ABSTRACT

“The Bounds of Life: The Role of Death in Schelling’s Internal Critique of German Idealism”
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What conditions the possibility of existentially valuable experience? Against nihilism, the threat that philosophical cognition undermines the very idea of purposiveness, German idealism posits that we are unconditionally conditioned by life, construed as the infinite purposive activity of reason. I reconstruct Schelling’s critique of this project as defending the idea that death conditions or puts into question our rational activity.

Scholars tend to read the idealists as rejecting Kant’s idea of an unknowable thing in itself by grounding philosophy on a knowable first principle and tend to situate Schelling as a phase between or a late attack on Fichte and Hegel. Part I gives a systematic account missing on the former, arguing that idealism is an instance of *immortalism*, which holds that life is the unconditioned condition of rational activity, while death is unconditionally conditioned. Part II gives a historical account missing on the latter, arguing that Schelling is an early and continual critic of idealism on behalf of *mortalism*, which holds that death unconditionally conditions rational activity. My first argument modifies typical readings of German idealism, revealing a deep connection between its rejection Kant’s idea and its refusal to let death put us into question. My second complicates typical readings of Schelling, casting his mortalism as rehabilitating the idea that something radically outstrips rational activity while representing a regulative ideal.
Although Schelling’s mortalism anticipates Heidegger’s, they differ: Schelling aligns death with the goal of systematic knowing, Heidegger with taking over one’s history as care. But Schelling overcomes immortalism, enabling Heidegger’s idea of death. Part III shows this idea is structurally analogous to Kant’s idea of the thing in itself. Immortalism’s failure leaves unsolved two antinomies I argue are formally identical and only solvable by thinking these ideas as boundary concepts the thought of which is necessary for the unity, respectively, of finite being and finite understanding. By reconstructing the role of death in Schelling’s internal critique of German idealism, then, my thesis also brings into closer contact Kant’s transcendental and Heidegger’s existential projects.
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INTRODUCTION

You have to lose, you have to lose
You have to learn how to die
If you wanna be alive.
—Wilco, “War on War”

A KANTIAN QUESTION

Transcendental philosophy’s original insight is that experience does not stand over empirical claims as a tribunal over a witness, but is a court in which reason takes both the stand and the bench. For traditional empiricism, experience is a flow of sense impressions that habituates tendencies in us to judge in certain ways. This fails to show that experience is something for which we are responsible. As such, it offers an impermissible ignorance about what makes experience possible in this sense. By contrast, transcendental philosophy offers a view of experience for which we are appropriately responsible. By posing to ourselves the question of the conditions of the possibility of experience, we occupy the stand and the bench in a court of reason. Standing as judge over our capacity for empirical testimony, we can interrogate our right to concepts that, along with intuitions of space and time, condition the possibility of experience. Moreover, through this self-critique, we can in turn legislate a system of cognitive ends that serve to guide the activity of experience.

This is what Kant’s transcendental idealism achieves. It also notoriously prohibits knowing things in themselves, extending this epistemic prohibition to purposiveness in nature. The first significant attack on Kant’s proscription is the Jacobian charge that transcendental idealism instantiates nihilism, the consequence of any view on which there is no reason to believe we have individual purposive agency. The charge targets Kant’s idealism as much as Spinoza’s monism, infamous for explicitly rejecting the idea
of purposiveness. We can briefly reconstruct the charge based on related passages in two of Jacobi’s most influential works, Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn (1785, 1789) and David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism (1787). The former recalls a dialogue with Lessing on Spinoza: “If there are only efficient, but no final, causes, then the only function that the faculty of thought has in the whole of nature is that of observer; its proper business is to accompany the mechanism of the efficient causes […] We only believe that we have acted out of anger, love, magnanimity, or out of rational decision. Mere illusion! What fundamentally moves us in all these cases is something that knows nothing of all that, and which is to this extent absolutely devoid of sensations and thoughts”. The latter introduces a crucial definition: “[a]ll truly actual things are individuals or singular things, and, as such, they are living beings (principia perceptiva et activa) that are external to one another”.

The first passage delineates the form of nihilism. It argues that a system of efficient causes—causes that explain something externally—is one in which individuals do not direct their actions, but simply “accompany” the contortions of a “mechanism”. Such a system undermines my belief that I direct myself toward ends. The second passage defines individuals as being “principia” or reasons for their own perception and

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1 Jacobi (1994), 189.
3 While it is not until his “Open Letter to Fichte” (1799) that Jacobi employs ‘nihilism’, a term he coins, he implies it a decade prior in the Spinoza Letters by the threat of annihilation (1994): “Whenever we say that we have researched a quality, we mean nothing else by that, save that we have reduced it to figure, number, position and movement. We have resolved it into these, hence we have objectively annihilated the quality […] To want to discover the conditions of the unconditional; to want to invent a possibility for what is absolutely necessary, and to construct it in order to be able to comprehend it, seems on the face of it an absurd undertaking. Yet this is precisely what we undertake to do whenever we strive to make nature into something that we can comprehend, that is, reduce it to a purely natural existence, and uncover the mechanics of the principle of mechanism. For if everything that is to come to be and exist in a way that is comprehensible to us must do so under conditions, then, as long as we can comprehend, we remain within a chain of conditional conditions. Where this chain ceases, there we also cease to comprehend, and the complex that we call nature ceases to exist too” (374, 376).
action. On this definition, individuals contain their own essence and purpose: they are formal and final causes that cannot be subsumed in a system without annihilating their individuality. A supplement to the David Hume indicates that Jacobi believes transcendental idealism instantiates nihilism by its presupposition of the thing in itself. If Kant’s presupposition entails nihilism, any post-Kantian concern for purposiveness must abandon it—as Jacobi’s charge inspires the German idealists to do. But we will see the antecedent is false.

Nihilism results from an argument to which Jacobi thinks all philosophers, in spite of any regard for individuality, are wed: (1) explanations give conditions; (2) all conditions are efficient; (3) systematic explanation entails mechanism; (4) mechanism entails nihilism. Jacobi sees no difference between explaining with reasons and with causes: the principles of sufficient reason and of causality are “identical”, he says, “unified through the proposition: ‘Everything conditional must have a condition’”. Whether something is conceived or exists through something else, its explicability is conditioned (1). If, as Jacobi believes, Spinozism is the paragon of explanatory rigour, philosophers must locate a thing’s explanatory conditions outside it (2). A systematic explanation of things would then entail mechanism (3). From this it follows that nothing is a living thing, on Jacobi’s definition, resulting in nihilism (4). Hence, the philosopher’s argument yields a system of efficient conditions containing no true individuals—no self-directed, goal-oriented agents.

We can see why Jacobi would hold that Kant’s idealism instantiates nihilism. Kant accepts (1) insofar as empirical objects are conditioned by our representations of

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them. Moreover, the latter do not obviously relate except as external conditions: one representation produces another according to the structure of experience (2). A system of such conditions entails mechanism (3), from which nihilism follows (4). But how does Kant’s presupposition of the thing in itself figure in this argument?

Notice that the charge of nihilism is motivated, first, by Jacobi’s fear of endless duration and arbitrary grounding and, second, by his refusal to accept the demand for justification that propels the philosopher’s argument. On the one hand, an infinite series of conditions provides no ground for certainty about our perception of empirical objects and a series that comes to an arbitrary halt throws perception against an inscrutable ground.\(^5\) Jacobi must count the thing in itself as such a ground since “we know not the least” of it. And “even if it can be conceded […] that a transcendental [object] might correspond to [empirical objects…] where this cause is, and what kind of connection it has with its effect, remains hidden in the deepest obscurity”.\(^6\) Hence, the thing in itself outstrips representations: it is the external condition \textit{par excellence}. Indeed, a worry is that, insofar as the thing in itself cannot be represented as occupying any finite region or interval, it forms an infinite ground—an unknowable version of Spinoza’s substance. On the other hand, not only is the thing in itself not an object for perception: Kant posits it in order to secure the \textit{unity} of cognition. That is, he conceives it in response to a demand for justification, namely, the justification for thinking (not knowing) that our cognitive activity forms an organic whole.\(^7\) Accepting the demand is what generates the philosopher’s argument in the first place.

\(^6\) Jacobi (1994), 335-7.
\(^7\) See Kant (1900–), KrV, A833/B861.
We see, then, that Jacobi’s charge of nihilism applies as much to Kant’s idealism as to Spinoza’s monism. Kant apparently threatens, not simply the *idealistic* nihilism of reducing objectivity to an endless duration of subjective representations, but, in positing the thing in itself, the *realistic* nihilism of arbitrarily resting representations on an inscrutable ground. For Jacobi, transcendental idealism must lie on a philosophical continuum angled toward nihilistic extremes.

**A POST-KANTIAN QUESTION**

Kant’s idealism makes salient the question ‘how is experience possible’. But it apparently fails to give an answer that guarantees the purposive agency of one who asks it. This raises a question that animates German idealism: what is the condition of the possibility of experience as *existentially valuable*, as organized by a system of cognitive, conative and affective ends? What, in other words, is the transcendental ground on which we can be said to seek these ends *purposively*? I will argue that their answer is a post-Kantian instance of what I call *immortalism*, which posits that life is the unconditioned condition of personhood and thus unconditionally conditions death. We will see that the German idealists conceive of life as the infinite activity of reason, which constitutes finite rational existence *entirely*, putting death into question by subjecting it to a process of rationalization.

Historically, immortalism offers philosophical consolation over the fact that we die. By cutting experience short, death threatens to undermine the thought that life’s

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8 Franks (2005) reads Jacobi as *affirming* Kant’s “realist” position on the thing in itself and rejecting, as *solely* nihilistic, Kant’s “idealist” position that we only know appearances (155-6). However, Jacobi cannot square the realist position, *insofar as he affirms it*, with the idea of an imperceptible, causally obscure ground, particularly in the name of a demand he decries. Insofar as Kant’s idea of the thing in itself veers toward realistic nihilism, Jacobi cannot find his preferred realism reflected in it.
value is intrinsic. Immortalism neutralizes death’s destructiveness by showing that this value is intrinsic given, say, the existence of the soul or the perfection of the intellect. In this, it combines two Socratic edicts—that the examined life is the only worth living and that it is a preparation for death\(^9\)—for we can only give an exhaustive account of life if, *inter alia*, we account for what it means to die. Thus, the immortalist treats death as a philosophical challenge, an aspect of our finitude that demands *intelligibility*, most often sought through a conception of life as an infinite entity or principle.\(^{10}\) This yields views that vary in degree of purposiveness.

In the *Ethics* (1677), Spinoza’s view is decidedly non-purposive: “a body undergoes death, when the proportion of motion and rest which obtained mutually among its several parts is changed”.\(^{11}\) If living bodies are simply recombinable arrangements of matter in motion and at rest, then life is qualitatively indistinct from death, only a quantifiable difference—a change in ratio—between matter’s structure *ante* and *post mortem*. Life and death for Spinoza are modal properties ultimately conceived through that which has *true* life: substance.\(^{12}\) Kant’s view is qualifiedly purposive. In §77 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), he says “it is merely a consequence of the particular constitution of our understanding that we represent products of nature as possible only in accordance with another kind of causality than that of the natural laws of matter, namely only in accordance with that of ends and final

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10 See Rosenzweig (2005): “it is from the fear of death that all cognition of the All begins” (9). Compare Rosenstock-Hüssy (1988): “A clever man just recently re-diagnosed philosophy as dread of the world and fear of death. In point of fact, all ‘abstracting’ is an attempt to escape the here-and-now concrete situation by weaseling out of the responsibility for answering, ‘I am here, and this is what I am’” (28).
11 Spinoza (1992), 4P39n.
Thinking of an organism—a whole whose parts depend on it for their possibility—does not warrant knowledge of it since knowledge proceeds from concepts of a thing’s parts. It reflects our emulation of an intuitive understanding. This warrants only the *regulative* idea of natural ends, an epistemic prohibition that forestalls any robust commitment to immortalism.

Jacobi’s charge that rigorous philosophy leads to nihilism inspires the German idealists to construct a system on a first principle that is compatible with purposive agency. They respond with unqualifiedly purposive systems. Fichte issues this consolation in *The Vocation of Man* (1799):

> All death in nature is birth, and precisely in dying does the augmentation of life visibly appear. There is no killing principle in nature, for nature is throughout nothing but life. It is not death which kills, but rather a more living life which, hidden behind the old life, begins and develops. Death and birth are only the struggle of life with itself in order to present itself ever more purely and more like itself. And how could my death be anything else? [...] Each one who like me leaves the earthly association [...] still exists, and is entitled to a new place [...] So I live and so I am, and so I am unchangeable, firm and complete for all eternity. For this is no being assumed from without. It is my own, my only true and essential being.

Not only is nature organized by life’s drive for self-harmony: I have a permanent place in life by being *qualitatively identical* with this drive. The thought that nature will engulf my body loses its sting once I see its purpose is not my demise, but the perfection of

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13 Kant (1900–), KU, 5:407-8.
14 Recent scholars of post-Kantian thought draw on German idealist accounts of *purposiveness* rather than *systematicity* so that non-regulative commitments to natural purposes are common, whereas talk of a first principle and its systematic derivation is not. These scholars emphasize the conception of life motivating the idealists: see McDowell’s (1994) appeal to Hegel’s notion of *Bildung* as a natural account of the acquisition of rationality; Bernstein’s (2007) assessment of the non-mechanical emergence of self-consciousness in Fichte’s view of embodiment; Rödl’s (2007) implicitly Fichtean account of the purposiveness of second person thought; and Thompson’s (2008) argument that natural purposes are objects of judgment, not mere reflection. An uncommon appeal to systematicity, via Schelling, is Gabriel’s (2009) account of the logical character of reflection on the ‘domain of all domains’.
15 Fichte (1964–), BM, 122-3.
nature, in which I play a vital part.\(^{16}\) In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel dulls the destructiveness of death by casting it as a step in life’s persistence: “the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself”.\(^{17}\) Spirit’s survival emboldens us to see death as transcendentally conditioned by enduring life.\(^{18}\) Though we will see Schelling’s relationship with immortalism is complicated, he is given to remarks like this, from *Philosophy and Religion* (1804): “love of rather than contempt for death—arises for those who are already imbued with eternalness and have set free the most the daemon within themselves”. For those affronted by “the entanglement of the soul with the body (which is called individuality)”,\(^{19}\) philosophy offers the comfort, not of a belief, but of an *attitude* that embraces that which does not threaten, but in fact individuates us.

**BEING PUT INTO QUESTION**

Schelling’s tenure as a German idealist is fraught with concerns and misgivings, none more pronounced than over life’s purported unconditionality. Early and often, he mounts objections to two of the tradition’s central projects: Fichte’s intellectual intuition

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\(^{16}\) See Rosenzweig (2005): “Philosophy has the audacity to cast off the fear of the earthly, to remove from death its poisonous sting […] It abandons the body to the power of the abyss, but above it the free soul floats off in the wind. That the fear of death knows nothing of such a separation in body and soul, that it yells I, I, I and wants to hear nothing about a deflection of the fear onto a mere ‘body’—matters little to philosophy […] Philosophy, which commends death to [man] as its special little shelter and as the splendid opportunity to escape from the narrowness of life, seems to be only jeering at him” (9).

\(^{17}\) Hegel (1970), PG, §32. Compare WL: “In the genus process, the separated individualities of individual life perish; the negative identity in which the genus returns into itself, while it is on the one hand the process of generating individuality, is on the other hand the sublating of it, and is thus the genus coming together with itself, the universality of the Idea in process of becoming for itself. In copulation the immediacy of the living individuality perishes; the death of this life is the procession of spirit” (§1676).

\(^{18}\) See Levinas (2000): “The funeral transforms the deceased into a living memory. Hegel always focuses on death in an interpretation of the behaviour of the survivor. As a moment in the appearing of the world, death is intelligible” (88-9).

\(^{19}\) Schelling (2010), PR, 47-8.
of life as the absolutely self-positing activity with which we are qualitatively identical and Hegel’s complete derivation of a system in which the life of Spirit has endured the death of all inadequate shapes of consciousness. This causes him to revisit the post-Kantian question of the condition of the possibility of existentially valuable experience. I will argue that Schelling’s internal critique of German idealism is a post-Kantian instance of what I call *mortalism*, the view that personhood is unconditionally conditioned by death. Reflecting on our transition into death, he holds that *dying* is a possibility we cannot comprehend, a completion we cannot know. It nevertheless represents the ideal of total self-understanding our endless striving for which individuates our finite rational activity. On Schelling’s mortalist view, dying is the idea of an end that, if pursued *regulatively*, ensures that an existentially valuable life is self-critical. As a transcendental condition of such a life, then, this idea ensures *philosophical humility*. So while German idealism under Fichte, Hegel and, for a brief time, Schelling himself absolutely privileges life, it is as an internal critic of this tradition that Schelling challenges its master concept. Against Fichte’s view that life puts us into question by demanding nature’s moral perfection, Schelling argues that dying puts us into question by demanding that we overcome all forms of philosophical arrogance. In this, he will ask whether the immortalist can live what I will call a *philosophy of life*, ultimately answering in the negative.

Schelling’s mortalism, of course, anticipates Heidegger in many ways. But it is crucial to see how it differs from Heidegger’s own. Though he depicts Schelling as a kindred spirit moved by shared problems, Heidegger does not defend mortalism against any explicit immortalist threat. As I show in Chapter 3, Schelling’s mortalism can only be understood against Fichte’s immortalism and his own period as an immortalist during
the identity philosophy. More to the point, Schelling’s critique of German idealism maintains the latter’s interest in systematicity and emphasis of cognition over what Heidegger calls ‘care’. So whereas dying represents for Schelling the unrealizable ideal of a system of a priori conditions, death represents for Heidegger the impossible possibility of having fully demonstrated responsibility for the history of one’s ways of being: it puts us into question by demanding authentic historicity. But while Schelling’s systematic mortalism differs from Heidegger’s historicist mortalism, the latter is nevertheless made possible by Schelling’s overcoming German idealist immortalism through his pioneering attacks on intellectual intuition and derivational completion. We will see in Chapter 5 how Schelling’s success in this in turn sheds light on the relation between Heidegger’s mortalism and Kant’s idealism.

In general, mortalism demands that death make sense of life. Rather than make it subservient to the rational ends of a philosophy of life, mortalism assigns death the deepest interrogative force. But since death lies beyond experience and so is unknowable, it cannot make total sense of life. To answer the post-Kantian question as a mortalist is therefore always to live a life that lacks sense. A mortalist will not simply resist immortalist consolations about death: she will persevere in the anxiety that no consolation is ever fully legitimate.

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20 See Heidegger (1985a): “as far as its plan and inner possibility go, Idealism is indeed the system of freedom. But it is not yet the system of freedom as long as essentially unsolved difficulties still remain in that which gives this system its centre and name, as long as essentially unsolved difficulties still remain in the nature of freedom and its determination. Above all, Idealism is not the true System of freedom when it is what prevents us from seeing these unsolved difficulties in the nature of freedom at all and is completely incapable of removing them. And this is actually the case. Idealism did arrive at the formal concept of freedom; it did truly recognize the general nature of freedom as independence and self-determination in the law of one’s own being. But it did not understand and has not yet understood the fact of human freedom in its factuality” (91).

21 A way of further distinguishing Schelling’s systematic from Heidegger’s historicist mortalism, which I will not pursue here, concerns the question of theism.
Schelling voices this anxiety in “Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism” (1795/6): “I understand you, dear friend! You deem it greater to struggle against an absolute power and to perish in the struggle than to guarantee one’s safety from any future danger by positing a moral god”.22 The “Letters” are this dissertation’s guiding text. They commend our refusal to be placated or relieved in the face of our demise. This is exemplified by the figure of the writhing mortal in the introduction to Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption* (1920): “upon all this misery, philosophy smiles its empty smile and, with its outstretched index finger, shows the creature, whose limbs are trembling in fear for its life in this world, a world beyond, of which it wants to know nothing at all. For man does not at all want to escape from some chain; he wants to stay, he wants—to live”.23 However doubtful of consolation, mortalism is not resigned. It meets the very human need of coming to terms with death by deriving existential significance from its cognitive opacity: if death is the unknowable *par excellence*, then the question it poses to life is unanswerable—one we must spend our lives answering. It should embolden us to know our answer is up to us, even if our answer is never adequate. Mortalist ‘consolation’, then, consists in placing humility at the center of the examined life.

COLLISION WITH THE CORPSE

If we understand a philosophical problem as “the collision between a comprehensive view (be it hypothesis or belief) and a particular fact which will not fit into

22 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:284.
23 Rosenzweig (2005), 9.
we should expect no greater problem for Spinozism and German idealism than the human corpse. That the living die is a problem for a view on which it is only a “figment of the human imagination” that the organic and inorganic differ in kind. And that the living die is a problem for a view on which life is infinite. Transition into death is intelligible on Spinoza’s view only if he can show how there can be a distinctly living consciousness that is extinguished and on the German idealists’ view only if they can show how a distinctly living consciousness can be extinguished. If the idealists are correct to construe Spinozistic matter as determined (efficiently, ad infinitum), inert (moving or at rest, unless impinged) and dead (organized, not self-organizing), the apparent exception to the rule is mortal matter—but this is precisely the exception to the idealists’ rule that matter is ultimately dynamic, self-determining and living. Both rules grapple asymmetrically around the same problem: if I lead the examined life of a Spinozist, I must explain how, in dying, what I lose is life, whereas if I lead that of an idealist, I must explain how, in death, life is what is lost.

25 Whereas Jonas (2001) places the corpse at the centre of the stalemate between ‘mechanism’ and ‘vitalism’, Schelling sees in the mortal the philosophical burden that unites ‘dogmatism’ and ‘idealism’.
27 See Fichte (1964–), VDWL: “the only thing that exists in itself is reason, and individuality is something merely accidental. Reason is the end and personality is the means; the latter is merely a particular expression of reason, one that must increasingly be absorbed into the universal form of the same. For the Wissenschaftslehre, reason alone is eternal, whereas individuality must ceaselessly die off” (505); and Schelling (1856–61), SGP: “By virtue of the self-affirmation of the absolute, whereby the latter eternally conceives the universe in itself and is the universe itself, the particulars of the universe, too, are granted a double life, a life in the absolute—which is the life of the idea, and which accordingly was also characterized as the dissolution of the finite in the infinite and of the particular in the universal—and a life in itself—which, however, is only proper to the [particular] merely to the extent that it is simultaneously dissolved into the universe, [for] in its separation from the life in God the latter is a mere semblance of life” (6:187).
In the “Letters”, Schelling describes Spinozism and idealism’s common task of deriving the *a priori* conditions of experience from a first principle.\(^{28}\) Their goal is to realize their respective principles as a system of such conditions at play in judgment—in other words, to cognize the *unity* of a first principle and the totality of judgeable phenomena. The phenomenon posing the deepest obstacle to this unity is the corpse: now dead and once living, its feet lie in two apparently different worlds for which derivational completeness demands a common ground, one over which Spinozism and idealism struggle. But if mortalism is correct, the corpse puts all systems into life-long question. As we might say, the body that can die embodies “the memento of the still unsolved question of ontology, ‘What is being?’ and must be the canon of coming attempts to solve it”.\(^{29}\) Asking this question as the post-Kantian question, the mortalist recognizes a limitation on any attempted answer that is embodied by the living—hence, dying—person.

To anticipate my mortalist interpretation of Schelling’s critique, I note the claim he voices through the title character of *Clara, or On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World* (1810) that *no* system can provide an answer that overcomes the problematicity of the corpse: “[p]hilosophers may very well say: there is no death, nothing in itself fades away; here they assume an arbitrary explanation of death and dying. However, what we others call it still remains, nevertheless, and words can no more explain this than they can explain it away”.\(^{30}\) Death is not something to be unconditionally conditioned by a first principle, but is the transcendental ground of systematic cognition in Schelling’s

\(^{28}\) See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, 327.
\(^{29}\) Jonas (2001), 19.
\(^{30}\) Schelling (1856-61), C, 30.
sense and authentic historicity in Heidegger’s sense.\footnote{Compare Haugeland (2000) on Heidegger: “Death, as Dasein’s finitude, plays, as we have seen, a starring role in this drama—not, however, as the antagonist who makes the dramatic resolution necessary, but rather as the protagonist who makes it possible” (77).} This is why, as I will argue, philosophy is not without its mortal presupposition.\footnote{See Rosenzweig (2005): “when philosophy denies the dark presupposition of all life, when it does not value death as something, but makes it into a nothing, it gives itself the appearance of having no presupposition” (11).}

**CAPUT MORTUUM**

I return to why Jacobi is wrong to think Kant’s presupposing the thing in itself entails nihilism: he confuses the *conditioning roles* empirical and transcendental objects play.\footnote{See Kant (1900–), KrV: “the object should be taken in a twofold meaning, namely as appearance or as thing in itself” (Bxxvii).} Empirical objects cannot exist outside our experience: they are conditioned by our representations of them. The transcendental object, by contrast, conditions the faculty of sensibility, providing it with the matter that, along with the understanding, it forms into experience. Since Jacobi sees conditions monolithically as external to what they condition, he is restricted to viewing them as efficient. But we can defend transcendental idealism by interpreting the transcendental object’s conditioning role *non-efficiently*—as Kant himself does.

Kant argues that the concept of an appearance entails the concept of that which appears: things as they appear presuppose things as they are in themselves.\footnote{See Kant (1900–), KrV: “even if we cannot cognize these same objects [of experience] as things in themselves, we at least must be able to think them as things in themselves. For otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears” (Bxxvi-ii); “it follows naturally from the concept of an appearance in general that something must correspond to it which is not in itself appearance, for appearance can be nothing for itself and outside of our kind of representation; thus, if there is not to be a constant circle, the word ‘appearance’ must already indicate a relation to something the immediate representation of which is, to be sure, sensible, but which in itself, without this constitution of our sensibility (on which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something, i.e., an object independent of sensibility” (A252-1).} So while an empirical representation gives a partial statement of how an object appears, no set

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31 Compare Haugeland (2000) on Heidegger: “Death, as Dasein’s finitude, plays, as we have seen, a starring role in this drama—not, however, as the antagonist who makes the dramatic resolution necessary, but rather as the protagonist who makes it possible” (77).

32 See Rosenzweig (2005): “when philosophy denies the dark presupposition of all life, when it does not value death as something, but makes it into a nothing, it gives itself the appearance of having no presupposition” (11).

33 See Kant (1900–), KrV: “the object should be taken in a twofold meaning, namely as appearance or as thing in itself” (Bxxvii).

34 See Kant (1900–), KrV: “even if we cannot cognize these same objects [of experience] as things in themselves, we at least must be able to think them as things in themselves. For otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears” (Bxxvi-ii); “it follows naturally from the concept of an appearance in general that something must correspond to it which is not in itself appearance, for appearance can be nothing for itself and outside of our kind of representation; thus, if there is not to be a constant circle, the word ‘appearance’ must already indicate a relation to something the immediate representation of which is, to be sure, sensible, but which in itself, without this constitution of our sensibility (on which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something, i.e., an object independent of sensibility” (A252-1).
of such statements can determine it as it is in itself. The idea of a thing in itself denotes an object’s complete concept of which our statements give only an incomplete expression. Such an idea conditions experience as a *formal* cause, for it represents the complete definition of an essence we strive endlessly to state empirically. Of course, there is no contradiction in supposing that infinite appearances are conditioned by infinite things in themselves bearing no unifying ground. General logic permits this. *Transcendental* logic, whose principal concern is for the unity of human experience, does not. It demands an unconditioned condition—an *infinitely conditioning* thing in itself as opposed to infinite conditioning things in themselves. This is what, in the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), Kant calls the ‘transcendental ideal’, which he derives by reflecting on the principle of thoroughgoing determination. According to this principle, for all pairs of opposed predicates, one predicate applies to every object. He says “the *whole of possibility*, as the sum total of all predicates of things in general […] contains as it were the entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken”.\(^{35}\) Kant identifies the ground of this storehouse as the transcendental ideal, referring to it with the idea of “a *thing in itself*”.\(^{36}\) At a *systematic* register, this idea denotes the unifying ground lacking at an *atomistic* register. But such an idea conditions experience, not just as a formal cause, but as a *final* cause, for it guides the integration of intuitions and concepts toward the end of systematic cognition, regulating our cognitive activity as that for the sake of which we cognize at all. Kant’s idea therefore does not entail nihilism. It

\(^{35}\) Kant (1900–), KrV, A571-2/B599-600.

\(^{36}\) Kant (1900–), KrV, A576/B604.
teleologically structures sensibility’s cooperation with the understanding. Rather than an external cause that pushes us from without, it is a purpose that drives us from within.37

We saw Jacobi’s charge moves the idealists to (1) reject the idea of the thing in itself and (2) construe the absolute ground of experience in terms of life. Fichte is the first to combine (1) and (2). The combination is no coincidence. As I will argue, Fichte’s Jena project substitutes Kant’s notorious idea with an idealist brand of immortalism for the same reason Schelling’s mortalist critique of the latter rehabilitates the former: the idea of death and the idea of the thing in itself are structurally analogous. They represent an unknowable goal the idea of which regulates a life lived toward systematic or historicist unity. The thought driving this dissertation, then, is that what Kant understands as the bounds of sense is congruent with what Schelling and Heidegger understand as the bounds of life. It is the mortalist thought that the condition of the possibility of personhood is beyond sense, beyond life.

My hope is to render philosophically productive our suspicion that death turns us into things—that life turns “into something that makes us shudder: into a spectre, a piece of the world of ghosts, which our waking consciousness perceives to be nonexistent”.38 My hope is also to render philosophically intelligible Jacobi’s use of an eighteenth century alchemical term in his “Open Letter to Fichte” (1799): “The I is a

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37 Schelling (1994b) sometimes misses this point, leading to ill-posed questions: “because [Kant] has an impression on the senses precede the real idea [of the thing in itself], but this idea cannot come from what has already been thought, thus not from the object which has already been clothed with the form of the understanding, but only from the thing outside and above all ideas, then he has to derive the impression from the real of the intelligible and to make the intelligible into the causa efficiens of our idea […] it must be asked (1) how this intelligible basis gets to the subject, how it affects it; (2) how this material so willingly bows to the form of the understanding; (3) whence the subject derives its power over the material. These questions are not answered in the Kantian critique, indeed they are not even asked” (GNP, 102).

38 Adorno (2004), 364.
science in itself, and the only one. It knows itself, and it would contradict its concept if it knew, or were to get hold of, something outside itself [...] The I, therefore, is necessarily the principle of all other sciences, and an unfailing menstruum with which they can all be dissolved and made to vanish into the I without any trace of a caput mortuum—the not-I—being left behind”.39 If Fichte’s immortalism is correct, the I—his technical term for life—unconditionally conditions human experience. Its scope leaves no trace of a “caput mortuum” or deadhead, the alchemical term for the useless remainder in attempts to distill the elixir of life. We can hear Jacobi’s use of the term as denoting the blind spot with which the corpse confronts answers to the post-Kantian question. If mortalism is correct and Fichte’s conception of life cannot ground experience without remainder—which is Jacobi’s contention40 in the letter—then an inexplicable caput mortuum is conceivable.41 Indeed, as mortals, we bear its trace.

Under Jacobi’s influence, Schelling locates this blind spot in “the incomprehensible basis of reality, the indivisible remainder, which cannot be resolved

40 See Jacobi (1994): “since I regard the consciousness of non-knowing as what is highest in man, and the place of this consciousness as the place of the true inaccessible to science, so I am bound to be pleased with Kant that [by presupposing the thing in itself] he preferred to sin against the system rather than against the majesty of the place. In my opinion, Fichte sins against this majesty whenever he wills to include the place within the domain of science, allowing it to be looked down upon from the standpoint of speculation, allegedly the highest of all, or the standpoint of truth itself” (499).
41 Contrast Hegel (1970), EL: “The thing-in-itself (and here ‘thing’ embraces God, or the spirit, as well) expresses the objec-ject, inasmuch as abstraction is made of all that it is for consciousness, of all determinations of feeling, as well as of all determinate thoughts about it. It is easy to see what is left, namely, what is completely abstract, or totally empty, and determined only as what is ‘beyond’; the negative of representation, of feeling, of determinate thinking, etc. But it is just as simple to reflect that this caput mortuum is itself only the product of thinking, and precisely of the thinking that has gone to the extreme of pure abstraction, the product of the empty ‘I’ that makes its own empty self-identity into its objec-ject. The negative determination that contains this abstract identity as [its] objec-ject is likewise entered among the Kantian categories, and, like that empty identity, it is something quite familiar.—We must be quite surprised, therefore, to read so often that one does not know what the thing-in-itself is; for nothing is easier to know than this” (§44).
into the understanding even with the greatest effort".\(^{42}\) Schelling’s thought that something always already eludes concepts of the understanding revives Kant’s idea of the thing in itself. If my structural analogy claim is correct, it also affirms the problematicity of the corpse—of my own deadhead—as that which resists subordination in any answer to the post-Kantian question. The intended effect is to cast death as philosophy’s deepest scandal, an inborn puzzle, a Trojan horse concealing the thing in itself in one’s own person.

ROADMAP

In Chapter 1, I show why Fichte’s idealism assigns explanatory priority to life and so counts as a philosophy of life. In Chapter 2, I argue that Fichte’s philosophy of life is an instance of immortalism. In Chapter 3, I draw on a selection of Schelling’s works to show why he rejects Fichte’s identification of philosophy’s first principle with life. In Chapter 4, I argue that Schelling’s critique is an instance of mortalism that revives Kant’s idea of the thing in itself. Transitioning from Schelling’s to Heidegger’s mortalism in Chapter 5, I consider two antinomies, one concerning our cognitive relation to the world and the other concerning our lived relation to our death, and argue that Fichte’s immortalism solves neither and that the ideas that provide their respective solutions are structurally analogous.

\(^{42}\) Schelling (1856-61), PUWF, I/7:359-60.
PART I: FICHTE’S IMMORTALISM

CHAPTER 1: FICHTE’S IDEALISM AS PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

O death, where is thy victory?
O death, where is thy sting?
—I Corinthians, 15:55

THE I AND THE SELF

In this chapter, I will argue that Fichte’s idealism, during his Jena period at least, is a philosophy of life, a view on which life, construed as a self-organizing activity, has the explanatory primacy of a first principle, a view Fichte holds by resolving what I call the antinomy of systematicity between Spinozism and the Wissenschaftslehre. I will show this by answering two related questions: how does the Wissenschaftslehre treat life as explanatorily primary and why is the Wissenschaftslehre uniquely livable?

Jacobi problematizes systematicity on the strength of his charge that the philosopher’s argument leads inexorably to nihilism. Without a conception of how things in themselves affect sensibility non-efficiently, the charge implies that this fate is as much Kant’s as Spinoza’s, confronting the German idealists with a choice: either the

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43 There is a remarkable silence in the secondary literature on the centrality of life, purposiveness and organicity in Fichte’s Jena works; see Breazeale and Rockmore, eds. (1994, 2001, 2002), Ameriks, ed. (2000) and Sedgwick, ed. (2000). Neuhouser (1990) asks whether intellectual intuition—Fichte’s mode of apprehending philosophy’s first principle—bestows a “quality or marker” on representations that ensures their membership in a unified consciousness (85), but offers no answer where he may have found instruction in Fichte’s associations of intellectual intuition with life. His discussions of intellectual intuition’s identity with its product and of the I’s self-causation (108-13) thus fall short of a fully satisfying account. The same lacuna limits Beiser’s (2002) analysis of Fichte’s Jena period (268-9). Like Neuhouser, Martin (1997) does not frame this period in terms of the nihilistic threat raised by Jacobi’s influential writings on Spinoza, a threat that rallies the German idealists around the cause of purposiveness. As a result, he notes Fichte’s opposition to dogmatism’s (i.e., Spinozism’s) mechanistic explanation of nature and denial that mere causality can account for normativity (42, 50) without calling attention to Fichte’s contrasting organistic explanatory framework. Wood (2000) correctly reads Fichte as arguing that to know the I is to generate what one knows and to know something that is “simultaneously theoretical and practical” (94-6), but does not infer the radically teleological character of this act. We will see that understanding Fichte’s idealism as a philosophy of life explains his move from a first principle expressing a fact (Tatsache) to one expressing an act (Tathandlung) and in what sense he thinks this establishes idealist conclusions.
thing in itself has a place in a systematic philosophy, which is destined for nihilism, or it has none, in which case alone can philosophy establish the conditions of possibility of finite purposive agency. Since the first disjunct annihilates purposiveness, the only option is to begin absolutely from the subject’s standpoint of self-organization. The only option, in other words, is to show that this standpoint is the starting point or first principle of philosophy. Such a principle must be the form of purposive activity and not merely persistent existence.\footnote{As Pippin (1989) argues, Fichte’s strategy is not to pursue a metaphysics of identity, the problem being that any reflection on the possibility of consciousness presupposes consciousness of oneself as reflecting on possibility, but to investigate the very possibility of a metaphysics of identity, that is, “the possibility of self-conscious judgments about objects”, locating this possibility, not in concepts that presuppose a theory of identity, but in the act of self-positing always already posited in any self-conscious perspective (47-53).}

It is insufficient if this principle is the form of necessary and infinite existence, for Propositions 6 through 8 of Part I of the \textit{Ethics} show this is true of Spinoza’s substance: since substance is constituted by attributes of its kind, it cannot be produced by a substance of a distinct kind, but must exist by the necessity of its nature; there can be no substance of a distinct kind as it would be finite and so limited by something constituted by attributes of the same kind, in which case it would be no substance; thus, there is only one substance, which is infinite.\footnote{See Spinoza (2002), IP6-8.} Spinoza’s substance exists necessarily and infinitely. Since it has the form of merely persistent organization, it does not support a principle that explains how a human is capable of self-organization.\footnote{See James (1878): “If ministry to survival be the sole criterion of mental excellence, then luxury and amusement, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Plato, and Marcus Aurelius, stellar spectroscopy, diatom markings, and nebular hypotheses are by-products on too wasteful a scale” (10).} Fichte calls such a principle of purposiveness ‘the I’.
Before beginning to draw the connection between the I and life, we must be clear that Fichte’s principle is the *infinite* I, not the *finite* I or *self* reading this sentence. In a footnote to the first and only published chapter of *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797/8), he says:

The word ‘self’ has frequently been employed of late to designate this same concept [i.e., ‘the I’]. If my derivation is correct, all the words in the family to which the word ‘self’ belongs (e.g., ‘self-same’, ‘the same’, etc.) signify a relationship to something that has already been posited, though only insofar as it has been posited through its mere concept. If what has been posited is I, then the word ‘self’ is formed. Hence the word ‘self’ presupposes the concept of the I, and everything that is thought to be absolute within the former is borrowed from the concept of the latter.47

Fichte is unequivocal: ‘self’ and ‘I’ do not unqualifiedly co-refer. When I refer to myself, I do not refer to the first principle or unconditioned condition of a philosophical system. My existence is not unconditioned.48 Rather, I organize my representations as my own and, as I will put the point in this dissertation, realize the infinite I as the original form of self-organization.49 I realize an unconditioned condition that Fichte calls ‘I-hood’ (*Ichheit*), whose unconditionality is supposed to make it impervious to nihilism. Unless nihilism is true, I must be able to demonstrate my capacity for self-organization. On pain of this capacity’s dissolution into the efficient explanations of Jacobi’s philosopher, my demonstration must realize the I as this capacity’s original form. Fichte will aim to show that my positing anything self-consciously *always already* posits I-hood as the condition

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47 Fichte (1964—), VDWL, 530n. Compare Fichte’s letter to Jacobi, 30 August 1795: “the individual I must be deduced from the absolute I”.
48 This does not entail, as Beiser (2002) claims, that the I produces what I *qua* self perceive (282-3). As we will see, the I has no existence apart from my realization of it. Beiser’s claim stems from his denial that Fichte assigns the I an infinite status. But Fichte is adamant that, to ground systematic philosophy, what I realize must be infinite, that is, *trans-individual*.
49 Zöller (2000) is attentive to the centrality of the I/self distinction in Fichte’s Jena period. It goes missing on Neuhouser’s (1990) account. Its absence from Martin’s (1997) explains his concern that the concept of an infinite I “borders on the theological”. We will see that if theology is a mode of special metaphysics whose object transcends our cognitive activity, Fichte’s concept borders on nothing of the sort.
on which self-conscious positing is at all possible.\textsuperscript{50} Rather than uncharitably reading Fichte as solipsistically conflating the I with the self, we see ‘I’ and ‘self’ cannot unqualifiedly co-refer.\textsuperscript{51}

But there \emph{is} a sense in which they co-refer, for they are at least \emph{modally} distinct. A modal distinction stands between two entities, one of which is intelligible without the other but not \textit{vice versa}.\textsuperscript{52} The self is unintelligible independent of the I. It is because the latter is the former’s unconditioned condition that to refer to myself as a self—not a non-entity\textsuperscript{53} lacking intrinsic properties and so real identity—just is to refer to I-\textit{hood}. Fichte, however, does not leave the I modally independent on the self. If the self is not also necessary for the I, we face the problem of how from something unconditioned or infinite anything conditioned or finite can arise. In the \textit{Spinoza Letters}, Jacobi claims Spinoza’s awareness of this problem:

It is certainly nothing other than the ancient \textit{a nihilo nihil fit} that Spinoza made an issue of, but with more abstract concepts than the philosophers of the cabbala or others before him. In keeping with these more abstract concepts he established that with each and every coming-to-be in the infinite, no matter how one dresses it up in images, with each and every change in the infinite, \textit{something} is posited \textit{out of nothing}. He therefore rejected any \textit{transition} from the infinite to the finite. In general, he rejected all \textit{causae transitoriae, secundariae or remotae}, and in place of an

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{50} Thus, we may discard Russell’s (1963) uncharitable claim that Fichte “carried subjectivism to a kind of insanity” (718).
\textsuperscript{51} Compare Fichte’s letter to Schelling (1997), 15 November 1800: “the \textit{object} is not joined to \textit{consciousness}, nor \textit{consciousness to the object}, but rather both are immediately united in the I as the \textit{ideal-real} and the \textit{real-ideal}” (74).
\textsuperscript{52} See Suarez’s (1947) account of real, modal and rational distinctions.
\textsuperscript{53} See Jacobi’s (1994) characterization of modes as “\textit{non-entia}” in Spinoza’s system (219-20). Compare James (1878): “[For Spencer,] there is no resource but to appeal to the polyp, or whatever shows us the form of evolution just \textit{before} intelligence […] If the embryologic line of appeal can alone teach us the genuine essence of things, if the polyp is to dictate our law of mind to us because he came first, where are we to stop? He must himself be treated in the same way. Back of him lay the not-yet-polyp, and, back of all, the universal mother, fire-mist. To seek there for the reality, of course would reduce all thinking to nonentity, and, although Mr. Spencer would probably not regard this conclusion as a \textit{reductio ad absurdum} of his principle, since it would only be another path to his theory of the Unknowable, less systematic thinkers may hesitate” (4).
\end{footnotesize}
emanating En-Soph he only posited an immanent one, an indwelling cause of the universe eternally unalterable within itself, One and the same with all its consequences.\textsuperscript{54}

Since nothing limits substance, it cannot be a determinate object. It is unconditioned: it is \textit{no thing}.\textsuperscript{55} But there is no transition from changeless substance to that of changeable modes, lest we posit something arising from nothing. An unbridgeable gap divides indeterminate from determinate existence so long as modes are modally distinct from substance, for in that case intelligibility lies solely in that from which nothing can arise except \textit{ex nihilo}.\textsuperscript{56} This is why Jacobi says Spinoza’s substance \textit{dwell immanently} in the universe of modes. It exists equiprimordially with its consequences, “for if a series [of effects] is not to arise from \textit{nothing}, it must be infinite absolutely”.\textsuperscript{57} We avoid explaining creation \textit{ex nihilo} by viewing the existence of substance and modes as unintelligible independent of the other, that is, as rationally distinct. Similarly for Fichte, the I and the self, properly understood, are rationally distinct. Their equiprimordiality avoids the problem of explaining how the I has meaning independent of the self, which would be to show—from without the standpoint of selfhood and so \textit{per impossibile}—how transition from the first principle to anything determinate is possible. Their

\textsuperscript{54} Jacobi (1994), 187-8.
\textsuperscript{55} Compare Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, who calls the notion of “an unconditional thing” a contradiction (327) on the grounds that, whereas a thing is conditioned or \textit{bedingt}—thinged or \textit{made thingly}—the unconditioned is \textit{unbedingt}—unthinged or \textit{not thingly}—and so not a thing.
\textsuperscript{56} Support for Jacobi’s reading lies in noticing that while substance is \textit{conceptually prior} to modes, defined by Spinoza (2002) as “that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing” (ID3), it is \textit{existentially equiprimordial} with modes since it can only exist according to its essence as constituted by its attributes, which themselves must be expressed through their proper modes since, for example, extension is inconceivable without changes in motion and rest, which just are extended modes. Spinoza affirms the inseparable presentation of substance and modes when he says: “whatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only, and consequently […] the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that” (2P7Sch). On this point, I am thankful for conversations with Torin Doppelt.
\textsuperscript{57} Jacobi (1994), 188.
equiprimordiality satisfies the dual need to transcendently condition selfhood on I- hood, avoiding Spinozism, and actualize I-hood through selfhood, avoiding creation ex nihilo. It shows that the I as first principle and its instantiation are inseparable.\footnote{Schelling (1994b), GNP, does not grasp this point when he says: “Fichte […] proclaimed frankly: the I, namely the I of every single individual, is the only substance […] It is not that Fichte understands the I as universal or absolute, but only as a human I. The I as which everyone finds himself in his consciousness is the only true existent. For everyone, everything is posited only with and in their I” (106). Fichte (1964–), WLNM, does call the immediate relation between I and self “a creation out of nothing”, although this is because it arises from an act that, because it is self-grounding, “produc[es] something that did not exist before” (IV/2:47) in and for some particular self.} A full understanding of the rational distinction between I and self requires grasping Fichte’s argument, which he develops in the 1790s, that intellectual intuition is the act whereby I realize the first principle. If successful, it will show that transcendental reflection on the first principle of the Wissenschaftslehre provides the proper conception of human finitude.

But I have not explained how I come to know myself as a self, as possessing a capacity for self-organization whose original form is the I. Fichte’s position in the Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre (1794/5) and in the New Presentation is that I achieve self-knowledge by grasping I-hood, which I can only do by resolving the antinomy of systematicity. Resolving this antinomy affords a conception of my finitude that salvages purposiveness in the face of Spinozism, namely, by demonstrating the explanatory primacy of life. A Fichtean resolution will accordingly ground self-knowledge in a philosophy of life.

ANALYTIC AS DIALECTIC

To understand the antinomy, we must first understand Fichte’s conception of systematicity. To this end, notice how Kant’s distinction between a canon and an
organon informs his distinction between analytic and dialectic. An analytic is the part of transcendental logic

that expounds the elements of the pure cognition of the understanding and the principles without which no object can be thought at all [...] But because it is very enticing and seductive to make use of these pure cognitions of the understanding and principles by themselves, and even beyond all bounds of experience [...] the understanding falls into the danger of making a material use of the merely formal principles of pure understanding through empty sophistries [...] Since [transcendental logic] should properly be only a canon for the assessment of empirical use, it is misused if one lets it count as the organon of a general and unrestricted use, and dares to synthetically judge, assert, and decide about objects in general with the pure understanding alone. The use of the pure understanding would in this case therefore be dialectical.  

Analytic gives a canon of the a priori principles of cognition, a catalogue of the forms of the understanding as well as limitations of their use. Restricted to a canon, analytic resists the temptation to use these forms unilaterally—without consulting the matter of sensation—and thereby to produce an organon through their illegitimate or dialectical employment. This explains why the Transcendental Analytic of the first Critique studies the a priori conditions of cognition, while the Transcendental Dialectic studies their misapplication and resulting illusions. Kant’s alignment of these distinctions apparently privileges critique, as a propaedeutic to a system of pure reason, over doctrine, as supplying the organon that would compose a system if not for the understanding’s misuse.  

By collapsing the analytic/dialectic distinction, according to which a canon of principles is necessary but insufficient for a system of reason, Fichte comes to identify critique and doctrine and thereby bring a systematic transcendental idealism into view.  

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60 Hence, in the Analytic of Principles, Kant (1900–), KrV, claims the principles of the understanding “are merely principles of the exposition of appearances, and the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic a priori cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g., the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding” (A247/B303).
In Part I of the *Foundations*, Fichte takes the first step toward a Kantian analytic: deducing the concepts that condition experience *a priori*. But rather than produce a canon, his deduction fast becomes a *dialectical* process of analyzing these concepts to reveal their concealment of a contradiction. Contradiction here is not simply a violation of a mere logical principle, but undermines the unity of the very *standpoint* from which one carries out a deduction. Resolution is paramount. It requires a further concept that reconciles or synthesizes the opposing terms born of the first—until this concept yields a further contradiction. For Fichte, analytic *takes the form* of dialectic by starting with *a priori* conditions of experience, moving through contradictions they yield and progressing to their resolution in a complete system of conditions. In this way, contradiction *compels* critique’s search for a canon down the path to a doctrine.

The contradiction yielded in this presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* arises from a three-step proof of its third principle. Fichte’s first step is to argue that the proposition $A = A$ presupposes the *original positing* of the I. To posit (*setzen*) the I as first principle is not to think or represent it, but is an *existential commitment* to the activity of the I as that which conditions the very possibility of thought and representation.\(^6^1\)

Reading the proposition in question as *if A exists, then A exists*, Fichte says its self-evidence consists, not in its *matter*—whether $A$ exists—but in its *form*, namely, the necessary connection between its antecedent and its consequent. But this form

\(^6^1\) See Fichte (1964–): “That our proposition [of the I] is the absolutely basic principle of all knowledge was pointed out by Kant, in his deduction of the categories [...] Descartes, before him, put forward a similar proposition: *cogito, ergo sum* [...] But in that case the addition of *cogitans* is entirely superfluous; we do not necessarily think when we exist, but we necessarily exist whenever we think. Thinking is by no means the essence, but merely a specific determination of existence; and our existence has many other determinations besides this. —Reinhold put forward the principle of representations [...] He makes a notable advance over Descartes; but if his intention is to establish simply knowledge itself, and not merely a propaedeutic to the same, it is not enough; for even representation is not the essence of existence, but a specific determination thereof” (GW, I:100-1).
presupposes the identity of the I that posits it. Indeed, the I is this form: “in claiming that [this] proposition is absolutely certain, what is established is that between that if and this then there is a necessary connection […] To this necessary connection I give the preliminary designation X […and] X=I am”. The originality of the I’s position consists in this, that it is always already posited just in positing anything; “prior to all positing in the I [vor allem Setzen im Ich], the I itself is posited”. Insofar as the I is posited, then, it is posited absolutely and through itself. Fichte accordingly infers that the priority of its being posited is the same as the priority of its existence: “[t]he I posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists; and conversely, the I exists and posits its own existence by virtue of merely existing”. It is therefore as a first principle or “ultimate ground” that the I posits itself absolutely.

Here, a principle has not been proven, but has followed simply from reflecting on the form of positing. The same is true in Fichte’s second step, where he reads the self-evident proposition \(~A=\neg A\) as \(~A\) is not equal to \(A\). It is formally identical to \(A=A\) in that it also presupposes the I that posits its antecedent-consequent connection. Indeed, for the opposing of \(~A\) to \(A\) in the second proposition to be “a counterposing” and not just another positing, the very same I that grounded the first proposition must ground the second. Every opposing, like every positing, occurs “absolutely, by virtue of an act of the I”. But while the I determines the second proposition’s form, the matter of \(~A\) is “governed” by \(A\): it is what \(A\) is not, which is why I only know what \(~A\) is “on the assumption that I am acquainted with \(A\)”. But being acquainted with \(A\) entails

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64 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:102-4.
difference—the difference between the matter of A and that of \( \neg A \) as well as between the matter of what I know and the form by which I know anything at all, namely, the I. Difference thus enters as something opposed to the I: “[n]othing is posited to begin with, except the I; and this alone is posited absolutely. Hence there can be an absolute opposition only to the I. But that which is opposed to the I=\neg I".\(^{65}\) From this reflection follows a second principle: whatever is not-I is opposed absolutely to the I.

The first and second principles provide a priori conditions of experience—the categories of reality and negation, respectively. In a third step, Fichte says\(^{66}\) they yield a contradiction: (1) the I cannot be posited independently of the not-I and so exist in virtue of itself since (a) insofar as counterpositing presupposes the I, the not-I is posited in the I and (b) insofar as the not-I is posited, the I is not posited; (2) the I must be posited independently of the not-I and so exist in virtue of itself since (a) only insofar as the I is posited is the not-I counterposited to anything and (b) insofar as the not-I is posited in consciousness, the I must also be posited therein. The I cannot be self-identical so long as counterpositing introduces an opposition to it, but it must be self-identical for counterpositing to be contrastive. The problem is how the I can include difference. By including its opposition to the not-I, the I suffers exactly the more than merely logical contradiction that threatens the unity of a self-organizing perspective. Nevertheless, a third principle follows from the first two: I=\neg I and not-I=I.

At this point, Fichte remarks:

All these conclusions have been derived from the principles already set forth, according to laws of reflection that we have presupposed as valid; so they must be correct. But if so, the identity of consciousness, the sole

\(^{65}\) Fichte (1964–), GW, I:104.

\(^{66}\) See Fichte (1964–), GW, I:106.
absolute foundation of our knowledge, is itself eliminated. And hereby our task is now determined. For we have to discover some $X$, by means of which all these conclusions can be granted as correct, without doing away with the identity of consciousness.\footnote{Fichte (1964--), GW, I:107.}

$X$ represents the point of completion for analyzing and synthesizing contradictions in a succession of \textit{a priori} conditions. It represents a system, where the "\textit{form} of the system is based on [this] highest synthesis".\footnote{Fichte (1964--), GW, I:115.} $X$ is the ideal point at which the I's identity is rendered compatible with the difference it contains. But the task of discovering $X$ is only salient when the third principle is proven, which is precisely when Fichtean analytic reveals its true, dialectical character. This principle yields the category of determination, which Fichte understands as the "positing of quantity in general, whether it be quantity of reality or negativity".\footnote{Fichte (1964--), GW, I:122.} This category's instability owes to a tension internal to the concept of determination, namely, that we must conceive the I's capacity to posit the not-I as residing in the I for the sake of its self-identical quantity \textit{without} effacing the quantity of difference in the not-I. This takes Fichte, in Part II of the \textit{Foundations}, through a series\footnote{For key moves in this dialectic, see Fichte (1964--), GW, I:107-10, 127-9, 131-4, 136-8, 166-7.} of candidates for theoretically resolving the category's inner tension, each of which is as unstable as the third principle itself. Whether, in positing the not-I, the I is thought of as divisible, limited, determined, passive or negated, the contradiction of (1) and (2) remain. Nevertheless, analytic is not possible except as a dialectic that seeks the elimination of this contradiction.\footnote{Neuhouser's (1990) question about whether Fichte’s first principle “involves a claim about the \textit{practical} nature of the subject or […] is to be understood as a starting point with a purely \textit{theoretical} content" (44) is therefore ill-posed, for the theoretical and practical portions of that work are introduced to resolve a
THE ANTINOMY OF SYSTEMATICITY

Fichte’s analytic differs from Kant’s by taking dialectic as its core. This allows him to surmount Kant’s division between critique and doctrine and transform transcendental idealism into a system. As we will see in detail in Chapter 2, the “decrees of reason” to stabilize critique by deducing a system of conditions is not theoretical, but practical. Fichte argues in Part III of the Foundations that the only way to reconcile the I’s identity with the not-I’s difference is to cast the task of discovering X as the I’s moral drive to “fill out infinity”, that is, progressively to bring the universe under laws of reason by exerting its efficacy on the not-I. The task is practical in that it aims at constructing a system of reason through practical agency. This distinguishes Fichtean from Kantian systematicity, which is regulatively presupposed rather than constructed. It also anticipates a way of grasping Fichte’s notion of antinomy. Just prior to turning to Part III, Fichte says:

If the I reflects upon itself, and thereby determines itself, the not-I is infinite and unbounded. If, on the other hand, the I reflects upon on the not-I in general (upon the universe), and thereby determines it, it is itself infinite. In presentation, therefore, I and not-I are reciprocally related; if the one is finite, the other is infinite. And vice versa; but one of the two is always infinite—(Here lies the ground of the antinomies expounded by Kant).

This passage addresses the tensions internal to an analytic and the consequent need to construct a system. Though it explicitly concerns the contradiction above, we can hear it contradiction that emerges from the first principle. Similarly, it is inaccurate for him to claim that the I’s dependence on what Fichte calls ‘the check’ (Anstoss) “generates” the central contradiction in the Foundations (49), for this term arises within the theoretical portion’s attempt to resolve that contradiction. Moreover, that the first principle yields a contradiction whose resolution lies in the practical notion of ‘striving’ does not entail that Fichte “necessarily surrenders the certainty of that principle and thereby dissolves the very foundation upon which the truth of his system, including its proof of practical reason, was to be based” (52-3). It is precisely this foundation that provides striving’s form and function.

72 See Fichte (1964), GW, I:106.
73 See Fichte (1964), GW, I:288-91.
voicing a *metaphilosophical* contradiction between the two comprehensive views it contains: Spinozism and the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This standoff constitutes the antinomy driving the *New Presentation*, a text that will emphasize the scope and significance of life in Fichte’s system.

Fichte here claims that, to “determine” itself, the I must posit a quantum of reality belonging to the not-I and, to that extent, accept the negation of its own reality. This restates (1), for by admitting the not-I into what is absolutely posited, the I differentiates its identity, abdicating its original position and rendering the not-I “infinite and unbounded”. This is to cede the I’s role as *ground* to a thing that persists outside of it. But points in the direction of Spinoza’s principle of persistence, which renders the idea of freely constructing a philosophical system incoherent. By contrast, to reflect on the not-I “in general” is for the I to reflect on what it is to “know about anything at all, whatever it may be”.\(^75\) It is, in other words, for the I to reflect on the *form* rather than the matter of positing and, hence, to reflect on *itself*. As a reflection on what is always already posited, this restates (2). It affirms the I as the ground of positing. This points in the direction of the principle of purposiveness, which validates the idea of philosophical construction. Hence, we hear in reason’s practical decree an antinomy about the very possibility of such a task, one Fichte will articulate in the *New Presentation*.

Before turning to that text, we must assess Fichte’s claim that this antinomy is “the ground of the *antinomies* expounded by Kant”.\(^76\) If, as I suggest, Fichte’s is an antinomy between systematic transcendental realism (Spinozism) and systematic transcendental idealism (*Wissenschaftslehre*), how can it ground Kant’s dynamical

\(^{75}\) Fichte (1964–), GW, I:93, italics mine.

\(^{76}\) Fichte (1964–), GW, I:246.
antinomies, which pit transcendental realism against empirical idealism? According to Kant, the transcendental realist’s Platonic urge subordinates the understanding’s causal rule to reason’s demand for causal closure in an unconditioned cause, while the empirical idealist’s Epicurean urge rejects any abstraction from the aggregate of natural causes, sacrificing causal closure for endless causal efficiency: the former seeks a single explanation of all things; the latter seeks explanations of every single thing. Their common failure is their conflation of appearances with things in themselves. Thus, whereas parties to Kant’s antinomies neglect a crucial distinction, Fichte’s antinomy is post-Kantian precisely in its concern over how to conceive it, that is, over whether the idea of the thing in itself should play any explanatory role in a philosophical system. By grasping this distinction, the parties to Fichte’s antinomy adopt a wider scope than those of Kant’s. This indicates why Fichte says the former grounds the latter. Moreover, it points to the value Fichte places on distinguishing the letter from the spirit of Kant’s idealism. On the letter, he says in Part II of the Foundations:

The qualitative realist proclaims the reality, independent of the I, of a determinate; the quantitative realist, the reality, independent of the I, of a mere determination. There is a determination present in the I, whose ground is not to be posited in the I; that, for him, is a fact: as to its ground as such, he is cut off from inquiring into it, that is, it is absolutely and ungroundedly present for him. To be sure, he must relate it to something in the not-I, as real ground, in accordance with the grounding law inherent in himself; but he knows that this law lies merely in himself, and is not deceived thereby. It will at once be apparent to everybody that this realism is nothing other than what was set forth above under the name of critical idealism; just as even Kant established nothing other than this, nor was able or willing, at the level of reflection on which he had placed himself, to establish anything else. And on the spirit, he says:

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77 See Kant (1900–), KrV, A471/B499.
This is not the place to show, what can manifestly be shown nonetheless, that Kant also knew very well what he did not say. Nor is it in place to give the reasons why he neither could nor would say everything that he knew. The principles established and yet to be established here are obviously the basis of his own, as anyone can convince himself who is willing to make a study of the spirit of Kant’s philosophy (which should not indeed be lacking therein). He has said on several occasions that in his Critiques he was not seeking to establish science, but only the propaedeutic thereof; and it is hard to see why this is the only thing his devotees have not wanted to believe in him.79

The qualitative realist and quantitative realist adopt different stances toward the not-I. For the former, it bears qualities that determine the self toward cognition. This is the pre-Kantian thesis that the mind conforms to an object, which brings about cognition. For the latter, the not-I is a restriction on the self’s cognitive activity the concept of which is a determination of the self. This is the Kantian thesis that whereas the object qua appearance conforms to the mind, the object qua thing in itself is an idea guiding the mind. The qualitative (transcendental) realist represents a set of qualities as intrinsic to the not-I and determinant of our cognition of it. By contrast, the quantitative (empirical) realist defends the inscrutability of any such set and instead posits the not-I’s reality as an unconditioned quantity required by the “grounding law” for any conditioned quantity. Kant follows this law by arguing that an empirical object presupposes a transcendental object, though he denies the latter is knowable. This is the letter of Kant’s idealism, which leaves just enough—hence, too much—room for the spoiling ingredient of the Spinozistic disjunct: the not-I or thing in itself.

79 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:187n.
Its spirit, on the other hand, is grasped if we hear Kant’s offer of critique as a propaedeutic for, not a prohibition against, a system or doctrine. Invoking this spirit in §6 of the Second Introduction to the New Presentation, Fichte says:

[While] Kant by no means established a system of [a priori conditions...] I think I know with equal certainty that Kant envisaged such a system; that everything that he actually propounds consists of fragments and consequences of such a system, and that his claims have sense and coherence only on this assumption [...] and the eminent author still retains unique credit for this achievement, of having first knowingly diverted philosophy away from external objects and directed it into ourselves. This is the spirit and inmost heart of his whole philosophy, as it is also the spirit and heart of the Wissenschaftslehre.\(^80\)

Just as empirical cognition is not safe from skepticism unless we presuppose the idea of a whole by which it is a unity rather than a heap, so too, Fichte thinks, Kant’s idealism must be read as assuming a system in which the not-I is not a competing ground, but is integrated into a system whose first principle is the I. Indeed, Fichte’s argument is that the idea of the thing in itself is inconceivable apart from this system: “what more do [the Kantians] know about [this idea] than this: that they are required to think in accordance with it? It follows that they are asserting no more than this: that they are required to supply the thought of a thing as a ground or foundation [of experience]. We are quite prepared to concede this claim and even to join them in affirming it, insofar as it pertains to the standpoint they occupy. Their thing is a product of their own thinking”.\(^81\) Only by

\(^{80}\) Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:478-9. This is an implicit objection to Schelling’s defense of Kant’s critique/doctrine distinction in the “Letters”, which I will investigate in Part II.

\(^{81}\) Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:491. Hence, Fichte proclaims the idea of the thing in itself “the uttermost perversion of reason, and a concept perfectly absurd” (I:472). Moreover, he says this “all-too-avoidable deception, to be radically extirpated by a true philosophy, has thus been created solely by yourself and as soon as you come to be clear about your philosophy, it falls from your eyes like scales, and the deception never returns” (I:514). Fichte prohibits any commitment to the thing in itself and instead posits what in the Foundations he calls a ‘check’ (Anstoss) on the subject’s activity (I:210). Beiser (2002) reads this as postulating a thing in itself (271). But the concept of a check denotes a not-I that ideally depends on the self yet on which the self really depends. This is the “circle” to which our finite existence is confined on
granting the fundamentality of *thought*, even with respect to the thing in itself, are Kant’s achievements parts of a systematic idealism and not mere fragments. The alternative is to grant the Spinozistic—hence, nihilistic—disjunct on which the idea of the thing in itself plays a fundamental explanatory role. This follows from Fichte’s identification of analytic with dialectic, which, if sound, shows that critique is, not barred from, but is *destined* for doctrine. Only in this way can transcendental idealism contend with Spinozism—by becoming systematic—while distinguishing itself from it—by demoting utterly the idea of the thing in itself in its explanatory ranks. Hence, the post-Kantian character of Fichte’s conception of antinomy is that it seeks, not to avoid transcendental realism and empirical idealism, but to champion the systematic spirit of transcendental idealism over the Spinozistic threat of its letter. In this regard, Fichte’s antinomy grounds Kant’s antinomies only insofar as the spirit of Kant’s philosophy *would* define them.

**FORMATIVE POWER**

We can now begin to see why Fichte’s is a philosophy of life. First, life is an *unconditioned condition* of personhood. As he says in “From a Private Letter” (1800): “something stable, at rest, and dead can by no means enter the domain of what *I* call philosophy, within which all is act, movement and life.”\(^{82}\) Whereas what persists is inert
unless moved, only what moves itself toward some end is alive. But how is “all” that lies in the domain of philosophy purposive? It cannot be due to something conditionally true of anything—or even of everything—that concerns philosophy, which would entail nihilism. It must derive from something unconditionally true, from that which grounds all things, namely, the I. Hence, just if the I is the first principle of philosophy are all things of concern to philosophy explicable as active, mobile and living. On pain of Spinozism, all is unconditionally purposive. For Fichte, the I is an unconditioned condition just if life is. And since the Wissenschaftslehre must demonstrate the I’s primacy, it follows that this just is to demonstrate the primacy of life.

To clarify this organistic reading of Fichte’s Jena project, I will draw on a broadly Aristotelian view of life on which something is living if it is the source of its organization. An organism is this source by bearing a formative power, a power for effecting and maintaining its matter and motion. Notice that a formative power is no mere property or project, neither one of many attributes nor one of many doings. Rather, it is intrinsic to the organism qua organism: biconditionally, it is possessed because it is used and used because it is possessed. Possession without use is a power that only potentially organizes its purported matter: it is an empty form separated from matter, inviting skepticism about its reality. Use without possession is a power that organizes matter but is not proper to that matter: it is an external form imposed on some matter, which nihilistically threatens that matter’s infinite efficient causation. We must instead view a

83 See Fichte’s (1964–) claim that, for Spinoza, the I “does not exist absolutely because it exists; but because something else exists” (GW, I:100).
84 Compare Heidegger (1985a): “The I in Fichte must be understood as the living unity of beings and Being. ‘I’ means what everything ‘is’, what can still become an object for itself, whose own Being can still be existence in the I” (82).
85 I am indebted to Sebastian Rödl (2010) for explicating the Aristotelian idea of a formative power operative in Kant and Hegel.
formative power as activated and self-activating—activated on pain of an organism not maintaining itself, self-activating on pain of an organism owing its structure and movement and so its life to something else. In this way a formative power is not just an activity, but a self-activity, persisting as long as an organism is an organism, that is, as long as it lives. It is no property or project, but that in virtue of which an organism bears properties and undertakes projects. More than merely the principle of an organism’s intelligibility, a formative power is that by which an organism renders itself intelligible.

The notion of a formative power or self-activity can be traced to Aristotle’s conception of motion. In the *Metaphysics*, he distinguishes potentiality from actuality. By ‘potentiality’ he means a capacity to move another or be moved by another. Building is a potentiality because it is the ability to manipulate materials into a structure. Potentiality is movement that initially lacks its end and so is incomplete. It accordingly involves kinetic movement. Kinetic movements like building differ from energetic movements like thinking, which are complete in that they are their own end: it is for thinking’s sake that I think. The self-sufficiency of energetic motion owes to its being an ‘actuality’, by which Aristotle means a capacity to move oneself according to one’s nature. He defines nature as a “principle and a cause of being moved or of rest in the thing to which it belongs primarily and in virtue of that thing, but not accidentally”. Energetic motion is an actuality in virtue of a principle that inheres in something essentially or intrinsically. Whereas a bed or garment exists through external causes, thinking is not a capacity to efficiently cause or be efficiently caused by something other: thinking is a motion I explain formally, namely, by my essence or nature. In other words,

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my thinking is explained by my formative power, which, since it is a self-activity, entails that my thinking is explained by *me*.

My formative power, moreover, is an actuality prior to potentiality in two respects. First, it is prior “in formula” because knowledge of myself as a self precedes knowledge of what is possible for me. Properties or projects I take on presuppose that in virtue of which I am intelligible or, properly speaking, in virtue of which I *make myself* intelligible. This is the sense in which—*contra* nihilism—I use my formative power because I possess it: any organization that this power’s use gives to a property or project assumes my possessing it. Second, my nature is an actuality prior to potentiality “in substance” since, for any property or project I pursue, I must already exist by my nature in order to pursue it. This is clarified by Aristotle’s analogy that one has the power of investigation in order to investigate, not *vice versa*. Just as I cannot investigate as a means to having the power of investigating, so I cannot pursue any property or project as a means to existing by my nature: the former is possible only because of the latter. This is the sense in which—*contra* empty formalism—I possess my formative power because I use it: my possession of this power assumes the organization that my use of it gives to some property or project. Actuality’s formulaic and substantial priority over potentiality thus bears out the biconditional relationship between possessing and using a formative power, for it is by this dual priority that a bond holds between a living thing’s formal nature and the matter it organizes.

Of course, this bond will break in finite living beings. Their formative power is *relatively* self-sufficient and exhaustible. Aristotle understands finitude partly in terms of

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the reliance of self-organization on external goods, which is why in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he cites the gods as an *ideal of self-organization* insofar as their happiness owes to their independence from external goods.89 If, as Aristotle suggests,90 natural science concerns finite self-organization, we seem to require a different science to grasp the ideal of self-organization, whose object bears an *absolutely* self-sufficient formative power. The science whose function is to know this power seeks a maximally organized universe and thus a system whose first principle is this power. I suggest that, *qua* philosophy of life, Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* is just this science.

To see why, notice that something organizes itself only if it *explains* itself. By organizing itself, something is the formal and final explanation of itself: it is as a formal explanation that an organism provides the nature or essence of its organization and it is as a final explanation that it provides the goal or purpose of its organization. Now, in §1 of the First Introduction to the *New Presentation*, Fichte says the philosopher’s task is to seek the “ground” or “foundation of all experience”, by which he means “the basis of the system of those representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity”. Since a ground “explains why what is based upon it is determined in precisely the way it is”, Fichte infers that it “must lie outside of what it grounds” and hence that “philosophy’s object must necessarily lie *outside of all experience*”.91 Two things are clear: (a) the object of philosophy is not proper to natural science as it lies beyond experience; (b) it differs from its *explanandum*—experience as a system of representations—by being its own *explanans*. Since this object is the I, we can infer from (b) that the I explains itself; and

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91 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:423-5.
since the I is tantamount to life, we further can infer that the I organizes itself. And since this ideal represents an inexhaustible formative power, then, as (a) indicates, it must be the object of a philosophical science, which Fichte calls ‘Wissenschaftslehre’.

Literally a ‘doctrine’ or ‘theory of science’, the Wissenschaftslehre is not a third personal philosophy akin to pre-Critical metaphysics, but rather a first personal philosophy. As he says in Second Introduction §1:

> the object reflected upon within the Wissenschaftslehre is something vital and active, something that generates cognitions out of itself and by means of itself, while the philosopher merely observes what happens. The part played by the philosopher in this process is no more than this: his task is to engage this living subject in purposeful activity, to observe this activity, to apprehend it, and to comprehend it as a single, unified activity [...]. The Wissenschaftslehre [accordingly] contains two very different series of mental acting: that of the I the philosopher is observing, as well as the series consisting of the philosopher’s own observations.92

The object here is the I. Investigating it involves more than the real series of facts that the philosopher observes, for otherwise the objects of these observations would be causally responsible for a doctrine constructed from them, a doctrine tantamount to transcendental realism. An investigation of the I only also involves the ideal series of cognitive acts ineliminable from the philosopher’s observations.93 This is why Fichte’s doctrine is critical: it is a philosophical science conducted from the perspective of knowing. What I as philosopher observe is myself as knower, an observation that takes my knowing as its end. My knowing is essential to this activity. Not only am I essential in realizing the doctrine of science, but I ensure it avoids the problem of creation ex nihilo

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92 Fichte (1964–), VDML, I:454. This, again, is a response to Schelling’s “Letters”.
93 See Fichte (1964–), VDWL: “there is a double series within the intellect: a series of being and a series of observing, a series of what is real and a series of what is ideal. The essence of the intellect consists precisely in the indivisibility of this double series. (The intellect is synthetic.) In contrast, only a single series pertains to the thing, namely, the real series (a merely posited being)” (I:436).
by showing that the original form of self-organization and the reality of my finite self-organization are equiprimordial or rationally distinct. I show this by proving that the I has meaning through me, specifically, through my act of intellectual intuition, which, as a self-organizing act, actualizes the I as its original form or ideal. So while the I is a transcendental condition for the possibility of selfhood, it is only actual when I transform it into a normative condition for doing systematic philosophy, a condition for which I take myself to be responsible. But what makes this act metaphilosophically superior? Indeed, why is the science of knowing uniquely livable?

THE KIND OF PERSON ONE IS

Answering this question helps to specify the sense in which Fichte is a philosopher of life. It requires grasping the pedagogical function the New Presentation serves. Rather than reflecting on the form of positing, as in the Foundations, Fichte here invites us to take a first personal turn: “Attend to yourself; turn your gaze from everything surrounding you and look within yourself: this is the first demand philosophy makes upon anyone who studies it”. It is up to us, Fichte’s students, to perceive the facts of consciousness and respond to the invitation to find their ground. It is our task: if this ground is the principle of purposiveness—the original form of self-organization, the ideal of self-activity—it cannot be given to us, for our receiving it would be explained

94 The I is accordingly never a mere empty form, just as the rational subject is never merely a possibility: properly thinking either requires thinking both together. We only conceive the principle of purposiveness by being free selves, which we only are by locating our absolute ground in this principle.
95 Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:422-3. Compare WLNM: “The identity of the positing subject and the posited object completely exhausts the concept of I-hood, insofar as this concept is postulated by the Wissenschaftslehre. We do not here import into this concept anything else that one might otherwise think of in conjunction with self-positing. The Wissenschaftslehre can do nothing with a person who will not concede this identity” (IV/2:7-8).
by something else—efficiently—which would threaten nihilism. Fichte summons us to attend to ourselves so that we may freely posit this ground.

In taking up this task, Fichte says we pursue “the origin” of experience and so seek an answer to the question “how is a being for us possible”.96 To answer it, Fichte says we may abstract “from all being” toward either the thing, the object to which cognition is directed, or the intellect, the subject who engages in cognition. Our choice between which is the “explanatory ground of experience” determines how we resolve the antinomy of systematicity, for abstracting toward thing-ness counts as “dogmatism”, while abstracting toward I-ness counts as “idealism”.97 Our choice demonstrates how we implicate ourselves in the search for this ground—as non-entities or as true selves. As Fichte famously though misleadingly puts it, the “kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends on the kind of person one is”.98 This is misleading if it is taken to mean one can be either an idealistic person or a dogmatic person. In First Introduction §4, Fichte is clear:

The object of idealism has an advantage [...] over that of dogmatism, for the former can be shown to be present within consciousness—not, to be sure, as the explanatory ground of experience, for this would be contradictory and would transform this system into a portion of experience; yet it can still be shown to be present, as such, within consciousness. In contrast, the object of dogmatism cannot be considered to be anything but a pure invention [blosse Erdichtung], which can be made into something real only by the success of this system.99

96 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:456.
97 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:425-6. Compare GW: “Any philosophy is [...] dogmatic, when it equates or opposes anything to the I as such; and this it does in appealing to the supposedly higher concept of the thing (ens), which is thus quite arbitrarily set up as the absolutely highest conception” (I:119).
98 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:434.
99 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:429.
The dogmatist’s object is a fiction because the concept of thing-hood presupposes his conceptual framework, which implicates his cognitive activity. A subject cannot posit the thing as the ground of experience without, per impossibile, annihilating her subjectivity. This is why the dogmatist has no legitimate object and therefore no philosophy: he is not up to the task of grounding. But if one’s philosophy depends on one’s kind of person and dogmatism is no philosophy, then one cannot be a dogmatic person, but at worst a failed idealist. The dogmatist unavoidably lives his freedom, but only in bad faith. In Socratic terms, the unexamined life, however undesirable, is nonetheless livable. At our least reflective, we are philosophers, albeit bad ones. To make sense of the dogmatist’s failure, we must read Fichte’s summons as making a normative claim on us that we can fail to meet. This is why the antinomy of systematicity is not theoretical, but practical, offering two performative options. Nothing other than subjectivity is at stake in it and so our response must exude subjectivity, however well or poorly. The only question is whether we trip into the ballroom of system or willingly dance ourselves in.

Fichte accordingly discerns a performative irony in the dogmatist’s position. On the one hand, the antinomy between idealism and dogmatism is theoretically insoluble:

100 Hence, Fichte (1964–), GW, says Spinoza “ought to have stopped forthwith at the unity given him in consciousness [i.e., in the I], and should not have felt the need to excogitate a higher one still, which nothing obliged him to do” (I:121). Compare WLNM: “The dogmatist’s presupposition is nothing but a mere thought. Moreover, his presupposition cannot be justified, for it does not even explain what it is supposed to explain [namely, freedom]. As soon as there appears another system that does explain everything, then there can no longer be any place for the dogmatist’s presupposition” (IV/2:16).
101 See Fichte (1964–), WLNM: “Whether one embraces or rejects [idealism] is something that depends upon one’s inmost way of thinking and upon one’s faith in oneself. A person who has faith in himself cannot accept any variety of dogmatism or fatalism […] The interest of reason lies in confidence in one’s own self-sufficiency and freedom, and reason’s [i.e., general logic’s] interest in unity and coherence is a consequence of this prior interest [of transcendental logic]. One could call the latter ‘the interest of speculative reason’, because it demands that the whole be constructed upon a single foundation and be connected therewith. Idealism is more compatible with this interest than is dogmatism” (IV/2:17).
Neither of these two systems can directly refute the opposing one; for the
dispute between them is a dispute concerning the first principle, i.e.,
concerning a principle that cannot be derived from any higher principle. If
the first principle of either system is conceded, then it is able to refute the
first principle of the other. Each denies everything included within the
opposite system. They do not have a single point in common on the basis
of which they might be able to achieve mutual understanding and be
united with one another. Even when they appear to be in agreement
concerning the words of some proposition, they understand these same
words to mean two different things.\textsuperscript{102}

If persistence is explanatorily primary, purposive existence plays no explanatory role,
but is explained \textit{away}. And so long as purposiveness is the first principle of systematic
philosophy, the idea of sheer persistence completely transcending I-hood is incoherent.
This is why idealism and dogmatism share only the appearance of common content in
the guise of shared terms: they give radically different senses to their terms’ referents
through mutually exclusive stances taken on the basis of opposing first principles and
thus, where theoretical demonstration is concerned, talk past each other.\textsuperscript{103} Theoretical
refutation is all the more impossible given that, as systems resting on \textit{first} principles,
neither can demonstrate its own completeness, deriving its own principle from itself.

On the other hand, Fichte observes that the dogmatist’s assertion of his first
principle constitutes a \textit{practical self-refutation}. By explaining everything, including
himself, in terms of thing-hood, he would abolish his self-sufficiency to do so were it not

\textsuperscript{102} Fichte (1964\textendash{}), VDWL, I:429. Compare WLNM: “Every philosophy presupposes something that it does
not demonstrate on the basis of which it explains and demonstrates everything else. This is also true of
idealism. Idealism presupposes the previously mentioned free activity as its first principle, on the basis of
which it must then explain everything else; but this principle itself cannot be explained any
further”(IV/2:17).

\textsuperscript{103} See Fichte (1964\textendash{}), GW: “Even if they appear to agree about the words in a sentence, each takes
them in a different sense” (I:429).
for the fact that, just by positing a ground, he betrays his self-sufficiency or “inner power [innere Kraft].”¹⁰⁴ As Fichte says at the beginning of the First Introduction §5:

> When the dogmatist’s system is attacked he is actually in danger of losing his own self [wirklich in Gefahr sich selbst zu verlieren]. Yet he is not well prepared to defend himself against such attacks, for there is something within his own inner self which agrees with his assailant. This is why he defends himself with so much vehemence and bitterness. The idealist, in contrast, is quite unable to prevent himself from looking down upon the dogmatist with a certain amount of disrespect, since the dogmatist cannot say anything to him which he himself has not long since known and already rejected as erroneous. For one becomes an idealist only by passing through a disposition toward dogmatism—if not by passing through dogmatism itself.¹⁰⁵

In spite of itself, the dogmatist’s act of assertion practically demonstrates the fundamentality of I-hood.¹⁰⁶ It betrays the form of his capacity to will an end and to explain himself as acting on the concept of that end, the end here being the object of philosophy.¹⁰⁷ This is why his insistence provokes the idealist’s disrespect, for positing a first principle is an irreducibly first personal act.¹⁰⁸ It is a response to a normative claim,
an act for which one is responsible.\textsuperscript{109} It is crucial that this passage \textit{prefaces} Fichte’s dictum about the kind of person one is. It is also crucial that his dictum is followed by the claim that “a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it”. That soul is judged by how high it rises to “the level of idealism”.\textsuperscript{110} The \textit{Wissenschaftslehre} is therefore the only standard by which to judge the kind of person one is.\textsuperscript{111}

In Fichte’s philosophy of life, I am responsible for the principle I posit because my subjectivity is ineliminable from my philosophy. I cannot \textit{but} construct a system because a system always implicates my commitment to it. While theoretical refutation is not possible in the antinomy of systematicity, practical refutation is, namely, if my principle is dogmatic.\textsuperscript{112} This is the sense in which the \textit{Wissenschaftslehre} is uniquely livable: it alone is consistent with subjectivity. It alone makes personhood intelligible by showing that it presupposes I-\textit{hood}—even despite itself—such that any philosophical science will be a science of \textit{knowing}, whether or not knowingly. Idealism is the only philosophical system I may inhabit, but it is nonetheless up to me what my standards of living will be.

\textsuperscript{109} Fichte would accordingly call the dogmatist a \textit{caput mortuum}, to borrow Jacobi’s phrase, implying, not that he is dead, but that he is a numbskull, a \textit{failed person}, someone expressing bad faith and deficient personality by supposing himself efficiently determined \textit{ad infinitum}.

\textsuperscript{110} Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:434.

\textsuperscript{111} Thus, \textit{contra} Suber (1990), Fichte is not faced with the following dilemma: “If he knows something before the choice, then either it has no warrant in his system or there is no primordial choice after all. But if he does not know something before the choice, then his choice of idealism is a matter of indifference to everyone else; he must be content to live in his rhetorical sterile field.” (23). Fichte simply affirms the first lemma, summoning us from the level of idealism. As we will see in Part II, Schelling thinks Fichte has no warrant and so is forced onto the second lemma: we know nothing before our choice of first principle. But Schelling will argue that this is no matter of indifference since it occurs \textit{non-rhetorically} in a ‘field of dispute’.

\textsuperscript{112} Beiser’s (2002) claim is therefore confused: “Fichte wavers between these positions in the \textit{Erste Einleitung} to such an extent that he flatly contradicts himself. While in section 5 he argues that dogmatism and criticism are both irrefutable, he argues in section 6 that dogmatism cannot explain experience after all, and that idealism is the only possible philosophy” (480).
We see, then, that Fichte is a philosopher of life, not only by taking life as explanatorily primary, but by giving an account of what it means to live by the implications of this.

SHOWING AND SAYING

Conceding this grants metaphilosophical superiority to the Wissenschaftslehre. But it does not yet illuminate the act on which it is based: intellectual intuition. Recall that this is the act whereby I know myself to bear a capacity for self-organization. Fichte introduces his notion of intellectual intuition in his 1794 review of Aenesidemus (1792), written pseudonymously by Schulze as an attack on Reinhold’s first principle, the ‘principle of consciousness’, due to its entrapment in the relationality and hence the mediacy of consciousness. Intellectual intuition is meant to avoid this by standing for the I’s immediate grasp of itself, an unconditioned act that can serve as a first principle.

Fichte says:

Inasmuch as the mind is the ultimate ground of certain thought-forms, it is noumenon; inasmuch as these are unconditionally necessary laws, the mind is a transcendental idea, but one which is distinguished from all the rest in that we realize it through intellectual intuition, through the I am, and indeed through the I am simply because I am. All the claims of Aenesidemus against this procedure are based merely on the fact that he wants the absolute existence or autonomy of the I to be valid in itself (just how and for whom we do not know), whereas it should only hold for the I itself. It is for the I that the I is what it is, and is why it is. Our knowledge cannot advance beyond this proposition […] For if, to present the stages of the inference in their most abstract form, the I in intellectual intuition [das Ich in der intellectuellen Anschauung] is because it is, and is what it is, it follows that to this extent it is self-positing, absolutely self-subsistent and independent.113

Fichte makes two important claims. First, I “realize” my mind through this intuition. If to be a mind is to be the organizational unity of one’s representations, then a successful

argument for intellectual intuition will show it is the act whereby I prove that I bear a
capacity for self-organization, that is, a formative power. Second, the act of realizing my
mind is nothing other than the “I am”. This is Fichte’s phrase in the Foundations for
the I as first principle—which implies that intellectual intuition is identical with the I. Although the phrase ‘intellectual intuition’ does not appear in the Foundations, we hear it there in terms used to denote the I’s original position. It is because the I is always already posited that Fichte there concludes: “the I exists because it posits itself, and posits itself because it exists. Hence self-positing and existence are one and the same”. Notice the biconditional relation between the I’s positing and existing is definitive of intellectual intuition, which, in the Aenesidemus review, is that which is absolutely “self-positing”. It should therefore follow that grasping my formative power by an act of intellectual intuition is tantamount to the actualization of its original form, namely, the I.

114 See Fichte (1964–), GW, I:94.
115 Compare Fichte (1964–), ZV: “the I is originally not only a sensible, but an intellectual intuition” (I:34); and WLNM: “The I is identical with immediate consciousness” (IV/2:33). This casts doubt on Breazeale’s (2000) claim that the notion of an absolute I “subverts itself” after the Foundations (178). There, Fichte’s orienting thought is that to discover the “first principle of all human knowledge” is to apprehend the expression of the “Act” that grounds all consciousness (GW, I:91), the very act he intuits in the New Presentation as self-reversion. Admittedly, this involves trading a tortuous logic for a pedagogical method, but the continuity should mitigate the appearance of reversal (see WLNM, IV/2:33) and any stock we place in it (see Wood (2000), 101).
116 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:134. Compare this: “the I posits itself simply because it exists. It posits itself by merely existing and exists by merely being posited” (I:97). Putting this existence/self-positing biconditional in explanatory terms, the I explains itself by being explained and is explained by explaining itself.
117 Beiser (2002) denies intellectual intuition is knowledge of the I’s “existence” (284–7). While the I cannot be construed as substantial existence on pain of dogmatism, Fichte’s argument for intellectual intuition is on behalf of knowledge of an activity whose names include ‘I’, ‘life’ and ‘reason’. Hence, Fichte (1964–), VDWL: “reason […] is all that exists” (I:474). To deny that intellectual intuition ‘refers’ and ‘apprehends’ (I:472, 515) is simply to deny Fichte’s central claim that knowledge is not exclusively of substantial existence. In this connection, see Gardner’s (2007) defense of an ‘ontological’ reading of Fichte’s commitment to the I: “Fichte’s exclusion of being from the Wissenschaftslehre can be taken as methodological, and as leaving space for Ontological recharacterisation [of activity] at a higher speculative level […] if we know that the Wissenschaftslehre is the right story to tell, then why hold back from an Ontological interpretation?” (18, 20-1). One question that arises is whether intellectual intuition is
But the identity of intellectual intuition and the I is only sketched in the review and left implicit in the *Foundations*. It is not until the *New Presentation* that Fichte explicitly treats "the I as an intellectual intuition". His discussion there is consistent with the review, for he remains committed to denying that this intuition is a fact "valid in itself", outside human action, and committed to affirming that it is a self-organizing act, the cause of "what" and "why" it is. Since, as we saw, self-organization is self-explanation, it follows that intellectual intuition is an act that explains itself—precisely what Fichte says of the I in the First Introduction §1. Two passages from §5 indicate further that the I is identical to the act of intellectual intuition:

‘Intellectual intuition’ is the name I give to the act required of the philosopher: an act of intuiting himself while simultaneously performing the act by means of which the I originates for him [...] That we possess such a power of intellectual intuition is not something that can be demonstrated by means of concepts, nor can an understanding of what intellectual intuition is be produced from concepts. This is something everyone has to discover immediately within himself; otherwise, he will never become acquainted with it at all.\(^\text{119}\)

Intellectual intuition provides the only firm standpoint for any philosophy.\(^\text{120}\)

Notice what these passages jointly claim: intellectual intuition is an act we can only be invited to discover in ourselves, and it is philosophy’s only firm standpoint or ground. We saw that the invitation to a first personal turn is Fichte’s method of preparing us for finding the explanatory ground of experience. What these passages indicate, however,

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creation *ex nihilo*. For Fichte, my actualization of the I occurs, not in a vacuum, but within earshot of your summons. It is the creation of my I-hood from within the ‘rational mass’ of humanity. As we will see in Part II, the question of creation for Schelling refers to the origin of this mass, that is, of rationality itself. This is a question neither Fichte’s argument for intellectual intuition nor any transcendental reflection on grounding can answer because, in virtue of its existence, rationality always already excludes something from intelligibility, namely, itself.

\(^{118}\) See Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:515.
\(^{119}\) Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:463.
\(^{120}\) Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:466.
is that taking this turn is *equivalent* to meeting this task, for to discover intellectual intuition in ourselves just is to find the ground in the I. The alternative is to find it in the not-I, which is a *performative contradiction*. Hence, we see that intellectual intuition and the I are one and the same object of a task undertaken first personally—they can be no more than rationally distinct. In Fichte’s words: “As an intellectual intuition, the I contains nothing but the form of I-thood, self-reverting acting, which, to be sure, also becomes the content of the I […] The I exists in this form only *for the philosopher*, and insofar as one grasps it in this form, one thereby raises oneself to the level of philosophy”.$^{121}$

For Fichte, I grasp myself as bearing a capacity for self-organization by intuiting the I, resolving the antinomy of systematicity in favour of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This act, if it is to be "something living",$^{122}$ must be directed at its own activity. However, we are not always living. We bear a relatively self-sufficient formative power that requires external goods and is finally used up. The I, by contrast, is an absolutely self-sufficient formative power, an activity identical with its object. As Fichte says in Second Introduction §4, “‘I’ and ‘self-reverting activity’ are completely identical concepts”. This is because the I cannot be present “in advance and independent of this act” on pain of dogmatically predicating its activity on mere matter.$^{123}$ Intellectual intuition is accordingly “a type of consciousness in which what is subjective and what is objective cannot be separated from each other at all, but are one and the same. This, then, is the type of consciousness required to explain consciousness at all”.$^{124}$ How, then, can a self, the conditions of whose existence outstrip its capacity for self-positing, possess such an

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$^{121}$ Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:515.
$^{122}$ Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:465.
$^{123}$ Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:459, 462.
$^{124}$ Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:527.
apparently divine power as intellectual intuition? How can Fichte define intellectual intuition as an act of infinite self-organization or “self-reversion” and invite us finite self-organizers to partake in it?

This question is similar to the one Kant raises in the Amphiboly about how an infinite intellect could be a faculty or power—absolutely self-sufficient yet somehow accessible by us who are beset by incapacity and limitation. However, our question now is not how intellectual intuition is the perfection of our formative power, but rather how it is its genesis.

Consider the I/self distinction in light of the latter’s cognate, self-consciousness. Fichte flatly asserts in §4 that intellectual intuition “produces no consciousness, not even self-consciousness”.\(^\text{125}\) There he also says: “I cannot take a single step, I cannot move my hand or foot, without the intellectual intuition of my self-consciousness in these actions. It is only through such an intuition that I know that I do this”.\(^\text{126}\) This indicates that intellectual intuition of the I is distinct from conscious of oneself, but how? Self-consciousness involves a difference between representations of objects and the subject who self-ascribes these representations. Intellectual intuition, as a subject-object identity, involves no such difference, but instead conditions its possibility: this “act of the I merely serves to put the I into a position in which self-consciousness—and, along with this, all other consciousness—becomes possible. But no actual consciousness has yet arisen at this point”.\(^\text{127}\) It is through this act that I know I bear a capacity for self-consciously organizing my representations as my own. Intellectual

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125 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:459.
126 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:463, italics mine.
127 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:459.
intuition therefore must differ from self-consciousness. This explains why, as Fichte says, cognates of ‘self’ signify a relation to what is always already posited, namely, the I. Indeed, if what is thought to be absolute in the self is borrowed from the concept of the I, it is because self-consciousness qua self-organization is not identical with the I qua intellectual intuition, but presupposes it as its original or ideal form.\(^{128}\)

We see, then, that intellectual intuition is open to beings who bear an exhaustible formative power if we read this presupposition as involving a rational distinction between I and self. It is in virtue of the I as ideal of self-organization that the self is intelligible. But it is only through the self’s practical demonstration of the explanatory primacy of I-thood that this ideal is realized.\(^{129}\) My act of intellectual intuition is none other than my performative proof of the unconditionality of life, nothing in which demands the absolute self-sufficiency of my formative power. In other words, I prove the I’s reality by individuating it.\(^{130}\) This is not a proof I say, as if I could convince you in a piece of writing, but one I show by adopting the practical attitude of life.\(^{131}\) Fichte’s summons is an invitation to prove a qualitative identity between the form of life and my instantiation of it. It therefore does not intend the irrational demand for a capacity I could

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\(^{128}\) Thus, we cannot grant Beiser’s (2002) claim that “the self-consciousness of freedom is [Fichte’s] first principle for the deduction of experience” (273), nor can we accept Rockmore’s (1994) false impression that Fichte inconsistently posits both that intellectual intuition conditions the possibility of consciousness and that, in this act, we are conscious of this conditioning (102).

\(^{129}\) See Fichte (1964—), VDWL: “I have life within me, and draw it from myself” (I:466).

\(^{130}\) Schelling (1994b), GNP, again does not fully appreciate Fichte’s position, which he claims to improve with the following claim: “the I, to the extent to which it is thought beyond consciousness, is precisely not the individual I, for it determines itself as individual I only in the coming-to-itself, thus the I which is thought beyond consciousness, or the stated ‘I am’, is for all human individuals the very same, it only becomes in everyone his I, this individual I, precisely by coming to itself in him” (109).

\(^{131}\) Bykova (2010) is therefore wrong to claim that Fichte’s account of the emergence of consciousness is put “in abstract formalistic terms” and urges the mere “belief” that self-posing grounds consciousness (143). Like Kant’s fact of reason—which Franks (2005), drawing on the Latin ‘facere’, reads as an act (278)—intellectual intuition is a claim or testimony to my formative power that renders doubts such as Ameriks’ (2000a, 119-20) idle.
not live, but encourages me to see myself as that which animates systematic philosophy.
PART I: FICHTE’S IMMORTALISM

CHAPTER 2: FICHTE’S IDEALISM AS IMMORTALISM

The heart is a stone and this is a stone that we throw.  
Put your hand on the stone, it’s the stone of a home you know.  
They say we’ll go far, but they don’t know how far we’ll go  
With our legs on the edge and our feet on the horizon.  
—Beach House, “10 Mile Stereo”

TWO TASKS

In this chapter, I will argue that Fichte’s idealism is an expression of immortalism, the view that life is the unconditioned condition of personhood and thus unconditionally conditions death. Fichte typifies the view with his account of the moral perfection of nature, according to which the self is constituted by the moral perfection of nature, a task set by the first principle of the Wissenschaftslehre. I will show this by answering two questions: how does Fichte’s conception of deduction inform the moral structure of human life and how does death figure in this structure?

I first want to allay the worry that it is orthogonal to attribute immortalism to Fichte given the little mention he makes of death in the philosophy of life that defines his Jena period. We saw that Fichte’s response to the post-Kantian question of what makes existentially value experience possible is to posit the I, which he defines as a self-organizing activity and which, I argued in Chapter 1, is to be understood in terms of purposiveness or life. Any legitimate objection to his position must address the terms on which it rests, engaging its organistic framework by pressing on claims on which I will focus in this chapter, such as that ‘I’, ‘life’ and ‘reason’ are synonymous terms whose referent is an eternal activity in which we can know ourselves always already to participate. Such claims bear conceptually on mortality. More to the point, however, it
cannot be more pertinent for understanding the *Wissenschaftslehre*, a science that aims to make finite rational existence completely intelligible, than to investigate its implications for the cessation of such existence, particularly given that Fichte advances it in order to silence the nihilistic threat that such existence is incoherent. Attributing immortalism to him should thus be seen as *internal* to grasping his philosophy of life.

To begin to understand how Fichte is an immortalist, recall his argument from Part I of the *Foundations* that an analytic of the *a priori* conditions of cognition is a dialectical resolution of the contradictions these conditions yield and that the unity of consciousness depends on discovering the highest synthesis of these contradictions, represented by $X$ as the form of a complete system of philosophy. Notice that discovering $X$ is distinct from the task Fichte sets in the *New Presentation* of finding the ground of experience. Both tasks are *normative*: we may fail to discover $X$ and lead a splintered conscious life just as we may fail to grasp the I and exhibit a dogmatist’s bad faith. What distinguishes them is that the latter is a *grounding* norm while the former is a *deductive* norm. Discovering the I lets us *enter* the system of philosophy; discovering $X$ lets us deduce the *a priori* conditions of this system’s *completeness*.\(^\text{132}\) Grounding the *Wissenschaftslehre* is therefore necessary but insufficient for a stable idealism: we also require a deduction.\(^\text{133}\) As Fichte says in the *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy Nova Methodo* (1796/9), “the system consists of precisely two parts”. It must first show that the infinite I or “pure will is the true object of consciousness [[and] the foundation of

\(^{132}\) See Fichte (1964–), GW: “The feeling of force is the principle of all life; the transition from death to life [i.e., from dogmatism to idealism]. To be sure, in existing merely, life is still very far from complete; but for all that, it is already distinct from inanimate matter” (I:296).

\(^{133}\) It is worth emphasizing that deduction is a task we incur only because we are capable of realizing the I. It is by proving our constitution by the principle of purposiveness that the moral ideal at which deduction aims becomes salient. We require deduction, but only by having fulfilled the grounding norm.
everything else” in consciousness. The second part begins “at that point, and here we are engaged in the actual process of constructing [consciousness]”. Fulfilling the grounding norm establishes “our foundation”; fulfilling the deductive norm outlines “the method we will be following”\(^{134}\) in constructing consciousness from this foundation.\(^ {135}\)

Despite shifting from the reflective method of the *Foundations* to the pedagogical method of the *New Presentation*, Fichte consistently holds that a foundation or ground is necessary for the system of philosophy.\(^ {136}\) It is by an argument developed in the *Nova Methodo* that he establishes the necessity of deduction. As we will see, Fichtean deduction casts the concept of personhood in an explanatory hierarchy in which life is the highest *explanans* and death the lowest *explanandum*.

**THE I AS IDEA**

Three of the major Jena texts diagnose the same problem: the contradictions arising from reflection on the relation between the I and the not-I—that the I determines and is determined by the not-I, that its reality negates and is negated by the reality of the not-I—stem from the contradiction, discussed last chapter, that the I must and

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\(^ {134}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:179.

\(^ {135}\) Much ink has been spilled over whether Fichte is a foundationalist. Rockmore (1994) defines three types of foundationalism: ontological, which relies on a “direct grasp of reality”, perceptual, which relies on “indefeasible knowledge”, and principal, which relies on “assumed” principles (100). Given these definitions, he denies Fichte is a foundationalist and reads the *Wissenschaftslehre* as anti-foundationalist in spirit, focusing on the *circular* relation between the I’s activity and its product, namely, itself. But these definitions are not exhaustive: a fourth foundationalist type lies in the circularity Rockmore fails to analyze in teleological terms, for the concept of the I denotes an activity that explains and so *founds* itself. Acknowledging the *Wissenschaftslehre*’s organicist spirit may therefore recommend a foundationalist reading. However, a common feature of Rockmore’s definitions is an *external* relation between foundation and founded—anathema to a philosophy of life, whose grounding principle relates *internally* to what it grounds. Removing this feature perhaps dissolves the interpretive antinomy, yielding a new notion of foundation that renders moot Breazeale’s (1994) attempt to affirm both of the opposing readings.

\(^ {136}\) See, for example, Fichte (1964–), GW, I:91, 95; VDWL, I:426-7.
 cannot be posited in itself, independent of the not-I. The root problem is that the I cannot be self-identical if positing the not-I introduces opposition in it, yet must be if positing the not-I is to be contrastive.

All three texts demand a practical solution since reflection on the concepts of the I and not-I only illustrates their mutual presupposition: the contradiction is theoretically insoluble. In the Foundations, Fichte says the problem poses a task “for action”, demanding that the I “exert causality on the not-I”. Only this way can the I determine itself and so maintain its reality over against the not-I. Given the organistic character of the Wissenschaftslehre, the I must subordinate the not-I—a term for bodily inclinations, the material conditions of existence and, ultimately, the world—to purposive rather than mechanical necessity, progressing thereby toward nature’s moral perfection. However, the I “can exert no causality on the not-I, because the not-I would then cease to be a not-I (to stand opposed to the I) and would itself become the I”. By subsuming the not-I under its own law, the I would make it an effect of its will, divesting it of its otherness. But the not-I must oppose the I, for to be an intelligence—to have a concept of an end that conforms to its law—the I needs something other. The theoretical tension

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137 See Fichte (1964–), GW, I:106. While the atheism controversy cuts short the full publication of the New Presentation, it ends, in Chapter One, with the claim that consciousness of one’s activity presupposes that of an opposing state of repose and vice versa (VDWL, 1:532). This implies the opposition between the I and not-I, which is made explicit in §2 of the Nova Methodo: “No I without a Not-I, no activity apart from repose [...] Neither term is a part of the act, but both originate at the same time and accompany each other [...] The act of limiting is based on this: what the one is, the other is not” (WLNM, IV/2: 45–6).

138 See Fichte (1964–), GW: “[t]he expressions to posit a not-I and to restrict the I are completely equivalent, as was shown in the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre” (I:252); VDWL: “only in the context of practice can this Idea [i.e., reason’s perfect exhibition in nature] be postulated as the supreme goal of the striving of reason” (I:516); and WLNM: “some feeling must lie between this categorical demand [that I exert myself as a pure will] and this act of thinking [that connects the manifold of feeling to my own willing]”, namely, “striving” (IV/2:142).

139 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:105.

140 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:254.
between these concepts therefore *persists* into the practical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

In a guiding move for subsequent Jena texts, Fichte asserts that the I is infinite in one sense and finite in another. It is “*infinite, insofar as its activity returns upon itself* [...] Product and activity here are one and the same (§1), and we distinguish them only for the purposes of self-expression”.¹⁴¹ As a self-reverting activity, the I is infinite—as Fichte notes, it is the first principle examined in §1 of the *Foundations*. Any distinction posed in its activity serves the purpose of “self-expression”, of clarifying what it means to be, by contrast, a finite I or self. As we saw, “the I is finite, insofar as its activity is *objective*”,¹⁴² that is, insofar as it posits the not-I as its object or end. The self bears a relation to its object, which can only be posited “insofar as there is resistance to an activity of the [finite] I; no such activity, no object”. As we saw, this relation is unstable. Self and object must accordingly relate to each other in some *ideal* way. For Fichte, this is the demand that “they *ought* to be absolutely alike”. Specifying this likeness, he says: “what is required is the conformity of the object with the [finite] I; and it is the absolute I which demands this”.¹⁴³ This is the demand that the self exert causality on the object. But the object’s conformity cannot be complete, on pain of erasing the otherness on which the concept of the self’s activity depends. This is why the demand is *merely* an ought. It represents only the self’s “*tendency or striving* towards determination [...] *an infinite striving* at that”.¹⁴⁴ Ours is a striving that, since it cannot limit itself and be what it

¹⁴¹ Fichte (1964—), GW, I:256.  
¹⁴² Fichte (1964—), GW, I:257.  
¹⁴³ Fichte (1964—), GW, I:259-60.  
¹⁴⁴ Fichte (1964—), GW, I:261.
is, “must therefore be limited by a force opposed to that of the striving itself”, namely, the unassailable not-I. The not-I is a necessary otherness because “the very concept of striving already involves finitude, for that to which there is no counter-striving is not a striving at all”. Hence, Fichte says the self’s striving determines, not the world as it ever is, but “a world as it would be, if all reality were absolutely posited by the self; hence, an ideal world”. Rather than dissolving the tension in the practical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte shows it as the result of an insatiable demand.

The moral ideal is the point $X$ at which the root contradiction would dissolve. Its discovery grounds our hope for unified consciousness. This hope guides our attempt to meet the deductive norm since it orients our deduction of the *a priori* conditions that make approaching $X$ possible.

In Part III, Fichte names the ideal in question:

we have at last discovered the point of union we were seeking between the absolute, the practical and the intellectual characters of the I. —The I demands that it encompass all reality and exhaust the infinite. This demand of necessity rests on the idea of the absolutely posited, infinite I; and this is the *absolute* I, of which we have been talking. [Here the meaning of the principle, the I posits itself absolutely, first becomes wholly clear. There is no reference at all therein to the I given in actual consciousness; for the latter is never absolute, its state being invariably based, either mediate or immediately, upon something outside the I. We are speaking, rather, of an idea of the I which must necessarily underlie its infinite practical demand, though it is inaccessible to our consciousness, and so can never appear immediately therein (though it may, of course, mediately, in philosophical reflection).]

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145 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:287.
146 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:270. While conceptually unassailable, the not-I is in principle rationalizable. As Hoeltzel (2010) says, Fichte’s ontology has no “essentially un-mental entities”, no “non-conscious, arational causal determinants of the rational being’s activity in understanding and aspiring” (91).
147 Fichte (1964–), GW, I:269.
Fichte again distinguishes between I and self. The latter is the finite entity beset by its relation to the not-I. The former is the idea of this relation’s moral perfection: ‘I’ names the ideal relation between self and world in which the former exerts total causality on the latter. But how can the I be this ideal and the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*? How can it both represent a mere ought and be the act through which we ground the science of knowing?

Fichte unpacks this subtle distinction in a crucial passage in §11 of the Second Introduction to the *New Presentation* concerning the confusion between the I as an intellectual intuition, with which the *Wissenschaftslehre* commences, and the I as an Idea, with which it concludes. As an intellectual intuition, the I contains nothing but the form of I-ness, self-reverting acting, which, to be sure, also becomes the content of the I [...] The I exists in this form only for the philosopher; and insofar as one grasps it in this form, one thereby raises oneself to the level of philosophy. But the I is present as an Idea for the I itself, i.e., for the I the philosopher is observing. The philosopher does not portray this as his own I, but rather as the Idea of the natural, albeit completely cultivated, human being.\(^{149}\)

We saw in Chapter 1 that to realize the I as an act of intellectual intuition is to practically demonstrate one’s *qualitative* identity with the I as the original form of self-organization, for it is an act that irreducibly explains and so organizes itself. But it only lets one *enter* the system of philosophy. While it demonstrates one’s qualitative identity with the I, a *quantitative* difference remains between the existential and explanatory scope of the I and the self, as evinced by the contradiction that demands practical resolution. This is why the system cannot simply commence, but requires completion. The I as “Idea”

\(^{149}\) Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:515.
represents this goal, which Fichte construes as a moral ideal of human cultivation.\textsuperscript{150} It is “the ultimate aim of reason’s striving [...] something to which we ought to draw infinitely nearer”. He adds that what “the Idea of the I has in common with the I as an intuition is this: in neither case is the I considered to be an individual”. Individuality is precluded in the latter case by the self’s quantitative difference from the I and in the former by the fact that in the Idea “individuality has vanished as a result of a process of cultivation in accordance with universal laws”, a process that transcends “the limitations of sensibility”.\textsuperscript{151} So long as the self lives, such limitations remain, which is why, as in the \textit{Foundations}, the practical demand is merely an ought. This, then, is how ‘I’ names both the first principle of the only accessible system—the sun that illuminates the ground of a project—and the inaccessible completion of the same—the moon that is the pale replica of that light.\textsuperscript{152}

\textbf{AFTER SKEPTICISM}

Grasping the I as Idea is only the beginning of fulfilling the deductive norm since it is not enough to identify an end: one must discern the \textit{means} to it. This for Fichte requires deducing the \textit{a priori} conditions on which it is possible to strive for X, conditions on which the self can be thought as limited and able to strive to overcome its limitation. In the \textit{Nova Methodo}, these conditions include concepts of a sensible world in which to

\textsuperscript{150} Compare Beiser (2002): “The first ‘I’ is only the form of subjectivity, while the second also includes its content. The form of the ‘I’ is nothing more than its pure self-determining activity, prior to any of its creations and its specific determinations; the matter of the ‘I’ includes all its creations and determinations, both actual and possible. We have an intellectual intuition of the form of the ‘I’ because we can intuit that we are self-determining; but we have no such intuition of the matter of the ‘I’ because we cannot intuit how we are self-determining, in what specific properties or determinations its activity consists. The ‘I’ that is not only form but also matter is simply an idea, a goal for our infinite striving” (285).

\textsuperscript{151} Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:516.

\textsuperscript{152} This crucial distinction is left ambiguous in Wood (2000), 102.
conduct its moral project and of a community of selves from which to be summoned to
strive for this ideal. Fichte’s arguments for their *a priori* necessity will show how his
conception of deduction informs the structure of human life. But we must first understand what his conception of deduction is.

Fichte’s is a distinctly post-Kantian conception of deduction, not motivated, like
Kant’s, by a skeptical challenge to our *a priori* entitlement to certain concepts, but by our
need to secure the conditions for dissolving the contradictions arising from the mutual
limitation of self and world. It is motivated, in other words, by the ideal represented by
the I as Idea. But this is a goal we grasp *once inside* the *Wissenschaftslehre* since
otherwise the very idea of a goal would be incoherent. Deduction is a norm we
approach having already fulfilled the grounding norm of proving the fundamental reality
of I-thood.\(^1\) It is therefore only possible *after* we have refuted dogmatism and the

\(^1\) Beiser’s (2002) claim, then, is confused: “The only way to resolve the contradiction between the demands of morality and the actual existence of the ego, Fichte then explains, is to read the constitutive principle ‘the ego *is* self-positing’ as the regulative ideal ‘the ego *ought* to be self-positing’” (286). Regulatively pursuing the I as idea depends on having already intellectually intuited the I as constitutive first principle. (This is even implied by Beiser’s claim that intellectual intuition entails the self’s self-
constitution and self-knowledge (304).) Hence, Gardner (2007), contra Beiser: “In Kant, regulativity is given definition and held in check by the prior account of constitutivity: we learn that we must *only* employ reason’s transcendental ideas regulatively, *after* we have learnt that contradiction results from and illusion underlies their constitutive employment; just as practical reason’s employment of those ideas comes in the wake of theoretical reason’s failure to employ them constitutively. If, however, the constitutive background is eliminated, then the question arises, whether what is now *called* regulative does not in fact carry part of the meaning of Kant’s constitutive, or at least, whether it can continue to bear unchanged the same Non-Ontological meaning as it bears in Kant. When regulation does not occur in opposition to constitutive being, the imperative mood of regulative principles ceases, one may think, to be a reliable index of their philosophical significance. So when Fichte describes the first principle as a ‘postulate’, and claims that ‘the scope of Kant’s practical postulate is too narrow’, the question is whether his proposed extension of scope can leave unaffected the understanding of *what it is* to ‘postulate’. One may think that, although Fichte is entitled to use the concept of postulation to draw attention to a continuity with Kant, really its meaning for Fichte has to be understood via the *Wissenschaftslehre*, not the other way round” (18).
skeptical threat it contains. In contrast to a Kantian deduction, then, Fichte approaches the deductive norm with a *post-skeptical* attitude.\(^{154}\)

Recall Fichte’s argument that a consistent response to the grounding norm is idealistic. As we saw in Chapter 1, any response to the task of grounding the system of representations implicates the kind of person one is insofar as one is always responsible for how one responds to this task. Any response exhibits *personality*, which is why performative contradiction results from a dogmatic response whereas the refutation of skepticism results from an idealistic response, after which we may meet the deductive norm free of doubt. We can reconstruct the argument for the anti-skeptical position at which Fichte arrives thus: (1) philosophy must be systematic, for it “has the task of providing [the] system of experience with a foundation”;\(^ {155}\) (2) skepticism is *theoretically* self-refuting since it can only deny the possibility of a system “in systematic fashion”; (3a) there are in theory “only two systems”,\(^ {156}\) but (3b) in practice only one, for dogmatism is *practically* self-refuting since it can only deny the possibility of idealism in (unwittingly) idealistic fashion; hence, (4) philosophy is systematic just if it is idealistic. Fulfilling the grounding norm vindicates the *Wissenschaftslehre*, for which deduction remains a concern. Skepticism is only a concern for those who have not yet adopted the standpoint of the philosophy of life. For them, the deductive norm is not yet conceivable.

\(^{154}\) This undermines Martin’s (1997) argument that the *Wissenschaftslehre* “underwrites a skeptical denial of knowledge”. On that argument, things in themselves are “unknowable” because they must conform to the conditions of my knowing them yet must exist “independently of me” (73–4). This confuses the independence of empirical and *transcendental* reality. More to the point, Fichte’s (1964– ) claim is *not* that things in themselves are unknowable, but that they are *unthinkable*. To wit: such an idea is “the uttermost perversion of reason, and a concept perfectly absurd” (VDWL, I:472). This hardly constitutes “principled agnosticism” (66), as Martin claims (and anyway, the methodological/ontological distinction on which he bases his claim is at odds with the *Wissenschaftslehre*’s systematic spirit). For Fichte, fulfilling the grounding norm is our practical removal of the perversion that is precisely the *source* of skepticism.

\(^{155}\) Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:428.

\(^{156}\) Fichte (1964–), GW, I:121n.
While deduction is not conducted under the threat of skepticism, Fichte gives it a positive characterization in the Jena period as a *derivation* from the mind of the *a priori* necessary conditions for thinking the relation between the I and the not-I:

The question is how the human mind originally comes to make this distinction between a reflection of activity from without, and another reflection from within. It is this distinction which has to be derived [abgeleitet] as a fact, and, by that very derivation [*Ableitung*], demonstrated.\(^{157}\)

[Critical idealism must] actually derive from the fundamental laws of the intellect the system of the intellect’s necessary modes of acting and, along with this, the objective representations that come into being thereby.\(^{158}\)

A deductive proof proceeds as follows: We can assume that it is the very nature of the human mind to posit itself and to oppose a Not-I to itself; but if we assume this, we must also assume much else as well. This is called ‘deducing’, i.e., deriving something from something else [...W]hen the philosopher provides a derivation [...] it is then called ‘*a priori*’.\(^{159}\)

The problem motivating deduction is how to think the self in a *stable* relation with the world. Theoretically, we are forced to think an unstable relation in which the I must and cannot be posited in itself—as self-identical—leading us to redefine the relation practically as an ideal world that would conform to our causality. If the conditions for thinking this relation are necessary *a priori*, they will be the means to this ideal’s realization. To establish these conditions requires *thinking about thinking* whereby the mind reflects on the form it must take in order to have a determinate thought about the self *vis-à-vis* the world. The findings of a deduction will accordingly be *sui generis* products of the mind that enable our pursuit of the moral ideal.

\(^{157}\) Fichte (1964–), GW, I:232.
\(^{158}\) Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:442.
\(^{159}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:8, 137.
In the First Introduction to the *Nova Methodo*, Fichte says the *Wissenschaftslehre*

proceeds to exhibit the conditions that make it possible for the I to posit itself and to oppose a Not-I to itself, and this is what proves its correctness. These conditions are the human mind’s original ways of acting. Whatever is required in order for the I to be able to posit itself and to oppose a Not-I to itself is necessary. The *Wissenschaftslehre* demonstrates these conditions by means of a deduction.\(^{160}\)

The conditions by which the self posits itself and the world as *partes integrantes* of the moral project of realizing the I as Idea are *a priori* or “original” to the mind because they make it possible determinately to think of this self in contrast to that world. These conditions cannot depend on sense experience since they are presupposed by it. As a result, the mind that conducts their deduction *apprehends itself* as their source: their derivation occurs by a *genetic* act of the mind that produces the conditions under which it can think self and world without contradiction.\(^{161}\) As Fichte says later in the First Introduction, we demonstrate “in a genetic manner” conditions “present within us necessarily”.\(^{162}\) This explains why Fichte calls these conditions the mind’s original ways of *acting*: they are generated through a transcendental logic that seeks to establish the fundamental creativity of the rational subject. Transcendental logic of this sort differs from Kant’s, which according to Fichte “insists upon the primacy of the practical reason, but [...] has failed to show decisively that the practical is the source of the theoretical”.\(^{163}\)

While Kant’s transcendental logic shows only that certain *a priori* concepts constitute the mind’s cognitive activity, for Fichte it shows they are *generated* by this activity. And

\(^{160}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:8.

\(^{161}\) As Breazeale (2010) notes, dialectic is *doubly* genetic in that the genesis of solutions to contradictions arising in acts purported to condition the standpoint of I-hood is itself the genesis of the concept of the I (59). But it is never settled which of the products of this construction are immune to revision (50, 57).

\(^{162}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:9.

\(^{163}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:61.
this owes to their differing sense of deduction: Kant construes it legalistically as an argument from *entitlement*, whereas Fichte construes it genetically as an argument from *production*. Not only, then, is Fichtean deduction a post-skeptical task: it is thoroughly organistic, in keeping with his philosophy of life.\(^\text{164}\)

**BARE MATTER**

Having determined what deduction is, we can see how Fichte’s conception of it informs the moral structure of human life. Specifically, we can ascertain why the concepts of a sensible world and a community of selves are *a priori* necessary means to the moral perfection of nature—as represented by the I as Idea—and why deriving them fulfils the deductive norm of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Fichte’s deduction of the concept of a sensible world is nascent in the *Foundations*\(^\text{165}\) and is an unsatisfied demand in the unfinished *New Presentation*.\(^\text{166}\) It occurs in the *Foundations of Natural Right* or *Naturrechts* (1796/7) and in the *Nova Methodo*. In the former, Fichte infers the concept of a sensible world from a theorem which states that a finite rational being posits itself only by ascribing to itself an activity whose ground is itself, an activity that bears the mark of “I-ness”.\(^\text{167}\) Recall that I-ness is the capacity to will an end and to explain oneself as acting on the concept of that end. In other words, it is the capacity to posit oneself as positing, to act in the awareness *that*...

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\(^\text{164}\) Limnatis (2010) shows that, for Fichte, general logic abstracts from the content of science, while transcendental logic reflects on the form this abstraction must take (25). This differs from Kant, for whom the latter *contains* the former by delimiting the cognitive project within which validity is so much as salient, but must continually account for itself in light of skeptical threats. If, however, the former *derives* from the latter, which itself is infallible because grounded in a first principle, no such threats exist.

\(^\text{165}\) See Fichte’s (1964–), GW, I:289-97.

\(^\text{166}\) See Fichte (1964–), VDML: “[w]hat has to be derived now are determinate representations of a material, spatial, etc. world, one which is present without any help from us—for representations of this sort are notoriously present within consciousness” (I:440).

\(^\text{167}\) Fichte (1964–), GNR, I:17.
one acts. We saw in the *New Presentation* that Fichte calls this act of self-positing ‘intellectual intuition’ and says it contains “nothing but the form of I-hood”.\(^{168}\) We also saw that this act is required “to explain consciousness at all”,\(^{169}\) such that one who commits this act—one who demonstrates the primacy of I-hood—explains the possibility of one’s being conscious. Thus, the mark definitive of a rational being is an act that explains itself. This is why Fichte describes I-hood in the First Theorem of the *Naturrechts* as a self-reverting activity in which the rational being has “itself as an object”,\(^{170}\) that is, as an *explanandum*.

From this theorem Fichte infers that to self-ascribe an activity that grounds itself, a finite rational being must posit a sensible world “neither produced nor producible through [its] activity”.\(^{171}\) Only in this way is it practical, limited by an object on which it can exert its causal efficacy. Fichte shows this in a four-step argument:

The [finite] I exists in a state of endless becoming, there is nothing permanent in it at all: the object is [...] is what it was and what it will be [...] Next—the concept of efficacy, which is constructed with absolute freedom and could be varied under the same circumstances *ad infinitum*, extends out to an efficacy in the object. Thus the object must be infinitely alterable, in consequence of an infinitely variable concept [...] Finally—the rational being [...] cannot posit itself as having an effect on a particular object without all the while representing that particular object [...] Thus the object remains the same object, even though it is endlessly altered; that is, the substratum brought forth by the imagination in order to connect the manifold in the same object (that which underlies the accidents that ceaselessly exclude one another and is called ‘bare matter’) remains the same. This is why we can posit ourselves as altering the form of things, but never the matter, and why we are conscious of our capacity to alter the forms of things *ad infinitum* but of our incapacity to create or annihilate those things.\(^{172}\)

\(^{168}\) Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:515.
\(^{169}\) Fichte (1964—), VDWL, I:527.
\(^{170}\) Fichte (1964—), GNR, I:17.
\(^{171}\) Fichte (1964—), GNR, I:23-4.
A condition of being rational is that one ascribes to oneself a self-grounding or free efficacy, but a condition of exercising this efficacy is a realm in which to do so. The first step in the argument for this conclusion is that the exercise of this efficacy, since it is self-grounding, is unfixed: a rational being can construct the concept of any possible end it might pursue. This is the sense in which the finite I or self is “becoming”: it is not determined to pursue any end in particular. The second premise claims that the object is infinitely “alterable” or determinable by the self’s capacity for constructing concepts, for it can play any number of roles in the possible ends a self might pursue. The third premise holds that by assigning the object a role, the self represents that object as playing that role, that is, as an independent “substratum” conceivable in light of the end to which a self enlists it as a means. This is the sense in which the finite not-I or object is unassailable—never a mere effect of the self’s will and so never divested of its otherness. It follows that while the object’s form can be made to conform to my end, its matter must be conceived, for the sake of the possibility of this conformity, as existing independently of that end: I neither create nor destroy “bare matter” since otherwise my capacity to bend the world to my aims would lose its sense qua striving. This bare matter constitutes the sensible world, the concept of which is therefore presupposed by a rational being’s capacity for self-positing.

The *Nova Methodo* contains two versions of this deduction. The shorter occurs in §13, where Fichte says an ought must relate to “free choice in a sensible world” because moral striving presupposes feeling as a “limitation” on striving.¹⁷³ The simple idea is that only a spatio-temporally limited being can strive, which necessitates the

¹⁷³ Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:142.
concept of a world limiting this striving. The longer version occurs in §18, but requires introducing Fichte’s principle of determinability from §2:

All consciousness of spontaneous self-activity is a consciousness of our own restricting of our own activity; but I cannot intuit myself as restricting my activity in this way without also positing a transition from indeterminacy to determinacy, and thus without at the same time positing this state of indeterminacy and opposing it to the determinate condition. {Nothing determinate is possible apart from what is determinable, i.e., without intuiting the one along with the other.174

The last sentence is an official statement of the principle. What prefaces it is a dense argument Fichte constructs from the nature of the finite rational being, which he will use to deduce the concept of a sensible world. The first premise paraphrases the First Theorem of the Naturrechts—that a finite rational being posits itself as grounding its own activity—as stating that the finite I bears “self-activity”. We saw in Chapter 1 that a formative power, an organism’s capacity to maintain its structure and movement, is activated on pain of empty formalism and self-activating on pain of nihilism: such a power is self-active. An implicit second premise is that a formative power organizes consciousness spontaneously. In other words, it grounds consciousness. The third premise holds that consciousness is of something determinate, something restricted in content. An implicit fourth premise is that the ground of consciousness, since it is spontaneous, is by contrast indeterminate—hence determinable—and thus unrestricted. Such a ground stops the regress of restrictions. What follows from these premises is a generalization whose slogan is the principle of determinability: determinacy, since it consists in restriction, implies a conceptual transition from that which is determinable. No determinability, no determinancy.

174 Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:35.
In §18, Fichte applies this finding to human activity. When I deliberate among various goals, I am a self-determining force “related to each of the possible cases that occur to me [...] Here, {in the concept of a goal,} I appear to myself as a sheer noumenon, {as free}”. This is reminiscent of the first premise in the deduction from the *Naturrechts*, which held that since mine is a self-grounding efficacy, I may construct the concept of any goal: in deliberating, I am no fixed phenomenon, but rather becoming. The deliberating self is unrestricted even as it pursues restriction toward some decision. When I do make a decision, my noumenal flight among possible goals “is brought to an end. My thought is now focused upon a single point, and {a determinacy is brought into being thereby} [...] I appear to myself as an empirical consciousness—something produced, generated, determined {in a certain manner within the concept of a goal}”.\(^{175}\)

In accord with the principle of determinability, this shows that decision restricts a deliberative capacity that in itself is unrestricted. The determinacy that comes with willing an end must *transition* from the presupposed determinability of a mind that can freely deliberate among possible ends.

But the principle applies *no less* to the object that the self puts to some end:

matter possesses neither activity nor freedom [...] {Insofar as selfhood and freedom are related to this stuff,} matter becomes something {subsisting} in itself and through itself, a self-sufficient, {objective} thing. Whereas matter is previously something I merely entertained the thought of, it [now] becomes for me something given, an object that is present without any help whatsoever from me [...] {Though it is} something determinable [...] matter is not my product.\(^{176}\)

This passage echoes the third premise of the deduction in the *Naturrechts*. The self relates to objects through its capacity for representing them in the light of chosen ends.

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\(^{175}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:217.

\(^{176}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:221-2.
But this *formal malleability* of objects presumes their *material self-sufficiency*, for representing an object as a means to an end presupposes its subsisting for the sake of this. In other words, and in keeping with the principle of determinability, though I restrict the significance of an object by determining it according to the concept of an end, I do so by transitioning from the concept of it as unrestricted and “determinable”. This is the concept of the bare matter of the sensible world that limits the self’s striving.

**EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION**

Deducing the concept of a sensible world may seem sufficient for approaching the ideal relation between self and world. It establishes an arena in which to conduct the moral perfection of nature, making room for the *expansion* of the self’s causal efficacy. But while it is necessary, it is not sufficient. Not just *anything* can incite this expansion, which, to remain limited and thus determinate, requires a “feeling of prohibition, of not being permitted to go beyond [one’s] sphere”.

Permission can only issue from that which bears a right, namely, another self. By deducing the concept of a community of selves, Fichte sets a rational condition for this expansion, namely, the *contraction* of the self’s efficacy into a sphere that it recognizes as its own and from which it can recognize the spheres of other efficacious selves. The concept represents the rational mass from which one may be individuated and thereby may strive for the moral ideal. We will see that its deduction completes the moral structure Fichte places on human life.

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177 See Fichte (1964–), GW: “the principle of life and consciousness, the ground of its possibility—is admittedly contained in the I; but this gives rise to no genuine life, no empirical existence in time [...] If such a genuine life is to be possible, we need for the purpose another and special sort of check to the I on the part of a not-I” (I:279).

178 Fichte (1964–), WLN, IV/2:142-3.
The Second Theorem in the *Naturrechts* gives this deduction in order to avoid a vicious circle that follows from presupposing the self’s free efficacy unaided by the thought of another self’s free efficacy:

Any act of comprehension is conditioned by a positing of the rational being’s own efficacy; and all efficacy is conditioned by some prior act of comprehension by the rational being. Therefore, every possible moment of consciousness is conditioned by a prior moment of consciousness, and so the explanation of the possibility of consciousness already presupposes consciousness as real. Consciousness can be explained only circularly; thus is cannot be explained at all, and so it appears to be impossible.\(^{179}\)

The first direction of the apparently circular conditioning of consciousness follows from the First Theorem: no act of comprehension without free efficacy, that is, without self-activity. Put in terms of a formative power, no use without possession. Why does the second direction follow? Recall that a formative power is self-active because it is possessed just if it is used: if not used, it only potentially organizes an organism’s matter; if not possessed, its organization owes to something other. Hence, there is no possession without use—no efficacy without act, as the second direction of conditioning states. Now, insofar as there is a biconditional relation of possession and use in the *functioning* of a formative power, no vicious circle is threatened. But one *is* threatened where this power’s *grounding* is concerned, for the condition of the possibility of this relation cannot be given by one of its *relata* without circularity. That condition must lie outside this relation.

Fichte argues that the required condition must explain how the self finds itself *as* self-active, leaving the self “in full possession of its freedom to be self-determining”, for otherwise the self could not find itself as a self. The condition must not simply restrict

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\(^{179}\) Fichte (1964–), GNR, I:30.
what it conditions if the latter is to be free. It must be one on which the self “finds itself as something that \textit{could} exercise its efficacy, as something that is summoned to exercise its efficacy but that can just as well refrain from doing so”. Clearly, it cannot condition the self’s self-activity as an \textit{efficient} cause, which determines its effect with mechanical necessity, fixing how its effect is realized. We know from Jacobi—so influential on Fichte’s thinking—that the threat of nihilism emerges from the spoiling premise in the philosopher’s argument that all conditions are efficient. This threat indicates \textit{why} not just anything conditions the possibility of a rational being’s self-activity. It also indicates why Fichte’s location of the required condition in another self is no \textit{non sequitur}. Only that which is self-active can issue the appropriate condition, namely, in a summons. A summons is an “invitation [\textit{Aufforderung}]” that may be received in different ways, some of which it prohibits—though only because it \textit{concedes} their possibility—and some of which constitute its end—though not as \textit{necessitated} by it. A summons’ causality, in other words, is not efficient, but \textit{final}. In the Second Theorem, Fichte says its “ultimate end” is

\begin{quote}
the free efficacy of the rational being to whom the summons is addressed. The rational being’s activity is by no means to be determined and necessitated by the summons in the way that—under the concept of causality—an effect is determined and necessitated by its cause; rather, the rational being is to determine itself in consequence of the summons. But if the rational being is to do this, it must first understand and comprehend the summons, and so it is dependent on some prior cognition of the summons. Thus the external being that is posited as the cause of the summons must at the very least presuppose the possibility that the subject is capable of understanding and comprehending; otherwise its summons to the subject would have no purpose at all. The purposiveness of the summons is conditional on the understanding and freedom of the being to whom it is addressed. Therefore, the cause of the summons must
\end{quote}

\footnote{Fichte (1964–), GNR, I:33-4.}
\footnote{Fichte (1964–), GNR, I:34.
itself necessarily possess the concept of reason and freedom; thus it must itself be a being capable of having concepts; it must be an intelligence, and—since this is not possible without freedom, as has just been shown—it must also be a free, and thus a rational, being, and must be posited as such.\(^{182}\)

The summons aims to ignite the self’s free efficacy or self-activity. It seeks freedom, specifically, the self’s freedom to realize its possession of a formative power and, by realizing this, to use it. Through your summons, I am aware of my freedom to respond.\(^{183}\) It is because the summons is purposive in this sense that its causal effect on the self is not efficient: the condition of the possibility of the self’s self-activity is *teleological*. And it is because the summons is purposive that what issues it must be an intelligence since to do so it requires the concept of an end—in this case, the self’s free efficacy. Just as a self is summoned, so a summoner is a self.\(^{184}\)

Fichte now appears to posit *two* grounds of self-activity. According to the *New Presentation*, intellectual intuition is our mode entering the *Wissenschaftslehre* and so must precede the summons. Evidence that this act grounds self-activity occurs in *Nova Methodo* §17, where Fichte says “I discover myself only as a subject engaged in willing [...] We have discovered that what comes first is not the concept of the summons, but

\(^{182}\) Fichte (1964–), GNR, I:36.

\(^{183}\) Compare Hegel (1970), PG: “A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it” (§177).

\(^{184}\) If we combine this thought with Fichte’s position that dogmatists are deficient persons, a difficulty arises in imagining how someone deceived about their own personhood can summon us to recognize our own. Allen Wood has suggested to me that we locate the difficulty “in the world”, not in Fichte’s view. On the one hand, the dogmatist’s is a *contingent* self-deception: he can be reached and, indeed, we have a duty not to give up communicating with him (see Fichte (1964–), SS, 4:310-1). We have a duty not to rest content with the distance between us and him, even if it makes him seem as far away as a “piece of lava on the moon” (see GW, I:175n). On the other hand, his self-descriptions are *genuine* convictions and must be taken at face value: part of recognizing him is acknowledging his being committed to a view that thwarts mutual recognition. We cannot fail to register both thoughts. But their resulting difficulty owes to their object—not the *Wissenschaftslehre*—which reflects precisely what Fichte calls the ‘problematic’ character of cognizing another as free (see GNR, I:42).
rather an act of willing”. This seems to contradict the argument in the *Naturrechts* that your summons conditions my self-activity. To make sense of Fichte’s view, we can distinguish *systematic* from *temporal* priority. An *a priori* condition is systematically prior if it lets us apprehend the ground of a philosophical system, which we do by meeting the grounding norm. An *a priori* condition is temporally prior if it commences that system's construction. It lets us begin realizing a system, which we do by meeting the deductive norm. Hence, whereas intellectual intuition is systematically prior to any act of willing—for by it I demonstrate the primacy of my determinable capacity for willing *in general*—the summons is temporally prior to any act of willing—for it generates my determinate response to your summons *in particular*. The former grounds me; the latter individuates me as so grounded.

It is not far from the concept of a summoner to that of a community. In the Third Theorem, Fichte argues that the self must not only posit a world and a self outside itself, but must posit itself as standing in a *relation of right* to a community of selves. According to this relation, “each is to limit [their] freedom through the concept of the possibility of the other's freedom, under the condition that the latter likewise limit [their] freedom through the freedom of the former”. We saw that the very idea of a self

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185 Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:187.
186 We can discern this distinction in Fichte's (1964–) Third Theorem: “the subject's efficacy lies simultaneously within itself and in the being outside itself. If the external being had not exercised its efficacy and thus had not summoned the subject to exercise its efficacy, then the subject itself would not have exercised its efficacy. The subject's activity as such is conditioned by the activity of the being outside it [...] But within the sphere allotted to it, the subject has freely chosen; it has absolutely given to itself the nearest limiting determination of its own activity; and the ground of this latter determination of the subject's efficacy lies entirely within the subject alone. Only in this way can the subject posit itself as an absolutely free being” (GNR, I:41).
187 We can therefore discard Breazeale's (2000) dichotomy between a "metaphysics of the absolute I" and an "analysis of the conditions necessary for the possibility of free self-positing" (178). The former is Fichte's means to the latter.
188 Fichte (1964–), GNR, I:52.
entails that of another. But even the smallest plurality of selves is sustainable only as a community because the boundaries among selves cannot be effected mechanically. Selves must relate to each other in mutual recognition of their respective spheres of efficacy. The character of the limitation placed on a self by another thus consists in a prohibition against transgressing another’s sphere; and where prohibition is reciprocal, a relation of right obtains.

In the *Nova Methodo*, Fichte connects his idea of right to the idea of morality presented in the *Foundations* and the *New Presentation*. In §13, he distinguishes between the two: “[t]he union of prohibition and desire produces {not an ‘ought’, but merely} a [feeling of] being permitted to satisfy the desire {in a certain respect, without any immediate expression of the categorical drive [toward moral action] within the power of feeling}. Whatever is included within the sphere of what I am allowed to do is permitted”. Another’s sphere of efficacy is a prohibition against its transgression. Where what falls outside it falls within one’s own sphere, one is permitted to act as one will. But what one rightfully wills is not thereby moral: “natural right is concerned with what we are permitted to do, rather than with what we ought to do. It refers only to empirical willing. Morality tells us that we ought to do something, which, from the standpoint of natural right, we are merely permitted to do”. Fichte continues: “an ‘ought’ arises when what is permitted accords with pure willing”.\(^\text{189}\) Pure willing is what the I as Idea represents, the morally perfected relation between self and world in which the latter conforms to the former’s will. Only where actions falling within one’s sphere—actions to which one is permitted by relations of right—accord with this Idea are they moral. Of

\(^{189}\) Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:145.
course, nature’s moral perfection is an individual task charged by one’s ineliminable freedom and fulfilled by one’s own efforts. But, as the deductions in the *Naturrechts* and the *Nova Methodo* show, individuality itself has sensible as well as social conditions through which the self is (temporally) first aware of itself as self-active and thus as capable of causal expansion.

Meeting the deductive norm therefore situates individuality. It sets a priori conditions on which a morally striving individual is possible. The concepts of a world and a community specify such a being, conditioning its determinacy and seeking its freedom, respectively. By both limiting and enabling our self-activity, deduction gives moral structure to human life. We can now see where human death figures in this structure and why Fichte is an immortalist.

**THE DEATH OF DEATH**

In his first post-Jena public lectures, published as *Vocation of Man* (1800), Fichte makes a string of immortalist claims:

I will not gain entry into the supernatural world only after I have been severed from connection with the earthly one. I already am and live in it now, far more truly than in the earthly. Already now it is my only firm standpoint, and eternal life, which I have already long since taken possession of is the only reason why I still care to carry on my life on earth. Heaven, as it is called, does not lie beyond the grave. It already surrounds us here and its light is kindled in every pure heart.  

I am immortal, imperishable, eternal as soon as I decide to obey the law of reason. I must not first become so. The supersensible world is no future world: it is present.

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190 Fichte (1987), BM, 94-5. Hearing Fichte’s “firm standpoint” as the I, we can discern why only this ground, which differs from the empirical or “earthly”, makes life worth living, for apprehending this ground gives rise to the moral ideal that gives rational existence its value.

Only reason is; infinite reason in itself [...] will annihilate our present life with what we call death and introduce us into a new life [...] All our life is its life. We are in Its hand and remain there, and no one can tear us out of it. We are eternal because It is.\(^{192}\)

All death in nature is birth, and precisely in dying does the augmentation of life visibly appear. There is no killing principle in nature, for nature is throughout nothing but life. It is not death which kills, but rather a more living life which, hidden behind the old life, begins and develops. Death and birth are only the struggle of life with itself in order to present itself ever more purely and more like itself. And how could my death be anything else? For I am not a mere representation and image of life, but bear within me the original life which alone is true and essential [... unlike] nature [...] which itself lives merely for my sake.\(^{193}\)

The appearance of death is the guide by which my spiritual eye is led to my new life and my new nature. Each one who like me leaves the earthly association [...] still \textit{exists}, and is entitled to a new place [...] So I live and so I am, and so I am unchangeable, firm and complete for all eternity. For this is no being assumed from without. It is my own, my only true and essential being.\(^{194}\)

These passages clearly assign life a truer \textit{reality} than death and present it as the \textit{reason} behind death. They trade the strict methods of analytic, dialectic and deduction for the moving religious vocabulary of a public lecture, a major catalyst being Jacobi's charge in his "Open Letter to Fichte" that the \textit{Wissenschaftslehre} is atheistic. While this provides context for the claims in the \textit{Vocation}, we can still ask what in the Jena period motivates them. Can we \textit{philosophically} translate the popular claims? Can we hear them \textit{retrospectively} in the Jena texts? I think we can if we read them with an eye

\(^{192}\) Fichte (1987), BM, 111. This passage claims we are identical with the infinite life of reason in respect of eternality. We saw in Chapter 1 why this is not the eternality of persistence, but of purposiveness. Thus, in keeping with Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition, we are identical with reason in respect of the quality of eternal (because self-organizing) activity. Contrast Fichte's claim that we are always "in [Reason's] hand" with Heidegger's (1996) claim that Dasein "is thrown in such a way that it is the there as being-in-the-world" (135).

\(^{193}\) Fichte (1987), BM, 122. This passage provides further evidence against the view that nature, for Fichte, is a mechanical realm of law closed off from a self-grounding subjectivism. We have seen that the I as intellectual intuition proves that nature is in principle rational—since its unconditionality precludes any essentially extra-rational entity—and that the I as Idea demands that this possibility be realized. Here, the view is cast in immortalist terms, where the I as "original" life manifests itself through finite life and death.

\(^{194}\) Fichte (1987), BM, 123.
toward the conditioning relation they establish between life and death. The function this relation yields for the concept of death will show that the public lectures are a popular expression of Fichte's pre-existing commitment to immortalism.

One might object that a finite rational being's limitation by world and community is sufficient for grasping Fichte's idea of finitude and that death need not be included in it. This would exclude the Jena project from the immortalist-mortalist debate. But it would ignore the role that death must play in Fichte's idealism in particular and German idealism in general. It is because life is at stake in the antinomy of systematicity, which pits the dead matter of Spinozism against the living activity of the Wissenschaftslehre, that the idealists are driven to resolve it—to vindicate life over death. They must ground death's possibility in the I on pain of dogmatism, a threat made pressing if our imminent demise contains the possibility of purposeless, merely persistent being. It is the threat that in our own person we betray evidence of the truth of dogmatism—if, per impossibile, we could posit this evidence. Without an account of death's purpose, an idealist account of personhood's condition of possibility will fall short of completeness. This is why Fichte must be an immortalist. He cannot allow the proof of I-hood to expire, that is, to begin in our response to the summons to fulfil the grounding norm, to falter in proportion to our moral abilities and to be falsified in the final remnant of our finitude, the corpse. The mortal transition cannot remain an unanswered question. As I will argue,

\[195\] See Fichte (1964–), VDML: “Every person who ascribes an activity to himself appeals to [intellectual] intuition. It contains within itself the source of life, and apart from it there is nothing but death” (I:463); and AP: “something stable, at rest, and dead can by no means enter the domain of what I call philosophy, within which all is act, movement and life” (I:38). This idea persists in the post-Jena period, where Fichte claims his system “pursues death all the way to its last resort in order to arrive at life” (WL, II/8:121).

\[196\] For Fichte, the corpse threatens to be a bare result with no process to give it meaning. Hegel (1970) calls a result with no such process “the corpse which has left the guiding tendency behind it” (PG, §3).
death must figure in the *Wissenschaftslehre* as the *highest answer* to the unconditioned condition—life—that puts our finite existence into question.

While Fichte consistently identifies the I with life, *Nova Methodo* §18 specifies that the I “is to be understood as reason as such or in general, which is something quite different from personal I-hood”.

This helps to clarify two crucial claims from the Jena period. The first is from the Second Introduction §9: “the only thing that exists is reason, and individuality is something merely accidental. Reason is the end and personality is the means [...R]eason alone is eternal, whereas individuality must ceaselessly die off”. The second is from the *Nova Methodo* §17: “my own individuality arises from the total mass of reason”.

Both claims concern the self’s *individuation*. According to the first, reason or life is eternal because it exists intrinsically. Selves die because, by contrast, their existence is accidental, though not thereby haphazard since their existence serves an end: it is *instrumental* to reason’s demand for nature’s moral perfection. Hence, we can conclude that life individuates the self, setting a purpose to which it is answerable.

The second claim compares my individuation to a selection from a rational mass, which we saw occurs on condition of mutual recognition. Recall

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197 Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:220.
198 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:550. Compare WLNM: “When the idealist says ‘outside of me’, he means ‘outside of reason’; when the individual says the same thing, he means ‘outside of my person’ (IV/2:25); and Fichte (1987), BM: “Only reason is; infinite reason in itself, and finite reason in it and through it” (111). These passages guard against the false dichotomy implied by Breazeale (2000): “Though Fichte, to this day, is widely associated with the claim that nothing is really real but the ‘absolute I’ and that everything else is merely a free product or ‘posit’ of the absolute ‘I’, this claim is, in fact, quite incompatible with what is here taken to be the deepest spirit of his thought [...as a] theory of finite subjectivity” (189, 192). Quoting the second sentence in the passage from VDWL, Pippin (2000) infers that Fichte’s monism is “normative”, committed to the “unconditioned status of the space of reasons” (164). But this only indicates monism’s *form*. Had Pippin quoted the first sentence, with its teleological language, he may have inferred that Fichte’s monism is organicist, committed to the unconditioned *value* of the space of reasons, which is the I’s realization through nature’s moral perfection. This would further indicate monism’s *function*.

199 Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:179.
200 Compare Fichte (1964–), VDWL: “[i]t is only through the medium of the ethical law that I catch a glimpse of myself” (I:466).
that this condition derives from the I, that is, from fulfilling the deductive norm that arises with the I’s proof.\textsuperscript{201} Since the I or I-hood is life, we can maintain our conclusion that life individuates the self.\textsuperscript{202} On Fichte’s model of individuation, we do not each have irreducible individuality because we are members of a rational kind.

To comprehend my individuation by I-hood in terms of being put into question, consider what it means to give an answer. Any statement is an answer to an implicit or explicit question in virtue of which it is about something in particular. It is thanks to a question that a statement is sought and, once given, satisfying (or not). On Fichte’s view, my actions are a statement of my efforts to answer a question life poses to me in the form of the I as Idea. Nature’s moral perfection individuates me as my final cause, hence as a question I am beholden to answer. No answer is definitive, lest I exert total causality on the world and thereby undermine the very idea of my capacity for venturing. By asking me to bend nature to my will, the moral ideal puts me into question and I am always answering for myself. My individuation is thus a relation through which I am not only intelligible, but responsible.

We can now see how I-hood, the unconditioned condition of personhood, puts one’s demise into question. First, the I’s moral demand renders the entire project of a finite rational life intelligible. Any true response to it is made down to one’s final moment, lest one subordinate one’s causality to nature. To the objection that the I’s moral project

\textsuperscript{201} This, contra Beiser (2002): “There is yet another, even more powerful, consideration weighing against the existence of an absolute ego in Fichte’s system. In his Grundlage des Naturrechts Fichte puts forward an elaborate, extended, and explicit argument about why the ego, if it is to be self-conscious as a rational and free being, must be individual, and indeed why it must be even physical, having a body that appears in space and time.” (284).

\textsuperscript{202} For this reason, we need not worry that what Hoeltzel (2010) calls “cosmological idealism”, the view that what ultimately exists is a plurality of rational beings, and what he calls “speculative egoism”, the view that there exists a single self-positing subject and nothing else besides (94), are incompatible.
dies when we do, Fichte will say this confuses the self with “the only true substance”,
mistaking the I for the former’s “accident”. On pain of dogmatism, nature can be
“nothing but an accident” of our “way of looking at” the I. As a natural phenomenon,
my death must be grounded in the I. Indeed, my death is only part of a moral life if the
I is its unconditioned condition. Death *conditions nothing*, for it is *conditioned utterly*.
This provides a translation of Fichte’s popular claims that death is an “appearance” that
lets me grasp life’s eternality and that life, not death, is “essential” to me.

Second, contrast any statement about the self with the statement of the I’s
unconditionality. The former will always be put into question by the moral demand of
reason, whereas the latter is precisely the source of this question and so is put into
question by nothing. As the *Wissenschaftslehre*’s first principle, I-hood stops the
question-answer regress, for it is the answer to no question—it is the highest question.
This is how Fichte’s immortalism resolves the collision between the corpse and a

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203 See Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:550. A related objection is that the I has explanatory power so long as I
render it actual on pain of its creation *ex nihilo*. But its actuality persists through those who survive me
and render my death intelligible through mourning, funeral rites and shared memory.
204 See Fichte (1964–), WLNM, IV/2:43.
205 Compare Hegel (1970), PG, on the divine law in ethical life, which gives meaning to death: “[Death] is
a state which has been reached *immediately*, in the *course of Nature*, not the result of an action
*consciously done*. The duty of the member of a Family is on that account to add this aspect, in order that
the individual’s ultimate being, too, shall not belong solely to Nature and remain something irrational, but
shall be something *done*, and the right of consciousness be asserted in it […] The dead individual, by
having liberated his *being* from his *action* of his negative unity, is an empty singular, merely a passive
being-for-another, at the mercy of every lower irrational individuality and the forces of abstract material
elements, all of which are now more powerful than himself […] The Family keeps away from the dead this
dishonoring of him by unconscious appetites and abstract entities, and puts its own action in their place,
and weds the blood-relation to the bosom of the earth, to the elemental imperishable individuality. The
Family thereby makes him a member of a community which prevails over and holds under control the
forces of particular material elements and the lower forms of life, which sought to unloose themselves
against him and destroy him” (§452). By interrupting death, ethical life has the last word.
206 Compare Pippin’s (2000) account of Fichte’s conception of the thing in itself as a “*non-thought*”: “No
explanatory role for the non-thought except as thought” is the idealist claim, not ‘no possible thought of a
non-thought” (156).
systematic view of life: “there is no bridge” to build between the form of moral agency and the matter of the corpse since any such heterogeneity is systematically intolerable. Only a gapless transition from life to meaningful death ensures the closure of questions and answers, a gaplessness provided by the I as the deepest question underlying every statement of one’s life, including one’s last. In death, the self poses no question: rather than a question left hanging, her death is the highest answer to the question of all questions. This gives sense to Fichte’s claims in the public lectures that life can “annihilate” death in order to present itself and that death can only manifest the struggle of this, life’s self-presentation.

Fichte’s idealism is therefore not simply a philosophy of life, but one that seeks the metaphysical victory of life or the death of death. Grasping the significance of death on this view is a matter of deducing the a priori conditions of leading a finite rational life and recognizing that death is rendered rational and meaningful to the extent that it figures in the moral structure of such a life. We see its function is to put nothing into question. It is, in the final analysis, unconditionally conditioned by that to which it is the highest answer. For the immortalist, death can only be our final statement by manifesting the unconditionality of infinite life of reason, that is, of I-ness. Whether I can claim the metaphysical victory as my own depends on my spirit, on whether I grasp my living essence or reject it in bad faith. The former is a pre-mortem achievement of immortality since, by striving for nature’s moral perfection, I presuppose life’s primacy. Hence Fichte’s popular claim that I am “eternal as soon as I decide to obey the law of reason”, for, in so doing, I accept that death is nothing and life is all.

\footnote{See Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:436.}
PART II: SCHELLING’S MORTALIST CHALLENGE

CHAPTER 3: SCHELLING’S CRITIQUE OF FICHTE’S IDEALISM

We must ask from the gods things suited to hearts that shall die,
Knowing the path we are in, the nature of our doom.
—Pindar, Pythian 3

ONCE SUMMONED

We saw in Part I why Fichte is a philosopher of life and an immortalist. In Part II, I will draw on a range of Schelling’s texts to show that his internal critique of German idealism rests on arguments for the unliveability of two projects central to the tradition: a first principle’s apprehension in intellectual intuition and the derivation of its necessity through the realization of a complete system of *a priori* conditions. I will focus in this chapter on his rejection of Fichte’s Jena view that the infinite activity of reason—in short, the I or life—is the unconditioned condition of personhood. For Schelling, life is rather the context in which persons posit and challenge claims to the unconditioned, a common time in which systematic ventures are taken. This idea is oriented by a deep concern for human finitude, emerging from an uneasy relationship with intellectual intuition that manifests Schelling’s commitment to freedom and philosophical pluralism. Since it threatens the two claims of Chapter 1—that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is a philosophy of life and is uniquely livable—I must ask: why for Schelling is the *Wissenschaftslehre* incapable of capturing what it is to live one’s system? Answering this will undermine Fichte’s philosophy of life, allowing me then to reconstruct Schelling’s objection to his immortalism in Chapter 4.

Schelling tends to be over- or under-integrated into the German idealist tradition. An older reading sees him as an absolute idealist who succeeds Fichte by completing
philosophy's systematization. A newer reading sees his central role as a late skeptical attack on Hegelian systematicity. Both readings are inadequate: Schelling is not simply a systematizer or an anti-systematizer. While he contributes to the idealist project from its inception, inspiring both Fichte's identification of transcendental idealism with systematic philosophy and Hegel's union of transcendental idealism and philosophy of nature, his view takes many turns, all of which concern whether systematic philosophy is so much as possible after Kant. In this, Schelling remains critical of the German idealist project. However, his is an internal critique with a deep stake in the outcome. Before assessing his specific objections to Fichte, we must review his initial Fichtean response to the grounding norm of discovering philosophy's first principle.

Schelling takes seriously the task to which he is summoned. A close study of Fichte's *Foundations* leads him in “Of the I as Principle of Philosophy” (1795) to assert that anyone “must be interested in the question of the highest principle of all knowledge because [one's] own system, even if it is the system of skepticism, can be true only through its principles.” Securing truth through principles is a familiar move: Kantian analytic catalogues *a priori* principles for what we can know, while Fichtean analytic dialectically generates *a priori* principles for knowing what to do. Our necessary interest in the “highest” principle owes to a challenge Schelling poses in §1: “[e]ither our knowledge has no reality at all and must be an eternal round of propositions, each dissolving into its opposite, a chaos in which no element can crystallize—or else there must be an ultimate point of reality on which everything depends, from which all

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208 Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:153.
firmness and all form of our knowledge springs”.

Schelling sees that unless our principle is “ultimate”, the knowledge resting on it is vulnerable to the Agrippan trilemma, according to which justification is circular (an endless round), arbitrary (dissolvable into its opposite) or regressive (crystallizing into nothing secure).

Schelling agrees with Fichte that the discovery of the I avoids this threat. The first principle is no object, which is always an object “of knowing” and so subject to conditions of possible experience. It is no subject either, “which is determinable only by contrast with but also in relation to a previously posited object”, a relation that echoes Kant’s idea that the subject’s logical function is to accompany its objective representations. It is rather unconditioned (unbedingt)—un-thinged or free of objective relations. Thus, Schelling calls dogmatism’s first principle, the infinite not-I represented by Spinoza’s substance, a contradiction: it is “an unconditioned thing [ein unbedingtes Ding], that is, a thing that is not a thing”. He infers that the “perfect system of science proceeds from the absolute I”, through whose positing alone “does it

209 Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:162.

210 Schelling’s concern for properly conceiving the ground of knowledge is sparked by Jacobi’s critique, so influential for German idealism, of Reinhold’s principle of consciousness. As Frank (2004) shows, Jacobi argues that being is irreducible to consciousness on pain of an infinite regress of reasons (which, as we saw in the Introduction, entails nihilism) and so must be construed as unconditioned; see Lectures 3-4. That said, it is misleading for Frank to say that what Jacobi calls our ‘feeling’ of being is what Fichte and Schelling call ‘intellectual intuition’ (78), for, as I have argued, the latter’s referent is an infinite self-organizing activity that I show myself to instantiate.

211 Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:164-5.

212 See Fichte (1964—), GW: “The absolute I of the first principle is not something (it has, and can have, no predicate); it is simply what it is, and this can be explained no further” (I:109).

213 Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:171. Compare Novalis (1978) from the same year: “We everywhere seek the unconditioned [das Unbedingt], and always only find things [Dinge]” (266). In a move similar to Fichte’s in the New Presentation—with its Jacobian misreading of Kant—Schelling rejects the very idea of a thing in itself: “[t]he usual assumption was that pure being pertained to things in themselves. However, I believe that what Kant says about things in themselves cannot be explained at all except as a result of his persistently maintained system of condescension. According to Kant’s own deductions the idea of a thing in itself must be contradictory. Thing in itself means neither more nor less than a thing which is no thing. Wherever there is sense perception there is not-I, and where there is not-I there is sense perception. What is seen intellectually is no not-I at all but sheer I” (I/1:210).
become possible that a not-I appears in contrast to it, indeed that philosophy itself becomes possible”.\textsuperscript{214} Like Fichte, Schelling thinks intellectual intuition is our only mode of accessing the I as first principle, arguing for this by process of elimination. It is not accessible by a regulative idea, which is an empty form. Nor is it accessible in sensible intuition, which is a contradiction: “since the I is I only because it can never become an object, it cannot occur in an intuition of sense, but only in an intuition which grasps no object at all and is in no way a sensation, in short, in an \emph{intellectual} intuition”.\textsuperscript{215} It is because the I consists in supra-objective intelligibility and supra-sensory immediacy that our grasp of it must be through an act of an intellectual intuition.\textsuperscript{216}

Schelling recognizes that grasping the I fulfills one task while incurring another: the freedom of the empirical I cannot possibly realize itself, because the empirical I as such does not exist through itself, through its own free causality. Neither could this freedom of the empirical I be absolute, as is the freedom of the absolute I, because the latter simply posits the mere reality of the I, whereas the causality of the freedom of the empirical I ought first to \emph{produce} the absolute reality of the I. The freedom of the absolute I is by itself and is absolutely non-finite, but the freedom of the empirical I is empirically infinite, because to \emph{produce} an absolute reality is an empirically infinite task.\textsuperscript{217}

The absolute and empirical I—in Fichte’s terms, the I and self—share the \emph{quality} of freedom, but differ quantitatively in their efficacy. A self’s efficacy presupposes that of an object and \emph{vice versa}, which yields the problem Fichte diagnoses in the major Jena texts that the self must and cannot exert causality over nature. This tension raises the moral demand that the self generate or, as Schelling says, “\emph{produce}” conditions under

\textsuperscript{214} Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:176.
\textsuperscript{215} Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:182.
\textsuperscript{216} It is incorrect, then, of Beiser (2002) to read “Of the I” as departing from Fichte for “giv[ing] the idea of the absolute not a regulative but a constitutive status” (473).
\textsuperscript{217} Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:235.
which its causality may become unlimited. But since the mutual presupposition of self and nature constitutes this production, we are saddled with what he calls an “empirically infinite” task that lasts our entire finite existence. This task specifies the ideal Fichte calls ‘I’. Hence, once summoned to systematize philosophy, the early Schelling takes Fichte’s lead.

ANTI-CRITIQUE

But Schelling begins to break with Fichte in the “Anti-critique” (1796), his reply to Erhard’s critical review of “Of the I”. It contains three reasons why positing—the assertion of an unconditioned condition or first principle—is insufficient for grounding—the realization of that condition. Fichte argues, in the Foundations, that the I is posited just if it exists as the ground of positing in general and, in the New Presentation, that to posit I-hood just is to realize the I as this act’s original form. Schelling’s short piece plants the seed of a critique he will develop throughout his career: to assert a first principle is necessarily to fail to prove its reality. The first two reasons he gives for this in the “Anti-critique” will serve as premises to the conclusion—the central claim of this chapter—that the Wissenschaftslehre cannot capture what it is to live one’s system, that is, what it is for one’s system to be commensurate with one’s finitude. My reconstruction of this argument from the “Letters” thus offers a more complex reading of Schelling than

218 See Schelling’s (1856-61), VIPP: “[i]n the finite I there is unity of consciousness, that is, personality. The non-finite I, however, knows no object at all and therefore no consciousness and no unity of consciousness, no personality. Consequently, the ultimate goal of all striving can only be represented as an expansion of personality to infinity, that is, as its own destruction [...] In order to approach this ultimate goal, an infinite approximation takes place, therefore an infinite continuance of the I, immortality” (I/1:200).
219 Compare Schelling (1856-61), VIPP: “Since your perception ties you to objects, and since your intellectual intuition is dimmed and your existence, that in which you live and act, think and know, becomes in the end (and for your will) only an object of faith—a something which seems different from yourself and which you are forever trying to realize in yourself as a finite creature and still never find as real in yourself” (I/1:216).
those on offer. Rather than brazen or cynical, he is a critical proponent of the German idealist project who is committed to \textit{systematicity within the bounds of human finitude}.

The first reason is that positing lacks \textit{dictatorial} authority. Consider Kant’s claim in the section of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method entitled, ‘The discipline of pure reason with regard to its polemical use’:

Reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings, and cannot restrict the freedom of critique through any prohibition without damaging itself and drawing upon itself a disadvantageous suspicion. Now there is nothing so important because of its utility, nothing so holy, that it may be exempted from this searching review and inspection, without regard for persons. The very existence of reason depends upon this freedom, which has no dictatorial authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his \textit{veto}, without holding back.\textsuperscript{220}

Critique furnishes the \textit{a priori} principles of cognition. Kant’s claim is that restricting critique—say, to the apprehension of certain principles over others—clouds reason with suspicion. This befalls Fichte when he restricts systematic philosophy to the intellectual intuition of the I, effectively legislating idealism for any would-be philosopher. His suspicion of dogmatists’ first principle leads him to tar them as failed idealists for whom he “knows no respect” as persons.\textsuperscript{221} By contrast, Schelling agrees with Kant that reason cannot dictate principles, but can only propose them to a free citizenry of reason. In the “Anti-critique”, he says of the author of “Of the I” that the “question as to which (\textit{abstract}) principle could furnish the starting point for philosophy seemed to him unworthy of a free man who knows his own self [...] The author believes that man was

\textsuperscript{220}Kant (1900–), KrV, A738-9/B766-7.

\textsuperscript{221}See Fichte (1964–), VDWL: “[t]he idealist, in contrast, is quite unable to prevent himself from looking down upon the dogmatist with a certain amount of disrespect, since the dogmatist cannot say anything to him which he himself has not long since known and already rejected as erroneous. For one becomes an idealist only by passing through a disposition toward dogmatism—if not by passing through dogmatism itself” (I:434).
born to act, not to speculate, and that therefore his first step into philosophy must manifest the arrival of a free human being”. Positing a first principle is a free act, lest nihilism ring true: it is not necessitated by something other, but is contingent on one’s choice. Contingency of choice is, of course, an important mark of personhood. And, as Schelling says, philosophy must signal “the arrival of a free human being”.Positing, then, is constrained by neither dogmatic nor idealist interests. Since philosophical interest in general originates in a “free action”, any inquiry into which principle is first is “ill-fated”. This reasoning implies that Schelling anticipates Fichte’s dictum—that one’s philosophy owes to the kind of person one is—as we might be misled to hear it in Fichte, namely, as stating that a person may in fact be an idealist or dogmatist, owing to one’s peculiar spirit. The I consequently cannot be an unrivalled principle.

It is consistent with this, Fichte will respond, that while idealists and dogmatists create systems, only the former prove their principle’s reality, namely, by an act of intellectual intuition, and thus can claim to create something of philosophical value. While Schelling’s view in “Of the I” suggests that he agrees, he alters his position in the “Anti-critique”, in which his second reason why positing is not grounding is that it postulates. Fichte himself calls positing a ‘postulate’, a summonable and iterable act

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222 Schelling (1856-61), AK, I/1:242-3.
223 See Schelling’s (1856-61), PBDK, respect for the dogmatist: “Let us stop here, my friend, and admire the calmness with which Spinoza approached the completion of his system. He may have found that calm only in the love of the infinite. Who would think any worse of his serene spirit for harbouring such an image, under which he found bearable the thought at which his system stopped?” (I/1:316). Now, he also says: “dogmatism, if consistent, is bent not upon contest but upon surrender, not upon enforced but upon voluntary annihilation, upon quiet abandonment of oneself to the absolute object […] Quiet abandonment to the immeasurable, to rest in the arms of the world, this is what art sets up in extreme contrast with struggle” (I/1:284). As a mortalist, Schelling extols struggle, not surrender. But his claim is not that dogmatism is unlivable, for he never suggests “voluntary annihilation” is a performative contradiction.
224 See Fichte (1964–). WLNM: “The first principle is a postulate. Just as geometrical instruction begins with the postulate that one describe space, so too must the reader or student of philosophy begin by doing something […] Postulate: Think the concept ‘I’ and think of yourself as you do this […] In this case
of intellectual intuition. But he denies that the dogmatist realizes anything by postulating the not-I: his is a performative contradiction, the profession of an act that is incompatible with his finitude. Speaking again of the author of “Of the I”, Schelling extends this denial to the idealist: “[s]till less does he think of a universally valid philosophy, a philosophy of which only a wiseacre should boast [...] However, since the philosophical public seemed to have ears only for first principles, his own first principle in regard to his readers had to be a mere postulate [nur ein Postulat seyn]. It demands the same free action as that with which, as he is convinced, all philosophizing must begin. The first postulate of all philosophy, to act freely, seemed to him as necessary as the first postulate of geometry, to draw a straight line”.  

Since a system arises from the contingency of freedom, it rests no more on a first principle than on a first act. Positing does not realize an unconditioned condition, but a decision that differs from cognition if we consider that judging in accord with the rules of a practice is cognitive. By contrast, one decides to accept the framework formed by such rules and, systematically, the first principle of that framework.  

Decision is pre-cognitive in this sense. Positing, then, is

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the thinking subject and the object of thought cannot be distinguished from each other in the way they could be while I was still thinking about the wall. The thinking subject and the object one is thinking of, the thinker and the thought, are here one and the same [...M]y activity is self-reverting; i.e., it is directed back upon the I” (IV/2:28-9).

Schelling (1856-61), AK, I/1:243. Compare James (1878): “The truth appears to be that every individual man may, if it please him, set up his private categorical imperative of what rightness or excellence in thought shall consist in, and these different ideals, instead of entering upon the scene armed with a warrant—whether derived from the polyp or from a transcendental source—appear only as so many brute affirmations left to fight it out upon the chess-board among themselves. They are, at best, postulates, each of which must depend on the general consensus of experience as a whole to bear out its validity” (12-3).

Compare Carnap (1988): “To be real in the scientific sense means to be an element of the system; hence this concept [of reality] cannot be meaningfully applied to the system itself. Those who raise the question of the reality of the thing world itself have perhaps in mind not a theoretical question as their formulation seems to suggest, but rather a practical question, a matter of a practical decision concerning the structure of our language. We [...] may regard it as a matter of decision in this sense: we are free to choose to continue using the thing language or not [...] If someone decides to accept the thing language, there is no objection against saying that he has accepted the world of things. But this must not be
not the cognitive act Fichte takes it to be. It is not proof of my constitution by some form, but my willingness to accept\textsuperscript{227} one—not my conformity to a necessary rule, but my proposal to live by a possible rule. As Schelling will put it in “Letters”: “[w]hich of [dogmatism and idealism] we choose depends on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired. We must be what we call ourselves theoretically. And nothing can convince us of being that, except our very striving to be just that. This striving realizes our knowledge of ourselves, and thus this knowledge becomes the pure product of our freedom. We ourselves must have worked our way up to the point from which we want to start. Man cannot get there by arguing, nor can others argue him up to that point”.\textsuperscript{228}

Whereas Fichte holds that philosophy begins with the reality of the I, Schelling now says it begins with “ideas”, “goals” that one must “create”\textsuperscript{229} given that an unconditioned condition is not a cognizable reality.

\textsuperscript{227} See Heidegger (1985a): “Schelling says, ‘It is a matter of the determination of the principle by which man knows in general’. According to our interpretation, this means it is a matter of the determination of the relation of man to beings, a matter of naming this relation in general, of accepting it as the ground of the possibility of knowledge and of expressly taking it over” (53).

\textsuperscript{228} Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:308. In the first instalment of the “Letters”, Schelling contrasts dogmatism (or realism) with ‘criticism’, a term ambiguous between Kant’s transcendental philosophy and Fichte’s systematization of the same. In the second, he contrasts it with Fichtean ‘idealism’, reserving ‘criticism’ to denote Kant’s notion of a canon for any systematic philosophy, whether dogmatic or idealist. As this captures the spirit of the “Letters”, despite their title, I will adopt the latter contrast in my analysis.

\textsuperscript{229} See Schelling (1856-61), AK, I/1:243.
The third reason positing is not grounding is that it consists in *endless production*. Schelling says philosophy is “an idea whose realization the philosopher can expect alone from practical reason”. Coupled with his claim that an idea is a goal in Kant’s sense of an *infinite task*,\(^{230}\) this amounts to the view that realizing the highest goal of philosophy—a system of *a priori* conditions—is an infinite activity. On this view, it is never settled *which* conditions are necessary for the possibility of experience, for if nothing more than a contingent decision authorizes my endorsement of a first principle, deriving a system of conditions from that principle labours under the question of whether a rival principle better accounts for the possibility of experience. Positing, then, is a contingency that *incurs* contingency: just as it lacks necessity, so too does the derived set of conditions at any given time. Of course, Fichte *agrees* that derivation is an infinite task,\(^{231}\) but he affirms this after arguing for the singularity of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which Schelling now calls into doubt. Moreover, Schelling’s affirmation of this has the effect of collapsing the grounding norm—the task of cognizing a first principle—and the deductive norm—the task of deducing a system of conditions from this principle—into a *derivation* norm—the task of endlessly striving for systematicity.

I will now extract these reasons from the “Letters”, written the same time as the “Anti-critique”, in order to reconstruct Schelling’s argument that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is incommensurate with human finitude. After a brief discussion of his identity philosophy, I will then reconstruct this argument from the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* or *Freiheitsschrift* (1809).

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\(^{230}\) Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:243.

\(^{231}\) Fichte (1964–), GW, I:261.
THE FORM OF SYSTEMATICITY

The “Letters” cast the antinomy between dogmatism and idealism as a red herring that obscures what I will call the form of systematicity, which Schelling thinks any philosophical system must instantiate. In the Third Letter, he reads the central question of the first Critique—how synthetic a priori judgments are possible—as asking how we “come to egress from the absolute, and to progress toward an opposite”.232 He interprets Kant’s question as posing a derivation problem. If judgment as such rests on an “absolute” principle, then the problem of how synthetic a priori judgments are possible is a specification of this problem. Kant’s question thus becomes the question of how such judgments, and the a priori conditions they presuppose, emerge or “egress” from this principle. Egression is a relation between a first principle and the conditions derivable from it, a relation we demonstrate by striving to produce a system. It is in response to this derivation problem that, in the Fourth Letter, Schelling places a criterion on judgment. He says that it must “be preceded by an absolute unity” and that its “purpose” is to “terminate in an absolute [...] doctrine”.233 This criterion yields the form of systematicity, which the activity of judgment must instantiate if it is to be systematic.

Two considerations lead Schelling to prescribe (1) the positing of a first principle and (2) the derivation of a system from that principle. First, he remains convinced that (1) responds to the challenge posed by Agrippan skepticism. Second, (2) avoids empty formalism—the problem whereby a principle lacks reality because it lacks the matter

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232 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:295. Compare VIPP: “the author of the Critique of Pure Reason, in his attempt not only to arbitrate the dispute among philosophers but also to resolve the antinomy in philosophy itself, did not know what else to do than to state the point at issue in an all-encompassing question, which is expressed as follows: How are synthetic judgments a priori possible? As will be shown in the course of this investigation, this question in its highest abstraction is none other than: How is it possible for the absolute I to step out of itself and oppose to itself a not-I?” (I/1:175).

233 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:296-7.
whose unity it is meant to supply. One derives a system of conditions in order to supply this matter, that is, to show that one’s principle constitutes a systematic order. We saw empty formalism expressed in Chapter 1 as the problem of creation ex nihilo, according to which there is no transition between an infinite ground and its finite consequent. By demonstrating the constitution of a system of conditions by an absolute principle, (2) not only avoids empty formalism, but removes the threat of a gap between the infinite and the finite. Hence, Schelling approvingly cites Jacobi’s account of Spinoza’s awareness of this problem:

When Lessing asked Jacobi what he would consider the spirit of Spinozism to be, Jacobi replied: it could be nothing else than the old a nihilo nihil fit [...]Spinoza] found that the notion of anything emerging within the non-finite posits something from nothing regardless of any support which images and words seem to furnish. ‘Consequently, he rejected every transition of the non-finite into the finite’, all transitory causes whatsoever, and for the emanating principle he substituted an immanent principle, an indwelling cause of the world, eternally immutable in itself, a cause which would be one and the same as all its effects. I don’t believe that the spirit of Spinozism could be better circumscribed. But I believe that the very transition from the non-finite to the finite is the problem of all philosophy, not only of one particular system.234

The problem for “all philosophy” is not simply to posit a first principle, but to construct a system in which it can be said to dwell. Notice that the considerations comprising Schelling’s criterion are mutually dependent: on pain of Agrippan skepticism, judgment and the conditions it presupposes require a first principle; and on pain of empty formalism—congruent with creation ex nihilo—that principle must inform a system of conditions as its matter. These demands fuse into a single criterion, namely, a single form of systematicity.

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234 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:313-4. While he here employs the metaphysically loaded ‘a nihilo’, implying a nothing that generates creation, elsewhere in the “Letters” Schelling uses the more conventional ‘ex nihilo’, implying that the material from which creation is generated is nothingness.
The form of systematicity is borne by an activity of judgment that assumes a ground and strives for a system. We can see how this activity bears a form of life. First, like Kant, Schelling conceives judgment as a self-conscious activity whereby a subject organizes its beliefs and actions as its own. As such, judgment maintains its own structure and so counts as a self-activity, which we saw in Chapter 1 is a living thing's formative power. Second, Schelling says in the Fifth Letter that the “system” at which it aims “must obtain reality, not by a theoretical but by a practical faculty; not by a cognitive faculty but by a productive realization; not by knowledge but by action”.

Recall that action, the contingent decision to posit a first principle, signals “the arrival of a free human being”. Given this, we can infer that the activity bearing the form of systematicity is none other than the human formative power. Put differently, the form of systematicity is the form of human life, where such a life is committed to self-examination and where such a form is instantiable in more than one way.

Can we anticipate a proper way of instantiating this form, a truly examined life? Fichte’s argument that dogmatism is practically self-refuting implies we can. Against this, Schelling ends the Sixth Letter thus: “[i]f we want to establish a system and, therefore, principles, we cannot do it except by an anticipation of the practical decision [praktischen Entscheidung]. We should not establish those principles unless our freedom had already decided about them; at the beginning of our knowledge they are

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235 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:305. Compare Jacobi’s (1994) second edition Spinoza Letters, Supplement VII: “The principle of all cognition is living being; living being proceeds from itself, it is progressive and productive […] The faculty of abstraction and language arouses the need for a more complete perception, a more manifest connection. A world of reason arises, in which signs and words take the place of substances and forces. We appropriate the universe by tearing it apart, and creating a world of pictures, ideas and words, which is proportionate to our powers, but quite unlike the real one. We understand perfectly what we thus create, to the extent that it is our creation. And whatever does not allow being created in this way, we do not understand” (370).
nothing but proleptic assertions, or, as Jacobi expresses it [...] original insuperable prejudices [Vorurtheile]. My prejudice is a pre-judgmental (because pre-cognitive) decision to organize my judgments into a system of my choosing, idealist or dogmatic. While Fichte rightly combats the threat of nihilism, he unwittingly courts it in constraining the freedom of decision, effectively conditioning an unconditioned act. He supersedes the insuperable on a misconstrual of what positing is, thereby invalidating his resolution of the antinomy of systematicity. As Schelling says: “[e]ither of the two absolutely opposed systems, dogmatism and idealism, is just as possible as the other, and both will coexist as long as finite beings do not all stand on the same level of freedom”. By restricting freedom to “the level of idealism”, Fichte misrepresents the prejudicial character of freedom and for this reason at least misidentifies positing as grounding.

236 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:312-3.
237 Compare Heidegger (1967): “With the question ‘What is a thing?’ we are asking for something unconditioned [...] The demand for knowledge in our question is a presumption of the kind found in every essential decision [...] We want to participate in the preparation of a decision; the decision: Is science the measure of knowledge, or is there a knowledge in which the ground and limit of science and thus its genuine effectiveness are determined?” (16-7).
238 See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK: “Which of the two we choose depends on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired” (I/1:308). He may be targeting Fichte when he says positing first principles “will not coerce our freedom to decide this way or that (that would be blind dogmaticism)” (312). Compare GPP: “if someone did not want or intend to speak simply about philosophy in general, but to present the philosophy that is, and thus also endures, such a person would be the most inclined to let all previous developments have a just hearing, since they all must find their goal in the true philosophy. Such a person would feel the greatest reluctance to arouse the opinion that those attending his lectures should be prepared exclusively for some one system and should be intentionally left in ignorance about all the other standpoints that lie outside that position or should only be told of them in a partisan manner. Nothing could more enrage a youthful and fiery sensibility, burning for the truth, than the intention of a teacher to prepare his audience for some one special or particular system, wishing in this way to emasculate them by underhandedly removing the freedom of inquiry” (II/3:16).
239 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:307.
240 See Fichte (1964--), VDWL, I:434.
241 See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK: “for a spirit who has made himself free and who owes his philosophy only to himself, nothing can be more unbearable than the despotism of narrow minds who cannot tolerate another system beside their own” (I/1:306).
To be a finite being is to exemplify the ideal of systematicity in an *unprethinkable* way. Schelling accordingly rejects any solution to the antinomy of systematicity, arguing that it is “vain to believe that the victory is decided by the mere choice of principles which are to serve as a basis of one’s system […] for] as soon as we are in the contest, those very principles as set up in the beginning are no longer valid in and by themselves: now only is it to be decided, practically and by our freedom, whether they are valid or not”.242 First principles are not self-validating acts, for they incur the task of *generating* their validity by producing a system—by fulfilling the derivation norm. As such, they neither prove the reality of an unconditioned condition nor disprove that of an opposing ground. They are “absolute assertions” in favour of a system that “decide nothing for a conflicting system”.243 Simply holding a prejudice says nothing about an antinomy that it might comprise with some opposing prejudice: that requires reflection on the form of systematicity, as we will now see.

A true opposition between idealist and dogmatic prejudices assumes a common problem. As Schelling says, anyone

who intends to close the dispute between the philosophers must proceed from the very point from which the dispute of philosophy itself proceeded, or, what amounts to the same thing, from the point from which the *original* conflict in the human mind proceeded. This point, however, is nothing but the *egress* [*Heraustreten*] *from the absolute*. For, if we had never left its sphere we should all agree about the absolute, and if we had never stepped out from it, we should have no other field for dispute.244

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242 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:312. Compare Heidegger (1985a): “The truth of a principle can in general never be demonstrated by success. For the *interpretation* of a success as a success is, after all, accomplished with the help of the presupposed but unfounded principle […] Thus, in relation to living nature what is decisive (and never yet seriously undertaken) is the essential project of life movement as *movement*” (138).

243 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:312.

244 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:293-4.
We reveal the antinomy or “dispute”, not just by positing a first principle, but by reflecting on the form of systematicity. On the one hand, the opposition between systems is “original” to humans, for it depends on deciding how one egresses from the absolute, that is, on how one decides to articulate the egressive relation between a principle and the conditions it grounds. On the other hand, opposing positions “must meet at some common point […] No line of distinction could be drawn between different systems except in a field they had in common”. The antinomy is a talking-with because the act of positing emerges in a field of “dispute” concerning the infinite ground of reality. Beyond this field, no such act could distinguish itself from its ground. Hence, the finitude of life is what binds parties to the antinomy. We see here that Schelling resists Fichte’s identification of the I with life. Life is not an infinite and eternal activity of which we are temporary instantiations, but the disputational context in which philosophical systematicity drives and divides contemporaneous reasoners. Genuine disputes in this context presuppose a shared problem, namely, the system at which our formative power aims, that is, the fulfillment of the derivation norm. Idealism and dogmatism therefore differ not, as Fichte holds, in their pursuit of distinct objects, but in the distinct attitude or “spirit” with which they live the very same “vocation”.

As in the “Anti-critique”, Schelling rejects Fichte’s conflation of a critique and a system of reason, defending Kant’s distinction between them: “[n]othing, it seems to me, proves more strikingly how little of the spirit of the Critique of Pure Reason the majority have grasped, than the almost universal belief that [it] belongs to one system alone, 

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245 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:293.
246 See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:332. Compare IPN: “Seldom have great minds lived at the same time without working from altogether different angles towards the same objective” (19).
whereas it must be the very peculiarity of a critique of reason to favour *no* system exclusively, but instead to establish truly, or at least to prepare, a canon for *all* systems*. The form of systematicity must be understood critically—as a canon—since it is the form of human life—whose instantiation cannot be determined as or by a doctrine. Nihilism results if we dictate a critique of reason’s “actual spirit in a *particular* system”, for to decide in advance how one lives one’s vocation is to annul the freedom distinctive of persons. Schelling accordingly denies *Wissenschaftslehre* is the system Fichte takes it to be, explicitly claiming that Kant’s *Critique* “is, or contains, the genuine science of knowledge [*die eigentliche Wissenschaftslehre*] because it is valid for all *knowledge*”. This radically alters the exclusive disjunction the German idealists inherit from Jacobi: nihilism is entailed by *neither* a system based on the thing in itself *nor* one void of it because *both* presuppose the human as free, as engaged in a “struggle” that “presents [one] at the climax of [one’s] self-assertion”. Rather than

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247 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:301. Schelling goes on to say that the spirit of the *Critique* consists in deducing “the very possibility of two exactly opposed systems”, that is, in establishing “a system of idealism as well as and in exact opposition to it, a system of dogmatism or realism” (I/1:302). This is in stark opposition to Fichte (1964–), VDWL, for whom critique demands its own doctrine, and an idealistic one at that: “I know full well that Kant has by no means actually constructed a system […] Nevertheless, I am equally certain that Kant has entertained the thought of such a system, that all of the things he has actually presented are fragments and results of this system, and that his assertions make coherent sense only on this assumption […] his worthy man will still retain the sole credit for having been the first person who consciously attempted to divert the attention of philosophy away from external objects and to direct it within ourselves. This is the spirit and the innermost soul of Kant’s entire philosophy, and it is also the spirit and soul of the *Wissenschaftslehre*” (478-9). Contrast Fichte with Kant (1900–), KrV: “this critique […] is a treatise on the method [of metaphysics], not a system of the science itself; but it catalogues the entire outline of the science of metaphysics, both in respect of its boundaries and in respect of its entire internal structure” (Bxii).

248 Compare James (1878): “no law of the *cogitandum*, no norm-ative receipt for excellence in thinking, can be authoritatively promulgated. The only formal canon that we can apply to mind which is unassailable is the barren truism that it must think rightly” (16).

249 See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:304.

250 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:304. If this is right, we cannot accept Neuhouser’s (1990) claim that Fichte’s attempt at systematic deduction is consistent with the spirit of Kant’s critical philosophy (28).

251 See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:284. Admittedly, in characterizing the dogmatist’s self-assertion as voluntary (hence purposive) annihilation, Schelling construes as livable what Jacobi deems nihilistic.
identify life with the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schelling’s early view is that the form of human life is instantiable by any philosophical interest.

AS FROM A STATE OF DEATH

Schelling’s pluralism extends the idea from the “Anti-critique” that positing lacks dictatorial authority. We saw Fichte’s response to this is to grant our freedom to create a system of our choice and deny that any but idealist creations rest on a principle whose reality is knowable. Similarly, Fichte can grant Schelling’s claim that positing is an insuperable prejudice while distinguishing *mere* prejudice from *probative* prejudice. A dogmatist posits his object with mere prejudice because, as Fichte says in the First Introduction §4, the thing in itself is “a pure invention and has no reality whatever”, whereas “the object of idealism has this advantage over the object of dogmatism, that it may be demonstrated [...] in consciousness”. Positing the thing in itself is possible, but while the dogmatist “wants, indeed, to assure reality to that thing, that is, the necessity of being thought as the ground of all experience”, 252 wanting is a conscious decision that cannot transcend thought for being *per se*. This undermines the very idea of being or substance *per se*. By contrast, the idealist is uniquely poised to prove the reality of the I in intellectual intuition, in which case positing is grounding.

Schelling denies any straightforward entitlement to intellectual intuition in the “Anti-critique” on the grounds that positing a first principle is a mere postulate. But in the

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252 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, 428.
“Letters”, he argues that it is *unliveable*. Reconstructing this argument will show why he thinks the *Wissenschaftslehre* misconstrues a philosophical system’s livability.

In the Eighth Letter, Schelling says “[w]e all have a secret and wondrous capacity for withdrawing from temporal change into our innermost self, which we divest of every exterior accretion. There, in the form of immutability, we intuit the eternal in us [...] It is this intuition which first convinces us that anything *is*, strictly speaking, while everything else merely *appears*. Withdrawal is from the mutable to the changeless, from what Spinoza calls “knowledge by causal experience” to the “intuition” of God and from what Fichte calls sensible intuition to intellectual intuition. It is a reflection on unconditionality open to philosophers of any stripe. And yet, it is prone to an error of which we are all capable: *impersonal esotericism*. Schelling acknowledges that positing a first principle is “esoteric” in that it depends on my *personality*. But this act is impersonal if, under the name ‘intellectual intuition’, it claims to realize an unconditioned condition, for this renounces the twofold contingency that attends my personality.

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253 To be sure, Schelling’s argument begins in 1795/6, while Fichte’s engagement with intellectual intuition only blooms in ’97/8 and, moreover, is partially a *response* to this argument. However, Fichte (1964–) uses the term in his ’94 review of *Aenesidemus*, and not in passing. There, it is given its canonical formulation as (a) the I’s being what and because it is, (b) the I’s self-positing, (c) the I’s self-subsistence and (d) the I’s independence, and is contrasted explicitly with (e) a mere logical ground, (f) a thing in itself and (g) a “transcendental idea”. Fichte also says that, through intellectual intuition of the I, we secure (h) the ground of knowledge and do so (i) by the act (rather than mere fact) of its realization (RA, 147, 151). This formulation carries over to the *Foundations’* description of the infinite I the same year (the absence there of ‘intellectual intuition’ notwithstanding) and to the full account of intellectual intuition in ’97/8. It is precisely Fichte’s concern for science in the face of skepticism that he isolates the elements of intellectual intuition in the review; in this connection, see Beiser (2002), 652n36. Thus, we see the term is implicitly central to his project prior to Schelling’s use of it in “Of the I” and attack on it in the “Letters”. We will see in this chapter that Schelling’s relationship with intellectual intuition is uneasy, evinced by his changing estimations of it as deathly, identical with the absolute, a temptation to dogmatism and expressible only aesthetically. Tracking these changes can explain the term’s various appearances (and absences) throughout his career. On this point, I am indebted to conversations with Devin Zane Shaw.

254 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:318.
255 Spinoza (1992), 2P40Sch2.
256 See James’ (1878) response to a transcendental realist of sorts: “your true knowledge and my pious feeling have alike nothing to back them save their seeming good to our respective personalities” (12).
namely, my preference for a principle and my commitment to its realization as a system. Claiming to grasp a point where “the intuining self [das anschauende Selbst] is identical with the intuited”\(^{257}\) disowns what is distinctive of personhood. As Schelling says:

> in the realm of the absolute, none but analytical propositions are valid. Here no laws are observed except the law of identity; here we are concerned not with proof, but only with analyses, not with mediate cognition, but only with immediate knowledge—in short, here all is intelligible. No proposition can be more groundless, by its very nature, than the one which asserts an absolute in human knowledge. Just because it affirms that which is absolute, no further ground can be given for the proposition. As soon as we enter the realm of proofs, we enter the realm of that which is conditioned and, vice versa, entering the realm of that which is conditioned—we enter the realm of philosophical problems.\(^{258}\)

The identity of intuiter and intuited is a relation between an individual and an unconditioned condition in terms of a quality like purposiveness. It is also immediate, lest it be mediated by something else and the condition be conditioned. An immediate relation cannot be proven, for this would mean its mediation by another relation: it transcends proof even while making proof as such possible. But we cannot with certainty grasp this relation by means other than proof, for to transcend the realm of proof is to abandon the realm of the “conditioned” in which persons distinguish themselves in disputation. It is to arrive where “all is intelligible” and nothing problematic—a night in which all cows are black,\(^{259}\) a “quiet desert, into which distinction never gazed”\(^{260}\). This act lies beyond a “field for dispute” and is therefore impersonally—irretrievably—esoteric, a privacy excluded by our struggle for self-

\(^{257}\) Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:319.

\(^{258}\) Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:308-9.

\(^{259}\) Scholars tend to overlook this when citing Hegel (1970, PG, §16) contra Schelling.

\(^{260}\) See Meister Eckhart (1981), 198.
Indeed, by surpassing the form of systematicity, it surpasses our form of life. We are therefore incapable of intellectual intuition as Fichte formulates it, for we could not survive it.

Schelling explicitly likens this intellectual intuition to death:

We awaken from intellectual intuition as from a state of death. We awaken through reflection, i.e., through a forced return to ourselves. But no return is thinkable without resistance, no reflection without an object. We designate as alive an activity directed at objects alone and as dead an activity losing itself in itself. Man ought to be neither lifeless nor merely living. His activity is necessarily intent upon objects, but with equal necessity it returns into itself. The latter distinguishes him from the merely living (animal) being, the former from the lifeless.

Despite the freedom with which we posit a first principle, we are finite. Our finitude consists in part in being reflective creatures. Unlike “merely living” animals, we are aware of ourselves as intentional and thus as both resistant of objects and resisted by objects. Resistance is constitutive of what it is to live a reflective life, to possess and use a formative power for organizing oneself over against one’s surroundings. As Schelling puts it: “activity without any object, an activity to which there is no resistance, never returns into itself. Only through a return to one’s self does consciousness arise.

Compare Collingwood (1969), who reads Aristotle’s distinction between metaphysics and a science of pure being as distinguishing a struggle for wisdom (philosophia) from this struggle’s total satisfaction (sophia). While metaphysics has definite subject matter “logically presupposed by all other sciences”, a science of pure being “would have a subject matter entirely devoid of peculiarities; a subject matter, therefore, containing nothing to differentiate it from anything else, or from nothing at all”. The latter “gives rise to no special problems and no special methods” (5, 14-5).

Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:325. Compare Hölderlin (1982): “the spirit longs to return to the unclouded aether. But there is indeed something in us that prefers to keep the chains; for were the divine within us not constrained by any resistance, we could feel neither ourselves nor others. But not to feel oneself is death. To know nothing and to cease to be are, for us, the same” (lines 134-9).

Compare Schelling (1856-61) in Ages of the World (1811/5): “[t]here is no consciousness without something that is at the same time excluded and contracted. That which is conscious excludes that of which it is conscious as not itself. Yet it must again attract it precisely as that of which it is conscious as itself, only in a different form” (WA, I/8:262).
Only a restricted reality is actuality [Wirklichkeit] for us”. As we will see next chapter, our form of life is more than merely functional, for it makes itself vulnerable by striving after what is absolute, what transcends “the realm of proofs”, of the “conditioned”, “of philosophical problems”. One’s power of judgment, in other words, is drawn to an act with which it is incompatible—the act of grasping an immediate qualitative identity between one and an unconditioned condition by which one would lose oneself as resistant and resisted. Schelling grants that one may profess this identity, as Spinoza and Fichte do. This is why he says one “ought” not to profess it, on pain of feigning lifelessness, an inauthentic play betraying the creativity of naming and articulating an unconditioned condition. Another diagnosis of performative contradiction emerges: whereas Fichte argues that dogmatists practically refute their claim to the primacy of thinghood given their ineliminable subjectivity, Schelling argues that dogmatists and idealists alike refute any claim to intellectual intuition by their ineliminable vitality, that is, by the fact that their form of life is reflective and so constituted by resistance. Theirs is a claim to something unliveable.

Schelling continues:

Intuition as such is usually explained as the most immediate experience; correctly, so far as it goes. Yet, the more immediate the experience, the closer to disappearance. Even sensuous intuition, as long as it is only what it is, borders on nothingness. Should I maintain it as intuition I would cease to be I; I must grasp myself with might in order to save myself from the abyss of intuition. Still, as long as intuition is intent upon objects, that

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264 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:324. Compare Schelling, SP: “Without opposition [there is] no life. Indeed, such [opposition] inheres in man and in all existence” (I/7:435).

265 Matthews (2011) quotes the passage from PBDK about our “secret and wondrous capacity” to support his claim that Schelling affirms intellectual intuition of the divine (65-6). It is telling that this is the only use he makes of the “Letters”, which not only repudiate this claim, but, as I am arguing in Part II, are the source for his continual denial of the act. Matthews’ confinement to Schelling’s commentary on Plato’s Timaeus and the core texts of his identity philosophy go toward explaining this oversight and the non-mortalist reading he gives to the “organic form of philosophy” in Schelling (xii).
is, as long as it is sensuous intuition, there is no danger of losing oneself. The I [Das Ich], on finding resistance, is \textit{obliged} to take a stand against it, that is, to return into self. However, where sensuous intuition ceases, where everything objective vanishes, there is nothing but infinite expansion without a return into self. Should I maintain intellectual intuition I would cease to live: I would go ‘from time into eternity’.\footnote{Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:325. Compare Novalis (1978): “Time can never stop—we cannot \textit{think} away time—for time is the condition of the thinking being—time only stops with thinking” (180). Compare Hölderlin’s letter to Hegel, January 1795: “[Fichte’s] absolute I […] contains all reality; it is everything, and outside of it there is nothing; there is therefore no object for this absolute I, for otherwise the whole of reality would not be in it; but a consciousness without an object is unthinkable, and if I am this object myself, then as such I am necessarily limited, even if it only be in time, thus not absolute; thus there is no consciousness thinkable in the absolute I, as absolute I, I have no consciousness, and to the extent to which I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing, therefore the absolute I is (for me) nothing” (in Frank and Kurz, eds., 124).}

An object impresses itself on me in sensible intuition, a relation I mediate by the conceptual stance I take on it as, say, red. I “return” to myself through my awareness that, while I conceive it in this way, I can conceive it in other ways. Through reflection, then, I grasp myself as taking a stand on something that stands up to me. But since this resistance constitutes my cognitive grasp of the world, sensible intuition under the aegis of concepts is \textit{essential} to my life.\footnote{In this connection, see Larkin’s “Aubade”: “The sure extinction that we travel to / And shall be lost in always. Not to be here, / Not to be anywhere, / And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true […] / And specious stuff that says \textit{no rational being} / \textit{Can fear a thing that will not feel}, not seeing / That this is what we fear […] The anesthetic from which none come round” (in Rowe, ed. (2004), 182).} It blocks an intuition whose immediacy annihilates resistance. Such immediacy defines intellectual intuition, in which the \textit{vital difference} between subject and object vanishes.\footnote{Compare Nietzsche (1989a) on modern natural science as “a means of self-anaesthetic” (§23).} Positing is therefore not grounding because grounding myself in an unconditioned condition is incompatible with \textit{the very idea} of instantiating my form of life.

Notice that being barred from intellectual intuition as Fichte formulates it radically alters his rational distinction between the I and the self who posits it, which was meant to establish the equiprimordiality of infinitude and finitude and thereby avoid the problem
of creation *ex nihilo*. Equiprimordiality must instead be established elsewhere, namely and as the form of systematicity defines, in a *lived tension* between the principle we posit and the system of conditions we produce. Notice also that being barred does not mean I cannot grasp myself as bearing a formative power. For Fichte, this requires intellectual intuition because the alternative is dogmatism and thus nihilism. Schelling's counterargument is that dogmatism rests on just as contingent a decision—an act that boasts only personal authority and instantiates the same form of life as idealism. His point is that only this authentic understanding of positing, not Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition, allows me to grasp myself as bearing a formative power.

Schelling’s critique of Fichte in the “Letters” consists in denying that (1) positing a first principle is an unrivalled act and (2) positing proves the reality of an unconditioned condition. Respectively, these points show that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is neither *uniquely* livable nor liveable *if it rests on Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition*. Having undermined the two claims of Chapter 1, we see that Fichte cannot capture what it is to live one’s system. At best, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is the philosophy of a *life*, not the philosophy of life. To see how Schelling extends (1) and (2) to a critique of German idealism in general, I will track them through the *Freiheitsschrift* beyond. Before I do, I must account for the identity philosophy, Schelling’s absolute idealist phase, in which he *champions* intellectual intuition.269

THE IDENTITY PHILOSOPHY

269 While in the “Letters” Schelling (1856-61) bemoans intellectual intuition as the distinctionless night Hegel famously depicts in the *Phenomenology*, his defense of it in this phase aims to show its *compatibility* with difference: “most people see in the essence of the Absolute nothing but pure night and cannot recognize anything in it; it shrinks before them into a mere negation of difference and is for them something purely privative, whence they cleverly make it into the end of their philosophy […] I want to show here […] how that night of the Absolute can be turned into day for knowledge” (FDSP, I/4:403).
Schelling writes several systematic texts from 1797 to 1800 in an attempt to improve the Fichtean idealism that he had begun to challenge. They come to maturity in the identity philosophy, comprehensively presented in the Würzburg lectures, published as *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* (1804). This phase marks a return to intellectual intuition, not of the I, but of an absolute ground indifferent to both Fichte’s I and Spinoza’s not-I. How is this consistent with his early arguments against its liveability? How does this affect the derivation norm into which he collapses grounding and deduction and the critique/doctrine distinction he restores? How could this be part of a critique of German idealism?

I begin by suggesting that Schelling’s return to intellectual intuition demonstrates a commitment to avoiding one of the threats to which the form of systematicity is in part a response: Agrippan skepticism. He never abandons the project of grounding philosophy in a first principle. This is why intellectual intuition fades only to resurface: its inadequacy represents, not a misadventure, but a problem. Hence Schelling’s fraught relationship with it: he is obsessed yet uneasy, as evinced by his shifting account of it as necessary, unleivable, one with the absolute and, as we will see later this chapter, thwarted by the anarchy of freedom and limited to the expression of a unique longing. His vacillations themselves exemplify our infinite task of capturing what is lost in the attempt at intellectual intuition.²⁷⁰ They bespeak our desire to name that which resists

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²⁷⁰ In a passage critiquing Fichte’s idealism and implicitly aimed at his conception of intellectual intuition, Schelling (1994b), GNP, says: “as the I becomes an *individual* I—which announces itself precisely via the ‘I am’—having arrived, then, at the ‘I am’, with which its individual life begins, it does not remember the path anymore which it has covered so far, for as it is only the end of this path which is consciousness, it (the now individual I) has covered the path unconsciously and without knowing it […] The individual I finds in its consciousness only, as it were, monuments, the memorials of that path, not the path itself. But for that very reason it is the task of science, indeed of the primal science, philosophy, to make that I of
naming, that whose anonymity sustains our longing for it. Thus, I will read intellectual intuition in the identity philosophy in this light and consider its various implications.

The Würzburg lectures begin with a statement of philosophy’s “genuine impulse”: to identify the presupposition on which knowledge rests and “endow this presupposition with its own reality”. The issue is at once epistemological and ontological: to locate the ground of knowledge is to locate a unique existence, in which “the knower and that which is known are the same”. Schelling gives a four-step proof of this presupposition. First, assume subject and object are really distinct, the thought being that “the truth of knowledge” is their “correspondence”. This is untenable, for, in knowledge, subject and object are mutually entailed—the former by the latter as knowing it, the latter by the former as known by it. Neither alone is sufficient to explain correspondence: they are not even modally distinct, but rationally distinct. And they cannot be “united by something outside of knowledge and the known [...for] this would merely amount to an assumption for the benefit of the explanation”. Correspondence is thus an inadequate model for knowledge. Knower and known must be one: “if the consciousness come to itself, i.e., into consciousness, with consciousness [...] Philosophy is, as such, nothing but an anamnesis, a remembrance for the I of what it has done and suffered in its general (its pre-individual) being” (110). Notice that the absence of a path connecting absolute and individual I-ness is the denial of the equiprimordiality of the infinite and the finite—the view Schelling attributes to Spinoza.

Compare Fichte (1964–), GW: “An inability entails (a) a continuance of striving; for otherwise the thing I cannot do would have no existence for myself; it would be altogether out of my sphere; (b) limitation of real activity; hence real activity itself, for what does not exist cannot be limited; (c) that the limiting factor should lie (or be posited), not in me, but outside me; for otherwise there would be no striving. We should then have, not an inability, but an unwillingness. —So this manifestation of inability is a manifestation of equilibrium” (I:289). Compare also Heidegger (1985a): “Longing is the nameless, but this always seeks precisely the word. The word is the elevation into what is illuminated, but thus related precisely to the darkness of longing” (127).

This is in contrast to Beiser (2002), who confines his study of Schelling to his ‘absolute idealist’ phase.

See Schelling (1856-61), SGP: “if knowledge is effected by that which is known, the latter will not be known as it is in itself but strictly by virtue of its effect [...The opposite effect] proves no less incomprehensible. For either the [object] would be absolutely determined by the subject and, independent of the latter, would be nothing at all [...or] it would be something unknown, [similar to] Kant’s thing in itself, something ineffable that, in turn, is but a mere thought” (6:139).
knower and that which is known were to differ, knowledge would be inconceivable, and indeed impossible". Second, they must be one in general—“in all possible situations of knowledge”—lest the threat remain that they differ at some point at which, then, knowledge is impossible. Third, they must be one when the knower-known identity in particular is known, from which it follows that this very identity must know itself. Schelling concludes that this self-knowing entity is “reason. For either reason is at no point knowledge, or it is knowledge of the eternal [and] immutable in knowledge”. If reason knows anything, it knows this identity, which, given its generality and self-referentiality, is just to say reason knows this identity as itself. Schelling therefore calls this identity “the only principle of unconditional and absolute knowledge. By absolute knowledge I mean one where it is not the subject as subject that knows but reason”. What knows absolutely is reason; and what it knows as absolute is itself.

Identifying reason as philosophy’s first principle leads to a retrieval of intellectual intuition. If reason knows the knower-known identity as itself and absolutely, this knowledge is mediated by no other knowledge. It is immediate or intuitive, where what is intuited “cannot possibly be limited and finite” and so cannot be sensibly discrete, but “can only be something infinite, strictly unlimited, and inherently affirmative”. It must be

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275 Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:138-40.
276 Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:141.
277 While this does not support what Gram (1981) calls the ‘continuity thesis’—the false claim that Kant’s idea of intellectual intuition is monolithic and uncritically adopted by Fichte and Schelling—Schelling’s idea of a knowing that is its own object surely echoes Kant’s third doctrine of intellectual intuition as the identity of an act of knowing and its object, on the one hand, and, on the other, does not count as an object’s creation by a knowing “subject”, as Gram suggests (289). See Estes (2010), who argues that Kant’s doctrine is in fact fivefold and that Fichte’s own incorporates two of the doctrines outlined on Gram’s account (170).
278 Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:147.
279 This contrasts with what Schelling (1856-61) calls Fichte’s “subjectivization” of knowledge (SGP, 6:142), according to which the self, by reflecting on her act of knowing, sees that knowledge of the absolute cannot transcend her act. This captures Fichte’s view that the I’s intelligibility is dependent on the self, but ignores the other side of what we saw in Chapter 1 is a rational distinction between the two.
“an intuition of reason or, as it is called otherwise, an *intellectual intuition*. Since reason intuits none other than itself, intellectual intuition is “of reason” in the accusative and the genitive sense.\(^{280}\) *Reason constitutes itself* through intellectual intuition. As Schelling says: “if someone should demand that we communicate the intellectual intuition to him, this would be the same as to demand that reason be communicated to him”.\(^{281}\) Knowledge is only possible in a system whose principle is indubitable because it constitutes knowledge just as such. In other words, reason—what Schelling also calls ‘God’—is affirmed and is its own affirmation if there is knowledge at all.\(^{282}\) Reenlisting intellectual intuition in this manner is the apotheosis of what typically is understood as German idealism and is espoused in texts from the identity philosophy such as *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy* (1802), in which Schelling calls intellectual intuition philosophy’s “first cognition”, one that “snatches the ultimate doubling {of the real and ideal} away from the dualism it inhabits and establishes *absolute idealism* for the partial idealism of the world of appearances”.\(^{284}\)

Schelling’s return to intellectual intuition has several implications. First, it meets the grounding norm of establishing the reality of an unconditioned condition, but also the

\(^{280}\) Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:153-4.

\(^{281}\) Compare Schelling (1856-61), FDPS: “There is not absolute knowledge and outside of this an absolute, but the two are one” (4:404).

\(^{282}\) Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:154.

\(^{283}\) See Schelling (1856-61), SGP: “Just as God generally cannot know or affirm Himself without, in turn, being known by himself as one endowed with knowledge, and *vice versa*, the affirmation of the idea of God, who is the essence of reason, once again also posits immediately the affirmation of this affirmation; the same holds true for any other knowledge posited along with that immediate affirmation of the idea of God; which is to say, that once again we posit immediately with it the knowledge of Him, etc. All infinite regress ceases here. All *true* knowledge, i.e., all rational knowledge, is immediately also a *knowledge of this knowledge*, and if the absolute is the ground and the principle of all truth, I therefore know immediately, when possessing true knowledge, *that* I have such a knowledge; hence, absolute knowledge is possible only in virtue of the idea of God, that is, an absolute knowledge such as requires no further knowledge and affirms itself absolutely and in infinite repetition” (6:173).

\(^{284}\) Schelling (1856-61), FDSP, 4:404.
deductive norm of establishing conditions for a systematically judgeable universe: "[t]he universe is coeternal with God; for only God is by virtue of the eternal affirmation of Himself, i.e., He is only as the universe: God Himself, however, is eternal, hence the universe, too, is eternal". The first task avoids Agrippan skepticism, the second, as we saw, the problem of creation ex nihilo, though neither in isolation: God affirms Himself if anything is judgeable. Like the phase preceding the identity philosophy, then, this collapses Fichte's grounding and deductive norms, but not into a derivation norm of production. The primeval unity of God and universe is no philosophical product, as Schelling asserts, contra his early essays: "it must be generally possible, with regard to all ideas and the absolute in general, to overcome this vain instinct of selfhood, which converts everything into its product". What was formerly vital self-return is now vain self-conceit as Schelling transforms the derivation norm into an intuitive norm according to which one simply does or does not grasp God's self-affirmation. Second, while Schelling remains pluralistic to the extent that knowing the absolute is not exclusive to

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285 Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:177. Compare FDSP: "Just as the preceding remarks clearly illuminate this feature of knowledge: that philosophy is in the absolute, so too they bring to light the whole business and enterprise of philosophy. This lets us see the error of those pictures of philosophy that locate its task: in a derivation, whether from the absolute or from another principle in its place, or in some deduction of the real, appearing world, as such, or of the possibility of experience. For, in the first place, how could philosophy know something derivative or which can be derived, since only the absolute is without qualification? Everything we can know is a fragment of the absolute essence of the eternal principle, only cast in the form of appearance. But philosophy considers only what everything is in itself, i.e., in the eternal [...] If one wanted to say that philosophy still has to exhibit the real world in its immediate possibility: viz., in the necessary and universal laws that determine appearances like the law of cause and effect, I answer, first, that all these laws, far from expressing some true possibility of the things of appearances, are instead truly expressions of their absolute nothingness and insubstantiality" (4:396-7).

286 Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:187.

287 As evident in Further Presentations, Schelling's (1856-61) identity philosophy eschews the pedagogical matter of bringing the student to grasp this unity: "intellectual or rational intuition is something fixed and decided for the philosopher in rigourously scientific construction, something about which no doubt is allowed nor explanation found necessary. It is that which simply and without restriction is presupposed, and can in this respect not even be called the postulate of philosophy [...] The requirement on which every science bases its reality is that what is absolutely cognized by it: the idea, also be the real itself [...] In philosophical construction this point of coincidence is simple, absolute, context-free intellectual intuition" (FDSP, 4:361, 370).
idealists or dogmatists, this comes at the expense of his earlier (and later) notion of productivity. This is confirmed in *Further Presentations*: “[p]hilosophy rests on this point of coincidence between formal absolute cognition [i.e., intellectual intuition] and the absolute itself [i.e., reason], on its cognizing the mode of this coincidence, and on insight into the uniqueness of the point where cognition can be absolutely one with its object.” Cognition is “one with its object” in reason because reason is a self-knowing that, by grounding all particular cognitions, is indifferent to who apprehends it. Third, *contra* Kant, his analysis of the absolute *qua* first principle yields a doctrine or system of knowledge. Fourth and most significant for my purposes, intellectual intuition’s renewed affirmation brings Schelling close to Fichte’s immortalist position:

> By virtue of the self-affirmation of the absolute, whereby the latter eternally conceives the universe in itself and is this universe itself, the particulars of the universe, too, are granted a *double life*, a life in the absolute—which is the life of the idea, and which accordingly was also characterized as the dissolution of the finite in the infinite and of the particular in the universal—and a life *in itself*—which, however, is only proper to the [particular] merely to the extent that it is simultaneously dissolved into the universe, [for] in its separation from the life in God the latter is a mere semblance of life [...] Precisely by virtue of its dissolution into infinite universality, the particular attains an *absolute life* [and] is inherently absolute.

Whereas the “Letters” deride dissolution in the absolute as a waking death, the Würzburg lectures do not. Rather, they echo Fichte’s immortalist distinction between reason’s intrinsic and selves’ instrumental existence, as when Schelling claims that in

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288 Compare Schelling’s letter to Fichte (1997), 3 October 1801: “Because this absolute identity of thought and intuition is the highest principle, it is, if actually understood as absolute indifference, also necessarily the highest being. In contrast, the finite and conditioned being (the individual physical object, for instance) always expresses a specific difference between thought and intuition. Here, ideal and real are obscured by each other. The unobscured indifference of both exists only in the absolute […] In my letters concerning dogmatism and criticism [i.e., idealism], I may have been quite clumsy in expressing that first, still raw, and undeveloped conviction that truth lies on a higher plane than idealism. Nevertheless, I can point to these letters as a very early document of that feeling” (85, 88).

289 Schelling (1856-61), FDSP, 4:369.

290 Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:187.
“reason all subjectivity ceases” and that “it is not me who recognizes this identity, but it recognizes itself, and I am merely its organ”.291 The Schelling of the “Letters” would refuse this disavowal of the personal as unbearable. As we will see later this chapter, the Schelling of the Freiheitsschrift will charge this conception of subjectivity with misunderstanding the very idea of a system. This should indicate that Schelling’s relation to immortalism is a process of attraction and repulsion by which he comes to terms with the untenability of an otherwise desirable project.292 This is to say, as I have been arguing, that his critique of the German idealist project is internal: he is a recovering immortalist precisely because his relationship with intellectual intuition is ongoing and critical.

This gives reason to view Schelling’s identity philosophy, not as a radical break with his earlier claims to intellectual intuition’s unliveability, but as a stage in a process of accepting insuperable limitations on the demands of systematicity.293 Viewed this

291 Schelling (1856-61), SGP, 6:142-3.
292 The first sign that this process is transitioning past the identity philosophy is Schelling (2010), PR: “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 […] The producing agent continues to be the idea, which is the soul insofar as it is destined to produce finiteness and to intuit itself in it. That wherein it becomes objective is no longer the real but rather a pseudo-image—a produced reality that is not in itself real but real in relation to the soul and even then only insofar as it has fallen away from the originary image […] Thus the origin of the finite world cannot be traced directly to the infinite world but must be understood within the principle of causation, which itself is infinite and therefore has only a negative significance: no finite thing can directly originate from the Absolute or be traced back to it, whereby the cause of the finite world is expressed as an absolute breaking-away from the infinite world. This falling-away is as eternal (outside of time) as the Absolute and the world of ideas […] Irrespective of this eternal character of the falling-away and the sensate universe that follows from it, both are merely accidental with regards to the Absolute, for the cause of the falling-away lies neither in the one nor the other but rather in the idea seen under the aspect of its selfhood. The falling-away is extra-essential for the Absolute as well as for the originary image because it does not affect either one since the fallen world is thereby immediately brought into nothingness. In view of the Absolute and the originary image, it is the true Nothing and is only for itself” (29, 48).
293 For an account of Schelling’s initial break from the identity philosophy in 1804, see Bowie’s (1993) account of finitude as the ‘fall’ from the absolute, to which philosophy endlessly attempts to regain access by hazarding symbolic articulations (87-90).
way, it is consistent with his account of finitude and striving in the early essays and account of freedom in the *Freiheitsschrift*. To anticipate Schelling’s transitioning beyond the identity philosophy, consider this statement from the Munich lectures, published as *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (1833/4):

> One does not even yet have [the existence of the universal subject-object in intellectual intuition] as something which is really thought, i.e., as something which has been logically realized; it is rather from the very beginning merely what is wanted; ‘the pistol from which it is fired’ is the mere wanting of that which is, which, though in contradiction with not being able to gain possession of that which is, with not being able to bring it to a halt, is immediately carried away into the progressing and pulling movement, in which being behaves until the end as that which is never realized, and must first be realized.294

We desire to realize an unconditioned condition in intellectual intuition. But this is “mere wanting”—a *wish*.295 Three decades after the identity philosophy, Schelling asserts the simultaneous desirability and impossibility of intellectual intuition in a succinct statement of the deep relation between this impossibility and that of philosophy’s culmination in absolute knowledge—which just is a statement of the identity of the grounding and deduction norms. Of his identity philosophy, he explains that ‘intellectual intuition’ rarely occurs in its earliest presentation because it “was not brought to a conclusion”, whereas a *truly* absolute philosophy “becomes a substance, a *being*, precisely only at the last moment […] Before that it is not something *of which* I have a concept, but is itself only

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294 Schelling (1994b), GNP, 151. This dodges Hegel’s (1970) famous bullet, intended for Schelling’s identity philosophy: “this coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge* […] least of all will it be like the rapturous enthusiasm which, like a shot from a pistol, begins straight away with absolute knowledge” (PG, §27).

295 Compare Nietzsche (1989): “[Philosophers] act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic (in contrast to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest than the philosophers and also sillier—they talk about ‘inspiration’—): while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an ‘inspiration’ or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract—and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact. They are all advocates who do not want to be seen as such; for the most part, in fact, they are sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as ‘truths’” (Part I, §5).
the concept of all being as something which is to come”. And he goes on: “in rejecting intellectual intuition in the sense in which Hegel wants to attribute it to me, it does not follow that it did not have another sense for me, and that I do now still hold it in this sense”. Schelling is clear: intellectual intuition does not realize an unconditioned condition. It signals our longing for the same and so retains the value of a systematic telos. While the term goes missing in many texts after the identity philosophy, its misuse is represented in his subsequent discussions of ‘evil’ and ‘dogmatizing’, each an example of ignoring the impossibility of grasping the absolute.

PERSONAL I-HOOD

The “Letters” show that Fichte misconstrues positing as an actually probative and exclusively idealistic act when in fact it is a decision to enter and entertain a system of one’s choice. Presented as an investigation of human freedom, the Freiheitsschrift transforms Schelling’s account of positing into a theodicy that confronts the problem of evil as our capacity to express our desire for systematicity without humility. I will translate its terms into the language of positing to see what comes of the first two reasons the “Anti-critique” gives for the insufficiency of positing for grounding.

To prove the decisional origin of philosophical systems, Schelling begins the Freiheitsschrift with a dense argument for the compatibility of freedom with systematicity. It dispels the assumption that freedom is “completely incompatible with system, and every philosophy making claim to unity and wholeness should end up with

296 Schelling (1994b), GNP, 152. Intriguingly, Schelling parenthetically remarks that the absolute “is only thought in the last moment (take good note of this expression!)”.
the denial of freedom”\textsuperscript{297}—an assumption that he implicitly recognizes can recommend immortalism.\textsuperscript{298} Schelling argues that since “no concept can be defined in isolation [...] and only proof of its connection with the whole also confers on it final scientific completeness, this must be preeminently the case with the concept of freedom, which, if it has reality at all, must not be simply a subordinate or subsidiary concept, but one of the system’s ruling centre-points”.\textsuperscript{299} This argument’s first premise states that a concept is only holistically definite, determinate in virtue of its place among other parts of a system. An implicit second premise, stemming from Schelling’s original concern with Agrippan skepticism in “Of the I”, is that a system is monistic just if it rests on a first principle.\textsuperscript{300} Schelling infers that freedom is compatible with a system just if it is its first principle. The alternative is a scenario in which freedom is no ‘centre-point’, but mediated by its relation to adjacent concepts in a system and therefore annihilated. A system in which freedom has a place at all is one that begins with the contingent act of positing. Indeed, since to be exhaustive a system must accommodate the concept of freedom, the only possible system is one grounded on freedom.\textsuperscript{301}

\textsuperscript{297} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:336.
\textsuperscript{298} See Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF: “Is there any other way out of this argument than to save personal freedom within the divine being itself [...] to say that man is not outside of, but rather in, God and that his activity itself belongs to the life of God? It is exactly from this standpoint that mystics and religious natures of all times have attained to the belief in the unity of man with God, a belief that seems to accord with the deepest feeling as much as, if not more than, with reason and speculation. Indeed, scripture itself finds exactly in the consciousness of freedom the seal and pledge of the belief that we are and live in God. Now, how can the doctrine necessarily be at odds with freedom, which so many have asserted in regard to man precisely in order to save freedom?” (I/7:340).
\textsuperscript{299} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:336.
\textsuperscript{300} Compare Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF: whether a system is brought to “clarity in human understanding [...] depends on determination of the principle by which man comes to have knowledge of any kind” (I/7:337).
\textsuperscript{301} Compare Heidegger (1985a): “The concept of freedom is not only one concept among others which somehow has its place in the system, too. Rather, if it has any reality at all, it is the dominant central point of the system [...] What good is a system [...] if [we] cannot be an essential point in it?” (20-1, 91).
Schelling’s conclusion reconciles systematicity with freedom, levelling the field for idealists and dogmatists. He remarks in a footnote shortly after how “strange” it is for Fichte to think the *Wissenschaftslehre* can refute Spinozism since each is a “system of reason”.

302 The implication is that a system is a *personal* creation. We saw in Chapter 2 that ‘I-‐hood’ for Fichte denotes “reason as such or in general, which is something quite different from personal I-‐hood”. Impersonal I-‐hood is the eternal activity instantiated by individuals who “ceaselessly die off”. By identifying life, not with this activity, but with the experiential arena in which persons advance systematic cognition, Schelling employs a *personalized* notion of I-‐hood—a *finitized* notion of reason.

We will see in Chapter 4 that his reconception transposes the *Wissenschaftslehre* and Spinozism from *contradictory theses* in an antinomy of systematicity to *contrary attitudes* in an antinomy of desire.

Schelling’s redefinition of I-‐hood supports his specific charge that Fichte must show, “not only that I-‐hood is all, but also the reverse, that all is I-‐hood”. On Fichte’s definition of I-‐hood, he indeed shows both: I fulfil the grounding norm by rising to the level of idealism, proving that I-‐hood is all *qua totality’s ground*; and I begin fulfilling the deductive norm by striving for nature’s moral perfection, proving (endlessly) that all *qua grounded totality* is governed by I-‐hood. But if we reject Fichte’s definition, our task is to

302 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:350n.
303 See Fichte (1964--), WLNM, IV/2:220.
305 Compare Schelling (1856-61), WA, in which he acknowledges Fichte’s organicism—to which he opposes his pluralism: “No doubt, when German idealism emerged in its highest intensification with Fichte, the fundamental thought of the I, that is, of a living unity of that which has being and Being, aroused the hope of an elevated Spinozism that led to what is vital. But that the spirit of the age would have it differently was expressed all too quickly in a manifest way audible to the people. Only the person or the human race is there, namely as the power of representation” (I/8:342).
306 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:352.
show that I-hood is all—by locating personality at the ground of systematicity—and that all is I- hood—by conceiving nature as the contingent production of persons. This, Schelling thinks, is the task we incur by reconciling freedom with systematicity: “making freedom the one and all of philosophy has set the human mind free in general, not merely with respect to itself, and brought about a more forceful change in all divisions of knowledge than any prior revolution”.307 Philosophy’s task is to radicalize freedom, not on behalf of any particular bent of mind, but on behalf of the human mind “in general”. Since this cannot exclude a priori any specific use of freedom, the very idea of systematic philosophy presumes rival grounds, that is, rival freedoms.

Freedom’s radicalization shows that, like the “Letters”, the Freiheitsschrift equates positing with a pre-cognitive act. It also clarifies a contrast Schelling makes between God’s existence and the ground of God’s existence.308 He calls the latter “nature” and says it is “inseparable, yet distinct” from the former.309 But how is God a consequent of nature? And how does God differ from nature? We have seen that Schelling makes a rational distinction between a system and its ground: the latter is unintelligible without the former on pain of creation ex nihilo, the former without the latter on pain of Agrippan skepticism. Applying this distinction, it would seem that God exists as a system in which nature must be said to dwell as its ground.

But if ‘God’ names a system, what nature can be its ground? Insofar as ‘nature’ denotes an essence, we should expect the essence at issue is none other than human

307 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:352.
308 See Schelling’s (1856-61), PUWMF, claim that things have “their ground in that which in God himself is not He Himself, that is, in that which is the ground of His existence” (I/7:358).
309 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:358.
freedom.\textsuperscript{310} Nature is not the mechanism of Spinoza, but what Schelling calls our “dynamic” power as persons, as “free beings acting on [our] own”.\textsuperscript{311} God is accordingly the culmination of human willing, which supplants the position traditionally ascribed to God for the sake of the latter’s realization.\textsuperscript{312} This explains Schelling’s claim that “in the final and highest judgment, there is no other Being than will. Will is primal Being to which all predicates of Being apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence from time, self-affirmation”.\textsuperscript{313} These are predicates of \textit{persons}, who are uniquely capable of positing, that is, of desiring systematcity. Of this capacity, Schelling says that it wants to give birth to God, that is, unfathomable unity, but in this respect there is not yet unity in the yearning itself. Hence, it is, considered for itself, also will; but will in which there is no understanding and, for that reason, also not independent and complete will, since the understanding is really the will in will. Nevertheless it is a will of the understanding, namely, yearning and desire for the latter […] After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy still lies in the ground.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{310} See Heidegger (1985a) on the \textit{Freiheitsschrift}: “If [Schelling’s] inquiry deals with human freedom, this means that it deals with a particular kind of freedom as the nature of true Being in general. The nature of man is in question; that is, one is questioning beyond man to that which is more essential and powerful than he himself: freedom, not as an addition and attribute of the human will, but rather as the nature of true Being, as the nature of the ground of beings as a whole […] Now it is no longer a matter of understanding human freedom as distinguished from nature. As long as this is the intention, thought’s effort moves in the direction of showing that man’s freedom consists in his independence of nature. Beyond that, however, and above all, the much more essential and far more difficult task is to understand man’s inner independence of God. With this line of questioning, freedom slips out of the opposition to nature. The opposition into which freedom now comes is generally lifted out of the level of nature (in its previous sense) up to the relational realm of man and God” (9, 60).

\textsuperscript{311} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:347, 349. Compare Merleau-Ponty’s claim to a “generative principle’ that makes things and the world be […] a principle older than God himself”, after which he adds, “(Schelling)” (in Petzet (1983), 158).

\textsuperscript{312} See Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF: “God must become man so that man may return to God” (I/7: 378).

\textsuperscript{313} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:349-51. As Bowie (1993) shows, the rational distinction between nature and God is “dialectical”: “the ground can only be \textit{as} the ground because God ex-sists on the basis of it: without the difference between itself and God it could not be as itself. As such, God is actually prior to the ground, even as it is in Him as His ground, which he needs in order to be above it as God” (95).

\textsuperscript{314} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:359-60.
We have seen that positing expresses a lack in that it strives to realize an unconditioned condition as a system, that is, as God.\textsuperscript{315} Willing God in this sense is “no understanding” since it is \textit{pre}-judicial—a pre-cognitive decision—but is “of the understanding” because its aim is \textit{judicial}—that is, a system of the \textit{a priori} conditions of judgment. Hence, by “the initial anarchy of nature”,\textsuperscript{316} Schelling denotes positing as an activity with no ground or origin (\textit{arche}) beyond itself, one that garners “rule, order and form” by producing a system of cognition, a consequential God.\textsuperscript{317} It does not begin with proof of a first principle, but, prejudicially, with will and desire.\textsuperscript{318} In respect of \textit{cognition}, then, opposing principles—competing acts of positing—are different shades of the same darkness.

The \textit{Freiheitsschrift} does not mention intellectual intuition. It instead criticizes Fichte for imposing order on our anarchical nature:

The understanding is born in the genuine sense from that which is without understanding. Without this preceding darkness creatures have no reality; darkness is their necessary inheritance. God alone—as the one who exists—dwells in pure light since he alone is begotten from himself. The arrogance of man rises up against this origin from the ground and even seeks moral reasons against it. Nevertheless we would know of nothing that could drive man more to strive for the light with all of his strength than the consciousness of the deep night from which he has been lifted into existence. The effeminate lamentations that what is without understanding is thus made the root of understanding, the night into the beginning of light, indeed rest in part on a misunderstanding of the matter [...] yet do

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{315} See Bowie (1993): “the ground [...] has an inherent lack that it constantly tries to overcome” (100).
  \item \textsuperscript{316} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:361.
  \item \textsuperscript{317} Compare Merleau-Ponty (1968): “It is this wild or brute being that intervenes at all levels to overcome the problems of the classical ontology (mechanism, finalism, in every case: artificialism)—the \textit{Theodicy} of Leibniz sums up the effort of Christian theology to find a route between the necessitarian conception of Being, alone possible, and the unmotivated upsurge of brute Being, which latter is finally linked up with the first by a compromise, and to this extent, the hidden god sacrificed to the \textit{Ens realissimum}” (211).
  \item \textsuperscript{318} Compare James (1878): “we are all fated to be, \textit{a priori}, teleologists whether we will or no. Interests which we bring with us, and simply posit or take our stand upon, are the very flour out of which our mental dough is kneaded. The organism of thought, from the vague dawn of discomfort or ease in the polyp to the intellectual joy of Laplace among his formulas, is teleological through and through. Not a cognition occurs but feeling is there to comment on it, to stamp it as of greater or less worth. Spencer and Plato are \textit{ejusdem farinae} [i.e., of the same flour...] Spencer merely takes sides with the τέλος he happens to prefer [...] He represents a particular teleology” (13)
\end{itemize}
express the true system of today’s philosophers who happily want to make *fumum ex fulgore* [smoke from lightning] for which, however, even the most violent Fichtean impetuosity is not sufficient. All birth is birth from darkness into light; the seed kernel must be sunk into the earth and die in darkness so that the more beautiful shape of light may lift and unfold itself in the radiance of the sun.\(^\text{319}\)

Positing is a prejudicial act “without understanding”, unless nihilism is true and creatures like us “have no reality”. The “light” of cognition shines in the systems we create, but to “strive for the light” critically is to acknowledge the pre-cognitional “deep night” of positing. Those who refuse this insist that philosophy is not driven by the “darkness” or anarchy of our nature, but springs from a “lightning”-bright insight into its ground—those like Fichte (but also Schelling in his identity philosophy phase) who impetuously hold that positing is grounding, that grounding is intellectual intuition and that intellectual intuition is liveable.\(^\text{320}\)

Modifying his comparison of intellectual intuition to death, Schelling argues that philosophical life is driven to construct an illuminating system yet is unable to give its ground “rule, order and form” because this ground is the darkness in which cognitive clarity must “die”.\(^\text{321}\)

As in the “Letters”, Schelling’s position in the *Freiheitsschrift* is that positing neither takes a single form nor sustains intellectual intuition. But while he skirts errors to

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\(^{319}\) Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:360.

\(^{320}\) In a transcript of Fichte’s 1812 Berlin lectures, Schopenhauer complains of when Fichte “went into laborious contortions in order to get behind the ego [...] there is only One Viewing, the ego: and for that reason it is never Viewed” (see Safranski (1990), 141). There is a time when Schelling (1856-61) is just as guilty of impetuosity: “This eternal form [of intellectual intuition], equal to the absolute itself, is the day in which we comprehend that night and the wonders hidden in it, the light in which we clearly discern the absolute, the eternal mediator, the all-seeing and all-disclosing eye of the world, the source of all wisdom and cognition” (FDSP, 4:405).

\(^{321}\) This bears a striking relation to Jacobi’s (1994) “Open Letter to Fichte”, in which he describes the unfathomable mystery of freedom” and claims that “outside the mechanism of nature” he feels “a terrible horror before the nothing, the absolutely indeterminate, the utterly void [...] especially as the object of philosophy or aim of wisdom” (38). Compare Žižek (2007): “[f]or Schelling, then, the primordial, radically contingent fact, a fact which can in no way be accounted for, is freedom itself, a freedom bound by nothing, a freedom which, in a sense, is Nothing” (16).
which Fichte seems to be prone, he apparently commits the error Jacobi credits Spinoza with avoiding: creation *ex nihilo*. How does philosophy’s beginning from an *indeterminate yearning* not instate an unbridgeable gap between it and a determinate system? If our anarchical nature resists determination, how is transition from its indeterminacy to systematic determinations possible? In other words: *why is there something rather than nothing?* Schelling asks this very question in the introduction to the Berlin lectures on the philosophy of revelation, published as the *Grounding of Positive Philosophy* (1841/2). As I will argue in Chapter 4, his answer avoids the apparent error by expounding his third reason for why positing is not grounding, namely, that it consists in the endless production of a system.

We have seen that Schelling’s first two reasons develop despite drastic shifts in his thinking. That they do so via the idea of the form of systematicity, and that this form is the form of human life, is crucial, not only because it shows the *Wissenschaftslehre* incapable of capturing what it is to live one’s system, but because it weakens the foundation of Fichte’s immortalism, thereby reopening for post-Kantian thought the question of the philosophical status of death.
For we are nothing but the husk and the leaf.
Great death, that each within him bears,
Is the fruit around which all revolves.
—Rilke, The Book of Poverty and Death

A COLLISION IN US

Schelling’s argument that the *Wissenschaftslehre* fails to capture a philosophical system’s liveability guides his trajectory from Fichte’s acolyte to internal critic of German idealism. It undermines Fichte’s Jena view that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is uniquely livable with the charge that life is not an unconditioned condition, but an experiential realm in which persons postulate first principles. We should expect such a charge to recommend mortalism as the affirmation of death’s unconditionality. I will argue that Schelling’s critique of Fichte’s idealism recommends just this by asking: how does death put us **into question**, that is, how does death individuate living a finite rational life? Answers will emerge from assessing the development of Schelling’s third reason why positing is not grounding, namely, that it consists in the endless production of a system. It will turn out that, while the first two reasons undermine Fichte’s argument for intellectual intuition, the third undermines his argument against Kant’s idea of the thing in itself, allowing for that idea’s rehabilitation. In Chapter 5, I will parallel the latter with Heidegger’s mortalist conception of death in order to solve two antinomies left unsolved by the failure of German idealist immortalism.

Before assessing the third reason, I want to remove the worry that Schelling’s idea of a form of systematicity commits the same error the “Letters” attribute to Fichte,
namely, the error of deciding a philosophical matter prior to our “practical decision”\textsuperscript{322} on it. By effectively legislating idealism to would-be systematic philosophers, Fichte fails to see that positing can have no necessary form. Does the form of systematicity similarly impose a constraint? Surely we can live without positing a ground and striving for a system. Schelling grants this when, after saying everyone “must be interested in the question of the highest principle of all knowledge”, he admits there are “people who have lost all interest in truth”\textsuperscript{323} and so will not accept this claim. We are capable of devaluing truth and living unexamined lives. But the form of systematicity is \textit{normative}. It outstrips Fichte’s claim—that we rise to better or worse levels of \textit{idealism}—by claiming that we can engage \textit{the activity of judgment} well or poorly, given the criterion it sets.\textsuperscript{324}

To accept this claim, we need only acknowledge our cognitive \textit{hunger}.\textsuperscript{325} The claim merely urges us to see ourselves as compelled by a combination of nihilism, Agrippan skepticism and empty formalism to think and act systematically. Far from restricting the

\textsuperscript{322} See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:312-3.
\textsuperscript{323} Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:153.
\textsuperscript{324} The freedom this normative claim legislates is not the indifferent liberty to contradict reason, which Kant calls an “inability” (GMM, 6:227), but has the rational structure of a life enacted among competing accounts of that very structure. See Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF: “For the common concept of freedom, according to which freedom is posited as a wholly undetermined capacity to will one or the other of two contradictory opposites, without determining reasons but simply because it is willed, has in fact the \textit{original undecidedness of human being as idea} in its favour; however, \textit{when applied to individual actions}, it leads to the greatest inconsistencies. To be able to decide for \textit{A} or \textit{~A} without any compelling reasons would be, to tell the truth, only a prerogative to act entirely irrationally and would not distinguish man in exactly the best way from the well-known animal of Buridan which, in the opinion of the defenders of this concept of free will \textit{[Willkür]}, would have to starve if placed between two piles of hay of equal distance, size and composition (namely because it does not have this prerogative of free will)” (I/7:381, italics mine). Human freedom \textit{a priori} has no essence—hence has no definitive \textit{Wille}—but is only manifest in the course of normatively living it—hence is incompatible with \textit{Willkür}.
\textsuperscript{325} Compare Collingwood (1969): “When one becomes aware of effort, one becomes aware of a mental hunger that is no longer satisfied by what swims into one’s mouth. One wants what is not there and will not come itself. One swims about hunting for it” (37).
freedom of decision, it *elicits* it.\textsuperscript{326} Moreover, the claim elicits a *plurality* of decisions since it is made, not in isolation, but through another’s summons to be philosophical.\textsuperscript{327}

This avoids the above worry, but invites the objection that it is a paradox to be moved by both skepticism and systematicity. On the one hand, we acknowledge that we cannot justify our first principles, which would be to condition first acts. We therefore can never fulfil the grounding norm and attain Fichte’s post-skeptical attitude. On the other hand, we cannot abandon the project of philosophy’s systematization, which would be to refuse to derive a justification for our first principles. Freedom’s contingency burdens us with skeptical despair even while its productivity spurs us on with systematic hope. Can we make sense of a simultaneously despairing and hopeful response to the normative claim in the form of systematicity? We can if we see how this response reflects two features of our formative power. First, it can systematically organize our thought and action in accord with certain rules. Second, it can disclose the arbitrariness of our commitment to *just these* rules. These features reveal a paradox: we are capable of treating our rules with seriousness and grasping how this seriousness is arbitrary.\textsuperscript{328}

But it is because this paradox results, “not from a collision between our expectations and the world, but from a collision within ourselves”\textsuperscript{329} that being moved by systematicity and skepticism is no more objectionable than any other feature of our

\textsuperscript{326} Compare Cavell (2003a): “To say ‘Follow me and you will be saved’, you must be sure you are of God. But to say ‘Follow in yourself what I follow in mine and you will be saved’, you merely have to be sure you are following yourself” (32). We can hear Fichte in the first instruction, Schelling in the second.

\textsuperscript{327} Contrast Heidegger (1996): “In the call of conscience, what is it that is talked about—in other words, to what is the appeal made? Manifestly, Dasein itself. This answer is as incontestable as it is indefinite [...The] call ‘says’ *nothing* which might be talked about, gives no information about events. The call points *forward to* Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being, and it does this as a call which comes *from* uncanniness” (272).

\textsuperscript{328} Compare Nagel (1971), 719.

\textsuperscript{329} See Nagel (1971), 722.
formative power. We will see in this chapter that Schelling employs the idea of a collision in us in order to support his third reason for denying that positing is grounding.

We can now turn to examine how Schelling uses the form of systematicity to develop a Fichtean idea—that positing a principle commences its endless production as a system—from a non-Fichtean standpoint that purports neither to refute dogmatism nor to achieve intellectual intuition. I will begin, as in Chapter 3, with the “Letters”.

A COMMON TRANSITION

We saw the “Letters” recast the opposition between dogmatism and idealism by showing that positing is a contingent and prejudicial act. And we saw them substitute Fichte’s account of systematicity with a multiply instantiable form that sets our common task as the derivation of a system of \textit{a priori} conditions of experience. I will reconstruct from the “Letters” Schelling’s three-step argument for why this task cannot be complete.

The first premise holds that judgment seeks to realize an unconditioned condition as a system of cognition. It occurs as part of the normative claim contained in the form of systematicity. As we saw in Chapter 3, realizing a system is necessary on pain of creation \textit{ex nihilo}, a problem of which Schelling is aware via Jacobi and which, like a formative power possessed but unused by an organism, threatens empty formalism. The second premise is that judgment presupposes the resistance between subject and object that constitutes reflective life, a premise for which Schelling has a sub-argument.

\footnote{This is likely to cause some anxiety. As Žižek (2007) reads him, Schelling defines anxiety as “when a subject experiences simultaneously the impossibility of closing itself up, of withdrawing fully into itself” in systematic closure, “and the impossibility of opening itself up, admitting an Otherness” or resistance to a system’s purview that only honest skepticism reveals (24).}
First, the contingency of which first principle one posits extends to the validity one generates for it through the derivation of a system. In the Ninth Letter, Schelling says the “whole sublimity of [one’s] science has consisted in just this, that it would never be complete. He would become unbearable to himself the moment he came to believe that he had completed his system. That very moment he would cease to be creator and would be degraded to an instrument of his own creature”.\footnote{Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:306. Hegel’s (1970) argument for completion derives from his immortalism. In the Preface to PG, he says reason can be raised to a “completely determined” system of truth and so “can lay aside the title of ‘love of knowing’ and be actual knowing” (§§5, 13), arguing that the necessity of this aim is identical with its “accomplishment” because its “result is the same as [its] beginning” (§8). In other words, reason’s origin is a purpose containing its own actuality (§22). Here we see life’s unconditionality: nothing outstrips a purposive activity that actualizes its own end. Removing the thought that death is our “absolute Lord” (§194), Hegel says: “the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it” (§32). No dismemberment by negation is unliveable for reason. Hegel likewise conceives reason’s activity in the Science of Logic (1812/3) in terms of life, defined as that whose “self-directed purpose, has its means within it and posits it as its means, yet is immanent in this means and is therein the realized purpose identical with itself” (WL, 12:177).}

This states the main argument’s conclusion—the incompleteness of producing a system—while contributing its sub-argument’s first premise: a system is one’s own creation. If so, one cannot claim that one’s system is fully realized without disowning one’s role in realizing it. Such a finished product would be conditioned by nothing, not even one’s creative activity. It would be absolutely necessary and so condition unconditionally.\footnote{Compare Schelling (1856-61), PBDK: “if I presuppose the absolute as object of my knowledge, it exists independently of my causality. Its causality annihilates mine. Whither shall I flee from its power?” (I/1:334). One may defend completion by distinguishing a system’s conditioned act from its unconditioned content and claiming the latter achievable. But either this content explains this act unconditionally and so explains it away or it cannot explain this act and so is not unconditioned.} Schelling’s point is that it is a performative contradiction to claim to create what would undermine our creation of it. He says: “every system bears the stamp of individuality on the face of it, because no system can be completed otherwise than practically, that is, subjectively”.\footnote{Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:304.}

An absolutely true theory would, per impossibile, be independent of the subjective
interest and effort that sustain it. We saw in Chapter 3 that positing does not fulfil a grounding norm: it is *groundless*, a free act that must generate its validity by fulfilling the derivation norm. If, as the present argument aims to show, this norm cannot be fulfilled, the production of a system of conditions will never derive the necessity of its beginning. That is, it will never be more than a provisional response to Agrippan skepticism—it will never be more than *hypothetically* justified. It is therefore out of respect for human freedom that Schelling assigns to skepticism an essential philosophical function in the Fifth Letter:

> [t]he highest dignity of philosophy is precisely to expect everything of human freedom. Hence, nothing can be more detrimental to philosophy than the attempt to confine it in the cage of a system universally valid by theory [...] Accordingly, how much more merit, on behalf of true philosophy, lies in the skeptic who declares war in advance upon every universally valid system [...] Who would not respect in the skeptic the true philosopher as long as he remains within his own boundaries? that is, as long as he does not on his part encroach upon the realm of human freedom, as long as he believes in infinite truth yet also in its merely infinite pleasure, in a truth which we obtain ourselves, progressively.334

To avoid nihilism, we must not infringe on the contingency that constitutes personhood. But, in this, we must remain critical of the truth of our system of choice.335

Second, the freedom on which philosophical thinking rests and the necessity at which it aims *coincide* in a realized system. As Schelling says, he

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334 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:306-7. Contrast the identity philosophy: "skepticism will never find any weapons against speculation or absolute cognition except those derived from commonsense or relative knowledge. It must impugn the reality of those weapons, since they are not only objects of its doubt but are unconditionally rejected by it. Related in this way, skepticism and philosophy can never coincide. The former stands to the latter as its absolute privation, almost the way darkness stands to light: for the light, darkness simply does not exist and is immediately abolished by it" (FDSP, 4:366).

335 The intersection of nihilism, skepticism and incompleteness sets Schelling apart from Fichte. Whereas Fichte thinks we overcome both nihilism and skepticism by meeting the grounding norm as idealists, Schelling thinks it unwittingly nihilistic to suppose we are capable of meeting the grounding norm, casting it as an incompleturable derivational task we only meet under permanent threat of skepticism and nihilism.
who has reflected upon freedom and necessity has found for himself that these two principles must be united in the absolute: freedom because the absolute acts by unconditional autonomy, and necessity, because it acts only according to the laws of its own being, the inner necessity of its essence. In the absolute there is no longer any will that could have reality independently of those acts. Absolute freedom and absolute necessity are identical [...] The absolute, if represented as realized (as existing), becomes objective; it becomes an object of knowledge and therewith ceases to be an object of freedom. And nothing is left for the finite subject but to annihilate itself as subject in order to become identical, through such self-annihilation, with that object. 

While a realized system’s unconditionality illustrates its “inner necessity”, its being conditioned by nothing illustrates its inner freedom. It “ceases to be an object of freedom” for us, then, by ceasing to be something to do. It would unconditionally condition one who would produce it. This is why Schelling uses the language of annihilation to describe this conditioning: the identity of necessity and freedom resolves the tension of living a life that begins in anarchy and strives for ‘rule, order and form’. This identity, of course, defines Fichte’s notion of intellectual intuition, an unlivable act that effaces the resistance between an organism and its environment. We are therefore led to infer from these two sub-premises the main argument’s second premise that the activity of judgment presupposes the resistance constitutive of reflective life.

Finally, we infer from this and the first premise that judgment seeks what is beyond life, what transcends our humanness. It is the activity of leaping, not out of a

337 See Fichte (1964-), VDWL: “idealism proceeds from a single fundamental principle of reason [i.e., intellectual intuition], which it demonstrates directly in consciousness. In so doing it proceeds as follows. It calls upon the listener or reader to think a certain concept freely; were he to do so, he would find himself obliged to proceed in a certain way. We must distinguish two things here: the required mode of thinking—this is accomplished through freedom, and whoever does not achieve it with us will see nothing of what the Wissenschaftslehre reveals—and the necessary manner in which it is to be accomplished, which latter is not dependent on the will, being grounded in the nature of the intellect; it is something necessary, which emerges, however, only in and upon the occurrence of a free action; something found, though its discovery is conditioned by freedom” (445).
system that threatens to annihilation, but into a system of one's making, with the awareness that one's life project aims at what is unliveable.\textsuperscript{338} Thus, Schelling later lauds Jacobi for recognizing "the true character of all modern systems, namely, that they, instead of offering us what we really desire to know, and, if we want to be honest, alone consider it is *worth* the effort to know, offer only a tiresome substitute, a knowledge in which thought never gets beyond itself and only progresses within itself, whilst we really desire to get *beyond* thinking, in order, via that which is *higher* than thinking, to be redeemed from the torment of thinking".\textsuperscript{339} As the pinnacle of validity and the silencing of skepticism, a realized system would *relieve* us of striving. But it is because we strive for it that it is neither trivially unliveable nor a mere demise. Its systematic significance is what gives value to philosophical striving.

In the Third Letter, Schelling says:

[i]f we had to deal with the absolute alone, the strife of different systems would never have arisen. Only as we egress from the absolute does opposition to it originate, and only through this *original* conflict in the human spirit does any opposition between philosophies originate. And if there should ever be success, not for the philosophers indeed, but for man, in an attempt at leaving this field into which he entered by egressing from the absolute, then all philosophy, *and the field itself*, would cease to be. For that field comes about only through that opposition and the field has reality only as long as the opposition lasts.\textsuperscript{340}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{338} Compare Kierkegaard (2009): "when Jacobi discovers to his *horreur* that Lessing is really a Spinozist, he speaks out of total conviction. He wants to sweep Lessing off his feet. Lessing replies: ‘Good, very good! I can use all of that, but I cannot do the same with it. Altogether I quite like your *salto mortale*, and I see how a man with a good head can lower his head in a somersault in this way to get going; take me along, if at all possible’. Here Lessing’s irony comes out superbly, aware as he presumably is that when you are to leap you must surely do it alone, and also be alone in properly understanding that it is an impossibility. One has to admire his urbanity and his liking for Jacobi, and the conversational skill that so politely says: ‘take me with you, if at all possible’" (86).}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{339} Schelling (1994b), GNP, 167.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{340} Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:293, italics mine. Compare Rosenzweig (2005): “The fear of the earthly should be removed from [man] only with the earthly itself […] And philosophy dupes him of this should when around the earthly it weaves the thick blue haze of its idea of the All. For clearly: an All would not die, and in the All, nothing would die” (10).}
\end{footnotes}
This passage restates Schelling’s anti-Fichtean conception of life. The dispute over the correct system can only arise because we lack access to its “absolute” ground, that is, only in a “field” of dispute. From the perspective of the disputants, this field just is life. And life is incompatible with the dispute’s resolution, for the absolute would resolve the tensions that constitute life as “the realm of that which is conditioned”. It would amount to death. The impossibility of completing a system’s realization accordingly signals the diminished conditioning power of the concept of life.

Further evidence that Schelling conceives of death as completeness lies in the Eighth Letter when he identifies the activity of judgment’s satisfaction with its cessation: “with absolute freedom [which is identical with absolute necessity] self-consciousness is unthinkable [...] The supreme moment of being is, for us, transition to not-being, the moment of annihilation. Here, in this moment of absolute being, supreme passivity is at one with the most unlimited activity”. The coincidence of “unlimited activity” and “supreme passivity” is the mark of a realized system and so the satisfaction of the activity of judgment. It marks, Schelling says, our “transition to non-being”, our passing from existence to death. This, we have seen, is why the coincidence point is unliveable. Moreover, according to the form of systematicity, the “absolutely inevitable” presupposition is that all systems “are intent upon the dissolution of that contrast between subject and object, upon absolute identity”. Such is an identity that, “no longer

341 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:308. Compare Heidegger (1996): “This structural factor of care tells us unambiguously that something is always still outstanding in Dasein which has not yet become ‘real’ as a potentiality-of-its-being. A constant unfinished quality thus lies in the essence of the constitution of Dasein. This lack of totality means that there is still something outstanding in one’s potentiality-for-being [...] As long as Dasein is as a being, it has never attained its ‘wholeness’. But if it does, this gain becomes the absolute loss of being-in-the-world. It is then never again to be experienced as a being” (236).
342 Compare Novalis (1997): “Life is the beginning of death. Life is for the sake of death” (Miscellaneous Observations §15).
343 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:324-5, italics mine.
limited by objects”, is “no longer accompanied by consciousness”. Hence, it entails the “self-annihilation” of the judge. Again, the absolute would relieve us of our systemic desire. It is our ending and our end, that for which we lead a philosophical life.\(^\text{345}\)

Schelling’s three-step argument for why the activity of judgment seeks annihilation elaborates his third reason why positing is not grounding, for it shows why a system’s completion cannot be experienced. Casting philosophy’s systematization as a process of striving to overcome finitude, it lets us conceive death in a register at which it is not judgment’s obstacle, but its goal—where the goal is to have lived a kind of life, namely, one in which the derivation norm is fulfilled. Since this cannot be lived, death is revealed as the guiding ideal of judgment: it puts the existentially valuable life into question, leaving it there as long as it is lived. A result of this that I will explore in Chapter 5 is that death is not passively suffered, but achieved by a certain way of living.

AGAINST DOGMATICISM

The three-step argument for why judgment seeks death is the first account after the “Anti-critique” of the third reason why positing is not grounding. Its conclusion is that positing commences a creative process for which there is no livable completion.\(^\text{346}\) The

\(^{344}\) Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, l/1:327.

\(^{345}\) Contrast Aristotle (1991): “the poet was carried away when he made the ridiculous statement ‘he has an end, for the sake of which he was born’. For not every last thing tends to be an end, but only the best” (Physics, 2.2).

\(^{346}\) See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK: “Philosophy, an admirable word! If I may have a vote, I will cast it for the retention of this old word. For, as far as I can see, our whole knowledge will always remain philosophy, i.e., always merely progressing knowledge, the higher or lower degrees of which we owe only to our love for wisdom, i.e., to our freedom. Least of all would I wish to have this word removed by a philosophy that has for the first time undertaken to save the freedom in philosophizing from the presumptions of dogmaticism, by a philosophy which presupposes the self-achieved freedom of the spirit, and which, accordingly, will be eternally unintelligible to every slave of system” (l/1:307n). Contrast Hegel (1977), PG: “To participate in the collaborative effort at bringing philosophy nearer to the form of science—to bring it nearer to the goal where it can lay aside the title of ‘love of knowledge’ and be actual knowledge—is the task I have set for myself” (§5).
lived significance of its conclusion is that philosophy is a project our role in which we cannot disown. In organicist terms, the use and possession of our formative power is coextensive with the incompleteness of our self-organization. In terms of the form of systematicity, our instantiation of our form of life is incompatible with the vindication of our preferred system. In a slogan: death is certain, life is not.

Schelling’s conclusion to this argument sheds light on his final claim in “Of the I” that the “unity” of an absolute doctrine is regulative, not constitutive. The claim occurs in a passage stating that our “highest vocation” is “to turn the unity of aims in the world into mechanism, and to turn mechanism into a unity of aims”.\textsuperscript{347} If aims are purposive, a unity of aims assumes idealism, while the systematic denial of purposes is the thesis of mechanism, which assumes dogmatism. If our vocation is to combine these systems, we must look to the goal to which both tend. In the Ninth Letter, Schelling says “realism, [i.e., dogmatism] conceived in its perfection, necessarily and just because it is perfect realism, becomes idealism. For perfect realism comes to pass only where the objects cease to be objects, that is, appearances, opposed to the subject—in short, only where the representation is identical with the represented objects, hence where subject and object are absolutely identical”.\textsuperscript{348} Both systems aim to resolve deep divisions. But if that goal removes their very opposition, it can be no more one system’s perfection than another’s: it can be no more idealistic than dogmatic.\textsuperscript{349} And since it is unliveable, it is

\textsuperscript{347} Schelling (1856-61), VIPP, I/1:242.
\textsuperscript{348} See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK I/1:330.
\textsuperscript{349} Compare Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF: “it is entirely the same for pantheism as such whether individual things are in an absolute substance or just as many individual wills are included in a primal will. In the first case, pantheism would be realist, in the other, idealist, but its grounding concept remains the same. Precisely here it is evident for the time being that the most profound difficulties inherent in the concept of freedom will be just as little resolvable through idealism, taken by itself, than through any other partial system” (I/7:352, italics mine).
unknowable. It therefore demands a form of representation that guides judgment but remains cognitively empty. It requires a regulative principle.

A regulative principle guards against transgressing epistemic boundaries: “[idealism] can be spared the reproach of enthusiasm just as little as can dogmatism, if, like the latter, it transcends the vocation of man and tries to represent the ultimate goal as attainable.” This implies that idealists and dogmatists are equally capable of leading the philosophical vocation authentically, namely, by resisting the urge to believe that positing a first principle secures cognition. Accordingly, Schelling distinguishes both idealism and dogmatism from “blind dogmaticism [Dogmaticismus], which uses the absolute as a constitutive principle for our knowledge”. This term co-refers to what, in the Grounding, he calls ‘dogmatizing’, the error of attempting to prove existence from a mere concept. It therefore sets a very important precedent for understanding Schelling’s developing internal critique of German idealism.

If completeness is impossible in my lifetime, nothing legitimates my intolerance of others’ systems, which would exceed my mortal means. This does not warrant relativism since tolerating a plurality of systems is consistent with fallibility and critical dialogue. And discourse is non-negotiable in striving for systematicity; as the form of systematicity shows, being with others plays an essential role in creating one’s system.

Positing a first principle, furthermore, is an act arising in the experiential situation of

351 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:333. He immediately adds: “while dogmatism uses it merely as a constitutive principle for our vocation” (italics mine). Our vocation is to strive for a cognition that dogmaticism appropriates illegitimately. Distinguishing idealism and dogmatism from dogmaticism as regards cognition helps to sharpen Schelling’s claim that which of the former we choose “depends on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired” (308), where freedom is a matter of decision.
352 Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:82.
coming to lead a certain life. Just as essential to this activity, then, is *being in the world*, as our form of life also shows.\textsuperscript{353} Thus, we see that Schelling’s statement against dogmaticism follows from his reflection on the social and worldly constraints on the freedom with which we can take on a systematic project.\textsuperscript{354} In the next section, we will see how the Freiheitsschrift’s account of the third reason why positing is not grounding expands this reflection: insofar as fulfilling the derivation norm is impossible, philosophy can at base only demonstrate its desire for a system. Schelling’s driving concern in this text will be our capacity to express this desire without humility.

**THE ANTINOMY OF DESIRE**

The “Letters” give a three-step argument for why positing begins an endless process of production. We can reconstruct another three-step argument for this from the Freiheitsschrift. This will show that Schelling not only rejects Fichte’s *solution* to the antinomy of systematicity, but alters its component theses to create what I will call the antinomy of desire. Diagnosing this antinomy is his attempt to solve the problem of theodicy by showing that good and evil are expressions of our desire for systematicity. We will see that Schelling’s solution to the antinomy further diminishes the conditioning power of the concept of life.

\textsuperscript{353} See Schelling (1994b), GNP: “the external world is admittedly only there for me insofar as I myself am there at the same time and am conscious of myself (this goes without saying), but it was also evident that, conversely, the moment I am *there* for myself, I am conscious of myself, with the statement ‘I am’, I also find the world as already being—there, thus that the *already conscious* I cannot possibly produce the world” (190). Compare Heidegger (1996): “As long as Dasein is a being, it has never attained its ‘wholeness’. But if it does, this gain becomes the absolute loss of being-in-the-world” (236).

\textsuperscript{354} Compare Heidegger (1985a): “As *freedom*, man’s freedom is something unconditioned. As *man’s* freedom it is something finite. Thus, the question lying in the concept of human freedom is the question of a finite unconditionedness, more explicitly, of a *conditioned unconditionedness*, of a dependent independence (‘derived absoluteness’)” (71).
The first premise is that, at base, the activity of judgment ultimately expresses a particular kind of desire. Two premises form a sub-argument for this premise.

First, a system is only possible if it rests on freedom. Otherwise, its concept is determined by its relations to other concepts within that system and so is annihilated.\textsuperscript{355} Second, freedom assumes a definition of I-hood according to which a system is not an impersonal creation, but originates in my creative will. Schelling says that in nature there is not simply pure reason but personality and spirit [...] otherwise the geometrical understanding that has ruled for so long would have long ago had to penetrate into nature and prove its idol of general and eternal natural laws to a greater degree than has occurred thus far, whereas it has had to recognize the irrational relation of nature to itself rather more every day. The creation is not an occurrence but an act.\textsuperscript{356}

We saw last chapter that the \textit{Freiheitsschrift} interprets the activity of judgment as originating in the anarchy of the will. In contrast to geometric thinking, which derives knowledge from fixed definitions and axioms, the will is a groundless ground expressing a desire that \textit{drives the very use} of reason. In giving rationality its \textit{value}, the will cannot but imbue its creation with personality. The necessity of its creation is not geometric, then, but rather is \textit{contingent} on the decision from which it begins—for example, a Spinozist’s decision to derive proofs for propositions from given definition and axioms.\textsuperscript{357} By radicalizing the creative dynamism of persons, Schelling can claim that the “highest striving of the dynamic mode of explanation is nothing else than this

\textsuperscript{355} See Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:336.
\textsuperscript{356} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:482-4.
\textsuperscript{357} Compare Gabriel (2009) on the contingency of necessity: “We are always confronted with the higher-order problem as to how to determine the necessity or contingency of a given framework which allows for necessary statements. If we are to assert that a given framework F is necessary then we \textit{ipso facto} have to rely on another framework F* which allows for the quantification over frameworks. Whenever we record the existence of a framework and thereby quantify over a certain object domain, we generate a set of background assumptions (axioms) which ascertain the conditions for there being an object in the relevant domain. These assumptions are never accessible within a given framework unless a meta-language is introduced, and this meta-language is itself ‘threatened’ by contingency” (51-2).
reduction of natural laws to mind, spirit and will”. He can also charge that “the God of pure idealism, as well as the God of pure realism, is necessarily an impersonal being, of which the concepts of Spinoza and Fichte are the clearest proofs”, given their subordinations of personhood. We saw last chapter that a personalized notion of I-hood puts the component theses of the antinomy of systematicity on par rather than in contradiction since, on this notion, idealists and realists threaten each other only with rivalry, not refutation. This hints at a new antinomy composed of different theses, which will emerge soon. For now, we can infer from the radicalization of personality the main argument’s first premise that judgment is driven by a groundless desire or conviction of will.

The second premise is that judgment expresses this desire only by a sustained contradiction between freedom and necessity. Notice that parties to the antinomy of systematicity reconcile freedom and necessity by conceptually integrating them. Thus, Spinoza explicates them from the concept of substance: “[t]hat thing is said to be free which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone”. While modes are externally determined, nothing constrains substance. Its freedom consists in necessitating itself in accord with its essence. Likewise, Fichte reconciles freedom and necessity by arguing that idealism

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358 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:484. Compare Heidegger (1985a): “Being also cannot be understood as the brute existence of something manufactured, but must be understood as the jointure of ground and existence. The jointure is not a rigid jungle gym of determinations but [...] presences as will” (135).
359 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:395. Compare Jacobi’s (1994) charge that Fichte’s system is founded on a “will that wills nothing, that impersonal personality, that naked I-hood of the I without any self” (33).
360 Compare Schelling, WAMV, insists: “Common ethical judgment therefore recognizes in every person—and to that extent in everything—a region in which there is no reason/ground [Grund] at all, but rather absolute freedom [...] The unreason [Ungrund] of eternity lies this close in every person, and they are horrified by it as it is brought to their consciousness” (I:93).
361 Spinoza (1992), 1Def7.
calls upon the listener or reader to think a certain concept freely; were he
to do so, he would find himself obliged to proceed in a certain way. We
must distinguish two things here: the required mode of thinking—this is
accomplished through freedom, and whoever does not achieve it with us
will see nothing of what the *Wissenschaf tslehre* reveals—and the
necessary manner in which it is to be accomplished, which latter is not
dependent on the will, being grounded in the nature of the intellect; it is
something necessary, which emerges, however, only in and upon the
occurrence of a free action; something found, though its discovery is
conditioned by freedom.\textsuperscript{362}

Grasping the truth of idealism is free, on pain of dogmatism, but must take the form of a
self-organizing act, namely, intellectual intuition. For Spinoza and Fichte, freedom and
necessity coincide at the system’s ground. But this annihilates the radical contingency
and resistance that define persons, from which Schelling infers that the irresolution of
freedom and necessity conditions the possibility of undertaking systematic philosophy.
In the Preface to the *Freiheitsschrift*, he says it is “time that the higher or, rather, the
genuine opposition emerge, that of necessity and freedom, with which the innermost
centerpoint of philosophy first comes into consideration”.\textsuperscript{363} Earlier, he states that
“without the contradiction of necessity and freedom not only philosophy but each higher
willing of the spirit would sink into the death that is proper to those sciences in which
this contradiction has no application”.\textsuperscript{364} Schelling’s contradiction criterion holds that the
activity of judgment depends on a tension between the freedom of realizing a system

\textsuperscript{362} Fichte (1964–), VDWL, 445.
\textsuperscript{363} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:x.
\textsuperscript{364} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:403. Compare Heidegger (1985a): “the question of the compatibility
of system and freedom […] is not only an ‘object’ of philosophy […] but is in advance and at bottom and
finally the condition of philosophy, the open contradiction in which it stands and which it brings to stand,
brings about again and again […] Philosophy is intrinsically a strife between necessity and freedom. And
in that it belongs to philosophy as the highest knowledge to know itself, it will produce from itself this strife
and thus the question of the system of freedom […] Schelling wants to say we are not philosophizing
‘about’ necessity and freedom, but philosophy is the most alive ‘And’, the unifying strife between
necessity and freedom. He doesn’t just ‘say it’, he enacts this in the [*Freiheitsschrift*]” (57-8).
and the necessity of a realized system, a tension represented by \textit{striving}.\textsuperscript{365} Their resolution accordingly confronts rational life as a “death” in which this activity has been reified into a \textit{monument} to striving—a petrification of personality.\textsuperscript{366}

From these premises we infer that the desire judgment expresses is never satisfied since this would mean the reconciliation of freedom and necessity and so the extinguishing of desire. This illustrates Schelling’s third reason why positing is not grounding, echoing the conclusion in the “Letters” that judgment’s satisfaction is its cessation, the implication again being that the derivation norm is impossible to fulfil.

A new antinomy emerges from this conclusion. First, notice that, insofar as the grounding and deductive norms collapse into a derivation norm, positing a first principle and realizing it as a system are \textit{one and the same activity}.\textsuperscript{367} To desire to prove a ground’s reality \textit{just is} to desire to realize it as a system. Since we can neither prohibit dogmatism nor lay claim to intellectual intuition, this desire will remain \textit{obscure}.\textsuperscript{368}

\textsuperscript{365} Compare Schelling (1856-61), PR: “God is the \textit{absolute} harmony of necessity and freedom”, which “cannot be revealed in individual destinies but only in history as a whole” as “a progressively evolving revelation” (44).

\textsuperscript{366} Compare Schelling’s contradiction criterion with what we may call Gabriel’s (2009) \textit{mythology criterion}: “Reification mistakes its own activity of setting up its world (in the sense of a framework in which determinate things can appear) for the activity of something external to it to the effect that the world appears as the given \textit{par excellence}. The essence of reification is not simple objectification (which is inherent in language itself or, better, is expression itself) but rather the objectification of objectification, i.e., the objectification of the contingent activity of objectifying as necessary [...] This is why the concept of ‘mythology’, my mythology of mythology, can be used as an ideology-critical tool. It is meant to secure the standpoint of an \textit{unrestricted higher-order contingency}. Ultimately, we are not capable of objectifying the conditions of possibility of objectivity. And yet, we create images of those conditions, works of art, science, religion, philosophy, etc., which function to transcend the given limits of determinacy and, by doing so, make their contingency visible” (77-8).

\textsuperscript{367} Compare James (1878): “consciousness itself is not merely intelligent […] It is \textit{intelligent intelligence}. It seems both to supply the means and the standard by which they are measured. It not only \textit{serves} a final purpose, but \textit{brings} a final purpose—posits, declares it. This purpose is not a mere hypothesis—‘if survival is to occur, then brain must so perform’, etc.—but an imperative decree: ‘Survival \textit{shall} occur, and, therefore, brain \textit{must} so perform!’” (15).

\textsuperscript{368} See Gabriel (2009): “If the \textit{only way} to confer meaning on statements is to blindly accept certain things, then this acceptance cannot be seen as an irrational shortcoming. It rather enables rationality without itself being rational” (76).
Hence, for one who desires philosophically, the goal is, not to know some transcendent reality, but to know oneself as *one who would be satisfied*. We have seen why this knowledge is unliveable. And yet it does not saddle us with *sheer unknowability*. Instead, it leaves us within a problematic of hypothetical justification.\(^{369}\)

This problematic assumes we are moved by both skepticism and systematicity, the former a check, the latter a pledge. The space this creates excludes dogmaticism, the view that construes a first principle as constitutive for knowledge, that is, as either cognizable as an unconditioned condition or fit to yield absolute cognition. On this view, skeptical and systematic concerns need not confine us to hypothetical justification because a first principle poses an *epistemic* question, something with a determinable *truth value*. We will see that the *Freiheitsschrift* provides an account of the dogmaticist view through its analysis of evil.

Schelling investigates evil at a *metaphilosophical* rather than an ethical register:

> Since selfhood is spirit [...] it is at the same time raised from the creaturely into what is above the creaturely [...] Since, however, selfhood has spirit [...] self-will can strive to be as a particular will that which it only is through identity with the universal will; to be that which it only is, insofar as it remains in the *centrum* [...] also on the periphery [...] that precisely this elevation of self-will is evil is clarified by the following. The will that steps out from its being beyond nature, in order as general will to make itself at once particular and creaturely, strives to reverse the relation of the principles, to elevate the ground over the cause, to use the spirit that it obtained only for the sake of the *centrum* outside the *centrum* and against creatures.\(^{370}\)

As we saw, we are not mere creatures because our freedom consists in ‘personality and spirit’, that is, in the dynamism of will that grounds ‘pure reason’. But it is because I am

\(^{369}\) Compare Kierkegaard (2009): “a system that is not entirely finished is a hypothesis, whereas a half-finished system is nonsense” (91).

\(^{370}\) Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:363-5.
“above the creaturely” that I am capable of striving to be “as a particular will” what I am
“through the identity with the universal will”. Schelling’s point is that my freedom allows
me to take myself as a particular judge to judge from the perspective and hence with
the authority of a universal judge. I am able, in other words, to conceive myself as a
finite mouthpiece for the infinite. But to attribute this authority to myself as myself is to
assert my qualitative identity with an unconditioned condition or “centrum”. Of course,
this distorts the prejudicial and striving character of positing. And yet the temptation to
impersonal esotericism—to depersonalize one’s creation—shadows every step of
philosophy’s systematization. As Schelling says, the “general possibility of evil consists,
as shown, in the fact that man, instead of making his selfhood into the basis, can strive
to elevate the instrument into the ruling and total will and, conversely, to make the
spiritual within himself into a means”. Evil is my potential for ignoring the fact that my
will is only ideally identical with an absolute or “total will” since as a real identity would
mean my annihilation—my satisfaction, hence my cessation.

We might profess satisfaction along with Spinoza and Fichte. Theirs is a will that
steps out of their nature as particular wills “in order as general will to make [themselves]
at once particular and creaturely”. Theirs is the inauthentic play of what, in the Ninth
Letter, Schelling calls the degradation of oneself to an instrument of one’s creation. Theirs is the actualization of our possibility for evil in the form of dogmaticism.

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371 See Heidegger (1985a): “By elevating itself above the universal will, the individual will wants precisely to be that will […] In this reversal of the wills the becoming of a reversed god, of the counterspirit, takes place […] It is not finitude as such that constitutes evil, but finitude elevated to the dominance of self-will” (143, 145).
372 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:389.
373 See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, I/1:306.
Given freedom’s radical status, we cannot attribute evil to a privation in someone, but must ascribe it entirely to their will. Thus, Schelling says the ground of evil lies “in that which is most positive in what nature contains”. What is most positive is our creative spirit or dynamism. But evil becomes comprehensible once we acknowledge our tendency to express our desire for systematicity without humility: “[t]he arrogance of man rises up against this origin from the ground and even seeks moral reasons against it. Nevertheless we would know nothing that could drive man more to strive for the light with all of his strength than the consciousness of the deep night from which he has been lifted into existence”. A dogmaticist reacts understandably, if illegitimately, to the obscurity of the anarchical ground from which his preferred system originates. It is this “deep night” that provokes his crystal clear report of the reality of this ground and his relation to it. It is “arrogance”, however, to believe this report to be truth-apt.

Harbouring this belief, the dogmaticist locks himself into an antinomy with a skeptic who, like him, thinks a first principle bears a determinable truth value. Whereas he affirms the truth of his preferred principle, his counterpart affirms the falsity of all first principles. These are the component theses to the antinomy of desire. One desires systematicity hubristically, the other despairingly, neither with humility. Both actualize the possibility of evil, for they assume a cognitive standpoint from which our contingent capacity to posit a principle for absolute cognition rests on a ground that, respectively, redeems and renounces this capacity. Both fail to comprehend the first two reasons

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374 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:368.
375 Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:359-60.
376 On the latter, compare Gabriel (2009): “Meillassoux has recently argued for the necessity of contingency: it could not be otherwise than that everything could be otherwise. His goal is to prove that the only necessity is that of contingency: it is necessary that there be no necessary being […] As liberating and welcome as Meillassoux’s avowal of instability and contingency appears at the first glance,
why positing is not grounding: one purports to realize an unrivalled principle while the other deems rivalry moot. Their shared assumption that positing is an epistemic act is the dogmaticist spoiling ingredient that yields the antinomy.

Schelling’s solution is to remove this ingredient—to remind us of the humility demanded by our form of life, which we can only instantiate by living the tension between skepticism and systematicity, by endlessly striving for systematic cognition.\textsuperscript{377} In the terms of the \textit{Freiheitsschrift}, we must express philosophical desire with \textit{goodness}. Evil, Schelling says, “perverts the temperance contained in the good into distemperance [...and] does not follow from the principle of finitude for itself but rather from the selfish or dark principle having been brought into intimacy with the \textit{centrum}”.\textsuperscript{378} We can grasp the temperate and selfless character of goodness by reading this passage alongside the claim that evil, “which, though it never becomes real, yet continually strives toward that end”, is a will that “reacts necessarily against freedom as that which is above the creaturely and awakes in freedom the appetite for what is creaturely just as he who is seized by dizziness on a high and steep summit seems to be beckoned to plunge downward by a hidden voice”.\textsuperscript{379} It is clear why evil “never becomes real”: it is a

\textsuperscript{377} See Kant (1900–), KrV: “a new phenomenon of human reason shows itself, namely a wholly natural antithetic, for which one does not need to ponder or to lay artificial snares, but rather into which reason falls of itself and even unavoidably; and thus it guards against the slumber of an imagined conviction, such as a merely one-sided illusion produces, but at the same time leads reason into the temptation either to surrender itself to a skeptical hopelessness or else to assume an attitude of dogmatic stubbornness, setting its mind rigidly to certain assertions without giving a fair hearing to the grounds for the opposite. Either alternative is the death of a healthy philosophy” (A407/B433-4). Compare Gabriel (2009): “to be human is to oscillate between the subjective and the objective, between the world \textit{sub specie humanitatis} and the world insofar as it is not of our own making” (88).

\textsuperscript{378} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:369, 372.

\textsuperscript{379} Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:380-1.
performative contradiction whereby the living feign an unliveable completion.\textsuperscript{380} Crucially, evil seeks to explain everything, to submit all things to their conditioning reasons and causes, rendering even its own freedom “creaturely”. A dogmaticist’s attitude toward the anarchy of his freedom is accordingly a reaction against his very nature.\textsuperscript{381} Schelling’s response is to prescribe a temperance that resists an arrogant deployment of freedom (the “principle of finitude”) that thwarts the systematic project. His post-Kantian theodicy thus transforms the traditional query over the divine countenance of evil into an analysis of the possibility of philosophical arrogance and its actualization as dogmaticism. Its demand for goodness is an expectation we make on ourselves to view our “identity with the universal” simply as postulated, never as realized.

It is because evil is an imminent threat that humility is an infinite task.\textsuperscript{382} Before we turn to the \textit{Grounding}’s account of this task, recall Schelling’s insight, which brought the antinomy of desire into view, that positing a principle and realizing a system are one and the same activity expressing the same desire. If so, then, from the standpoint of judgment, one’s principle and one’s system are \textit{indistinguishable}. In other words, the object of one’s singular desire is the \textit{selfsame unliveable object}.\textsuperscript{383} This fully

\textsuperscript{380} Compare Kierkegaard (2009): “One who is existing is continually in the process of becoming; the actually existing subjective thinker, thinking, continually reproduces this in his existence and invests all his thinking in becoming. This is similar to having style. Only he really has style who is never finished with something but ‘stirs the waters of language’ whenever he begins, so that to him the most ordinary expression comes into existence with newborn originality. To be continually in the process of becoming in this way is the illusiveness of the infinite in existence. It could bring a sensate person to despair, for one continually feels an urge to have something finished, but this urge is of evil and must be renounced” (73).

\textsuperscript{381} Again, compare Nietzsche (1989a) on modern science as “a means of self-anaesthetic” (§23).

\textsuperscript{382} See Novalis (1978): “There is no philosophy \textit{in concreto}. Philosophy is, like the philosopher’s stone—the squaring of the circle etc.—just a necessary task of scientists—the absolute \textit{ideal of science}” (623).

\textsuperscript{383} See Schlegel (1997): “Some objects of human contemplation—because of what lies in them or in us—entice us to an ever deeper contemplation, and the more we follow this enticement and lose ourselves in them, the more they all are united into a Single Object, which, depending on whether we seek it and find it
undermines the conditioning force of Fichte’s concept of life and hints at the unconditionality of the concept of death, which I will explore in the last section. For now, it is worth noting that, despite the sense we cannot give to the singular object of philosophical desire, we cannot deny that we give it any sense, for it is not merely unknowable. Its absence is significant for us who desire it.\footnote{See Schelling’s (1856-61) Erlangen lectures (1820/1), which prefigure his Berlin lectures’ attack on Hegel regarding reason’s capacity to actualize the absolute: “in man there is no objective bringing forth [of the absolute subject] but rather just ideal imitation [ideales Nachbilden] [...I]n him there is only knowledge [...] The absolute subject is only there to the extent to which I do not make it an object, i.e., do not know it, renounce knowledge” (IPU, 38). Compare Bowie (1993): “The question is really whether we can write off all the aspects of the history of mythology, religion, art and psychoanalysis, which depend upon some such intuited being [as the unconditioned], without repressing much more than we gain in the demonstration of the logical impossibility of knowing or saying anything about it” (105); and (2003): “[t]here seems to be a negative way of representing the absolute, in that the very relativity of the attempt to represent it makes us aware of what is being missed in the attempt” (91).}

THE WORK OF REASON

After the Freiheitsschrift, Schelling remains fixated on the realization of a system and its relation to death. In a letter to E.F. Georgii at Easter, 1811, he writes: “death, which may cause us to curse our dependence on nature and which fills a human soul’s first impression almost with horror against this merciless violence, and which destroys even the most beautiful and best without mercy when her laws demands it, even death, when grasped more deeply, opens our eyes to the unity of the natural and the divine”.\footnote{Schelling (2002), xxx.} The Grounding provides his clearest critique of the conditions for demonstrating this unity, arguing for a double method—the negative method of regressing from existence to its unconditioned condition or first principle and the positive method of progressing inside or outside of ourselves, we characterize as the nature of things or as the destiny of human beings” (118).
through experience to this condition’s realization. We will see that the *Grounding*’s argument for the endlessness of realizing this condition further articulates Schelling’s third reason why positing is not grounding.

In general, the *Grounding* offers an internal critique of the German idealist project as advanced by Fichte and allegedly completed by Hegel. According to Schelling, this project takes itself to have regressed from existence to a principle that is intelligible *without remainder*. But he sees existence as *precisely* its remainder since “there could very well be nothing that exists”. It is not necessary that this principle should condition *anything*, that it *must* have a conditioned. Hence, Schelling enlists a positive method that can *begin* with a conditioned, namely, the fact of existence, and experientially progress from it to a proof of this principle’s reality. But an opposing problem arises: any such proof faces the absurdity of this fact, the absurdity that there is *anything* rather than nothing. We only avoid this dual threat by an endless oscillation of showing, on

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386 Schelling (1856-61), GPP, defines negative philosophy as a “withdrawal back into its limits”, distinguishing it from Hegel’s philosophy, in which the negative “is driven beyond its limits: it does not exclude the positive, but thinks it has subdued it within itself […It] puffs itself up to be the positive, whereas according to its final rationale it can only be negative” (II/3:80).

387 Schelling’s specific attack on Hegel is beyond the scope of this chapter. But I will suggest that Hegel’s first step in the *Logic* is to assume we can answer the question of why there is not nothing simply by thinking of being, whose indistinguishability from nothingness leads to the concept of becoming and so to *something*—a move Schelling will charge with dogmatizing. Moreover, *that* reason moves in the ways the *Logic* describes is perhaps due to its *facticity*, of which it cannot give a prior account. See Heidegger (1985a): “The fact that the necessity of philosophy cannot really be grounded and that philosophy itself can never be attacked is an advantage for its inner nature, but for its external position it is always a disadvantage. Its claim can never get rid of the suspicion of arbitrariness” (10).

388 Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:59. Compare GNP: “Whence [pure knowledge’s] ‘ex-sistence’, i.e., its being outside itself, being outside the one place where it ought really to be, namely, outside the inside? If it is the world-producing principle in this externality, how did it become external?” (176).

389 As Schelling (1856-61) asks: “Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?” (GPP, II/3:7). I am indebted to Paul Franks for noting Jacobi’s formally equivalent formulation of this question. Whereas Schelling asks why there is *not nothing*, given the absurdity that anything exists, Jacobi asks why there is *something*, given the absurdity of supposing that thought captures rather than annihilates existence. One worries that matter is *inexplicable without form*, the other that matter is *explained away by form*. The first question poses a *challenge* to positive philosophy, necessitating its cooperation with negative philosophy, the second issues a *warning* to positive philosophy, imploring its resistance against negative philosophy.
the one hand, that existence is made rational through positing a first principle and, on
the other hand, that this principle is made real through sense experience.\textsuperscript{390}

Notice that the idea of the fact of existence—of matter uninformed by any rational
principle—points to Kant’s idea of the thing in itself—of that which outstrips our forms of
cognition. Schelling does indeed call for a “return to Kant”.\textsuperscript{391} So why do we hear this
from a German idealist? Why return for a student of Fichte who initially sought to move
past Kant’s troublesome idea?

An answer lies in seeing what Schelling’s double method shares with what I will
call Kant’s \textit{epistemic reciprocity}. For Kant, we demonstrate our entitlement to the \textit{a priori}
concepts that condition the possibility of experience by a deduction, which is meant to
answer the question of right or \textit{quid juris}.\textsuperscript{392} But it is in order to answer what I will call
the question of proof or \textit{quid indicii} that we must also show that these concepts apply to
sensation and thereby prove they are real and not empty forms. While the threat of
empty formalism is diagnosed by Maimon—whose \textit{Essay on Transcendental

\textsuperscript{390} Schelling’s late project is to unite both philosophies in order to meet this challenge and heed this warning. \textit{But contrast} Schelling’s mood here with the Würzburg lectures, the most confident point in his relationship with intellectual intuition: “The absolute light, the idea of God, strikes reason like a flash of lightning, so to speak, and its luminosity endures in reason as an eternal affirmation of knowledge. By virtue of this affirmation, which is the essence of our soul, we recognize the \textit{eternal impossibility of nonbeing} that can never be known nor comprehended; and the ultimate question posed by the vertiginous intellect hovering at the abyss of infinity: ‘Why something rather than nothing?’, this question will be swept aside forever by the necessity of Being, that is, by the absolute affirmation of Being in knowledge. The absolute \textit{position} of the idea of God is indeed nothing but the absolute negation of nothingness, and the same certainty of reason that endures the negation of nothingness and thus the nullity of nothingness also affirms the totality and the eternity of God” (SGP, 6:155).

\textsuperscript{391} Compare Schelling’s account of language in the \textit{Philosophy of Art} (1802/3), described by Bowie (1993): “Without the real to strive against there could be no meaning, because language would have no medium in which to exist; at the same time the real has no \textit{reason} to be manifest and […] always poses the question as to how it is that it \textit{is} manifest” (118).

\textsuperscript{392} See Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3: 31-2.

\textsuperscript{392} See Kant (1900–), KrV, A84/B116.
Philosophy (1790) charges Kant’s deduction with begging the question quid indicii and who in correspondence accuses Reinhold of failing to ask it—Kant also detects it. In the Transcendental Doctrine, he says reason proves its principles, not directly from concepts, but rather always only indirectly through the relation of these concepts to something entirely contingent, namely possible experience [...] Thus no one can have fundamental insight into the proposition ‘Everything that happens has its cause’ from these given concepts alone [...] But although it must be proved, it is also called a principle and not a theorem because it has the special property that it first makes possible its ground of proof, namely experience, and must always be presupposed in this.

This passage gives three criteria for proving a principle, such as ‘all events are caused’, and the category on which it rests, such as ‘causality and dependence’. It must be indirect, incomplete and reciprocal. First, a proof relates a principle to possible experience. This is non-negotiable for us who lack direct insight into a principle’s

393 Maimon (2010) argues that to be entitled a priori to a concept “we must put the reality of its use beyond doubt before ascribing reality to it as a form of thought in logic; but the question is not whether we can use it legitimately, which is the question quid juris?, but whether the fact is true, namely, that we do use it with actual objects” (42), which is the question quid indicii. The move is from a question of possession to one of application: having answered the former, a transcendental deduction must answer the latter on pain of empty formalism. As Maimon says in regard to the concept of causality: “determination of the effect by the cause cannot be assumed materialiter [...] though it[...] must rather be assumed formaliter” (27).

394 See Maimon (2000), IV:230n, 239. Contrast Fichte’s confidence in deduction, which in Chapter 2 we saw is post-skeptical. In the Foundations, Fichte (1964–) argues that skepticism about a first principle’s reality “would be no system at all, since it denies the very possibility of any system. But this it can only do in systematic fashion, so that it contradicts itself [...] A critical skepticism, such as that of Hume, Maimon or Aenesidemus, is another matter; for it points out the inadequacy of the grounds so far accepted, and shows in doing so, where better are to be found” (GW, I:121n). By his lights, Maimonian skepticism is instructive, by uncovering inadequate principles for grounding experience, but is itself incoherent.

395 I hope eventually to show that Kant possesses a social logic that anticipates and domesticates Maimonian skepticism, the thought being that, on the one hand, answering the question quid juris requires showing how all judges would ideally judge a purported case of experience and so implicitly assumes the third Critique’s idea of a sensus communis and, on the other hand, the impossibility of a definitive answer to the question quid indicii similarly assumes the impossibility of definitively instantiating that idea understood as an “indeterminate norm” (see Kant (1900–), KU, 5:239).

396 Kant (1900–), KrV, A736-7/B764-5.
significance. Second, a proof cannot be given from concepts alone, but depends on the matter we receive in sensation. It is because its experiential *relatum* is “entirely contingent” that the relation in a proof is never complete. Third, since a principle makes possible the experience to which it relates in a proof, the relation is reciprocal. A principle both grounds and depends on its proof such that, while a series of causal conjunctions lends proof to the principle ‘all events are caused’, it is only of causal conjunctions on the assumption of this principle. Like wind rustling wheat, the categories shape experience and, like wheat displaying the wind’s force, experience proves the categories’ reality, a reciprocal relation that is epistemic insofar as it aims to give meaning to the categories through their application in experience.

The reciprocity Schelling demands between negative and positive philosophy aims similarly to give meaning to a first principle. The alternative is to posit an empty

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397 See Kant (1900–), KrV: “[o]nly in the case of the categories is there this special circumstance, that they can have a determinate significance and relation to any object only by means of the general sensible condition” (A244-5/B302).

398 Incompleteness of proof is compatible with the completeness of deduction. Introducing the table of categories in Chapter I of the Analytic of Concepts, Kant (1900–), KrV, says “the understanding is completely exhausted and its capacity entirely measured by [the logical functions of all possible judgments]” (A79/B105). In Chapter II, he distinguishes this *a priori* completeness from completeness achieved *a posteriori*: “Particular laws, because they concern empirically determined appearances, cannot be completely derived from the categories, although they all stand under them. Experience must be added in order to come to know particular laws at all” (B165). Deduction is not concerned with the experiences that contribute proofs of particular laws or principles. Hence, the thesis of epistemic reciprocity lies *downstream* from the deduction: it follows the achievement of *a priori* or *formal* completeness—as an answer to the question *quid juris*—with a demand for *a posteriori* or *material* completeness—as an answer to the question *quid indicii*.

399 The reciprocal relation between categories and sensation might seem forced in light of Kant’s (1900–), KrV, claim in the Architectonic of Pure Reason that transcendental philosophy “considers only the understanding and reason itself in a system of all concepts and principles that are related to objects in general, without assuming objects that would be given”. However, critical metaphysics is composed of *both* transcendental philosophy and a “physiology of reason”, which “considers nature, i.e., the sum total of given objects (whether they are given by the senses or, if one will, by another kind of intuition), and is therefore physiology (though only rationalis)”. The “immanent” use of this physiology “pertains to nature insofar as its cognition can be applied in experience (in concreto)” (A845/B874). It is the physiological portion of critical metaphysics that oversees the formation of cognition through the reciprocal relation between categories and sensation.

400 The analogy can be put in more Kantian terms between form as determination and matter as determinable. See Kant (1900–), KrV, A261/B317, A266-7/B322-3.
form and so fail to answer the question *quid indicii*. He registers this threat in the
“Letters”\(^{401}\) and the *Grounding*\(^{402}\) and while Maimon alerts him to it,\(^{403}\) he avoids it by
following Kant’s threefold criterion for proof.

First, we cannot directly prove a first principle’s reality as we lack intellectual
intuition. We can only prove it in relation to possible experience: “it is vital for [reason] to
have a control through which it can demonstrate that what it has found *a priori is not* a
chimera. This control is experience”.\(^{404}\) This avoids the tautology to which Schelling
thinks idealism is prone: by regressing to a first principle or ‘*prius*’, it is no more
probative than the ontological argument for God’s existence, for if something’s concept
contains its existence, “the proposition *that it exists* is certainly nothing other than
tautological”\(^{405}\). Leaving open whether the *prius* exists, idealism only shows how it
would exist given its ‘whatness’. Its ‘thatness’ must be sought in “*completely
transcendent being*”, in that existence which must outstrip the *prius* if it is to have a

\(^{401}\) See Schelling (1856-61), PBDK: “True enough, criticism can prove the necessity of synthetic
propositions for the realm of experience. But of what avail is that in answering our question? I ask again,
why is there a realm of experience at all? Every reply I give to this already presupposes the existence of a
world of experience. In order to be able to answer this question we should first of all have to have left the
realm of experience; but if we had left that realm the very question would cease” (I/1:310).

\(^{402}\) See Schelling (1856-61), GPP: “[Philosophy’s] astonishing challenge in this is to prove that what the
ultimate principle of the negative science was, and what, in reference to everything else that exists, is that
which is beyond existence, is not merely the highest idea, but is that which *actually exists*” (II/3:150).

\(^{403}\) See Schelling (1856-61), VIPP: “[Reinhold’s] theorem of consciousness automatically vanishes as a
principle of philosophy. For it is clear that through it neither subject nor object is determined, except
logically, so that the theorem has no real meaning, at least as long as it is supposed to be the ultimate
principle. No philosopher has pointed out more emphatically this lack of reality in the theorem of
consciousness than Salomon Maimon” (I/1:208n).

\(^{404}\) Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:62. Compare Beiser’s (2002) account of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* as
falsifiable by experience (527). Fichte (1964–), GW, thinks it is superfluous to look to experience to prove
a first principle because proof presupposes laws of thought “derived from that [principle] whose assertion
is warranted only if they are warranted also. This is a circle, though an unavoidable one […] But since it is
unavoidable, and openly acknowledged, we may appeal to all the laws of common logic even in
establishing the highest fundamental principle” (I:93-4). The self-sufficiency of thought for realizing its first
principle is a hallmark of German idealism, which is why Schelling’s late turn is so striking.

\(^{405}\) Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:157. This targets his earlier formulation of the absolute as “that whose
ideal includes *its Being* [and] whose idea is thus the immediate affirmation of Being” (SGP, 6:147).
conditioned. Second, unless we consult experience, we risk a “dogmatizing” proof. But since the principle to be proved conditions the whole of experience, our proof’s experiential relatum must be “all of experience”. It “is not just the beginning or a part of a science [...but] the entire science, that is, the entire positive philosophy” and so is “never finished”. The relatum’s immensity makes our proof incomplete and thus coextensive with lived history. Notice that this already entails the unliveability of completion. Third, since there could be nothing, and since it is unclear why there is anything, neither prius nor being is sufficient for our proof. It is as one-sided to think the prius is

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406 See Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:127. Compare GNP: “being” relates to thought “not even as a real object of thought for by ‘object’ one understands something which keeps still, which stands still, which remains. It is not really an object, but rather the mere material of thought throughout the whole science; for real thought expresses itself precisely only in the continual determination and formation of this which is in itself indeterminate, of this which is never the same as itself, which always becomes an other. This first basis, this true prima materia of all thought, cannot, therefore, be what is really thought, not be what is thought in the sense that the single formation is. When thought is concerned with the determination of this matter, it does not think about this substrate itself, but rather only of the determination of the concept” (152).

407 See Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:82.

408 Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:131. He adds, contra Hegel: “for this very reason this science is only a Philo-sophie”, a non-consummated love of wisdom. Compare GNP: “[philosophy] had to give up its claim to objectivity, i.e., it had to confess to being a science in which there is no question of existence, of that which really exists, and thus also not at all of knowledge in this sense, but only of the relationships which the objects take on in mere thinking, and since existence is always the Positive, namely, that which is posited, affirmed, asserted, then it had to confess to being a purely negative philosophy, but precisely thereby had to leave space free outside itself for the philosophy which relates to existence, i.e., for the positive philosophy” (133).

409 See Schelling (1856-61), GPP: “The substantial movement in which rationalism is confused starts out from a negative prius, for example, starts out from something nonexistent that must first move itself into being; but the historical philosophy starts out from something positive, that is, from an existing prius that does not first have to move itself into being” (II/3:125). Compare GNP: “[systematic philosophy] is not something of which I have a concept, but is itself only the concept of all being as something with is to come. It is that which never was, which, as soon as it is thought, disappears and is only ever in what is to come, but is only in a certain manner there as well, thus is only really in the end” (152).

410 Hence, Schelling (1856-61), PBDK, says the question “why is there a realm of experience at all? [...] can be answered only in such a way that it can never again be asked” (I/1:311, italics mine).

411 The question ‘why is there something rather than nothing’ can be asked in at least two registers: cosmologically, in terms of the end for which existence came into being, and experientially, in terms of how a priori conditions should be realized in existence. Schelling (1856-61), GPP, asks it in at least the second register: “What exists, or more precisely, what will exist (for the being derived from the prius relates to the prius as a being yet to come; from the standpoint of the prius, therefore, I can ask what will be, what will exist, if anything at all exists) is the task of the science of reason, which allows itself to be realized a priori. But that it exists does not follow from this, for there could very well be nothing at all that
essentially real as it is to think being is essentially rational. Hence, negative and positive philosophy must reciprocally and endlessly legitimate each other so that, on the one hand, the *prius* is empty without continuous experience of its reality and, on the other hand, experience is blind without presupposing the condition on which it is possible.\(^{412}\)

Schelling’s argument for the endlessness of realizing the *prius* applies Fichte’s idea of infinite striving to a framework of personalized I-thood so strikingly un-Fichtean due to the significance of being as in principle beyond reason’s formal grasp.\(^{413}\) Being is meant to fulfill the *prius’* need for a conditioned—and thus rehabilitates Kant’s idea of the thing in itself.\(^{414}\) But while positive philosophy invokes the concept of being to answer the question *quid indicii* and avoid the problem of empty formalism, it cannot remove the absurdity of existence. Reason can only seek a solution to both problems by deferring a *definitive* response. Schelling’s idea of being is therefore a boundary concept reminding us that at no point can the threefold criterion of proof be met.\(^{415}\)

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\(^{412}\) See Schelling (1856-61), GPP: “as little as the *a priori* excludes the empirical, to which it rather has a necessary relationship, just as little is the empirical free from the *a priori*, having rather a significant amount of the same in itself [...The] essence [of the empirical] is, in the consummation of this science, something to be comprehended *a priori*, but that it exists, that it is empirical, is only to be realized *a posteriori*” (II/3:102-3). See also: “Every experiment is a question addressed to nature that nature is forced to answer. But every question contains a hidden *a priori* judgment; every experiment which is an experiment is prophecy” (II/3:276). Compare James (1878): “The formula which proves to have the most massive destiny will be the true one. But this is a point which can only be solved *ambulando*, and not by any *a priori* definition [...W]hat umpire can there be between us but the future? The idealists and the empiricists confront each other like Guelphs and Ghibellines, but each alike waits for adoption, as it were, by the course of events” (12-3).

\(^{413}\) Compare Novalis (1978): “I is basically nothing—Everything has to be *given* to it—but it is to it alone that something can be given and the given only becomes something via the I” (185).

\(^{414}\) See Kant’s (1900–) account of ‘being’ in “The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God”: “something can be thought [...] merely as the relation (*respects logicus*) of something as a characteristic mark of a thing. In this case, being, that is to say, the positing of this relation, is nothing other than the copula in a judgment. If what is considered is not merely this relation but the thing posited in and for itself, then this being is the same as existence” (2:118).

\(^{415}\) Schelling (1856-61), GPP, puts this point in terms of a necessary vulnerability to future contradictions and resolutions: “the object of the positive philosophy is the object of a proof that is, while of course
Insofar as this undercuts Fichte’s rejection of Kant’s idea, it will allow for that idea’s repurposing within a mortalist framework.

PUTTING PHILOSOPHY INTO QUESTION

We have seen the conditioning power of the concept of life undermined by the unliveability of intellectual intuition and of a system’s total realization. This puts us in a position to show how death put us into question—how it individuates human life. To this end, I will parallel Chapter 2’s philosophical translation of Fichte’s popular immortalist claims with a translation of mortalist claims in Schelling’s Stuttgart seminars (1810):

[N]ature is something divine, though in an inferior sense, something that has been awakened from death, so to speak.  

Hylozoism postulates a primordial life in matter, whereas we do not. By contrast, we claim that matter contains life not in actu but only in potentia, not explicitly but implicitly: it contains everything under the aegis of Being and death. (As regards death, it is necessary to conceive of a death that contains life within itself.)

[Death] ought to be understood as a lucid form of sleep or as a wakeful sleep = clairvoyance, a state involving an immediate relation with the world of objects rather than one mediated by our [sensory] organs.

Like the Vocation of Man, Schelling’s seminars are for a lay audience and include less rigorous, often dramatic claims. We can hear them in their philosophical context by answering our question.

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sufficient at earlier levels, nonetheless still incomplete; there could always arise in a resulting stage a contradiction of an earlier postulate. In this context, even the present is no limit, but is here a view that still opens onto a future that will also be nothing other than the progressive proof of the existence of the power [i.e., negative philosophy] that rules over being” (II/3:131-2).

416 Schelling (1856-61), SP, II/7:441.
417 Schelling (1856-61), SP, II/7:444.
418 Schelling (1856-61), SP, II/7:477. The claim that death is a sort of clairvoyance implies it is not merely reason’s deactivation—the nothing Heidegger describes—but rather its merger with the unconditioned.
419 It is noteworthy that Schelling gives the Stuttgart seminars amid deep despair at the loss of his wife, Caroline, the year prior; see Schelling (1994), 195.
To instantiate our form of life is to heed the normative claim of freely positing principles to be realized as systems. Aiming at the coincidence of our freedom and our product’s necessity, this activity strives as much for satisfaction as for cessation. As we saw, it strives for being. This suggests how a rational life functions toward death. In the final lecture of the *Grounding*, Schelling calls being “the inverted idea, the idea in which reason is set outside itself. Reason can posit being in which there is still nothing of a concept, of a whatness, only as something that is absolutely outside itself [...] In this positing, reason is therefore set outside itself, absolutely ecstatic”.\(^420\) Being is the horizon that recedes as we prove the *prius*’ reality, a thatness that excludes determination by whatness, by any “idea” of reason. Hence, it represents the inversion of reason’s determining activity, that is, its deactivation.\(^421\) This is why being is reason “set outside itself”, for nothing is more external or ec-static to finitized reason. But this is just to say that nothing is more other to our I-hood than death.\(^422\)

Rational life functions toward death insofar as reason works toward its inversion. We saw that the activity of judgment desires a singular object because the principle we posit and the system we strive to realize are indistinguishable because unliveable. If the intuition and articulation of reason’s ground are equally barred to the understanding—if they equally lie beyond possible experience—they are neither distinct in themselves nor

\(^{420}\) Schelling (1856-61), GPP, II/3:162-3.

\(^{421}\) Insofar as satisfaction and cessation are reason’s selfsame end, it is easy to hear the consummation of the love of wisdom as its consumption, where being with one’s end is one’s end.

\(^{422}\) Compare Jacobi’s (1994) open letter to Fichte: “As surely as I possess reason, just as surely I do not possess with this human reason of mine the perfection of life, not the fullness of the good and the true. And as surely as I do not possess all this with it, and know it, just as certainly do I know that there is a higher being, and that I have my origin in Him. My solution too, therefore, and that of my reason is not the I, but the ‘More than I!’ the ‘Better than I!’—Someone entirely Other” (514, italics mine).
distinct from each other. Hence, they are identical. This reveals an unexpectedly systematic role for the unliveable: the selfsame object of positing and striving, that is, the unconditioned condition of systematic philosophy, must be conceived in terms of death. At this register, death is not a mere physiological event, but a humbling principle, the nameable yet unknowable end of a monistic pursuit. Grasping death in its systematic role shows how the “deep night” from which consciousness is born is the very same night for which it is destined. This explains the Stuttgart claims that nature is “awakened from death” and that death is the “clairvoyance” of an immediate relation to all things. It also explains Clara’s claim, quoted in the Introduction: “[p]hilosophers may very well say: there is no death, nothing in itself fades away; here they assume an arbitrary explanation of death and dying. However, what we others call it still remains, nevertheless, and words can no more explain this than they can explain it away”.

We see now that when, in the Freiheitsschrift, Schelling says the “anarchy” of will is “the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding”, he is analyzing will qua “primal Being”, the very being that escapes and inverts reason. This explains the

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423 With this, Schelling (1994b), GNP, can answer a question he thinks eludes Kant, who “wants to think of [the thing in itself] as supersensuous. Here it would first be asked: how this supersensuous relates to the supersensuous of the other kind which Kant always presents at least as the object of the endeavour of our cognition, although he denies that it can be really known, how it relates to that supersensuous which Kant recognizes in God, in the human soul, in the freedom of the will, etc. Nothing is more noticeable than the fact that in the famous critical procedure Kant never came across this obvious and pressing question: how the one extra-sensuous or the merely intelligible relates to the other, the really supersensuous; nothing is more noticeable than that he calmly leaves these two standing side by side, without in some way either distinguishing them or connecting them” (102).

424 See Schelling (1856-61), WAMV: “Poured from the source of things and the same as the source, the human soul has a co-knowledge/con-science/con-sciousness of creation” (I:4, italics mine).

425 Schelling (1856-61), C, 30.

426 See Schelling (1856-61), PUWMF, I/7:359, 350.
Stuttgart claim that life occurs “under the aegis of Being and death”.\footnote{157} In this, Schelling is a monist for whom being bears an intimate conceptual relation to death.

Consider these translations in light of my suggestion in the Introduction that by ‘\textit{caput mortuum}’\footnote{158} Jacobi means the blind spot with which death confronts immortalist philosophy, specifically Fichte’s. In terms of the \textit{Grounding}, this is the claim that an indivisible remainder is conceivable if the \textit{priors} of negative philosophy is not intelligible without remainder. On pain of tautology, we must affirm the antecedent, deny the unconditionality of life and infer the consequent.\footnote{159} The conditioning power of the concept of life is thereby \textit{utterly subordinated} to that of death as grasped at the register of being. This does not vindicate dogmatism as Fichte defines it, for the very idea of vindication assumes dogmaticism. It is a pyrrhic victory at best.

Consider them also in light of the observation from the Introduction that the greatest problem for a philosophical system is the human corpse, that is, the transition from life to death. A view on which life is an arrangement of matter distinct from others only in degree can no more show that dying is a loss of life than one on which death is the highest answer to the moral question life poses. But if death is the common end of systems, it is not unconditionally conditioned, but the unconditioned condition, that in

\footnote{157} This circumscribes the scope of reason. As Schelling (1856-61) says, the world “contains such a \textit{preponderant} mass of that which is not reason, that one could almost say that what is rational is what is \textit{accidental}” (GPPMV, 99, italics Schelling’s). Contrast Fichte’s (1964–), VDWL, claim in Second Introduction §9, which is central to his immortalism: “the only thing that exists is reason, and individuality is something merely accidental. Reason is the end and personality is the means [...] reason alone is eternal, whereas individuality must ceaselessly die off” (I:550). If immortalism is false, the question I posed in a footnote in Chapter 1—whether positing a first principle is creation \textit{ex nihilo}—is left hanging. No judgment can prove the reality of the origin of rational matter since no such judgment is truth-apt. \footnote{158} See Jacobi (1994), 509. \footnote{159} We can also affirm the consequent on independent grounds, namely, by reflecting on what it is to instantiate the form of systemativity.
virtue of which we systematize, whether as Spinozists or as German idealists. The reversal of rank in the conditioning order shows what individuates me is not the I, which is indifferent to me. It is the activity of living a life whose ground is unliveable. Death in this sense is the highest question—an answer to no question—in response to which a philosophical life answers for itself endlessly. The corpse is therefore not the greatest problem for philosophy: it puts philosophy into question.

Schelling’s critique of Fichte undermines his Jena project, for if death is philosophy’s unconditioned condition, immortalism is false. On his view, death makes sense of a philosophical life or, given the endlessness of producing a system, of having lived such a life. This mortalist thesis shows that Fichte evades death as our individuating condition. As I will show in Chapter 5, it anticipates Heidegger’s own mortalism and, to the extent Schelling’s critique revives Kant’s idea of the thing in itself, suggests a way of paralleling that idea with Heidegger’s conception of death.

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430 Compare Jonas (2001), whom I signaled in the Introduction on this point: “this body is the memento of the still unsolved question of ontology, ‘What is being’ and must be the canon of coming attempts to solve it. These attempts must move beyond the partial abstractions (‘body and soul’, ‘extension and thought’, and the like) toward the hidden ground of their unity and thus strive for an integral monism on a plane above the solidified alternatives” (9).

431 Compare Hegel (1970), EL: “The living being dies, because it is a contradiction. Implicitly it is the universal or Kind, and yet immediately it exists as an individual only. Death shows the Kind to be the power that rules the immediate individual. For the animal the process of Kind is the highest point of its vitality” (§221, italics mine). Contrast Jacobi (1994) in Allwill: “As little as infinite space can determine the particular nature of any one body, so little can the pure reason of man constitute with its will (which is evenly good everywhere since it is one and the same in all men) the foundation of a particular, differentiated life, or impart to the actual person its proper individual value. What produces the manner of sensing that is someone’s peculiarity, someone’s peculiar permanent taste—that inscrutable energy which, acting all by itself, determines its own object, comprehends it, holds it fast...supposes a person...and in particular it constitutes the mystery of the slavery and the freedom of each and everyone—that’s what decides” (488).

432 Contrast Fichte (1964–), WLNM, for whom philosophy puts itself into question: “To ask how we are able to raise ourselves beyond experience to the level of philosophy is to call into question the very legitimacy of philosophical inquiry; i.e., it is to call into question the entire process of reason which makes us search for a foundation for everything contingent. Philosophy itself is supposed to provide an answer to this question, and to this extent philosophy is self-grounding” (IV/2:14, italics mine).

433 See Schelling (1856-61): “You are right, one thing remains, to know that there is an objective power which threatens our freedom with annihilation, and, with this firm and certain conviction in our heart, to fight against it exerting our whole freedom, and thus to go down” (PBDK, I/1:336).
PART III: DEATH AND THE THING IN ITSELF

CHAPTER 5: ANTINOMIES OF FINITUDE

A man gets tied up to the ground.
He gives the world its saddest sound.
—Simon and Garfunkel, “El Condor Pasa”

REALISM’S HUMAN FACE

I have so far retrieved from Schelling’s internal critique of German idealism a mortalist challenge to its immortalist program, one of whose central aims is defusing the nihilistic threat posed by the corpse. Schelling’s critique offers conceptual resources I can now put toward establishing my main thesis—the structural analogy between Kant’s idea of the thing in itself and Heidegger’s idea of death—for whose purpose I will confine myself to Being and Time (1927). Before proceeding, a question arises about how to transition from Schelling to Heidegger: how do their respective mortalisms differ?

To flag a connection confined thus far to footnotes, Heidegger’s 1936 lectures offer a rich account of Schelling’s Freiheitsschrift that supports my mortalist reading of it in Part II. Notwithstanding the problems and solutions separating German idealism from existentialist phenomenology, Heidegger’s analysis reveals a kindred spirit in Schelling, plausibly interpreting and emphasizing themes in the text that figure prominently in Heidegger’s own work, such as clarifying the structure of Being, rediscovering the nature of the human and locating philosophy’s basic law in freedom.\(^4\) Indeed, he hears Schelling’s most significant claim about the inexplicable ground of system as framing the early existentialist philosophy from which he draws inspiration. Indeed, we have

seen that Schelling’s mortalist position draws reason’s attention to its groundlessness, a move that exercises a profound influence on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.435

Granting Schelling’s importance for this tradition, it is crucial to distinguish the context in which his own position emerges, for it is the double bind of German idealism’s desire and incapacity for systematicity that makes death philosophically salient for him. Before suffering the deaths of his wife Auguste and stepdaughter Caroline Schlegel,436 his reflection on annihilation is motivated by cracks he sees in the foundation of Fichte’s philosophy of life. Intellectual intuition is the problem to which his analysis of death is a solution. But then it is the immaterialist core of Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition that incites Schelling’s mortalist challenge: no such threat motivates Heidegger’s mortalism. Moreover, Schelling’s challenge serves a cognitive end, namely, the systematization of philosophy. For all Heidegger owes to Schelling’s view of the finitude—and for all his debt to the space opened for existentialist thought by Schelling’s critique of the idealist project—his concern lies, not with a system of a priori conditions, but with Dasein as a unity of care, that is, with taking responsibility for one’s possibilities as one’s own history. Whereas annihilation represents Schelling’s ideal of systematic cognition, death represents Heidegger’s ideal of owning for one’s history as care.

435 See Žižek (2007): “Other actually existing entities do not relate to possibility as such; in them, a possibility is simply realized; man only relates to possibility as such—for him, a possibility is in a sense ‘more’ than actuality, as if the actualization-realization of a possibility somehow already ‘betray’ or ‘devalues’ it. This opposition, of course, coincides with the opposition between necessity and freedom: an unfree entity simply is, it coincides with its positive actuality, whereas (as Schelling asserts, announcing thereby the existentialist problematic) a free being can never be reduced to what it is, to its actual, positive presence—its ‘project’, the undecidable opening of what it might do or become, its ‘want-to-be’, is the kernel of its very existence” (20).

436 While he does not draw an inference to Schelling’s mortalism, Richards (2002) suggests Auguste’s and Caroline’s deaths in 1800 and 1809, respectively, explain his turn from the identity philosophy (166-203).
The difference between Schelling’s *systematic* and Heidegger’s *historicist* mortalism is undeniable. It is just as certain the one is formative for the other. It moves the post-Kantian dialectic past Fichte’s and Hegel’s immortalism with a profound impact on existentialism and phenomenology. Given the essential role Schelling ascribes to discursivity as a constraint on the content and force of a system under construction, it may even enrich Heidegger’s apparently individualistic formulation of Dasein as the being whose existence is always an issue for it. And yet Schelling is a recovering immortalist who must twice defend systematic mortalism against the temptation to posit life as the unconditioned condition of existentially valuable experience—first as a critic of Fichte’s Jena project and then as a critic of his own identity philosophy. The origin of historicist mortalism lacks this inner struggle, starting as it does with a picture of Dasein’s being as care and situating *within* it such projects as systematic cognition.

While I do not wish to elide systematic and historicist mortalism, I think the former is crucial for understanding the latter’s relation to Kant’s idealism. Recall that Schelling’s defense of the unconditionality of death revives Kant’s idea of the thing in itself under the name ‘being’. His success in establishing an intimate relation between death and the thing in itself is instructive for solving two parallel antinomies left unsolved by Fichte’s immortalism. In this chapter, I will argue that, by solving these antinomies, the idea of death and the thing in itself show themselves to be structurally analogous—a thesis that brings Heidegger and Kant into closer contact on the basis of the independent merits of Schelling’s mortalism. Connecting systematic and historicist
mortalism this way seeks to clarify the thought I have been pursuing in this dissertation, namely, that the bounds of sense are intimately related to the bounds of life.437

Let us first review. In Part I, I showed why Fichte’s idealism is a philosophy of life and argued that it is a post-Kantian instance of immortalism. In Part II, I reconstructed Schelling’s argument for why Fichte’s idealism misrepresents what it is to live a philosophical system and read his critique as a mortalist demand that death serve as the unconditioned condition of existentially valuable experience. In Part III, I will present two antinomies of finitude that are left unsolved by Fichte’s immortalism, a view that excludes the ideas that, I will argue, are necessary for their resolution.

We saw in Part II that Schelling’s critique of Fichte’s idealism undermines his argument for intellectual intuition, which pluralizes systematic philosophy, and that his mortalist challenge to Fichte’s immortalism undermines his argument against Kant’s idea of the thing in itself, which reverses the conditioning order in death’s favour. This raises two questions: how must we think the thing in itself and how must we think of death? Answering these will first require showing that thinking about each of life and death presses us into opposing commitments we cannot simultaneously meet, causing a tension that manifests as an antinomy.

Before pressing ahead, I will allay a worry regarding the antinomies that motivate this chapter’s questions. Their general form is that there is a state whose significance for us is undeniable yet unknowable. This form emerges on the transcendental idealist view that the forms of cognition, which condition the possibility of experience and thus empirical reality, must be credited to the human standpoint, a perspective nevertheless

437 Compare Hölderlin (1982): “To know nothing and to cease to be are, for us, the same” (lines 138-9).
outstripped by *transcendental* reality. One may wish to avoid the antinomies by simply dismissing idealism. But this move will likely assume one of two positions that that view avoids: dogmatism and skepticism—what Kant calls ‘transcendental realism’ and ‘empirical idealism’. The view can show that this move attributes the forms of cognition to something beyond the human standpoint, incurring the charge that we cannot *justify* cognition, or confines these forms to a particular human standpoint, *devaluing* the forms we employ. As I have suggested, the view also avoids difficulties in German idealism, which derives forms of cognition from a first principle, but leads to immortalism.

Despite revolutions in logic, geometry and physics since Kant’s formulation of transcendental idealism, its view of human finitude survives in Heidegger,\(^\text{438}\) Wittgenstein\(^\text{439}\) and Hilary Putnam.\(^\text{440}\) I will not assess them as readers of Kant or defend their views. But I take them as indebted to Kant’s insight that (a) forms of cognition owe to our first person plural or human standpoint, (b) the matter of cognition

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\(^{438}\) See Heidegger’s (1996) claim that “truth *is* only insofar as and as long as Dasein *is*” (§44).

\(^{439}\) See Wittgenstein (1972): “If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false” (§205); “Our ‘empirical propositions’ do not form a homogeneous mass” (§213); “At the foundation of well-founded beliefs lies belief that is unfounded” (§253); “What we have here is a foundation for all my action. But it seems to me that it is wrongly expressed by the words ‘I know’” (§414).

\(^{440}\) For a time, Putnam (1983) defends internal realism as a “*human* realism, a belief that there is a fact of the matter as to what is rightly assertable for us, as opposed to what is rightly assertable from the God’s eye view so dear to the metaphysical realist” (xviii). He says it is “an approach which claims that there *is* a ‘transcendental’ reality in Kant’s sense, one absolutely independent of our minds, that the regulative ideal of knowledge *is* to copy it, but (and this is what makes it ‘natural’ metaphysics) we need no *intellektuelle Anschauung* to do this: the ‘scientific method’ will do the job for us: ‘Metaphysics within the bounds of science alone’ might be its slogan” (226). Suggesting Kant’s distinction between knowable objects and things in themselves, Putnam (1981) says “[a] sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects *within the conceptual scheme of those users*. ‘Objects’ do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. *We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. Since the objects *and* the signs are alike *internal* to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what*” (52). He insists that the “very fact that we speak of our different conceptions of *rationality* posits a *Grenzbegriff*, a limit-concept of the ideal truth” (216) and he (1990) maintains that if objects are “theory-dependent, the whole idea of truth’s being defined or explained in terms of a ‘correspondence’ between items in a language and items in a fixed theory-independent reality has to be given up. The picture I propose instead is not the picture of Kant’s transcendental idealism, but it is certainly related to it. It is the picture that truth comes to no more than idealized rational acceptability” (41).
does not owe to this and (c) the latter’s significance for the former poses an antinomy whose solution requires non-determining judgment. Formulating this antinomy will take us from Kant to Heidegger and thereafter to the account of a solution.

THE LIFE ANTINOMY

We can speak of the world in two ways: as we experience it and as it is independent of our experience. It is subject to our forms of cognition yet transcends these. We will see that both conjuncts must be affirmed. We will also see that this requires distinguishing the senses of speaking of a world that must bear empirical significance and one that cannot—between a world within and beyond our cognitive grasp, one tethered yet alien to our kind of life. Until we distinguish these senses, we are saddled with what I call the life antinomy.

To find the conjunction compelling, consider what results if we deny its first conjunct. On the one hand, skepticism ensues if we doubt our forms of cognition are adequate to how the world is. In that case, objects of cognition are empirically ideal, the mental representations or psychological states of an individual subject. But I cannot stably adopt the standpoint from which I imagine generalized cognitive failure, for either this standpoint betrays its possession of a conception of an adequate relation between mind and world—in which case the purported failure is overcome—or it lacks such a conception—in which case the purported failure cannot be formulated in the first place. Instead, we find that we must accept certain things as beyond doubt, such as that there
is a world, a subject who knows it and epistemic norms certain experiences may fulfil. Doubt must have its own ground for conviction.\textsuperscript{441}

On the other hand, dogmatism ensues if we credit the world’s mode of presentation to itself rather than to our forms of cognition.\textsuperscript{442} In that case, we adopt the \textit{transcendental realist} idea of nature as possessed of a mind-independent causal structure that explains our cognitive success, a structure our comprehension of which is incidental. But this confuses the world as it is in itself with the world insofar as it appears to minds and fulfils norms set by individuals for whom cognitive success is an issue. We avoid this confusion by recognizing that thoughts about how the world is are always already \textit{judgments} about it, which deploy concepts under appropriate conditions and thereby convey cognitive significance to similarly equipped judges.\textsuperscript{443} The world’s mode of presentation—how it shows up—is constituted by these ways of thinking.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{441} See Wittgenstein (1972): “So is the \textit{hypothesis} possible, that all the things around us don’t exist? Would that not be like the hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations?” (§55); “When one says: ‘Perhaps this planet doesn’t exist and the light-phenomenon arises in some other way’, then after all one needs an example of an object which does not exist. This doesn’t exist—as \textit{for example} does...” (§56); “That is to say, the \textit{questions} that we raise and our \textit{doubts} depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn” (§341); “That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are \textit{in deed} not doubted” (§342).}
\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{442} Appealing to a first person plural standpoint is not \textit{merely} relativistic. By giving this standpoint the loudest voice we can imagine—the only one our ears could hear—we can show that complaints about its range are misguided in that they strain literally to hear nothing.}
\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{443} See Putnam (1983): “[cognitive] salience and relevance are attributes of thought and reasoning, not of nature. To project them into the realist’s ‘real world’, into what Kant called the \textit{noumenal} world, is to mix objective idealism (or, perhaps, medieval Aristotelianism) and materialism in a totally incoherent way [...] If events \textit{intrinsically} explain other events, if there are saliencies, relevancies, standards of what are ‘normal’ conditions, and so on, built into the world itself independently of minds, then the world is in many ways \textit{like} a mind, or infused with something very much like reason” (215-6). And see McDowell (1998): “in theorizing about the relation of our language to the world, we must start in the middle, already equipped with command of a language; we cannot refrain from exploiting that prior equipment, in thinking about that practice, without losing our hold on the sense that the practice makes” (330).}
\end{footnotesize}
Hence, it is as we experience it, lest we fall into oscillation between skepticism and dogmatism.\footnote{444}  

But experience does not yield exhaustive cognition of the world. There are many ways of comprehending nature—all historically contingent, some peculiarly human if we follow Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic.\footnote{445} Our forms of cognition, including our forms of sensibility, structure a unique activity. However necessary for transcendental logic, which seeks the \textit{a priori} conditions of cognition, they are arbitrary for general logic, which seeks only deductive order.\footnote{446} This is no reason to abandon them, but it is a reason to affirm the life antinomy’s second conjunct. This is supported by the first of two arguments Kant gives for why empirical cognition presupposes the world as it is in itself, for why appearances presuppose the thing in itself. While this argument saddles us with the life antinomy, we will see that his second argument allows us to hold both conjuncts without equivocation and thereby to solve the antinomy.\footnote{447}

\footnote{444} Compare McDowell (1998): “Dummett’s interpretation of our slogan ['meaning cannot transcend use'] presents us, in effect, with a dilemma: either the acquisition of knowledge in which, on appropriate occasions, the understanding of a language is exercised consists in awareness of such unproblematically detectable facts; or else we must be conceiving it psychologically, as involving inner states of the speaker lying behind the behaviour. Avoiding psychologism, Dummet opts for the first horn. But if 'unproblematically detectable' here means 'detectable by anyone whatever, whether or not he understands the language', then we must reject the dilemma [...] for there can be facts that are overtly available [...] but awareness of which is an exercise of a perceptual capacity that is not necessarily universally shared” (331-2).  
\footnote{445} Establishing the non-trivial contingency of our forms of sensibility in the Transcendental Aesthetic is part of Kant’s long argument to the conclusion that cognition fails to exhaust the world as it is in itself and contrasts with what Ameriks (2000) calls Reinhold’s ‘short argument to idealism’, which “abstracts from any reference to a specific form of representation”, such as human sensibility. Treating representation generally in this way makes its absence synonymous with the thing in itself, from which the latter’s unknowability trivially follows (128-9). See Fichte’s (1964–), GW, adoption of the short argument: “Kant demonstrates the ideality of objects from the presupposed ideality of space and time; we, on the contrary, shall prove the ideality of space and time from the demonstrated ideality of objects” (186n3).  
\footnote{446} For Kant’s (1900–) distinction between transcendental and general logic, see KrV, A55-7/B79-82.  
\footnote{447} I model these arguments on what Franks (2005) calls Kant’s ‘analytic’ and ‘synthetic’ commitments to the thing in itself (43-5).
Kant’s first argument occurs in the first *Critique* in the chapter of the Analytic of Principles entitled, ‘*On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena*’:

Sensibility and its field, namely that of appearances, are themselves limited by the understanding, in that they do not pertain to things in themselves, but only to the way in which, on account of our subjective constitution, things appear to us. [...] It follows naturally from the concept of an appearance in general that something must correspond to it which is not in itself appearance, for appearance can be nothing for itself and outside our kind of representation; thus, if there is not to be a constant circle, the word ‘appearance’ must already indicate a relation to something the immediate representation of which is, to be sure, sensible, but which in itself, without this constitution of our sensibility (on which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something, i.e., an object independent of sensibility.\(^448\)

Empirical cognition for Kant is a nexus of sensibility and understanding. What we sense is restricted by what we intuit in space and time, while what we intuit is determined or “limited” by what we can think. It is because our forms of sensibility are peculiar to our “subjective constitution” that we cognize only what appears to this constitution. But then appearances are not logically self-standing: their concept is qualified by conformity to human sensibility, which implies the concept of what is independent of sensibility. Thinking appearances is transitive in this sense, lest, as Kant says in the B Preface, we hold “the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears”.\(^449\) While sensibility defines the field of appearances, appearances themselves compel the thought of a non-sensible object or thing in itself. Hence, the world is independent of our experience of it.

\(^448\) Kant (1900–), KrV, A251-2.  
\(^449\) Kant (1900–), KrV, Bxxvii.
This conclusion follows from “the form of thinking in general”,\footnote{See Kant (1900–), KrV, A55/B79.} from reflecting on the concept of appearances. It says nothing of what makes thinking the thing in itself \textit{valid for cognition}. It only shows that we hold two conjuncts that produce an antinomy. This leaves unclear (a) the concept proper to thinking the thing in itself and (b) the significance of thinking it. Until we clarify (a), we risk equivocating between the world as we experience it and as independent of experience. And until we clarify (b), we do not know the purpose of thinking the thing in itself. I will argue that Kant’s second argument for this thinking clarifies (a) and (b) with an account of the \textit{unity} of understanding.

\textit{SUM IN ESSENDUM}

The second argument begins in the Introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic with a distinction between the unity that understanding gives to \textit{particular} experiences, by bringing sensible intuitions under rules contained in the categories, and the unity that reason gives to the \textit{body} of the experiences that understanding functions to produce. The latter is “not the unity of a possible experience”, an episode of cognition composed of an intuition and the specific rule under which it falls, but “the unconditioned [condition] for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which [the understanding’s] unity will be completed”.\footnote{Kant (1900–), KrV, A307/B364.} Kant does not mention the thing in itself in this section. But he will later argue that the unity of an unconditioned condition is provided by the thing in itself construed, not as what is implied by a \textit{single} appearance, but as what reason demands for the \textit{whole} of appearances. Such a unity is “obviously \textit{synthetic}; for the conditioned
is analytically related to some condition, but not to the unconditioned”. Analysis goes no further than showing that the concept of an appearance entails that of a thing in itself. It is no contradiction to conceive infinite appearances each conditioned by a thing in itself but resting on no ground. Such a ground requires synthetically thinking of appearances as that whose logical implications form a unity, one furnished by an unconditioned condition. It requires thinking, not infinite conditioning things in themselves, but rather an infinitely conditioning thing in itself.

As I noted in the Introduction, this is the thought of what in Chapter Three of the Dialectic Kant calls the ‘ideal of pure reason’ or ‘transcendental ideal’. Its concept emerges from reflecting on the principle of thoroughgoing determination, according to which, for all pairs of opposed predicates, one predicate applies to every object. The “whole of possibility, as the sum total of all predicates of things in general […] contains as it were the entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken” and is “nothing other than the idea of an All of reality (omnitudo realitatis). All true negations are then nothing but limits, which they could not be called unless they were grounded in the unlimited (the All)”.

Kant identifies the ground of this storehouse with the thing in itself:

Through this possession of all reality, however, there is also represented the concept of a thing in itself which is thoroughly determined, and the concept of an ens realissimum is the concept of an individual being, because of all possible opposed predicates, one, namely that which belongs absolutely to being, is encountered in its determination. Thus it is a transcendental ideal which is the ground of the thoroughgoing determination that is necessarily encountered in everything existing, and which constitutes the supreme and complete material condition of its possibility, to which all thinking of objects in general must, as regards the

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452 Kant (1900–), KrV, A308/B364.
453 Kant (1900–), KrV, A571-2/B599-600, A575-6/B603-4.
content of that thinking, be traced back. It is, however, also the one single genuine ideal of which human reason is capable, because only in this one single case is an—in itself universal—concept of one thing thoroughly determined through itself, and cognized as the representation of an individual.\textsuperscript{454}

The totality of reality (\textit{omnitudo realitatis}) is the sum of all predicates, within which objects’ predicates are determined negatively, relative to what they are not. This totality has its ground in a most real being (\textit{ens realissimum}) or transcendental ideal. Kant casts the thing in itself as this ideal—as “being”. He indicates that existence “belongs absolutely” to being when he says it is the \textit{telos} toward which thinking of objects traces: to think an object is to think that whose existence is a limitation, not only of the existence of other objects, but of that whose existence is unlimited—an absolute being. Thinking of objects synthetically, as parts of a totality, accordingly leads to thinking of an unconditioned condition, the concept of which provides the unity of thinking of objects, which is to say, \textit{the unity of understanding}.

In line with his first argument, Kant says the thing in itself \textit{qua} unconditioned condition is “\textit{transcendent} in respect of all appearances, i.e., no adequate empirical use can ever be made of that principle”.\textsuperscript{455} Thinking it expresses reason’s drive for the transcendental ideal, but is no cognition of it: as the “\textit{supreme and complete material condition}” of totality’s thoroughgoing determination, it is the matter that outstrips our forms of cognition. Still, this clarifies (b), for the significance of this thought owes to reason’s desire for a \textit{system}, which Kant defines in the Transcendental Doctrine of

\textsuperscript{454} Kant (1900–), KrV, A576/B604. In his lectures on religion, Kant describes the “\textit{ens originarium} as an \textit{ens summum}” as a “\textit{living} being, as a living God”. As suggestive as an identity between the \textit{ens realissimum} and the \textit{ens summum} is, Kant is only a would-be philosopher of life, for his description is consistent with the postulate of something we do not know, but “must think” (VPR, 28:1000-1).

\textsuperscript{455} Kant (1900–), KrV, A308/B365.
Method as “the unity of the manifold of cognitions under one idea. This is the rational concept of the form of a whole […] to which all parts are related and in the idea of which they are also related to each other, allow[ing] the absence of any part to be noticed in our knowledge of the rest”.\textsuperscript{456} Reason’s desire for a system is satisfied by thinking the thing in itself. That this thinking is non-cognitive clarifies (a) by isolating thinking that is non-determining or “regulative”. As Kant says in the first section of the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic entitled, ‘On the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason’, this thinking is not “cognition of the object itself (as in the application of the categories to their sensible schemata), but only a rule or principle of the systematic unity of all use of the understanding”. Such a principle is “subjective” insofar as it is held, not from personal interest, “but from the interest of reason in general to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object”.\textsuperscript{457} Thus, while we experience the world as it appears to our forms of cognition, we have a distinct interest in thinking it as a “systematic unity” that, since it is unknowable, is assumed by our kind of subject.\textsuperscript{458} With this, we avoid equivocating between the conjuncts comprising the life antinomy. We thereby make sense of holding both simultaneously and thus solve the antinomy, a solution won, not by knowledge, but by a sort of hinge commitment.\textsuperscript{459}

\textsuperscript{456} Kant (1900–), KrV, A832/B860.

\textsuperscript{457} Kant (1900–), KrV, A665-6/693-4. Compare Cavell’s (2003) implicit formulation of the life antinomy and its solution in regulative thinking: “Kant’s conception of experience as appearance, hence of a world for us and simultaneously of a world of experience denied or lost to us, will force us to recuperate, such as we can, both worlds by a philosophy of necessary Ideas, of things and matters beyond our knowledge; then philosophy has to do with the perplexed capacity to mourn the passing of the world” (115).

\textsuperscript{458} Compare James (1878): “Mental interests, hypotheses, postulates, so far as they are bases for human action—action which to a great extent transforms the world—help to make the truth which they declare. In other words, there belongs to mind, from its birth upward, a spontaneity, a vote. It is in the game, and not a mere looker-on; and its judgments of the should-be, its ideals, cannot be peeled off from the body of the cогitantum” (17).

\textsuperscript{459} Compare Nagel (1971): “What sustains us, in belief as in action, is not reason or justification, but something more basic than these—for we go on in the same way even after we are convinced that the
The thing in itself is neither the presence of what can appear in experience nor the absence of what can never appear, like a square circle. Its significance is as a whole on condition of which the “absence” and the presence of its parts are possible. We might call it the absence of presence and absence—that which we can neither place nor misplace since it transcends the bounds of sense. This anticipates a formulation of the idea of death that will emerge from a solution to the death antinomy. For now, we see that solving the life antinomy consists in showing that the concept of being unifies the understanding by representing its final cause, the ideal at which it aims.460

Fichte’s philosophy of life cannot solve this antinomy. He jettisons the idea of the thing in itself as “the uttermost perversion of reason, and a concept perfectly absurd”, a mere product of thinking and an “all-too-avoidable deception, to be radically extirpated by a true philosophy”.461 He sees it undermined by the spirit of Kant’s idealism, which he interprets as assigning a grounding role to intellectual intuition. But since, as we saw in Part I, this act is not livable as he formulates it, Fichte leaves the antinomy unsolved. By contrast, Kant solves it by showing that the understanding—the activity of judgment—is

reasons have given out. If we tried to rely entirely on reason, and pressed it hard, our lives and beliefs would collapse—a form of madness that may actually occur if the inertial force of taking the world and life for granted is somehow lost. If we lose our grip on that, reason will not give it back to us” (724).

460 Cavell (1999) says the “problem with the concept of the thing-in-itself is that it should itself have received a transcendental deduction, i.e., that it itself, or the concepts which go into it (e.g., externality; world (in which objects are met)), should have been seen as integral to the categories of the understanding, as part of our concept of an object in general” (54). However, Kant (1900–) provides a deduction of the idea of the thing in itself in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic (KrV, A669-71/B697-9). He argues that this idea keeps reason’s “empirical use” from “going contrary to experience” by serving as “a necessary maxim of reason” according to which cognition is “cultivated and corrected”. Integral to our concept of an object of possible experience is the idea that its use figures within a unity that experience cannot provide. Cavell (2003) should therefore read Wittgenstein’s insight—that “the demand for unity in our judgments, that is, our deployment of concepts, is not the expression of the conditionedness or limitations on our humanness but of the human effort to escape our humanness”—as reflecting rather than “replacing” (118) a Kantian insight.

461 Fichte (1964–), VDWL, I:472, 491, 514.
teleologically bound by reason for a unity represented by the idea of the thing in itself.\textsuperscript{462}

I solve the life antinomy by seeing that my form of life functions toward being—by seeing that, insofar as I am, I am toward being: \textit{sum in essendum}.

This anticipates my thesis that the thing in itself and death are structurally analogous ideas.

Before turning to the death antinomy, I want to flag a remark Kant makes about the transcendental ideal. He says the “problem” with it is that we seek but cannot understand either the \textit{concept of this being’s necessity} or the \textit{necessity of its concept}. We want to but cannot cognize either how this being is necessary or why our conceiving it is necessary. Kant says if we can show the first, we can show the second. And while our \textit{thought} of it is a “need of reason”, this does not follow from having shown the first since

unconditioned necessity, which we need so indispensably as the ultimate sustainer of all things, is for human reason the true abyss […] One cannot resist the thought of it, but one also cannot bear it that a being that we represent to ourselves as the highest among all possible beings might, as it were, say to itself: ‘I am from eternity to eternity, outside me is nothing except what is something merely through my will; \textbf{but whence} then am I?’.

Here everything gives way beneath us, and the greatest perfection as well as the smallest hovers without support before speculative reason, for which it would cost nothing to let the one as much as the other disappear without the least obstacle.\textsuperscript{464}

For the sake of the unity of the understanding, we cannot resist thinking the ideal. But reason balks at conceiving the \textit{necessity} of this “highest” being since it lacks any

\textsuperscript{462} Schelling (1856-61), GNP, fails to see this in Kant when he says: “If we now ask what that can still be which is not in space, not in time, which is not substance, not accident, not cause, not effect, then we will have to admit that the Unknown does not = x, as Kant designates it […] but that it = 0, that it has become absolutely nothing for us. Since, for him, that thing which is presupposed outside experience […] becomes absolutely nothing by that very fact, we see that Kant brings us again at the end to where we were before, to completely unexplained experience” (101).

\textsuperscript{463} Here I transpose Heidegger’s (1985) phrase “\textit{sum moribundus}”, from \textit{History of the Concept of Time}, his published 1925 lectures, which he translates as “insofar as I am, I am [dying]” (317).

\textsuperscript{464} Kant (1900–), KrV, A612-4/B640-2.
determining condition. As Kant says, it is “from eternity to eternity”.465 This is why reason cannot “bear” it: it is the “abyss” we struggle to represent when we think beyond the bounds of sense.466 Regardless of whether this hints at an analogy between thinking the ideal and thinking death, Kant does not imply that the former is a mere confounding of representation, for he says the idea of the ideal “must find both its seat and its solution [Auflösung] in the nature of reason”.467 Unbearable as it is, the idea of being is a problem conceived from the “seat” of reason and whose “solution” lies as well in reason. How do we grasp ourselves as containing the solution to a problem that owes to our own finitude? An answer will arise from a Heideggerian insight.

THE DEATH ANTINOMY

I can speak of death in two ways: as my surest possibility and as the inaccessible state \textit{par excellence}. I cannot deny that I will die, but I cannot claim any insight into the nature of death. We will again see that both conjuncts must be affirmed. And we will again that see this requires distinguishing the senses of speaking of a state that must bear existential significance for me and one that cannot—between a state within and beyond my possibilities for being, one unique yet foreign to my particular life.468 Until we distinguish these senses, we will be saddled with what I call the \textit{death antinomy}.

465 Compare Schelling (1856-61), PBDK: “where sensuous intuition ceases, where everything objective vanishes, there is nothing but infinite expansion without a return into self. Should I maintain intellectual intuition I would cease to live: I would go ‘from time into eternity”’ (I/1:325).
466 Compare Cavell (1999): “We begin to feel, or ought to, terrified that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rests upon very shaky foundations—a thin net over an abyss, (No doubt that is part of the reason philosophers offer absolute ‘explanations’ for it.)” (178-9).
467 Kant (1900–), KrV, A614/B642, italics mine.
468 Compare Blattner (1994): “[there is] an apparent contradiction in Heidegger’s treatment of death—that death is a condition in which Dasein is unable to be, and that death is a way to be Dasein [...but] we must take seriously the claim that death is a way to be Dasein in which Dasein is unable to be Dasein” (49).
We can look to *Being and Time* to see why the conjunction is compelling. Consider that we must affirm the first conjunct on pain of two errors that parallel the skeptical and dogmatic denials of the life antinomy’s first conjunct. Those denials assume a *third personal ideal of cognition*, the first devaluing what we claim to know on the grounds that the ideal cannot be met, the second buttressing the same on the grounds it can. The first lacks conviction in the veracity of our forms of cognition while the latter is convinced of a sort of veracity beyond our forms of cognition. Similarly, the errors preventing affirmation of the death antinomy’s first conjunct take opposing stances on a *third personal idea of death’s certainty*, one that evades this certainty and one that inductively infers it from experience. Neither, Heidegger will argue, is adequate.

Evading death’s certainty is enabled by the cliché of an unreflective public—what Heidegger calls ‘the they’—according to which death is a distant event: “One also dies at the end, but for now one is not involved”. One “‘knows’ death as a constantly occurring event”, a type we all token. To speak of the third person singular ‘one’ is to disown death as my surest possibility in that I “convince [my]self that in no case is it I myself [who dies], for this one is no one”. I transfer what is “essentially and irreplaceably mine” to a “publicly occurring event” in an “evasion of” or “*tranquilization about death*”.469 Just as Kant’s skeptic retreats from taking responsibility for her forms of cognition, so the they “*does not permit the courage to have Angst about death*”.470 This

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469 Heidegger (1996), 253. Compare Schopenhauer (1969): “no one is noticeably disturbed by the thought of certain and never-distant death, but everyone lives on as though he is bound to live forever. Indeed, this is true to the extent that it might be said that no one has a really lively conviction of the certainty of his death, as otherwise there could not be a very great difference between his frame of mind and that of the condemned criminal. Everyone recognizes that certainty in the abstract and theoretically, but lays it on one side, like other theoretical truths that are not applicable in practice, without taking it into his vivid consciousness” (281-2).

470 Heidegger (1996), 254.
is a kind of paranoia—of *being beside one’s own understanding*—for it ascribes a fate to oneself while refusing to ascribe it to oneself as oneself. Thus, Heidegger says it is “something like a *certainty* of death”, but not “authentically ‘certain’”. In it, we lack the “*conviction*” of letting what is certain be the “sole determinant”\(^{471}\) of how we comport to it when we let platitudes and rituals lull our attitude.\(^{472}\) But evasiveness cannot secure authentic certainty about death.

Neither can inductively inferring death’s certainty from the observation of corpses. We may think our kind of being—what Heidegger calls ’Dasein’—grasps death’s certainty by experiencing the deaths of others. But, as Heidegger says,

> when someone has died, his Being-no-longer-in-the-world (if we understand it in an extreme way) is still a Being, but in the sense of the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of a corporeal Thing which we encounter. In the dying of the Other we can experience that remarkable phenomenon of Being which may be defined as the change-over of an entity from Dasein’s kind of Being (or life) to no-longer-Dasein. The *end* of the entity *qua* Dasein is the *beginning* of the same entity *qua* something present-at-hand. However, in this way of interpreting the change-over from Dasein to Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more, the phenomenal content is missed, inasmuch as in the entity which still remains we are not presented with a mere corporeal thing. From a theoretical point of view, even the corpse which is present-at-hand is still a possible object for the student of pathological anatomy, whose understanding tends to be oriented to the idea of life. This something which is just-present-at-hand-and-no-more is ‘more’ than a *lifeless* material Thing. In it we encounter something *unalive*, which has lost its life.\(^{473}\)

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\(^{471}\) Heidegger (1996), 255-6

\(^{472}\) As Heidegger (1996) says, the they “does not dare become transparent to itself” as that for which death is “*possible in every moment*” (257-8). A question arises whether authentic Dasein could attend a funeral, an event typically defined by tranquilizing practices like judging the timeliness of demise based on age or experience, laying the dead ‘to rest’, assuring the deceased are in a ‘better place’ and stating that things happen ‘for a reason’. It may seem Dasein should boycott such practices. But this assumes we can settle how best to mourn, based presumably on knowledge of the essence of death. The they is a testament to just the opposite: proper conviction in death’s certainty consists in refusing to let any practice confer *definitive* meaning on it. Thus, for the same reason that living in the mountains can be as unreflective as living in bourgeois society, boycotting funerals can be as unreflective as attending them. On this point, I am thankful for conversations with Alastair Cheng.

In dying, the other ceases to be that whose existence consists in possibilities for being and becomes actual, fixed, "lifeless". He ceases to be what, in life, was "more" than mere matter. But observing his corpse cannot show how his "change-over" is a certainty for him, for it does not begin from the standpoint of the dying—of he who transitions. His corpse is not merely empirical or present-at-hand, but signifies a loss, hence a continuity with the perspective for which it comes as a loss. Showing how his death is a certainty for him requires conceiving death from the first person, from the standpoint from which I expect death as my surest possibility. Neither abandoning death’s certainty to the impersonal standpoint nor observing its effects from that vantage exhibits death’s certainty as a transition I am to make.

The mistake of inductively inferring death’s certainty from what is “objectively accessible” threatens to draw us into an immortalist debate in which we explain death under the Spinozistic principle of persistence or the German idealist principle of purposiveness. We saw in the Introduction that we cannot conceive death as a loss of life if we treat the living as arrangements of matter identical in kind with the dead or treat the dead as constituted by the activity of life. Neither entitles us to speak of one’s death as radically unique to them. While German idealism saves personhood from the nihilism entailed by Spinozism, it does so by individuating persons with an impersonal notion of reason on which the standpoint of the dying is simply incidental.

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474 See Heidegger (1996): “The essence of Dasein lies in its existence. Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not ‘properties’ present-at-hand of some entity which ‘looks’ so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case possible ways for it to be, and no more than that [...] So when we designate this entity with the term ‘Dasein’, we are expressing not its ‘what’ (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its Being” (242).
But if Schelling’s critique of Fichte is sound and immortalism is false, we may speak of death as uniquely one’s own—as Heidegger does:

the suggestion that the dying of Others is a substitute theme for the ontological analysis of Dasein’s totality [i.e., end] and the settling of its account rests on a presupposition which demonstrably fails altogether to recognize Dasein’s kind of Being [...namely,] that any Dasein may be substituted for another at random, so that what cannot be experienced in one’s own Dasein is accessible in that of a stranger [...] No one can take the Other’s dying away from him [...] Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine, insofar as it ‘is’ at all.475

What individuates me is not reason, which individuates the mass of beings who share my formative power, but death. It isolates me profoundly. No one can save me from it, which is why anxiety is the proper mood of its apprehension.476 Rather than a particular feature of my genus, my death is a possibility I cannot substitute for yours, “an existential phenomenon of a Dasein which is in each case one’s own”.477 Hence, death is my “ownmost potentiality-of-being”,478 my surest possibility.479

And yet, we must affirm the second conjunct, for where death is, I am not.480 It “has the character of a no-longer-being-there”. This is why Heidegger contrasts death—what he calls Dasein’s ‘not-yet’—with a debt, where what is outstanding (goods owed) has “the same kind of being” as what is already secured (goods owned). Repaying a

476 See Haugeland (2000): “Heidegger says that anxiety individualizes Dasein. This does not mean that Dasein is not, in each case, already an individual, but rather that, in anxiety, a person’s individuality is ‘brought home’ to him or her in an utterly unmistakable and undeniable way. Falling back into public life (normality) is a way of escaping anxiety, and the public culture encourages this” (63-4).
477 Heidegger (1996), 240.
478 Heidegger (1996), 263.
479 Compare Rosenzweig (2005): “the nothing of death is a something, each renewed nothing of death is a new something that frightens anew, and that cannot be passed over in silence, nor be silenced [...] The nothing is not nothing, it is something [...]The multiplicity of the nothing that philosophy presupposes, the reality of death that cannot be banished from the world [...] makes a lie of the basic thought of philosophy, the thought of the one and universal cognition of the All” (9-11).
480 See Mulhall (2009): “a human being’s death is not an event in her life, not even the last” (99).
debt means aggregating more of the same, increasing a stock. Dying is not seamless in this way. Running life’s course is not a “‘progressive’ piecing-on” of what is now dead with what was once living, as if the one stock raises the other: “[t]hat Dasein should be together only when its not-yet has been filled out is so far from the case that precisely then it no longer is”. Dasein’s not-yet is, moreover, categorically unlike the moon’s pending fullness, which “pertains only to the way we grasp it perceptually”. I do not perceive more of death as I do of the moon in its phases, for it “is’ not yet ‘real’ at all”. Heidegger qualifies reference to death here with quotation marks, which illustrates the point: the manifest presence of my life betrays any claim to death’s reality, just as the absence of the deceased complicates my referring to him even as a dead person. His is an absence of presence and absence. Like the thing in itself, the dead are not simply elsewhere. We see, then, that we must affirm the second conjunct insofar as my death excludes the very sense of mineness.

While death is not lacking in the way of unpaid debts or unseen phases, neither is its inaccessibility stably interpreted as something that is outstanding. What for fruit is

482 Heidegger (1996), 243.
483 Compare Adorno (2004): “Attempts to express death in language are futile, all the way into logic, for who should be the subject of which we predicate that it is dead, here and now?” (371).
484 The deceased, once capable of presence and absence, is capable of neither, a rupture of space itself. Heidegger (1996) seems to deny that the deceased is an absence of presence and absence (238). The deceased is “the object of ‘being taken care of’ in funeral rites, the burial, and the cult of graves”, which he is merely the objective presence over which survivors preside. And yet Heidegger explains that, in “lingering together with him in mourning and commemorating, those remaining behind are with him, in a mode of concern which honours him”. He must mean a very specific with-ness, given that the deceased is undeniably actual rather than, like living Dasein, pure possibility. Indeed, he infers that “the deceased himself is no longer factically ‘there’” since “being-with always means being-with-one-another in the same world” and the “deceased has abandoned our ‘world’ and left it behind”. How, then, are we with something gone from the world? With whom are we in mourning? What space could contain the rupture of space? Heidegger answers: “[t]he deceased himself, then, by being in mourning with each other, by being with each other in his memory. Our collective act no more predicates him than it predicates his impredicability.
outstanding is neither more of the same nor what is unseen, but rather its ripeness. Fruit does not ripen merely with the addition of external matter, for \textit{qua} living it is the means to its ripening: it is its unripeness. Heidegger says this is only “formally analogous” to death, for whereas ripening is fruit’s self-fulfilment, death does not fulfil my possibilities for being, but robs me of future ones. “Even ‘unfulfilled’ Dasein ends”, which means what is outstanding in fruit is categorially unlike my not-yet. Thus, we equivocate in reading death simply as outstanding, making it all the more urgent “to ask \textit{in what sense, if any, death must be grasped as the ending of Dasein}”.\footnote{Heidegger (1996), 244.} In other words, it raises the question of how rational life functions toward something as seemingly outstanding as death.

We saw in Chapter 4 that Schelling conceives reason as functioning toward a grasp of being, where this entails reason’s \textit{inversion}—its transition from (ec) the first person position (\textit{static}) to the absolutely third person position of a realized system. This is very suggestive for understanding how the thought of death is valid for cognizers. But for now we are left to confirm the conjuncts of an antinomy.\footnote{Compare Coetzee (1999): “All of us have such moments, particularly as we grow older. The knowledge we have is not abstract—‘All human beings are mortal, I am a human being, therefore I am mortal’—but embodied. For a moment we are that knowledge. We live the impossible: we live beyond our death, look back on it, yet look back as only a dead self can. When I know, with this knowledge, that I am going to die, what is it, in Nagel’s terms, that I know? Do I know what it is like for me to be a corpse or do I know what it is like for a corpse to be a corpse? The distinction seems to me trivial. What I know is what a corpse cannot know: that it is extinct, that it knows nothing and will never know anything anymore. For an instant, before my whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic, I am alive inside that contradiction, dead and alive at the same time” (32). And compare Rosenzweig (2005): “[Man] feel[s] as violently inevitable that which he never feels otherwise” (9).} Again we are in need of a solution.\footnote{See Mulhall (2009): “as long as Dasein exists, it can never achieve wholeness; it will always already be ahead of itself, essentially related to an unrealized possibility, to something that it is not (yet). And yet, of course, human life does have an end. In Being-ahead-of-itself, Dasein also understands itself as relating to, standing out towards, its own future completion, towards a point at which there will be nothing} It is an antinomy whose practical significance Schelling registers in a
footnote to the “Letters”, an antinomy that leaves unclear (a) the concept proper to thinking of death and (b) the significance of thinking this concept. Until we clarify (a), we vacillate between a possibility that is non-transferrable yet non-actualizable. And until we clarify (b), we do not know what end is met by thinking of death. Like Kant’s second argument for why appearances presuppose the thing in itself, Heidegger clarifies (a) and (b) with an account of unity, namely, the unity of Dasein’s historicity.

**SUM MORIBUNDUS**

We are again confronted by an activity—not simply of judging, but of existing—whose concept entails its limitation, a boundary that raises the question of how to think beyond it and for what purpose we must do so. We will again find an answer by thinking synthetically about the unity toward which this activity strives.

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488 Schelling (1856-61), PBDK: “We can never get rid of ourselves [...] The necessity to save one’s ego from all objective determination and, accordingly, to still think of oneself in every instance, is illustrated by two contradictory yet very common experiences. Now and again our thought of death and not-being is connected with agreeable feelings, and for no other reason than this, that we presuppose a pleasure in not-being, that is, we presume a continuation of ourselves even during not-being. On the other hand, we also connect disagreeable feelings with the thought of not-being. ‘To be or not to be’—this question would be wholly indifferent to me if I could but conceive of a complete not-being. For I could not feel any fear of a collision with not-being if I did not apprehend a survival of myself, so that my feelings would survive too. Sterne’s striking exclamation would be perfectly correct, ‘I’d be a fool to fear you, death! As long as I am, you are not, and when you are, then I am not!’—provided I could hope not to be at all, at some future time. But I am apprehensive of being when I no longer am. Therefore the thought of not-being is a torment rather than a terror, because I have to think of myself as existing in order to think of my not-being, i.e., I find it necessary to think a contradiction. Consequently, when I am afraid of not-being, what I fear is not not-being but rather my subsistence [Dasein] even after my not being any longer. I’ll gladly not be, only I don’t want to feel my not-being. I do not want an existence which is not an existence, or, according to Baggesen, the clever annotator of Sterne’s sentence, I fear only the lack of expression of existence, a lack that is indeed also an existence simultaneous with not-being” (320n).

489 Heidegger (1996) says the truism, “As soon as a human being is born, he is old enough to die right away”, is a “negative” commitment to Dasein’s not-yet. A “positive” commitment is needed whereby we are “unequivocally oriented toward the constitution of being of Dasein” (245-6). Compare Franks (2005) on Kant’s negative and positive commitment to the thing in itself (43-5).
Dasein’s existence is constituted by what Heidegger calls ‘care’. Unlike a merely objectively present being, for which “its being is a matter of ‘indifference’”, I am always already concerned about my being. For any possibility I may undertake, the “personal pronoun” accompanies it.\textsuperscript{490} While cognition is an example, possibility more typically involves non-cognitive activities like the skilled use of tools, quasi-automatic techniques and coping with situational changes. Care is the mode of being whereby I project myself onto possibilities for being in general, comporting myself to “the being of a possible being-in-the-world”.\textsuperscript{491} The unity of such possibilities is accordingly a \textit{unity of care}. In this connection, Heidegger says the “whole of the constitution of Dasein itself is not simple in its unity, but shows a structural articulation which is expressed in the existential concept of care”.\textsuperscript{492} My existence is the complex structure of the projects I undertake, which I articulate by carrying things out, by unifying particular efforts toward the completion of larger tasks. How is it that I am the “unity” of all such unifying efforts? What makes me a unity of care—a “whole” life composed of such tasks as parts?

Heidegger addresses this question in §75 of \textit{Being and Time} entitled, ‘The Historicity of Dasein and World History’:

Inauthentically existing Dasein first calculates its history in terms of what it takes care of. In so doing, it is driven about by its ‘affairs’. So if it wants to come to itself, it must first \textit{pull itself together} from the \textit{dispersion} and the \textit{disconnectedness} of what just ‘happened’, and because of this, it is only then that there at last arises from the horizon of the understanding of inauthentic historicity the \textit{question} of how one is to establish Dasein’s ‘connectedness’ […] This question cannot ask: how does Dasein acquire such a unity of connection that it can subsequently link together the succession of ‘experiences’ that has ensued and is still ensuing; rather, it asks in which of its own kinds of being \textit{does it lose itself in such a way that}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{490} See Heidegger (1996), 42-3.
  \item \textsuperscript{491} Heidegger (1996), 57.
  \item \textsuperscript{492} Heidegger (1996), 200.
\end{itemize}
it must, as it were, pull itself together only subsequently out of its dispersion, and think up for itself a unity in which this together is embraced? Lostness in the they and in world history revealed itself earlier as a flight from death. This flight from...reveals being-toward-death as a fundamental determination of care.493

Like Schelling after him, Kant conceives the unity of understanding in terms of a system of cognitions. Heidegger conceives the unity of Dasein’s existence in terms of the unity of care, specifically, the interconnected history of Dasein’s instances of taking care. Such a history cannot temporally precede these instances and “subsequently link” them, for they constitute Dasein: they can have no temporal precedent. Rather, I grasp and own my history by exposing my absorption in a public that discourages thoughts of my ownmost, which we saw includes my possibility of no-longer-being. My unity of care, then, is first made salient by its absence. Indeed, it is my responsibility to find its absence salient.494 Under the ethos of the they, I am inauthentically “driven about by its ‘affairs’”, externally thrust by ways of being whose norms are not of its making. My affairs only come to comprise my history—I only attain what Heidegger calls ‘authentic historicity’—when I resolve to ask how they form, not an arbitrary series of affairs, but a unity of possibilities whose ground lies in me. This ground is my being-toward-death,

494 Compare Haugeland’s (2000) gloss of this responsibility with the idea of the thing in itself understood as a task reason sets for itself: “Taking responsibility for something is not only taking it as something that matters, but also not taking it for granted. Taking the disclosure of being for granted—whether explicitly or tacitly—is characteristic of fallen Dasein and normal science. Owned Dasein, as taking over responsibility for its ontological heritage, no longer takes it for granted. It reawakens the question of being—as its ownmost and sometimes most urgent question. In other words, it holds itself free for taking it back. That doesn’t mean it does take it back, still less that it does so easily or casually. The freedom to take it back is not a liberty or a privilege but rather a burden—the most onerous of burdens [...]. Giving up on a disclosing of being is not a matter to be taken lightly [...for] if intransigent discovered impossibilities undermine a disclosure of being, they pull the rug out from under themselves as well [...] The disclosure, the discoveries and the abilities to discover all stand or fall together—as a whole. So giving up on a disclosing of being is, in effect, giving up on everything—including the self-disclosing that makes possible that way of life. This is why Heidegger speaks of death—or, rather, of resolute being toward death. Taking responsibility resolutely means living in a way that explicitly has everything at stake” (72-3).
that is, my ownership of what most individuates me. By distinguishing as mine “the possibilities lying before” me, death discloses “the possibility of existing as a whole potentiality-of-being”.\textsuperscript{495} Being-toward-death is my willingness to bear responsibility for this whole, to “take over [my] own thrownness” into mortality.\textsuperscript{496} I grasp my unity of care, then, as a life lived in resolute acceptance of my unique fate.\textsuperscript{497}

Earlier in §74, Heidegger says the more that Dasein

understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost eminent possibility in anticipating death, the more unequivocal and inevitable is the choice in finding the possibility of its existence. Only the anticipation of death drives every chance and ‘preliminary’ possibility out. Only being free \textit{for} death gives Dasein its absolute goal and pushes existence into its finitude. The finitude of existence thus seized upon tears one back out of endless multiplicity of possibilities offering themselves nearest by—those of comfort, shirking and taking things easy—and brings Dasein to the simplicity of its \textit{fate}. This is how we designate the primordial occurrence of Dasein that lies in authentic resoluteness in which it \textit{hand itself down} to itself, free for death, in a possibility that it inherited and yet has chosen.\textsuperscript{498}

Dasein’s peculiar fate articulates or “pushes” its existence into its finite shape. Anticipating it is thus a function of \textit{individuation}. Being-toward-death sets in relief a unity of care—a life—by resolving to accept what grounds its uniqueness. As Heidegger says, death “claims not only \textit{one} definite kind of behaviour of Dasein, but claims Dasein in the complete authenticity of its existence”.\textsuperscript{499} This entails historicist mortalism in that it affirms that death unconditionally conditions the care-structure of personhood. It is resolute Dasein that “lets death become powerful”\textsuperscript{500} as such a condition. What Dasein

\textsuperscript{495} Heidegger (1996), 264.
\textsuperscript{496} Heidegger (1996), 385.
\textsuperscript{497} As Heidegger (1996) notes, fate retains its power in spite of the they: “Fate does not first originate with the collision of circumstances and events. Even an irresolute person is driven by them, more so than someone who has chosen, and yet he can ‘have’ no fate” (384).
\textsuperscript{498} Heidegger (1996), 384.
\textsuperscript{499} Heidegger (1996), 265.
\textsuperscript{500} Heidegger (1996), 384.
accepts in this is neither death’s *physiological* power to annihilate the body—the effect of which Heidegger calls ‘perishing’—nor its *efficient* power to halt the pursuit of possibilities—the effect of which is ‘demise’—but its *transcendental* power to condition the possibility of Dasein’s authentic historicity—the effect of which is to clarify what it means existentially to die.\(^{501}\) Dying conditions the possibility of “being-whole” and so “is not something which Dasein ultimately arrives at only in its demise”.\(^{502}\)

We see, then, that Heidegger can clarify (a) and (b). Grasping death as the unity of my history as care allows me to conceive dying, not as something I passively suffer, but as a way of living.\(^{503}\) Dying is my surest possibility, but not one I realize: its standing outside possibilities I *can* realize, and its standing there *for me*, is what delimits them as parts of my history, rather than states driving me about. It is inaccessible to me because it sets the *boundary of mineness*.\(^{504}\) It is for the regulative unity of personhood, then,

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\(^{501}\) See Heidegger (1996): “*Dying*, however, serves as a title for the way of being in which Dasein *is towards* its death. Thus, we must say: Dasein never perishes. But Dasein can only demise so long as it is dying” (247).

\(^{502}\) Heidegger (1996), 259. As Blattner (1994) shows, inauthentic Dasein *conflates* death with demise (55-6), disowning its sort of being by treating its death, not as internal to, but as an *external check* on its possibilities for being.

\(^{503}\) See Heidegger (1996): “By thus casting light upon the ‘connection’ between anticipation and resoluteness in the sense of the possible modalization of the latter by the former, we have exhibited as a phenomenon an authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole which belongs to Dasein. If with this phenomenon we have reached a way of Being of Dasein in which it brings itself to itself and face to face with itself, then this phenomenon must, both ontically and ontologically, remain unintelligible to the everyday commonsense manner in which Dasein has been interpreted by the ‘they’” (309). Fynsk (1986) notes that Dasein’s attunement to death is what Heidegger calls a ‘birth’, a finding of its wholeness in its thrownness: “Dasein discovers its thrown being and discovers itself as the thrown being that it is and that in existing it has to be […] Dasein’s sole power […] inheres in the possibility of resolutely assuming its thrown being, assuming it by giving itself up to—affirming and receiving—the possibility of its own annihilation”. This birth of Dasein is furthermore a *rebirth* in that it can reenact its thrownness by repeatedly grasping itself as always already thrown (37, 40).

\(^{504}\) See Mulhall (2009): “[death] is that against which specific features of the existential terrain configure themselves, an omnipresent self-concealing condition for the human capacity to disclose things (including itself) as they really are, and so something that is in a sense revealed in anything and everything we can genuinely grasp. In Costello’s and Coetzee’s terms, one might say that death is the self-concealing and self-revealing wound of human life, a wound that is touched on in every aspect and element of any such mode of existence” (101). See also Blattner (1994): “Suppose we call situations in which an ability cannot be manifested because stifled a ‘limit-situation’ for that ability […] Limit-situations (Grenzsituationen) help
that I think my death. As we might put it, the ‘I am dying’ must be able to accompany all my projects, for otherwise a project would be impossible or else would be nothing for me. Thinking of death in this non-determining or regulative way clarifies (a), while thereby pursuing authenticity clarifies (b). It lets us hold both conjuncts of and hence solve the death antinomy. To solve it is, in Heidegger’s terms, to comprehend that “death is in the being of [Dasein’s] being-toward-its end”. But if death is understood as internal to the activity of resolutely living toward it, it would seem that the puzzle death initially posed in the form of an antinomy finds its solution in us, which might elucidate Kant’s claim that we contain the solution to a problem that owes to our finitude. In any case, it turns out that I solve the death antinomy by grasping that sum moribundus.

This poises us to grasp the structural analogy between the idea of the thing in itself and the idea of death. Before we do, I want to make three summary remarks.

First, while being-toward-death provides a solution to the death antinomy, Fichte cannot even formulate the antinomy because his immortalism prevents him from affirming its first conjunct. The Fichtean notion of ‘mineness’ is not determined by the possibility of impossibility, but by actuality of an activity—nature’s moral perfection—to define an ability by revealing its limits (Grenzen) […] Death is the limit-situation that defines the limits of Dasein’s ability-to-be […] ‘Death’ is the name for a certain condition in which Dasein can find itself” (67-8).

505 As a function of personhood, thinking of death must be indeterminate. Hence, Heidegger (1996) assigns it a diffuse, indefinite mood: “Angst in the face of death is Angst ‘in the face of’ the ownmost non-relational possibility-of-being not to be bypassed. What Angst is about is being-in-the-world itself. What Angst is about is the potentiality-of-being of Dasein absolutely. Angst about death must not be confused with a fear of one’s demise. It is not an arbitrary and chance ‘weak’ mood of the individual, but, as a fundamental attunement of Dasein, the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown being-toward-its-end” (251).

whose goal is imminent.\footnote{See Fichte (1964–): "To the extent that I adopt this goal that is posited for me by my own nature and make it into the goal of my real acting, I at the same time posit that it is possible to accomplish this goal through real acting. These two propositions are identical, since 'I propose a goal for myself' means 'I posit it as actual at some future time'. But possibility is necessarily posited along with actuality. Unless I want to disown my own essence, I must propose for myself the former, that is, the accomplishment of this goal. Accordingly, I must also assume the latter, namely, that this goal can be accomplished. Indeed, this is not actually a case of what comes first and what comes second, but rather of an absolute unity. In fact, here we have not two acts, but one and the same indivisible act of the mind" (GGW, I:352).} As we saw, Schelling’s charge that Fichte fails to give a satisfying account of human finitude pertains, not just to a system’s liveability, but to what individuates a finite rational being. A correct account of the latter is necessary to grasp the first conjunct of the death antinomy.

Second, being-toward-death is a \textit{socially} acquired attunement, for it requires reflecting on one’s tranquilization by the they. This perhaps renders more perspicuous Schelling’s idea that a philosophical system can only emerge in a field of dispute.\footnote{Against the impression that Heidegger’s analysis of death is anti-social, Fynsk (1986) says: “Heidegger appears to suggest—in seeming contradiction with his assertion that the experience of death is strictly individual—that Dasein can understand and, thus we might say, participate in the death of the other. Perhaps this should not be surprising because the death that one can live with another is not the death in which Dasein ceases to exist altogether (in which Dasein cannot even be \textit{alone}), but death become possibility, the death that is true, not ‘true’ death. Dasein’s friend, then, appears in a position parallel to that of Dasein’s conscience, and we may well wonder whether it is not \textit{in} the position of Dasein’s conscience […] Dasein responds to the other (the Dasein that has been) in terms of the factual possibilities that constitute the existence of the world of the other […] But we also see that the relation to the other is once again founded upon a relation to the death of the other, for ‘faithful’ disclosure of the other’s existence requires an understanding of that past existence in its authenticity […] Dasein’s resolute repetition of its own thrownness is thus also a repetition of the other’s resolute being toward death. We follow reverently the past Dasein in the same way we loyally follow ourselves […] in resolute existence” (41-2, 47-8).}

Third, being-toward-death shows how the body is a \textit{canon} for philosophy. Recall that a canon catalogues the principles of cognition and sets the limitation of their use. Similarly, the body incarnates the bounds in which a cognitive project can authentically be undertaken: ”[t]he existential interpretation of death is prior to any biology and ontology of life. But it is also the foundation for any biographico-historical or ethnomologico-psychological inquiry into death. A ‘typology’ of ‘dying’ characterizing the states and
ways in which a demise is ‘experienced’ already presupposes the concept of death. Moreover, a psychology of ‘dying’ rather gives information about the ‘life’ of the ‘dying person’ than about dying itself. Death delimits my possibilities by being the sole possibility that annihilates possibility. Hence, it precedes as a boundary concept my deployment of the principles of any science. Heidegger implicitly extends this humbling observation to the immortalist position when he claims that an analysis of being-toward-death says nothing of whether Dasein “‘lives on’ or even, ‘outliving itself’, is ‘immortal’” since it is “methodically prior to the questions of a biology, psychology, theodicy and theology of death”. Any project—even immortalism—is a doctrine whose possibility rests on the canon made flesh by the body. This reflects Schelling’s idea that a project, expanded now to include projects of care, is contingently animated by a life.

509 Heidegger (1996), 246-7. Since being-toward-death enables Dasein to understand “the power of its finite freedom”, it reveals our freedom to exercise a typic, that is, to execute a law or principle. Heidegger can accordingly speak of a “typology of dying” as a typology of the dying.


511 Compare Cavell (2002): “We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing ensures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing ensures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls ‘forms of life’. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying” (52). Citing this passage, McDowell (1998) responds: “What is needed is not so much reassurance—the thought that after all there is solid ground under us—as not to have felt the vertigo in the first place. Now if we are simply and normally immersed in our practices, we do not wonder how their relation to the world would look from outside them, and feel the need for a solid foundation discernible from an external point of view. So we would thereby be protected against the vertigo if we could stop supposing that the relation to reality in some area of our thought and language needs to be contemplated from a standpoint independent of that anchoring in our human life that makes the thoughts what they are for us” (211). While McDowell several times quotes “whirl of organism” in approval of an organismic image of the human activity he refuses to cede to dead mechanism or disembodied Platonism, he reads Cavell’s vertigo as a skeptical thesis in an antinomy whose spoiling ingredient is the thought that cognitive practices must abide by human-independently objective rules. But Cavell’s point is that vertigo can result even after we jettison that thought: shared meaning rests on both no more and no less than our forms of life, which is as much a sobering reminder as an emboldening affirmation. McDowell’s exclusive focus on the affirmation suggests their disagreement is a difference of attitude and mood, or what Schelling calls ‘personality’ and
STRUCTURAL ANALOGY

In this chapter, I have set out to answer the questions of how to think the thing in itself and how to think of death. I argued that this requires diagnosing two antinomies of finitude that cannot be solved by Fichte’s immortalism. It remains to make explicit how they are formally identical.

The life and death antinomies are *two aspects* of the same predicament. The first conjunct of each illustrates the forms our standpoint contributes to livable possibilities: neither the world nor death is intelligible independent of our subjective constitution. The second conjunct of each illustrates these forms’ inadequacy for grasping a *unity* of such possibilities: our subjective constitution exhausts the significance of neither the world nor death. Both antinomies are born in a standpoint whose constitution is an object of critique and an obstacle to unity. Hence, they are formally identical antinomies—problems whose solutions, we have seen, are *structurally analogous thoughts*. The questions driving this chapter, then, are aspectually related, for asking how to think either the thing in itself or death are two ways of asking how to think our unconditioned condition. They are equivalent ways of putting ourselves into question.

A common ground for Kant’s and Heidegger’s projects expands once we see that transcendental idealism and existentialist phenomenology argue for an *a priori* condition

‘desire’—an *Ursprung* for philosophical thinking we cannot reduce to biology on pain of nihilism, but which we can trace to experiences that make, say, terror salient. Such experiences include considerations of questions one finds pressing and so shed light on our contingent philosophical preferences. As Schelling’s critique of Fichte illustrates, the relation between one’s life—composed of attitude, mood, desire—and one’s preferred system is reciprocal: just as one’s personality can lead to endorsing a way of life, so one may be moved by certain experiences either to reaffirm this way or to endorse another. On this point, I am indebted to conversations with Matthew Congdon.
that grounds the unity of human life. In a passage that could equally apply to the thing in itself or ‘being’, Heidegger says:

*The nearest nearness of being-toward-death as possibility is as far removed as possible from anything real.* The more clearly this possibility is understood, the more purely does understanding penetrate to it as the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general. As possibility, death gives Dasein nothing to ‘be actualized’ and nothing which it itself could be as something real. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every mode of behaviour toward..., of every way of existing. In running ahead to this possibility, it becomes ‘greater and greater’, that is, it reveals itself as something which knows no measure at all, no more or less, but means the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence. Essentially, this possibility offers no support for becoming intent on something, for ‘spelling out’ the real thing that is possible and so forgetting its possibility. As anticipation of possibility, being-toward-death first makes this possibility possible and sets it free as possibility.\(^{512}\)

Ever close at hand, death is neither ready to hand nor present at hand. Being-toward-death anticipates a possibility that, by conditioning the possibility of distance, is as near as it is far. Like being, it is the absence of presence and absence. We saw in Part II that being cannot be realized in cognition. Like death, it is “nothing which it itself could be as something real”: it is something that “knows no measure at all”. And yet neither being nor death is a possibility by itself: we make them the possibility they are by finding ourselves bound for them. To think the unconditioned that they equivalently represent is to think ourselves as bound for it. Such thinking is a matter of asking, not what we are, but what we are to become.

One of the deepest insights of Kant’s first *Critique* is that we suffer from a peculiar fate: we are driven to ask questions that, due to our limitations as finite

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\(^{512}\) Heidegger (1996, 262. By the same token, Heidegger’s (1984) account of the world could apply to death: “we can say about the world that it is a *nothing*. What sort of *nihil* is it? […] If it is a *nihil*, then it must not be a *nihil negativum*, i.e., not the simple pure empty negation of something. The world is nothing in the sense that it is nothing that is. It is nothing that is yet something that ‘is there’ […] We therefore call it the *nihil originarium*” (210).
knowers, we cannot answer. Despite its ambitions, human reason is confined to the bounds of sense. The main goal of this dissertation has been to indicate why it is so difficult to think the bounds of sense apart from the bounds of life. By registering the formal identity of the life and death antinomies and the structural analogy between the ideas that solve them, we see the peculiar fate that Kant diagnoses is intimately related to the peculiar fate that Heidegger analyzes. My point of entry for demonstrating this has been Schelling’s systematic mortalism, whose undeniable value for Heidegger’s historicist mortalism is that, by through sustained internal critique of German idealism, it forces philosophy to confront, not just nihilism, but annihilation. Schelling’s demand, in other words, is that philosophy faces its dark presupposition.
CONCLUSION

An object that tells of the loss, destruction, disappearance of objects. Does not speak of itself. Tells of others. Will it include them? Deluge.
—Joseph Kosuth, “Jasper Johns (Art as Idea as Idea)”

My dissertation’s title is an echo and a reply. It echoes the original title of the first Critique, which, Kant writes in a letter to Herz, 7 June 1771, is The Bounds of Sensibility and of Reason. If, as I have argued, human sensibility and reason are coextensive with human life, then they articulate the same boundary. My title also replies to Strawson’s charge in The Bounds of Sense (1966) that Kant “seeks to draw the bounds of sense from a point outside them, a point which, if they are rightly drawn, cannot exist”, which leads him to dismiss the idea of the thing in itself as “disconcerting” and “ironical”. But determining the conditions of the possibility of existentially valuable experience from “outside” the first person standpoint is transcendent philosophy; doing so “rightly”, from within it, is transcendental philosophy. No one is more sensitive to this distinction than Kant. In this connection, I have argued that there is no better way of grasping the strange idea of the thing in itself than by grasping that idea, so strangely familiar from our standpoint, of death.

To show this, I have focused on a philosophical system’s commensurability with our finitude, that is, on its livability. Life is a pressing concern for Jacobi, who, in the face of the nihilism of systematicity, defines true individuals as ‘living beings’. Life is of total importance for Fichte, who, for the sake of systematicity, grounds philosophy on a first principle and, for the sake of life, posits a principle of purposiveness. While life’s centrality in German idealism is well-known, I have argued that Schelling’s original

513 Kant (1900–), K, 10:123.
514 Strawson (1996), 12, 242, 245.
insight is to question its master concept—to extend the interrogative dialectic, in which the Fichtean asks the Spinozist if he can live his Spinozism, by asking the philosopher of life if he can live his philosophy. The answer must be in the negative if, as he argues, it is not the life of reason, but reason’s *annihilation*, that puts philosophy into question.

I have reconstructed Schelling’s internal critique of German idealism as an argument for the unliveability of two projects central to the tradition: a first principle’s intellectual intuition and its complete derivation as a system of *a priori* conditions. As to the former, the resistance that constitutes finite rational life precludes any insight into its ground. The resulting opacity comes as no surprise: the ground of rational activity cannot be rationalized without assuming this activity. This does not preclude having *any* comportment to the ground, for we can be regula
tively committed to the principle we decide to accept. We need only eschew dogmaticist claims to cognition of it.\(^{515}\) As to the latter, the desire that animates a system’s articulation cannot be conditioned by that system because it is essentially a free act. This, too, is no surprise: as long as finite rational subjects exist, they will exclude completeness. Schelling’s challenge to idealism is to reveal our form of life as *evidence* of insurmountable contingency—of a remainder to reasoning. This insight, which Heidegger inherits and alters, is *metaphilosophical*. Rather than endorse a definitive successor system to Spinozism and the

\(^{515}\) Compare Heidegger (1985a): “The way man has cognition and the decision about what he takes cognition to be and the order and rank of different kinds of cognition, all of this is only determined by the way in which the determining ground of knowledge, the principle, is itself determined, the way in which the relation of man to beings is conceived in advance. How man as existent stands in relation to beings as a whole is contained in this fundamental relation, how difference and agreement, how the strife and the harmony of the being which he is not and of the being which he himself is are determined. Schelling says, ‘It is a matter of the determination of the principle by which man knows in general’. According to our interpretation, this means it is a matter of the determination of the relation of man to beings, a matter of naming this relation in general, of accepting it as the ground of the possibility of knowledge and of expressly taking it over” (53).
*Wissenschaftslehre*, it shows what systematicity must be given the personality that drives reason. In reviving Kant’s idea of the thing in itself and anticipating the core values of existentialism, Schelling’s critique offers a pluralistic view that remains consistent with philosophy’s systematic aspiration, one consequence of which is to bring naturalism into contact with other metaphysical projects.

I hope to extend the thesis established in this dissertation by weighing the merits of the varieties of non-determining judgment employed by post-Kantian philosophers concerned with mortality and systematicity. Following Schelling, these thinkers engage these themes using critical analyses of myth, poetry and tragedy as *knowing surrogates* for philosophy’s “compassionate lie”,⁵¹６ that is, as *truthful untruths*. My aim is to read them against the immortalist-mortalist background that enabled my philosophical translations of Fichte’s and Schelling’s popular claims, revealing valuable contributions to systematic philosophy in, for example, this claim from Hölderlin’s 1795 preface to *Hyperion*:

> We all pass through an eccentric path, and there is no other way possible from childhood to consummation. The blessed unity, Being (in the only sense of that word), is lost to us, and we had to lose it if we were to gain it again by striving and struggle. We tear ourselves loose from the peaceful *hen kai pan* of the world, in order to restore it through ourselves [...] To end the eternal conflict between our self and the world, to restore the peace that passeth all understanding, to unify ourselves with nature so as to form one endless whole—that is the goal of all our striving.⁵¹⁷

This project will aim to display the Schellingian insight operative in this passage from *Hyperion* (1797/9, 1822):

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⁵¹⁶ See Rosenzweig (2005): “the fear man feels, trembling before [death’s] sting, always cruelly belies the compassionate lie of philosophy” (10).

To be one with all—this is the life divine, this is man’s heaven. To be one with all that lives, to return in blessed self-forgetfulness into the All of Nature—this is the pinnacle of thoughts and joys, this the sacred mountain peak, the place of eternal rest […] On this height I often stand, my Bellarmin! But an instant of reflection hurls me down. I reflect, and find myself as I was before—alone, with all the griefs of mortality, and my heart’s refuge, the world in its eternal oneness, is gone; Nature closes her arms, and I stand like an alien before and do not understand her.\(^{518}\)

It will similarly interpret this passage from Nietzsche’s “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (1873): “The drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself. This drive is not truly vanquished and scarcely subdued by the fact that a regular and rigid new world is constructed as its prison from its own ephemeral products, the concepts. It seeks a new realm and another channel for its activity, and it finds this in \textit{myth} and in \textit{art} generally.”\(^{519}\) As a promissory note for this project, I have prefaced each chapter of this dissertation with lyrical epigraphs about mortality, cognition, striving and death, the thought being that what philosophy can never completely say—given the skin it lives in—only art can show.

\(^{518}\) Hölderlin (1990), 41-2.

\(^{519}\) Nietzsche (1990), 21.
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