composed of the properties of their parts, and so on, until we reach the most basic unit of reality: a single power. This account therefore entails the acceptance of ungrounded dispositions: because this account advocates a conception of reality as dispositions all the way down, these basic powers will necessarily lack grounding in anything further. While macro-level objects have powers as their causal basis, this conception will necessarily bottom out in ungrounded powers (Molnar 2003: 131–2).

This conception of an ungrounded power, or, in other words, a power which is not borne by a concrete object, seems initially problematic as it is intuitively difficult to grasp the idea of a power without an object. However, this aspect of a power-based account is in fact supported by the ontology of contemporary science. Elementary particles, which are understood as packets of force or power, are fundamental to the scientific understanding of the world and seem to be the perfect candidate to be ungrounded powers.

This account sees objects as inherently powerful by virtue of their dispositional properties, which are composed of the groupings of powers which constitute them. Therefore any causal or modal force possessed by an object is intrinsic to that object: powers are immanent to objects and constitute their fundamental natures.

As I argued at the beginning of this section, the fact that this (or any) account of how powers are able to combine to give rise to objects is absent from the contemporary literature is one of the central reasons why attempts to use pan-dispositionalism to account for higher-level phenomena such as human freedom fail. In order to bring out why this is the case I want to take a brief detour from outlining the contemporary pan-dispositionalist account to look at a criticism of the view from Bird. I think that Bird is correct in his assessment of some of the problems that this view has; however, I want to demonstrate that his critique does not apply to the version of the view that I will argue is found in Schelling.

Powers and Objects – Bird's Worry

Bird (2016) puts forward a version of the worry that I have been flagging above: that using claims about the nature of fundamental natural powers

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in an account of higher-level phenomena such as human freedom requires a considerable amount of work to link these together; work which has not currently been done in the literature.

Bird identifies two distinct kinds of argument for the existence of powers. The first, which he terms 'a-type' arguments, 'operate at a fairly abstract and general level of metaphysics' (2016: 341); these are the kinds of arguments I have summarised in this chapter, such as those surrounding natural laws and property identity, and which relate to powers on what we might call the micro level. The second type, which Bird refers to as 's-type' arguments, focus on phenomena at the macro level, and 'propose that powers can provide superior accounts of certain specific phenomena of philosophical interest, such as causation, intentionality, free will, and even morality' (2016: 341–2). Note that these two types of argument move in different directions: the a-type arguments begin from a philosophical problem and posit powers as a solution whereas the s-type arguments begin from a conception of powers and argue that this conception could have fruitful consequences when applied to our way of thinking about some other particular phenomenon. Bird's contention is that beginning from this conception of powers in the way that s-type arguments do is not warranted: just because we have some arguments which support the existence of powers at the micro level, this does not entail that we can take for granted the existence of these or similar powers at the macro level.

What the pan-dispositionalist lacks, then, is a sufficient explication of the link between these levels. However, if her accounts of freedom, agency, etc. in terms of powers are to get off the ground, she needs to be able to give a clear account of this link. As Bird puts it, she needs to be able to move from the claim (about the micro level) that 'many or all fundamental natural properties are powers' to the claim (about the macro level) that 'many or all macro properties are powers or clusters of powers, and such properties play a role in explaining important phenomena involving macro entities' (2016: 342). Bird's conclusion is that however good the arguments are for powers on the micro level, and however useful powers might be in terms of explaining particular macro phenomena, taking claims about the micro level and applying them at the macro level without further argument is simply not legitimate. As Bird summarises:

> Even if we accept the laws and identity arguments for powers and reject the corresponding criticisms [. . .] we are not thereby committed to (nor are we thereby entitled to) belief in non-fundamental powers. The standard A-type arguments for powers establish only [a claim about fundamental powers]; they do not support [a claim about macro powers]. (2016: 348–9)

I agree with Bird's assessment of this issue. I do not, however, agree with his conclusion that 'we lack sound positive arguments for any macro powers'

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(2016: 354). I think that we do have good arguments for the existence of powers on the macro level; I think that the attractiveness of power-based accounts of macro-level phenomena such as agency do count as good arguments for the existence of macro powers. If a particular ontology allows us to explain multiple phenomena on different levels in the same way, and if it allows us to retain a commitment to the real irreducible existence of these phenomena where alternative views do not, this to me seems to count as a very strong set of reasons in favour of that ontology. Where Bird's assessment is correct is in his claim that these reasons *alone* are not sufficient for us to posit the existence of macro level powers. What is needed in addition, and what is missing in the contemporary literature, is an account of how the gap is bridged between the micro- and macro-level powers. What I want to demonstrate throughout this book is that this kind of account is not only possible, it is exemplified by Schelling's ontology of powers.

I want to show through my account of Schelling's philosophy that this worry can be solved by a view which gives a clear account of a power-based ontology *as a whole*. Where contemporary work on powers tends to be piecemeal and focus on certain areas of metaphysics, Schelling's account takes a holistic approach, following the ontology of powers through the different levels of nature from fundamental forces to higher-level phenomena such as human agency. This means that Bird's worry about the gap between micro and macro not being sufficiently bridged simply does not arise for Schelling's view: in fact Schelling's ontology calls into question the assumption that there is a gap to be bridged. For Schelling, there is rather one natural process which manifests itself in different ways in different kinds of natural product. Therefore the account of how this plays out with respect to different phenomena is built into Schelling's ontology from the start.

I will return to these claims in more detail later in the project, but for now I hope that the example of the constitution of objects serves as a good initial indication of the way that the holistic nature of Schelling's approach gives it an advantage over contemporary views. While contemporary accounts take powers as an explanatory tool which they then apply to disparate areas of metaphysics; Schelling's aim is to provide a philosophy of nature *as a whole*, and therefore to give an account of how nature's fundamental powers are manifested in all natural phenomena, regardless of whether these are taken as being at the micro or macro levels.

Pan-dispositionalism and Natural Laws

Having outlined the basic ontology and account of the constitution of objects entailed by pan-dispositionalism, we are now in a position to outline

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the conception of natural laws that this account entails. Although a number of conceptions of natural laws are compatible with pan-dispositionalism, the most natural fit will be one which sees natural laws as arising from the powerful properties of objects rather than as something imposed on objects externally. Because the conception of objects outlined above takes objects to be inherently active, there is no need to argue for the existence of an external set of laws in order to explain the activity and properties of objects, as these are understood as intrinsic to the nature of objects already. Because of this conception of objects, 'dispositional monism [. . .] permit[s] an account of the laws of nature as generated by dispositional essences, or [it] obviate[s] the need for laws' (Bird 2007b: 515). Therefore the conception of laws which fits best with a power-based ontology will resemble Mumford's 'realist lawlessness' which I outline below.

Mumford (2004) starts from the claim that the two dominant conceptions of laws both entail fundamental problems. The neo-Humean conception, which denies the existence of laws, must also deny the existence of necessary connections in nature, while the nomological realist conception admits the existence of natural necessity but does so by introducing laws which exist over and above objects and determine the behaviour of these objects. Thus the neo-Humean position is untenable as it forces us to deny the existence of natural necessity, while the nomological realist is faced with the dilemma of having to provide an intelligible conception of laws without invoking quiddities. The problem with quiddities for the nomoligical realist about laws mirrors the problem with quiddities for the nomic necessitation view of properties outlined above. For the nomological realist, laws are external to objects and their properties and are only contingently related to them: in other possible worlds the same properties might be governed by different laws and therefore play entirely different causal roles while still somehow remaining the same property. It seems that without an intrinsic connection between a property and its behaviour, the only way that the nomological realist can account for the identity of a property over different possible worlds is by invoking a quiddity which individuates the property. As Mumford argues:

> [I]f the causal role of a property is altered, are we still talking of the same property? If something has the causal role of F, why are we not now talking of F? And if F now has the causal role that G had, why is F not G? The only available answer [on the nomological realist view] seems to be: if the property had a quiddity over and above its causal role. But this allows that F and G could swap their entire causal roles and yet still be the same properties that they were. (Ibid. 104)

Realist lawlessness aims to retain the important insights of both of the above positions: it retains the Humean insight that natural laws are a problematic

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addition to our ontology, but also retains the nomological realist insight that there is some necessity present in the natural world and the way that objects behave in this world. The mistake of both these positions is to assume that laws are the only way to ground natural necessity: that any necessity in the world must be superimposed from above, by laws which confer extra properties onto objects.

Because the pan-dispositionalist account entails a conception of objects as inherently powerful and active there is no need to invoke natural laws standing over and above objects: the activity and modal force of objects are explainable in terms of those objects alone, by virtue of their powerful properties. Thus 'laws, according to dispositionalism, are not themselves entities: they are truths derived from the nature of properties' (Bostock 2008: 140). This is why Mumford terms his position 'realist lawlessness': it is realist in the sense that it argues for the existence of causal relations and necessity in nature, but it is lawless in the sense that it does not invoke extra entities ('laws of nature') in order to confer these causal and modal properties onto the world.

The powers of objects therefore provide the immanent grounds for laws of nature (Molnar 2003: 199), and these laws arise from (or, better, are descriptions of) the interactions of particular objects and systems. This account therefore allows for a gradient of natural laws: as some systems are relatively stable they will enter into relationships which are similarly stable, thus giving rise to strict law-like behaviour. Other systems, in contrast, are less stable; therefore the behaviour of these systems is less predictable, and the laws we will form for these systems will be probabilistic rather than strict. This is why Bird argues that a dispositional account is able to account for both strict and *ceteris paribus* laws (2005: 443): because different objects have different degrees of probability of manifesting their dispositions, different natural systems will give rise to laws with varying degrees of strength.

Mumford argues that as well as accounting for regularities in nature without having to invoke the existence of natural laws, the powers account is also able to explain the existence of *de re* necessity (necessity in nature). Because certain powers necessitate the having of other powers (having the property of redness necessitates being extended (metaphysical necessity); having gravitational mass necessitates the attraction of other objects (dispositional necessity)), this accounts for certain kinds of necessity in nature. Similarly, certain powers make the having of other powers possible (being extended makes possible being red (metaphysical possibility); being fragile makes possible being broken (dispositional possibility)), while certain powers make the having of other powers impossible (being round makes being square impossible (metaphysical impossibility)); being fragile makes being unbreakable impossible (dispositional impossibility)).

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Thus our knowledge of laws and natural necessities should rather be seen as knowledge of *natures*, as it is the natures of objects rather than natural laws (conceived as entities over and above the properties of objects) that are the truth-makers of claims about regularity and necessity in nature. This view is supported by Cartwright, who arrives at her conception of laws through an investigation of various law systems both in physics and economics. Cartwright claims that it is evident from the myriad laws of physics that 'the laws that describe nature are a patchwork, not a pyramid' (1999: 1): different natural systems are governed by different types of law, and these laws (when they do hold) hold only *ceteris paribus* rather than with strict necessity. The reason that the laws which govern our world form this patchwork is simply because they arise from the properties of objects, thus different objects with different properties give rise to systems which act in accordance with different types of law:

> It is capacities that are basic, and laws of nature obtain – to the extent that they do obtain – on account of the capacities; or more explicitly, on account of the restricted operation of a system of components with stable capacities in particularly fortunate circumstances. (Ibid. 49)

Because some objects have highly stable natures (i.e. are composed of a limited number of powers and therefore have a very small number of possible manifestations), these objects give rise to regularities which tend to hold and are easy for us to predict. As some objects have less stable natures (they are composed of a complex grouping of a number of different powers so have a far wider range of possible manifestations) these objects will tend to form systems whose behaviour is far less regular and thus far less predictable. This supports Mumford's conception of laws not as rigidly determining entities which necessitate the behaviour of objects, but as regularities which are grounded in and arise from the powerful properties of objects: 'A good deal of our knowledge [. . .] is not of laws but of natures. These tell us what can happen, not what will happen' (ibid. 10).

Thus pan-dispositionalism and its conception of objects as inherently active and powerful gives rise to a conception of laws as probabilistic, and as intrinsic to the natures of objects. It is the powerful properties of objects, not external laws, which ground regularity and *de re* necessity in nature. This allows for a variety of different natural laws, with differing degrees of strength, governing the behaviour of different natural systems. Thus while lawfulness exists in some systems in nature, the behaviour of others will be far more indeterminate. Although this account allows for different kinds of laws governing different kinds of natural systems, the interaction of these laws and systems with one another is not problematic as they all share the same ontological ground: the dispositional properties of objects.

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Powers and Human Freedom

We are now in a position to give an initial assessment of what kind of implications the pan-dispositionalist account has for debates surrounding human freedom. As the answer to this question will come to the fore in my discussions of Schelling's conception of freedom later in this project, for now I will simply highlight some central aspects of the power-based account which seem beneficial in arguing for the reality of human freedom.

Firstly, the conception of objects as inherently powerful actors implies that the causal powers possessed by agents are fundamentally of the same kind as the causal powers possessed by other objects in the natural world. This account allows for a conception of agents as simply a particular kind of natural product, arising from a distinctive combination of powers, and therefore has no need to introduce a dualism between the causality of agents and the causality of other natural products. A distinctive advantage of a conception of human freedom derived from a power-based ontology lies in the fact that it has no need to argue that there is any incompatibility between agency and natural causality: the powers account allows us to be naturalists without denying the reality of human freedom. Human agency can thus be seen both as consistent with, but also importantly distinct from, other kinds of natural causality: not distinct because agents possess a different *kind* of causal power to other natural products, but because of the distinctive combination of natural powers which constitute the make-up of agents. Thus agents can be seen as natural products composed of a highly complex grouping of natural powers, which leads them to have highly generalised capacities with a wide range of possible manifestations.[9]

This consideration leads Groff to argue that:

> [F]ree agency is far more readily compatible with causation on a power-based account of the latter. If one is prepared to say that the real question concerning human freedom is whether or not the powers of human beings can be squared with the powers of other causal bearers, discovered in the course of our best scientific theories, the answer to the question is yes. (Groff 2013: 80)

The distinction between spontaneous causal powers and causal powers which require a stimulus in order to produce their manifestation may also prove useful in arguing for the reality of human freedom: although some powers require an external stimulus in order to lead to a manifestation, some require no stimulus and can therefore manifest spontaneously. It might therefore be argued that (some of) the powers possessed by agents are of the latter variety.

Secondly, the conception of natural laws implied by the powers account entails that agents need not have a special ability to break the laws of nature

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in order to exercise their agency. The conception of natural laws as probabilistic and as regularities that arise from the properties of objects allows us to see how the acts of agents can be incorporated as part of these natural systems rather than conceiving agents as possessing some kind of separate causal force which upsets the natural causal order. Because this account dispenses with the idea of natural laws as external forces which determine the behaviour of objects:

> [O]n this model there are no laws that agents must break in order to be free. There are simply many other causal bearers in existence besides individual human beings – ranging from electrons to oxygen molecules to the international banking system. The fact we have the extraordinary powers that we do does not render us omnipotent. (Ibid. 81)

Groff's final point above makes explicit that this account entails that freedom can never be absolute: agents are part of a system which includes a great many other bearers of causal powers, thus the behaviour of agents will often be restricted by the activities of these other causal powers. Thus this conception is able to account for both the causal force possessed by agents as well as the fact that this causal force is often limited by external circumstances. We can understand this on the basis of a distinction made by Harré and by Cartwright between capacities and powers. Cartwright argues that capacities should be seen as bundles of powers (1999: 59) and therefore that capacities are more open-ended than the powers that make them up. While a power is always directed towards a particular manifestation or set of manifestations, capacities which are composed of bundles of these powers are always more open-ended. Harré argues that this allows us to make sense of the fact that we can lose our capacities in particular contingent situations without this changing the essential nature of the powers that constitute these capacities (1970: 93): thus when blindfolded, although I lose my *capacity* for sight due to the particular contingent circumstances, I retain my *power* of sight, which means that my essential nature does not change and I am able to regain my capacity when placed in a different situation. This distinction between capacities and powers can also work the other way round, and therefore becomes comparable to the case of extrinsic powers mentioned above: although the powers that I have are essential to me, certain contingent situations confer on me the ability to use these powers in a different way, and thus the capacity that this situation affords me should perhaps be considered an extrinsic power.

Before I finish this chapter I want to raise one of the problems with a power-based account of human freedom which I will return to in more detail later in this project. The worry centres on the question of control: an important feature of a libertarian conception of human freedom is that

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the agent is the ultimate controller of her actions. However, the powers account is currently unable to satisfy this criterion that the agent controls her actions: this account leaves open the possibility that an agent's *body* has particular powers that are manifested without the agent controlling the exercise of those powers. Thus powers could be things that are simply exercised by bodies rather than something that I, as an *agent*, exercise. If the former is the case then the powers account does not help to secure human freedom: it merely secures the existence of bodies with active powers, but does not entail that it is the agent who is in control of the exercise of these powers. This problem of control also entails a problem with individuation, which I will also argue arises for power-based accounts.

On these accounts, the fundamental ontological unit is an ungrounded power: these powers can combine in particular ways to manifest as objects with particular dispositions; these objects and dispositions can then combine in other ways to manifest as larger objects; and so on. Therefore on this account we have a number of different objects at a number of different levels, some of which will be composed of smaller objects or make up part of a larger object. A question arises therefore of which the causally relevant objects are: given that the agent is composed of smaller objects (atoms, organs, etc.) and constitutes a part of larger objects (a crowd, a social group, etc.), which of these objects is the relevant level to appeal to when explaining activity in the world? Should we appeal to the activities of the atoms which make up the agent, the agent's intentions or the social dynamics of crowds? Because, on the pan-dispositionalist account, there are many entities which can be called objects, giving an account of how the agent is able to have control over the powers which make her up (which will entail an account of why the agent should be taken as the causally relevant level in our explanations of the world) becomes central in order to defend a libertarian conception of freedom. These two worries are largely unrecognised in the literature. This may seem surprising, however, as I argued above the literature is also characterised by a neglect of the question of how micro-level powers feature through the different levels of nature and are then manifested in macro-level phenomena such as agency. The lack of this kind of account both prevents the two problems I have just highlighted from coming properly into view and makes a solution difficult without substantial further work to explicate a power-based ontology as a whole. However, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, this kind of work is already done by Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*.

Mumford and Anjum (2015) do come close to recognising that there is an issue here – they write 'perhaps the concern of determinism is that free agents are just puppets of microphysical interactions' (8); however, they argue that this concern does not apply to their view because of the

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nature of the dispositional modality. What this means, they argue, is that micro-level events will not always necessarily manifest themselves in the same macro-level events – because causation is never necessitating, in their view; they argue that this entails that it is not the case that the micro level necessarily determines the macro level, so they take the problem to be avoided (ibid.). However, this objection misses the point: whether causation is a necessitating relation or not, this does not answer the question of whether or how the agent is able to control the causal powers of her constituent parts and therefore have ownership of her actions in a meaningful way. In *What Tends to Be* (2018) Anjum and Mumford again acknowledge that there is something to be accounted for here, but fall short of actually providing the account they gesture towards. They claim that in order to really make sense of human freedom we would need an account of the agent's normative powers (170–2); presumably the thought is that the aligning of these with the other causal powers that the agent manifests would account for when the actions should properly be taken as the agent's own. However, again these comments are unhelpful: until we have a worked-out account of the way that micro powers are able to give rise to macro powers, and until we have a worked out account of how these levels interact, invoking mysterious normative powers (or any other macro level power) to attempt to solve these issues will fail as their existence and operation are not yet accounted for. I will not say any more about these worries for now, as the extent of them will become clearer through my account of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in Chapter 3 and the particular way that these problems arise for the ontology which Schelling advocates there.

Notes

1. This is a startling omission in Mumford and Mumford and Anjum's accounts, in particular given the number of areas that they apply power-based thinking to. However, I have not been able to find any clear statement of the relationship between powers and objects in their work and have not been able to get clarity on this question from Mumford in conversation.
2. See, for example: Mumford (2004), Molnar (2003), Marmodoro (2010), Bigaj (2010), Bird (2007a), Bostock (2008).
3. See Black (2000) and Bird (2007b: 70–9) for a more detailed discussion of the problems with quidditism.
4. This may seem a little quick – perhaps it is possible that the fundamental powers which constitute reality could be in a static and unchanging relation rather than in the dynamic relations which would entail a process ontology. However, Deleuze's consideration of Nietzsche's eternal return gives reasons to doubt this possibility: if powers were in equal or static relations with other powers then they would cease to have the active and dynamic characteristics which render them powers at all (Deleuze 2006: 40).
5. Thanks to Stephen Mumford for highlighting this example to me.

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6. Not all dispositions need a stimulus in order to be manifested: there may be some powers which are continually manifested, such as gravitational mass which continually manifests itself by pulling objects towards it, and some objects will have powers which can manifest spontaneously, such as particles which undergo radioactive decay. Human freedom may be thought of as an instance of this kind of spontaneously manifesting power.
7. It is important to note that not all contemporary power-based ontologies will make this claim about the dispositional nature of causation: most contemporary accounts argue that causes do necessitate their effects, but maintain that causation should be understood in terms of the manifestation of dispositions. I follow Mumford and Anjum's account here as it is most similar to my reading of Schelling's account of causation in the *Naturphilosophie*. This difference between Mumford and Anjum's account and other accounts of the literature will not be important for the problem that I want to raise for contemporary power-based accounts: the problem will remain regardless of whether causation is necessitating or dispositional.
8. Thanks to Tim O'Connor for bringing the importance of this distinction to my attention.
9. This conception of agents as highly complex natural organisms implies that a power-based conception of human freedom may need to be coupled with an account of emergence that makes explicit the way in which properties such as consciousness and agency are able to emerge from lower-level natural properties. I discuss how this kind of emergence is accounted for by Schelling in Chapter 3.

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Chapter 2

Freedom: The Post-Kantian Perspective

Introduction

Before turning to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, I want to provide some context for Schelling's particular approach to the question of human freedom, in order to demonstrate the way that this problem features in the formation of his philosophical system. Although Schelling does not tackle this problem in any great detail until the *Freedom* essay in 1809, it is clear throughout his philosophical career that it is an important concern for him: although he does not provide a well worked out account of the nature of human freedom until 1809 his concern with freedom is clear throughout his works, and he uses the term frequently not only when describing human agents, but also other natural products and processes and the whole itself. I do not want to claim that this is the only concern which motivates Schelling's philosophy, but I do want to suggest that it provides a useful lens through which to approach his thought. I want to argue that Schelling's philosophy is characterised by an enduring concern with a cluster of philosophical problems (which could be considered as one problem approached from different angles): the relationship between parts and whole, infinite and finite, ground and grounded, and freedom and system. The question of human freedom is one way into this set of problems, and Schelling's account of human freedom that I present in Chapter 5 also serves as a solution to the other problems within this cluster.

In this chapter I outline the context of Schelling's treatment of the question of human freedom. Schelling's philosophical system and development was influenced by a wide range of thinkers; the scope of this book means that it is impossible for me to give a comprehensive account of all of these figures and their relation to Schelling's thought here.[1] Instead, I have

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chosen to focus on the three figures whose treatments of human freedom best highlight the commitments and tensions which characterise Schelling's views in this area: I want to argue that Schelling's evolving account of human freedom represents an attempt to retain the insights of the three positions I discuss below, while avoiding their problematic consequences.

The landscape of the problem of freedom inherited by the early post-Kantian idealists has a number of parallels to the contemporary treatment of the problem: the tensions between commitments to naturalism (understood as the basic position that everything that exists is part of nature and thus can be understood in naturalistic terms) and the principle of sufficient reason[2] as well as commitments to autonomy[3] and a libertarian conception of freedom, which arguably characterise the differing positions in the contemporary debate, were all very real concerns for the German idealists. Schelling's account of human freedom represents an attempt to overcome these tensions – to unite all of these concerns within a single system, rather than to prioritise one over the other. This chapter outlines the tensions that define Schelling's attempts to overcome the problem through an investigation of the successes and failings of the philosophers which I argue were most influential on Schelling's thinking about freedom: Kant, Spinoza (whose philosophy was popularised at the time by Jacobi) and Fichte.

Kant's dualistic system, which attempted to accommodate both a commitment to the principle of sufficient reason and freedom, failed to successfully unite these and therefore produced a conception of freedom that could have no effects in nature. Kant's inclusion of autonomy and spontaneity in his system came at the price of separating agency from nature, rendering nature as a mere mechanism and driving a wedge between agents and other natural products. Spinoza provides a system which entails the rejection of this distinction between nature and agents, as all natural products are inherently active. However, his system entails not only determinism but necessitarianism, and therefore, for Schelling, cannot accommodate any meaningful conception of human freedom. Finally Fichte, who attempted to learn from Kant's mistakes and place freedom at the centre of his system, failed to do justice to nature and ultimately fell back into the kind of problematic dualism that Schelling was so keen to avoid.

I want to suggest that the tensions between the different commitments found in Kant, Spinoza and Fichte reflect a number of concerns which arise throughout Schelling's work, and that the attempt to balance these concerns is central to Schelling's project. One of these concerns is systematicity: the thought that a philosophical system must be fully derived from, and explainable by, a single first principle. A foundational principle or first principle is best thought of in this context in terms of a proposition: a first

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principle is a self-justifying proposition which grounds all other knowledge claims. However, as for German idealism, ontology and epistemology are in a sense synonymous (see below); a first principle also serves as an ontological ground, a *causa sui* that gives rise to the rest of reality. This principle must be self-explanatory in the sense that its existence, as well as the manner of its existence, is explainable through itself alone: it cannot be explained with reference to any other being; therefore it constitutes the most fundamental level of explanation. This principle therefore grounds all knowledge claims as well as reality as a whole. That the same principle is ground both of knowledge claims and reality itself is necessitated by Schelling's particular form of idealism. For an absolute idealist, the process through which reality arises is parallel to the process of knowledge (although this should not necessarily be taken to refer to knowledge possessed by any particular consciousness), and therefore the conditions of the possibility of knowledge of objects are also the conditions of the possibility of the existence of objects. This means that an epistemological principle capable of grounding all knowledge claims will be reflected in an ontological principle which grounds reality.

The importance of systematicity comes from two related concerns: one epistemological, following from Agrippa's trilemma,[4] and one ontological, following from the idea that all apparent difference must be grounded in an underlying unity. This is motivated by concerns regarding the interaction of things – if two seemingly different things are able to interact, it seems that these things cannot be different on a fundamental level, as there must be some ground of unity which facilitates their interaction. This latter concern is reflected in the claim common to German idealism that the only viable metaphysical systems are monism or holism.[5] These concerns are related as both raise questions of grounding: the first how knowledge is grounded; the second whether difference requires a common ground. For the German idealists, in order that reality can be conceived and understood *as a whole*, it must be grounded in a single foundational principle. This claim – that the ground of knowledge and the ground of being is one single principle – is linked to the absolute idealist claim that nature or reality as a whole contains elements of reason: because being is rational and grounded in a single first principle, knowledge of being will similarly be grounded in this first principle. Because nature itself is rational, gaining knowledge of nature means understanding nature as it is in itself: the system of knowledge will therefore reflect the system of nature. The claim that knowledge requires a single ground is also motivated in part by Reinhold's worries about the grounding of Kant's system, which I return to in more detail below.

A second fundamental concern for Schelling is naturalism. This is driven by a number of considerations: Schelling was committed to the ability of scientific investigation to produce true statements about reality and, coupled

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with the commitment to systematicity and unity (which entails that all aspects of reality must be accountable for within a single level of explanation) this implies that naturalistic explanations are best placed to describe reality as a whole. In addition, Kant and Fichte's systems, outlined below, demonstrate the problematic consequences of separating rational agents from the rest of nature, thus Schelling was convinced that any successful account of subjectivity will be naturalistic: accounting for the subject as part of nature, rather than as separate and transcendent. It is this commitment to naturalism that leads to the embedded conception of freedom and agency that I will outline in the later chapters of this project. It is crucial to note, however, that this naturalism does not imply reductionism – subjectivity and freedom are not denied or dismissed as epiphenomenal – rather this is a naturalism which affirms the reality of these aspects of being, but argues that they arise from nature and are thus fully natural.

A final crucial concern is an emphasis on transcendental philosophy,[6] which begins from the necessary aspects of subjective experience. Thus the conditions of subjectivity play a fundamental role in Schelling's ontology, something which is reflected in his commitment to providing a strong conception of human freedom. However, this emphasis on subjectivity must not come at the cost of naturalistic explanations: the natural and the transcendental must form two halves of a whole, two aspects of one reality.

The attempt to address all of these concerns is central to Schelling's philosophy. However, the implications of these positions (when conceived in certain ways) come into conflict with one another, and it is the failure of the philosophical systems discussed in this chapter to resolve these conflicts which makes them so influential on the development of Schelling's philosophy.

Kant's Theory of Freedom[7]

The obvious starting point with regard to this problem, and to almost all problems in German idealism, is Kant. It is clear that freedom was one of Kant's central philosophical concerns; however, his conception of freedom, and its relationship to other aspects of his critical system, is arguably one of the most problematic aspects of his theoretical philosophy.[8]

Although the first *Critique* contains little discussion of freedom in comparison to some of Kant's later critical works, it is here that the foundations for his theory of freedom, and the aspects of his system that come into conflict with this theory, are laid. The most important section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* with regard to freedom is the third antinomy, which deals with the conflict which arises from competing demands of the

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principle of sufficient reason. Kant's solution to this antinomy is intended to leave open the crucial space needed in order for causality through freedom to be possible. However, that Kant's system is already problematic with regard to freedom is ensured by the second analogy.

The Second Analogy: The Necessity of Causality

The purpose of the analogies is to demonstrate the necessity of certain concepts (i.e. categories of the understanding) for our experience. The arguments in the analogies proceed by showing that without the application of these categories, representation of objects would not be possible at all. The argument of the second analogy attempts to demonstrate that if external sequences of events were not governed by causal laws we would be unable to distinguish between objective sequences of events and subjective sequences of representations of static objects. Without this crucial distinction between inner and outer, the representation of an external world would become impossible:

> Experience – in other words the empirical knowledge of appearances – is thus only possible in so far as we subject the succession of appearances, and thus all alteration, to the laws of causality; and, as likewise follows, the appearances, as objects of experience, are themselves possible only in accordance with this law. (KrV, B234)

The problem that Kant aims to solve in this analogy arises from the fact that all representations are necessarily successive – because time is the form of inner sense for rational beings all of our representations take place in sequence, regardless of whether these are representations of a static object or of a moving object or sequence of events. The worry thus arises that we have no way of knowing when the sequential nature of our representations corresponds to a *real* sequence of events taking place outside us (an objective succession), or whether it is simply a subjective succession of perceptions, as is the case when we apprehend a static object. However, Kant argues, there *is* a difference between objective and subjective successions, which we experience as part of our representations of objects, and it is by attending to this difference that the necessity of causality for experience becomes apparent.

Kant argues that the crucial difference between these experiences is that while in the case of subjective succession there is no necessity attaching to the order of my representations, in the case of objective succession 'I cannot reverse this order, proceeding back from the event to determine through apprehension that which precedes' (KrV, B239/A194). In other words, the order of representations is necessary – we could not reverse the sequence,

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or reorder our representations and still be witnessing the same event. Crucially, there is a sense in which the latter representations are *contained* in the former – this reflects a conception of causality based on the principle of sufficient reason, where each event conditions the next: 'The event, as the conditioned, thus affords reliable evidence of the condition, and this condition is what determines the event' (ibid.). This Kantian formulation of the principle of sufficient reason, that every conditioned implies a further condition, will be central to the problems which arise later in the third antinomy, as it conflicts with Kant's further claim that any series of conditions implies an unconditioned.

In the case of objective succession, then, the order in which the representations appear is experienced as necessary and irreversible (as opposed to subjective successions of representations of static objects, the order of which we experience as contingent), and Kant argues that this is possible *only* due to the fact that our experiences of events in the external world are subject to causal laws – '[t]he experience of an event (i.e. of anything *happening*) is itself possible only on this assumption' (KrV, B240/A195).

The success or otherwise of Kant's arguments in the second analogy will not concern us here. One central problem with the argument is it seems that Kant has not in fact demonstrated the necessity of deterministic or mechanistic causality: although Kant has shown that *some* kind of causal regularity is necessary for our experience of nature, the analogy fails to show why this entails causal determinism. This assumption that causal regularity must be deterministic is most likely due to Kant's commitment to Newtonian physics (which he understood as mechanistic) and may account for his lack of argument as to why this must be the cause. The crucial point for our purposes, however, is that for Kant the analogy demonstrates that causality (conceived mechanistically) is a central feature of our experience. Not only this, but for Kant causality is a *constitutive* principle[9] – it literally constitutes the world of our experience (in that appearances *only* become possible through the application of causal laws), therefore any human experience whatsoever is impossible without it. The implications for a libertarian conception of freedom should be clear – it is hard to see how this conception of freedom will fit with Kant's deterministic picture of causality.

The Third Antinomy: The Possibility of Freedom

It is in the third antinomy that the conflict between freedom and second analogy causality comes to the fore. The antinomies arise from reason's attempt to '*free* a concept of *understanding* from the unavoidable limits of possible experience' (KrV, A409/B436) – that is, to extend the categories

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beyond their proper domain in order to try to reason about objects as they are independently of the way that they appear to us, outside of possible experience. Reason's drive for completeness leads it to speculate about the ground of appearances (which is necessarily beyond the bounds of possible experience) in accordance with the principle 'that if *the conditioned is given, the entire sum of conditions, and consequently the absolutely unconditioned* (through which alone the conditioned is possible) *is also given*' (ibid.). Thus this formulation of the principle of sufficient reason leads reason to extrapolate from the conditioned series which constitutes the sensible world and to posit an unconditioned ground which makes these possible. The antinomies arise, however, because the ideas of reason come into conflict with themselves – the (empirical) concepts which reason uses to think the unconditioned provide two contradictory yet equally internally consistent answers to the same question – thus reason is led into confusion as it has no way of discerning which of these answers is correct. Kant, of course, argues that the solution to the antinomies can only be achieved by adopting transcendental idealism.

The third antinomy deals with the conflict between causality through freedom and the causality outlined in the second analogy. It is useful to read this antinomy as expressing a conflict between two requirements of Kant's formulation of the principle of sufficient reason:[10] for Kant, this principle demands that every event is grounded in another previous event, but also states that the chain of conditions must ultimately be grounded in an unconditioned – there must be a first member of the series that is free from conditioning by a previous member. However, this unconditioned would clearly violate the first commitment, as it would not be conditioned by a previous event. If Kant is able to show that this kind of unconditioned cause is possible (without contradicting the principle of sufficient reason) this will open up the space to argue that *not* all events are conditioned, and therefore open up the space to argue for a libertarian conception of freedom.

The thesis of the antinomy argues that natural causality (i.e. the causality secured by the second analogy) is insufficient to explain all appearances, as it entails that every event is causally determined by a previous event and is therefore unable to account for the beginning of the series. In order to account for this beginning the thesis argues that we must assume an '*absolute spontaneity*' (KrV, A446–B474) – something which is undetermined by any previous cause and further has some kind of productive power to begin a sequence of events. This demonstrates that natural causality is unable to explain all aspects of experience, and we are justified in positing the existence of causality through freedom.[11]

The antithesis responds by arguing from the necessity of the laws of nature for experience. The central claim is that:

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> Transcendental freedom [. . .] stands opposed to the law of causality; and the kind of connection which it assumes as holding between the successive states of the active causes renders all unity of experience impossible. (KrV, A446/B474–A447–B475, my emphasis)

The antithesis further argues that freedom is inconceivable as it implies complete lawlessness and that freedom is something we never actually encounter in experience, and therefore concludes that causality through freedom cannot exist and is nothing but 'an empty thought-entity' (KrV, A447/B475). The antithesis thus highlights the central difficulty involved in Kant's attempts to include a conception of human freedom (as complete spontaneity) into his system – the existence of this kind of freedom would come directly into conflict with the mechanistic causality of the second analogy, and because this kind of causality is a necessary condition for appearances, freedom's violation of natural causality would render experience impossible.

The validity of Kant's arguments will, again, not concern us here (the thesis argument, in particular, is generally considered to be problematic[12]) – it is the solution to this antinomy which is important for our purposes as it contains the central element of Kant's theory of freedom. As mentioned above, the solution to all four antinomies lies in the acceptance of transcendental idealism (indeed, Kant argues that this resolution of the antimonies ought to persuade anyone who is not yet convinced by his system (KrV, A506/B534)), which is able to dissolve these conflicts of reason by rendering both the antithesis and the thesis of the first two (mathematical) antinomies false, and rendering both positions of the second two (dynamical) antinomies true (KrV, A531/B559–A532/B560). In the case of the dynamical antinomies the ostensibly conflicting positions are shown to be compatible, as one is true at the empirical level (the antithesis) while one is true at the transcendental level (the thesis).

In the case of freedom and natural causality, Kant argues that:

> [T]he *causality* of [rational agents] can be regarded from two points of view. Regarded as the causality of a thing in itself, it is *intelligible* in its *action*; regarded as the causality of an appearance in the world of sense, it is *sensible* in its *effects*. (KrV, A538/B566)

This means that there is no conflict between maintaining that all appearances in the sensible world are causally determined while also regarding the acts of agents as free, as these are simply two levels of explanation that apply to the same event when conceived from different perspectives: one which is empirically valid and applies to agents conceived as part of the sensible world; and one which is transcendentally valid applying to the intelligible character of agents.

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Kant argues that this is evidenced by our self-experience – we experience ourselves both as having an empirical character, but also through apperception we perceive our intelligible character which we simply cannot regard as a product of the sensible. Specifically, we experience ourselves as being subject to imperatives – to oughts – which we impose on ourselves and which '[express] a kind of necessity and of connection to grounds which is found nowhere else in the whole of nature' (KrV, A547/B575). However, the *actions* to which these oughts lead must also be possible under natural conditions: although these acts have their source in our intelligible character, their sensible effects take place in conformity with the causal system which constitutes nature. Kant further argues that although these events take place within the system of natural causality, reason is the 'faculty through which the sensible condition of an empirical series of effects first begins' (KrV, A552/B580). This indicates a crucial aspect of reason's causality: it is not only an independence from empirical conditions but also has a positive 'power of *originating* a series of events' (KrV, A553/B581). This conception of reason, as independent from external determining conditions as well as having this positive causal power, is the basis of Kant's conception of transcendental freedom.

However, Kant is careful to state that this conception of reason's causality is only, at this point, a regulative principle:[13] the *reality* of freedom has not yet been established. What the antinomy has shown, however, is that causality through freedom *is* compatible with deterministic nature.

The Critique of Judgement*: The Possibility of Teleological Causation*

The metaphysical picture offered in the first *Critique* opens up the conceptual space for transcendental freedom to exist despite empirical nature being governed by deterministic causality: transcendental idealism allows Kant to claim that the latter does not threaten the existence of the former as both belong to different realms of reality. However, an obvious problem arises for this picture: it seems that our free actions can, and do, have effects in empirical nature; the problem, therefore, is to account for how these two fundamentally different kinds of causality are able to interact.[14] This is the problem which concerns Kant in the second half of the third *Critique*, where he attempts to demonstrate the possibility of a ground of unity of freedom and natural causality that would render their interaction possible.

The *Critique of Teleological Judgement* is a central aspect of Kant's account of the problem of freedom for Schelling. Although the discussions in this *Critique* do not provide a solution to the dichotomy between freedom and nature necessitated by Kant's earlier critical works, I will argue that

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the means for a solution are present in this text, and that it is the limits of transcendental idealism which prevent Kant from being able to use these resources to provide a solution. Arguably the realisation that this kind of solution is only possible on a different philosophical system was a crucial reason for Schelling's rejection of transcendental idealism and his development of his own distinct approach. The importance of the *Critique of Teleological Judgement* for the formation of German idealism as a whole, in particular with regard to their positions on freedom, should not be underestimated as the implications of Kant's arguments here also demonstrate the need for holism and systematicity as well as the need for a reworking of the concept of nature.

The problem concerning Kant here stems from a conflict between two principles which we use for judging nature – in short, the determinative (thus constitutive) principle that all nature can be explained in mechanistic terms, and the reflective (thus regulative) principle that there are certain natural products which cannot be fully explained by a mechanistic account. Kant's attempt to reconcile these principles is significant for two reasons: firstly, if Kant can demonstrate that nature is not wholly explainable in terms of mechanism this opens up the space for the free causality of agents to have effects in nature; and secondly, because Kant's proposed solution to this antinomy of teleological judgement involves the positing of a supersensible ground of appearances beyond the realm of possible experience. This conception of a supersensible ground provides the basis for the concept of the absolute which Schelling will later develop.

The conflict between our principles of judgement arises when we are confronted with certain natural products which we are unable to represent as having arisen from merely mechanical laws, and can only regard as purposive. Thus we judge these entities to be natural purposes, natural products whose purpose appears to consist in fulfilling a concept:[15] this is the sense in which natural purposes are comparable to works of art, as we are unable to conceive of their production without reference to concepts and intentions. Kant argues that 'a thing is a natural purpose if it is *both cause and effect of itself*' (KdU, 370), in that the instantiation of its concept is both the cause of the organism (as the fulfilling of this concept is the purpose of the organism) and the effect of the organism (as it arises from the combination of the parts into the organism as a whole). Conversely, the parts are both cause and effect of the whole, as the existence and combination of the parts is necessitated by the concept of the whole (the arrangement and relationship of the parts is caused by the concept of the whole); however, the whole only arises through this combination of parts (the whole as existent is caused by the arrangement and relationship of the parts). One of Kant's examples of the way that a natural end is both cause and effect of itself concerns the growth

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of a tree, and what is interesting here is that Kant argues that some kind of autonomy is possessed by the tree; although the raw materials for the tree's growth are provided by nature there is an aspect of the tree's development that cannot be explained by natural mechanism and therefore suggests some level of spontaneity on the part of the tree:

> For though in terms of the ingredients that the tree receives from nature outside it we have to consider it to be only [a product], still the separation and recombination of this raw material show that these natural beings have [the] ability of very great originality. (KdU, 371)

The reciprocal relationship between the whole and the combination of its parts is central to the concept of a natural end, with Kant arguing that a natural purpose must fulfil two requirements: firstly, the possibility of the existence and form of the parts must depend on the whole or, in other words, the concept of the whole must be intrinsic to the parts; and secondly, the parts must be reciprocally cause and effect of one another and thus of the whole. In this type of whole the parts reciprocally produce and maintain one another, all existing as a result of and for the sake of the whole. The relationship of whole to parts reflects this structure, with whole and parts reciprocally producing as well as existing by virtue of one another. These kind of beings are both organised and *self*-organising, and it is this self-organisation which sets them apart from mechanical beings: as Kant argues, the difference between a watch and an organism is that although the watch is an organised collection of mutually supporting parts, the cause of the watch is external; it lacks the ability to organise itself, to repair broken parts, etc. This demonstrates that there is a different kind of causation at work in natural purposes: whereas the watch possesses merely motive force the organism possesses a *formative* force, the ability to create and organise itself. Because of these distinctive characteristics of natural organisms, Kant argues that we can do no other than consider these organisms as instantiating natural purposes. Further, the existence of these organisms provides us with a natural analogue to the (intelligible) causality of rational agents, as their causality in terms of natural purposes reflects our causality from practical purposes.

This comparison between natural purposes and autonomous agents arises a number of times in the *Critique of Teleological Judgement*: for example, Kant describes agents and organisms as comparable in that they are both ends in themselves; and (as I will discuss further below) compares the dichotomy of freedom and natural causality to that of teleology and mechanism. This analogy between natural products and autonomous agents points towards a conception of human freedom as embedded in nature, not as separate and transcendent to the natural world, but as part of a world

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which shares elements of, rather than being fundamentally opposed to, this freedom. I want to argue that this kind of conception, however, is not available to Kant because (given the metaphysical reading of his system which I am presupposing here) transcendental idealism necessitates the divide between the realms of nature and the realms of freedom, thus this comparison between organisms and agents can only remain subjectively valid (i.e. it can only remain a regulative principle: something which we cannot dispense with in our judgements of nature but which may have no objective validity) and cannot be used to provide a solution to the antinomy of freedom and nature. However, this aspect of Kant's work on freedom, although not taken to its conclusion by Kant, will later be central to the development of Schelling's conception of freedom.

Given the apparent existence of natural purposes, judgement is impelled to question our standard understanding of nature as governed only by mechanistic laws:

> [F]or the concept of natural purposes leads reason to an order of things that is wholly different from that of mere natural mechanism, which we no longer find adequate to deal with such natural products. (KdU, 377)

The concept of a natural purpose combined with reason's tendency to seek unity leads judgement to the idea of nature as a whole as a system of purposes, or as itself a purposive whole, and this in turn leads us to posit a supersensible ground for nature which could provide this purpose. Kant argues that this is inevitable. Once we discover that natural products can only be thought of as operating under purposes this compels us to go further and attempt to unify natural laws under the principle of purposiveness: we begin to interpret these purposes as belonging to a whole system of purposes, and thus seek a supersensible ground for nature whose principle is not mechanistic, as a mechanistic principle simply cannot explain nature's purposive forms:

> For the idea of nature as a system already leads us, as concerns its basis, beyond the world of sense, so that the unity of the supersensible principle must be considered valid not merely for certain species of natural beings, but just as much for the whole of nature as a system. (KdU, 381)

A problem arises, however, because this reflective principle of judgement (that some natural organisms cannot be fully understood unless they are judged as purposive) comes into conflict with another principle for judging nature: that all natural products must be judged in mechanistic terms. This leads to the antinomy of teleological judgement, as it seems that these two principles are contradictory. However, Kant argues that this antinomy is illusory, as the principles make claims about the way that we must *judge*

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nature rather than claims about how nature *is*. If the latter were the case (and both of these principles were determinative) then this would be problematic, but as these are only assertions about our manner of *thinking* about nature (and are thus reflective judgements), there is no contradiction incurred – the antinomy simply states that there are two different principles which we use when judging different aspects of nature.

Kant uses this antinomy as a way in to discussing the peculiarities of our particular cognitive make-up, and the way that these affect our judgements about the world. These peculiarities stem from a tension between the understanding and reason, and Kant gives a few examples of the kinds of ideas that arise from this conflict of our cognitive powers. Reason is compelled to seek the unconditioned, but as it has no concepts of its own, it must use the concepts provided by the understanding. The understanding, however, is conditioned by sensibility, thus the concepts that reason must use in its attempts to think the unconditioned are necessarily empirically conditioned. When reason goes beyond the understanding and attempts to form its own concepts, these can never be objectively valid in the way that the understanding's concepts are but rather must remain ideas (ideas are comparable here to regulative principles – they feature in our interpretation of appearances, but are not constitutive of experience in the way that the concepts of the understanding are). The validity of these ideas is necessarily restricted because the understanding is unable to 'keep up' with reason, which means that we are unable to make any claims about the relation of these ideas to objects and can only assert that they are necessary for the kind of subjects that we are, but may have no basis in objective reality.

Further, the discursive nature of our cognition necessitates that we make certain distinctions which similarly may have no basis in reality. This tendency is present, Kant argues, in the case of the concepts of freedom and nature as well as in the case at hand here, teleology and mechanism. In the first case, reason's ideas come into conflict as it must regard its causality as unconditionally free but it must also regard the laws of nature as necessary, creating a conflict between acts that are morally necessary but the existence of which in nature is contingent as these acts may not be necessitated by natural laws: this is why moral commands are expressed in the form of *ought to be the case* rather than *is the case*. Kant argues that if reason was not conditioned by sensibility and was fully supersensible this opposition would not exist: there would be no distinction between actions and obligations, or the practically possible and the physically actual. Thus in this world freedom, as well as the actions commanded by the moral law, would be fully actual. However, due to our mode of cognition which necessitates that we are presented with a sensible world, we are forced to keep freedom only as a regulative idea, and moral commands remain as oughts.

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Similarly, it is the nature of our understanding that necessitates the apparent distinction between teleological and mechanistic causality – our understanding proceeds from universal to particular, but as there is always some contingency in the particular in comparison to the universal (this is necessitated as a universal must range over a number of different particulars, thus there will always be some peculiarity contained in any given particular that is not present in the universal) this introduces an element of contingency into our experience of particular laws of nature. Thus judgement is compelled to posit a universal law in terms of purposiveness in order to unify and justify this contingency which we encounter in experience. Kant argues that because we can account for how these principles (freedom and teleology) arise from the peculiarities of our cognitive capacities, we are not justified in asserting them to be objective principles – they must remain regulative principles, even though they 'hold just as necessarily for our *human judgement* as [they] would if [they were] objective principles' (KdU, 404).

Kant further argues that our experience of natural organisms as purposive is also due to the discursive nature of our cognitive capacities. This necessitates that we are only able to understand wholes as composed of and dependent on their parts, and therefore we are unable to conceive of wholes as grounding their parts except by comparison to human projects (such as works of art) in which the concept and the object are separate. This means that the understanding is compelled to posit a concept separate from the whole, which both the whole and the parts are grounded in, and this is the origin of our conception of teleological causality in nature. This is also the reason that we are compelled to posit a supersensible cause of nature: as nature lacks the ability to produce concepts, we posit something beyond nature which is capable of providing these concepts. An intuitive understanding,[16] however, would lack this distinction between concept and product, and would therefore have no need to posit the whole and the parts as dependent on an external concept. Thus this kind of intellect would be able to perceive natural beings as synthetic wholes which are greater than the sum of their parts without having to introduce the link to concepts which is at the base of our idea of purposiveness.

What this discussion demonstrates is that the wholes that we are forced to apprehend as teleological could in fact have been produced mechanistically, as not all intellects would be compelled to understand the kind of unity embodied by natural organisms in terms of purposes and intentions. However, despite this, Kant argues that we cannot dispense with teleology when investigating certain natural products. Because we regard material substances as appearances, we must posit these as dependent on a substrate, a supersensible ground which Kant argues that we must consider in terms

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of a corresponding intuitive intellect. The existence of this supersensible ground, which we will never be able to cognise, implies that the two seemingly contradictory principles which we use to judge nature *are* in fact compatible, as they both stem from the same supersensible ground. Thus although they may not be compatible at the level of our experience we are justified in assuming the existence of an underlying ground of unity which justifies the validity of both principles.

Thus Kant argues that it is reasonable for us to use mechanistic laws when considering things that are necessary in nature as an object of sense, but when considering the unity of contingent natural laws and products, and when considering nature as a whole, we are justified in applying teleological laws. This means that we can never dispense with teleological explanations as without appeals to this kind of causality we cannot hope to understand the unity or even the possibility of nature as a whole. However, as we can't find any ground for this purposiveness in nature, we are forced to look for it in the supersensible:

> There is absolutely no possibility for us to obtain from nature itself bases with which to explain combinations in terms of purposes; rather, the character of the human cognitive power forces us to seek the supreme basis for such combinations in an original understanding, as cause of the world. (KdU, 404)

Reason is unable to dispense with either mechanism or teleology, as both give different kinds of information about nature when considered in different ways. Therefore, although these two kinds of explanation can't be reconciled in one object (nature) we are justified in the belief that they *are* reconcilable, and that this takes place at the level of the supersensible which grounds nature. Thus, Kant argues, all we can do in our investigations of nature is to continue to use both teleological and mechanistic explanations:

> [F]or we are assured that it is at least possible that objectively, too, both these principles might be reconcilable in once principle (since they concern appearances, which presuppose a supersensible basis). (KdU, 413)

This positing of a supersensible basis for mechanism and teleology reflects Kant's solution to the antinomy of freedom and natural causality: because we are justified in positing a supersensible ground for appearances, we are similarly justified in attributing the existence of certain aspects of our experience to this ground. In both of these cases we are compelled to judge certain aspects of our experience (our agency and the causality of natural purposes) in a certain way (as free and as purposive), however these judgements are problematic as they come into direct conflict with the constitutive principles which give rise to the sensible world. We must, therefore,

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attribute these aspects of our experience to a supersensible ground, and trust that the apparent conflict is resolved at the supersensible level.

The problem with this solution, in the case of freedom and in the case of teleology, is that because we are unable, in Kant's system, to make any positive claims about the noumenal whatsoever, we will never be able to be certain about the reality of freedom and of purposiveness and we are rather left with two regulative principles: principles which we are unable to dispense with, but will always be secondary to the constitutive principles which construct the world of experience. Thus transcendental idealism prevents Kant from being able to fully work out a solution to how freedom and natural causality or teleology and mechanism can interact: although the resources for providing a solution by way of a unifying ground are present in the *Critique of Teleological Judgement*, Kant's inability to make any claims beyond the phenomenal mean that he is unable to turn these resources into a solution. As mentioned earlier in the case of the analogy between natural purposes and rational agents, it is the possibility of this kind of solution that Schelling will later investigate.

Summary

In short, Kant's transcendental idealism prevents him from being able to provide a viable solution to the question of the relationship between freedom and natural causality: paradoxically perhaps, it is transcendental idealism which allows Kant to include freedom in his system in the first place; as the separation of noumenal from phenomenal enables him to include a libertarian conception of freedom in a realm which is unaffected by natural causality. However, it is transcendental idealism which prevents Kant from finding a way to bridge this divide, necessitating that freedom and teleology remain merely regulative ideas.

Given these problems with Kant's system, and the theory of freedom which it allows, it seemed that the only viable philosophical system which could overcome these concerns, as well as uphold Schelling's commitments to systematicity and naturalism, was a holist rather than dualist system. These concerns with systematicity and naturalism, and the claim that only a holist or monist system can accommodate them, also have their roots in Schelling's dissatisfaction with Kant's system. Reinhold's argument (which was largely accepted by the German idealists) that Kant's philosophy lacked the consistency necessary to form a coherent system entails that in order to constitute this kind of system any philosophical system must start from a single first principle. Kant's failure to provide a conception of nature as living and dynamic is necessitated by his dualism; by separating agency

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and freedom from the natural world Kant is thereby unable to provide the kind of account of nature which Schelling favoured: therefore in order to conceive of nature in this way it must be thought of as sharing a ground with free autonomous subjects. Conversely, in order for free agency to be able to have effects in the natural world (something which is ruled out by Kant's dualistic system) this must be made possible by the fact that both share a common ground. This cluster of related problems which arise for Kant's critical philosophy all point towards the need for a system based on a single first principle, and all motivate Schelling's move away from transcendental idealism to this kind of system. One reason for Schelling's great admiration of Spinoza was the latter's commitments to systematicity and naturalism: Spinoza presents a fully systematic account of reality, a monism with nature as its first principle. However Spinoza's philosophy implies certain conclusions about the nature and possibility of human freedom which meant that adopting a materialist monism similar to his was simply not an option. These problems were outlined and popularised at the time by Jacobi, to whose account we now turn.

Jacobi and Spinoza: Monism and Determinism

Jacobi was one of the earliest critics of Kant's system, and the charges that he levelled against Kant played an important role in setting the agenda for discussions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the years immediately following its publication. The difficulties that Jacobi identified in Kant's system, as well as his wider philosophical views which underpinned these criticisms, played a central role in determining the context within which Schelling understood Kant's philosophy. Jacobi gained recognition through his role in the Spinozism controversy,[17] which not only shaped his critique of Kant but further was one of the central reasons for the renewed interest in Spinoza in this period. Accordingly, I will first give a brief summary of Spinoza's system before outlining Jacobi's role in the Spinozism controversy as well as his wider philosophical position, and finally present an account of his conception of the problems implied by the *Critique of Pure Reason.*

Spinoza

Spinoza's system aims to present an account of reality through deduction from a number of propositions concerning concepts such as God and substance. Crucially, for Spinoza, God, nature and substance are one and the same, a conclusion which follows from logical analysis of the necessary

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features of these concepts. That God must be synonymous with reality as a whole results from Spinoza's recognition of the illogicality of the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of God as separate from the world: if God is separate from that which it creates this implies that it is neither infinite nor perfect, as this other entity necessarily contains some aspects it does not, thus limiting its infinity and perfection (*Ethics*, IApp). However, as infinity and perfection are necessarily contained in the concept of God this traditional conception renders it a contradiction in terms thus, Spinoza contends, God must be conceived as synonymous with nature as a whole: therefore Spinoza uses the term *deus sive natura* (this translates as 'God or nature', with the 'or' signifying equivalence) to refer to this being.

This conception of God as the whole necessitates certain conclusions about reality: for Spinoza, the nature of God is wholly necessary, as God is determined by the attributes which are logically contained in its concept. Crucially, this is the sense in which God is free: God enjoys ultimate freedom in that it is entirely internally determined by its necessary attributes and is free from any external determination (*Ethics*, IP17). The freedom of God is an important indicator of the nature of freedom for Spinoza: to be free is to be determined internally by one's nature rather than being determined by external causes (*Ethics*, ID7). The necessary nature of God implies that the whole of reality is similarly necessary, as all that is exists as a consequence of God's nature (see, for example, *Ethics*, IP11D; IP25–IP29). Clearly this conception of reality has serious consequences for human freedom: although Spinoza does have a conception of human freedom it differs radically from Kant's account of freedom as a power of spontaneity. For Spinoza humans are able to be free in the same manner that God is free (although necessarily to a lesser degree): humans are free when they are determined internally (through their necessary nature as rational beings) rather than being determined externally by causal relations with other objects. Therefore an important aspect of human freedom for Spinoza consists in the cultivation of our rational powers, and with this a cultivation of our understanding of ourselves as simply one part of an infinite causal series necessitated by the nature of God.

It is important to note that Spinoza's system is not only deterministic but necessitarian, in that it entails a denial of the existence of mere possibility: it implies that there is, and only ever was, *one* way that reality could be (*Ethics*, IP33). The ramifications for any traditional libertarian conception of freedom should be clear: this system rejects the existence of alternative possibilities, so a conception of freedom based on the ability of agents to choose between and to actualise different courses of action is ruled out. Thus Spinoza's system presents a challenge to Schelling: to provide a system which respects the commitments to systematicity and naturalism in a similar way

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to Spinoza's; but which leaves room for a stronger conception of human freedom. However, it is the very possibility of a system of this kind that is called into question by Jacobi.

Jacobi and the Spinozism Controversy

The Spinozism, or pantheism, controversy took place in the 1780s following the death of Lessing in 1781. Mendelssohn, a friend of Lessing's, had been planning to write a piece on the latter's philosophical views following his death. However, before this work was published Mendelssohn received a letter from Jacobi in which he claimed that Lessing had confessed to him that he had become a Spinozist.[18] As Spinozism was a term interchangeable with atheism at the time, Mendelssohn was shocked by Jacobi's claims and, seeking further information on Lessing's supposed confession and on the exact nature of his alleged Spinozism, began a correspondence with Jacobi. These letters, as well as transcripts of dialogues concerning Spinozism which Jacobi claimed took place between himself and Lessing, were published in 1785 as a book entitled *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, which was reprinted with further elaboration in 1789.[19] Whether or not these dialogues between Jacobi and Lessing actually did take place, the work served as an opportunity for Jacobi to outline his conception of Spinoza's position as well as to present some of his own philosophical views.[20]

Jacobi's central argument is that philosophy is misguided in privileging reason as a means of gaining access to reality and grounding knowledge (Horstmann 2010: 331), as all appeals to reason will ultimately end in a system comparable to Spinoza's which, in Jacobi's eyes, necessitates fatalism, nihilism (a denial of the reality of independent objects) and atheism. Jacobi identifies Spinoza's first principle as one common to all rationalism: the principle of sufficient reason. This implies a conception of reasons as explanatory conditions; thus to give a reason for something is to provide an explanation of the conditions that gave rise to it, which themselves will also have preceding reasons, and so on. As this principle states that nothing can exist without a reason, it follows that this chain of reason-giving will continue either infinitely or until we reach a self-grounding reason, a *causa sui* of the kind that we find in Spinoza's *deus sive natura.*[21] Jacobi extends his depiction of the consequences of the principle of sufficient reason in Spinoza to argue that *any* system based on the idea of reason-giving (note not just any *rationalist* system, although these will be most susceptible to this critique, but *any* system that works on the basis of reason-giving or rational demonstration) will necessarily end up as Spinozism: as the

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principle of sufficient reason must either lead to infinite regress or a *causa sui*, these kinds of system inevitably end in a monism that will have all of the negative characteristics that Jacobi associates with Spinoza.

The reasons why Jacobi feels that monism, atheism, fatalism and nihilism will be entailed by any rationalist or reason-giving philosophy are best understood through his analysis of Spinoza's system. For Jacobi it is not the case that these features of Spinoza's philosophy are incidental, but rather they are the necessary consequences of the principle of sufficient reason: Spinoza's system is remarkable in these features simply because he is the only thinker who has thoroughly understood and accepted the ramifications of his commitment to this principle.

The sense in which Spinoza's, and therefore any rationalist system on Jacobi's account, is necessarily monist is the easiest to demonstrate. Jacobi understands monism here as a system which posits the existence of only *one* being, and therefore entails the claim that all other beings are simply aspects of this original being with no independent existence.[22] As outlined above, the principle of sufficient reason demands that every event has an explanatory reason, and therefore in order to avoid infinite regress and to ground knowledge each series of reasons must have some kind of self-explanatory beginning: every series of reasons must culminate in a self-grounding reason. It follows, therefore, there must be *one* unique self-grounding and self-explanatory reason from which all other reasons are derived – the first cause. It may seem here that a first cause is not a reason in any normal usage of the term. However, as mentioned earlier, there is a metaphysical as well as an epistemological aspect to the principle of sufficient reason. Thus the first cause is a 'reason' in the sense that it provides the conditions for the possibility of the objects that it produces. The necessity that there be *one* original principle from which all others are derived comes from considerations of Kant's system offered by Reinhold (2000). Reinhold originally became known for popularising Kant's philosophy; however, he came to regard the critical system as incomplete and sought to make improvements to it in order to make it fully systematic and thus raise philosophy to the status of a science. In order to be fully scientific, Reinhold argued that a philosophical system must be composed of propositions which have the right logical connection: they must form a system which is complete and consistent and there must only be one such system otherwise philosophy will have failed to give an account of reality as a whole. These criteria imply the need for a single first principle, as Reinhold argued that in order to demonstrate that propositions are consistent it must be shown that they can be derived from a single principle which would also provide the foundation for the completeness of the system. On this account any system which begins from a number of first principles cannot properly be

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called a system at all, but rather constitutes a number of separate systems. This consideration, coupled with the commitment to a single grounding principle to solve the Agrippan trilemma, was a central aspect of the post-Kantian commitment to systematicity.

For Spinoza, the original self-grounding principle can be nothing other than the totality of existence, a conclusion which he argues follows necessarily from the nature of this cause as unique and completely self-determining. As this cause must be *first*, nothing can precede it, either logically, ontologically, spatially or temporally (see, for example, *Ethics*, IP11D and IP16C3). Further, it must precede both space and time as *any* prior existent will negate its nature as originary. This alone necessitates that all beings must follow from the first cause; however, it is not yet clear why this implies monism. It seems at this point that the first cause could begin a chain of events separate from itself, thus although this series of events would still be grounded in it they would nonetheless retain an independent existence. However, this picture is prevented by the fact that the first principle must be self-grounding: this implies that *every* aspect of its being must be explainable through itself alone. Therefore the existence of *anything* external to this cause would negate its nature as self-explanatory: any existent outside of its own being would constitute a limit as the original principle would be conditioned by this existent, simply because the latter would contain some aspects of being that the former did not. In other words, as negation is a central aspect of determination in this account, any objects external to the first cause would act as determinants to it, and therefore any complete explanation of it would involve reference to these external objects, thus contradicting its nature as self-explanatory and self-determining. Therefore, in order to retain the concept of a self-explanatory first principle, which Jacobi contends that rationalism must in order to ground knowledge and avoid infinite regress, any system which looks to retain this concept *must* end in monism.[23] Any other system, as both Jacobi and Spinoza recognise, will have to relinquish its claim to a truly self-grounding first principle, and with this its adherence to the principle of sufficient reason.

Once the inevitability of monism has been established, the charges of atheism, fatalism and nihilism follow easily. For the reasons discussed above, this system is necessarily unable to posit a transcendent God, therefore the only way to include God in such a system is to follow in the footsteps of Spinoza and re-characterise God as synonymous with reality as a whole (see, for example, *Ethics*, IP14 and IP18). For Jacobi, however (and Kant would certainly be in agreement here), this in itself necessitates atheism: claiming God to be equivalent with the totality of existence is tantamount to claiming that there is no God at all.

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The charges with regard to fatalism and nihilism follow similar lines. In terms of fatalism (referring here to a kind of attitude towards the self and others – a feeling of powerlessness and resignation, a feeling that human life has lost its value – which Jacobi argues follows from the acceptance of determinism), it seems that, given this ontology where everything is wholly dependent on, and indeed part of, the first principle, concepts like human freedom and choice become redundant (because everything is a direct result of the first cause and, because the existence of alternative possibilities is ruled out in this account, humans can neither be credited as the causal source of particular actions nor with the ability to choose between different possibilities), thus acceptance of this system leads to the fatalistic attitude which Jacobi sees as problematic.

Analogously, nihilism is necessitated because of the fact that all individuality is subsumed into the first principle: as no objects can exist independently of the first cause but rather exist as aspects of its being, it becomes incoherent to describe objects as either individual or independent. Nihilism is used here to refer to a denial of the reality of objects:[24] thus rationalism gives way to nihilism as it must maintain that all individuality, of objects and of subjects, is subsumed in the whole in order that these entities do not act as external determinants of the whole. As Franks summarises:

> For Jacobi, the lesson was clear: the Principle of Sufficient Reason led inexorably to an All that was One, and therefore Nothing. [The] quest for infinite intelligibility therefore led to the annihilation of the actual. (Franks 2000: 98–9)

Thus, Jacobi argues, the satisfaction of the principle of sufficient reason necessarily entails a monist ontology (in order that knowledge can be adequately grounded), and this kind of ontology in turn necessitates fatalism, atheism and nihilism. Crucially, for Jacobi, this does not just apply to any rationalist system but to any philosophical system which operates through providing reasons: '*Every* avenue of demonstration ends up in fatalism' (Jacobi 1994b: 234, my emphasis). Therefore Jacobi's answer was to reject the idea that reasons can be given for everything – he argues that the *only* way to justify a belief in God, freedom, the self and the existence of external objects is through faith (ibid. 231).

Jacobi and Kant

Jacobi's critique of Spinozism does seem to give reasonable grounds to make similar criticisms of other rationalist systems. However, Kant takes special care in the construction of his system *not* to end up as a traditional rationalist, and therefore it remains to be seen if his system is susceptible to Jacobi's

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charges. Arguably an important reason for Kant's separation of noumena from phenomena is to avoid the consequences that Jacobi identifies in Spinoza – mindful of the fact that only a self-grounding system of reasons can provide a firm justification for knowledge, but also aware that this kind of system leads to a monism similar to Spinoza's, Kant posited a conception of a dual reality in an attempt to respect both sides of this dilemma. Jacobi's specific critiques of Kant's system, and the inability of transcendental idealism to deal with these critiques, will shape the responses that Schelling will later give to the dilemma which Jacobi poses for rationalist systems.

Kant's dualism allows the phenomena, as a causally ordered system, to be ruled by the principle of sufficient reason: thus we are justified, within this realm, in maintaining that every event *does* have an explanatory reason and that these form a unified system of reasons which we can continue to trace back. However, as we must assume that the ultimate ground for these reasons (the originary, self-conditioning reason) is *outside* of the phenomenal realm[25] (although the sense in which we understand the term 'outside' here must necessarily remain elusive), we are also justified in maintaining that there is an important element of separation between these: because the ground is noumenal while objects are phenomenal, this prevents the reduction of objects into the ground.

This separation of phenomena from noumena will similarly come to the rescue in order to save Kant's system from the charges of atheism and fatalism.[26] As God and freedom are noumenal concepts, we are not justified in either affirming or denying their existence. We are, however, justified in retaining these concepts as regulative ideas: although we remain agnostic about the existence of their referents we must continue to operate with these ideas as they are necessary for us to conduct ourselves in the phenomenal world in the manner that we do. Thus although Kant is able to retain the idea of nature as a lawful system governed by sufficient reasons, the implication that freedom and God must be denied is avoided: because these entities (if they do exist) have a different manner of existence they are not susceptible to reduction into the system of reasons.

Whether or not these Kantian responses are adequate is contentious, and for reasons of space this is a question that cannot be tackled here. The important point is that Kant does at least have some grounds to claim that his system does *not* collapse into Spinozism like some rationalist systems would: in the second *Critique* Kant even engages with Spinoza directly, outlining the reasons why their accounts must be seen as fundamentally distinct (KpV, 101–3). Despite this Jacobi presents arguments against Kant's system specifically (1994: 331–8), which are more difficult to refute. Jacobi's dissatisfaction with Kant's transcendental idealism is therefore on a number of counts: not only is Kant's system susceptible to the critique

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of rationalism discussed above, but Jacobi contends that it further fails to secure the very thing that Kant (using the principle of sufficient reason) had aimed to secure: a first principle that could provide a solid ground for knowledge and therefore defeat scepticism. As Horstmann notes:

> [F]or Jacobi, the most telling example of a philosophical project that claims to rely solely on reason and scientific rationality and that nevertheless fails badly in the attempt to gain knowledge is Kant's theoretical philosophy. (Horstmann 2010: 331)

In addition Jacobi contends that there are internal difficulties inherent in the Kantian system which necessitate its failure.

Jacobi's critique is incredibly simple and rests on difficulties regarding Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena. The claim is that Kant makes contradictory assertions regarding the relationship between things-in-themselves and appearances: both sides of this contradiction cannot hold together; however, either side alone also causes problems for Kant, as one renders his position subjective idealism, while the other leaves his system open to scepticism. Jacobi's central objection is succinctly expressed in his famous assertion: '*without* that presupposition [of a link between things-in-themselves and appearances] I could not enter into the system, but *with* it I could not stay within it' (Jacobi 1994a: 336).

In other words, in the Kantian account, sensibility is affected by something, and this provides data which are then synthesised and conceptualised to form the objects of experience. However, the question remains: what is it that effects sensibility? The answer to this, it seems, must be things-in-themselves, but this, Jacobi argues, commits Kant to a problematic claim regarding the role of the thing-in-itself and our relationship of knowledge towards it. Kant seems committed, then, to claiming that we *do* know something about things-in-themselves (that they affect sensibility and are therefore in some sense the cause of appearances), but also that we know nothing about them (as transcendental idealism is based on the claim that they are necessarily outside the reach of our knowledge). If the first claim is true, however, the distinction between phenomena and noumena vanishes: by claiming that we can have this knowledge of the noumenal Kant facilitates the collapse of the distinction as if we can have knowledge of the thing-in-itself this becomes, by definition, a phenomenal object. For Jacobi this is tantamount to subjective idealism as it amounts to the claim that even objects which appear to be completely independent of our cognition are in fact mind-dependent in some sense. If Kant takes the second option, however, and claims that we cannot know anything about things-in-themselves, he must retract the assertion that sensibility is affected by these things and therefore sever any epistemic link

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to independent reality. For Jacobi this is problematic as it leaves the system open to scepticism about the grounding of knowledge: the very thing that the principle of sufficient reason is supposed to guard against. Further, Jacobi contends that this commits Kant to a form of nihilism: as Kant can make no claims about the reality of independent objects this is as good as a denial of their existence.

This, then, is where the force of Jacobi's critique of Kant lies: in attempting to escape from the determinism and atheism implied by rationalist systems, Kant has failed to provide a principle that can ground human knowledge and therefore falls prey to the sceptic. The difficulty which Jacobi makes explicit, then, can be characterised as a tension between certainty and autonomy: it seems that either a system can provide a definite ground for knowledge, and with this a systematic account of reality, but at the cost of God, freedom and individuality, or retain these at the cost of relinquishing certainty and systematicity and surrendering to scepticism. For Jacobi the only remaining option is clear: the leap of faith, which is beyond all justificatory reasons, is the only way to secure the reality of God, freedom and individuality, and is the only feasible response to scepticism.

For Schelling, however, this cannot be a satisfactory response, as it does not so much combat scepticism as affirm its concerns while attempting to sidestep its conclusions: Jacobi's conclusion implies that the sceptic's challenge is unanswerable and the only means for certainty can be faith. In addition, the rationalist answer similarly cannot suffice: the autonomy and individuality which Kant's system had secured for rational beings was too important to be sacrificed in exchange for certainty. The challenge, then, was set: to provide a system capable of grounding knowledge (which Jacobi and Spinoza had shown could *only* come from a system based on a self-grounding first principle) which could avoid the decline into fatalism and affirm the reality of human freedom. Fichte's system, to which we now turn, represents an attempt to do just this.

Fichte: Absolute Freedom

Fichte's philosophy explicitly prioritises freedom: in the first introduction to the *Science of Knowledge* (*Wissenschaftslehre*) he claims that all philosophy can be separated into either Idealism, a system which begins from freedom, or Dogmatism, a system such as Spinoza's which prioritises objects over freedom. This choice, for Fichte, is one which all philosophy must make, and is necessitated by the two competing kinds of experience we have: experience of objects, which is accompanied by the feeling of their necessity, and experience of ourselves, which is accompanied by the feeling of

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freedom. Fichte argues that neither of these systems can refute the other, as each begins from a fundamentally incompatible first principle; thus the choice between them depends only on the kind of person that one is. As a philosophical system can only begin from *one* first principle and as there are no empirical means to decide which of these principles is correct, the choice between them can only be made as a result of individual reflection.[27] Fichte's conception of dogmatism is based on Spinoza's system, therefore Fichte understands dogmatic systems as necessarily entailing strict determinism and fatalism. Thus, for Fichte, a Dogmatist system entails the denial of subjectivity and freedom (1991: 6–16).

Of all the idealists in this period it is Fichte who most explicitly considers himself to be continuing Kant's project: he stresses that 'my system is nothing other than the *Kantian*' (ibid. 4). However, influenced by Jacobi's criticisms of Kant's conception of the thing-in-itself, as well as Schulze's sceptical challenges to Kant's system,[28] Fichte concludes that idealism must be radicalised in order to surmount these problems and therefore rejects Kant's conception of the thing-in-itself. Thus Fichte argues that philosophy should concern itself only with the objects of possible experience and therefore should begin as transcendental philosophy: investigating and establishing the necessary conditions for subjectivity before making any claims about objects.

Fichte's system therefore begins with and is grounded in the absolute freedom of the subject. The technical term for this subject is the I or the Ego; however, this is a term which Fichte uses in two distinct ways. Firstly the I refers to the absolute or transcendental I, which embodies pure subjectivity, unconditioned by individuality or relations to objects. Secondly there is the empirical or particular I, which refers to persons: individual human subjects. The threefold process that Fichte describes[29] (where the three stages are co-dependent, theoretically forming a whole) is based on a completely free act of the absolute I: the absolute subject freely posits itself *as* free. With this act the absolute I demarcates itself as a free being, and thus constitutes itself as such. However, in doing so it must also posit its negation, in order that it has something that it is determined in relation to: only by positing an opposition to itself is the I able to take a determinate form. Therefore the ascribing of complete freedom to the I necessitates the ascription of another domain, the realm of sensibility, thus in positing itself the I also posits the not-I in the form of objective nature. In order that this not-I can act as a determinant of the I it must embody opposing properties to those of the I; therefore nature is, on this account, entirely necessary and deterministic in opposition to the absolute freedom of the pure I. That nature is posited by the I is indicative of the I's relationship to nature: the I is always active in relation to nature, which is nothing more than a passive object; the I,

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as free, is always positive, and nature is nothing but the negation of this freedom (Pippin 2000: 163). Nature therefore has no positive qualities in its own right – in short, the being of nature is only possible by virtue of and in terms of the I.

Although the pure I freely posits its negation (nature), this act leads the I to become conditioned (by the existence of its negation), thus it becomes particularised, the result being particular Is: autonomous rational subjects. Fichte's conception of individual subjects reflects Kant's as both hold that rational beings are necessarily conditioned and finite, therefore the self-positing of the pure I and the self-limiting that this entails are necessary in order that particular subjectivity in the form of finite rational beings is possible. Theoretically the freedom of these particular Is should be able to overcome the opposition offered by nature and thus return to the unconditioned status of the absolute I – this is supposed to be the third stage of the process – the synthesis of subject (the free I) and object (necessary nature).[30]

However, this synthesis of subject and object that is supposed to constitute the final stage of the process is in practice unattainable: although the freedom of the pure I is absolute, the freedom of particular Is is fundamentally limited by the fact that this freedom must exist within a system that is in constant opposition to it. This limited freedom of particular Is can in practice never overcome objective nature, so the final synthesis of subject and object can never be attained. It is for this reason that Fichte's ethical theory is based around the concept of striving – the particular subject must eternally strive to overcome objective nature, a goal that can never be achieved: 'Man must approximate, *ad infinitum* a freedom which he can never, in principle, attain' (1999: 115). This lack of final unity of subject and object is the basis for Hegel's critique of Fichte's system in the *Difference* essay: Hegel argues that as the freedom of the I and the necessity of the not-I remain antithetically opposed Fichte has failed to present a complete system, instead presenting a purely subjective and therefore one sided account of reality (124). It is crucial to note that even if the freedom of particular Is was such that it could overcome nature this would not constitute a synthesis but a *subordination* of nature to the I: even if Fichte's supposed final unity could in fact be reached, this would not be a unity but the raising of one side of the dichotomy (the I) over the other (nature) rather than a solution.

The dichotomy of freedom and nature is, for Fichte, fundamentally insoluble as his system necessitates that nature and the I embody opposing properties, and it is for this reason that Fichte attempts to secure the absolute freedom of the subject by positing this freedom as the ground of reality/subjectivity. However, in practice this strategy fails: maintaining the

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absolute opposition between the freedom of the I and the necessity of nature means that although subjective freedom is theoretically absolute, in practice this freedom is totally incapacitated by its fundamental incompatibility with the system that it exists within.

Schelling's Critiques of Fichte

Schelling's early philosophical works are deeply indebted to Fichte, to the extent that his early work is often referred to as his Fichtean period. However, over time, deep disagreements between the two began to appear, most importantly over the nature of the absolute and the status of nature. Although these points of disagreement took some time to fully emerge, there is evidence of Schelling's differing stance from Fichte even as a student in the *Tübinger Stift*: Schelling was working on Plato's *Timaeus,* demonstrating an interest in a realist, power-based account of nature even then. In this section I want to briefly outline the trajectory of Schelling's move away from Fichte – which culminates in the former's prioritisation of *Naturphilosophie* over the transcendental philosophy of the *Wissenschaftslehre* – in order to bring Schelling's critiques of Fichte's system to the fore.[31]

Schelling's earliest works are explicitly Fichtean; however, as early on as his 1775 *Of the I* there is already evidence of some of the areas that Schelling will later distance himself from Fichte on. Although the text endorses a lot of Fichte's claims, 'in subtle and unconscious ways the ground is already laid [here] for the later break with Fichte' (Beiser 2002a: 472). The basic difference which emerges surrounds the status of the absolute. While Schelling follows Fichte in claiming that the absolute is an I, he also makes comments which call this claim into doubt. For example, he claims that the unconditioned can neither be subject nor object (because both are possible only in opposition to one another and are therefore conditioned), and further argues that as criticism and dogmatism both make the same error (of seeking the absolute in something which is conditioned), both are guilty of falling into the same contradiction (*Of the I,* 74; SW I, 165). Schelling shows signs of what will progress to full blown transcendental realism in his later *Naturphilosophie* when he argues that the idea of the absolute has constitutive rather than merely regulative status – we must take it as a being whose '*original form is that of pure eternal being*. We cannot say of it *it was, it will be*, but simply *it is*' (*Of the I,* 100; SW I, 202). It is also striking that after this passage Schelling describes the absolute in terms remarkably similar to Spinoza.

These initial discrepancies from Fichte's account begin to indicate Schelling's central worries about Fichte's view. Firstly, the characterisation of the absolute as I is called into question – Schelling argues that this leads to a

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contradiction as it involves conceiving of the unconditioned as something conditioned. Secondly, this worry about the primacy of the subjective is also a worry about the relative status of the objective. For Fichte, the objective will always be subordinate to the subjective which is its ground. The later Schelling will end up arguing the reverse: that the subject must arise from nature as its material condition (though it is important to note that Schelling is not arguing here that the subject is grounded in the object as both arise from an absolute which is neither subjective nor objective). Schelling's comments above advocating a conception of the absolute as real independently of the thinking subject are an important foreshadowing of these later claims.

Schelling's 1795 and 1796 *Letters* again is ostensibly a Fichtean text, as despite Schelling's claim there that dogmatism and criticism have equal validity on both theoretical and practical grounds, he does advocate criticism over dogmatism and further defends Fichte from some objections. However, this text also makes some of his implicit anti-Fichtean arguments from *Of the I* explicit – specifically Schelling clearly calls into question whether the absolute should be thought of as only subjective. Following his argument from *Of the I* Schelling claims that the standpoints are identical from the perspective of the absolute: both dogmatism and criticism are only intelligible if there is a distinction between subject and object; however, in the absolute this distinction disappears (*Of the I*, 188–9; SW I, 330).

These early departures from Fichte's view become even more pronounced when Schelling starts to produce work on *Naturphilosophie*. I deal with the central texts on *Naturphilosophie* in Chapter 3, so for now I simply want to give a sketch of the way that these texts cement Schelling's move away from Fichte. Schelling's first *Naturphilosophical* text is the *Ideas*, which while focusing on nature does so from an explicitly transcendental perspective: the guiding question of the work is not on nature considered as an independent object, but rather on how the *idea* of a nature outside of us becomes possible *for subjects* (*Ideas*, 10, 23, 41; SW II, 12, 29–30, 55). However, *Naturphilosophie* quickly begins to take on an independence from transcendental philosophy with regard to their respective first principles, and is further given an equal footing with the latter. As Beiser notes, there are two central assumptions that the *Naturphilosophie* makes which are fundamentally at odds with Fichte's transcendental philosophy: transcendental realism (the claim that nature is independent of the subject which thinks it); and naturalism (the claim that everything, including the thinking subject, is explicable by the laws of nature) (2002a: 483). However, these assumptions are valid only from *within* the perspective of the *Naturphilosophie*: just as the transcendental philosopher must assume the primacy of the subject in her work, the *Naturphilosophin* must take nature as primary in her

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investigations. In this view, both are equally valid starting points for two different articulations of the same system from different sides – neither has priority over the other, both are independent from one another and both have an equal right to take their object as absolute (Beiser 2002a: 487).

The eventual priority of *Naturphilosophie* over the *Wissenschaftslehre* is explicitly articulated and justified in a letter from Schelling to Fichte in November 1800:

> [T]he *Wissenschaftslehre* is not yet philosophy itself [. . .] it proceeds entirely in pure logic and has nothing to do with reality. It is, as far as I understand it, the formal proof of idealism and hence science. What I want to call philosophy, however, is the material proof of idealism. In this latter discipline, the last is to deduce nature with all its determinations, indeed in its objectivity, in its independence, not from the I, which is itself objective, but from the I that is subjective and does the philosophizing. This occurs in the theoretical part of philosophy. (Letter 14, in Vater and Wood 2012: 44)

For Schelling, then, the proof of idealism which the *Wissenschaftslehre* is able to provide is a kind of secondary proof; standing alone, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is simply a formal exercise with no connection to reality. It only takes on significance, therefore, once *Naturphilosophie* has been completed, as the latter provides the material conditions for its possibility – it is only once the proof of idealism from the side of *Naturphilosophie* has been completed that the *Wissenschaftslehre* becomes objectively valid.

Let me summarise the worries about Fichte's account which are instrumental in Schelling's development of his own distinctive system. These worries stem from Fichte's emphasis on the primacy of the subject at the expense of the object. Firstly, this entails that Fichte's account of the absolute is necessarily impoverished: as outlined above, it means that Fichte's conception of the absolute is contradictory as the absolute is unconditioned by nature; however, subjectivity is only possible through being conditioned by an object. Secondly, the assertion of the absolute opposition between subjects and objects entails that the system will always be characterised by opposition. If subjects and objects are taken to be necessarily and fundamentally opposed in this way, the unity which a truly systematic account of reality requires is ruled out from the outset. Finally, as is made explicit in the excerpt from Schelling's letter above, the primacy of the subject over nature in fact damages transcendental philosophy's claim to validity, as it lacks a material connection to reality and thereby becomes a detached exercise in logic.

This indicates Schelling's fundamental issue with Fichte's account of reality: it is one-sided, as it only deals with the subjective. For Fichte the world of nature exists by virtue of and for the subject, having no positive characteristics and simply acting as a determinant of the I. This highlights

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the lack of unity in Fichte's system, and further goes against Schelling's commitment to naturalism. Not only does Fichte's account render nature subordinate to the I, it also severs individual subjects from nature, rendering them transcendent to nature rather than as natural entities that are part of the system they exist within.

Finally, Fichte's theory of freedom fails in what it sets out to do: Kant's unresolved problem of the antinomic relationship between freedom and nature has not been solved. Although freedom has real existence and is theoretically absolute in Fichte's system, in practice this freedom is necessarily limited and can never realise itself as it will always be fundamentally opposed to the system of nature that it must attempt to act within. Thus Fichte fails to achieve what he set out to demonstrate – the freedom of particular subjects is always necessarily limited in his system[32] and no amount of striving can afford the subject the absolute freedom upon which Fichte's system is based.

Transition to Schelling's System

Schelling's conception of freedom, which I will outline in the course of this book, represents an attempt to respect the concerns of all of the above systems while avoiding the problematic conclusions that each of them entails. Schelling was in part concerned with remaining faithful to his Kantian and Fichtean heritage, and therefore seeks to retain the strong libertarian conception of freedom and emphasis on the importance of transcendental philosophy that these philosophers secure. However, the need to avoid dualism and the relegation of nature to a lesser status than the subject (which both Kant and Fichte are guilty of) entails that Schelling's system will have to be significantly different to those of his predecessors. His holism and naturalism must also find a different form to that which they take in Spinoza's system, in order to avoid the problematic consequences identified by Jacobi. Thus the challenge that remains for Schelling is to find a way to include human freedom within a naturalistic system which does not either reduce human freedom to the whole, implying a conception of freedom similar to Spinoza's, or prioritise freedom over nature, characterising these as fundamentally opposed and reverting back to dualism.

In what follows I will demonstrate that Schelling is able to circumvent these problems through positing an ontology which is fundamentally power-based. By conceiving of reality as a system of powers in process Schelling is able to give a holistic and naturalistic account of reality while avoiding the reduction of individual beings to the whole. This conception of nature as a power-based system underlies his account of the natural process

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as non-deterministic and grounding the possibility for freedom and novelty to arise as part of the natural world. In the next chapter I therefore turn to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, his account of nature as this kind of dynamic power-based whole.

Notes

1. There are a number of good accounts of Schelling's relationship to German idealism and romanticism: see, for example, Beiser (2002a and 2002b), Nassar (2014). Similarly Schelling's relationship to Spinoza is relatively well documented, and most accounts of Schelling's philosophy will include a discussion of this relationship. For work on Spinoza's influence on specific aspects of Schelling's philosophy see, for example, Nassar (2012), Lawrence (2003).
2. The principle of sufficient reason states that everything must have a reason or a cause. The tension between this principle and the possibility of human freedom is reflected in Van Inwagen's (1983) consequence argument – if every event has a prior cause, which in turn has a prior cause, and so on, this implies that human agents are incapable of performing actions that are not previously determined by some antecedent cause, invalidating the possibility of free actions.
3. Autonomy is understood here in the Kantian sense – an agent is autonomous in that she is self-governing. This means that the freedom possessed by the agent is greater than a merely negative freedom from external influences, but in addition to this consists in a positive ability to self-legislate. Thus the autonomous agent is bound only by laws of her own making.
4. The Agrippan trilemma is a central problem in epistemology which Kant, following Leibniz, was also concerned with. The trilemma is concerned with justification and states that any chain of justificatory reasoning will end in one of three ways: either the chain will continue infinitely, leading to infinite regress; the chain will lead back to a reason which is already part of the chain thus leading to circularity; or the chain will come to an end, but this endpoint will not admit of any justification and will therefore be arbitrary. The solution favoured by the German idealists was to escape the trilemma by isolating a non-arbitrary first principle – a self-explanatory principle capable of grounding all other knowledge claims. This problem is discussed in more detail in the section on Jacobi and Spinoza later in this chapter. For a detailed discussion of this problem in German idealism and its origins in Leibniz and Kant, see Franks (2005: chapters 1–2).
5. Both monism and holism can take a number of different forms: at bottom all of these forms share a commitment to the claim that reality is characterised by some kind of underlying unity; however, the nature of this unity can vary radically between accounts. For example, strongly monist accounts might argue that there is only one entity which exists (therefore providing the ground of unity for the appearance of difference), a weaker monism might claim that there is only one substance which makes up all of the different entities in experience whereas a holist account will simply claim that there is some kind of unifying relation which holds between the entities which exist, although it will maintain that these are in an important sense separate and independent beings in their own right. On my reading, Schelling's philosophical development is in part characterised by his movement through systems which represent different strengths of this commitment to unity: for example, in the *Identitätssystem* Schelling is a strong monist; however, his system in the *Freedom* essay moves away from this monism towards a holism.

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6. Transcendental questions or arguments proceed by way of identifying the conditions of possibility for something – for example, an argument is transcendental if it demonstrates the existence of something through its necessity for the possibility of something else. Transcendental philosophy in the sense in which the German idealists use it begins from subjective experience, and asks what kind of conditions must be in place in order that this kind of experience is possible.
7. In what follows I do not want to engage in debates regarding the metaphysical (or otherwise) status of Kant's claims: this is an important and complex issue in Kant scholarship which I do not have the space to do justice to here. For the purposes of this project, I will assume that Kant's system does entail a metaphysical separation between phenomena and noumena for the simple reason that it seems that Schelling read Kant's philosophy in this way. For interpretations of Kant's system as a metaphysical two-worlds account see Franks (2005) and Guyer (2006); for metaphysical two-aspect readings see Langton (1998) and Bird (2006); for the most influential epistemological two-aspect reading see Allison (2004); and for a recent account which argues that there is both a metaphysical and an epistemological distinction see Allais (2015).
8. There are also a number of problems which arise in relation to freedom in Kant's practical philosophy; however, a discussion of these is not in the scope of this project (not least because there are a number of complex problems in this area). See Allison (1990: part 2) for a useful discussion of the issues in Kant's practical philosophy as well as a good summary of debates in the literature. For some good recent work on issues surrounding freedom in Kant's practical philosophy see Freyenhagen (2008) and Saunders (2016).
9. On the distinction between constitutive and regulative principles see KrV, A178/B221–A180/B223.
10. This reading of the third antinomy as expressing an internal conflict in the principle of sufficient reason follows Allison (1990: 18). A similar reading is also found in Walsh (1975: 204–5). This reading of the antinomy is particularly useful in terms of this project as a whole, as the acceptance of the principle of sufficient reason is one of the most compelling arguments to reject the possibility of freedom. The commitment to this principle is also central to Jacobi's objections to Kant which will be outlined later in this chapter.
11. It may seem that this argument only yields the negative conclusion that *some* other causality than the laws of nature is possible, not the positive conclusion that freedom exists. However, as Kant later argues that freedom and natural causality are the *only* types of causality possible (KrV, A532–B560), the negative conclusion entails the positive one.
12. See Allison (1990: 14–19) for a discussion of the problems with the thesis argument as well as a summary of its reception in the literature.
13. Regulative principles are most easily understood in comparison to constitutive principles. Constitutive principles (such as second analogy causality) are instrumental in producing appearances, and as such are necessary and unavoidable aspects of the way that we experience the world: experience is impossible without them. Regulative principles, in contrast, are principles which we use to judge experience – they are certain principles which we use in our understanding of ourselves and the world. Although they are unavoidable (in the sense that they arise naturally given the nature of our cognitive capacities), they are not necessary for the possibility of experience in the way that constitutive principles are.
14. There has been some debate in recent Kant scholarship surrounding the implications of this problem for practical action: see Blöser (2015), Frierson (2018) and Saunders (2019).
15. It is important to distinguish (as Kant does at KdU, 378) between natural purposes and purposes of nature – the latter presupposes some kind of ultimate purpose of

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nature as a whole, which (because, for Kant, nature cannot ground itself) would have to be located outside of nature and therefore would be uncognisable to us. Although the existence of natural purposes does compel us to speculate about a purpose of nature as a whole, these purposive natural products do not in themselves presuppose this kind of ground, therefore we are justified in judging them as natural purposes without the need to posit a purpose for nature as a whole. However, as Pluhar notes (in KdU, 378, n. 41), Kant is sometimes inconsistent with his use of these terms, referring to a purpose of nature when in fact he means a natural purpose.

16. An intuitive understanding is used by Kant as a contrast to our discursive understanding which must subsume objects under concepts in order for cognition to be possible. An intuitive understanding, however, would intuit objects directly and thus there would be no distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances for this being. This necessitates that there would similarly be no distinction between concept and product, or possibility and actuality, for this being: concepts and objects would be united in its cognition, and it would have no need for the concept of possibility as everything that it cognised would be actual.
17. In addition to this, he also courted controversy later in his career – he accused Schelling of pantheism, and his accusation that Fichte was an atheist was instrumental in Fichte's dismissal from his post at the University of Jena in 1799 (Franks 2000: 95–6). For a detailed account of the Atheism Controversy, see Di Giovanni (1989) and Beiser (1987: chapter 2).
18. It is contentious whether Lessing did actually hold this view: Henrich argues that there is nothing in his work to support this conception (2008: 91) whereas Beiser sees Jacobi's characterisation as a fair representation of Lessing's views (1987: 79).
19. See Jacobi (1994: 173–252) for an English translation of the 1785 version, and 339–79 for excerpts from the 1789 version.
20. Beiser provides an extremely thorough summary of the Pantheism controversy, including a detailed account of Jacobi and Mendelssohn's positions (1987: chapters 2 and 3 respectively).
21. This problem entailed by the commitments of the principle of sufficient reason (that everything must have a reason, yet that there must be something which ultimately grounds these reasons and therefore does not admit of any further justification) is the problem addressed by Kant's third antinomy discussed above.
22. Arguably, Jacobi is correct to claim that any monist system will entail the reduction of all beings to the whole, and therefore the denial of any genuinely independent beings (other than the whole itself). Later in this project I want to argue that the realisation that this is an unavoidable consequence of any monism is instrumental in Schelling's move towards the holist system which he outlines in the *Freedom* essay.
23. It seems here that Jacobi is perhaps conflating entity monism (which posits the existence of only one entity) and substance monism (which allows for the existence of many different entities all composed of one common substance). The latter position is comparable to holism, the position that reality is a unified whole, albeit one which contains difference and differentiation. It may seem, then, that adopting one of the last two positions (which seems more defensible than entity monism) would be sufficient to combat the worries regarding justification. However, Jacobi argues that *any* system based on some kind of unifying ground (whether this is a single entity, a single substance or simply the unity of the whole) will necessarily collapse into entity monism, because the ontological dependence of everything on the original cause entails its reduction into this cause.
24.

    The moment man sought to establish scientifically the veracity of our representations of a material world that exists beyond them, and independently of them, at that very moment the object the demonstrators wanted to ground disappeared before their eyes. They were left with mere subjectivity, with *sensation*. And thus they discovered idealism.

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> The moment man sought to prove scientifically the veracity of our representations of an immaterial world that exists beyond them, to prove the substantiality of the human spirit, and of a free Author of this universe who is however distinct from it [. . .] The moment he tried this, the object likewise disappeared before the eyes of the demonstrators. And in this way they discovered nihilism. (Jacobi 1994: 583)

25. This follows from a claim that Kant makes, following Leibniz, that nature is incapable of providing its own ground. As nature is not a candidate for the kind of being that could be self-grounding (it does not contain its reason within itself), its ground must be located externally. See Bell (2003: 198) for a contemporary version of this argument.
26. Although, arguably, these defences against atheism and fatalism are incompatible with the above account of the question of a self-explanatory reason, as in a sense they work the other way round: the self-explanatory reason does not lead to monism as it is placed in the noumenal realm and therefore retains the separateness from phenomena that is needed; while God and freedom are protected as they are placed in the noumenal, away from the aspects of the phenomenal world that would seem to negate or contradict their existence. However, if it is the case that the first principle as well as God and freedom are noumenal, it is hard to see how Kant can escape from the charges of fatalism and atheism – although the first principle is separate from the world of experience, it seems that Jacobi's difficulties regarding fatalism and atheism will still apply, albeit in a realm that we are unable to gain knowledge of. It seems, then, that this latter claim (our inability to gain knowledge of the noumenal), is all that Kant could use in defence of these charges. However, this critique only remains valid *if* Kant intended something in the noumenal to serve as a self-explanatory principle in order to ground justifications and reasons in the phenomenal – something that has been assumed here for reasons of space but is itself debatable.
27. Schelling's early work *Letters* contains a similar discussion about the personal motivations which lead a philosopher to become either a dogmatist or a critic, claiming that the choice of these positions ultimately rests on different ways of conceiving of the identity between the subject and the whole. He writes of Spinoza:

    > Either he had become identical with the absolute [dogmatism], or it had become identical with him [criticism]. In the latter case, the intellectual intuition was intuition of self; in the former, intuition of an absolute object. This latter was what Spinoza preferred. He believed himself identical with the absolute object, and lost in its infinitude. (*Letters*, 181 (translation modified); SW I, 319)

28. In essence, Schulze argues that Kant has made a dogmatic and invalid assumption that the way that the structures of mind *appear* is an indication of the way that they really are, and therefore has violated one of the central claims of transcendental idealism by assuming appearances to be things-in-themselves. For a good account of Schulze's argument see Henrich (2008: chapter 10).
29. Whether this process describes the creation of reality or the creation of individual subjectivity (or both) is contentious, as it depends on the account one accepts of Fichte's system as a whole. Again, this is an important issue in Fichte scholarship that I cannot deal with here, so I will be assuming a metaphysical reading of Fichte for the same reasons that I assumed a metaphysical reading of Kant: it seems clear that Schelling read Fichte in this way, therefore assuming this reading is most useful for the purposes of this project. See Guilherme (2010: 5–7) for evidence that Schelling had this kind of understanding of Fichte's system.
30. For Fichte's full account of this threefold process see Fichte (1991: 93–119).
31. The summary which follows of Schelling's move away from Fichte is indebted to Beiser (2002a: 469–504).
32. This view is supported by Ameriks (2000: 178) and Breazeale (2000: 189).

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Chapter 3

Powers: Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an outline of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, sketching some of the motivations and commitments behind this view and summarising its central claims. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* provides an account of nature as a whole, beginning with its emergence and working through its manifestation in the potentiated series of natural beings that we experience in the natural world around us. In this chapter I want to show that the *Naturphilosophie* should be understood as a power-based system, and will highlight a number of striking similarities to the contemporary pan-dispositionalist accounts that I outlined in Chapter 1. I also want to argue that Schelling's use of powers, and the ontological structure that the power-based account entails, is central to many of the other claims in his *Naturphilosophie*, but also in his subsequent work. For example, in the later chapters I will argue that his account of the natural process, the relationship between essence and form, and his conception of human freedom in the *Freedom* essay all utilise a particular ontological structure which has its basis in Schelling's ontology of powers. In fact, I will argue that these, and other elements of Schelling's philosophy, are different examples of the very same process – the process of nature, which characterises nature in all of its manifestations. Schelling's ontology of powers, as I will show, enables him to think of all natural phenomena as unified by being instances of the same process, but in such a way that also emphasises and makes sense of the important differences between natural phenomena conceived as products. On the reading of Schelling I argue for the *Naturphilosophie* is central to understanding his thought; the ontology of powers which is found here recurs time and time again in his subsequent work and, as I will show in the

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following chapters, the basic ontological structure which he outlines here is retained even through changes to other elements of his thought.[1]

In this chapter I look at some of Schelling's critiques of mechanistic accounts of nature and show how these lead him to the ontology of powers which constitutes his *Naturphilosophie.* I also want to show that part of Schelling's motivation for adopting this ontology stems from his attempts to solve the problems that I outlined in the previous chapter and the introduction. This set of problems is best understood in terms of tensions between competing commitments: the commitment to holism (to ground justification and explanation and to avoid problematic dualisms such as Kant's) is in tension with a commitment to freedom and individuality (as, in some holist and arguably all monist systems, individuals are subsumed into the whole); the commitment to naturalism conflicts with a commitment to freedom (at least in accounts of nature as deterministic or mechanistic); and the commitment to the centrality of transcendental philosophy comes into conflict with the commitment to naturalism (again, at least when nature is understood as being a particular way). These tensions which arise surrounding the relationship between freedom and nature, and individuals and the whole, are different ways of stating a set of problems (or perhaps form one problem stated in a number of different ways) which I argue concerned Schelling throughout his philosophical career. These problems focus on the relationship between individuals and the whole and ask how it can be the case that individuals can be part of, or at least grounded in, the whole and still be independent beings in their own right. This is reflected in the question of the relationship between freedom and system: how can something be part of a system but at the same time act in ways which are not circumscribed by the system and its nature? Finally this problem arises with regard to the relationship between the infinite and the finite: how can the finite be part of the infinite yet still exist independently? It seems that by being part of the infinite, finite things cease to be entities in their own right. Further, if the finite is part of the infinite, does this not limit the latter's status as infinite and therefore render it finite? The claim that both the infinite and the finite exist therefore entails the threat that one will ultimately be reduced to the other. I want to show throughout this book that Schelling's solutions to all of these related problems depend on the ontology of powers he develops in the *Naturphilosophie*.

Naturphilosophie: Central Claims

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*[2] is generally taken as his second distinct philosophical period and marks his break from Fichtean subjective idealism.

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There are a number of considerations that lead Schelling to *Naturphilosophie*. Firstly, his claim that the ability of subjects to form representations of nature requires that consciousness and world are fundamentally of the same kind underpins one of the central claims of the *Naturphilosophie*: that the subjective and objective are manifestations of a single principle which underlies all nature. An important aspect of Schelling's move away from Kant and Fichte is the claim that subjectivity is just as much a part of nature as any other natural phenomenon. This captures one of Schelling's central aims throughout his philosophical career: to provide a unified account of nature and subjectivity without entailing the reduction of one to the other. Given Schelling's rejection of dualism and his criticisms of Fichte's and Spinoza's systems as reductive (the former reduces nature to the subject; the latter reduces subjectivity to nature), one way the *Naturphilosophie* can be viewed is as an attempt to provide a middle ground between these two positions: to posit a unified conception of reality which is capable of securing the irreducibility of both subjectivity and nature.

Secondly, Schelling argues that the mechanistic conception of nature, which had dominated not only Newtonian physics but also previous philosophical accounts of nature, is inadequate for a number of reasons: this view of nature is fundamentally incapable of providing an account of subjectivity and freedom, and further fails to do justice to a number of natural phenomena in both the organic and inorganic realms. In the introduction to *Ideas* Schelling argues that philosophical questioning only becomes possible through the freedom of the subject; it is the freedom to separate self from world which allows the subject to question the very possibility of the existence of this world: 'I *am* free, in that I raise myself above the interconnection of things and ask how this interconnection has become possible' (*Ideas*, 13; SW II, 17). However, this separation of the subject from the world which takes place through freedom causes the subject to become alienated from her freedom: due to the mechanistic paradigm within which we think nature the subject comes to conceive of herself as a member in a series governed by efficient causality, thereby losing sight of how her freedom can have a place in the world. Esposito writes:

> Man comes to see himself as an object among objects, an effect among causes; and then, using mechanistic thinking to explain the very process of thinking, he can no longer find a place for the idea of freedom. (1977: 38)

Because the mechanistic conception of nature is unable to account for subjectivity and freedom, its pervasiveness has consequences for our conception of ourselves as subjects which for Schelling are deeply problematic: the mechanistic paradigm leads either to the reduction of our freedom and subjectivity or forces us into the Kantian claim that these aspects of our

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nature are somehow set over and above the natural order. For Schelling, although each of these positions contains a grain of truth (the former is correct in its claim that subjects are fundamentally natural beings which should be explained in the same terms as any other aspect of nature; the latter is correct to claim that subjectivity is real and irreducible), neither option is tenable, thus our way of conceiving nature requires a radical rethinking in order that we can affirm the unity of the subject and nature without implying the reducibility of either. For Schelling this can only be achieved through a holist conception of reality, by positing a single universal principle which manifests itself in both subjective and objective nature.

The first maxim of *Naturphilosophie* is therefore that nature must be treated as an autonomous, unconditioned, mind-independent and self-sufficient realm: the philosopher of nature should start from this basic assumption and explain all phenomena in terms of purely natural powers: '[t]he first maxim of all true natural science, to explain everything by the forces of nature, is therefore accepted in its widest extent in our science' (*Introduction*, 195; SW III, 273). Thus Schelling takes himself to be a naturalist – though his naturalism is very different from the naturalism that we find in contemporary philosophy due to his commitment to a broad conception of nature that it is capable of providing an account of subjectivity, consciousness and life in a way that is non-reductive and non-mechanistic. This account must be non-mechanistic as Schelling argues that it is impossible to understand organic life, in any form, in mechanistic terms, and must be non-reductive in order to do justice to the subjective as well as the objective facets of reality: although Schelling gives *Naturphilosophie* priority over transcendental philosophy the reason for this is not to deny the existence of the subjective but rather to affirm the naturalness of subjectivity.[3]

The *Naturphilosophie* thus entails two claims which make explicit the extent to which it marks Schelling's departure from Fichtean idealism: transcendental realism, the claim that nature exists independently of consciousness; and naturalism, the claim that all phenomena, including rationality and subjectivity, should be explicated according to purely natural principles. Again, Schelling contends that the only system which makes this possible is one which sees the subjective and the objective as arising from the same underlying universal principle. Thus Beiser argues, '[t]hat there is a single universal substance, of which the subjective and objective are manifestations, is the fundamental proposition of the philosophy of nature' (2002a: 483).

In this chapter I present an account of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, following his arguments which establish the existence of this single universal substance[4] and outlining the process through which this substance manifests

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itself in both subjective and objective nature. I argue that Schelling's absolute should be conceived as a primordial force or will, which gives rise to the system of powers which I claim constitutes the *Naturphilosophie*. I show that Schelling's attempt to achieve a non-reductive and unified account of the subjective and the objective rests on his power-based ontology, which will provide further support for my claim that *Naturphilosophie* is best understood as a power-based ontology: '*force* is the ultimate [. . .] to which all our physical explanations must return' (*Ideas*, 37; SW II, 50). I then explore the consequences of Schelling's account for organisms and their activity, and briefly return to the problems of individuation and control that I will argue in the next chapter cause serious difficulties for arguing for a libertarian conception of freedom on the basis of the *Naturphilosophie* or any similar power-based system.

Schelling's Critique of Mechanism

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* contains a positive aspect and a negative aspect, although the two cannot be easily separated. The negative aspect consists in his critique of the mechanistic conception of nature, with these arguments for the failings of mechanism informing his positive conception of nature. Schelling's critique of mechanism rests on the claim that the mechanistic paradigm is unable to account for certain aspects of nature: not only subjectivity and freedom, but also the purposive aspects of natural organisms and the interconnection of nature as a whole. Thus Schelling argues that the mechanistic conception is inherently flawed as it is unable to account for the world as experienced:

> Schelling's negative argument against mechanism as a model for nature may be summarised as the view that any philosophy unable to account for the existence of the philosopher who thinks it (the knowing self) is deficient, or at the very least incomplete. (Snow 1996: 74)

Schelling aims to demonstrate that as well as being unable to account for subjective experience, the foundational assumptions of mechanistic thought are incoherent, and through these arguments to show that we need to change the way that we think about nature.

Schelling's critique of mechanism focuses on three central areas: the mechanistic account of matter, the mechanistic conception of causality and finally the inability of mechanism to account for the nature of organisms. I suggest that these critiques together constitute an argument that the fundamental failing of mechanism is reductionism: mechanism proceeds by attempting to explain the higher in terms of the lower, thus its mode of

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explanation is necessarily reductive and cannot account for those aspects of nature which emerge only at the higher levels. This reductive tendency also entails that mechanism tries to understand its objects in isolation, by abstracting individuals from their place within their immediate environment and the whole, and thus cannot account for the relations and interconnections between natural objects. Schelling's method in the *Naturphilosophie* aims to reverse this tendency: rather than explaining objects reductively and in isolation, Schelling's method is synthetic as it aims to understand the lower levels of nature in terms of the higher. For Schelling, experience demonstrates that reality consists in relations rather than isolated objects, therefore any explanation of an object must look beyond that individual and explain it in the context of its place within the whole. This means that lower levels of nature should be understood in terms of the higher levels in which they are synthesised and through which they gain their meaning. This in turn implies that all natural processes can and should be explained with reference to one single synthetic principle: this principle is nature as a whole, and objects have their meaning by virtue of their position in this whole and relationships to other objects within it. Schelling's advocacy of the synthetic method can therefore be seen as further support for his claim that all aspects of nature are manifestations of a single underlying principle or process.

Schelling's critiques of mechanism are complex so for the purposes of this chapter I will simply give a brief outline of each to highlight the ways that these critiques inform Schelling's positive account of nature as a system of dynamic powers.

Powers and Matter

Schelling's first target is the mechanistic or Newtonian conception of matter as inert bodies which must be moved by external forces. Schelling argues that this conception is based on a natural (but fatal) mistake which arises from the fact that the nature of our cognitive faculties allows us to form two separate concepts, one of force and one of matter:

> Because reflection is able to separate what in itself is never separated, because the fancy can divide the object from its property, the actual from its action [. . .] the supposition is that these real objects without properties, things without action, can also exist outside the fancy – regardless of the fact that, apart from reflection, every object is present for us only through its properties, every thing through its action alone. (*Ideas,* 155–6, emphasis removed; SW II, 194)

When we abstract from experience we are able to think of matter and force as separate despite the fact that we never experience them as such. This,

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Schelling argues, is the basis for the mistaken Newtonian idea that matter and force are separate, which leads to the view of matter as fundamentally inert. For Schelling this view is deeply problematic as it implies that forces are somehow implanted into reality from above, as if from a 'higher hand' (*Ideas*, 154; SW II, 193). Not only is it unintelligible how this would happen, it also implies that there is something beyond nature which grounds movement and change in the natural world.[5] This claim would contradict the naturalistic basis of the *Naturphilosophie* as it invokes an explanatory principle which is outside of nature. Therefore, far from being a naturalistic account of matter and force, the Newtonian conception in fact necessitates invoking some kind of transcendent power which exists over and above nature.

Schelling goes on to argue that the Newtonian conception itself demonstrates that the concept of force is more fundamental than that of matter: rather than matter coming first and forces somehow being implanted afterwards, force is instead the ground of matter. Force is central to the Newtonian account of matter as it is necessary to explain motion and interaction: without the concept of force, the Newtonian is left with an ontology of static discrete substances which radically contradicts our experience of the world. If matter is conceived as inherently inert, forces cannot be explained on the basis of matter. However, Schelling argues, matter *can* be explained on the basis of forces, and therefore we should take force to be the more fundamental of the two. Thus, Schelling concludes: 'Matter and bodies, therefore, are themselves nothing but products of opposing forces, or rather, are themselves nothing else but these forces' (*Ideas*, 156; SW II, 195). Schelling's positive account of matter as constituted by forces, which I return to below, thus provides further support for my claim that the *Naturphilosophie* is best understood as a power-based ontology.

Powers and Causality

Schelling's second line of attack against mechanism attempts to refute the claim that there is only one kind of causality in nature: efficient causality. Schelling argues that this conception of causation not only makes the existence of human freedom unintelligible but also is unable to account for the kind of causality which characterises natural organisms. It is this inadequate conception of causation which ultimately forces the mechanist into a reductive explanation of organisms. Further, Schelling holds that the conception of causality as always and only efficient prevents the mechanist from conceiving of nature as an interrelated whole (which in turn entails that the mechanist's conception of natural objects will always

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be impoverished, as she is unable to understand them in terms of their relationships within this whole), as it implies that nature is composed of discrete isolated individuals whose only relations to one another are of active cause to passive effect. The paradigm example of this mechanistic conception of causality is found in Kant's second analogy (KrV, A189/B232–A211/B256) and for Schelling Kant's order of priority in the three analogies demonstrates not only the fundamental problems with conceiving of causality as always efficient, but also the mistaken reasoning about nature which leads to this conception.

In the analogies Kant proceeds from the concept of substance to the concept of causality and finally to the concept of community (reciprocal interaction) which is understood as a synthesis of the former two. Schelling argues that Kant is unable to give a satisfactory account of community because his conceptions of substance and causality already entail a world of isolated individuals only related by efficient causal links: explaining reciprocal interaction between these individuals is therefore ruled out at the outset. However, the concept of community is necessary for accounting for the fact that we always experience objects as being part of a larger network of other objects – the fact that the world as a whole is an interconnected community of individuals and is always presented as such in our experience – therefore Kant's account falls short as it is unable to account for this fundamental aspect both of the nature of objects and of our experience of the world.

Schelling argues that the order of Kant's analogies must be reversed: Kant made the mistake of conceiving of the relationship between substance, causality and community in accordance with the order of experience (i.e. in terms of the order in which subjects discover these concepts) rather than the order of existence. Schelling argues that in fact community is foundational and grounds both causal relations and substances rather than being a synthesis of the two. This order of explanation is the only one that can make intelligible the existence of relations and connections throughout nature: reflecting his argument for the priority of force over matter Schelling argues that as community can explain causality and substance but the latter two cannot explain the former, community must therefore be prior. In addition to this, giving priority to the community of substances better accounts for our experience of the world as an interconnected and unified whole.[6]

This account implies the need to rethink our conception of causality as purely efficient: if objects are always in webs of reciprocal relationships with other objects and with the whole, the idea of causality as a linear relationship between two discrete individuals in which one is the causal actor and one the passive patient becomes incoherent. Schelling's positive conception of causality thus places reciprocity at the centre of the causal relation.

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Schelling's account of causation and the importance of reciprocal interaction becomes more intelligible if we consider it in the light of my interpretation of the *Naturphilosophie* as a power-based ontology. On my reading community is central because the interaction of nature's basic forces is ontologically primary: because the process through which forces interact is fundamental to nature, and because these forces always and only act in relationships with one another, reciprocal interaction between forces is therefore the primary causal relation. For Schelling, it is impossible that a force should exist or act in isolation from other forces. As the nature of forces is activity, this presupposes that a force has something external to itself to act upon, namely another force. This is why, in Schelling's account, forces are mutually dependent despite (or better, by virtue of) the fact that they are opposed. This indicates why for Schelling it makes no sense to think of causation in efficient terms, as active cause and passive effect, because it always takes two (or more) powers working together for an effect to arise. Thus there is activity on both sides of the causal relation, as causality requires the mutual manifestation of complementary dispositions. Further, my reading accounts for why, on Schelling's conception, causes cannot be thought of as necessitating their effects: firstly, due to the reciprocal nature of the causal relation to identify one power as cause and another as effect will not always be straightforward; and secondly, as causation requires the mutual action of powers it becomes unintelligible to say that one of these powers necessitated anything in the other. The fact that causation requires the manifestation of complementary powers rather than one power alone, and that causes never necessitate their effects, is made explicit in Schelling's discussion of opium. Schelling argues that we cannot see opium as necessitating the effect that it has on organisms, and further we cannot even claim that the opium alone causes these effects: the organic body itself also constitutes a cause of the effects that opium has on in it an important sense, as it needs to provide the right conditions (i.e. manifest the right dispositions) in order that the opium can take its effect (Schelling, *Outline*, 63; SW III, 83).

The idea that causes necessitate their effects comes from the mistaken conception of causes as fully active and events as fully passive, which in turn rests on a conception of causation as only efficient and linear, which itself is based on a problematic worldview which sees reality as composed of inert and unconnected particulars which are moved to action by external forces. This, of course, is the picture that Schelling's analysis of matter urges us to reject in favour of an ontology which posits powers as fundamental. I hope that the similarity between Schelling's account here and the dispositional account of causation I outlined in Chapter 1 is clear: both views claim that causation is best understood as the manifestation of dispositions;

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both therefore argue that causation requires the mutual manifestation of complementary dispositions, thereby rejecting the conception of causes as active and effects as passive; and both entail a conception of causal activity as grounded in objects themselves rather than as something separate from them.

The Concept of Organism

Schelling's final critique of mechanistic thought has implications for the wider claims of his *Naturphilosophie* as well as shedding light on his conception of causality, as it focuses on the inability of mechanistic conceptions of nature to account for the distinctively ends-based causality which characterises natural organisms. Schelling endorses Kant's claim that there are some natural organisms which we are compelled to conceive as purposive: as expressing an internal concept which grounds the development of the organism as well as the relationship between the parts and the organism as a whole. However, Schelling argues that Kant's account of purposiveness falls short: he rejects Kant's claim that purposiveness is a regulative idea which is imposed on nature by the subject. Where Kant claims that purposiveness is not intrinsic to organisms but is merely an idea through which we think them, Schelling argues that purposiveness is an intrinsic feature of organisms themselves.

For Schelling, Kant's conception of purposiveness as a regulative idea fails to account for why we are *compelled* to think of certain natural products under this concept, and further fails to account for why this compulsion applies to some objects rather than others. Schelling argues that if purposiveness was simply an idea which the subject projects onto reality we would not be compelled to apply it to any particular natural object rather than another: we would be able to decide for ourselves when to think of objects as purposive. However, experience demonstrates that in some cases we feel the necessity of applying the concept of purposiveness (as in the case of natural organisms) and in others we cannot meaningfully apply this concept even if we attempt to (in the case of objects such as rocks and washing machines). Therefore Schelling concludes that the purposiveness that we feel compelled to accept must be intrinsic to the objects: we are compelled to conceive of certain objects as purposive rather than others simply because some objects *are* intrinsically purposive and some are not (*Ideas*, 32; SW II, 42).[7] If this does not seem like the strongest argument against Kant, it is strengthened by taking Schelling's rejection of the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves into account. Schelling is committed to the claim that there is no distinction between the way that

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the world appears and the way that it is in itself: the way that reality appears to the knowing subject just is the way that reality is. Given this claim, it makes no sense for Schelling to hold, as Kant did, that purposiveness is a structure imposed on the world by the subject; for Schelling if the subject is compelled to conceive of certain natural products as purposive this indicates that this structure is present in nature itself.

Thus Schelling argues that purposive ends-based causality exists in certain natural products and in nature as a whole. However, the mechanistic conception of nature and its conception of causality as only efficient is unable to account for the presence of purposiveness: because the mechanistic account is reductive and attempts to explain the parts in isolation from the whole, it is unable to account for properties which arise at the level of the whole, rendering it incapable of accommodating the kind of causation which characterises natural organisms. For Schelling, following Kant, organisms have an intrinsic or internal telos (unlike the washing machine the purpose or end of a natural organism is contained within it rather than being added externally), and the organism as a whole is only properly understood in relation to its intrinsic concept which is both the ground and the end of the system. In this sense, organisms are both cause and effect of themselves (*Outline*, 51; SW III, 65–6): the idea of the organism as a whole determines (causes) the parts and their particular arrangement, while the parts give rise to (cause) the whole to which they belong. The relationships between the parts of an organism simply cannot be understood on the basis of an efficient conception of causality, as the relationships between them are reciprocal and derive their significance from their relation to the whole. As Esposito summarises:

> In [the case of organisms], cause and effect are not distinct events. In an organic totality, it makes no sense to speak of one part by itself having an effect on another part. Rather, because all parts are internally related, we can speak only of individual parts being effected by and affecting the whole. This is because as a genuine unity each organic form is governed by a *concept*, which determines precisely what the interaction among parts is to be. (Esposito 1977: 68–9)

If the causality which exists in organisms works through reciprocal interactions between the parts and whole, this demonstrates the extent to which the mechanistic conception of causality as only efficient is fundamentally inadequate to understand organic causality. As we saw above, efficient causality, with its conception of active cause and passive effect, cannot account for relationships in which both members of the causal relation are active, as is the case with the parts and whole in a natural organism. In addition, efficient causality is linear, as the energy flows through the causal chain from cause to effect and never the other way round. In an organism, however, Schelling argues that the organism's causal powers are instead

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directed inwards: in order to maintain itself the organism must be able to act on itself, to turn some of its energy inwards to conserve itself. This central aspect of the causality of organic beings therefore cannot be captured by a mechanistic account which understands causality as only efficient and linear. This conception of the causality of natural organisms thus demonstrates the importance of Schelling's positive account of causation as reciprocal action: if we take the organism to be a paradigm case of the reciprocal causality which takes place throughout nature, then in order to give a full account of natural products, and the interconnected nature of reality as a whole, we need an account such as Schelling's that is able to account for community and reciprocity in a way that the mechanistic account is fundamentally incapable of doing.

The critiques of these central aspects of the mechanistic conception of nature thus form the basis of Schelling's positive account, as his challenges to mechanism all imply that a different way of looking at nature is required. I argue that his challenge to each of the aspects of mechanism discussed above leads to his power-based ontology: his critique of the Newtonian conception of matter necessitates an account of matter as arising from forces; his critique of efficient causality implies the need for an account of causation as the mutual manifestation of powers; and finally his account of the causality of natural organisms (when applied to nature as a whole) entails that these powers must form an interconnected web which is unified under a single concept or as instances of a single process. This leads on to another central aspect of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* which I argue arises (in part) from the above critiques: the concept of the absolute as a fundamental principle or process which unifies and is manifested in all natural products. Schelling's conception of matter as composed of forces demonstrates that in order to fully understand natural phenomena we must conceive of them as manifestations of basic forces (the most basic of which is the absolute conceived as primal will); his conception of causality as reciprocal interaction implies the need for a unifying whole within which these relations take place (and which is constituted by these relations); and finally the extension of organic causality to nature as a whole necessitates an overarching concept which unifies and gives meaning to its parts and their relations. Thus Schelling's critique of mechanism leads to a conception of nature as characterised by fundamental forces and grounded in a unifying principle or process. It is to this process we now turn.

Natura Naturans, Natura Naturata

For Schelling, investigations of nature inevitably lead us to:

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> [A] common principle in which, fluctuating between organic and inorganic nature, is contained the first cause of all change in the former and the final ground of all activity in the latter. Because this principle is everywhere present, it is nowhere; because it is everything, it cannot be anything determinate or particular. (*World-Soul*, 89; SW II, 347)

This principle is what Schelling refers to as the absolute:[8] the absolute is the fundamental principle which grounds all natural products; it is neither subjective nor objective but is rather the primordial indifference point which subtends all distinction and differentiation. The absolute is both the basis of all things and the totality of all things; it makes possible variety as well as interaction and grounds both universality and particularity. It is the infinite unified whole which constitutes and encompasses all being and the ground of all finitude and differentiation. If, however, reality consists in this universal undifferentiated whole, the question arises of how and why the world of our experience becomes differentiated: why does the world consist of a myriad of distinct individuals if it is the manifestation of an undifferentiated unity?

This question is one which preoccupies Schelling throughout his philosophical career – in his early work *Letters* Schelling poses this question as the 'riddle of the world, the question of how the absolute could come out of itself and oppose to itself a world?' (*Letters*, 173–4; SW I, 310). Similarly, in the introduction to the *Outline*, Schelling claims that the 'supreme problem of the philosophy of nature [is]: What cause brought forth the first duplicity [. . .] out of the universal identity of nature?' (*Outline*, 10; SW III, 9, emphasis removed). The problem, then, is to account for why an undifferentiated whole would produce differentiated beings: why would the absolute limit itself by manifesting its universality in particularity, its unity in difference? This question can be rephrased in terms of the relationship between the infinite and the finite: how does the finite come out of the infinite without this constituting a limit to the latter's infinitude? These questions form part of the nexus of problems which I have been arguing preoccupied Schelling throughout his philosophical career, to which the question of the relationship between system and freedom also belongs.

Part of Schelling's answer to these questions is that the finite and the infinite are not in fact separate but are two sides of the same coin: like Spinoza's *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* they are two aspects of the same activity, distinguished only as process (*natura naturans*) and product (*natura naturata*). Schelling conceives of the absolute as primordial will or as eternal act,[9] and I suggest that it is this which necessitates that the absolute must go beyond itself and create a world. In my reading of the *Naturphilosophie* as a power-based ontology the absolute is itself a power or disposition, and as a power is always directed towards something beyond

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itself: the absolute act constitutes a continual striving for its manifestation in the world of nature. The absolute '*is itself* this eternal activity, *since it belongs to its idea* that *immediately through its concept it should also be, that its essence should also be form for it, and the form essence*' (*Ideas*, 47; SW II, 65). The nature of the absolute is such that it demands to be manifested: the reason that there is something rather than nothing is that the nature of reality is power or will, a will which strives to actualise its concept and manifest its essence in individual forms.

As undifferentiated whole the absolute cannot concretely exist: it can only actualise itself through concrete particulars. This necessitates that the undifferentiated absolute has to divide, to introduce differentiation within itself, in order to give rise to distinct entities (*Ideas*, 150; SW II, 118). Schelling characterises this differentiation in a number of ways: the absolute is said to divide into essence and form, universal and particular, ideal and real, subject and object, productivity and product, productivity and limitation. The crucial aspect of all of these distinctions is that both terms are mutually dependent: essence or the universal cannot exist without its instantiation in concrete forms or particulars, and conversely form or particularity cannot come to be without the essence or universal which it instantiates. This characterisation of the reciprocal relationship between essence and form is central to Schelling's account of the natural process which I argue in Chapter 5 underpins his conception of human freedom. Similarly, the real and the ideal reciprocally determine one another: Schelling (*Ideas*, 173–4; SW II, 217) uses an argument similar to Kant's in the refutation of idealism (KrV, B274–279) to demonstrate that subjectivity presupposes an outer (which must be distinct in order to constitute an outer, but share a ground of unity in order that it can have any interaction with the subject at all), and conversely that the real can only become real through its opposition to the ideal. This highlights that although Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is a form of idealism it represents an important shift from Fichte's subjective idealism as Schelling's system implies that the subject and the object are equally fundamental to the actualisation of the absolute: both are necessary together, and neither is reducible to the other.[10]

Finally, the infinite productivity of the absolute and the finite product which constitutes nature both require one another: if nature was purely a product, the conditions of its productivity would lie outside it, which would mean invoking a transcendent entity and an extrinsic purpose, both of which Schelling is committed to denying. Thus the ground of nature's productivity must lie within it: productivity and product must be united if nature is to be an autonomous self-sufficient realm. Similarly, without finite products to express itself in and oppose itself to the infinite productivity of nature would come to nothing, would never be actualised. As Esposito argues:

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> If nature were pure process alone, there would be nothing toward which it strived; no product could be produced to resist the further encroachment of process, even temporarily, so there would be no process in the first place. (Esposito 1977: 83)

Product and productivity (and the other oppositions detailed above) never exist apart from one another; natural objects and nature as a whole are combinations of product and productivity. As Fischer notes:

> [T]here is no such thing in nature as the merely produced; there is no pure product [. . .] Similarly, there is no pure productivity. Productivity must be made determinate; it must be limited by the fixity and permanence of product. (2020: 4)

This reciprocal dependence reflects the fact that for Schelling the relationship between the above pairs of opposites is one of identity: they express two aspects of the same fundamental activity which must appear as distinct only to become actual. Thus productivity and product do not simply *happen* to require one another; they are united as two elements or manifestations of the same process. I will return to the nature of this relationship of identity and its implications for Schelling's account of human freedom in my account of the *Freedom* essay later in this project.

For our purposes in this chapter the most central of the above pairs is productivity and product, as it highlights why nature plays such a fundamental role in Schelling's system: as the absolute (as pure productive force) can never become actual without being instantiated in nature (as product), nature is the concrete manifestation of the absolute. Although we can *think* of nature and the absolute as separate, in reality they never exist except as unified. This is why the *Naturphilosophie* is central for Schelling: the only way that we can know the absolute is through its products (*Outline*, 14; SW III, 12–13)[11] therefore *Naturphilosophie* represents the only method available for coming to know the absolute.

This structure of opposing but mutually dependent powers or tendencies which are united as two aspects of the same process is central to Schelling's conception of nature and his conception of natural beings. For Schelling, all natural beings reflect the basic activity of the absolute of which they are manifestations, so all of these beings are similarly products of the interactions of opposed but mutually dependent powers which are unified in nature as a whole. This highlights the centrality of powers to Schelling's account, providing further support for my claim that the *Naturphilosophie* is fundamentally a powers-based system: the absolute is primordial will or power which actualises itself through the interactions of its two basic tendencies or powers, and this process is then repeated throughout nature whereby natural powers interact to produce different natural products. How these powers give rise to the concrete beings which constitute nature as product will be the focus of pages 90–100 of this chapter.

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The Actualisation of the Absolute

Although the absolute as productive and the absolute as product (nature) are inseparable, Schelling argues that we can nonetheless reconstruct the process through which the absolute actualises itself in the natural world. To refer to this as a process is somewhat misleading as the term process implies a temporal sequence of stages, when in the case of the absolute giving rise to nature these 'stages' are inseparable, mutually dependent and do not take place in any temporal order. For this reason it is perhaps more apt to refer to them as aspects, where these aspects are simultaneous and presuppose one another: Schelling argues that the third aspect is only conceivable as a third in relation to the first two and, conversely, that these first two only become possible in relation to the third (*Ideas*, 181; SW II, 226). These three aspects constitute three different unities (with Schelling characterising the absolute as the unity of all three unities): the first unity expresses the transition of essence into form, the infinite embodied in finitude, and characterises the manifestation of the absolute in its concrete form as material nature. The first unity necessitates the second, which is the transition of form into essence, the finite embodied in the infinite, and is constituted by the arising of the subjective in nature in the form of light.[12] The third embodies the unity of the first two, but unites them *as distinct*: they retain their difference within this final unity (*Ideas*, 48; SW II, 64). As the absolute has come out of itself and created the original opposition that leads to nature, this opposition can now never be fully overcome: the indifference of the absolute is impossible to recreate once differentiation has been introduced into being; this is why the third unity can only ever unify the first two *as distinct*. Schelling describes the three aspects as the real unity, the ideal unity and the unity of real and ideal (*Ideas*, 83; SW II, 107).

This dynamic sequence is repeated throughout nature, and it is through this threefold process that different kinds of natural product arise. Nature's forces are a reflection of the fundamental forces which constitute the activity of the absolute: a tendency for infinite productivity which constitutes a continual movement and striving forward; which is limited by a negative force which strives to turn the productive force back on itself; and finally the two forces are unified (as distinct) in particular products. It is the interaction of these forces at different levels of nature which drives nature's productivity and structures the development of natural products:

> These two conflicting forces conceived at the same time in conflict and unity, lead to the idea of an *organising principle*, forming the world into a system. Perhaps the ancients wished to intimate this with the *world-soul*. (*World-Soul*, 96; SW II, 381)

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Thus, for Schelling, the world-soul does not refer to a vitalist animating principle or to universal subjectivity, but rather to the basic structure which organises nature into products and is present at all levels from the inorganic to rational subjects. As Stone notes: '[For Schelling] nature is composed of one single fundamental structure – the interdependence of opposed forces – that elaborates itself at different levels of realisation' (Stone 2018: 129). This claim, that there is one single natural process which manifests itself in various ways in different natural products, is central to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and is a claim that he maintains throughout his philosophical career.

The organising activity of nature's basic forces constitutes a continual process which necessarily extends to infinity; if everything that exists is a manifestation of the absolute we must conclude that:

> *[B]eing itself* is nothing other than *the constructing itself*, or since construction is thinkable only through activity, *being itself* is nothing other than the *highest constructing activity*, which, although never itself an object, is the principle of everything objective. (*Outline*, 13–14; SW III, 12)

As the absolute is by nature productive activity, it follows that this activity will not reach its conclusion until the absolute has fully realised its nature in its product. Thus the absolute continually strives to manifest itself in a product which expresses the universal in a form which wholly exemplifies its essence. However, as the absolute can only give rise to products by inhibiting its activity and thus limiting its infinitude, it can only produce finite products which are necessarily incapable of expressing its nature: as the absolute is infinite its activity could never be exhibited in a finite product but only in an infinite one (*Outline*, 15; SW III, 14). This entails that nature is an infinite process: the productive tendency of the absolute attempts to create an infinite product; however, as all products involve limitation it can only produce the finite. This finitude is an affront to nature's infinite productivity, so productive nature continually strives to destroy its finite products and to subsume them into a unity in order that it can attempt to create new products that come closer to approximating the unity of the absolute. As Fischer notes: 'this oscillation between productivity and product never resolves, [nature is] a state of becoming, contesting against all permanence, infinite in its development and evolution' (2020: 5). This highlights the somewhat paradoxical relationship between nature as productivity and nature as product: productivity can only express itself in products, but products are necessarily finite so always fail express infinite productivity. Therefore nature's becoming will continue infinitely as it will always fail to exemplify its essence in form, never able to exhaust its productive drive in any particular product. This is why Schelling states that 'nature contests the individual; it longs for the absolute and continually

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endeavours to represent it' (*Outline*, 35; SW III, 43): the productive aspect of nature abhors the individual as individual products constitute a barrier to its striving to achieve absolute unity. This will turn out to have important implications for Schelling's conception of organisms and of freedom, which I return to below.

It is because of the infinite productivity of nature that Schelling states: 'the chief problem for the philosophy of nature is not to explain the *active* in nature, [. . .] but the *resting, permanent*' (*Outline*, 17; SW III, 18). As we have seen, products arise from nature's infinite productivity due to nature's opposing but mutually dependent tendency for limitation: products arise when productivity is limited or turned back on itself, thus crystallising into a product. However, as these natural products are reflections or manifestations of the absolute, Schelling argues that all products contain within them the potential and drive for development and activity; rather than being static, natural objects are 'permanent processes' (*Outline*, 32; SW III, 39) which express the continual activity of the absolute in their own self-maintenance and preservation. This will similarly have important implications for Schelling's conception of freedom discussed below.

The central point here is that for the *Naturphilosophie*:

> [T]he main objects of investigation are dynamical forces or productivity, not static objects or products. The static object is always secondary with respect to the forces and powers that generate and maintain it. Thus there is unity at the level of production and diversity at the level of the products in nature. (Peterson, in *Outline,* xxix)

This is why Schelling likens natural products to whirlpools – a whirlpool is a determinate object, but one which consists in a continual process which is grounded in the whole to which it belongs:

> A stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance – a whirlpool forms. Every original product of Nature is such a vortex, every organised being. E.g., the whirlpool is not something immobilized, it is rather something constantly transforming – but reproduced anew at every moment. Thus no product in Nature is *fixed*, but is reproduced at each instant. (*Outline*, 18n; SW III, 18n)

This quotation makes explicit both the inherent activity of organisms as well as the extent to which Schelling considers all natural products as modifications of a single whole – nature. Nature as a whole is activity, and 'individual being can be viewed as a determinate form or limitation of the original activity' (*Outline*, 14; SW III, 12): particular natural products are determinate aspects of a wider whole. In fact, speaking in terms of particular natural products is somewhat misleading, as for Schelling there is really only *one* product, concrete nature as a whole: 'all these various products =

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one product that is inhibited in sundry stages. They are derivations from *one* single ideal' (*Outline*, 6; SW III, 6). This conception of nature as a single product relates to Schelling's claim that we should conceive of nature as an organism. Nature is an organic whole, and all natural products are simply parts of this whole, particular limitations of the being of the whole *as* whole. As Beiser notes:

> What creates and maintains life in every individual thing is simply its participation in the soul of Nature, the *natura naturans*. All particular things are simply modes or functions of the growth and development of this original productive activity, corresponding to the various stages in its differentiation and growth. (Beiser 2002a: 547)

Thus for Schelling there is both a hierarchy of natural products, as each represents a different stage of limitation of the whole (I return to this idea in more detail below), but also an interdependence between each individual part of nature as well as between these parts and the whole: 'Nature has admitted nothing, in her entire economy, which could exist on its own and independently of the interconnection of things' (*Ideas*, 87; SW II, 111). This underpins Schelling's conception of causation as a fundamentally reciprocal relation: community (reciprocal interaction) is prior to efficient causality and individual substance because the whole is given first. Other causal relations within the whole thus depend on this reciprocal relationship, and individual objects or substances then arise as a result of these relations. I return to this claim below, arguing that this account presents a problem for attempting to defend a libertarian conception of human freedom. This problem arises because as aspects or limitations of the universal organism, agents are simply parts of a wider whole and are therefore in an important sense determined by the concept of the whole rather than by their individual motivations.

Nature's Potencies and the Genesis of Natural Products

The single structure I have been outlining (which Schelling will later refer to as the natural process) is the way that the fundamental tendencies of the absolute are manifested in nature, and it is this same process which gives rise to all of the differentiated natural forms which constitute nature as a whole. This threefold process, through which the absolute makes the transition from essence to form, from form to essence, and finally to the unity of the two, is repeated at every level of nature and gives rise to all natural objects. Schelling describes the phenomena which correspond to each of the three stages as potencies:

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> These unities, each of which signifies a degree of embodiment of the infinite into the finite, are represented in 3 potencies of the philosophy of nature. The first unity, which in embodying the infinite into the finite is itself again this embodiment, presents itself as a whole through the *universal structure of the world*, individually through the series of bodies. The other unity, of the reverse embodiment of the particular into the universal or essence, expresses itself, though always in subordination to the real unity which is predominant in nature, *universal mechanism*, where the universal or essence issues as *light*, the particular as *bodies*, in accordance with all dynamical determinations. Finally, the absolute integration into one, or indifferencing, of both unities, yet still in the real, is expressed by *organism*, which is therefore once more the *in-itself* of the first two unities, and the perfect mirror image of the absolute in nature and for nature. (*Ideas*, 51; SW II, 68)

Schelling describes the first potency, matter in space, as the embodiment of unity in multiplicity: the unity of the absolute disperses into particular forms of being, corporeal bodies. The second potency represents the endeavour of the particular to return to universality and is manifested in light; Schelling argues that this potency gives rise to forms of activity and process (reflecting the essential nature of the absolute) yet still within the confines of space. The third potency, which expresses the indifference point of universality and particularity and reflects the unity of the absolute as both essence and form, is found in the organism. For Schelling, it is in the organism that the two aspects of the absolute are united: where the first potency expresses only the absolute as being (*natura naturata*) and the second expresses the absolute only as becoming or activity (*natura naturans*), in the unity of the organism 'the being is activity, and activity at the same time being' (*Ideas*, 138; SW II, 176). Thus with the emergence of the organism, the indifference point of the real and ideal in the natural world, the ideal aspect of the absolute emerges as reason and the process of the absolute's manifestation in nature has come full circle, with the original unity of the absolute reproduced in the agent:

> [W]ith the perfectly real image of the absolute in the real world, the most perfect organism, the completely *ideal* image, also immediately enters, as reason [. . .] here, in the real world, the two sides of the absolute act [. . .] show themselves as archetype and ectype of each other, just as they do in the absolute; reason symbolizing itself in the organism, just as the act of cognition does in eternal nature; and the organism is transfigured into absolute reality in reason, just as nature is transformed in the eternal resumption of the finite into the infinite. (*Ideas*, 51; SW II, 68–9)

Although the organism represents a point of unity in nature, a reflection of the unity of the absolute, this does not signify the end of the process as the productive drive in nature necessitates that the threefold process must begin anew in organic life: the formative impulse which leads to the construction of matter gives rise to the reproductive drive in organisms; the drive to transform form into essence gives rise to the phenomenon of irritability;

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and finally the unity of essence and form gives rise to sensibility. I return to these organic phenomena in more detail below.

The important point with regard to the construction of the different potencies of nature is that the process which gives rise to them is the same: each potency arises from the last by the same threefold process which transforms essence into form, form into essence, and finally unifies the two on a higher level: 'The potencies [differ] only in form but not in content or substance: they are only different kinds of manifestation of one thing, namely, living force' (Beiser 2002a: 549). This demonstrates the importance of the concept of force for Schelling's non-reductive account of subjectivity and nature: this account is holist as it is the same natural powers interacting in different ways and at different levels of complexity (but always in accordance with the same threefold organising principle) which gives rise to different natural products. Thus Schelling is able to argue that all natural products share the same ontological ground as they are manifestations of the same fundamental activity, therefore ensuring the unity of nature and subjectivity. The way that Schelling attempts to achieve the irreducibility of subjectivity to nature will be outlined later in this chapter.

The process through which the potencies of nature arise through the interactions of the same basic forces is most clearly seen in Schelling's account of the construction of matter. As I outlined above, Schelling argues against the Newtonian conception of matter and force as distinct and concludes that we must conceive of matter as being composed wholly of forces. The Newtonian is right to maintain that the nature of matter consists in occupying space, but Schelling argues that matter in fact *fills up* space – matter is able to occupy space only by virtue of the fact that it is inherently active: 'What IS *in space* is in space by means of a continually active filling up of space; therefore, in every part of space there is moving force' (*Outline*, 20; SW III, 22).[13] In order to account for matter's ability to fill space, it is necessary to posit a positive, repellent force, a force which expands outwards thus ensuring that no other object is able to fill the same point in space. However, Schelling argues that if matter were composed of this repellent force alone it would continue to expand outwards to infinity,[14] thus filling all space. If this were the case, matter would in a sense be everything and nothing: there would be no such thing as a determinate quantity of matter at a particular point in space; matter would be everywhere and therefore nowhere. Thus it is necessary to posit an opposing negative force which is attractive by nature and limits the activity of the positive force by restricting its activity to a determinate position. Again, this force alone cannot constitute the essence of matter, as if matter were composed of just this attractive force its attempts to limit would result in it imploding into itself in a single point, thus again matter would in a sense be nothing.

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This is a difficult set of thoughts to grasp, and is perhaps best thought of in terms of limits: matter must include the power to fill space (in order for it to exist at all it must be capable of extending itself in space and preventing other objects from occupying the same space); however, this power needs to be limited in order that matter can be a determinate quantity. The attractive or retarding force is therefore necessary to provide a boundary which binds the expansive force to a determinate point, forming matter in space. Thus Schelling argues that:

> [R]epulsive force without attractive force is *formless*; attractive force without repulsive force *has no object*. The one [repulsive] represents the original *unconscious,* mental self-activity, which by nature is unrestricted; the other [attractive], the *conscious* determinate activity, which first gives form, limit, and outline to everything. But the object is never without its limit, or matter without its form. The two may be separated in reflection; to think of them as separated in reality is absurd. (*Ideas*, 187; SW II, 234)

This quotation makes explicit the sense in which the construction of matter reflects the original activity of the absolute: both require the interaction of two opposed but mutually dependent tendencies interacting within a wider unity in order to become actual. Schelling argues that matter requires two opposing mutually dependent forces but also a third term which unites the two – gravity. This is one element of his critique of Kant's conception of matter – Kant was correct to argue that the interaction of forces is necessary for matter, but failed to realise that this interaction only becomes intelligible on the basis of a third unifying principle (*Outline*, 189–92; SW III, 264–8). The positive and negative forces thus correspond to the original tendencies of productivity and limitation in the absolute. The fact that matter requires *both* of these forces in order to become actual reflects and makes explicit the extent to which the absolute's two opposing tendencies are fundamentally inseparable:

> [W]here the positive exists, the negative exists – and precisely because of it. Neither the latter or the former exist *absolutely and in itself.* Both maintain a single, isolated existence only in the moment of conflict; where this breaks off, the two disappear into one another. (*World-Soul*, 115–16; SW II, 396)

Finally, in order for these tendencies to be able to interact they must both be united in a higher unity: the absolute.

Schelling thus concludes that 'no matter is, or can be, anything but forces attracting and repelling through action and reaction' (*Ideas*, 143; SW II, 179). This further supports my claim that forces are central to Schelling's account of nature. Matter itself, and all of its properties, depends on the nature of the fundamental forces which constitute it: '*all quality of matter rests whole and solely on the intensity of its basic forces*' (*Ideas*, 216; SW II, 272).

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This process through which the fundamental natural forces interact to give rise to matter is then repeated on a higher level: matter and forces combine in different ways to give rise to chemical bodies and chemical systems; these systems and forces combine in different ways to produce more complex bodies; and this process continues through higher and higher degrees of organisation until the organism emerges, at which point the process begins again through the emergence of reproduction, irritability and sensibility. Coppleston summarises:

> [T]he original construction of matter is repeated, as it were, at the higher level. On the lower level we have the elementary operation of the forces of attraction and repulsion and their synthesis in matter as mass. At the higher level we find the same forces showing themselves in the phenomena of magnetism, electricity and chemical processes or the chemical properties of bodies. (Coppleston 1963: 111)

Different natural beings thus differ only in terms of the combination and concentration of the forces which constitute them:

> [T]he identity of a material is ascertained only by the permanence of its qualities, its identity in no way differs from the latter; every material is thus nothing other than a *determinate degree of action.* (*Outline*, 23; SW III, 25–6)

This helps to shed light on Schelling's earlier claim that all natural products are simply processes: as all natural products are composed of varying degrees of forces these products are therefore nothing more than the continual process of interaction of these forces. Qualitative differences between objects rest simply on differences in dynamic process: all natural objects are dynamic processes; but different objects arise from different quantities and combinations of powers and therefore have different qualities. Thus Peterson argues that for Schelling: '"Forces" are the empirical manifestation of nature's 'productivity' or activity, and all matter, organic or inorganic, is composed of a play of forces' (in *Outline*, xviii). Again, the similarity to the accounts that I outlined in Chapter 1 should be clear here.

A second important point arising from Schelling's argument that all natural objects are composed of varying degrees of forces is that this further supports his claim that all nature constitutes a single active system, and thus there is no essential differentiation between different levels of nature and natural products. For Schelling, as each potency synthesises the forces present in the lower potency, nature constitutes more and more complex forms of the same basic process:

> What is implicit, inchoate, and disparate on a lower level or potency becomes explicit, organised, and unified on the higher one. Since a higher potency unifies the factors of a lower potency, it reproduces them and so is not completely distinct from them. (Beiser 2002a: 548)

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This unity of different natural products, and Schelling's claim that higher potencies arise from lower potencies, means that we can consider Schelling as an emergentist – as claiming that certain natural products are emergent phenomena which arise from other natural products or processes. This claim, that there is no essential differentiation between different levels of nature, falls out of any ontology which posits powers as the fundamental ontological constituent. It is this claim that allows these kinds of account to maintain the continuity between subjectivity and nature, but I will argue that it also leads to a problem surrounding the individuation of entities which has serious consequences for attempting to argue for a libertarian conception of human freedom.

The Emergence of Organisms and the Unity of Organic and Inorganic Nature

Schelling's account of the construction of matter from the fundamental forces of nature is reflected in his account of the emergence of organic from inorganic nature. The process through which matter arises is repeated at increasing degrees of complexity giving rise to electricity, chemical systems, magnetism and so on up through the levels of inorganic nature until the organism is produced. This process then continues to repeat at the level of organic nature, giving rise to more and more complex organisms until reason and self-consciousness emerge at the level of the rational subject.[15] This unity of process resulting in a diversity of products is the reason why:

> For Schelling the opposition between the organic and inorganic realms is merely apparent, and [. . .] the attempt to reduce one to the other is futile, and a false problem. They are not opposed at all; the organic is nothing but a 'raising to a higher power' of the inorganic forces. (Peterson, in *Outline*, xxxii)

For Schelling the apparent opposition between inorganic and organic nature results from the failure to understand the unity of nature:

> *All diversity of natural products can only derive from the various proportions of actants.* All multiplicity of nature is to be sought in the elementary actants alone; matter is everywhere *one*, only the proportions of the original combination are different. (*Outline*, 29; SW III, 34–5)

Once we come to understand the unity of nature, and understand all natural products as expressions of the same fundamental forces, we begin to see that the opposition between organic and inorganic nature is misguided. The differences between different types of natural product are only differences in form and organisation; the fundamental constituents of all natural products

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are the same: nature's basic forces which through dynamic interactions give rise to a diverse range of natural forms.

This unity of organic and inorganic nature is demonstrated, for Schelling, by the fact that we can identify the same threefold process at work in all natural forms: '*the same dynamic sequence of stages prevails in universal and anorganic nature as in organic nature*' (*Outline*, 9; SW III, 9). Thus we begin with three basic natural forces (the attractive, the repulsive and gravity which unifies the two) which are then manifested in inorganic nature as chemical processes, electrical processes and magnetism, and these forces then manifest themselves at the level of the organism as sensibility, irritability and formative or reproductive drive. I will return to these final three 'organic functions' in more detail in the next section.

Organic nature is therefore a synthesis of the stages of inorganic nature which preceded it; the organism constitutes a higher form of organisation of the inorganic. However, Schelling argues that the organisation which is characteristic of natural organisms must be understood in relation to a different kind of causality to that which defines the inorganic: while the inorganic can be understood (to an extent) in terms of linear causality, the causality of the organism is in a sense circular, as in order to maintain its existence as an organised whole the organism's causal powers must be directed inwards (*World-Soul*, 92; SW II, 349). Schelling describes this kind of causality as a turning back on itself, as in order to maintain an organised form (i.e. to remain a *whole* and avoid the dispersal of its parts) the organism must continually direct its energy back towards itself so that it can use this energy to self-organise and self-maintain. Thus although the organism is composed of the same basic powers as the inorganic, it is importantly distinct as it must synthesise these powers on a higher level and with a different kind of causality. As Wandschnieder notes, 'the life-process presupposes the level of the dynamic process, but [at the same time] surpasses it' (2010: 79).

This emergence of the inorganic from nature's fundamental forces, and the organic from the inorganic, leads Richards to argue that 'Schelling was indeed proposing a real evolution occurring in nature and seems to have been the first thinker to apply the term to species alteration' (2002: 145). This evolutionary drive in nature reflects the activity of the fundamental tendencies of the absolute: the productive aspect of nature aims for the proliferation of as many natural forms as possible in its infinite attempt to manifest pure productivity, thus driving the evolutionary process. However, as outlined above, because this productive drive strives to manifest absolute unity (something which is impossible in particular natural products), once it has produced finite products it aims to subsume these within the whole in accordance with its drive to unity. This is where the limiting, particularising

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tendency of the absolute comes in: once the organism has emerged it strives to retain its individuality and particularity in the face of nature as a whole. And, because the organism is a reflection of nature as a whole and thus also possesses its productive drive, it is able to maintain its individuality by turning this productivity inwards and using its energy to self-organise.

For Schelling, evolution through different natural forms represents different stages of development of the same fundamental constituents: organic and inorganic forms are unified as they are both grounded in the activity of the same basic natural forces. However, this unity does not imply that the more highly organised natural products are in any sense reducible to those that are less organised:

> Nothing which *comes to be* in nature *comes to be* in a leap; all *becoming* occurs in a continuous sequence. But it by no means follows from this that everything which exists is for that reason continuously connected – that there should also be no leap between what *exists*. From everything that is, therefore, nothing has *become* without steady progression, a steady transition from one state to another. But now, since it *is*, it stands between its own boundaries as a thing of a particular kind, which distinguishes itself from others in sharp determinations. (*Ideas*, 133–4; SW II, 172)

Although there is unity and continuity in nature at the level of becoming (process), once higher forms of organisation have emerged from less organised forms they become distinct, for a number of reasons. Firstly, although they contain the same fundamental constituents, the higher forms synthesise the lower and thus have a far more complex organisation of these components, allowing for the emergence of properties which only arise at a certain level of complexity and are thus properties of the whole and are irreducible to the properties of its parts. Secondly, this organisation requires a kind of causality which is different to that exhibited on the lower levels, as it involves the turning inwards of causal power that is necessary for self-organisation and self-maintenance.

This progression from lower to higher forms of organisation, whereby the higher forms depend on but are irreducible to the lower forms, implies that there is a hierarchy in nature – nature evolves through various forms in its attempt to produce the closest possible approximation of its original unity. This is found in the unity of real and ideal which exists in the human subject: agents represent the third aspect of the absolute's progression as the real and ideal aspects of being are united in the agent. The agent has a real corporeal body, but also is the location of the emergence of reason which Schelling characterises as the ideal in nature.

This conception of the agent as representing the highest potency of nature does not, however, imply that the agent has some kind of priority over other natural products or that the rational capacities of the agent

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represent something transcendent – for Schelling the potential for the capacities characteristic of agents are already in some sense contained in less organised natural forms:

> [A]lready in the chemical properties of matter there are actually lying the first seeds, albeit still quite undeveloped, of a future system of nature, which in its most diversified forms and structures can evolve up to the point where creative nature seems to return back into herself. Thus the way is at once pointed out for further inquiries as to where in nature the necessary and the contingent, the mechanical and the free, part company. (*Ideas*, 149; SW II, 187)

The chemical systems which arise from the interactions of matter and forces already begin to organise themselves in a way that contains the beginnings of the kind of self-organisation that will later arise at the level of organisms. In fact, Schelling even goes further, arguing that even 'mere' matter itself contains life, albeit life of a more restricted kind than that enjoyed by organisms (*Ideas*, 35; SW II, 46 – see also *Ideas*, 136; SW II, 174). This means that matter itself is a condition of possibility for life and reason to emerge at all: 'matter is the general seed-corn of the universe, in which is hidden everything that unfolds in the later developments' (*Ideas*, 179; SW II, 223). This demonstrates that, for Schelling, just as the fact that more highly organised natural products evolve out of and are in some sense grounded in less organised forms does not necessitate that the former are reducible to the latter, the fact that this natural hierarchy (where more organised products are understood as closer and closer approximations to absolute unity) exists does not entail that the less organised forms are somehow subordinate to or less important than the higher forms. For Schelling, the less organised forms are essential for the emergence and continued development of the higher natural forms, and the relationship between them is one of reciprocity rather than priority of one over the other. Their relationship should rather be seen in terms of synthesis: in a synthesis the terms subsumed do not lose their meaning or significance but rather take their place within a wider whole of which they are an essential part and through which they gain fuller expression and meaning.

This relationship between the inorganic and the organic in nature, whereby the inorganic provides the conditions of possibility for the organic and is synthesised and raised to a higher level by the latter, is reflected in Schelling's conception of the relationship between mechanistic and teleological causality.[16] Coppleston argues that for Schelling:

> [I]t is a question of seeing the sphere of mechanics as the necessary setting for the realisation of the ends of Nature in the production of the organism. There is continuity. For the lower is the necessary foundation for the higher, and the latter subsumes the former in itself. But there is also the emergence of something new, and this new level explains the level which it presupposes. (Coppleston 1963: 110)

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While Schelling does not deny that mechanistic causality exists in nature, he strongly denies that it is the only kind of causation that exists, and that it can be used to accurately describe nature as a whole. This is because of the particular kind of causality which defines natural organisms: mechanistic causality takes place between two distinct individuals, a cause and an effect, and is a linear relationship, whereas in organisms the organism itself is both cause and effect and the relationship is circular (*Ideas*, 30; SW II, 40) However, this does not imply that mechanism and teleological causality are incompatible with one another: they are simply two different instances of the natural process, and the former is synthesised in (and so gains a higher significance in terms of) the latter. What it does imply, however, is that nature as a whole must be teleological: because it is not possible to explain teleology through mechanism but it is possible to explain mechanism as a means for teleology, Schelling argues that we must conceive of nature as a whole as a purposive organic system:

> If [. . .] we gather up Nature into a single Whole, *mechanism*, that is a regressive series of causes and effects, and *purposiveness*, that is, independence of mechanism, simultaneity of causes and effects, stand confronting each other. If we unite these two extremes, the idea arises in us of purposiveness of the whole: Nature becomes a circle which returns into itself, a self-enclosed system. The series of causes and effects ceases entirely, and there becomes a reciprocal connection of *means* and *end*; neither could the individual become *real* without the whole, or the whole without the individual. (*Ideas*, 40–1; SW II, 54)

Schelling goes on to argue that this judgement that nature as a whole is purposive is not arbitrary but necessary[17] as it is only with this understanding of nature that we can account for all the natural phenomena (from mechanistic systems to organisms to rational subjectivity) that we experience – unlike the mechanist's, Schelling's conception of nature as a purposive whole allows us to retain (rather than reduce) all of our knowledge of nature and to synthesise this knowledge under a single principle. The relationship of mechanism to teleology thus reflects the relationship between inorganic and organic nature: although the former is in a sense subsumed by the latter this does not imply its reducibility as although the latter gains its meaning by virtue of the former, it also provides the conditions which make the former possible.

Although Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* necessitates that we posit the absolute at the outset it also demonstrates that when we investigate various natural phenomena we find ourselves compelled to conceive of nature as expressing an absolute unity. The unity of real and ideal, cause and effect, and mechanism and teleology, that we find in organisms should therefore be our model for the way that we think of nature as a whole: nature is both ideal productivity (*natura naturans*) and real product (*natura naturata*), and like organic beings nature is a self-organising self-enclosed system in which

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productivity and causality are turned inwards in a circular manner. Like an organism, the causal powers of nature are self-directed and aim at nothing more than self-production and preservation. Through our investigations of nature we are thus led to a conception of nature as an organism which expresses itself in various different forms throughout nature, hence Schelling's claim that 'organisms overall are to be seen as only *one* organism inhibited at various stages of development' (*Outline*, 43; SW III, 54).

This understanding of nature as an organic whole is necessary in order for us to understand how it is that we fit into nature as a system, and to comprehend how our freedom and subjectivity can be part of nature and not separate from it: the organic conception of nature is necessary to rectify the alienation from nature which is brought about through reflection and enables us to have a greater understanding of nature as a whole as well as ourselves:

> So long as I myself am *identical* with nature, I understand what a living nature is as well as I understand my own life; I apprehend how this universal life of nature reveals itself in manifold forms, in progressive developments, in gradual approximations to freedom. As soon, however, as I separate myself, and with me everything ideal, from nature, nothing remains to me but a dead object, and I cease to comprehend how a *life outside* me can be possible. (*Ideas*, 36; SW II, 47–8)

Organisms and the Struggle for Individuality

Schelling's account of nature as a single organic unity of which particular natural products are limitations and his evolutionary account of the genesis of natural products entails a deep continuity between different natural forms. Why, then, is there such a diversity of natural organisms? And why is there a greater diversity of organic forms than of inorganic forms? There are a number of answers to these questions: firstly, the productive drive in nature strives to create as many natural products as possible in its quest to express absolute unity in a single product. Because each attempt to produce absolute unity necessarily fails, the absolute activity continues to give rise to more and more natural forms. Secondly, in my account of the *Naturphilosophie* as a power-based ontology, the reason that there is a far greater diversity of organic than inorganic forms relates to the structure and complexity of the fundamental forces which constitute both: because organic beings are more complex than inorganic beings, there is a wider range of different possible concentrations and combinations of these forces which can then give rise to a greater range of beings with different qualities:

> Every organism is defined, not primarily by its external form (though its form and organs will follow from the decomposition of its powers), but by the particular proportion of forces acting within it. (Peterson, in *Outline* xxx)

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Thus in the organism nature's basic forces are able to combine in a variety of ways to give rise to a diverse range of organic forms. Schelling describes the combination of these forces as lawless, but argues that the nature of the forces necessitates that they are constrained (by their own nature) to produce certain qualities in the product. Thus although the forces which constitute organic products are not bound by any law in their combination, they nonetheless give rise to '*lawful aspects of the product itself*' (*Outline*, 51; SW III, 65). The combinations of powers which manifest in organisms result in certain necessary functions, which Schelling argues are present in all organic life and which define the nature of the organic as opposed to the inorganic. All organic beings will therefore have the same functions although they will have these in different combinations, intensities and proportions which accounts for the diversities between different organic products.

These organic functions arise necessarily from the nature of the powers which constitute the organic as they mirror the threefold potencies which characterise nature as a whole. Thus reproductive force represents the first potency (and relates to chemical processes in inorganic nature); irritability represents the second potency (relating to electrical processes); and sensibility represents the third potency, the unity of the previous two (and thus relates to magnetism, the unity of opposites in one body). This is why Schelling argues that organic functions are nothing but inorganic functions 'raised to a higher power': the functions of organisms reflect the threefold structure which is present throughout nature, but on a higher level of complexity than inorganic functions. As is the case with all instances of this structure in nature, the three aspects of the process are dialectically related with each presupposing and mutually supporting the others.

Reproductive force pertains to the tendency of organisms to reproduce and to produce other individuals of the same kind, and thus relates to the positive expansive force. Irritability concerns an organism's ability to respond to stimuli in its environment and relates to the reactive attractive force. Finally, sensibility, as the synthesis of the first two, constitutes an organism's ability to react to environmental stimuli but also to respond to these stimuli and act on the world around it. Schelling argues that reproductive drive is the most widely distributed in nature, as all organisms have the capacity for reproduction. Conversely, high levels of sensibility are found in relatively few organisms. For Schelling, because of the nature of the threefold process, each of these aspects is inseparable from the others, so each is found in every natural organism but to greater and lesser degrees. Schelling argues that plants have very low levels of sensibility but very high levels of reproductive drive: plants have the capacity to reproduce numerous individuals of the same type but have very little capacity to act

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on their environment. Mammals, on the other hand, have a far lower level of reproductive drive and therefore will have relatively few offspring, but have high levels of sensibility and are therefore able to respond to and act on their environment in a vast number of ways.

This difference in organic functions thus accounts for the differences which apply in the organic realm, as different organisms are defined by the ways in which they are able to maintain their individuality against universal nature. Thus the plant maintains its individuality by producing large numbers of individuals of the same type (maintaining the individuality of its species rather than its own individuality), whereas mammals use their high levels of sensibility to react to their environment in novel ways and thus preserve themselves as individuals. The higher the degree of sensibility an organism has the more active it is able to be with respect to its environment, and the more creative it can be in finding new ways to interact with its surroundings thereby preserving its individuality. This ability for novelty and creativity culminates in agents with the emergence of reason, which gives creatures the capacity for rational reflection and thus creates new opportunities for novel engagements with the environment. Coppleston summarises:

> On the lower levels [. . .] the individual organisms are lost, as it were, in the species. On the higher levels [. . .] the organism is, so to speak, more of an individual and less a mere particular member of an indefinite class. The culminating point is reached in the human organism, which most clearly manifests the ideality of Nature and forms the point of transition to the world of representation or subjectivity, Nature's reflection on itself. (Coppleston 1963: 111–12)

This indicates why agents are a more perfect approximation of the absolute's unity than any other natural form: agents have the ability to direct themselves using reason; reflecting the rational self-directing nature of the absolute. It is important to note, however, that this capacity for rational reflection does not afford agents a kind of freedom not possessed by natural organisms: rather, all natural beings have the ability to act upon and creatively engage with their environment; the emergence of reason in agents simply means they have another tool at their disposal to use in this engagement.

This struggle for individuality is a central aspect of all organic life, and again is necessitated by the nature of the fundamental natural forces. As outlined above the basic tendencies of nature are conflicted: the productive drive strives for unity and universality whereas the limiting tendency strives for particularity and individuality. As the inherent activity of the absolute can only be expressed in an infinite product, yet all natural products are necessarily limited and therefore finite, the productive drive in nature strives to subsume all individual products in its attempt to return to

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the original undifferentiated unity of the absolute. This struggle between nature's tendency towards universality and its (mutually dependent but opposing) tendency for particularity is thus played out in the struggle of the individual organism to maintain its existence in the face of nature as whole. This is why Schelling claims that 'life, where it comes to exist, comes against the will of eternal nature, as it were, by a tearing away from it' (*Outline*, 62; SW III, 81).

Organisms, from the moment they emerge as products from universal nature, are engaged in continual activity and a struggle against nature in order to maintain their individuality. However, Schelling argues that this struggle is essential to the organism's continued activity and survival: 'The beginning of life is activity; it is a tearing loose from universal nature. But that activity is itself again receptivity, for receptivity is only the minus of activity' (*Outline*, 65; SW II, 85). In order to be active, and therefore maintain its individuality, the organism needs something to be active against – this is why Schelling argues that excitability is the necessary condition for life and the condition which is presupposed by reproductive drive, irritability and sensibility – the organism must be 'excited' into its activity by the activity of something external to it. Schelling's conception of the dialectical relationship between nature's fundamental forces, and his arguments for the necessity of reciprocal relations for causality, entail that activity is impossible unless in response to another action: '[A]ctivity and receptivity arise simultaneously in one and the same invisible moment, and precisely this simultaneity of activity and receptivity constitutes life' (ibid.). Thus although life is an activity which by nature resists external impact, it is also conversely an activity which cannot continue except in the face of external impact: the condition for life is this excitation from external influences. This highlights the importance of reciprocity in Schelling's ontology; in Chapter 5 I will argue that the nature of this reciprocal relationship enables Schelling's account of human freedom outlined in the *Freedom* essay.

In its struggle to assimilate and extinguish the individual, nature actually preserves life, 'because it always excites the organic activity anew, rekindles the flagging contest' (*Outline*, 62; SW III, 82). By continually attempting to subsume the individual into the universal, nature in fact provides the conditions necessary for life to flourish, simply because '[t]he activity of life is extinguished without an object, [so] it can only be excited through external influence' (*Outline*, 63; SW III, 82). Schelling comments that there is a certain irony in the tendency of the individual to attempt to completely free itself from nature: just as universal nature struggles to assimilate the individual (unaware that the individual is a condition for its continuing productivity), the individual continually strives to break away from nature as a whole entirely, unaware that its reciprocal interactions with nature are

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the conditions for its continued activity, and that if it was able to break away from nature completely the result would be non-existence.

The continual struggle between nature's tendencies to universality and particularity thus has an important implication for the nature and activity of organisms: in answer to the question 'how can any individual nature hold its own against the universal organism?' (*Outline*, 54, SW III, 70, emphasis removed) Schelling argues that 'in order not to *be* assimilated, it must *assimilate*; in order not to *be* organised it must *organise*' (ibid.). The struggle against nature as a whole necessitates that in order to maintain their individuality organisms must be inherently active: the organism must use its powers against nature, self-organise and find creative and novel ways to act on itself and its environment in order to preserve its individuality.[18] Just as the causal powers of nature are turned inwards in order to maintain the system as a whole, so too the causal activity of organisms is turned inwards so that they can maintain their individuality against universal nature. The more complex an organism is, the greater its activity and creativity will need to be, thus the distinction between inorganic and organic products is one of both complexity and activity. As Esposito summarises:

> [T]he differences that do exist [between the inorganic and the organic] are ones that derive from the *degree* of complexity of structure. The more evolution proceeds to the complex, the more difficult it becomes for the evolved product to achieve a state of indifference. Once irritability in the organism is established, it will continually respond to changes in its environment and will, through further development, seek to overcome these changes with its creative instinct [. . .] Life reaches out beyond itself to achieve wholeness, but the more it does so, the more productive it must become. (Esposito 1977: 92–3)

This need for organisms to become increasingly active against their environment as they increase in complexity plays an important role in Schelling's conception of freedom in the *Naturphilosophie*. The organisation and activity required for an organism to maintain its individuality entails an ability to act in a number of ways in the face of environmental pressures, and to develop in accordance with ends or purposes. Thus Esposito argues that for Schelling, 'to become more organised meant something had achieved greater freedom, for organisation made possible selectivity and purpose, and the latter made possible genuine freedom' (132). For Schelling in the *Naturphilosophie*, I suggest that freedom amounts to nothing more than the activity and creative instinct of an organism that enables it to survive and prosper in the face of its environment. The emergence of reason therefore marks an increase in the freedom of agents as opposed to other organisms only to the extent that reason constitutes an additional tool that the agent is able to deploy in the struggle against nature as a whole: reason allows for greater creativity and thus can give rise to novel forms of interaction with

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the environment which are unavailable to other organisms. However, the conception of freedom at work in the *Naturphilosophie* means that reason, far from being a precondition for freedom, is rather merely a special case, or a more sophisticated version, of the freedom which exists throughout nature. For Schelling, freedom comes in degrees, and the difference between the freedom of agents and the creative activity of organisms is therefore one of degree rather than kind. This conception of freedom as coming in degrees further entails that all natural products possess freedom to some degree, as the active natural powers which constitute freedom in organisms will be present to some extent in all natural products.

However, this account of freedom as the ability of organisms to struggle to assert themselves as individuals against the whole, of which they are ultimately aspects, raises two problems which I will return to throughout this book. The first is a problem with securing control: we tend to think that an important aspect of the freedom of agents is that they are in control of their actions in a way that other natural products are not. This underlies our intuition that agents have a special ethical status (even in the minimal sense that agents can be held responsible for their actions) which other natural products lack. However, in the conception of freedom outlined above it seems that the freedom which the agent has is fundamentally of the same kind as any other natural product: agents have no more or less control over their actions, and therefore are no more or less responsible, than any other natural organism. This account therefore fails to secure the aspect of agential control which is central to our conception of human freedom.

Secondly, I want to argue that this kind of control simply cannot be secured for agents, or for any other particular natural product, given Schelling's account in the *Naturphilosophie*. This is because of the central claim of the *Naturphilosophie* that all natural products are simply aspects or modifications of the absolute process: the powers which are manifested through natural products belong not to these products but to the absolute as a whole. Therefore the conception of freedom entailed by the *Naturphilosophie* also implies that there is a problem with individuation: it is impossible to individuate agents or any other natural products as the causal source of their actions because these actions are simply manifestations of the absolute process. It seems, then, that if any freedom exists in this system it is freedom not at the level of individual products but at the level of the absolute: the absolute freely manifests itself through the activities of its aspects; these aspects (even to the extent that we are able to pick them out from the process of nature as a whole) do not have any freedom in their own right. I give a more detailed account of why these problems necessarily arise from the power-based ontology of the *Naturphilosophie* at the beginning of the next chapter.

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The Importance of Powers in the *Naturphilosophie*

I have argued above that the *Naturphilosophie* is best understood as a power-based ontology. In my interpretation Schelling's central claim in the *Naturphilosophie* is summarised by Peterson when he states: '[For Schelling,] "Activity" is univocal being in itself' (Peterson, in *Outline*, xix). As I have shown, in Schelling's account nature is composed of active forces which combine in different ways to give rise to different natural products. Before moving on I want to briefly make clear the centrality of Schelling's power-based ontology to his *Naturphilosophie*. I suggest that there are certain aspects of this account which are only made possible on the basis of his power-based ontology, as well as certain other aspects which draw heavily on the active natural powers which underpin this system.

Firstly, Schelling's power-based ontology underlies his central claims regarding natural phenomena. As we saw above, Schelling's critiques of the mechanistic conception of nature draw heavily on his power-based ontology: his positive account of matter relies on a conception of opposed but mutually dependent powers; his arguments for the importance of reciprocal interaction in causality presuppose an account of causality as dispositional (because reciprocal interaction between causes and effects only becomes intelligible when we conceive of this relationship in terms of two objects manifesting complementary dispositions) and this in turn underlies his conception of the ends-based causality which defines not only natural organisms but also nature as a whole.

Further, Schelling's use of powers allows him to argue that nature is self-governing and self-grounding: as nature is composed of fundamentally active powers there is no need to appeal to an animating principle or ground external to nature to account for its activity. This can be seen most clearly in Schelling's account of natural laws. In the *Outline,* Schelling argues that:

> [S]ince nature gives itself its own sphere of activity, no foreign power can interfere with it; all of its laws are immanent, or *nature is its own legislator* (autonomy of Nature). Whatever happens in nature must also be explained from the active and motive principles which lie in it, or *nature suffices for itself* (autarchy of Nature). (*Outline*, 17; SW III, 17)

The account of natural laws alluded to in this passage suggests a conception of laws not as entities external to nature which determine the behaviour of objects, but rather as something immanent to nature and based on the activities of its fundamental forces. This suggests that the *Naturphilosophie* entails a conception of laws as descriptions of the activities of natural powers, and thus as able to evolve and change with the evolution of nature as a whole. This interpretation is supported by Schelling's comments in

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World-Soul that in the future or in the past the laws which describe the behaviour of nature could be radically different to those which describe its behaviour now (*World-Soul*, 91; SW II, 348–9)[19] – as nature evolves its powers will interact with one another in new ways, therefore the laws that we use to describe nature would also change. Thus on Schelling's account natural laws are fundamentally unfixed and flexible, as the evolution of nature will necessitate that laws (understood as descriptions of natural powers) are subject to change.

I argue that it is the presence of powers in Schelling's account that enables him to have this conception of natural laws as descriptions of the activities of powers rather than as entities which determine the behaviour of objects. That Schelling conceives of natural laws as descriptions of dispositions is further supported by the fact that he seems to hold that different natural laws and different kinds of causality can exist in different natural systems. In the *Ideas* Schelling discusses the difference between mechanical systems and chemical systems as a difference between kinds of causality: as the activities of the powers which constitute these systems are different, the causality which determines the system will be different, and the laws that we can use to describe these systems will similarly be different. Schelling seems to maintain that this will hold through all levels of nature: because different combinations of fundamental forces produce natural objects with varying levels of complexity, the behaviour of more complex systems will differ from those which are less complex; thus these different systems will be describable by different laws. Again, I hope that the similarity with the dispositional account of natural laws I outlined in Chapter 1 is clear here.

Finally, I suggest that Schelling's power-based ontology enables him to have the particular conception of agents that is present in the *Naturphilosophie*. The account of natural objects as arising from powers enables a conception of agents as fundamentally natural beings which emerge from the activity of natural powers. Because of Schelling's account of emergence (which I argued above is similarly dependent on his power-based ontology), he is also able to claim that there is something distinct and irreducible about agents: because there are certain powers (such as reason, self-consciousness and human freedom) which only emerge at the level of the agent, agents are irreducible to the less complex natural products from which they arise. However, Schelling is still able to claim that consciousness and reason are not transcendent properties as they too are fundamentally natural powers. It is important to note that this irreducibility of agents to lower-level natural products does not help to deal with the worry regarding individuation which I raised above: although Schelling's account of emergence secures the irreducibility of the organic to the inorganic, it does not entail that all natural beings are not reducible to the absolute as a whole.

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The Implications for Human Freedom

The *Naturphilosophie* entails certain consequences that seem to be necessary in arguing for a libertarian conception of human freedom. It is generally accepted that the libertarian must secure two central claims in order to argue for the reality of human freedom. The first of these is an open future: the future must not be fixed by the laws of nature or the present state of the world; there must be aspects of the future which are unsettled such that it can be within the power of agents to settle these matters through their actions. The second is the control of the agent over her behaviour: it is not enough that the future be unfixed; it must also be the case that the acts of the agent which fixes these matters is within her control. I suggest that in my account of the *Naturphilosophie* it is able to secure the first criterion, but will have some important difficulties regarding the second.

The *Naturphilosophie* presents a system with a fundamentally open future. This is ensured by a number of aspects of Schelling's account. Firstly, nature is a system of infinite productivity: it continually gives rise to new products and is fundamentally a system in process. This entails that the future of the system is open in the simple respect that it has not happened yet: the future state of the system just does not exist. In addition, the fact that nature is an evolving system whose laws are similarly evolving and are thus unfixed, ensures that the future of the system is not determined by its present state or by its laws: because these laws are subject to change as the system evolves, and are seen as descriptions of natural powers rather than as playing a determining role, they do not fix the future of the system. Thus Schelling's account of nature is able to secure the open future necessary for a libertarian conception of human freedom.

Schelling's account of causality is similarly helpful to the libertarian: Schelling's conception of causality as not merely efficient and his dispositional account of reciprocal action in causal relations (which implies that causes do not necessitate their effects) leave the necessary space for the libertarian to argue that the acts of agents are free from determination by causal antecedents.

However, agential control is arguably far harder to secure on Schelling's account of nature, because his conception of nature as an organism of which particular natural beings are merely parts or limitations implies that any acts seemingly performed by the parts are in fact acts performed *by* the whole *through* the parts. Similarly, his conception of the organic causality which characterises nature as a whole entails that all parts of the system, including the acts of agents, are in some sense determined by the concept inherent in the whole rather than by the agent herself. These considerations, and those which I raised on pages 97–8 above, indicate that securing the

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ability of the agent to control her actions is problematic on the basis of the *Naturphilosophie*. Later in this project I want to argue that this is a problem that will arise for any pan-dispositionalist; in the next chapter, however, I will have more to say about the exact nature of this problem and why it is entailed by the *Naturphilosophie*.

Notes

1. Due to my particular focus in this project I am looking at a relatively limited slice of Schelling's work; however, I think that this claim about the consistency of the basic ontological structure which Schelling uses applies to his later work too, though I do not have the space to provide arguments for this claim in the current project.
2. For the purposes of this chapter I am using a narrow conception of what constitutes the *Naturphilosophie*, taking this term only to refer to the *Ideas*, the *World-Soul*, the *Outline* and the *Introduction*. The question of what counts as part of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is a difficult one. While I perhaps do not go far as Grant (2006) who claims that all of Schelling's work should be considered *Naturphilosophie*, I agree that the concept of nature is central to Schelling's ontology throughout his works, and that he produces work that could be considered as *Naturphilosophie* until very late in his life. Therefore I do not want to make any claims about what should or should not be considered as 'the' *Naturphilosophie*, and will be using the texts mentioned above because they provide a good sense of Schelling's thinking about nature at a particular time prior to the *Freedom* essay, and are therefore a useful set of works to highlight the trajectory of ideas that I argue takes place.
3. Schelling initially argues that transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophi*e form two complementary aspects of a whole system of philosophy:

   > Now if it is the task of transcendental philosophy to subordinate the real to the ideal, it is, on the other hand, the task of the Naturphilosophie to explain the ideal by the real. The two sciences are therefore but one science, differentiated only in the opposite orientation of their tasks. Moreover, as the two directions are not only equally possible, but equally necessary, the same necessity attaches to both in the system of knowledge. (Schelling, *Introduction*, 194; SW III, 272–3)

   However, Beiser argues that *Naturphilosophie* must be seen as having priority over transcendental philosophy due to Schelling's conviction that the absolute is neither subjective nor objective: transcendental philosophy's priority of the subject implies that the subjective is absolute whereas *Naturphilosophie*, as it deals with nature as subject as well as nature as object, is able to accommodate the claim that subjects and objects are equally necessary aspects of the being of the absolute, but that neither subject or object taken in isolation from the other are absolute (Beiser, 2002a: 485). Schelling later explicitly argues for the priority of *Naturphilosophie* in his 1800 *General Deduction of the Dynamic Process*; as Vater summarises Schelling claims here that 'Philosophy can travel two paths – from us humans towards nature, or from nature to us – but the true path is the one that nature has *actually* followed' (Vater 2013: 7). This indicates that although both transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie* are legitimate directions of travel for the philosopher, only the latter gives an accurate account of the process of reality. The 1801 *On the True Concept of the Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Method for Solving its Problems* also argues that *Naturphilosophie* is superior, as only *Naturphilosophie* is able to operate within the original identity between subject and object. (SW IV, 92; 2014, 10)
4. To describe Schelling's absolute as 'substance' is perhaps misleading as this term is often taken as having materialist connotations – as the absolute is neither

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subjective nor objective, to describe it either as substance or as mind/subject is incorrect. However, because the absolute contains no differentiation and is prior to all difference, any way of characterising it will be problematic as all concepts involve limitation. As language and conceptual thought both involve determination (and therefore negation), all attempts to apply any concept or term to the absolute will necessarily fail to capture its nature.

5. This is one area where Schelling's arguments have clear parallels with contemporary work on pan-dispositionalism – the claim that there is no need to appeal to something over and above natural objects to explain their activity, or to explain natural laws, should be familiar from my outline of contemporary pan-dispositionalist views in Chapter 1.
6. The above summary of Schelling's discussion of the analogies follows Esposito (1977: 56–68).
7. *Ideas*, 32; SW II, 42:

   > Certainly there are philosophers who have *one* universal answer to all these questions, which they repeat at every opportunity and cannot repeat enough. That which is form in the things, they say, we initially impose on the things. But I have long sought to know just how you could be acquainted with what the things are, without the form which you first impose on them, or what the form is, without the things on which you impose it. You would have to concede that, *here* at least, the form is absolutely inseparable from the matter, and the concept from the object. Or, if it rests with your choice whether or not to impose the idea of purposiveness on things outside you, how does it come about that you impose this idea only on *certain* things, and not on *all*, that further, in this representing of purposeful products, you feel yourself in no way *free*, but absolutely constrained? You could give no other reason for either than that this purposive form just belongs to certain *things* outside you, originally and without assistance from your choice.

8. Schelling's changing terminology for the absolute reflects his changing philosophical position: in his Fichtean period he refers to the absolute I or ego, but during his works on *Naturphilosophie* he comes to refer to it simply as the absolute. As we will see, in the later stages of his work he begins to refer to the absolute as God. I include some brief discussion of the relationship between God and the absolute for Schelling in the next two chapters. An interesting and fruitful research project would be to chart Schelling's changing terminology for the absolute and to investigate the implications that it has for his system. However, this is not something I have the space to even begin to attempt in this book.
9. Schelling frequently describes the absolute in terms of will, and often describes it as an act. However, this characterisation of the absolute as act or will should not be taken to imply that Schelling conceives of the absolute as ideal or subjective by nature. Rather, I suggest that Schelling uses terms such as act which we associate with subjectivity for the same reason that de describes himself as a critic (idealist) rather than a dogmatist (realist): because the language of consciousness is able to capture the aspect of process and activity inherent in the absolute in a way that materialistic language is incapable of doing.
10. Schelling's idealism is absolute as opposed to subjective idealism. Absolute idealism does not consist in the claim that reality is grounded in or a product of subjectivity or mind, but rather the claim that there is a rational structure to reality which is reflected in (and therefore accessible to) individual consciousness. The claim that the real and ideal aspects of reality are united is a fundamental claim of this kind of idealism, and it is for this reason that Beiser argues that absolute idealism is inseparable from *Naturphilosophie* – *Naturphilosophie* is necessary to incorporate the main claims and solve the central problems which define absolute idealism (2002a: 467). Some claim that it is misleading to refer to absolute idealism as idealism at all: 'After a careful study of their thought one might well come to the conclusion that the term "idealist" is an inaccurate description of these thinkers' (Seidel 1976: 12). Arguably,

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absolute idealism is best thought of as realism about concepts or ideas, as the claims that these have a real existence independent of individual thinkers and that they play some role in the structuring of reality. These considerations make explicit the importance of conceiving of Schelling's absolute not as subjective but as the *indifference* point of the real and the ideal – to do otherwise fails to do justice to Schelling's intentions. Schelling himself explicitly warns against the temptation to prioritise the subjective over the objective, arguing that this mistake leads to a problematic system such as Fichte's (*Ideas*, 51; SW II, 67–8).

11. In fact, Schelling argues that we *cannot* know the absolute through natural products, as these products are only limitations or partial approximations of the absolute. However, the only way that we can come to know the absolute is by reconstructing its nature in accordance with the aspects of it that are accessible to us, namely natural products. Thus although we cannot gain knowledge of the absolute through investigating its products alone (this, Schelling argues, would be empirical science rather than *Naturphilosophie*), we must take these products as our necessary point of departure.
12. Schelling's views on light are complex; however, the details are not essential to my arguments here and therefore I will not be considering them in detail. For a good discussion of Schelling's conception of light and the role of light in the *Naturphilosophie*, see Esposito (1977: 88–93).
13. See also *Ideas*, 185; SW II, 231: 'Matter occupies space, not through its mere *existence,* but through an inherently *moving force*, whereby the *mechanical* motion of matter first becomes possible. Or rather, matter itself is nothing else but a moving force.'
14. Schelling conceives of the two basic forces of attraction and repulsion as being infinite, although he never makes clear why this must be the case – presumably these fundamental forces must be infinite as they are manifestations of the absolute's infinite tendencies for productivity and limitation. Of course, neither of these forces is in fact infinite, as each is limited by it opposite.
15. For a brief but detailed account of the construction of matter, and how this same process leads to the emergence of life and subjectivity, see Wandschneider (2010: 77–80).
16. The term teleology is perhaps misleading here as it has implications of some kind of overarching essential concept or plan which organisms and nature as a whole strive towards. While it seems that there is a teleology in nature and in natural products for Schelling, it is not clear that the concept or end to which organisms strive is any more than their own self-preservation and self-maintenance. I suggest that Schelling's conception of teleology should be interpreted in the same way as Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, which simply refers to the drive of each individual (including nature as a whole) to preserve its own existence through activity.
17. This judgement is necessary in the transcendental sense that reason is compelled to think of nature in this way: Schelling states that '[i]t is […] a necessary maxim of the reflective reason, to presuppose everywhere in Nature a connection by end and means' (ibid. 41, SWII, 54).
18. See Kabeshkin (2017) for a good account of this process.
19. It is important to note that this possibility of change in the laws of nature does not refer to a counterfactual analysis (of the form '*if* things had been different in some way the laws of nature could have been different'), but rather a claim that *given the state of the world as it is now* it is possible that the laws of nature could change. Thanks to Tim O'Connor for alerting me to this point.

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Chapter 4

Absolute Identity: Between the *Naturphilosophie* and the *Freedom* Essay

Introduction

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* attempted to find a way out of the impasse represented by the conceptions of freedom found in Kant, Spinoza and Fichte. The power-based ontology which constitutes the *Naturphilosophie* entails a dynamic conception of nature, rendering all natural products inherently active (thus avoiding the passivity of individual objects which we find in Spinoza's account), but also enables an understanding of agents as continuous with the natural world (avoiding the radical separation of free agents from mechanistic nature which we find in Kant and Fichte). At the end of the previous chapter I outlined a number of further ways that Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* provides a good basis for a libertarian conception of freedom: as well as implying the openness of the future, the *Naturphilosophie* holds that laws of nature are not deterministic but rather are descriptions of the interactions of active natural powers. This, coupled with the claim that causes do not necessitate their effects, leads to a conception of nature which includes the open future and lack of determinism necessary to argue for libertarian freedom. However, I also highlighted a problem for attempting to combine libertarianism with Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*: that this system does not do enough to secure the control of an agent over her actions that is required for libertarian freedom. Schelling barely discusses human agency in the texts which constitute the *Naturphilosophie*, and much less isolates what it is about agency which makes agents able to have control and ownership over their actions in a way that other natural beings do not. Put differently, as the *Naturphilosophie* presents a conception of natural objects as constituted by the activities of natural forces, and of the causal activities of these objects as the manifestation of these same natural forces, we need an

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account of what it is about agents that secures their unique ability to *control* these forces. If all natural products are merely vehicles for the activities of non-conscious natural forces, then without an account of how and why the agent is able to control these forces (and thus have ownership of her acts in the sense required for libertarian freedom) it seems that we must conceive of the agent too as a mere vehicle: a manifestation of forces that are neither the agent's own nor in any sense under her control.

In what follows I provide a more detailed account of this problem and argue that Schelling's position in the *Naturphilosophie* is more akin to compatibilism than libertarianism due to the failure of the *Naturphilosophie* to provide a satisfactory account of agency which makes intelligible the difference between a free agent and an un-free natural product. I further argue that this was a problem which Schelling was aware of, and claim that it was the awareness of this difficulty which led him to modify his conception of freedom and endorse the more Spinozist position which characterises his works on the *Identitätssystem*. I then outline the considerations, including worries about this Spinozist conception of freedom, which led Schelling to move away from the *Identitätssystem* and which define his goals in the *Freedom* essay, which I discuss in the following chapter.

I want to argue that the changes in Schelling's philosophical system and conception of freedom are motivated by his attempts at different solutions to the set of problems I have been highlighting throughout this project: each 'stage' of his philosophical development represents the attempt to think through one possible solution to this set of problems, and the changes in his system occur when it becomes clear that the attempted solution of the previous system is untenable. The set of problems which I have been arguing preoccupy Schelling throughout his philosophical career and which drive the changes in his system are as follows: the relationship of individuals to the whole; the relationship of freedom to system; the relationship of the infinite to the finite; and the relationship of ground to grounded. These problems are also reflected in his concern with the possibility of deriving content from the absolute. These problems represent facets of one single metaphysical problem that will arise for any monism: if reality is singular, how can we explain the existence of multiple, seemingly independent, entities? Moreover, how can we account for the existence of these entities in such a way that does not contradict the status of reality as singular? It seems either that the independence of these entities must be denied and their separateness from the whole dismissed as illusory (the whole subsumes individuals; freedom is not possible within system; there are no truly finite things; the grounded remains part of the ground); or the independent existence of these entities is affirmed at the cost of denying the singularity of reality (distinct individuals negate the absolute's oneness; freedom destroys

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the possibility of system; the finite limits and therefore negates the infinite; the grounded wholly supersedes the ground). For Schelling, none of these one-sided options is adequate, and I argue that his philosophical career (at least in the period from the *Naturphilosophie* to the *Freedom* essay) consists in the repeated attempt to find a solution to this set of problems which can balance both sides rather than advocating one at the expense of the other. A final problem (which I return to in more detail below), the question of deriving content from the absolute, concerns the ability of the philosopher to gain knowledge of nature from a rational first principle. The answer to this question will depend on the metaphysical commitments which follow from the way that the first set of questions is answered. I take Schelling's philosophical development from the texts on *Naturphilosophie* to the *Freedom* essay as falling into three distinct stages, each of which represents a different answer to this set of central problems. In this chapter I deal with two of these stages: I summarise the failure of the *Naturphilosophie* to tackle these problems, and I outline the attempt of the *Identitätssystem* to solve them by prioritising system, rationality and the whole over freedom and the individual. I finish the chapter by highlighting the problems which fall out of the *Identitätssystem* and which ultimately motivate Schelling's move to the third stage in the *Freedom* essay.

The *Naturphilosophie*

In his *Naturphilosophie* Schelling concentrated on re-examining features of the natural world which, construed in a particular way, would be detrimental to human freedom. As Kosch argues, for Schelling:

> The problem with seeing human actions as natural events [as in Kant's account] arose because this required seeing them as effects of preceding causes, and because on the Kantian view effects are *passive products* of their causes. In Schelling's conception of causality no sense can be made of the idea of an effect as a passive product, and he seems to have thought this a solution to the problem of freedom and determinism. (Kosch 2006: 74)

In the *Naturphilosophie* Schelling reconceptualises nature in such a way that the natural world is compatible with the free actions of agents, something that was ruled out by Kant's mechanistic conception of nature. As we have seen, Schelling's power-based account of causality emphasises the importance of reciprocal interaction: thus not only do causes not necessitate their effects, but both sides of any causal relation are equally active. Therefore even when they are effected by natural causes agents retain a measure of activity, and further it is never the case that the acts of the agent (or of any

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other natural product) are causally determined, as a cause fully determining its effect is unintelligible on this account.

However, although Schelling's conception of nature renders incoherent the claim that nature is deterministic (and therefore the claim that the acts of agents are determined), this lack of determinism alone does not entail that the agent has a sufficient measure, or in fact any, control over her actions. In other words, although Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is able to secure the open future necessary for a libertarian conception of freedom, it is unable to demonstrate that the agent has control over her actions. In fact, on Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* it is problematic to refer to *her* actions at all, because this account provides no means of differentiating between the acts of an agent and the activities of the non-conscious powers which constitute that agent and nature as a whole. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is based on the claim that nature consists in two mutually dependent yet opposed tendencies, and that all natural products are simply manifestations of the relationships of these powers. Without an account of what it is that makes agents able to consciously direct these powers (and therefore to have control over and ownership of their acts), it seems that the agent is no different from any other natural product: a dependent being which manifests the efficacy of a higher power (nature as a whole) without having any efficacy of its own. Therefore although agents (like all natural products) are not determined in the way that the traditional determinist holds, on this account they certainly are not in control of their actions either.

The implication for freedom of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is therefore that if there is any freedom in the system it is not the freedom of agents to control their actions but rather an indeterminacy which exists at a much higher level than the agent: it is not individual agents who are free, but rather if any freedom exists it is possessed by nature as a whole,[1] by the universal organism of which all natural products are only parts: 'Our opinion, then, is just that no *individual, unique* and *disconnected* life belongs to the animal, and we simply sacrifice its *individual* life to the *universal life of Nature*' (*Outline*, 138; SW III, 191). Thus there is no important difference between the control that agents have over their actions and the control that, say, a blade of grass has – both are simply vehicles for the activity of the universal organism. Further, although Schelling discusses the importance of the emergence of consciousness and reason at length in the *Naturphilosophie*, the possession of these does nothing to confer freedom on agents but merely gives rise to an illusion of their freedom: Schelling argues that '[b]ecause [the] understanding does everything it does with consciousness, hence the illusion [arises] of its freedom' (*Ideas*, 172; SW II, 215).

Thus although the *Naturphilosophie* secures the openness of the future necessary for free acts to be possible, the idea of a particular agent acting

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freely becomes unintelligible as all causal efficacy in the system is possessed by the system as a whole, not by the individuals through which it manifests this efficacy. Kosch therefore argues that:

> This view is fundamentally a compatibilist one. The determinism with which freedom is compatible on this view is dynamic/teleological rather than mechanistic, but it is the same as mechanistic determinism in this respect: it entails the inability of agents to do otherwise than they in fact do. (Kosch 2006: 77)

Although I support Kosch's conclusion that Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* does imply a form of compatibilism, I think that she misrepresents Schelling's position in her claim that the agent could not have done otherwise: in my reading of the *Naturphilosophie*, given the open future and lack of necessitating laws, something other than what did happen could have happened. However, it would not make sense to claim that the agent herself could have done otherwise, as properly speaking the agent herself never *does* anything: she is merely a vehicle for the manifestation of the causal powers of nature as a whole.

This compatibilist conception of freedom corresponds to a particular answer to the set of problems which I have been arguing shaped Schelling's philosophical development. In the texts on *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling seems to think that the problem can simply be dissolved by adjusting our perspective: just as a certain kind of compatibilist argues that we are free from one perspective yet causally determined from another,[2] Schelling seems to consider it satisfactory here to say that we are free individuals from one perspective, yet mere aspects of the activity of the absolute from another. Schelling's solution in the *Naturphilosophie* seems to be to attempt to deny the incompatibility of the terms of the problem: to hold that individuals may be mere parts of the whole (as they are simply crystallisations of the powers of the absolute) but they are still individuals; the freedom of agents may be the manifestation of higher causal powers but agents are still free, etc. In sum, Schelling in the *Naturphilosophie* attempts to balance the two sides of the problem without providing any account of how it is that they can be reconciled.

Following the *Outline* and *Introduction*, Schelling seems to turn his attention away from *Naturphilosophie* – although he does return to *Naturphilosophie* in other writings throughout his life, these texts arguably mark the end of the period when Schelling's philosophy as a whole is focused exclusively on *Naturphilosophie*. Shortly after their publication Schelling wrote his 1800 *System* which was closely followed by the *Presentation*. The former is generally seen as a presentation of the 'ideal' side of Schelling's system (transcendental philosophy) as opposed to the 'real' side (the *Naturphilosophie*), and the latter as the beginning of his attempts to bring the

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two sides together into a single system where the real and ideal, the whole and the individual, are absolutely identical: a single being conceived in different ways. This period of Schelling's work is commonly referred to as the *Identitätssystem*, due to its emphasis on the identity of all things in the absolute. The *Identitätssystem* sees Schelling move much closer to Spinoza's position where all individual beings are merely aspects or modifications of the absolute.

Although Schelling's aim in this period is to bring the two sides of his system together into one in which neither side has priority, I argue that the system presented in the central texts of this period in practice results in the prioritisation of the ideal over the real, the one over the individual, the infinite over the finite, and that this system ultimately fails because it is unable to secure a coherent conception of the finite independent individual.

The *System of Transcendental Idealism*

Schelling's move to this monist system which renders individuality, freedom and finitude as mere appearances of a reality which is singular, infinite and undifferentiated can be seen as early on as the 1800 *System*. This text contains an explicit discussion of human freedom – something which is not present in the *Naturphilosophie*. One of Schelling's concerns here is to make sense of the relationship between the free activity of the self and the activity of objective nature which takes place outside of the self: although the self is free with regard to its volitions, the results of these volitions take place in the natural world and therefore their appearance must be explicable as falling under natural laws (*System*, 186; SW III, 571–2). The difficulty here is that there are certain actions which take place in nature which seem to have been caused by the volitions of the self, while at the same time, as occurrences in nature, these also seem to have been the result of natural causal processes. Schelling's attempt to make compatible these two considerations is based on the idea of a pre-established harmony:

> The fact that for the [objective self] all action, insofar as it passes over into the external world, is predetermined, can no more prejudice the absolutely determinant self, superior as it is to all appearances, than does the fact that everything in nature is predetermined; for in relation to the free self the objective self is mere appearance, having no reality in itself, and like nature is merely the external basis of its action. For from the fact that an action is predetermined for appearance, or for the purely intuitant activity, I cannot infer back to its also being so for the free activity, since the two are wholly unequal in dignity; so that while the merely apparent is certainly quite independent of the determinant which does not appear, the latter is equally independent of the former, and each acts and proceeds on its

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> own account, one from free choice, the other, having been so determined entirely in accordance with its own peculiar laws; and this mutual independence of each from the other, despite their consilience, is in fact rendered possible only through a pre-established harmony . . . [E]ach of them is separated from the other, [. . .] no reciprocal influence of one on the other would be possible at all, unless a conformity between them were set up by something lying outside them both. (*System*, 192; SW III, 578–80)

Thus, Schelling argues, there exists a pre-established harmony between the volitional activity of the self and the activities of objective nature which ensures that the volitions of the self correspond to events which take place outside of the self. Thus the volition of an agent to make a cup of tea is accompanied by the relevant bodily movements – putting the kettle on, putting the teabag in the cup, etc. What is important here is that these movements are not *caused* by the self; they are the result of natural causal processes obtaining in objective nature. Although my actions *seem* to have been brought about as a result of my volition, in fact my volition simply corresponds to the relevant set of events which happen independently of my willing. These movements and events which take place in the natural world are explicable from the activities of natural powers alone, and my volition simply accompanies them due to the pre-established harmony which exists between the two. These two sides (the volitions of the self and the actions of the self) come together only by virtue of this pre-established harmony, as the free self lacks the causal power to bring about events in nature.

This discussion of pre-established harmony highlights two important claims which are central to the account of freedom presented in the *System*: first, the claim that the conformity between the objective self and the free self can only be explained by appealing to the existence of some third being which grounds this conformity (which Schelling will argue gives us grounds to posit the existence of the absolute); second, the claim that the perspective that we take on actions and events in the natural world will yield a different type of explanation, and a different answer to the question of the existence of human freedom. Schelling argues that it is the existence of these different perspectives which leads to the possibility of different accounts of human freedom:

> [I]f I reflect merely upon the objective activity as such, the self contains only natural necessity; if I reflect merely upon the subjective activity, it contains only an absolute willing by which nature has no other object save self-determination as such; if I reflect finally upon the activity determinant at once of both subjective and objective, and transcending them both, the self contains choice, and therewith freedom of the will. From these different lines of reflection arise the various systems concerning freedom, of which the first absolutely denies freedom; the second posits it simply in pure reason, i.e., in that ideal activity directed immediately to self-determining (by which assumption we are compelled, in all actions determined contrary to reason, to postulate an utterly groundless quiescence of the latter,

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> whereby, however, all freedom of the will is actually done away with); the third view, on the other hand, deduces an activity, extending beyond both the ideal and the objective, as that alone to which freedom can belong. (*System*, 192; SW III, 578–80)

In characteristic style Schelling presents a dichotomy here before advocating a third option which attempts to synthesise the previous one-sided views. Thus if we approach the question from the side of the objective we are led to affirm the primacy of natural necessity and deny freedom altogether; if we proceed from the subjective side we affirm absolute willing and are thus compelled to adopt a completely ideal conception of freedom; whereas if we take the third (and Schelling's preferred) option, we are told, we can make sense of the freedom of the self in a way that is neither merely ideal nor merely objective. However, this third view again necessitates the positing of something beyond the subjective and the objective which grounds the correspondence between the two – and crucially it is to *this*, not to the agent, that freedom belongs. Thus the worry that I identified with regard to the implicit account of freedom in the *Naturphilosophie* is confirmed by Schelling's explicit articulation of this account in the *System*: despite the emphasis on human freedom here there is no sense in which any individual qua individual is free – it is only to the activity of the absolute that freedom can be attributed.

Thus what Schelling describes as 'the supreme problem of transcendental philosophy' (*System*, 204; SW III, 594–5) – how freedom can be necessity and necessity freedom – is solved with an appeal to the freedom of the absolute. Foreshadowing the more Spinozist conception of the absolute which we find in the *Identitätssystem*, Schelling argues that in the absolute freedom and necessity are one: it is free in that it acts in accordance with the necessity of its nature. Individuals are simply vehicles for the freedom of the absolute. Schelling likens the activities of agents to actors in a play: if the actors were able to decide on the fates and actions of their characters on a whim then the production would not hang together as a whole; in order for this unity to be possible it is necessary for all of the actors to be acting towards the same purpose, the play that has been laid out for them and which determines their actions. For Schelling, the absolute, working through individuals, is the playwright which writes the script as it goes along: thus there is no pre-written script which the actors follow (so the future in this sense remains open), but there is a common purpose which unfolds throughout the performance and thus ensures harmony between the actors. Schelling seems to suggest that this entails that humans are free rather than compelled: the course of reality has not been determined before the process of reality ensues, but rather unfolds throughout (System, 210; SW III, 601–3). What is crucial to notice, however, is that regardless of the

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lack of a determined course for reality which pre-exists the process of reality there is no sense in which it is agents who are in control of their actions: it is the absolute which acts, not individuals. Schelling explicitly endorses this claim a few pages later when he states that it is only for inner appearance that we have the impression that we act, as in fact 'another acts through us' (*System*, 213; SW III, 605–6).

In the *System* Schelling makes explicit the compatibilism which is implicit in the *Naturphilosophie*: it is always and only the absolute which acts and the freedom of agents is simply an intellectual freedom, the freedom to will particular courses of action divorced from the capacity to bring about states of affairs in the natural world. Schelling's emphasis in the *System* moves away from the individual and towards the whole: while the *Naturphilosophie* attempts to argue that both the individual and the whole are equally fundamental and active, the *System* explicitly attributes all activity to the absolute. This shift in emphasis reaches its highest expression in Schelling's *Identitätssystem*, where the holism of the *Naturphilosophie* and the *System* is abandoned in favour of monism, with Schelling conceiving of the absolute not as the indifference point and ground of the real and the ideal, but as the absolute identity between the two, as the single real being; rendering freedom, individuality and finitude as illusory appearances. Rather than ground of a unified whole the absolute becomes an undifferentiated singular being, and Schelling therefore no longer sees nature and the subject as *products* of the absolute but rather as *aspects* of the absolute: any separation of beings from the whole is denied.

The *Identitätssystem*

The *Naturphilosophie* and the *System* were explicitly considered by Schelling as incomplete presentations of his philosophy: each represented only one half of a whole, and the *Identitätssystem* represents his attempt to unite these two sides into a single system. However, I want to claim that this attempted unity in fact takes the form of the elevation of one side over the other: the texts in this period prioritise the ideal over the real, the infinite over the finite, and the whole over the parts. Schelling's conception of the absolute in this period takes on a monism so strong that it becomes unintelligible to claim that the whole has precedence over the parts, or the infinite over the finite, as there simply *are* no parts, there *are* no finite beings: these are mere appearances of the singular reality, illusory products of reflection with no reality in themselves.

This is made explicit in Schelling's *Presentation* of 1801, which includes a discussion of the nature of the absolute and its relationship to individual

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finite entities. In this text the absolute is no longer conceived as the indifference point between the subjective and the objective, but as their absolute identity. This conception of the absolute as identity necessitates the conclusion that all that exists is identity; in §12 Schelling states that: '*Everything that is, is absolute identity itself.* Since identity is infinite and can never be abolished as absolute identity, everything that *is* must be absolute identity itself.' In a corollary to this section we are told that this entails that 'everything is in itself only to the extent that it is absolute identity itself, and to the extent that it is not absolute identity itself, it is simply not *in itself*' (*Presentation*, 352; SW IV, 119). This conception of the absolute therefore entails a denial of finite and individual existence: the absolute is absolute identity, which is the only possible existent, thus anything which is not absolute identity must be denied:

> *Nothing considered in itself is finite* [. . .] considering things as finite is precisely the same as not considering them as they are in themselves. – To the same extent, to consider things as differentiated or multiple means not to consider them *in themselves* or from the standpoint of reason. (*Presentation*, 352–3; SW IV, 119–20)

The *Presentation* outlines a system which takes the absolute *as* absolute to be the sole reality; where the *Naturphilosophie* posits an absolute which gives rise to differentiated natural beings, the *Identitätssystem* offers a conception of the absolute which is monist in the strictest possible sense: the absolute is the one singular reality which has no parts and does not give rise to individual beings. Schelling even goes so far as to state that the idea that the absolute has 'stepped beyond itself' to produce a world is 'the most basic mistake of all philosophy' (*Presentation*, 353; SW IV, 120). This appearance of the separation of things from the absolute is simply an error which arises from the standpoint of reflection (*Presentation*, 357; SW IV, 126), an artificial separation which leads to the false impression that finite individuated being is possible when in fact the only thing which has real existence is the absolute. Schelling explicitly states in §28 that the consequence of the view presented here is the denial of individuality: '*There is no individual being or individual thing in itself*' (*Presentation*, 357; SW IV, 125).

Despite these claims, Schelling discusses the nature of individuals, claiming that '*Each individual being is as such a determined form of the being of absolute identity*' (*Presentation*, 361; SW IV, 131). Thus to the extent that individuals exist (a claim which can only be made from the standpoint of reflection, which performs an artificial separation of absolute identity) they are simply the absolute appearing in a determinate form. Following this discussion Schelling is quick to reiterate the lack of existence afforded to individuals: these do not have any independent existence but are wholly dependent on the absolute, a mere mode of its appearing:

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> It might still be asked here what this individual is in relation to absolute totality. *In this relation, however; it simply does* ***not*** *subsist as an individual,* since viewed from the standpoint of absolute totality only totality itself *is* and outside it is ***nothing***. (*Presentation*, 362; SW IV, 133)

This denial of the separation of things from the absolute is elucidated further in the 1801 *Further Presentations* where Schelling discusses the possibility of intellectual intuition (direct intuitive knowledge of the absolute *as* absolute) and of construction (knowledge of the absolute which arises from consideration of a particular one of its aspects, such as a plant or animal). Construction also entails the possibility of retracing the arising of aspects from the absolute: a rational being should have the ability to infer from particular aspects of the absolute the nature of the absolute as a whole. This task may in practice be impossible for limited finite minds but is in principle possible because of the relationship which holds between the absolute and its aspects.

The possibility of construction and intellectual intuition of the absolute is ensured by the denial of the separation of things from the absolute in the *Presentation*. In the *Further Presentations* the extent of this lack of separation is made clearer, as Schelling argues that because in the absolute form or being immediately follows from essence, and as particular beings follow necessarily from the nature of the absolute, the particular form of finite beings (or better, those aspects of the absolute which appear as finite beings) is also fully contained in the essence of the absolute:

> [W]ith respect to the absolute, being immediately follows from essence [. . .] In the case of what is absolute, universal and particular are simply one. Its concept (to absolutely *be*) is also its particularity. It is, of course, absolute in both respects; consequently, it is neither like any other thing, (through some universal concept) nor unlike it (through its particularity). It is absolutely and essentially one, and simply self-identical. – [Now] *since* it is the form by which the particular entity is particular, the finite item a finite, so *too form is one with essence*, each of course absolute, since in the absolute the particular and the universal are absolutely one. Here in this *absolute unity or identical absoluteness of essence and form lies the proof of our above-stated principle,* the disclosure of how it is possible that the absolute itself and knowledge of the absolute can be one, of the possibility, therefore, of an immediate cognition of the absolute. (*Further Presentations*, 381; SW IV, 367–8)

In other words, the necessary nature of the absolute immediately entails its being, and (as aspects of this being) the finite, both in its essence and its particular form, also follows necessarily from the essence of the absolute. It is this relationship of entailment from the nature of the absolute to all aspects of particular being which makes construction possible: because the absolute essence is expressed in and determines every (appearance of) particular being, through consideration of particular being the philosopher is theoretically able to rationally deduce the nature of the absolute. There are

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two crucial claims here which ground the possibility of construction. Firstly, the claim that the beings with which philosophical construction begins are not separate from the absolute: there is no real distinction between them, they are simply the whole expressed in one determinate way. Secondly, the relationship of entailment which holds between the absolute and its expressions is one of rational necessity: if the relationship between the absolute and its expressions was anything other than rational and necessary, construction would be impossible. In other words, any irrationality or contingency in the relationship of appearances to the absolute would preclude the possibility that a rational mind could trace back the relationship between the absolute and its expressions: it is the rational and necessary nature of this relationship which grounds the possibility of philosophical construction. The implications for freedom here are clear: if any freedom in any individual aspect of the absolute were possible, this would introduce an element of contingency into the relationship thereby negating both the possibility of construction and the fully rational nature of the absolute.

A further comparison with Spinoza becomes apparent here, as Schelling's account of construction mirrors Spinoza's conception of the third kind of knowledge:[3] both involve the attempt to think the whole through one of its particular aspects. This possibility, both in Schelling's *Identitätssystem* and in Spinoza, is grounded in their strongly monist conceptions of reality: only if there is one being, whose nature is necessary, will it be possible to get from one appearance of this being to knowledge of this being in itself. It is the relationship of strict rational entailment between the absolute and its appearances which enables one to '[p]ick from the universe whatever fragment you will and know that it is infinitely fruitful and is impregnated with the possibilities of all things' (*Further Presentations*, 390; SW IV, 400).

Schelling emphasises in the *Further Presentations* that although construction begins from the (beings which appear as) finite, it in fact confirms the non-existence of finite independent beings as it demonstrates that any separation from or differentiation of the absolute is impossible: construction abolishes the illusion of the actuality of the appearing world by demonstrating that all this world can be is an appearance of the absolute, which only exists in reflection through the artificial separation of essence and form:

> You call the appearing world 'real' only because for you form has become something for-itself [. . .] The actuality of the appearing world *as such* cannot be acknowledged, therefore, not even insofar as its essence subsists in the absolute, but only its absolute unreality. (*Further Presentations*, 395; SW IV, 409)

What is central here is that all of these conclusions – the possibility of construction and intellectual intuition and the denial of individuality – follow

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from the strongly monist conception of reality which we find in the *Identitätssystem*, where reality is a single being whose form follows necessarily from its essence. This means that all aspects of it, which appear to us as individual finite beings, similarly follow necessarily in both their essence and form and it is this which opens up the possibility for us to understand the nature of the whole through the nature of its aspects, as these are fundamentally one and the same. In contrast to the holism implied by the *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling stresses here that it is essential that we understand unity in the strongest possible sense:

> [O]ur view is not just that opposites are generally bought to unity in some universal concept, for such a unity would again be of a merely formal sort, but that *substance* is one in all things that are ideally opposed, and that everything is identical, not by the external bond of the concept, but in inner substance and content, as it were. What you cognize, e.g., in nature as a totality aggregated in an enclosed space, and in history, on the other hand, as a totality pulled apart into endless time, are things not just figuratively one or in one concept, but truly *the same thing*. (*Further Presentations*, 396; SW IV, 411)

Schelling's advocacy of this strong monism reminiscent of Spinoza's is underlined in his 1804 *System*, where he discusses the nature of freedom in terms immediately recognisable from Spinoza. Schelling claims here that to be a free cause is simply to have an essence which follows from the law of identity, which necessitates all aspects of being. Thus the only freedom possible is divine or absolute freedom: the freedom of the absolute is the only freedom that could exist (SW VI, 538–9). Schelling further argues here that ascribing freedom to individual agents makes the basic error of attributing a will to individuals, when in fact all willing is entirely determined by the absolute (SW VI, 541–2). Repeating his claim from the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling states that the illusion of freedom arises due to the fact that our cognising activity (which is located in the self, for which the illusion of freedom arises) is separate from the activity of the absolute which acts through us (SW VI, 541). Thus the absolute alone is free, and it manifests this freedom though its many determinate aspects; the illusion of freedom arises in beings which have reflection simply because the separation between cognition and activity which this presupposes enables them to perform the artificial separation of themselves from the whole.

Implications of the Identitätssystem

Schelling's *Identitätssystem* marks a shift in his thought from the holism and compatibilism present in the *Naturphilosophie* to a strong monism, and with it a denial of the reality of freedom, finitude and individuality.

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In this period we see a conception of the absolute as identity, the single undifferentiated existent and the sole reality. The absolute's nature follows necessarily from the law of identity, and in turn determines all aspects of its existence, including the nature and particular form of its aspects which appear as finite independent beings. These beings, however, have no reality and are merely illusions which arise through the reflective activities of finite minds (the obvious problem here, that the activity which gives rise to the illusion of finitude is itself a *result* of finitude is something I will return to later). The radical denial of finitude, individuality, and freedom which we find in the *Identitätssystem* is summarised by Žižek:

> [H]ere Schelling is a Spinozist for whom the notion of the Absolute involves the absolute contemporaneity, co-presence, of its entire content: consequently, the Absolute can be conceived only in the mode of logical deduction which renders its eternal inner articulation – temporal succession is merely an illusion of our finite point of view. (Žižek 1996: 38–9)

This is in contrast to the holism found in the *Naturphilosophie* and (to an extent) in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*; in these texts the absolute gives rise to a world of beings which are differentiated from it. The absolute then expresses itself through the acts of these beings – although these acts are necessitated by the absolute, they only become actual through the activities of its parts. In the *Identitätssystem* it is always and only the absolute which acts: Schelling's account moves from finite individuals acting in accordance with the absolute to the absolute itself acting in different ways; in the *Identitätssystem* it becomes nonsensical to talk of individuals as these simply do not arise. Whistler states this explicitly:

> [O]ne consequence of [the *Identitätssystem*] is that in Schelling's universe there are no discrete individual substances [. . .] Our everyday belief in a plurality of finite beings is misguided [. . .] In short, there is only the absolute. (Whistler 2013: 74)

I want to argue that this move towards a more Spinozist view is necessitated in part by Schelling's growing concern with questions regarding ground, identity and content, which are left unanswered in the *Naturphilosophie*: what is the relationship between the ground (the absolute) and the grounded (finite beings)? How can these dependent beings be individuals in any proper sense at all (as if these beings were genuine individuals existing separately from the absolute, this would constitute a limit to its nature as absolute)? If everything is identical with the absolute (as everything must be, in order that the absolute remain absolute and not be limited by the existence of anything external), then does it even make sense to claim that finite individuals have any existence beyond appearances? It seems, therefore, that in order that the absolute be truly absolute, infinite,

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self-grounding, etc., particular individuals cannot be separate from it in any sense and must therefore be fully dependent, mere aspects of the absolute rather than beings in their own right. That Schelling considers the denial of individuality, independence, finitude and freedom as the best answer to this set of problems in this period is demonstrated by a comment in the 1801 *Presentation*: '[t]he most basic mistake of all philosophy is to assume that absolute identity has actually stepped beyond itself and to attempt to make intelligible how this emergence occurs' (*Presentation*, 352–3; SW IV, 119–20). Thus rather than trying to make sense of the emergence of differentiated beings from the whole (as he did in the *Naturphilosophie*) Schelling in the *Identitätssystem* answers the above questions by advocating a strongly monist conception of reality as single and undifferentiated. Solving the problems above then follows easily: to the question of how the finite arises from the infinite the answer is to simply deny the finite; to the question of the relationship of parts to whole the answer is to simply deny that the absolute has parts; to the question of the relationship of system to freedom the answer is to deny the possibility of freedom except at the level of the necessity of the absolute; and to the question of individual beings and their grounds the answer is to simply deny the existence of individuality and the separation of ground and grounded which it entails.

These concerns regarding grounding and individuality are closely related to the questions of the emergence of content from the absolute and of the possibility of construction. The former is another version of the questions discussed in the preceding paragraph: how can determinate content (such as finite beings) arise out of absolute indifference where everything is indeterminate? This is the question that Schelling attempted to solve in the *Naturphilosophie* by appealing to the absolute's need for manifestation, its need to produce content in order to become fully actual. However, in the *Identitätssystem* this content is conceived as mere appearance, as the absolute expressing itself in various modes rather than in separate differentiated beings. The possibility of construction is an epistemological question: if the world is a rationally structured system following from a fully rational absolute principle, then it follows from this that the content which appears to emerge from the absolute follows necessarily according to this rational principle. This grounds the possibility of construction, as it entails the ability of the philosopher to provide a complete reconstruction of the passage of content from the absolute: given knowledge of the rational first principle, a rational mind should be able to fully reconstruct the entire world-system exactly as it has and will evolve. As we have seen, in the *Further Presentations* Schelling claims that we should be able to work backwards, to begin from the determinate content that we experience and rationally trace this back until we reach the absolute principle.

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These two concerns (the relationship of the absolute to the beings which it grounds, and the possibility of construction) have important consequences for Schelling's conception of freedom. The former entails that the worry I posed in relation to freedom in the *Naturphilosophie* is confirmed: as Schelling now maintains that it makes no sense for us to consider finite beings as individuals in their own right but rather as aspects of the absolute, it becomes nonsensical to claim that any finite being is free, or in fact that anything finite exists at all. The latter has implications not for the freedom of individual beings, but for the nature of the system as a whole: the claim that all content arises from the absolute through rational necessity entails that the open future which was ensured by the *Naturphilosophie* drops out of the picture. If the progression of appearances from the absolute follows a rationally determined necessary course, then there are no alternative possibilities and therefore no open future.

These considerations therefore contribute to the change outlined above in Schelling's conception of freedom. This transition is made explicit when we consider Schelling's account of the freedom of the absolute sketched above: the absolute is free in the sense that it is the only being which is fully causally active and is determined only through its own necessary nature rather than by anything external. This conception is remarkably close to Spinoza's in its claim that freedom does not consist in the ability to actualise any of a number of possibilities, but rather in the ability to be self-determining to the greatest degree possible given the absence of these possibilities.

In my reading, these changes to Schelling's conception of freedom are necessitated by his account in the *Naturphilosophie* that I outlined in the previous chapter: the *Naturphilosophie* claims that subjects are part of nature and that all of nature is an expression of the absolute, which entails that subjects are similarly expressions of the absolute and therefore cannot enact their own wills but rather are appearances of the will of the absolute. This conclusion, which informs the conception of freedom based on pre-established harmony in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, and which then gives way to the Spinozist account of freedom in the *Identitätssystem*, is therefore the logical consequence of the compatibilism that we find in the *Naturphilosophie*. As Kosch argues:

> Schelling's achievement, in contrast with Hegel and the later Fichte, is to have recognised that this [compatibilist] position becomes absurd when taken to its logical conclusion – to have realised that the Kantian conception of freedom is not preserved in this form of absolute idealism, and to have shown that this view is no different, in its moral consequences, from Spinoza's. (Kosch 2006: 86)

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Transition to the *Freedom* essay: *Bruno* and *Philosophy and Religion*

The 1809 *Freedom* essay marks a decisive shift in Schelling's work. As well as representing a radical rethinking of the conception of freedom present in the years between the *Naturphilosophie* and the *Freedom* essay, this text also necessitates the abandonment of some of the central claims of Schelling's earlier work: most notably the claim that the absolute is fully rational, and with it the claim that philosophical reconstruction of the emergence of content from the absolute is possible. I want to argue that these changes are brought about both by problems internal to the *Identitätssystem*, and by certain shifts in Schelling's philosophical interests.

Two of Schelling's works written between the systematic texts of the *Identitätssystem* and the *Freedom* essay demonstrate these changing interests as well his growing awareness that the *Identitätssystem* was fundamentally incapable of giving an adequate account of individual existence. Although providing this kind of account was not Schelling's aim in the *Identitätssystem* (Whistler 2013: 87–8) in the years following the systematic works he began to become increasingly concerned with accounting for the possibility of genuine individuality. Schelling first acknowledges this problem in his 1802 work *Bruno*, where he attempts to argue that it can be solved from within the *Identitätssystem*. The solution offered in *Bruno* is unconvincing, however, and in 1803 Schelling published *Philosophy and Religion* which focuses on the problem of accounting for individuals and attempts a modified version of the solution offered in *Bruno*. In *Philosophy and Religion* Schelling begins to move closer to the kind of solution found in the *Freedom* essay – the idea of the 'fall' and the volition of the finite become central – however, in *Philosophy and Religion* Schelling remains within the broad metaphysical picture of the *Identitätssystem*. I want to argue that it is this metaphysical picture which prevents Schelling from working out a coherent solution to the question of individuality: the incompatibility of the *Identitätssystem* with the account of individuality he now wants to give is a central reason for Schelling's advocacy of the ontology presented in the *Freedom* essay.

In the dialogic *Bruno* Schelling engages with the problem of the status of individuals and the question of how opposition or difference can arise in the absolute. That Schelling attempts to solve these problems within the *Identitätssystem* demonstrates a tension in his thought in this period. As Vater argues, 'Schelling's metaphysics [in the *Identitätssystem*] in fact commits him to the thesis that relations are more fundamental than individuals, though he does not always seem to clearly grasp the point' (Vater, in *Bruno*, 14). *Bruno* demonstrates that Schelling has become aware that his system has some difficulty with accounting for genuine individuality,

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but has not yet realised that this difficulty is insoluble given that the central claim of the *Identitätssystem* is that only the absolute has reality.

The question of the status of difference and individuality arises in *Bruno*'s discussion with Lucian (*Bruno* represents Schelling's voice, while Lucian represents Fichte's) of how it is possible to claim that difference can exist as part of identity without this difference thereby threatening identity (*Bruno*, 136–9; SW IV, 236–8). Lucian argues that this problem can be solved with recourse to dualism: as identity is always defined in relation to opposition, we should simply claim that opposition is a necessary aspect of identity, though this entails the claim that identity is not primary. *Bruno* disagrees, arguing that identity is necessarily primary because opposition must always take place against some higher thing – identity – which is therefore supreme or absolute (*Bruno*, 136; SW IV, 236). However, this seems to simply reaffirm the problem: how can difference or opposition have any reality if it is always secondary to identity?

In response to this question *Bruno* gives a response familiar from the *Identitätssystem*: that the absolute idea is 'the sole intrinsically real entity' and finite differentiated beings are simply appearances which arise through distinctions made by our understanding (*Bruno*, 147; SW IV, 247). This response seems unsatisfying for a number of reasons, not least because of its explicit denial of the reality of the finite. In addition, as I mentioned briefly earlier, the status of the understanding which makes the distinctions which give rise to the illusion of finitude is far from clear: what kind of being possesses this understanding if not a finite individual? And if this is the case, how can we make sense of the idea that the act which is supposed to give rise to (the appearance of) individuality is itself performed by an individual? Bruno seems to affirm this confusion as he claims that the finite itself is responsible for its own actuality: the appearance of finitude only comes about from the perspective of the finite, but is itself brought about by the finite taking this perspective. This claim is made through a distinction between possibility and actuality:

> Now considered from the side of possibility, all things are identical in infinite thought, with no distinction of times or kinds of objects; but considered from the side of actuality, they are not all one, but are many, and necessarily and endlessly finite. (Bruno, 149; SW 249)

Bruno argues that the absolute contains all possibility, and no determination: all possibilities exist and are identical in the absolute. This ensures that there is no difference in the absolute itself. Individuality is impossible in the absolute for exactly the same reason: being an individual necessarily involves separation from other individuals and therefore the exclusion of other possibilities, both of which are impossible in the absolute. Bruno

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argues therefore that if the finite is to exist, it must be responsible for its own existence: the finite must perform the act through which it separates itself from other possibilities by positing itself as an independent individual in time (Bruno, 151; SW IV, 251).

This claim allows Schelling to argue that finitude and opposition are possible in such a way that they do not threaten absolute identity. On this account the absolute grounds the possibility of the finite but not its actuality; thus finitude and opposition are not contained in the absolute but simply made possible by it. This is supposed to account for difference without threatening identity: the absolute is the ground of difference in the sense that it grounds all possibilities; however, because the actuality of difference is separate from the absolute, its nature as absolute identity is not threatened.

This solution to the problem of individuation is incredibly obscure. Schelling seems to be aware of this as following the above discussion Lucian comments to Bruno that the latter has 'managed to delve pretty deeply into the nature of the incomprehensible! But I am curious to see how you will get us back to the place of consciousness, once you have soared so grandly beyond it' (*Bruno*, 152; SW IV, 252). Arguably Schelling never manages to get us back to the 'place of consciousness' as his account here raises more worries than it solves. One, which I have already raised, is the circularity of this account of individuation: the finite is responsible for its own finitude as it posits itself in time, but what is there to do this positing if individuated being does not yet exist? It seems that there must be some differentiation within the absolute in order that some aspects of it can posit themselves as temporal, but this introduction of difference into the absolute leads back to the question of how this is possible without contradicting its absolute identity. However, if there is no difference within the absolute it becomes difficult to see how we should understand the ability of finite beings to self-differentiate and to take the perspective necessary to see other things as finite. Further, it seems that despite Bruno's complex story about the self-temporalisation of the finite the solution here takes us no further than the systematic texts: difference and finitude are still rendered as illusory and lacking any proper reality.

Although the argument of *Bruno* ultimately fails to account for the reality of individuals the text is important as it draws attention to a number of points: first, that Schelling is now concerned with accounting for the reality of individuality and finitude from within the *Identitätssystem*, something which the earlier systematic works did not attempt. Secondly, *Bruno* is where Schelling first introduces an idea that will play a central role in the metaphysics and account of individuation in the *Freedom* essay: the claim that the absolute is ground of the possibility of the finite but not of its

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actuality, that the finite is responsible for its own finitude. This idea of the finite as having its own volition, that 'each thing takes from the absolute its own proper life' (*Bruno*, 159; SW IV, 258) is explored further in *Philosophy and Religion* and is central to Schelling's reworking of his metaphysics in the *Freedom* essay. *Bruno* contains the idea that the absolute does not necessitate everything that it grounds, that the absolute contains all possibility but that something more is needed to get from this to actuality: the volition of the finite. This enables Schelling's later claim that the absolute grounds but does not determine the world which is central to the *Freedom* essay's account of human freedom.

The failure of *Bruno*'s argument to establish the reality of individuality and difference led Schelling to publish another text soon after which explicitly focused on these issues. The 1804 *Philosophy and Religion* was written largely to respond to Eschenmayer's objections in his 1803 *Philosophy in Its Transition to Nonphilosophy*[4] which criticises Schelling for failing to account for how the absolute 'can come out of itself and become difference' (Ottmann, in *Philosophy and Religion*, xii).

The early parts of the text provide insight into the way that Schelling currently views his philosophical system: he claims that the true teachings of the absolute are contained in the *Naturphilosophie* (*Philosophy and Religion*, 8; SW VI, 18) demonstrating that he still sees the texts from this period as playing a fundamental role in his metaphysics. However, the first section of the text, which contains Schelling's outline of his conception of the absolute, indicates that *Philosophy and Religion* is still operating under the metaphysical picture of the *Identitätssystem.*

Schelling explicitly states that his solution to the question of the reality of individuals here will follow the same route as that offered in *Bruno* (*Philosophy and Religion*, 17; SW VI, 28), as it will be based on the claim that:

> [E]verything that seems to come out of oneness, or to tear itself away from it, has the POSSIBILITY of being for itself predetermined in this very oneness, and that the ACTUALITY of it having separate existence resides only IN THE THING ITSELF. (P*hilosophy and Religion*, 17–18; SW VI, 2–9)

Schelling also comments here that the answer to this question can only be pursued in the realm of practical philosophy (*Philosophy and Religion*, 18; SW VI, 29), highlighting that activity and volition are fundamental: the freedom of the finite to tear itself away from its ground is central to the existence of individuality.

However, as we saw in *Bruno*, this claim that the volition of the finite is central clashes with another of Schelling's claims: the fundamental tenet of the *Identitätssystem* that the absolute is all that there is and does not contain any real difference within itself. Schelling makes this claim explicitly in

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Philosophy and Religion, arguing that the absolute never introduces any division or difference into itself (*Philosophy and Reigion*, 22; SW VI, 33–4). Again it seems difficult to see how, given this commitment, difference and finitude can be afforded any reality.

The text provides a similar account of difference and finitude to that offered in *Bruno*, based on the claim that the absolute grounds the possibility of things but not their actuality. Schelling argues that the possibilities (ideas) that the absolute contains must be like the absolute in nature, which means that they must have the ability to self-posit and ground their own actuality. Thus the ideas *bring themselves* into actuality: the absolute is responsible for their possibility but they alone are responsible for their actuality. It seems that this is supposed to entail that the ideas, as actual, are somehow separate from the absolute, as Schelling argues that the absolute always remains absolute and undifferentiated and that the finite becomes so by separating itself from the former (*Philosopy and Religon*, 24; SW VI, 35–6). This claim that the finite is always separate from the absolute seems to be made to prevent Schelling from having to deny the central claim of the *Identitätssystem* (that the absolute contains no real difference) but in fact contradicts the other aspect of this claim (that the absolute is all that exists and cannot be separate from the world – Schelling states this claim explicitly in *Philosophy and Religion* (*Philosophy and Religion*, 11; SW VI, 21)) by allowing the existence of beings which are not part of the absolute. In order to avoid this conclusion the only other option for Schelling is to deny the reality of the finite, thereby failing to answer Eschenmayer's challenge. This is the option that he seems to take in *Philosophy and Religion*:

> The absolute is the only actual; the finite world, by contrast, is not real. Its cause, therefore, cannot lie in an *impartation* of reality from the Absolute to the finite world or its substrate; it can only lie in a *remove*, in a *falling-away* from the Absolute. (*Philosopy and Religion*, 26; SW VI, 38)

Finitude here is thus seen as privation: the finite removes itself from the absolute and therefore lacks positive reality as this is only possessed by the absolute; 'the finite is nothing positive but merely that side of selfhood of the ideas that turns into negation' (*Philosopy and Religion*, 49; SW VI, 62). As I will outline in the next chapter, Schelling will later argue against conceptions of finitude or evil as privation in the *Freedom* essay, arguing that this amounts to nothing more than a denial of their existence. This discrepancy between *Philosophy and Religion* and the *Freedom* essay casts some doubt on Schelling's comments in the latter that it does not represent a break from his previous works.

One point of similarity with the *Freedom* essay, however, is Schelling's claim that finite things are free: it is this freedom which allows them to break

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away from the absolute, and this freedom which ensures that the absolute is not responsible for them and that their finitude does not limit its nature as absolute:

> The cause of the falling-away, and therefore also its activity of production, lies *not in the Absolute* but merely in the *real*, in the *intuited itself*, which must be regarded as fully autonomous and free. The cause of the *possibility* of the falling-away lies in freedom. (*Philosophy and Religion*, 28; SW VI, 40)

This highlights a further point of difference from the *Freedom* essay: in *Philosophy and Religion* finitude has no necessary relation to the absolute; in fact Schelling argues that the telos of the system of the world is to cancel out the fall, to return finitude to absolute identity (*Philosophy and Religion*, 44; SW VI, 57). However, this raises a problem for *Philosophy and Religion*, as it becomes unclear on this account why the fall should happen at all: why should the absolute give rise to differentiated beings if the telos of the system is the same as its starting point? Why is a world created at all if the original state of the absolute is also its final goal?

Schelling's modification of the metaphysics of the *Identitätssystem* in the *Freedom* essay stems partly from his attempts to answer these questions. The question of the reality of individuals cannot be answered in a system which denies any differentiation in the absolute, therefore the *Freedom* essay returns to the conception of the absolute as a dynamic open system of powers which was outlined in the *Naturphilosophie.* This metaphysical picture, which posits difference as necessary to the absolute, also allows Schelling to account for the necessity of the existence of the finite: in the *Identitätssystem* the absolute is such that the fall of the finite is a threat to its nature as absolute; the metaphysics of the *Freedom* essay returns to a claim familiar from the *Naturphilosophie* by presenting a conception of the absolute as a process which *requires* the emergence of difference and freedom.

However, these changes to Schelling's metaphysics which underlie the *Freedom* essay only become possible because of the insight which begins in *Bruno* and is elaborated in *Philosophy and Religion*: the idea that grounded beings are not fully dependent on their grounds. The absolute grounds the *possibility* of the world but its *actuality* is grounded in contingency and freedom.

This idea also necessitates the rejection of other central aspects of the *Identitätssystem*, for example the claim that philosophical construction is possible. However, the denial of this possibility does not only arise because of Schelling's changing metaphysical commitments, but as White argues is internal to the *Identitätssystem* as the possibility of construction presupposes both the existence *and* the non-existence of human freedom:

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> While the constructive method assumes that there is no freedom, the constructive project makes sense as a chosen alternative only if human freedom is real. Perhaps more important, if Schelling denies the reality of freedom, he thereby repeats what he once saw as Spinoza's fundamental error. The problem of freedom [. . .] necessarily arises within the system of identity, but it at least remains insoluble within it. (White 1983: 103)

The constructive method is only possible if freedom does not exist: in order for the philosopher to be able to reconstruct the progression of things from the absolute, this progression must have taken place according to necessary rational laws; the possibility of free acts would introduce contingent elements into the system and thus would negate the possibility of reconstructing this system from its rational principle alone. However, Schelling repeatedly claims that any philosophical thought whatsoever is only made possible by the free act of the philosopher through which she separates herself from the world of objects and therefore makes contemplation of this world possible. The *Identitätssystem* therefore presupposes a notion of freedom, as it is only through a free act that the constructive method becomes possible, but the existence of this freedom undermines the very possibility of the constructive method. This mirrors the problem discussed above with regard to the reality of individuals: in both cases a free individual being is needed in order for the constructing/individuating activity to be possible, but the metaphysics of the system means that this kind of being is denied.

Philosophy and Religion also demonstrates that Schelling is becoming increasingly interested in a conception of freedom as volition, in the idea that beings are not fully determined by the absolute, and in the idea of responsibility: one of the central claims in *Philosophy and Religion* is that the finite is able to do things of its own volition and is therefore responsible for the things that it does. This is in contrast to the kind of freedom possible in the *Identitätssystem*, which necessarily rules out moral responsibility:

> Schelling's system [of identity] leaves no room for personal responsibility; it cannot, for if [acts] did not follow of necessity from the primal synthesis, then philosophical reconstruction would be impossible: we can reason from principles to results only when principles fully determine their result. (White 1983: 73)

Thus the only notion of freedom compatible with the *Identitätssystem* is Spinozist, where freedom consists in determination by one's necessary essence. However, as this kind of freedom is not enough to enable the philosopher to perform the free act of reconstruction, or enough to enable the finite to posit its own finitude, it cannot provide the ground which would make the constructive method or the existence of the finite possible.

This highlights a further problem with Schelling's claims in the *Identitätssystem*: they seem to necessitate a return to the mistakes of Spinoza that

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the younger Schelling was so keen to avoid. The transition between the *Identitätssystem* and the *Freedom* essay thus marks a return for Schelling to commitments which preoccupied him earlier in his career, in particular the need to account for finite individuals and their freedom, and the recognition of the difficulty of preserving these within a monist conception of reality. The *Freedom* essay can therefore be interpreted as Schelling's attempt, building on *Bruno* and *Philosophy and Religion*, to radically rethink the relationship between ground and grounded in such a way that would allow the infinite and eternal ground to give rise to beings with genuine independence and freedom without thereby limiting its infinite and eternal nature.

A further result of Schelling's rethinking of his metaphysics was that he came to doubt his earlier conviction that the absolute is fully rational. Through interactions with thinkers such as Jacob Boehme[5] and Franz von Baader (who brought Boehme's work to Schelling's attention) Schelling came into contact with the idea that reality contains some essential aspects which are fundamentally irrational and therefore cannot be captured in a system which proceeds from a fully rational principle. Thus in addition to finding a place in his system for individuality, freedom and moral responsibility, in the *Freedom* essay Schelling also attempts to find a place for what Marx characterises as:

> The irrational, that which cannot be accounted for, that which is essentially alien and unfamiliar in Being, the demonic and the magical that are to be found in reality, the undisclosed, uncanny forces slumbering in everything that is forceful and vital, that which is demonically threatening, and in particular, all the terrifying power and reality of evil. (Marx 1984: 61–2)

This conclusion, that the absolute contains both rational and irrational elements, is entailed by Schelling's account of the finite grounding its own actuality through volition. On this account there are some aspects of reality which are contingent and therefore are not contained in the rational nature of the absolute. However, the *possibility* of these contingencies is contained in the absolute, thus the absolute itself must contain an element that is not entirely rational.

Before moving on to consider the details of the *Freedom* essay, let me briefly summarise Schelling's philosophical progression (as I have presented it) which has led him to this point. Schelling's early work relies on the conviction that reality is based on an underlying principle which is rational and necessary, and his early texts are attempts at reconstructing the system of nature and history in order to demonstrate that these follow from this underlying rational principle and therefore are themselves rationally structured and necessary. However, the Schelling of the *Freedom* essay has rejected this conviction because the systems that it produced failed to

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account for the reality of individuality, finitude and freedom. Schelling now holds that these elements are a fundamental part of the world of nature, which therefore cannot be simply a product of pure reason. Philosophy has been unable to discover the world's underlying rational principle because there is not one to discover.

Schelling comes to see that the kind of rational system which defines German idealism comes at the price of reducing freedom to rational self-determination, i.e. to a Spinozist-style fatalism which is completely at odds with the Kantian conception of spontaneity and autonomy that the German idealists had hoped to save. The *Freedom* essay thus marks Schelling's turn away from the kind of grand rational system which he had searched for in his earlier works and his realisation that a strong conception of human freedom that is able to account for evil comes at the price of sacrificing a fully rational system. Put another way, Schelling had spent his early career attempting to avoid Jacobi's conclusion – that any rational system necessarily ends in the denial of freedom – but nonetheless ended up with the kind of Spinozism that Jacobi had warned against. The *Freedom* essay can therefore be read as Schelling's realisation of the truth of (an aspect of) Jacobi's conclusion: that freedom comes at the cost of sacrificing complete systematicity and rationality.

Notes

1. In fact the agent on this account is equally as free as the whole: the future is indeterminate both at the level of the absolute and the level of the agent, and neither the absolute nor the agent has conscious control over the exercise of their powers. However, even if the agent can be said to be just as free as the system as a whole the freedom that results from this conception is more akin to Spinoza's account than the traditional libertarian conception of freedom.
2. It is important to note that not all forms of compatibilism are committed to this claim that freedom is a matter of perspective; however, this form of compatibilism is most relevant here: firstly because it is closest to the compatibilism I am arguing is entailed by the *Naturphilosophie*; and secondly because this kind of compatibilism has clear roots in a certain reading of Kant's system.
3. See Spinoza, *Ethics* (IIP40S2 and VP24–VP42). For a good account of the third kind of knowledge in Spinoza see Moore (2014: chapter 2).
4. Schelling states that Eschenmayer's text was one of the central factors that led to his decision to write *Philosophy and Religion* (*Philosophy and Religion*, 3; SW VI, 13).
5. For a good account of Boehme's philosophy and his influence on Schelling see Brown (1977).

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Chapter 5

Freedom and Powers: Schelling's *Freedom* Essay

Introduction

Schelling's *Freedom* essay represents his attempt to rethink his metaphysical system in order to tackle the problems that arose from the *Identitätssystem*. Informed by his work on the fall of the finite in *Philosophy and Religion*, the *Freedom* essay emphasises the volition of the finite and the role that freedom plays in the individuation of beings from the absolute. Although the text is ostensibly concerned with theodicy, I want to argue that Schelling is concerned here with the same problems that preoccupied him throughout his philosophical career, and that the problem of evil provides a new way to think through these problems.[1]

There are two versions of the problem of evil which Schelling is concerned with in the *Freedom* essay. The first is the traditional problem of evil: why does God allow evil to exist? How can evil exist alongside God without threatening one of his necessary attributes? If God created evil then he cannot be wholly good; if God was unable to prevent the existence of evil then he cannot be omnipotent. And if God was unaware that evil would arise in his creation then he cannot be omniscient. I want to argue that Schelling uses this problem as a way to think through the questions surrounding the relationship of finite individuals to the whole and the process of their individuation that he was unable to solve in the *Identitätssystem*. The traditional problem of evil asks how a certain aspect of reality (evil) can exist as part of or alongside the whole (God) without constituting a limit to that whole; the question of the relation of the finite to the absolute takes the same form, as the existence of the finite seems to limit the nature of the absolute as infinite. Therefore a solution to the problem of evil which makes intelligible the existence of evil in a way that does not threaten the

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nature of God can be used to provide a parallel solution to the question of the relationship between the absolute and the finite.

The second version of the problem of evil that Schelling is concerned with here is the Kantian version of the problem:[2] the question of how moral evil is possible at all. This problem arises from the Kantian conception of freedom as autonomy or rational self-determination: if to be free is to act in accordance with reason, and if reason is constituted by following the moral law, then it seems that an agent committing an evil act is therefore not governed by reason and so not free. This kind of position leads to worries about the imputability of evil actions to agents and moral responsibility: it seems that in these cases the agent is governed by sensible motivations alone and is therefore *not* acting as a rational agent; this makes it difficult for us to attribute the action to the agent *as* agent, and therefore to hold that agent responsible for the choice of evil. For Schelling, this conception is equivalent to accounts of evil as privation (the view that evil has no positive reality and is merely an absence of the good – the kind of view entailed by *Philosophy and Religion*, where Schelling argues that finitude is merely privation) which he now argues are inadequate as they contradict our experience of evil: evil manifests itself as a real force in the world and is often carried out by individuals that we consider to be fully rational (*Freedom*, 32–5; SW VII, 367–71). Schelling's rejection of accounts of evil as privation or absence of goodness reflects his concern with the status of the finite. In the *Freedom* essay Schelling rejects the account of finitude he offered in the *Identitätssystem* on the grounds that his accounts there of the finite as mere appearance (the systematic texts) or as a privation of the absolute (*Philosophy and Religion*) ultimately render the finite unreal. For Schelling, the actuality of evil and the actuality of the finite can only be secured by arguing that both have a positive existence which is separate from the good or the infinite: conceiving of these as privation or mere appearance is tantamount to denying their reality.

Another dimension of the Kantian problem of evil concerns choice: as well as conceiving evil as a mere lack of rationality the Kantian account entails that evil cannot be freely chosen by a rational being; as rationality is constituted by following the moral law an agent performing an evil action cannot have rationally chosen evil, as evil can (by definition) never be the outcome of a rational choice.[3] For Schelling this is an unacceptable conclusion: if evil is to be real then it must be a live option for rational beings. The denial of the possibility of rationally choosing evil is, for Schelling, equivalent to denying the existence of freedom: freedom consists in the ability to choose good *or* evil, thus without evil there can be no freedom. Again this emphasis on choice reflects Schelling's concern with the independence of the finite and the process of individuation that would

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make this independence possible. In the case of evil, this entails that agents are only genuinely independent if they can choose *against* the rational order represented by the moral law, thereby making a positive choice to prioritise their own self-interest over the demands of morality. Schelling thinks of the independence of the finite in the same way: in order to be truly independent of the absolute finite beings must be able to *choose* to be independent; to assert their status as finite individuals over their status as parts of the absolute. This is one way that the idea of the volition of the finite, which Schelling introduced in *Bruno* and developed in *Philosophy and Religion*, becomes central in the *Freedom* essay.

These considerations help make intelligible the shift in Schelling's thought in the *Freedom* essay on the status of the irrational: where the *Identitätssystem* presents the absolute as wholly rational, here Schelling posits an irreducibly irrational and chaotic aspect of being. The absolute itself is claimed to have both a rational and an irrational aspect, and therefore the world of nature contains elements of both. Allowing for the existence of an irrational element in the absolute and (by extension) in the natural world opens up the possibility that some aspects of reality do not simply follow from the nature of the absolute with rational necessity, therefore negating the possibility of philosophical construction which the *Identitätssystem* entails: the ability of the philosopher in possession of the absolute first principle to rationally deduce the entire history of nature. If the absolute is fully rational then the reality which emerges from it follows necessarily in a rational progression, thereby securing the possibility that the philosopher could reconstruct this progression from the rational first principle. However, this conception of the absolute also entails that all beings and all events in the natural world, including the acts of agents, are determined by the absolute's rational nature. By introducing an irrational element at the centre of being Schelling ensures that this rational determination no longer holds, thereby ruling out the possibility that the philosopher could rationally reconstruct the progression of beings from the absolute: this reconstruction becomes impossible as it is no longer the case that everything that happens follows by necessity from the absolute's rational nature.

Schelling also seems to have realised in the *Freedom* essay that the existence of an irrational element to reality is the only way to ensure the possibility for genuine evil: if the absolute is fully rational then any deviation from this rationality can only be a privation rather than the affirmation or choice of some other equally real option. This is reflected in the Kantian problem of evil: if freedom is constituted by acting in accordance with reason then any deviation from reason is a privation of freedom rather than the free choice of another equally real option. The irrational aspect of the absolute is therefore central to Schelling's account in the *Freedom* essay. The relationship of the

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rational aspect of the absolute to the irrational aspect is also reflected in the traditional problem of evil: both consist in the question of how two contradictory aspects of reality (evil/the irrational and God/the rational) can exist together without one either limiting or subsuming the other.

Schelling's focus on theodicy in the *Freedom* essay therefore has wider implications than just an account of evil: Schelling uses the problem of evil to think through worries surrounding the relationship of finite individuals to the absolute, individuation and independence, and the irrational, which I argued in the previous chapter were insoluble from within the *Identitätssystem*. Schelling tackles these multiple worries by modifying his ontology, in ways that I will show return to the ontology of powers outlined in the *Naturphilosophie*: time and process become central, and an irreducibly irrational element is introduced at the centre of reality. The *Identitätssystem* conceives of the absolute as always already fully given; time is rendered illusory and movement and process is secondary to and contained within the absolute's oneness. In the *Freedom* essay time becomes necessary for the very existence of the absolute, with Schelling claiming that the absolute must undergo a temporal process in order to become fully actual. Rather than a singular being which is always complete, in the *Freedom* essay Schelling's absolute rather becomes an absolute process which is necessarily temporal and perhaps will never reach an end.[4] This is one way which the ontology of the *Freedom* essay moves back towards the ontology of the *Naturphilosophie*, as in the latter, unlike in the *Identitätssystem*, nature is conceived as an infinite temporal process. The absolute as presented in the *Freedom* essay is not a given and complete system but a progression from chaotic beginnings to the relatively ordered world of nature that we experience. As well as time and process becoming necessary to the absolute this account also entails that the existence of finite differentiated beings is similarly necessary: the absolute is able to reveal itself as actual only through its manifestation in finite entities. Rather than limiting the absolute the finite rather enables it to exist. The finite is no longer parasitic on the absolute for its reality, but there is a reciprocal relationship between the absolute and finite beings: the finite depends on the absolute to ground its possibility while the absolute depends on the finite for its actuality. It may seem that this dependence of the absolute on the finite for its actuality undermines the former's status as absolute; however, Schelling will argue that this is a positive and reciprocal kind of dependence which does not undermine the absolute's status but rather is what *allows* it to be absolute in actuality. I return to this account of the reciprocal relationship between the absolute and the finite later in this chapter. In the previous chapter I argued that the *Identitätssystem* was unable to account for the question of *why* the absolute should give rise to finite beings at all. The *Freedom* essay provides an answer to this question:

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the absolute gives rise to finite beings because finitude is a necessary aspect of the absolute process, without which the absolute could not manifest itself at all. The change in Schelling's ontology can be seen as a transition from the monism of the *Identitätssystem* to a holism, from a system where individuality threatens unity to a system where individuals are necessary for the manifestation of the whole.

However, the problem of just how independent these beings are arises again here, in the same form in which it arose in the *Naturphilosophie*: are finite beings ever fully independent or are they merely aspects of the absolute process, vehicles for its manifestation? This is where Schelling's treatment of the problem of evil and human freedom becomes central. In the following section I reconstruct the central arguments of the *Freedom* essay, with a particular focus on the claims which are central to the questions that I have argued Schelling is concerned with tackling in the text. Following this summary I will outline the ways that the essay attempts to tackle these questions, before outlining a further problem and possible solution.

The Argument of the Text

Schelling begins the *Freedom* essay by claiming that this text completes his system, building on *Philosophy and Religion* (*Freedom*, x; SW VII, 334), a claim which is questionable given the obvious departures which the essay makes from the *Identitätssystem.*[5] Despite these changes, Schelling's ontology in the essay is not completely new: it is clear that he sees the ontology of the *Naturphilosophie* as essential to the claims he wants to make here. Schelling argues that because of work in *Naturphilosophie* previous contrasts between nature and spirit based on accounts which see the latter as only existing in subjects and the former as mechanistic have been overcome. For Schelling, it is only now that these oppositions have been left behind that we are able see the 'real contrast' or 'higher distinction' that we should be concentrating on: the contrast between necessity and freedom (*Freedom*, ix; SW VII, 333).

Schelling emphasises that an essential aspect of his investigation into human freedom will involve examining the relationship that it has to the system that it exists within: no concept can be understood apart from the whole and freedom is such a central concept that its nature must be bound up with the fundamental nature of the whole itself:

> [N]o conception can be defined in isolation, and depends for its systematic completion on the demonstration of its connections with the whole. This is especially the case in the conception of freedom, for if it is to have any reality at all it cannot be a merely subordinate or incidental but must be one of the dominant central points of the system. (*Freedom*, 1; SW VII, 336)

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Schelling's previous failure to deduce the reality of finitude and individuality from a whole whose nature was incompatible with their existence seems to have led him to realise that finite freedom must be grounded in absolute freedom in order to have any reality. However, if human freedom brings with it the possibility for evil this creates a problem: we do not want to claim that the nature of the absolute contains evil, but we need to be able to derive human freedom from the nature of the absolute in order for this freedom to be possible. This mirrors the problem with individuality, which presupposes finitude: we cannot claim that the nature of the absolute is finite, but we need to be able to derive finitude from the absolute in order that its existence does not constitute a limit to the absolute's infinitude.

This highlights the reason that positive conceptions of evil and finitude were impossible from within the *Identitätssystem*: given that these could not be contained in the absolute as it was conceived in the *Identitätssystem*, their reality had to be denied and they were relegated to the status of illusions or privations. Schelling has rejected both of these options; he must now modify his conception of the absolute such that finitude and the possibility for evil become necessary to it without limiting it. Schelling therefore examines the relationship of freedom to system, arguing that philosophers have tended to take them as incompatible even though this is not necessarily true (*Freedom*, 2–3; SW VII, 339): system *itself* is not incompatible with freedom; it is simply a case of positing *the right kind of system.* Schelling argues that the resources to construct a system of this kind are already present in the *Naturphilosophie* (*Freedom,* 22; SW II, 357)*:* the process and power-based ontology outlined there will be central to the system outlined in the *Freedom* essay. Schelling also brings to the fore here aspects of the *Naturphilosophie* which were not fully developed previously, with his emphasis later in the text on the importance of creativity, strife/life and personality.

Schelling's claim that only a power-based system is capable of allowing for human freedom is highlighted in his discussion of Spinoza's pantheism. Schelling argues here that pantheism itself does not entail determinism; the claim that all beings are part of the absolute or God[6] does not itself entail that these beings are determined by God (Freedom, 10–11; SW VVII, 346). Again, Schelling argues that the problem here is not with system *simpliciter* but with the *kind* of system: 'The error of [Spinoza's] system is by no means due to the fact that he posits all things in God, but to the fact that they are *things*' (*Freedom*, 14, my emphasis; SW VII, 349). Pantheism or systematicity is not the problem; the problem is rather that Spinoza's system lacks dynamism: if we can think the absolute in terms of a system of powers in process rather than as a single material entity then the problem of the compatibility of freedom and system becomes solvable. Schelling even argues that pantheism is *necessary* for the possibility of human freedom,

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as the relationship of God to beings in a pantheistic system entails that these beings *must* be free: '[t]he procession of things from God is God's self-revelation. But God can only reveal himself in beings which resemble him, in free, self-activating beings' (*Freedom*, 11–12; SW VII, 347).

However, here the problem of evil arises in an especially pressing form: pantheism's claim that all things are in God, coupled with the claim that humans are capable of evil, seems to entail that the nature of God contains evil:

> To be sure [this problem] applies most strikingly to the concept of immanence, for either real evil is admitted, in which case it is unavoidable to include evil itself in infinite Substance or Primal Will, and thus totally disrupt the conception of an all-perfect Being; or the reality of evil must in some way or another be denied, in which case the real conception of freedom disappears at the same time. (*Freedom*, 17–18; SW VII, 353)

Schelling argues that it is not only pantheism, the claim that God is immanent in things, which is susceptible to this problem: as long as beings are grounded in God (however this grounding is cashed out) God will be responsible for their natures. Thus the solution to the problem of evil can only be reached if *self*-grounding beings are possible, as only these beings can be responsible for their own natures in a way that absolves God. This is why the volition of the finite will be central to Schelling's account of human freedom here. Further, the claim that an element of contingency or irrationality exists in the absolute will also be central, as it is this claim which entails that there are some aspects of reality that are not contained in or entailed by the nature of God.

Schelling reiterates his earlier claim that the only way to solve the problem of evil is through the ontology of the *Naturphilosophie*: the claim from the *Naturphilosophie* that the absolute necessarily divides into two opposing but mutually dependent tendencies is fundamental to the ontology of the *Freedom* essay and to Schelling's solution to the problem of evil. It is this claim that allows Schelling to distinguish between the rational and irrational elements of the absolute, and to make his crucial distinction 'between Being insofar as it exists, and Being insofar as it is the mere basis of existence' (*Freedom*, 22; SW VII, 357). This allows a further separation of God (being as existent) from his ground (being as basis):

> As there is nothing before or outside of God he must contain within himself the ground of his existence. All philosophies say this, but they speak of this ground as a mere concept without making it something real and actual. The ground of his existence, which God contains within himself, is not God viewed as absolute, that is insofar as he exists. For it is only the basis of his existence, it is *nature* – in God, inseparable from him, to be sure, but nevertheless distinguishable from him. (*Freedom*, 23; SW VII, 357–8)

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Following the power-based model outlined in the *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling argues that God must necessarily divide into two in order to become actual: one of these aspects is the ground of existence; the other is existence itself.[7] This distinction allows Schelling to drive a wedge between these two aspects of God: God as existent is rational while the ground is chaotic, irrational and unruly (*Freedom*, 24–5; SW VII, 360). God and the ground are frequently compared to light and gravity throughout the text: the former represents the expansive force of light while the latter corresponds to the contractive tendency of gravity. In the texts on *Naturphilosophie* Schelling argues that it is this contractive tendency which is the ground of individuation in nature, and its influence which leads natural beings to strive to assert their individuality and independence in the face of nature as a whole.

This further highlights the importance of the *Naturphilosophie* for Schelling's claims in the *Freedom* essay: Schelling's account of the emergence of actuality in the essay mirrors that given in the *Naturphilosophie.* Both here and in the *Naturphilosophie* the concept of power or will is central: here Schelling argues that prior to God's existence as actual all that exists is pure will, pure power which longs to become actual (see *Freedom*, 24 and 60; SW VII, 359 and 395 for example), and which then divides in order that it can be manifested. This claim – that opposition (and therefore an original division) is necessary for God to become actual – also has its roots in the *Naturphilosophie*. Schelling's conception of life in the *Naturphilosophie*, which is expanded on in the *Freedom* essay, is based on the centrality of opposition, strife and struggle: for Schelling, life is only possible when it has something opposed to it to struggle and assert its individuality against, and the same is true of God:

> God is a life, not a mere being. All life has destiny and is subject to suffering and development. God freely submitted himself to this too, in the very beginning when, in order to become personal, he divided light and the world of darkness. For being is only aware of itself in becoming. (*Freedom*, 69; SW VII, 403)

Actuality and life are impossible without becoming, a process which necessarily involves opposition and strife. The separation of the principles is therefore necessary in order that God exist at all. This separation of the rational existent God from his dark and irrational ground also entails two other things: it grounds the possibility of individuated independent beings and it grounds the possibility of evil. Again, the ontology outlined in the *Naturphilosophie* is central: after the division of the principles the process of nature begins; nature evolves from the interactions of the two principles (Schelling states that telling the story of exactly how this evolution progresses is the task of *Naturphilosophie*; he does not attempt it here (*Freedom*, 28; SW VII, 362)) into a system of beings which contain both principles

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in differing degrees. The dark, chaotic principle of the ground strives for independence and individuality and thus ensures that natural beings are never fully dependent on the rational nature of God. Schelling argues here (again echoing claims from the *Naturphilosophie*) that the most perfect beings are those which contain the most differentiation (*Freedom*, 28; SW VII, 362)[8] and perhaps unsurprisingly these turn out to be human agents, creatures in which the principles are most distinct from one another.

Agents contain both of the principles, but as differentiated: humans contain a separate rational aspect and an irrational chaotic aspect. In addition to this separation of the principles human agents are also remarkable in that they are conscious of the existence of both principles. Thus agents are conscious both of their place within a rational whole as well as of their status as independent individuals; this puts agents in a unique position as it allows them to choose between the principles. Although aware that the rational principle ensures order and harmony with the whole, the selfhood and individuality of agents draws them towards the irrational will of the ground which leads them to assert their particularity over the whole, willing the disruption of its harmony. This is the choice which constitutes evil:

> [T]hat evil is this very exaltation of self-will is made clear from the following. Will, which deserts its supernatural status in order to make itself as general will also particular and creature will, at one and the same time, strives to reverse the relation of the principles, to exalt the basis above the cause, and to use that spirit which it received only for the centre, which leads to disorganisation within itself and outside itself. (*Freedom*, 31; SW VII, 356)

Evil is an agent's choice to elevate her own selfhood over the will of the whole, to choose disorder and particularity over unity with the whole. It is the agent's choice to subvert the proper relation of part to whole, to assert herself as an individual over the whole to which she belongs; Schelling therefore compares evil with disease, in which one part of the organism turns against the whole: '[l]ocal disease also occurs only because some entity whose freedom or life exists only so that it may remain in the whole, strives to exist for itself' (*Freedom*, 32; SW VII, 366). Evil is a subversion of the proper relationship of the principles: although necessary for God's existence the dark ground only exists in order that God can become actual, and should therefore be subordinate to him. In evil the agent prioritises the will of the ground over the rational will of God by affirming her selfhood at the expense of the whole, attempting to make absolute the principle which should be subordinate.

How, then, does this ontological story ensure that the existence of evil is not attributed to God? Schelling gives two reasons: firstly, the existence of evil is necessary so that God can reveal himself:

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> For every nature can be revealed only in its opposite – love in hatred, unity in strife. If there were no division of the principles, then unity could not manifest its omnipotence; if there were no conflict then love could not become real. (*Freedom*, 38; SW VII, 373)

Thus it is only in the face of the existence of evil that God's nature as good is fully revealed.[9] Secondly, this account ensures that the *actuality* of evil only appears in humans: the separation of the principles and the nature of the irrational ground which arises from this is not itself evil; it merely grounds the possibility that evil could arise. It is only agents that are capable of making evil actual rather than merely possible: evil is the decision of a finite individual to elevate the will of the ground over the will of God, and this can only come about when creatures exist who have a separation of the principles within them and are capable of reflecting on this separation. The only creatures which meet these criteria (as far as we know) are human agents. This is the basis for Schelling's claim that evil exists only in humans: evil does not exist in God, the irrational ground, or in nature, although in the natural world we see instances of irrationality which are the precursors of evil (*Freedom*, 42; SW VII, 378). Evil is always based on a positive *choice*; it does not exist in the absolute as it only emerges in beings that freely choose it: 'evil ever remains man's own choice; the basis cannot cause evil as such, and every creature falls through its own guilt' (*Freedom*, 46; SW VII, 381–2).

In this way the *Freedom essay* succeeds in making evil imputable to agents alone, and further accounts for the necessity of the existence of evil: God is a living being and as such needs an opposing force to struggle against in order to preserve himself:

> Only in personality is there life; and all personality rests on a dark foundation which must, to be sure, also be the foundation of knowledge. But only reason can bring forth what it continues in those depths, hidden and merely potential, and elevate it to actuality. (*Freedom*, 79; SW VII, 413–14)

Schelling also makes a similar claim about the necessity of the irrational. Although the rational nature of God is necessary for the creation and maintenance of the natural world, this would itself be impossible without the existence of an irrational ground for God to oppose himself to.

The remainder of the text focuses on the relationship between God and this irrational ground, and raises the question of what existed prior to this opposition: as God and the ground are engaged in a reciprocal relationship they can only exist together. As Dunham et al. state: 'the ground of existence itself exists only insofar as it grounds actual existents, just as existents only exist insofar as they are grounded' (2011: 139). This entails that whatever they originated from can be neither God nor ground. Schelling terms

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this existent which is prior to both the groundless or *abgrund*: because a ground only exists when what it grounds is actual (grounding is a reciprocal relationship), whatever preceded actuality cannot (by definition) be thought of as a ground:

> [T]here must be a being *before* all basis and before all existence, that is, before any duality at all: how can we designate it except as 'primal ground' or, rather, as the 'groundless'? As it precedes all antitheses these cannot be distinguishable in it or be present in any way at all. It cannot then be called the identity of both, but only the absolute indifference as to both […] Indifference is not a product of antitheses, nor are they implicitly contained in it, but it is a unique being, apart from all antitheses, in which all distinctions break up. It is nothing else than just their non-being, and therefore has no predicates except for lack of predicates, without its being nothing or a non-entity. (*Freedom*, 72; SW VII, 406)

This *abgrund* is prior to reason; it is from this indeterminate state that reason emerges as actuality unfolds. This discussion of the *abgrund* foreshadows the project that will concern Schelling for the rest of his life: the *Weltalter*, his attempt to trace the emergence of reality from its unthinkable ground, to make sense of the progression of being from disorder to order and irrationality to reason.

Schelling's discussion of the *abgrund* need not concern us here, but there is one feature of his account that I want to draw attention to: the claim that God's self-revelation and the division of the principles which this entails was not a matter of necessity but was based on a positive choice. For Schelling, 'creation is not an event but an act' (*Freedom*, 61; SW VII, 396) in which God chooses to separate his rational nature from the irrational ground in order to actualise himself in the natural world. This aspect of Schelling's account is important as it underlines the fact that the freedom of the divine is of the same kind as human freedom: the ability to freely choose between two equally possible options is constitutive of freedom in both cases. This emphasis on volition is also reflected at the level of other natural beings: there is a sense in which all finite existents must 'choose' to assert their own existence and individuality in the face of the whole. Again, one of Schelling's central claims from the *Naturphilosophie* is therefore preserved in the *Freedom* essay: that the same process applies at all levels of being.

Solutions from the *Freedom* essay

Before moving on I want to briefly summarise the way that the ontology of the *Freedom* essay attempts to solve the problems which I have been arguing Schelling was concerned with throughout his philosophical career:[10] the relationship of the finite to the infinite; the relationship between individuals

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and the whole (how individuation and genuine independence are possible); the relationship of freedom to system; and the relationship between the irrational and the rational. I have also argued that these can be seen as different facets of the same problem, and that in the *Freedom* essay Schelling approaches this set of problems through his treatment of the problem(s) of evil.

The Kantian version of the problem of evil stems from the fact that, for Kant, acting freely is equivalent to acting rationally, which in turn is equivalent to acting under the moral law: therefore it seems that on this account evil acts cannot be free acts and therefore cannot be imputed to the agent. Further, it seems that on this account evil cannot be chosen by a rational agent: evil is simply not a live option for this kind of agent. It is important to separate two interrelated problems here for the Kantian account of moral evil: the impossibility that a rational agent could choose evil; and the claim that evil is a privation. The latter arguably entails the former: because evil is a privation rather than a positive option in its own right, the rational agent can never *choose* evil; evil can only arise in the absence of a rational choice being made, as if the agent were to deliberate and choose rationally she would always choose the good. For Schelling this is tantamount to the denial of freedom as it seems to lead to the conclusion that the agent is either determined by the demands of reason or determined by her sensible inclinations and desires: in either case the agent does not freely choose. Schelling's account in the *Freedom* essay attempts to avoid this problem by conceiving of freedom as constituted by the ability to choose between good and evil: rather than conceiving of evil as a privation or as unreal, evil becomes the necessary condition for freedom. On Schelling's account evil is both a live option for agents and can be chosen rationally: although evil is constituted by the agent's choice to prioritise her selfhood over the rational order of the whole, the agent still has some reasons which count in favour of this choice. Although in evil the agent wills the disruption of the rational order of the whole, there is at least some rational basis for her attempt to prioritise her individuality over the whole. Therefore for Schelling's agent evil is always a live option: being a free agent is *constituted by* the ability to make the choice between good or evil; there are reasons which count in favour of both options; and evil is therefore always imputable to the agent

Schelling's account in the *Freedom* essay also provides a response to the traditional problem of evil. Firstly, for Schelling, it is not the case that God creates evil but rather that the act of his self-revelation opens up the possibility that evil could arise. On this account evil is always a positive choice attributable to a particular agent and is therefore never the responsibility of God as this responsibility always lies solely with agents. Secondly, the fact that God's self-revelation brings about the possibility for evil does not

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conflict with God's goodness as this possibility is necessary for him to exist at all: in order for evil not to exist, God could not exist: the possibility of evil is a necessary condition for the actuality of God's goodness. Schelling even argues in the essay that the possibility of evil is morally necessary, as without this possibility there would be no morality and no goodness (*Freedom*, 68; SW VII, 402–3). A worry might be that on this account evil still seems to constitute a limit to God as his existence depends on the possibility of evil and he is unable to stop evil becoming actual in agents. However, this misunderstands the centrality of reciprocity and struggle in Schelling's ontology and in his account of life in particular: for Schelling opposition is necessary for existence and individuation; rather than limiting God the irrational ground (which brings with it the possibility for evil) enables God to exist. Thus this limit is not a limit to God in the problematic sense of limiting his infinitude, perfection, etc.; rather this limitation is what allows God to express these aspects of his nature in actuality. This kind of limitation is not restrictive; rather it enables God to manifest himself as a living being. Further, this limit is not external to God as it is self-imposed: the absolute freely divides in order to create the opposition necessary for its rational nature to manifest itself in the actual world.

Schelling's account of the centrality of reciprocity similarly forms the basis for his conception of the relationship between the infinite and the finite here: the existence of the finite does not destroy the infinitude of the absolute but rather enables it to be actual as on this account the infinite can only exist in and through its opposition with the finite. It may seem that this threatens the genuine independence of the finite as it exists only in the service of the infinite. However this worry is combated by Schelling's emphasis on the importance of choice: the finite's existence does not follow necessarily from the nature of the absolute but only arises because of the finite's own volition. Finite beings are constituted by the interactions of the absolute's two basic tendencies (the rational God and the irrational ground), but their continued existence is due solely to their own volition, to their continued assertion of their individuality in the face of the whole.

The same kind of story also applies to the question of the relationship between individuals and the whole: the ontology of the *Freedom* essay moves away from the monist conception of the absolute found in the *Identitätssystem* and conceives of the absolute as a process, a system which allows for the emergence of genuinely independent individuals. These individuals are independent in the senses outlined above: they are independent in that neither their existence nor their nature follow necessarily from the absolute (as the absolute itself is not wholly rational) and in the sense that their continued existence and acts are attributable to their own volition alone.

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Volition has therefore become the cornerstone of Schelling's system: because of the irrational element at the centre of reality, neither the existence of God nor the world of nature follows inevitably from the nature of the absolute. The existence of individual beings, the world of nature and even God himself are all the result of positive choices.

A New Problem

I have argued that Schelling's revised ontology in the *Freedom* essay underlies his solutions to the problems discussed above. This ontology, with its focus on process and reciprocity, allows for a conception of individuation and freedom which accounts for genuinely independent beings which do not problematically limit the absolute but rather play an integral part in its self-revelation. Choice and volition are central to this account, both at the level of human freedom and the freedom of the divine. However, although Schelling's account of human freedom seems to emphasise choice, this account raises a new problem for the possibility of agents exercising their freedom in the natural world. This is due to Schelling's claim that the choice that agents must[11] make between good and evil cannot take place in the temporal world:

> In original creation, as has been shown, man is an undetermined entity [. . .] He alone can determine himself. But this determination cannot take place in time; it occurs outside of time altogether and hence it coincides with the first creation even though as an act differentiated from it. Man, even though born in time, is nonetheless a creature of creation's beginning [. . .] The act which determines man's life does not belong in time but in eternity. Moreover it does not precede life in time but occurs throughout time [. . .] as an act external by its own nature. (*Freedom*, 50–1; SW VII, 785–6)

Prior to this claim Schelling's discussions of human freedom seem to suggest an account closer to twentieth-century existentialism – Schelling repeatedly stresses that 'man's being is essentially *his own deed*' (*Freedom*, 50; SW VII, 385) – in which human freedom consists in *acts*, in the ability to choose between good and evil. As we have seen, this emphasis on the agent's volition is important: agents must be self-grounding in order that their natures are their responsibility alone and not attributable to God. However, when Schelling discusses the 'formal concept' of freedom, we are told that this choice between good and evil does not, and indeed cannot, take place in the temporal realm: it does not belong in time but in eternity. If this decision, which defines the essence of the agent, were to take place in temporal nature it could be affected by something other than the agent

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herself – if the agent is to be truly free and self-grounding, this choice must be in some sense atemporal (Freedom, 48; SW VII, 383–4).

In the dominant reading in the literature of Schelling's claims here[12] this timeless act fully determines the essence of the agent, and this essence in turn fully determines all of the agent's acts in the temporal realm. In this reading the whole of the agent's temporal life is determined: although the agent is free of determination by natural causal forces her acts are necessitated by her eternal essence. In this view therefore the only free act which an agent is able to perform is the timeless choice which constitutes her essence. The freedom which attaches to the temporal acts of the agent is merely derivative in this account: these acts are free only in the sense that the essence which determines them was chosen freely. Thus the possibility of free choice in the temporal realm[13] is completely ruled out; every choice the agent will make is pre-determined by her essence.[14]

This does not seem like the kind of freedom that we want, or even any kind of freedom that we can understand. In this view the agent lacks any existential freedom as everything that she will ever do or be throughout her life is already determined by her atemporal choice. Although Schelling's ontology provides us with a system with an open future and alternative possibilities, the agent herself lacks these possibilities: she lacks the ability to make genuine choices in her life because her past, present and future are already fixed by the essence that she has freely chosen. This brings me back to the claim that this kind of freedom seems impossible to understand: it is difficult to see what kind of freedom can attach to this choice.[15] As the choice is outside of time it is therefore outside of my experience as an agent; since it seems to be a choice which is in some sense constitutive of my agency it is difficult, in this account, to see in what sense it is *my* free choice: how can I make a free choice when the 'me' that chooses is unable to have any consciousness of that choice, and perhaps in an important sense does not exist when the choice is made?

The dominant reading of Schelling's claims here completely rules out the possibility of any temporal freedom for the agent and entails that the only freedom that is possible is the free atemporal act through which the agent constitutes her essence. However, this reading gives us no way to make sense of this act and the freedom which attaches to it: the view leaves us with the conclusion that freedom on the temporal level is impossible and freedom at the atemporal level is unintelligible. I want to argue that this failure to make sense of the atemporal choice, and of the possibility of temporal freedom, is due to an assumption about the relationship of essence and form which underlies the dominant view: that this relationship consists of essence fully determining form. Schelling's understanding of this relationship is very different – as we have seen, Schelling's ontology focuses on reciprocity and

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process – and I want to argue that with a proper understanding of the way that he does conceive of the relationship between essence and form we are able to read the *Freedom* essay in such a way that not only makes the nature of the atemporal choice intelligible, but also allows for the possibility of free temporal acts. For Schelling the relationship between essence and form is not characterised by a one-way relationship of determination but by reciprocity, mutual interdependence and independence.

Making Sense of Atemporal Choice and Existential Freedom

I am claiming that a misunderstanding of Schelling's account of the relationship between essence and form underlies the problems with the dominant readings of the *Freedom* essay, and that these accounts overlook the importance of Schelling's conception of this relationship for the claims he makes in the essay. Despite Schelling's insistence that a proper understanding of the law of identity (the relationship between subject and predicate/consequent and ground) is essential to understanding his position, the relevance of his wider conception of the relationship of essence to form has generally gone unnoticed in the literature.[16] This is indicative of a broader failure to understand Schelling's wider views on the relationship of the infinite and the finite, the absolute and the world, the individual and the whole, etc. In all of these cases, for Schelling the emphasis is on the reciprocity of the relationship and on the extent to which the two terms are dependent on yet independent of one another. For Schelling, just as the absolute can only become actual in the system of nature and therefore depends on the latter for its articulation and determination, an essence can become actual only through its instantiation in form and the latter plays a role in the articulation and determination of essence.

It is clear in the *Freedom* essay that Schelling sees this relationship between ground and consequent, which is expressed by the law of identity, as central for understanding the nature of human freedom: Schelling writes that 'this mistake which indicates complete ignorance as to the nature of the copula, has repeatedly been made with respect to the higher application of the law of identity'. This 'dialectical immaturity' which Schelling identifies comes from seeing the law of identity as expressing a reproduction of the same, while Schelling argues that this law, properly understood, expresses the relationship of two different things: the terms in the claim A = A are subject and predicate, and the law of identity concerns the relationship between the two and the way that one is instantiated in the other.[17] Hence 'the proposition, "This body is blue", does not mean that a body in and of reason of its being a body is also a blue body, but only that the object

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designated as this body is blue though not in the same sense' (*Freedom*, 7; SW VII, 341). Therefore the body and its blueness stand in a particular relationship to one another that is more complex than the simple reproduction of the predicate blue in the subject body. Schelling's discussion here is followed a few pages later by his claims about the relationship of dependent beings to their grounds, where he argues that:

> Every organic individual, insofar as it has come into being, is dependent on another organism with respect to its genesis but not at all with respect to its essential being. It is not incongruous, says Leibniz, that he who is God could at the same time be begotten, or contrariwise; it is no more contradictory than for someone who is son of a man to be a man. On the contrary, it would indeed be contradictory if that which is dependent or consequent were not autonomous. There would be dependence without something being dependent, a result without a resultant, and therefore no true result; the whole conception would vitiate itself. (*Freedom*, 11; SW VII, 346)

In order for us to make sense of two things having a relationship of dependence, both must have some degree of autonomy from one another as without this there would not be two separate things at all, but rather one thing with two identifiable aspects. Schelling sees this relationship as taking a similar form to the one expressed in the law of identity: both apply to two separate things in some kind of productive relationship; one term is ground of the other, but in producing its consequent it does not simply reproduce the same as a degree of autonomy and novelty arises through the process of production.

It seems apparent that Schelling's account of the law of identity is central to his claims in the *Freedom* essay, and I want to argue that we need to understand the relationship between eternal essence and temporal acts in his account of human freedom in the same way that we understand the relationship between the two terms in the law of identity. However, as Schelling does not provide a full elucidation of his account of the relationship between ground and consequent in the *Freedom* essay, I want to turn to some of Schelling's other works from his middle and late periods in order to gain a more detailed view of the way that he understands this relationship. I argue that there are two central aspects of Schelling's account of the relationship between essence and form which are salient to his claims in the *Freedom* essay: firstly, form or consequent has a degree of independence from its essence or ground; secondly, there is an extent to which form or consequent plays a role in retroactively determining essence or ground. Thus, for Schelling, the relationship between the two terms is one of reciprocal dependence and determination: rather than essence fully determining form, the relationship of determination is reciprocal and, further, each term has a degree of independence from the other.

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The Law of Identity in Construction

For Schelling, the law of identity expresses the relationship of ground to consequent, essence to form, and his account of this relationship is most clearly elucidated in his account of construction or generation: the way that natural objects arise. Such objects arise through a process constituted by a reciprocal relationship between the ideal and real. Although this conception of generation is present in the *Naturphilosophie*,[18] Schelling's later formulations relate this process more explicitly to the relationship of essence to form that is expressed by the law of identity.

Schelling understands the construction of matter as the first potency of nature, and describes this construction in his 1844 *Exhibition of the Process of Nature* as 'the genuine process of nature by which concrete Being first emerges, [. . .] Being that co-develops from both A and B' (SW X, 325). A and B here refer to the two aspects which arise from the original division of the absolute: Schelling describes A as that which has Being, and B as that which A posits in opposition to itself (SW X, 309); therefore we can understand A as the ideal and B as the real. What is central about this account of construction is that both the ideal and the real are equally active in the construction of matter: it is not the case that the real is passively shaped by the ideal but rather both are equally active and necessary and the relationship between them is one of reciprocity – 'only both together, thus neither the first nor the second in themselves, first make the existent' (SW X, 304). For Schelling, essence or idea alone is mere *ability* to be, mere potency, and it remains abstract and ideal until it is exemplified and made concrete (and therefore determinate) in the real: 'both together *exhibit* the existent in their reciprocal attraction' (ibid.).[19]

In the process of construction, the real and the ideal are engaged in a reciprocal relationship to give rise to concrete particulars. Crucially, neither one has precedence in this relationship: the ideal requires the real for its actualisation and determinacy while the real requires the ideal to provide the conditions of its possibility.

Although the process outlined above is discussed in the context of the construction of matter, one of Schelling's central claims throughout his philosophy is that the same process applies at all levels of nature: that there is no difference between the levels of nature (both at the level of concrete, real nature and at the level of the ideal or the divine) in terms of their process of generation (SW X, 377).[20] Thus although the process of construction outlines the relationship between the ideal and the real rather than explicitly dealing with the relationship of essence to form we can conclude that the latter relationship will have the same structure as the former because for Schelling this process is what remains constant throughout all levels

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of nature.[21] We can therefore read the relationship between essence and form in the same way as the relationship between the ideal and the real in construction outlined above.

Thus, for Schelling, finite form is equally as important as eternal essence. Contrary to conceptions of this relationship which hold that essence has priority and forms are purely derivative, for Schelling essence relies on and is determined by form to exactly the same extent that form relies on and is determined by essence: '[I]t is now essential to a thing that it affirm itself in the form of the finite, [. . .] it is for that very reason immediately form' (SW II, 360). Essence therefore depends on form in order to exist at all – Schelling argues that essence remains 'pure can-being' (SW X, 347), not fully actual until it has form which both exemplifies it but also confers determinacy on it. While form is dependent on essence for its manner of being, the determinate details of its concrete being are not contained in its essence as these arise through its creative engagements with its natural environment. The specific ways in which it actualises its essence to produce its own unique being then have an effect on the essence itself, by increasing its determinacy: '[t]he unlimited, which in itself is neither great nor small, neither more nor less, neither stronger nor weaker, receives all determinations from the limiting' (SW XI, 393).

The Relationship of Ground to Consequent in Construction

As outlined above, the relationship between ground and consequent in construction is reciprocal: the ground (essence, A) does not fully determine the consequent (form, B). Although in principle the consequent is dependent on and therefore subordinate to its ground, the reciprocal nature of their relationship coupled with the consequent's capacity for creative engagements with its environment is such that the consequent retains a degree of independence from its ground:

> We thus assume that the two principles share governance, so to speak, balance out in such a way that the principle determined *in general* to submission [. . .] is nevertheless not unconditionally subordinate and that it has the ability to become in part independent being for itself, untouched by the opposite potency. (SW X, 312)

Thus the ground is not the cause of the consequent in the sense that it fully contains and determines the latter, it rather constitutes the conditions of the latter's possibility. Rather than determining all aspects of its being, it simply defines the parameters within which the consequent is able to creatively actualise itself. Schelling emphasises that the ground is not cause of its

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consequent in his definition of ground as 'the support [. . .] (not cause) of the possibility of another' (SW XI, 387).

In addition to this claim that the consequent is neither caused nor fully determined by its ground, Schelling also maintains that the ground is in an important sense dependent on its consequent, as it is only through the latter that it can become actual: 'the antecedent has its actuality in the consequent in respect of which it is accordingly mere potency' (SW IX, 375–6). Thus while the consequent depends on the ground for the conditions of its possibility, the ground is dependent on the consequent for its actuality and determination; essences only exist through their instantiations in form, and the manner which this form takes (which is not fully determined by essence as it is also shaped by creative engagements with nature) partially determines essence – 'the newly emergent acts on what previously had been' (SW XIV, 343–4).

What is important about this reciprocal relationship in which both terms are dependent on yet independent of one another is that it entails that neither term fully contains or exhausts the other. The ground will therefore always contain some aspects which are never fully exemplified in the consequent (not least because essences are eternal and abstract and forms are temporal and concrete) while the consequent will always have certain determinate aspects that aren't contained in its ground (because forms are specific and shaped by particular engagements with their environment).

For Schelling, this relationship whereby consequents are not fully determined by their grounds is what establishes the possibility for variety and freedom to exist in the natural world:

> [E]ven within the same kind nature experiences a certain unmistakable freedom, to preserve a free space for variety within an established circuit, such that no individual is absolutely identical to any other; individuals are even distinguished by accidents of form and outline, indeed by inner properties, from one another. For this reason I stated at the very outset that the principle dominant in organic nature is no longer merely subjugated to the higher potency, but resolved in voluntary union and as it were in collusion with it to free production and creation. (SW X, 378–9)

Organic beings are never fully determined by their essences: no two natural forms of the same kind are alike because essence does not determine form. Essence is not fully exhausted in form, therefore different forms will actualise different aspects of the same essence, and as form is not fully determined by essence different forms will actualise their essences in different ways through their creative relationships with their environment. Further, the relationship between the temporal organism and its eternal essence is also creative – each form has the ability to actualise and confer determinacy upon its essence in novel ways. This process, which is present at all levels of

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nature from the inorganic to the organic therefore also applies to the ways that human agents relate to their eternal essences.

A worry may be that I need to say more about how this process of form retroactively determining essence would work. A detailed account of this process is a considerable task beyond the scope of this chapter, but I want to gesture towards how this retroactive determination might be understood. One way to look at Schelling's problematic in the *Freedom* essay is in terms of the relationship between individuals and their essences: how can an essence contain enough content to fully determine all of the aspects of all of its particular forms? This is another way of stating the problem of individuation: if everything is grounded in the absolute essence, which is necessarily general, how does individuality arise from this generality? This question is troubling for essentialist accounts generally: if beings are determined by their essences, and if these essences (by virtue of being general) cannot contain enough content to determine all aspects of all of their particular forms, how can an essentialist view account for each unique individual which exemplifies a particular essence? I take Schelling to be attempting a solution to this worry in the *Freedom* essay. Schelling criticised Kant's account of evil for its failure to deduce how *individuals* can arise from essences (*Freedom*, 17; SW VII, 352): although Kant secures an essence for rational beings that exists outside the temporal realm (and therefore outside the realm of causal relations), this essence was, for Schelling, too abstract and indeterminate. If my essence is determined only by my nature as a rational being, then in what sense am I, as an *individual*, responsible for my acts? For Schelling the question of individuation is central, and the process through which form retroactively determines essence is fundamental in his account of individuation.

We can see the relationship whereby form retroactively determines essence as one way of making sense of how general essences can ground different individuals. If essences are not fully determinate until they are instantiated in particular individuals, and if these individuals are able to confer determinacy on their essences through particular interactions with the world, we get an account of how individuals arise: an indeterminate essence, given determination by the features of a particular individual, then constitutes the individuated essence of that concrete being. Thus even members of the same kind are differently individuated; the essence of a kind only contains some determinate aspects (for example, the essence of a cow may only specify that cows must be bovine, chew the cud, etc.), and this essence is made determinate in different ways by the specific features of different individuals of that kind (such as being an Aberdeen Angus, having horns, having a certain temperament, etc.). Through this process of particularisation of a general essence we end up with different individuations of

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the same general essence: one a good-natured, robust Friesian; and one an angry but sickly Shorthorn, for example.

In the case of human essences this process of particularisation through the concrete forms of an individual's being becomes all the more important: for Schelling all that is contained in an agent's essence is that she must choose between good or evil, and this choice alone seems inadequate to contain the determinacy required for my essence to contain all aspects of my particular being. Just as my essence as a human may determine that I am (say) a featherless biped but does not determine how long my legs are, even if my essence has been fixed as good this does not determine how I actualise this goodness; this is determined through my temporal existence. These examples demonstrate a point which Schelling is sensitive to in the *Freedom* essay: essences are *general*; in order for individuation to be possible this must arise through the particular interactions between a concrete individual and the world.

Implications for the *Freedom* essay

Following this we see that reading Schelling as understanding essence as fully determining form is a mistake – the very mistake that Schelling warns against. The law of identity does not describe the determination of one term by another, but describes a productive and creative relationship: the ground contains the conditions of possibility for the consequent, but does not become actual or fully determinate until it is actualised in a particular way through its consequent's creative relationship with its environment. The consequent, though dependent on its ground for the form of its being, is able to actualise this form creatively, and to act upon its ground to confer determinacy on the latter through its novel engagements with this ground as well as the natural environment.

Turning back to the *Freedom* essay, if we use Schelling's conception outlined above to understand the relationship of an agent's essence (ground) to her temporal existence (consequent) we see a different picture emerging in opposition to accounts which understand essence as fully determining the temporal agent. Because, for those accounts, essence causes and contains all aspects of form, there is nothing the temporal agent is capable of doing that is not predetermined by her essence. On these readings, temporal acts are free only in the derivative sense that they are determined by a freely chosen essence.

I have argued that the relationship between atemporal essence and temporal acts is more complex. On my account, taking Schelling's conception of the relationship between ground and consequent seriously, we

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can maintain that although an agent's essence provides the conditions of possibility for her temporal existence the latter is not fully determined by the former. On the contrary, because a consequent is engaged in a creative and reciprocal relationship with its ground, the way that an agent's essence is actualised is not predetermined but rather arises through her creative engagements with the world and with her essence. In this way, her essence becomes more determinate as it is concretely instantiated through her free acts in the world. Rather than the agent's temporal character being fully determined by her essence, the agent's character (as consequent) retains a degree of independence from this essence (ground), meaning that the agent is able to perform free acts in the temporal realm which are not determined by her essence.

One objection about the account that I have presented may be that it fails to isolate anything which is specific to human freedom, a worry that I raised in Chapter 3 for Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. On my reading freedom is present throughout nature: all natural products have freedom in some sense as all are able to creatively engage with their environment; the creative relationship between ground and consequent outlined above which entails that temporal beings are not fully determined by their essences is present at all levels of nature. Given this, it seems that human freedom is simply a more complex version of the same freedom that, say, a blade of grass possesses. This is a dissatisfying conclusion, especially from the perspective of questions about ethics and responsibility: why should we expect agents to act ethically, and why do we hold them responsible if we aren't willing to do the same (though perhaps to a lesser degree) with a blade of grass? This, I suggest, is a question that the *Freedom* essay answers in a way that Schelling's previous works failed to, as it gives an account of why agents are responsible for their essences in a way that other natural products are not. The essence of an agent is so indeterminate (all it contains is the fact that she must choose) that everything about this essence is the responsibility of the agent. Although agents have the same relationship to their essence and environment as other natural beings (which constitutes freedom), agents have a different ethical status because they are the only beings which have ultimate responsibility for their essences. While other natural beings can relate creatively to their essences these essences are determined by the natural/rational order, whereas human beings are able to self-determine their essences and therefore are the only natural beings that have moral responsibility. In my view the *Freedom* essay thus secures the fundamental difference between the creativity of natural organisms (which are able to interact with their environments in ways not wholly predetermined by their essences) and agents, who in addition to this basic level of creativity have the ability to genuinely determine their essences. This self-determination of

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essence which secures moral responsibility is what constitutes specifically human freedom.

However, it is important to note that this difference in the level of responsibility does not reflect a difference in kind with regard to the freedom which humans and other natural products have, or a difference in the basic ontological status of these beings. The relationship between agents and their essences is the same as the relationship between any natural being and its essence; and the indeterminacy of the human essence is simply a greater degree of the indeterminacy which exists in all of nature. Further, the principles which are differentiated in agents are the same principles which exist throughout the natural world, although they appear as separated in agents. Therefore although there is an important difference in terms of responsibility (only agents are morally responsible as only agents are capable of deciding which principle will structure their essence), this does not reflect an ontological difference in kind. Rather, when we get to the top end of the gradient of natural beings, the indeterminacy of essence and separability of principles give rise to a different kind of moral responsibility. This reflects Schelling's comments about the progression and differentiation of natural forms in the *Naturphilosophie* – progression is always gradual; however, this does not prevent genuinely distinct elements from emerging:

> Nothing which *comes to be* in nature *comes to be* in a leap; all *becoming* occurs in a continuous sequence. But it by no means follows from this that everything which exists is for that reason continuously connected – that there should also be no leap between what *exists*. From everything that is, therefore, nothing has *become* without steady progression, a steady transition from one state to another. But now, since it *is*, it stands between its own boundaries as a thing of a particular kind, which distinguishes itself from others in sharp determinations. (*Ideas*, 133–4; SW II, 172)

Thus although the *Freedom* essay builds on the *Naturphilosophie* in order to deal with some of the problems that arise in the latter, this constitutes a progression of the same ontology of powers rather than a radical break.

The Positive Story

I want to say a bit more about how we should understand Schelling's claims about the agent's atemporal essence and the way that it relates to existential freedom by sketching how the relationship between these aspects of the agent would work in two cases: firstly, in the case of the 'everyday' agent; secondly, in the case of Judas Iscariot that Schelling discusses.

On my account the atemporal choice which Schelling outlines is not one singular act which is situated outside of time and which determines the essence of the agent. Rather, this essence is determined through a continual

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process by the acts and choices that the agent freely makes throughout her life: the agent chooses the kind of life she endorses and constitutes herself as that kind of agent throughout her temporal life. This is entailed by Schelling's wider conception of the relationship between essence and form: these are coextensive, neither has priority and the relationship of determination between them is reciprocal. The essence of an agent simply necessitates *that* she must choose; the temporal agent confers determinacy on this essence and individuates herself as the particular agent that she is through *what* she chooses. Some of these choices will have more effect on the agent's essence than others: the act of choosing what to have for breakfast will have a far less constitutive effect on the agent's essence than her choice of whether or not to torture an enemy, for example. For most agents these kinds of extreme acts and choices simply won't arise: in most cases an agent's essence won't be fixed as wholly good or wholly evil as most will not have self-constituted in such a radical way.

However, as well as the agent's temporal acts having a determining effect on her essence, this essence also plays a role in determining her acts. Therefore although it will most often be the case that the agent's essence allows for a number of different courses of action, there will be some cases of individuals whose essences have been shaped by their previous acts in such a way as to necessitate that in particular situations the agent can only act in one way. This is the way that we should understand Schelling's comments when he claims that Judas could not have acted differently, although he was fully responsible for his behaviour (*Freedom*, 51; SW VII, 386). Schelling follows this claim by stating that:

> [S]omeone, who perhaps to excuse himself from a wrong act, says: "Well, that's the way I am" – is himself well aware that he is so because of his own fault, however correct he may be in thinking that it would have been impossible for him to act differently. (Ibid.)

Neither Judas nor the agent making this excuse was *compelled* to act as they did, but *given the kind of agent that they were* they could not have acted in any other way. In both these cases the essence of the agent necessitated that in that particular situation there was only one way that they could have acted: these agents are responsible because their essences were constituted by their own free choices in the past but nonetheless it would have been impossible for them to act differently at that particular time.

Although in these cases the agent was unable to act differently, Schelling does allow for cases of character transformation, of conversion from evil to good (or vice versa), but argues that this possibility is always contained in the agent's essence (*Freedom*, 54; SW VII, 389). This is intelligible, on my account, because of the reciprocal relationship between the agent's essence

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and temporal form. Cases like that of Judas describe situations in which the agent's essence has become fixed to such a degree that only one course of action is possible. However, there will be other cases where although an agent has tended to act in a particular way this has not been sufficient to fix her essence as forever good or forever evil. In these cases, character transformation is possible as the agent will be able to act differently through temporal acts of will, but this possibility is grounded in the fact that the essence of the agent is such as to allow this transformation. This highlights the central claim of my account: the agent's essence is not chosen once and for all, but shaped over time by her free acts. This determination is reciprocal, however: while the agent is able to shape her essence, this essence also shapes and can sometimes determine her actions, as in the case of Judas.

To finish this chapter I want to consider a final possible objection to the view I have argued for: that it moves too far from Schelling's claims in the text:

> In original creation, as has been shown, man is an undetermined entity [. . .] He alone can determine himself. But this determination cannot take place in time; it occurs outside of time altogether and hence it coincides with the first creation even though as an act differentiated from it. Man, even though born in time, is nonetheless a creature of creation's beginning [. . .] The act which determines man's life does not belong in time but in eternity. Moreover it does not precede life in time but occurs throughout time [. . .] as an act external by its own nature. (*Freedom*, 50–1; SW VII, 385–6)

Schelling is pretty unequivocal here that the agent's determining of her essence takes place outside of the temporal order. But in my view we can make sense of this claim in another way: although the determination of the agent's essence takes place through the temporal acts of the agent it is not itself any specific temporal act and thus is in an important sense not contained in the temporal realm; as Schelling claims, it does not belong in time but in eternity. However, this claim does not imply that an essence so determined is thereby totally separate from and unaffected by the agent's acts in the temporal realm, and to make this assumption is to repeat the mistake I identified above: to take the eternal or the ideal as being wholly separate from the temporal or the real.[22] Thus, on my account, we can see that the fact that the determination of an agent's essence is not contained in any temporal act does not entail that this essence is thereby wholly separated from the temporal actions of that agent. My reading also makes sense of Schelling's claim that, although not itself a temporal act, the determination of essence 'does not precede life in time but occurs throughout time' (*Freedom*, 51; SW VII 385): this determination of essence is a continual process which does not precede the agent's temporal existence but rather occurs throughout the agent's life.

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Notes

1. Schindler makes a similar claim – he parses one of the central problems of the *Freedom* essay as the problem of derivative absolutes (that is, how can beings exist which have some of the properties of the absolute, such as being self-grounding and unlimited, without this threatening the nature of the absolute itself?) and argues that the problem of evil provides a way for Schelling to think through this problem (Schindler 2012: 174).
2. See Kosch (2006: chapter 2) for a discussion of how these problems arise in Kant's system. Gardner (2017a) also provides a good summary of Schelling's worries about Kant's conception of evil, as well as other aspects of Kant's theory of freedom, and the way that these worries influence Schelling's account in the *Freedom* essay.
3. There is a possible Kantian response to this problem (see Alison 1990 for the classic example) based on Kant's distinction between *Wille* and *Willkur.* These refer to the two functions of the will: *Wille* is the legislative function of the will, the capacity that enables the agent to act according to the deliverances of pure reason while *Willkur* is the executive function of the will, the capacity for choice which enables the agent to choose between the demands of *Wille* and her sensuous desires. According to this response, while the agent may only be *free* when she acts in accordance with the imperatives that stem from *Wille*, she is always *responsible* for her actions because even when she is determined by her desires, that this determination happened was chosen by her *Willkur*. Therefore the agent is only free in the full sense when *Willkur* is determined by the demands of *Wille*, but is responsible at all times because of the operation of *Willkur* in all her actions. I have never been able to get a good grip on this response, and on what exactly the connection between *Wille* and *Willkur* is supposed to be. I think that the central issue here is the question of what principles *Willkur* could use to choose whether to follow the demands of *Wille* or sensuous desires, and given this issue the Kantian response simply seems to push the problem a level back. The original problem for the Kantian was that either the agent is using her reason, and will therefore freely follow the moral law, or fails to use her reason and is therefore determined in her action by her sensible desires, thus failing to exercise the freedom necessary for us to hold her responsible. This problem simply re-emerges at the level of *Wille* and *Willkur*: on what possible principles could *Willkur* choose between determination by *Wille* and determination by sensible desires? It seems that *Willkur* either chooses in accordance with *Wille* (thus the agent will freely follow the moral law) or fails to do so and therefore is determined by the demands of sensibility (thus the agent will fail to exercise the freedom necessary for us to hold her responsible). The introduction of *Willkur* as a power of choice does not do enough to make this latter case look like a genuine case of agency in the sense needed to meet the objection: it does not make sense to think of *Willkur* rationally choosing (exercising agency) to follow the demands of desire because once an agent engages in rational activity she will be led to the moral law. Thus in cases where the agent fails to perform the right action, she is necessarily failing to exercise her rationality and therefore her agency: it is impossible for an agent to freely perform an evil action. It seems to me that the problem for the Kantian arises because of the strict connection in Kant between freedom and reason: this connection still holds at the level of the *Wille/Willkur* distinction; the problem therefore recurs at this level too.
4. With regard to the *Freedom* essay, there is an interesting question here about whether Schelling sees the absolute as having an end that could ever be reached. It seems from some of his comments in the text that he does conceive of the absolute as a system which has a telos, which is something like the reunification of the principles, and therefore the reunification of beings with God. However, whether this is an end that could ever actually be reached or is merely a regulative ideal is unclear.

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5. The central change which takes place between these two texts are the changes Schelling makes to his ontology, which I outline below. In addition, Schelling's conception of evil has changed: *Philosophy and Religion* implies an account of evil as privation; Schelling rejects accounts of this kind in the *Freedom* essay. The *Freedom* essay also dispenses with some of the more obscure aspects of *Philosophy and Religion*, for example the claim that there are ideas which play some kind of mediating role between the possibility of things (which is contained in the absolute) and their actuality.
6. It is notable that in the *Freedom* essay Schelling now uses the term God instead of the absolute; for our purposes here we can take these terms to be roughly equivalent. There are interesting questions which arise, however, surrounding whether they are in fact equivalent: sometimes Schelling talks as if they are, but at other times it seems that God is simply one aspect of the absolute. Schelling also makes comments later in the text which seem to imply that God does not exist *as* God until some later stage in the process of reality. For reasons of space I will put these questions aside here.
7. It is claims like this which lead to the question of whether God is equivalent to the absolute or not: at this point it seems that God is only one aspect of the absolute (the rational existent side) while the ground is part of the absolute but separate from God.
8. It can readily be seen that in the tension of longing necessary to bring things completely to birth in the innermost nexus of the forces can only be released in a graded evolution, and at every stage in the division of forces there is developed out of nature a new being whose soul must be all the more perfect the more differentiatedly it contains what was left undifferentiated in the others. (*Freedom* 28; SW VII 362)
9. Again, this claim draws into question whether God and the absolute can be taken as equivalent: at times it seems that Schelling is claiming that God does not exist until evil emerges in the world for him to overcome.
10. I am not concerned here with the question of the success or otherwise of Schelling's arguments in the *Freedom* essay; I am more interested in the way that the text represents a new set of answers to the problems I have argued he was engaged with throughout his career, and in the way that the new ontology which enables these answers effects his conception of freedom. See Kosch (2006: chapter 4) and White (1983: 106–45) for some discussion of whether Schelling's arguments here go through.
11. It is important that agents *must* make this choice; for Schelling the choice is not optional but is a necessary aspect of agency:

    Man has been placed on that summit where he contains within him the source of self-impulsion towards good and evil in equal measure; the nexus of the principles within him is not a bond of necessity but of freedom. He stands on the dividing line; whatever he chooses will be his act, but he cannot remain in indecision because God must necessarily reveal himself and because nothing in creation can remain ambiguous. (*Freedom*, 38; SW VII, 374)
12. The accounts in the Anglophone literature are diverse and attempt to account for Schelling's claims about the atemporal choice in a range of different ways. However, these accounts either share the conclusion that the agent's temporal life is fully determined by her atemporal essence (Freydberg, Žižek, Marx, Kosch), or fail to make intelligible what the relationship between the temporal agent and her essence is supposed to be such that this conclusion is avoided (Snow, White). The failure of these accounts is due to the fact that all of them accept the problematic assumption regarding the relationship of essence and form which I discuss below. I outline and defend these claims in detail in Alderwick (2015).
13. In what follows I will refer to this as temporal or existential freedom. What I have in mind when I use these terms is something like our everyday conception of human freedom: the ability of agents to make free choices and perform free acts in their lives.
14. See O'Connor (2013) for a good account of the ways in which this reading of Schelling negates the possibility of existential freedom and autonomy.

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15. White (1983: 139) makes a similar point.
16. An exception is White who does devote some attention to the section of the *Freedom* essay which discusses the law of identity, but fails to link this discussion to Schelling's conception of freedom. See White (1985: 109–14). Gardner (2017a) also mentions the importance of the law of identity but again fails to make the crucial link that I identify below.
17. Schelling also characterises the law of identity in this way in his essay *On the Relation of the Ideal and the Real in Nature*: 'We can recognise no other distinction between these two than that which we could find in the law of identity (whereby the **combination** of the predicating and the predicated is eternally expressed)' (SW II, 361). Unless otherwise stated all translations of Schelling's SW used in this chapter are taken from Grant (forthcoming).
18. Arguably, the entirety of Schelling's *Outline* is an account of the process of generation in nature, from the initial inhibiting of the absolute's productivity through the stages of inorganic and organic nature: '*[B]eing itself* is nothing other than the *highest constructing activity*' (*Outline*, 14; SW III, 12).
19. See also:

    > Corporeal substance is neither B nor A alone, but what lies in the middle between the two, what balances the two, and nor should it be thought as if the corporeal was A in one part and B in another, but rather entirely A and entirely B. Better put, it is what at every point can equally be the one as the other. It is not that A or B is the corporeal; rather it is what holds the two together. (SW X, 349)

20. This kind of claim is also found throughout Schelling's works on *Naturphilosophie* (see, for example, *Outline*, 9; SW III, 9). That Schelling considers the process which underlies all natural products to be uniform throughout nature is also made evident by the fact that his work *Exhibition of the Process of Nature* (SW X, 303–90) refers to a singular process rather than a plurality of processes.
21. It is unclear from Schelling's work whether he conceives of essence and form as identical with the real and the ideal, or whether he simply conceives of them as having an analogous relationship and interacting through the same process. For my purposes here I can remain neutral on this issue: the central claim I want to make is that the relationship between essence and form is identical to the relationship between the real and the ideal, as they are both instances of the same process which remains constant throughout all levels of nature.
22. A consequence of my account is that it seems to entail certain conclusions about Schelling's view of eternity: if we take seriously Schelling's claims about the relationship of retroactive determination that takes place between essence and form, then this coupled with his claim that the natural process is uniform at all levels seems to imply that the eternal, for Schelling, must in an important sense be determined by the temporal. I do not have the space to explore this further here; however, I do take this conclusion to be consistent with Schelling's system.

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Chapter 6

Freedom and Powers: The Trouble with Powers

Introduction

I have presented Schelling's *Freedom* essay as building on the ontology of his previous work on *Naturphilosophie* in a way that enabled him to solve the outstanding problems that the latter, as well as his *Identitätssystem*, was unable to deal with. These problems focus on the relationship between the absolute and beings (or the infinite and the finite, system and freedom, the whole and its parts), and at their core is the question of how beings which are grounded in the absolute can be genuinely free and independent individuals given that they have their ground in another. This is mirrored by a question from the side of the absolute: how can the absolute, if it grounds beings which are genuinely individuated and independent from it, be *absolute*, that is how could it be the case that the existence of these beings does not limit it and therefore undermine its status *as* absolute?

The *Freedom* essay provides a complex solution to this set of problems through Schelling's account of the natural process (which characterises the relationship between ground and consequent, essence and form, the absolute and the world, etc.) which secures the ability of the grounded to attain a degree of independence from its ground, as well as ensuring that this independence does not threaten the status of the ground itself. This reciprocal relationship of mutual dependence and independence ensures that the circle of dependence which exists between the absolute and the beings which it grounds is virtuous rather than vicious: the absolute grounds the possibility of finite beings while these beings ground their own actuality, and in this way enable the absolute itself to become actual as it is manifested in the process of nature.

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I claimed that the problems Schelling tackles in the *Freedom* essay could not be solved by any of his previous systems: the *Naturphilosophie* provided the power-based ontology on which the solutions of the *Freedom* essay are ultimately based but on its own was insufficient. The ontology of the *Naturphilosophie* could not secure either the individuation of finite beings from the absolute, or the ability of these beings to have ownership and control over the natural powers which constituted them. I will focus on this ability, as well as the problem of individuation, in this chapter.

The problem of individuation is one of Schelling's central concerns in the texts on *Naturphilosophie*, in particular in the *Outline* where he claims that it is the 'highest problem' (*Outline*, 77; SW III, 102) to be dealt with. The problem arises because of the basic claims that *Naturphilosophie* makes about nature as a whole and its relationship to its products. The first principle of *Naturphilosophie* states that nature as a whole is unconditioned and infinitely active:

> The unconditioned cannot be sought in any individual 'thing' nor in anything of which one can say that it 'is'. For what 'is' only partakes of being, and is only an individual form or kind of being. Conversely, one can never say of the unconditioned that it 'is'. For it is being itself, and as such, it does not exhibit itself entirely in any finite product, and every individual is, as it were, a particular expression of it. (Ibid. 13; SW III, 13)

This claim indicates the complex and paradoxical relationship between nature as productive and nature as product: nature itself is absolute activity and therefore is never fully expressed in any of its products; however, in order to have any actual existence this absolutely productive force must necessarily limit itself to give rise to finite products in an attempt to express its infinite productivity (although these products will necessarily fail to do so). Whistler argues that the first principle of the *Naturphilosophie* generates two competing commitments that Schelling must attempt to affirm: the first is the claim that finite products must be expressions of the productive force of nature, since there is no other way that they could have arisen; and the second is the claim that finite individuals must always fail to express this force, since something infinite, active and unconditioned could never express itself as a finite limited product (Whistler 2016: 331).

Schelling attempts to deal with this problem of the relationship between nature as productive and nature as product by arguing that products, limitations of the absolutely productive force, are merely temporary and secondary: this is the basis for the *Naturphilosophie*'s claim that all natural products are in fact *one* product limited at various stages (*Outline*, 6 and 28; SW III, 6, and 32). The limiting of nature's absolute productivity is always temporary: a genuine product (i.e. an independent finite being) is impossible as the existence of this kind of individual would mean

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the ceasing of productivity and therefore the annulment of nature itself. Schelling in the *Naturphilosophie* thus conceives of all natural products as temporary inhibitions of the absolute process: natural individuals are transitory manifestations of the more fundamental activity which underlies them. For Schelling here a natural product is the same kind of thing as a whirlpool (*Outline*, 18n; SW III, 18n): both are the stable-looking manifestation of activity taking place in the thing of which they are a part; neither is a genuine individual. Although we might talk about the whirlpool and the natural product as individuals, from a higher standpoint they are secondary to the activity which underlies them and which will eventually assimilate them: in the case of the whirlpool, the river; in the case of finite beings, nature as a whole. This is why Schelling argues that nature is concerned with the annihilation of individuality itself rather than with particular individuals: the productive tendency of nature (which, from a higher standpoint, is always primary (*Outline*, 14; SW III, 15)) will eventually destroy the products which limit its infinite activity. Thus the paradox of *Naturphilosophie* becomes the problem of how to think natural products or individuals at all: it is necessary that we *do* think them, as it is only through them that we are able to glimpse nature's infinite productivity; however, if we give too much ontological weight to individuals then this productivity itself comes under threat.

In the *Naturphilosophie* Schelling does not provide a convincing solution to the problem of individuation. In a similar vein to his claims about freedom, Schelling seems to maintain that the problems which arise can be dealt with simply through the adoption of different standpoints: from the standpoint of finite individuals we can affirm their existence; whereas from the standpoint of being we take them to be merely temporary and secondary to nature's productivity as a whole. The task of *Naturphilosophie* is to somehow think from both of these perspectives. The problem with this kind of solution, as with the analogous solution in the case of freedom, is that Schelling also maintains that the standpoint of being is primary: and from this standpoint the reality of individuals as well as the reality of freedom must be denied.

In the systematic texts of the *Identitätssystem* Schelling abandons any attempt to argue for genuine individuality or freedom, suggesting a recognition that his previous account in the *Naturphilosophie* was inadequate. The *Naturphilosophie*'s attempt to account for the existence of genuinely independent individuals had failed; in the *Identitätssystem* Schelling therefore advocates a conception of individuality and finitude as mere illusion or privation. Rather than attempt a new solution to the problem of individuation, here Schelling accepts and attempts to work out the consequences of a system which denies the individual. However, problems internal to

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the *Identitätssystem*, as well as Schelling's continued desire to find a place for genuine finitude, individuality and freedom in his system led to his return to the ontology of the *Naturphilosophie* and his supplementation of this ontology with the additional claims of the *Freedom* essay. By emphasising the importance of life/strife, process and time, Schelling provides his dynamic conception of the natural process (which characterises the relationship between ground and grounded, essence and form, the absolute and the world of nature, etc.) which ultimately underlies his solutions to the set of problems discussed above.

I want to stress that, although the solutions that it provides are only made possible by moving beyond the *Naturphilosophie*, the *Freedom* essay ultimately rests on a power-based ontology, and further the advances it makes on the *Naturphilosophie* are only made possible because of this ontology. Although powers are not central to Schelling's account of human freedom, the ontology on which this account is based is only made possible through his use of powers. The separation between God and the ground, his insistence that the absolute is a system in process, the emphasis on the concept of life and with this the importance of opposition and struggle, the relationship between good and evil, and the nature of the ground/consequent relation which grounds the possibility of human freedom, are all derived from the basic structure of the power-based ontology outlined in the texts on *Naturphilosophie*. This ontology also enables a conception of objects as arising from the interactions of natural powers, therefore ensuring the continuity between the causal powers of agents and the causal processes which obtain throughout the rest of nature. However, this conception of objects alone is insufficient to entail the kind of account of agency that Schelling wants to argue for and ultimately outlines in the *Freedom* essay. This indicates that the power-based ontology itself cannot secure human freedom: in order to argue for human freedom on the basis of this ontology extra claims must be added (as Schelling does in the *Freedom* essay) in order to surmount the problems regarding individuation and ownership/control which arise from a power-based ontology when taken on its own: the very problems which arise for the *Naturphilosophie*.

In this chapter I want to say more about these problems, and why they are especially pressing for power-based accounts. Further, I want to claim that these problems will arise in any pan-dispositionalist ontology: therefore they apply equally to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and to contemporary power-based accounts. I do not want to reject pan-dispositionalism as a basis for arguing for libertarian freedom – in fact I think that an ontology of this sort provides the best possible basis for the libertarian. Instead I want to demonstrate that this kind of ontology *on its own* is insufficient. This is because of the problems surrounding individuation and control that I

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outline below: in order to give a good argument for the existence of human freedom the pan-dispositionalist ontology needs to be supplemented with some additional claims in order to tackle these problems. After outlining the problems and why they arise I will look at the kinds of additional claims that could be made to deal with them. This will include a discussion and assessment of Schelling's attempted solutions, as well as a discussion of the further options which may be available to the contemporary pan-dispositionalist.

Power-based Ontologies Revisited

First, I will briefly restate the central features of a pan-dispositionalist or dispositional monist ontology, features which I argued in Chapter 3 also characterise Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* which I claimed is fundamentally a power-based system. Systems of this kind posit powers as the fundamental ontological constituent, and (for Schelling as for contemporary advocates of this view) the central evidence for this claim is empirical: the most fundamental properties and entities that physics acknowledges are dispositional by nature.[1] A pan-dispositionalist ontology is also a process ontology: the nature of powers is that they are active; this necessitates that they must have something to act upon, namely other powers. These powers will therefore be engaged in continual relationships with each other which may sometimes reach a stable point but ultimately will never reach complete equilibrium: therefore the positing of powers as the fundamental constituent of reality necessitates a conception of this reality as a dynamic system which is continually in process.

A pan-dispositionalist ontology advocates the existence of powers 'all the way down': all properties at all levels of nature are dispositional, until at the lowest level we reach an ungrounded power, a disposition which is not possessed by any particular entity. These dispositions or powers are therefore understood as the fundamental constituents of objects: powers interact with one another in various combinations and in varying degrees, and when these interactions form stable relations they manifest as concrete objects. These objects will then have the particular set of dispositional properties or causal powers that they do due to the nature and relationship of the powers that they are composed of. Thus different objects will have different properties simply because of the different powers which constitute them: an object composed of two powers in a stable relation will likely have a small range of dispositional properties, while an object composed of a large number of powers in a complex relationship with one another will be likely to have a wide range of diverse dispositional properties.

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This conception of the nature of objects and their properties as irreducibly dispositional also has implications for our conceptions of natural laws and causation. On contemporary pan-dispositionalist accounts, as well as in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, causation is not understood as a relationship between a cause which is fully active and an effect which is entirely passive but is a reciprocal relationship where both sides of the relation are equally active: in order for a particular manifestation to occur *both* elements of the relation must manifest their dispositions together. One consequence of this is that, on this account, causation is not a necessitating relation: causes *never* necessitate their effects even if they in practice never fail to bring these effects about. This is because, in the dispositional account of causation I outlined in Chapter 1, the presence of all of the relevant causal antecedents is never sufficient to bring about a particular manifestation as an additional element is always needed, namely the object actually manifesting its disposition(s). And this may fail to obtain even when all of the relevant manifestation conditions are present: an object's activity or failure to act is always brought about only by that object itself.

This claim – that the properties of objects, and therefore objects themselves, are inherently powerful – has important consequences for our conception of natural laws and their relationship to events and processes in nature. The contemporary interest in dispositional properties stems in part from a reaction to categoricalist accounts of properties which render these inherently powerless and therefore claim that it is only through the movements of external forces that change occurs in objects or the world. These kinds of account give a central role to natural laws: because objects cannot ground their own activity, this is accounted for by an appeal to natural laws as a set of 'rules' which stand over and above objects and necessitate the ways that they behave. A dispositional monist account has no need to make this kind of appeal to a mysterious set of laws that somehow stands above but nonetheless causes change in nature, because the activities of objects are accounted for by the simple fact that objects and their properties are inherently powerful. The idea of natural laws as some kind of necessitating force external to objects is replaced by an account of *laws as immanent to objects*, as descriptive laws which simply outline what particular powers or combinations of powers tend to do in particular situations.

This entails that different natural laws will obtain at different levels of nature, simply because the character of the powers at work will be different. Therefore there will be some objects or systems which we are able to describe in laws which appear deterministic: as these objects or systems are composed of very few dispositions their potential range of manifestations will be very narrow, meaning that these objects and systems will tend to act in a uniform way given the relevant set of conditions. In these cases, our predictive

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power is likely to be very good, and I suggest that it is the existence of these objects and systems which tempts us to believe that all natural objects and processes are similarly predictable. On the pan-dispositionalist account, however, there will be more complex objects and systems which have a far wider range of possible manifestations, and therefore for these systems laws with such good predictive power will be impossible to formulate: for these kinds of objects or systems we may only be able to form probabilistic laws, as these objects or systems will tend to act in a variety of distinct ways even when the same conditions are present. Finally, it is conceivable that there will be some objects or systems whose range of possible manifestations is so great that it is impossible to formulate laws for their behaviour with any degree of accuracy: no matter which conditions obtain, and no matter how that object or system has tended to react to those conditions in the past, its dispositional properties always allow for novelty. It might be thought that agents are the paradigm case of this kind of system.

I hope that some of the features of this ontology which make it especially helpful for arguing for human freedom are clear, but before I move on I would like to highlight those which are most important for the arguments I want to make here. The central advantage of this kind of system is that it is able to provide a broadly naturalistic ontology which makes sense of the causal activities of agents in the same way as the causal activities which are present throughout nature. This account is able to claim that agents possess real and irreducible causal powers which are intrinsic to them without falling into dualism as it will also make the same claim about all other natural products: on this account, the causal powers of agents are fundamentally of the same kind as the causal powers which exist throughout the rest of nature. This kind of view therefore makes possible a compatibility[2] between the freedom of agents and other natural causal processes, as both of these are simply different instances of the same kind of causal power.

Along with ensuring this continuity of free agency and natural causality, the pan-dispositionalist account has a number of other features that lend themselves to arguing for human freedom. The account of natural laws as descriptions of powers and the claim that causes never necessitate their effects both entail that agents are not doing anything out of the ordinary when they act freely: there is no need for agents to have some kind of mysterious ability to 'break' the laws of nature or to intervene in a process that without them would have obtained by necessity, as nature, on this account, is never like this whether free agents are acting within it or not. Similarly this account of laws, which entails that different laws with varying degrees of accuracy and predictive power will be valid descriptions of different levels of nature allows for the claim that the free actions of agents

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do not come into conflict with deterministic laws which exist elsewhere in nature: natural laws are descriptions of the behaviour of powers therefore it is not problematic that some laws are different from others, as different powers and different systems just do behave differently from others.

However, despite the fact that a pan-dispositionalist ontology seems to provide many of the necessary features for arguing for the existence of human freedom, I now want to argue that this kind of ontology alone is not enough. Let me be clear: I want to claim that this kind of ontology is the most appropriate for the advocate of the existence of libertarian human freedom to adopt; I simply want to stress that this ontology alone is insufficient as an argument for the existence of human freedom. In order to make this latter argument, some additional commitments will need to be taken on and some further problems will have to be dispelled. I outline these in more detail in the following sections.

In brief, I want to argue that the set of questions surrounding the existence or otherwise of human freedom can be broadly split into two distinct sets of questions, both of which must be dealt with. The first set of questions is a set of questions about the world: if we want to argue that human freedom exists, we must be able to provide an account of the world as a whole which allows for, or is at least compatible with the existence of, this freedom. It is this set of questions which I take the pan-dispositionalist ontology to provide an answer to, and perhaps the best answer available to the advocate of the existence of freedom. However, there is a second set of questions relating to the agent: it is not enough for us to demonstrate that our world is compatible with free agency; we must also demonstrate that this agency exists and say something about what it is like. And it is on this side of the question that the dispositional monist ontology remains silent. In fact, it may seem that this kind of ontology is *un*helpful to those who wish to argue for the existence of human freedom: by making the activities of agents just another instance of the causal powers which exist throughout nature this ontology threatens to make agents no more (although also no less) free than any other natural process or product. Although I claimed above that securing some kind of continuity between the free acts of agents and the causal processes present throughout nature is a broadly positive feature of the pan-dispositionalist account, it seems that we intuitively want there to be at least *some* difference between agents and other natural beings: we want agents to have a measure of control and ownership over the manifestation of their dispositions in a way that other natural beings do not. Simply claiming that being an agent entails having this kind of control is not enough; a successful account will need to cash out what it is in virtue of that agents have this special kind of control. In the next section I want to argue that the pan-dispositionalist account brings with it two central

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problems for securing the agent's ownership or control over her powers: one is a problem with establishing that the agent has control over her causal powers; and one arises because without the former in place this kind of account faces a difficulty in individuating the agent at all.

The Trouble with Powers

In this section I outline two related problems which any power-based account attempting to defend a libertarian conception of human freedom must deal with. I want to argue that because of the central features of this ontology there are two ways which the agent may end up dropping out of the picture in this kind of view. The first is a problem with control or ownership, namely that this kind of account might fail to secure the control of the agent over the causal powers which constitute her which is central for arguing for libertarian human freedom. Put another way, without an account of this kind of control the pan-dispositionalist view might fail to make it the case that the agent's causal powers are properly *hers* rather than it being the case that the agent is simply a vehicle through which natural powers act. The second problem arises because if this account of control cannot be secured, the pan-dispositionalist finds herself with a difficulty when it comes to providing a principled account of how natural entities are individuated on her ontology.

Control

Control is a familiar problem with regard to human freedom: any libertarian account must tackle the question of whether and how it is the case that it is the agent herself, and not other natural causal forces or antecedent conditions, who has control over what she does. If this account of control cannot be secured then the agent falls out of the picture as she lacks any causal efficacy: the agent drops out of our explanations because her actions *as an agent* become irrelevant to our accounts of causation in the natural world. Schelling's example of the whirlpool is useful here. There is a sense in which the whirlpool is an object: we can pick it out from the body of water of which it is part and we can provide a set of identity conditions for the whirlpool which are distinct from those for the body of water. However, this alone is not sufficient to ensure that we are justified in claiming that the whirlpool is in *control* of or has any ownership over what it does, that it has any causal efficacy of its own distinct from the body of water as a whole. Rather, it seems more accurate to argue that the activities of the whirlpool

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are in fact caused by something else: the body of water as a whole and the natural forces which act within it.

If, as is the case in a pan-dispositionalist ontology, agents are composed of interacting natural forces, it seems that the case of agents is strikingly similar to the case of the whirlpool: although we can pick agents out as distinct objects, and provide identity criteria for them which distinguish them from the system of natural powers as a whole, this alone is insufficient to justify the claim that the agent *herself* is in control of these powers. Rather, like the whirlpool, it seems equally if not more plausible to claim that these powers act *through* the agent, in the same way that the body of water manifests its own activity through the whirlpool.

These issues surrounding control highlight the fact that we tend to take it that there are two different kinds of system in nature: those which have a measure of control over the parts which constitute them (and which we therefore assume to be objects in a causally relevant sense); and those which are made up of parts over which they have no control (in this case we take the relevant causal actors to be the parts of the system rather than the system as a whole). Given that, on the pan-dispositionalist account, these two kinds of system are both composed of the same fundamental natural powers the pan-dispositionalist must make explicit not only what makes these systems distinct (i.e. what the former have which the latter lack and constitutes control), but also what makes it the case that agents belong to the former group rather than the latter: what makes it the case that agents have control over their parts.

Individuation

The preceding discussion leads on to the problem of individuation which arises if the pan-dispositionalist cannot provide an adequate account of control. This problem mirrors the problem of individuation which Schelling discusses at length in the *Naturphilosophie*: if everything is a manifestation of the activities of the same natural powers, how can we pick anything out of this mass of powers as a genuinely independent object? Put another way, what is the salient feature that makes the whirlpool the relevant object rather than the water droplets which make it up, or the molecules which constitute these droplets, or the body of water as a whole?

Again, the case of the whirlpool is analogous to the case of agents on a pan-dispositionalist ontology: why do we take the agent to be the relevant level of object rather than the systems which make up agents, such as atoms or organs, and why do we take agents as the relevant objects rather than the systems of which agents are parts, such as social groups or even the

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ecosystem as a whole? In short, if nature is composed of systems of powers at various levels, we need a principled account of why it is that we take some of these systems to be *objects* and to have a special causal relevance rather than others. If this account cannot be given the agent will again drop out of the picture: we will have no more reason to give the agent a special status than we will to give electrons, bodily organs, weather systems and crowds this kind of status.

Let me say a little more about why this problem arises especially sharply for the pan-dispositionalist. The central claim of this ontology is that the same thing – natural powers – are operative at all levels of nature: the pan-dispositionalist advocates an ontology of powers all the way down, which sometimes enter into relationships which manifest themselves as stable objects. Notice that the term object is used loosely in the preceding sentence: in the above claim 'object' refers to any stable manifestation of powers in a relationship. These objects could therefore be anything from an individual atom, a Lego brick, an anteater, a weather system, an angry mob, etc. Some of these objects are composed of smaller parts which are also objects in this broad sense: a human body is composed of particular organs, which themselves are composed of atoms, and this body is also capable of being part of larger objects, such as the aforementioned angry mob, or the ecosystem as a whole, for example. A pan-dispositionalist ontology comes hand in hand with this kind of nesting: we have interactions of powers which manifest as objects, then these objects interact with other powers and these interactions can be manifest as further objects, and so on. In this ontology we have a variety of 'levels' of objects of different sizes, all made up of smaller objects, all the way down until we reach the smallest ontological unit, the ungrounded power. The problem this creates, I suggest, is that this picture makes it difficult for us to give a principled account of how we pick out the causally relevant level or set of objects. And this problem opens up a deeper worry: if we cannot give an account of how objects are individuated, then why talk about objects at all? Why not eliminate objects from our descriptions of the world and rather think in terms of the powers which ultimately make them up?

The problem also becomes more pronounced when the accounts we give of different levels contradict each other. For pragmatic reasons we might simply switch levels depending on our purposes, but this way of doing things falls short when our purposes include giving an accurate account of the causal processes which govern a system. This is especially relevant in the case of debates surrounding human freedom: it seems that we have one level of explanation which focuses on the agent and her decisions and actions etc., and another which focuses on the lower-level causal processes taking place within the agent's body. Although both of these explanations

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alone may provide a useful account of the phenomena, when taken together they are contradictory as one posits the agent herself as the source of causal efficacy while the other claims this source to be located in natural processes which take place below the level of the agent. This is especially problematic for the pan-dispositionalist as she must maintain that the agent and her parts are both manifestations of the same natural powers and processes, a claim which entails that both should be explainable within the same terms. Therefore the option of holding that contradictory explanations of one and the same phenomena can be made intelligible by the adoption of different perspectives is not open to the pan-dispositionalist, as one of the central claims of her ontology implies that these phenomena must admit of a single explanation. The pan-dispositionalist must rather provide an account of which of these levels (the agent or her parts, for example) is fundamental: an account of why it is that only one of these things counts as the causally relevant object.

Possible Solutions

In this section I explore some possible options for tackling the problems outlined above: I highlight the aspects of Schelling's philosophy which enable his attempted solutions, and sketch some other ways out of the problems that may be available to the contemporary pan-dispositionalist.

The problems surrounding individuation and control are linked in a number of ways therefore the solutions to these problems will go hand in hand, as an account of one will contribute to an account of the other. In particular, a satisfactory explanation of control will come with an account of individuation for free: the criterion for an entity to be an individual in the causally relevant sense will simply be that the entity has the kind of control that the account specifies. However, this will not necessarily work in the opposite direction: a good account of individuation will go some way to securing an explanation of control, but alone will not provide the full story. For this reason I present this section in reverse order to the previous section, tackling individuation first before moving on to control.

Individuation

The problem of individuation as I presented it above has two parts: the first concerns how we can identify objects as genuine individuals given an ontology which entails that everything that we take to be an object is simply a manifestation of powers in process. The second arises *after* we are able

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to identify individuals: once we have an account of the different kinds of objects that exist in the world we then need to give reasons for why we take the agent (and perhaps other objects on her 'level') to be causally relevant. The first problem concerns reduction: why, in this ontology, do we talk of objects at all rather than reducing these to the powers of which they are constituted? The second concerns explanation: in terms of what should we understand the processes which take place in nature? This question appears straightforwardly epistemic, but has a deeper ontological significance: it is not merely a question of how *we* should best understand the world, but rather a question of how *the world itself* should be understood.

The first of these problems is not too worrying for the pan-dispositionalist, as there is nothing in this ontology which entails reductionism: just because objects are *composed of* powers this does not imply that they are *reducible to* these powers. The pan-dispositionalist can maintain that although powers may be prior in terms of genesis (i.e. powers 'produce' objects in some sense) this does not afford them any ontological priority. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* takes this view, and further entails that neither powers nor the objects which they give rise to have priority because the relationship between them is reciprocal: the reason that the paradox of the *Naturphilosophie* is a paradox is that nature *has* to express itself in products which thereby limit it. For Schelling, nature can only express itself in something that it is not (infinite productivity manifested as finite product); the actualisation of nature's powers depends on their being manifested in objects, therefore the ontological relationship of dependence between powers and objects is reciprocal: neither is reducible to the other.

The second problem is more difficult to surmount: although objects are not reducible to the powers which constitute them, we still need an account of why we take certain objects to be reducible to their parts (i.e. the smaller objects of which they are composed) and some objects to resist this kind of reduction. For example, why is it that we take an angry mob to be explainable in terms of the agents which constitute it, but we do not take these agents to be explainable in terms of their underlying physical parts? For Schelling, this question is answered through his conception of organism, inspired by Kant's account of organic wholes in the third *Critique* (KdU, 366–77). For Schelling, there is a certain kind of natural object which is different from others because of the particular relationship between the whole and its parts: although the parts make up the whole (the whole depends on its parts), the arrangement and interaction of these parts is determined by the concept of the whole (the parts depend on the whole); the relationship of dependence between the parts and whole is reciprocal. These kinds of objects cannot be reduced to their parts because the whole itself plays an irreducible role in structuring and ordering the parts: organisms are wholes

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which are greater than the sum of their parts, and they are therefore not reducible to these parts. While Kant claimed that we can only *assume* that certain natural organisms do have this teleological structure (teleological because the organism is structured by a guiding concept, the idea of the whole), Schelling argues that organic wholes of this kind really do exist throughout the natural world. Schelling's evidence for this claim again builds on the third *Critique*: Kant argued that although we are compelled to judge certain objects as having this kind of teleological structure this cannot serve as proof that they in fact do while Schelling claims that we are compelled to judge these objects differently from others simply because they really are different. For Schelling, wholes of this kind exist throughout the natural world, and we are compelled to think about these objects (trees, agents, etc.) differently to the way that we think about other natural systems because they constitute a fundamentally different kind of object. And this is what makes these objects the relevant 'level': they are neither reducible to their parts nor can they be assimilated into another object as its mere parts (and thus fail to be individuals) because they are a distinctive kind of whole, the kind that nature is disposed to produce as they are the kinds of objects which best exemplify the structure of nature as a whole.

This account of the nature of organisms may seem unpalatable to the contemporary metaphysician for a number of reasons. Firstly, Schelling's account of organisms and of nature as a whole requires commitments both to essentialism and to some form of teleology in the natural world. This commitment to teleology is present on two levels in Schelling's account: first because there is a particular kind of organism which nature is disposed to produce (teleology at the level of the whole); and second because in this account organisms each have a telos, a structuring concept which governs the arrangement of their parts (teleology at the level of the organism). These claims about teleology in nature come hand in hand with a commitment to essentialism: an object's telos flows from the essence of that object, i.e. from the nature of the particular kind of being that it is.

Could the contemporary pan-dispositionalist use a similar solution to Schelling's while avoiding some of the potentially unpalatable commitments above? The best option seems to be to focus on giving an account of the different kinds of part/whole relationships which exist in nature as this could form the basis of the claim that agents are a particular kind of causally relevant whole and therefore cannot be explained in reductive terms. This will involve a commitment to a number of other claims. Firstly, the pan-dispositionalist will require an account of emergence in order to maintain that new objects can arise from lower level interactions of powers. Securing this claim should not be problematic as the existence of this kind of emergence is already built into her ontology in the claim that natural

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products arise from the interactions of powers. However, she will also need to provide a principled way of accounting for when a system counts as a new object in the causally relevant sense, which may prove more difficult. In Schelling's ontology this is accounted for through the concept of organism and the distinct part/whole relation which this entails, as these objects have a measure of control over their parts. This highlights that in order for something to count as an object with genuine causal efficacy the object must have some causal powers which exceed those of its parts: an account of how objects are individuated must claim that this individuation happens when a system of powers manifests itself in an emergent object with causal powers over and above those of its parts.

An account of this kind will secure individuation: it provides a principled way of identifying causally relevant objects which are irreducible to the parts or powers which constitute them. However, this alone is insufficient to distinguish agents from other natural objects: although we have an account of natural objects as emergent wholes with causal powers exceeding those of their parts, this does not account for why we take some of these wholes as able to control the powers of their parts while some are not.

Control

The above account of individuation allows the pan-dispositionalist to argue that although all natural objects are manifestations of underlying systems of powers, there are certain objects which are irreducible to these powers, and to their parts, and that these objects can be identified by their possession of causal powers which are not present in these parts. In order to make the further claim that there are certain kinds of wholes which have control over the powers of their parts, the pan-dispositionalist must argue that downward causation characterises these kinds of wholes: that these wholes have emergent dispositional properties which allow them to control the properties of their parts.

A difficulty arises here because top-down causation is not control: there may be some wholes where the parts behave differently by virtue of the whole to which they belong (i.e. because of their interactions with other parts) but this does not seem like a case where the whole itself is in control of the parts' behaviour. In the case of agents it is not enough to claim that their parts behave differently simply because of the way that they are arranged, we also want to say that the agent (as whole) is able to control (at least some of) the dispositional properties of her parts. Therefore if the pan-dispositionalist is going to secure an account of human freedom she must provide an account of why the agent is a different type of whole,

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and why being this type of whole comes with having a measure of control over the powers of its parts. In other words, an account is needed of why in agents the powers of the parts become the powers of the whole, in that they are manifested because of the volition of the whole rather than just the behaviour of the parts.

The need to give this kind of account is part of Schelling's concern in the *Freedom* essay. Schelling's account of organic wholes and the natural process more generally entails that there are a number of objects which fulfil the criteria for organic wholes: there are many objects in Schelling's ontology which are characterised by the distinctive relation between part and whole and the emergence of new causal powers which only exist at the level of the whole. Agents are one object of this kind, but this account alone is unable to account for the distinctive kind of control that we take agents to have over their parts: the concept of organism alone renders agents with no more (and no less) control over their parts than a tree has, for example. The problem of control therefore re-remerges given the account of individuation outlined above: this account still requires an additional claim about what is distinctive or unique about human freedom if agents are taken to be just one instance of a process which is present throughout nature.

The aim of Schelling's complex story about the relationship between agents and their essences is to make sense of this distinctive kind of control that we take agents to have. His answer is surprising, however, as the *Freedom* essay maintains that agents do not have a different kind of control to other organic wholes: like all natural organisms, agents are able to control their parts to an extent in order to creatively engage with the natural environment, and like all natural organisms, the range of possibilities which is open to the agent in these creative engagements is circumscribed by her essence. For Schelling, the distinctiveness of agents does not come from their having a different kind of control over their parts than other natural organisms, but from the indeterminate nature of the essence of agents. Because the essence of agents is the most indeterminate of any natural product, agents play a role in actively determining their essences: the essence of the agent simply contains the fact that the agent must choose, therefore the content of the agent's essence is filled in by that agent herself. Thus the agent not only has a wider range of possibilities than other organisms, but the range of these possibilities is determined by the agent herself, as her essence is crystallised[3] through her concrete actions in the world. Notice that this relationship that agents have to their essences is no different to the relationship that all natural beings have to their essences: because of the nature of the natural process which characterises the relationship between essence and form all natural products are able to creatively engage with their essences in this way. The crucial difference is the indeterminate nature of agents: agents

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have more control over their actions and their future possibilities than other natural products because the indeterminacy of their essences means that they are able to determine these to a greater degree. It is this claim about the nature of essences that allows Schelling to make a distinction not only between agents and other natural products, but also between other natural products with different levels of control/freedom. Essences of objects with greater degrees of the expansive force are more indeterminate and essences of objects with greater degrees of the contractive force are more determinate, and this accounts for why agents have more control than animals, why animals have more control than insects, why insects have more control than trees, and why trees have more control than pebbles.

Again, Schelling's story may be difficult for the contemporary metaphysician to swallow. His account is closely linked to his essentialism and his distinctive conception of the relationship between essence and form. This in turn is made possible by Schelling's account of the natural process and its fundamentally reciprocal nature, and his claim that this process is present at all levels of nature in the interactions between essence and form, agent and environment, absolute and world, etc. And the nature of this process is itself dependent on Schelling's conception of the absolute which stems from his answer to one of the questions that preoccupied him most: given the assumption that being is a unified whole, how can difference and individuality be accounted for? Thus Schelling's commitment to holism is fundamental to his project, and therefore to his solutions to the problems outlined above. I will return to the importance of this holism below. Schelling's solution also requires committing to the two levels of natural teleology I identified earlier: it seems to require the claim that nature has a particular disposition (telos) to produce certain kinds of objects that most express its fundamental structure, as well as the claim that agents have a telos by virtue of which they are individuated and which affords them control over their parts.

What are the options, then, for the contemporary metaphysician who is not inclined to accept Schelling's complex ontological story? One option is to appeal to self-awareness or rational capacities as those powers which afford agents a measure of control over their parts. This claim that agents simply are the kinds of things which possess special powers of this sort seems dubious, and at the very least raises a number of further questions: what makes it the case that this power arises only in agents? Could it possibly arise in other natural beings, or is there something distinctive about agents which means only they are bearers of this power? Further, claims about the inherent rationality of agents seem to implicitly commit the pan-dispositionalist to essentialism, as it seems that the only way to account for why agents possess this (or these) power(s) is by an appeal to the very

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nature of agents. Because the pan-dispositionalist is committed to the claim that all objects are composed of the same natural powers, she must also take the agent's rational powers to be natural. There is a difficult line to tread here as the pan-dispositionalist must claim that agents are simply another kind of natural object with natural powers, but in order to be a libertarian she must also claim that they are a very distinctive kind of natural object. This highlights one of the advantages of Schelling's account: it makes sense of the continuity of the causality of agents with that of other natural objects while also accounting for the distinctiveness of human freedom.

Holism

I claimed above that Schelling's holism is central to his solutions to the problems I have been discussing. I also claimed that if the pan-dispositionalist appeals to rational powers in order to account for the control which agents have over their parts, she makes an implicit commitment to essentialism. Looking at this commitment can help to highlight the holistic nature of Schelling's solution.

Once the pan-dispositionalist has committed to the claim that agents have the powers that they do because of the particular essences that they have, she must then extend this claim to all natural objects: because her ontology entails that all natural objects are composed of the same natural powers it would seem strange to claim that some of these objects have essences while some do not. The commitment to essentialism brings with it a commitment to teleology: an object's telos is to exemplify the essence of the particular object that it is. Once a commitment has been made to this kind of essentialism, the question arises of what grounds the nature of essences. Once a commitment has been made to this kind of essentialism, the question arises of what grounds the nature of essences. One way to account for this ground is through the idea of a whole with a particular structure which sets the essences of its parts. Thus a picture emerges of a holistic system with a telos of its own which grounds the nature of its parts. It is here that the questions which I have argued are central to Schelling's philosophical work emerge: questions surrounding the relationship of this whole to its parts. The way that Schelling attempts to answer these questions involves taking what we know to be true about this whole and its parts (for example, we know that the whole is an interlinking system including causal relations, we know that among the parts there are organic wholes, we know that some of these wholes are conscious rational agents) and attempting to provide a unified conception of nature which accounts for all the phenomena that we experience. Through this emerges an account of

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the natural process and its fundamentally reciprocal nature which then feeds back into Schelling's account of essences, the relationship of the absolute to the world, individuals to the whole, human freedom, causation, and many other aspects of his system.[4]

This highlights that what underpins Schelling's entire account is that it is fundamentally holistic: the claims that Schelling is able to make depend on his ontology as a whole. Not only is his power-based ontology central to his account, but his wider claims about the nature of the natural process ground his conceptions of causality, organism and essence on which his solution to the problems of individuation and human freedom is based. The natural process in turn is derived from Schelling's account of the absolute: the nature of the natural process follows from the nature of the absolute and the particular part/whole relation which characterises it.

Schelling's holism entails a methodological as well as an ontological commitment (though, of course, each of these reciprocally implies the other). The methodological holism allows us to approach these problems in a unified way, to keep them in mind all at once, in a way that has fallen out of fashion in contemporary metaphysics. But, as the account I have been arguing for demonstrates, these are not problems which can be dealt with in isolation: the question of human freedom is not just a question about what humans are like; it is also a question about what causation is like, what agency is like, a set of questions about the relations between these; etc. Taking a holistic approach therefore enables a solution to be worked out that applies to all aspects of the problem at hand, not just some of them. This relates to the problem I identified in Chapter 1 for contemporary pan-dispositionalist accounts: the contemporary approach tends to be piecemeal rather than holistic, which means that how particular claims are played out once they are extended to the ontology as a whole does not come into view. This indicates the further advantage of a holistic approach: it enables us to see how concepts from one aspect of our ontology could usefully be applied to other aspects, as demonstrated by the way that Schelling utilises the power-based ontological structure which characterises the natural process in his account of human freedom. Schelling's solution to the problem of the relationship between freedom and system depends on his account of the constitution of objects, the relation of objects to the whole, the natural process and the nature of essence, and it is only through approaching metaphysics as a whole that he is able to utilise these in the way that he does in the *Freedom* essay.

However, all of this indicates a difficulty for the contemporary metaphysician hoping to utilise some of Schelling's solutions: his system is so fundamentally interlinked that it is difficult to reject some of his commitments while retaining others: his philosophy comes as a whole, or not at

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all. It may be possible for the contemporary pan-dispositionalist to attempt solutions along similar lines, but I have shown above that these solutions come with their own difficulties. What Schelling's holistic solution to these problems demonstrates is that securing individuation, control and ultimately agency requires a rethinking of our account of nature as a whole rather than just some aspects of it. Schelling's solution depends on rejecting mechanistic, dualistic and reductive conceptions of nature; this allows him to provide an account of causality as reciprocal, and to give the account of the nature of natural objects and agency that I have been outlining throughout this project.

If this dualistic and reductive conception of nature is unchallenged by the pan-dispositionalist then the problems I have discussed in this chapter will remain, as they all stem from this problematic conception of nature: these problems only appear as intractable when they are viewed within this flawed paradigm. The specific details of Schelling's account may seem unpalatable to the contemporary metaphysician but I hope I have shown that his general strategy is the right one: to solve these problems holistically by questioning the ontology under which they arise. Schelling's ontology of powers rejects the central assumptions of the mechanistic, dualistic and reductive conception of nature, and this ontology underpins his accounts of natural laws, natural causal processes and nature as a whole. It is this ontology which allows his solutions outlined above: rather than struggling to solve the problems within the paradigm that generates them Schelling dissolves these problems through a re-evaluation of our central ideas about nature. Both Schelling and the libertarian pan-dispositionalist share a commitment to attempting to articulate a system that accounts for the reality of active powers and agency; Schelling places these powers at the heart of his ontology rather than attempting to include them in a picture of the world that seems to challenge the possibility of their efficacy.

Notes

1. See Mumford (2006: 476) for a characteristic example of the way that contemporary work on powers uses empirical evidence. These sorts of claims also feature heavily in Ellis (2002). Schelling's use of empirical science is clear throughout his works on *Naturphilosophie*.
2. Note that this does not entail that this account is compatibilist in the traditional sense, understood as the claim that freedom is compatible with determinism. Schelling's account (in the *Freedom* essay), and the account I have been arguing is made possible by a pan-dispositionalist ontology, does not fall under the category of compatibilism because it denies that nature is deterministic. For Schelling freedom is compatible with natural causality in that there is no difference between these kinds of causation: both are instances of the same natural process.

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3. This process of crystallisation can be thought of in terms of positing and depositing: as the agent posits herself as a particular kind of agent she 'deposits' these features into the content of her essence. Thanks to G. Anthony Bruno for this suggestion.
4. For example, the structure of the natural process will also characterise the relationships between time and eternity, God and ground, organisms and their environment, and agents and their community.

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Conclusions

In the course of this project I have argued that a pan-dispositionalist ontology provides a promising basis for defending the reality of human freedom. However, I also claimed that this ontology alone is not sufficient; this kind of system brings with it significant problems with accounting for individuation and control, and thus with finding a place for genuine agency. Schelling's struggles with these problems and the changes which he makes to his philosophical system in order to tackle them demonstrate that they are not easy problems to solve, and further show that attempting to deal with them in a way that makes the existence of human freedom intelligible necessitates taking on a number of ontological commitments not directly entailed by the power-based ontology. Schelling's solution, which brings with it a commitment to absolute idealism, essentialism and a teleological conception of nature (among other things) may not be initially attractive to the contemporary metaphysician, but I hope I have demonstrated that his system does at least have the resources to deal with these problems: although I have not had the space to properly assess the success of his solutions I have demonstrated that Schelling's general strategy is promising and deserving of further exploration.

Schelling's holism is central to his solutions to the problems that I have been discussing: his ontology of reciprocity and his conception of nature and the natural process underlies the accounts of powers, agency and causation which make his distinctive account of human freedom possible. Schelling's rejection of mechanism, determinism and dualism allows him to develop his power-based ontology and account of freedom in a way that avoids the problems discussed above: I hope to have shown that without this wholesale rejection of the mechanistic, dualistic and reductive conception of nature these problems will remain for the contemporary pan-dispositionalist attempting to argue for human freedom.

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I have also argued for a particular reading of Schelling: as advocating an ontology of powers, which forms the cornerstone of his metaphysics from its articulation in the *Naturphilosophie* through to Schelling's use of the ontological structure of powers in his unique account of human freedom. As I have argued, is the ontology of powers which makes this account of freedom possible. Schelling's power-based account of the natural process is what enables him to argue that human freedom is differentiated from other parts of nature only by degree rather than in kind, but further allows him to make sense of human freedom as a particularly exceptional expression of nature's fundamental forces.

I have also argued that there is a fundamental continuity underlying Schelling's thought in a certain period of his work; although there are some changes to Schelling's system, the ontological structure of powers remains. I have not discussed the question of whether this continuity is also present throughout Schelling's earlier Fichtean period or in his later work on the *Weltalter* and in the *Grounding* lectures. My sense is that after the *Freedom* essay the questions which dominate Schelling's thinking change: the ontology of the *Freedom* essay constitutes his final answer to the questions about the relationship of parts to whole, freedom to system, ground to grounded, which preoccupied him in his earlier works. I think that the rest of Schelling's works are then attempts to think through all of the consequences which this ontology entails – though of course I have not had the space to argue for these claims here. I also think that the power-based ontology I have been outlining, and the account of the natural process which it entails, plays a central role in Schelling's later work, though again investigating and articulating this thought has not been possible within this project.

There are a number of further issues that I have been unable to tackle in this project. One central issue is Schelling's account of identity: although Schelling consistently claims that the natural process (which the law of identity expresses) is uniform throughout nature, it seems that his conception of the nature of this relationship changes, for example between the *Naturphilosophie* and the *Identitätssystem*. Making sense of these changes and their implications for different aspects of Schelling's thought would be a considerable project and I therefore have not been able to look at this issue here. Two further questions (or, as with so much in Schelling's system, arguably two aspects of the same issue) that I have been unable to investigate here are the relationship between God and the absolute and time and eternity for Schelling. I think that my work on the nature of the natural process in this project could help shed light on these issues, but a comprehensive treatment of them would demand much more time than I have been able to devote to them here. These issues also relate to the

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question of whether reality has a telos for Schelling and the question of whether this end (if there is such an end) is one that could ever be reached in actuality. My sense is that reality does have a telos, for Schelling, but that the nature of this telos is such that this could never be reached: the telos of reality, for Schelling, will be something like infinite manifestation of possibility. I have in mind here something like what Schelling describes as the 'law of the world' in lecture 21 of the *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie* (SW XI, 492): 'The science with which we are concerned knows no other law than that all possibilities are fulfilled and none suppressed.' Again, I think that understanding Schelling's thought as an ontology of powers helps to make sense of this: because powers are never exhausted in any of their manifestations, or in the sum total of these manifestations, the complete manifestation of any power is impossible as there is always something in the power which exceeds its manifestation. In the case of the infinite powers which give rise to the world of nature, this conclusion is exacerbated: the complete manifestation of an infinite power is impossible, therefore the achievement of this manifestation would be a telos that is necessarily impossible for the system to reach. Again, this is a set of thoughts which demand far more investigation and argument than I have had space for here.

Schelling's thought is complex and directly engages with a number of the most fundamental issues in metaphysics. There is still a lot in his work that remains to be investigated and I hope that this project will contribute a useful addition to the recent recognition of the importance of his philosophy.

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