

F.W.J. Schelling's Revaluation of the Platonic Triad of the Good, the True and the Beautiful

-- or --

How Reflective Knowing Grounds Itself in the Figurative Powers of Productive Imagination

Zuletzt die Idee, die alle vereinigt, die Idee der *Schönheit*, das Wort in höherem platonischem Sinne genommen. Ich bin nun überzeugt, daß der höchste Akt der Vernunft, der, indem sie alle Ideen umfasst, ein aesthetischer Akt ist, und daß *Wahrheit und Gute, nur in der Schönheit* verschwistert sind - Der Philosoph muss eben so viel aesthetische Kraft besitzen, als der Dichter. Die Menschen ohne aesthetischen Sinn sind unsere Buchstaben Philosophen. (F.W.J. Schelling, *Älteste Systemsprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, 1796).

Im Grunde ist wohl alle Philosophie prosaisch; und ein Vorschlag, jetzt wiederum poetisch zu philosophieren, mochte so wohl aufgenommen werden, als der für den Kaufman: seine Handelsbücher künftig nicht in prose, sondern in Versen zu schreiben (Kant, *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vernehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, 1796, vol. XI, 482.)

Schelling's early works attempt nothing less than a reconfiguration of the Platonic triad of the good, the true and the beautiful, whereby truth and the good are united in and by the beautiful. As early as 1796, he writes of the necessity of a "philosophy of art" which, "drawn from" the philosophies of nature and history, would provide the point of repose in which their respective objects of "Nature and Freedom" would "come together" in the beautiful work of art (I/465).¹ For it is only in this highest act of reason *qua* work of the creative spirit, that the truth of nature and the moral autonomy of historical existence can find their one and only adequate mode of objective expression.

Schelling effects this revaluation through a decisive conversion of the Kantian epistemology, in which reason's most potent act manifests itself in the creative activity of the productive imagination. Whereas Kant had conveniently ignored the constitutive role the

¹ From the *General Overview of the most recent philosophical Literature*, translation mine. Schelling penned this essay at the age of twenty-two in 1797. All citations of Schelling's works refer to the pagination of the *Sämtliche Werke* (14 vols. Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1856-61) followed by the pages of the corresponding English translation (when available). I confine myself in this essay to the work produced by Schelling on this topic between the years of 1796 and 1804.

productive imagination played in his account of the synthesis of "definite" a priori knowledge,² Schelling instates the figurative powers of this faculty as the focal point through which all sciences of knowing become possible (I/3 629f/232f). The organ of the productive imagination whereby one ascertains and employs this figural voice, is the inner sense of time (I/3 350).³ Contrary to the Kantian construal, time for Schelling is not simply a formal condition of intuition, but is rather the constitutive factor in the productive activity of the self; the objects of Schelling's endeavors "exist not at all, save insofar as they are freely produced" (I/3 350). Consequently, "all philosophy is *productive*" (I/3 350) and the medium in which this production occurs is that of *intuition*, in both its subjective *qua* intellectual, and objective *qua* aesthetic forms. For only the creative powers of imagination can resolve the infinite contradictions of conceptual thought, and thereby move beyond the reflexive oppositions of subject-object, freedom-necessity, and conscious-unconscious. Only in the overcoming (*aufheben*) of the opposition of subject-object do we attain to true knowing *qua* identity; only in the overcoming of freedom in opposition to necessity do we achieve true moral action *qua* autonomy; and only in integrating conscious-unconscious production do we unite the two previous oppositions in an objective manifestation of the human will *qua* work of art.

The clearest articulation of Schelling's reconfiguration of the platonic triad occurs in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*. The task he sets for this work is to explain the transcendental condition of knowing, specifically the mechanism whereby subjective and objective correspond in the most primal of human convictions. The conception of philosophy that emerges from this work is fundamentally historical. Grounded in the autonomy of the will,

² Kant's epistemology maintains that the synthesis of any particular intuition requires a "figurative synthesis" to unite that *particular* intuition with the *general* concept thought in the category of the understanding. This "*figurative* synthesis" is "possible and necessary *a priori*" (B 151), and is termed "the *transcendental synthesis of imagination*" (B 151). From this it follows that the *transcendental synthesis of imagination* is also 'possible and necessary *a priori*.' Consequently, it appears that the final condition of the possibility of *a priori* synthetic knowledge is a **figural** synthesis of the transcendental **imagination**. Thus does the capstone of Kant's critical edifice appear to stand in discordant asymmetry to the professed rational and cognitive autonomy of his "transcendental unity of apperception." For the unity afforded by this apperception ultimately appears to be grounded in a schematism which Kant himself characterizes as "an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover" (A 142/B 181).

³ Schelling writes in 1797 that "if space is only the form of external intuition, then in contrast, time is the form of intuition in general; everything that is, is a function of time" (I/463).

both theoretical and practical philosophy have the task of presenting a history of the self in its twofold nature. The object of theoretical philosophy is the history of the unconscious self or nature, whereas the object of practical philosophy is the history of the conscious self. The former domain of nature is characterized by unconscious, and thus necessary activity, whereas the latter is characterized by the conscious action of free, moral agents. And that which is objectively real "in a system of idealism", namely history, "requires to be deduced transcendently no less than does the objective of the first order, namely nature" (I/3 333/4).

This deduction of history, continues Schelling,

leads directly to the proof that what we regard as the ultimate ground of harmony between the subjective and the objective in action must in fact be conceived as an absolute identity; though to think of this latter as a substantial or personal entity would in no way be better than to posit it in a pure abstraction -- an opinion that could be imputed to idealism only through the grossest of misunderstandings" (I/3 333/4).

The absolute identity thus understood also displays a twofold nature. From the standpoint of the infinite, it manifests itself as the Absolute; from the perspective of finite existence, it becomes progressively known through the creative acts of the self *qua* will. Accordingly, considered as a whole, this absolute identity must be conceived as the dynamic and *relational principle* of a logical structure, not hypostatized as a substantive Being. And it is not merely a figure of abstraction, for as the principle of Schelling's derivation of both productive nature and the world of the spirit, it must also be construed at the same time as a *generative activity*. Understood as an activity of incessant production, the self is not to be conceived as somehow determined by an *origin* of primordial unity, but must rather be envisioned as the *possibility* of this absolute identity realizing or creating itself at some point in time. For it is only through the creative activity of self-construction that the self can ever come to know itself fully; and the only way in which the self may ever know itself objectively is through the objective manifestations of its will, which is to say, through works of the creative spirit *qua* works of art. Schelling's *System* is thus nothing other than an historical account of the progressive development of the self which begins in a blind unconscious production and culminates in the most potent act of the human will, the work of artistic creation. And it is only in this highest objectification of the will that the self comes to know itself as both subject and object, creator and created, thereby overcoming the estranged oppositions of mere reflective thought, and momentarily realizing its capacity for wholeness and reconciliation.

I

Time and individuality arise for the empirical self in its act of free self-determination. With this autonomous act of the self, Schelling leaves the domain of theoretical philosophy and enters the realm of the practical. Whereas the object of theoretical philosophy is the activity of the self prior to consciousness, that is, Nature, the object of practical philosophy is the autonomous activity of the *will*, whose arena of performance is none other than that of history. And whereas theoretical consciousness is characterized by an incessant, blind producing that remains forever entrapped in in the duality of the subject-object relation, the condition for the possibility of practical self-consciousness is the self's interaction with other intelligences.⁴ Through this interaction the will attains to an absolute abstraction whereby it contemplates the ideal-real relation itself; it no longer opposes acts of real intuition and an ideal understanding, but rather views these two in opposition from the vantage point of their tensive union in imagination. Through this activity of the will the self sets itself free from the "objective", thereby allowing it to destroy "everything material in its presenting" (I/3 557/175). The objects of practical consciousness are not those of nature but the *occurrences* of history, that is, the activities of autonomous intelligences. In the *idealizing* activity of the will the concepts produced *exceed* and go beyond the object, so that the latter becomes "a *means* to an *end*" (I/3 553/172). Thus, to account for free activity what must be expressed is no longer the concept of an object, but the concept of a concept. To do this, there must arise a reflexive relation not between the self and the object world, but rather between the self and the products of its will. But in order for the self to become conscious of the will's activity, the will itself must become known to the self as an object of intuition which in its production clearly discloses the "expression" of that willing.

The expression of these intuitions occurs within the opposition created by, on the one hand, the freedom of the will "and thus also of infinity", and on the other hand by the "finitude" of the productive intuition's "compulsion" to incessantly produce presentations (I/3 558/176). "Hence," Schelling continues, "in virtue of this contradiction, an activity must arise which wavers in the middle between finitude and infinity"; an activity which mediates "between the theoretical and the practical" projects of reason; an activity which he provisionally terms "imagination". The power generated by such a polarity must of necessity produce something "which itself oscillates between infinity and finitude" (I/3 558/176). He terms the products of

⁴ "The act of self-determination, or the free action of the intelligence upon itself, can be explained only by the determinate action of an intelligence external to it" (I/3 540/161).

such an oscillation "Ideas" and, contrasting them with the "concepts" of the understanding, further delineates this state of productive imagining as an activity of "reason" in contrast to that of the "understanding." Schelling concludes that "what is commonly called theoretical reason is nothing else but imagination in the service of freedom" (I/3 559/176). The Ideas of reason *qua* imagination thus extend beyond the realm of possible experience to the domain of the Moral law,⁵ and find their expression in the autonomous works of the will through the mediating schematism of the *ideal*:

But now how in willing, the self makes the transition, even in thought, from the Idea to the determinate object (for how such a transition may be objectively possible is still not in question at all), is beyond comprehension, unless there is again some intermediary which is for acting precisely what in thinking the symbol is for ideas, or the schema for concepts. This mediating factor is the *ideal* (I/3 559/176).

The mediating concept for *action* is the ideal, precisely in the same manner in which the schema mediates the concept. Through this mediation, the integrity of the Ideas are protected and they remain active as the interminable product of the powers of imagination. For if they were to be divorced from the activity of the imagination and hypostatized as *objects* of the understanding, they would inevitably lead to the well-known paradoxes of Kant's antinomies.⁶ To remain activities of the imagination, and yet still be capable of directing moral action, the Ideas require the mediating concept of the *ideal* from which the understanding can derive its directives. This concept of the ideal limits the Idea "only for purposes of action," so that if "the ideal is realized, the Idea can be extended further, and so on infinitely" (I/3 561/177). The ideal is valid only for the present, whereas the Idea retains its validity in an eternal future which "can be realized only in a *progressus ad infinitum*" (I/3 562/178). The tension created by the mediation of the ideal between the "*is*" and the "*should*" generates the drive of the will to "transform the object as it is into the object as it should be" (I/3 559/177). And it is this compulsion to realize the infinite within the finite that fires the "imagination in the service of freedom" (I/3 559/176) to produce these ideals.

⁵ 6,186f/174f.

⁶ Schelling understood Kant's antinomies to be "contradictions whose existence rests solely on the fact that either we reflect upon the object, in which case it is necessarily finite, or else we reflect further upon our own reflecting, whereby the object again at once becomes infinite. But now it is obvious that if the question whether the object of an Idea be finite or infinite is dependent merely on the free orientation of reflection, the object as such can itself be neither the one nor the other" (I/3 559/176).

The domain of practical philosophy is that of human freedom, that is, the sphere of history understood as the "realm of experience".⁷ Theoretical philosophy is incapable of accounting for the contingencies of this realm. It "miscarries" when it attempts to "to become aware of its actions" (I/3 536/158) in this area of human activity, and inevitably puts forth what prove to be "totally groundless" propositions regarding the finite and conditional strata of our existence.⁸ Faced with the task of accounting for humanity's most "fundamental prejudices" of the existence of the self and an external world, theoretical reason misfires and falls victim to its own self-reference; failing to counter either solipsism or skepticism, its own internal logic compels it to affirm both these *counter-intuitive* positions. Where theoretical propositions fail, "where I can no longer find firm ground", Schelling is driven to that region of activity where "in order to stand firm, that ground itself must first be *brought forth*" (I/311). Thus where the static concepts of the understanding fail to produce a compelling relation to the contingencies of existence, the philosopher must rely on the productive powers of the imagination to create and *bring forth* such a bond. The philosopher is thus led to "a new realm, into the realm of the creative and realizing activity of reason" in which these propositions shall be *provided* with and *given* a reality that is produced and *brought forth* by the will itself:⁹

What lies beyond the real world are the *Ideas*, i.e., not as objects of speculation but of action, and to that extent therefore of a *future* experience (but nonetheless still of experience), something that should be realized in reality" (I/465).

The Ideas of the imagination *qua* ideals of the understanding fulfill their function in parallel fashion to the schemata of the concepts, producing an exemplar of moral action to be *realized* by practical consciousness. The energy which propels the will to reshape and transform an external object arises entirely from the "duality of the self that both idealizes (projects ideals) and realizes" (realizing in the sense of producing ideals) (I/3 536/158).¹⁰ And it is only through this

⁷ "*Gebiet der Erfahrung*" (1 310).

⁸ The analysis of the very concept of history discloses for Schelling the inherently temporal nature of historical experience, noting that the etymology of the German word *Geschichte* is "the knowledge of what has happened (*Kenntniß des Geschehenen*)" (I/466). Granting the possibility of a philosophy of history, Schelling attempts in this essay to derive the possibility of a "philosophy of experience"; a philosophy that, like history, will have as its object the symbolic manifestations of the will, but not merely in the *past*, but as they *occur* or *happen*.

⁹ "*das Gebiet der schöpferischen und realisirenden Vernunft*" (1 311).

¹⁰ Schelling's dialectical methodology focuses the dualities of our oppositional logic into lucid points of blatant contradiction, magnifying the tensive forces therein, until the incongruity produces a resolution which in turn generates another set of opposing forces. He explains his

activity directed at the transformation of an external object that the will can become an object for itself. This manifestation of the will comes to fruition in two types of activities: that of human activity in general, and of creative activity in particular. The former activity constitutes the object of the philosophy of history, the latter, that of the philosophy of art.

II

History is attributable only to those beings who are capable of acting in accordance with an ideal, which is to say, to only those beings whose imagination is capable of producing the ideals necessary to guide the self in its endless efforts at their realization:

it is therefore apparent that history comes about neither with absolute lawfulness, nor with absolute freedom either, but exists only where a single ideal is realized under an infinity of deviations, in such a way that, not the particular detail indeed, but assuredly the whole, is in conformity thereto (I/3 588/199).

From this it follows that there can never be a history of one person, for one person will never live up to an ideal. There can instead only be a history of entire species or groups of people, whose actions *en masse* and over time will approach the form of the ideal. Consequently all history must be *progressive*, a requirement that excludes all cyclic accounts (Mendelsohn). From the standpoint of the subjective, that is the standpoint of freedom, what can be predicted *a priori* and occurs in accordance with necessary laws cannot not be object of history; conversely, what is the object of history must not be capable of being predicted *a priori*:

Theory and history are totally opposed. Man has a history only because what he will do is incapable of being calculated in advance according to any theory (I/3 589/200).¹¹

If man has a history *a posteriori*, he has it only because he does not have one *a priori*; because he does not bring his history with him, he himself must first bring it forth through free activity (I/472). From the perspective of nature however, it must be added that absolute lawlessness, or a

procedure as follows:

Two opposites *a* and *b* (subject and object) are united by the act *x*, but *x* contains a new opposition, *c* and *d* (sensing and sensed), and so the act *x* itself again becomes an object; it is itself explicable only through a new act = *z*, which perhaps again contains an opposition, and so on (I/3 411/61).

Thus his system is fundamentally dynamic, and thereby capable of accounting for a mechanism of development and evolution.

¹¹ Schelling writes that "In every science, *history* has preceded theory. Thus Greek mythology was originally nothing other than a historical schematism of nature (which one has not yet begun to explain)" (I/472).

series of events with no purpose whatsoever, would also fail to qualify as history. In fact, that we have history at all is the result of our finitude and restrictedness (*Beschränktheit*), that is, it is the result of our being subject to the objective laws of nature. To this extent, in that our world is defined by what has come before, history is determinative for an individual's consciousness:

This particular individuality presupposes this particular period, of such and such a character, such and such a degree of culture, etc.; but such a period is impossible without the whole of history [...] all that has ever *been* in history is also truly connected, or will be, with the individual consciousness of each, not immediately, maybe, but certainly by means of innumerable linkages, of such a kind that if one could point them out it would also become obvious that the *whole* of the past was necessary in order to put this consciousness together" (I/3 591/201).

But while history's ultimate goal can never be realized by any one individual, history itself is nonetheless made up of individuals who have "been the cause of a new future"; for only "so much is posited" in history "as has so far continued to exert an influence" on later generations (I/3 591/202). The individual thus stands as mediator and product of the polarity of necessity and freedom. From the one extreme, the self appears as the product of the timeless necessity of natural law and the historically conditioned determinants required to put *this* particular consciousness together (historical determinants that are actually the ossified remains of past acts of freedom). From the other extreme, the self appears under the conditions imposed on it by the categorical imperative to determine the self in accordance with the moral law. As we have seen, our "freedom" is not the result of either singular extreme, but is rather the product of *both* as they reciprocally presuppose and condition the other. Consequently, and as strange as it may sound, the primary condition of the possibility of freedom is necessity.

To mediate this contradiction, Schelling postulates an *absolute identity beyond* this disjunction; an absolute identity which, properly speaking, *is neither* of the two contradictory elements but is rather *the common source of both*. It is thus an absolute "harmony of necessity and freedom... postulated for the sake of making action possible" (I/3 606/214). As the identity of both freedom and necessity, it is the condition of all duality, and is therefore the condition of all consciousness. And because this identity is itself the condition of consciousness, the latter can never attain to a synthetic or predicated knowledge of the former, thereby further proving the limitations of theoretical consciousness.

In postulating this unconditioned identity as the condition of the possibility of action, Schelling returns full circle to the beginning of his *System*, demonstrating the agency of a "*universally mediating factor...which is the sole ground*" of our knowledge (I/3 353/15), as the

unconditioned condition of all knowledge.¹² This "eternal *mediator*" (I/3 600/209) between subject and object, between "the self-determining subjective within us and the objective" common to us all, is none other than the absolute identity. And this absolute identity *qua* absolute cannot be grounded theoretically, but can only be justified as a postulate, as a condition for the possibility of practical *and theoretical* consciousness:

But now it is easy to see that this *absolutely identical principle*, which is already divided in the first act of consciousness, and by this separation generates the entire system of finitude, cannot, in fact, have any predicates whatever; for it is the absolutely simple, and thus can have no predicates drawn either from the intelligence or free agency, and hence, too, can never be an object of knowledge, being an object only that is eternally presupposed in action, that is, an object of belief (I/3 600/209).

With the introduction of the category of belief, Schelling finally speaks of the inescapably theological dimension of his philosophy as a history of self-consciousness *qua* Absolute. From the standpoint of this absolute identity, if reflection directs itself exclusively to the objective or unconscious strata in all activity, one is inevitably led to a system of "*fatalism*" in which all freedom is denied. If one only reflects on the opposing factor, that of the subjective, one arrives at a system of "*irreligion* and *atheism*," ruled by absolute lawlessness. "But if reflection be elevated" to the Absolute which balances both freedom and necessity in a perfect repose, then one reaches "the system of providence, that is, religion in the only true sense of the word" (I/3 601/209).¹³

III

According to Schelling, the "first act of consciousness" divides the original unknowing identity of the self, and through this separation "generates the entire system of finitude" and its accompanying dualisms (I/3 600/209). This first act of consciousness is an act of the will willing to become "conscious of itself", that is, to distinguish itself as an individual. But the moment the will distinguishes itself as individual, identity is ruptured, thereby separating the "free" from "the necessary" (I/3 603/210). With this separation of man from the world and of subject from object, reflection first truly begins. From this point on, the thinking self divides and separates that which nature enjoys as unity; object is separated from intuition, concept from image and

¹² This Identity evolves into the will of Schelling's 1809 essay on the *Nature of Human Freedom*. That which by definition *must* contradict itself can be the only viable principle of philosophy, that is, a principle capable of accounting for *difference in identity*.

¹³ The design of providence is thus the historical or empirical aspect of the transcendently conceived absolute synthesis.

eventually, in that the self becomes its own object, even the individual becomes divided from its ordinary wholeness (2,13). This last rupture throws the individual "into contradiction with himself"; it makes him "mindful of the fact that he is divided within himself" (I/3 582/195), and thus "forever a broken fragment" (I/3 608/216), torn between opposing forces and drives. Such a dissociation of subject from object, and the alienated relations of opposition demanded by a strictly reflective consciousness, leads Schelling to conclude that "mere reflection is thus a mental disorder of man" (2,13). But the condition of possibility of such reflection is an originary "estrangement" (*Entzweiung*; 5 115 (1802)) of man from his primordial self; an estrangement which inexorably leads to "the unconditional demand to posit the absolute external to oneself" (5 109), a demand which, if fulfilled, thereby surrenders to this alienation and institutionalizes it as a permanent condition of existence.

Schelling however considered reflection as merely a means to an end, which could never, of itself, be the sole vehicle through which philosophy should achieve its ultimate goal. The essence of philosophy does not consist in the results of a demonstration, nor merely in the results of a philosophical activity, but rather arises in the activity of philosophizing itself. Essential is not that the one who philosophizes acquires a certain system of propositions, whose definition and justification he can reproduce on demand. What is essential is that one become capable of actually *realizing* the activity of philosophizing. And it is only in this sense that Schelling's conception of "practical philosophy" can be adequately understood, for in it he demands the realization of theory: that we *become* what we call ourselves theoretically (I/308/173). The goal of "true" philosophy thus lies at the end of reflection, on the *other side* of the self-negation of reflexive thought, in the creative act of productive intuition.

As we have seen, the "eternal mediator", the absolute identity, is active in all the self's activities, reflexive or intuitive. It sustains with infinite energy each and every opposition that constitutes finite and temporal consciousness. Thus it must also support the appearance of both necessity and freedom. It must somehow "mediate" between the two in the experience of their contradiction in finite and historical existence. Hence, at the apex of his *System*, Schelling introduces the determinative factor of an irreducible mediation *qua* interpretation, to delineate his understanding of how the self relates to the history of both itself and the absolute identity:

If we think of history as a play in which everyone involved performs his part quite freely and as he pleases, a rational development of this muddled drama is conceivable only if there be a single spirit who speaks in everyone, and if the playwright, whose mere fragments are the individual actors, has already so harmonized beforehand the objective outcome of the whole with the free play of every participant, that something rational must

indeed emerge at the end of it. But now if the playwright *were to exist* independently of his drama, we should be merely the actors who speak the lines he has written. If he *does* exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he himself *would not be*, then we are collaborators of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play (I/3 602/210).

Here Schelling establishes a reciprocal relation between the activity of the self and the absolute as *Mitdichtern*, as co-collaborators in the unfolding drama of history. Man assumes an active part in freely creating his role in the drama of history, for "the history of man is not preordained, he can and should make his history himself" (I/471). Neither the Absolute nor the self fully determines the course of history. Instead, *both* are required to assume roles of mediation in the attempt to reconcile the conscious and unconscious factors of freedom and necessity. Indeed, implicit in this collaborative effort is some type of *affiliation* or similarity between the absolute identity and the self. For to deny any type of affiliation is to posit the absolute outside oneself, thereby denying all possibility of free action, and therewith the possibility of history. Such is the case in dogmatic theism which, in positing an absolutely transcendent God, declares all freedom to be a delusion; a position which inevitably devolves into a system of fatalism. But "conversely, the philosophy that proceeds from freedom, in doing so sublates (*aufheben*) everything absolute outside us" (I/473), and posits the absolute within us, at least to the degree that we share in that objective intelligence common to all of us.

Hence there emerges a doubling of the self and the absolute: both appear to subsist as the correlates of particularity and universality within the individual self. Consequently, the question of the possibility of history now also assumes an individual dimension, namely the question of the possibility of self-knowledge. Both endeavors project as their ideal their complete objectification: history as the complete revelation of the absolute, and the self-made manifest through the expression of its will.

But Schelling denies the possibility of both to wholly achieve either form of objectification. He does so on the grounds of the *infinite* freedom which motivates both correlates:

if the appearance of freedom is necessarily infinite, the total evolution of the absolute synthesis is also an infinite process, and history itself is a never wholly completed revelation of that absolute (I/3 603/211).

History is a progressive "self-disclosing revelation of the absolute", the nature of which precludes any attempt to specify particular times or places in which it has made itself visible.

"For God never *exists*", if to exist means to be that which "presents itself in the objective world" (I/3 603/211). Rather the Absolute continuously demonstrates its presence through man's history. Consequently, only the whole of history could render such a demonstration complete. But for history to complete itself the objective world would have to become a "perfect manifestation of God, or what comes to the same thing, of the total congruence of the free with the unconscious" (I/3 603/211). If this were to ever occur however, *freedom itself*, that infinite power which defines our humanity, would also cease to exist. And on the plane of individuality, for the self to have exhaustively objectified itself for itself, it too would have to wholly overcome (*aufheben*) the rupture which temporal consciousness induces in itself, and thereby restore the original unity of the self through the eradication of all patterns of discursive thinking. But to say that such a complete revelation of the absolute could occur, that history could end, or that man could overcome the restrictions of his finitude: all this requires a conception of an otherworldly utopia that Schelling simply finds both irrelevant¹⁴ and unappealing:

For if we were ever to fulfill our purpose and realize the absolute: then there would indeed be no other law for every individual, and for the entire species, than the law of their perfected nature, consequently all history would cease; hence the feeling of boredom that attaches itself to every idea of an absolute state of reason (like the idea of a theater piece in which all the major roles are played by perfected beings, or the lecture of a novel...where idealized people appear, or a Christian poem of the heroes in which angels -- the most boring beings of all -- play all the major roles) (I/473).

Schelling rules out an equally boring but much more frustrating possibility -- that of being trapped in an infinite *cycle* of a selfsame repetition -- through an appeal to the power of the infinite *qua* freedom. For given the infinite power of freedom, it would be incomprehensible to suppose that such a power would *continually* double back on itself, and thereby limit itself as exclusively finite. The dynamic of infinity is expansive whereas that of finitude is contractive. The dynamic of space conforms to infinity whereas that of time conforms to the finite. This most fundamental opposition of consciousness is irreducible. To collapse either extreme into the other is tantamount to denying the reality of reflective consciousness.

Schelling does however grant the theoretical possibility that God *may one day exist*, -- that the Absolute would wholly realize itself in history in the very same instant in which every

¹⁴ For what moral purpose could possibly justify this idea? As the two-plane model of Christianity illustrates, the only end such an other-worldly utopia can serve is that of a ruling class, whereby the injustice of this world is justified on the promise of better life in the world to come.

self would realize its perfected nature -- but Schelling grants reality to this possibility only as a *future event* whose eventuality we are incapable of determining in advance. For "when this period will begin, we are unable to tell. But whenever it comes into existence, God also will then *exist*" (I 604/212).

Schelling thereby postpones the possibility that the absolute harmony of necessity and freedom, the postulated identity which is both the "ground" of all knowing and acting, will ever become *fully objectified*. As long as humanity *exists* under the restrictions of finitude, and is thereby confined to a rationality that functions within a discursive system of predicative thought, man will be forced to simply *postulate* the possibility of an advance to a unity of self, conceived as an absolute identity of conscious and unconscious forces. In the meantime, the activity of this absolute identity is postulated as a condition of the possibility of both knowledge and action, and the nature of this identity can only be construed negatively as *not* being a "substantial or personal entity", nor "a pure abstraction" (I/3 333/4).

Schelling's postulated identity of difference provides the opposition that drives and sustains the process of both the progressive, self-disclosure of the absolute, and the gradual self-objectification of the finite will. The activity of the self ultimately aims at a total objectification of the self, a total self-determination or self-knowledge that elevates the self to an absolutely independent position of existing wholly for itself (*für sich*). But again, just as the revelation of the absolute in history is constrained by the restrictedness of time, so too is the realization of the absolute by the self restricted by the conditions of finitude that have caused the rupture of consciousness in the first place.

Given the restricted validity of reflective thought, it cannot be said that we *wholly know* either the *Absolute* or the *self*. Schelling does account however, for a mechanism whereby he can speak of the self becoming *conscious* of the identity which serves as the ground of both the self and the absolute. He does so through an appeal to the same mechanism that enables him to account for the phenomenon of *time*, that is, the power of intuition.¹⁵ Just as reflective thought is

¹⁵ Schelling points to the sophism of Zeno's paradox as a simple example of the problems that emerge for the reflective model of the self when time is removed through abstraction. Through the introduction of the concepts of mechanics, the attempt is made to mediate the transition from A to -A, from rest to motion, by describing that transition as mediated by an infinity. But this transition must still occur in a finite period of time. Hence, "from the standpoint of reflection" the construction of time is "utterly impossible, since between any two points on a line an infinity of others must be supposed" (I/3 519/145). This paradox is the result of the removal of "the original schematism of intuition" from the reflective model of the self.

driven to paradox when faced with explaining the mechanics of time, it is now faced with a similar incongruity in attempting to account for a mechanism through which the "self itself can become conscious of the original harmony between subjective and objective" (I/3 604/212). And just as reflective thought is incapable of accounting for the phenomenon of temporality, it is also incapable of accounting for the paradox of the self in its free and autonomous *activity*. For there is no possible way that discursive thinking can account for the absolute harmony of freedom and necessity, which is the condition of the possibility of all action.¹⁶ Only the mechanism of intuition can *exhibit* this condition and allow the self to become conscious of its primordial identity.

IV

Time is not a transcendental abstraction like the pure concepts of the understanding, for if it were, there would have to be just as many different kinds of time as there are different substances; "yet there is but one time; what we speak of as different times are merely different partitions of absolute time" (I/3 520/145). The intuitive model of the self has no problem accounting for Zeno's paradox. The intuitive self, which is constantly striving for "identity of consciousness", finds that "this combination of contradictorily opposite states is possible only through the schematism of time. Intuition produces time as constantly in transition from A to -A, in order to mediate the contradiction between opposites. By abstraction, the schematism, and with it time, are abolished" (I/3 518/144). Only the productive intuition "can picture an infinite within the finite, that is, a quantity in which, though itself finite, no indefinitely smaller part is possible" (I/3 518/144). This is because from the intuitive standpoint, time is originally already an object of outer intuition, so that there can be "no difference between *presentations* and *objects*" (I/3 516/143). Since originally time is the universal link between inner and outer senses, it is also the link between intuition and concept.

¹⁶ Schelling delighted in demonstrating the limits of a purely reflective mind, that is, its inability to account for "*das Real*" in experience. At the beginning of his career, his target was the hollow formalism of Kant's discursive system; at the end of his career, it was Hegel's even more exhaustive use of conceptual reification. In his *Philosophy of Nature* (1797), Schelling writes regarding those who attempt to account for our *conviction* "of an existence outside us" as a *speculative* problem: "The attempt has been made to represent this question as a purely *speculative* one. But it is a question of concern to *man*, and one to which a purely speculative cognition does *not* lead. "A person who feels and knows nothing real within him or without -- who lives upon concepts only, and plays with concepts -- to whom even his own existence is nothing but an *insipid thought* -- how can such a person speak about reality (any more than the blind man about colors)?" (*Ideas toward a Philosophy of Nature*, tr. P. Heath (Cambridge University Press: 1984), 173). The same could well be said today regarding those who believe all philosophical questions are *linguistic*, in that concept has been replaced by word. The estrangement from experience remains complete.

Schelling considers action to be subjectively free, yet *qua* objective consequence, it is conditioned by the necessity of natural law. Subjectively, through our inner sense, we perceive that we act. But objectively, through our outer sense, we perceive our actions once removed. Hence the inescapable feeling of incongruity or variance between intended actions and their performance, as if there were another objective agency somehow independent of me, that carries out and executes my inner orders. "But now this objective agency, which acts through *me*, must again be *myself*. Yet *I* alone am the conscious, whereas this other is the unconscious" (I/3 605/213). Thus that which constitutes my action is precisely the union or identity of both. This identity however dissolves itself through action, i.e., in acting the *unconscious* element objectifies itself and confronts me as an *objective* element. Consequently, free action requires, just as consciousness does, the division of the identity of conscious and unconscious activities.

Prior to the objectification of the unconscious and its appearance as an objective element, the unconscious activity is a productive intuition. It would thus appear that this original identity "must allow of being evidenced in intuition" (I/3 605/213). But such is not the case. Either the intuiting is absolutely subjective, and there exists nothing objective to be intuited, or the identity becomes objective in acting, and thereby destroys its identity in order to appear objectified. From this it follows that the originary identity will then "have to be evidenced only (we may suppose) in the products of the intuiting" (I/3 606/213). But this identity cannot be found in the order of history, for what lies at the root of this order is temporality and action, both of which require the *separation* of the very identity we seek to intuit.

This identity is also not to be found in the realm of nature. As the sphere of unconscious production nature does indeed present an original identity of unconscious and conscious activity. But Nature's fusion of freedom and necessity is presented in such a perfect harmony that its products appear "*purposive*, without being *purposively brought about*" (I/3 606/214), thereby presenting "this identity to me as one whose ultimate ground" does *not* "reside *in the self itself*" (I/3 609/217). The self does of course recognize an identity therein, but not an identity whose principle lies within itself. And the final goal of Schelling's *System* is after all, to explain precisely how *this* is possible, of how "the ultimate ground of the harmony between subjective and objective becomes an object to the *self itself*" (I/3 609/217).

At the beginning of practical philosophy, the absolute act of the will ensures that the intelligence is conscious only of its inner intuition; it is an intellectual rather than a sensual activity, in which its object, the moral law, appears neither subjective nor objective but totally

nonobjective. What remains to be accounted for is an external object which will express, in objectified form, the absolute identity that one intuits *internally* when one intuits the moral law. For through the absolute act of the will the self intuits the moral law, and therewith becomes capable of consciously free activity. But this capacity for self-determination is merely the result of an intellectual intuition of an internal subject-object opposition. What remains to be accounted for is an intuition which will bring together both the *identity* of the self's own consciously free acting and its unconscious necessity, *and* a consciousness of this identity. This could only occur for the self through an intuition in which this identity has been objectified into an object, an object which could then *reflect* that identity back to the self, so that the self may become conscious of this identity. But the possibility of recognizing the reflected identity presupposes the internal intuition of that identity in the moral law, for in order to recognize its reflection, the self must have already come to know itself directly through intellectual intuition.

As Schelling notes:

Every organism is a monogram of that original identity, but in order to recognize itself in that reflected image, the self must already have recognized itself directly in the identity in question (I/3 611/218).

The type of intuition capable of this is an *aesthetic intuition*, whose object is of course the "art-product".¹⁷ The dynamic of aesthetic intuition is the reverse of the productive intuition which generates the natural world. Productive intuition starts out unconscious and ends in consciousness; hence the process of production is not purposive whereas the product is. In contrast, aesthetic intuition begins with conscious activity and ends with an activity devoid of consciousness, in which of course the self is "conscious in respect of production, unconscious in regard to the product" (I/3 611/219). The end product of aesthetic intuition thereby presents an identity of the conscious and the unconscious, the subjective and the objective.

But how is it possible that something objective be brought forth with consciousness, for we have just seen that the objective can only be brought forth *without* consciousness? Schelling resolves this seeming opposition by pointing out that even in the exercise of free action there remains an irreducibly unconscious element. But whereas a free action abolishes the original

¹⁷ Schelling applies the term *aesthetics* in the original sense of the term, denoting the *asthetika*, the realm of sensory perception. Thus, the phrase "aesthetic intuition" must be understood as denoting the intuition of sensory objects which happen to be works of art. Sensuous nature revalued as the only vehicle through which the supersensuous can disclose itself.

identity of conscious and unconscious activity so that the act may appear free, the act of aesthetic intuition preserves that original identity. Consequently, although "the object of the free act is necessarily an *infinite* one" and thus can never be wholly realized, the object of aesthetic intuition, as an absolute union of freedom and necessity, provides an opportunity for the self to escape the infinite possibilities of free choice, and finally to arrive at its repose in the contemplation of these dualities momentarily united in the work of art.

It remains to be seen however, how the self is to become conscious of this aesthetic production. For the conscious and unconscious activities are to be somehow united in the product of aesthetic intuition, just as they were in the organic product, but with the notable difference that the self should now be conscious of this unity. Accordingly, the process of aesthetic production must commence with the free activity of the self in the conscious application of technique and design. Yet at some point this subjective involvement must "lose itself" in an unconscious and necessary expression. This progressive transition from the subjective to the objective finds the infinite object of free activity gradually being distilled and transformed into "a *thing present*", the infinite object of free activity becoming "actual, objective, in something finite" (I/3 614/220). The production thereby assumes the character of *necessity* and ceases to appear as a freely engendered object. Thus, to the extent that a sensory object has been *informed* (*eingebildet*) by the infinite, to that extent will the work of art satisfy Schelling's definition of beauty, namely that beauty is "the infinite finitely displayed" (I/3 620/225). In the encounter with beauty so defined, the self momentarily ends its infinite urge to produce, and faces with complete recognition "the identity expressed in the product as an identity whose principle lies" in the self itself (I/3 614/221). For here the work of art merely reflects to me what no other product is capable of, for as producer I have re-membered and objectively produced that which within my consciousness is still estranged:

namely that absolute identical which has already divided itself even in the self. Hence, that which the philosopher allows to be divided even in the primary act of consciousness, and which would otherwise be inaccessible to any intuition, comes, through the miracle of art, to be radiated back from the products thereof (I/3 625/230).

The absolute *qua* primordial self, which must forever remain unknown to theoretical consciousness, and which *reflective* consciousness will never grasp, is therewith "reflected from out of" the work of art. What is reflected is the "common ground of the preestablished harmony between the conscious and unconscious" (I/3 615/221), something which cannot be reflected by anything other than the work of art. The absolute identity so reflected bears with it no mark of

an arbitrary or impulsive production, but rather an air of intended equilibrium:

This unchanging identity, which can never attain to consciousness, and merely radiates back from the product, is for the producer precisely what destiny is for the agent, namely a dark unknown force which supplies the element of completeness or objectivity to the piecework of freedom; and as that power is called destiny, which through our free action realizes, without our knowledge and even against our will, goals *that we did not even envisage*, so likewise that incomprehensible agency which supplies objectivity to the consciousness, without the cooperation of freedom, and to some extent in opposition to freedom (wherein is eternally dispersed what in this production is united), is denominated by means of the obscure concept of *genius* (I/3 613/222).

Schelling proceeds to define the object of aesthetic production as being nothing other than a "product of genius". For it is only the genius who is driven by a force beyond his conscious control, as if to satisfy an irresistible urge of its nature, to produce works of art that display the dualisms of reflective consciousness in a unified form of consummate equipoise. Genius harmonizes the opposing elements of what Schelling terms *art* and *poetry*, of conscious technique and its unconscious correlate *poesis* (I/3 618/224). The former factor, which is what one commonly thinks of when analyzing aesthetic production, is limited by Schelling to only the conscious activities of thought and reflection, applied through technical skills which may be learned and mastered. The latter factor in contrast, is an unconscious power which cannot be learned, but must instead "be inborn through the free bounty of nature" (I/3 618/224). Both factors must be equally present to produce a truly perfect work of genius. A preponderance of poetry in aesthetic production results only in "dead products" which display but the "wholly blind force" of the nature which inspires them, whereas a preponderance of art or technique produces a work characterized by superficiality and "the mere mechanics" of production. It is to be expected however, that aesthetic production in which the latter dominates over the former should be able to achieve more than a pure work of poetry. For although the power of genius "is commonly regarded as the nobler" of the two factors, it is a formless power if not refined by "man's serious application, his industry and thought" (I/3 618/224).

Only the two united may produce a work which displays the "unfathomable depth" of the infinite within a finite form, a work of unconscious technique which neither the viewer nor the artist himself "is wholly able to penetrate" (I/3 618/224). Mirroring the play of forces which compel aesthetic production, the character of a work of art is one of "an *unconscious infinity* [synthesis of nature and freedom]" (I/3 619/225), which points to the infinite depth of meaning which the work of art displays in finite form. For example, the myths of ancient Greece that,

while displaying an "infinite meaning and a symbolism of all ideas", also manifest a strata of unconscious necessity which proves they were never the product of a calculated attempt at cosmological signification. Instead, like a work of art, they display both an inexhaustible field of meaning and the character of having arisen through some agency of unconscious necessity.

The necessity that propels true aesthetic production emerges from "an intrinsically infinite separation" of nature and freedom; it is fueled by the conflicts of finitude, by "that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart" (I/3 628/231). Consequently, since every aesthetic production proceeds from the feeling of this infinite contradiction, every production must end in the feeling of "an infinite tranquility" (I/3 619/225); an outcome that ends in the feeling of "infinite harmony" which alone pacifies our "our endless striving", resolves "the final and uttermost contradiction within us" (I/3 614/222), and satisfies the definition of beauty as the *infinite finitely displayed*.¹⁸ The product of genius, the "*phenomenon*" of a work of art, while being "utterly unaccountable" and "incomprehensible" from the "standpoint of mere reflection", provides through aesthetic intuition the "one everlasting revelation" which yields objective access to the Absolute (I/3 616/223). Schelling concludes his hymn to the productive powers of genius by stating that its products are alone capable of attaining "perfection", and that the role this creative force plays in aesthetics is analogous to the role which the self plays in philosophy, namely that it is "the supreme reality, which never itself becomes objective, but is the cause of everything that is so" (I/3 619/224).

Given this definition of beauty, Schelling is led by systematic considerations to invert Kant's position regarding the principle of art in contrast to the beauty of nature. Far from natural beauty providing the principle whereby works of art should be judged, only art in its "perfection" can possibly provide "the principle and norm for the judgment of natural beauty" (I/3 633/227).

¹⁸ Though seemingly ambivalent, Schelling makes no distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, treating them as synonymous terms. Subsumed beneath the true work of art is "pseudo-art" and "the merely strange". The former "merely apes" the true work of art, for the most this aesthetic product can achieve is the reproduction of the conscious activity of the artist. It is thus merely an "object for reflection" but not for intuition, insofar as the latter requires the depths of infinitude to excite its mechanism (I/3 619/225). "The merely strange" work of art produces a contradiction in the viewer, but whereas a sublime work is so powerful that it produces an involuntary reaction in us -- setting "all the forces of the mind in motion" in order to resolve a contradiction that "threatens" our whole existence --, the merely strange work of art confronts us with a contradiction that is "not worth the trouble of solving" (I/3 622/226). The vast majority of pieces I have seen in recent shows unfortunately would fall under one of these two categories of the strange or the pseudo-artwork.

This follows from Schelling's understanding of organic being as embodying *unseparated* that which the work of art exhibits as re-membered *after* its sojourn of estrangement. Because it begins unconscious and works towards consciousness, organic being thereby fails to meet the condition of aesthetic production which requires a finite, and therefore estranged consciousness, from which to proceed. If beauty is essentially the harmonization of an infinite conflict, organic being can never be beautiful *necessarily*, and because the condition of beauty, consciousness, does not exist in nature, it can rather only enjoy a *contingent* beauty,

The aesthetic product distinguishes itself from a common artifact through its *freedom*. Both objects are the result of powers unleashed by a contradiction, but whereas the artifact is determined by a goal which lies outside the producer, aesthetic production is determined entirely by a principle which lies within the nature of the artist. "This independence of external goals is the source of that holiness and purity of art" which divorces it absolutely from a dependent relation to "mere sensory pleasure", the "useful" and the "scientific" (I/3 622/227). The autonomy of art is so strictly delineated by Schelling, that even morality is banished from the realm of the truly aesthetic, for if it were allowed entry, it would then posit a goal of art external to that of the production itself. To posit art as a means to moral edification would be to deny its autonomy, and force it to serve as a means to an end beyond itself. Consequently, considered parallel to the absolute autonomy of the self, the work of art as the absolute expression of *a self* must also be accorded the same unconditioned status of autonomy.

✓

Schelling closes his *System* with a brief summary of a human capacity which he asserts is the very mechanism upon which the possibility of philosophy itself depends: the mechanism of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). As we have seen, philosophy must begin with a "principal which, *qua* absolutely identical, is utterly nonobjective" (I/3 625/229); a principle which thereby grounds the harmony of the objective and subjective factors of knowledge. However, philosophy *qua* activity, proceeds from "an infinite dichotomy of opposed activities" (I/3 625/230); a dichotomy which both characterizes our estranged consciousness *and* produces its powers of reflective and intuitive modes of activity. The powers of reflective thought are, by definition, insufficient even to effect the progressive development required to move through the levels of these oppositions, much less overcome their infinite dichotomy. Only through the productive power of imagination and its agency of aesthetic intuition is the self capable of traversing and (temporarily) removing their infinite opposition through the creative power of

aesthetic production. Schelling employs the term *Einbildungskraft* in its strict etymological sense to denote this capacity, construing this term literally to describe the self's *power to form something into a unity*.¹⁹ Beauty is thus the *In-eins-bildung*, the in-forming of the infinite into the finite, so that the particular and individual is permeated and infused by the ideal. Through this account of beauty and art Schelling believes he has finally rendered the mechanism of imagination "entirely intelligible" (I/3 625/230):

So far we have not been able to render this mechanism entirely intelligible, since it is only the power of art which can unveil it completely. This productive power is the same whereby art also achieves the impossible, namely to resolve an infinite opposition in a finite product...and its name is imagination (I/3 625/230).

Imagination is therefore the very same productive power that is the source and origin of both the sensible object and the object of art, "save only in the first case the activity is dull and limited, while in the latter it is clear and boundless" (I/3 626/230n). The soul's most primary potentiality produces the "primordial intuition", declaring itself in "finite and actual things", and, "reiterated to its highest power", also produces the work of art. In reference to his analysis of genius, Schelling labels this primary potentiality "the poetic gift".²⁰ He thereby posits as the productive agency of the imagination a gift of *figuration* that underlies all human activity and creation:

Hence, that which appears to us outside the sphere of consciousness, as real, and that which appears within it, as ideal, or as the world of art, are also products of one and the same activity (I/3 626/230f).

This activity is that of the imagination. Thus, the foundation or capstone of the mechanism of philosophy is the capacity for poesis, figuration, imagination, and indeed, for phantasy. Consequently, as a result of this *transfiguration* of the epistemological hierarchy, Schelling must reconceive the nexus of Reason's Ideas (truth, beauty and the good) to conform to his mechanism of philosophy, grounded as it is in the powers of figuration. And such a reworking of the nexus

¹⁹ The English term imagination derives from the term image and connotes an ethereal copy of an assumed reality. Hardly a process that can be called productive in a positive sense, it instead implies an act of deriving an inferior copy from a real original.

²⁰ Schelling thereby concedes to every human the *potential* for genius, though he of course remains zealously elitist when faced with the possibility of *completely* realizing this power. This suggestion does not contradict his earlier statement regarding the inborn "*element of poetry*" required for genius. For genius is to the artist what destiny is for the self, and since there are "men of destiny" (I/3 614/223) who differ qualitatively from all men with destinies, likewise, there are men of genius with the poetic element, who differ qualitatively from all men blessed with the poetic gift of imagination.

of ideas would most naturally follow from Schelling's new conception of human spirit and its relation to the world:

What we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script. Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which, marvelously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself; for through the world of sense there glimmers, as if through words the meaning, as if through dissolving mists the land of fantasy, of which we are in search. Each splendid painting owes, as it were, its genesis to a removal of the invisible barrier dividing the real from the ideal world, and is no more than the gateway, through which come forth completely the shapes and scenes of that world of fantasy which gleams but imperfectly through the real. Nature, to the artist, is nothing more than it is to the philosopher, being simply the ideal world appearing under permanent restrictions, or merely the imperfect reflection of a world existing, not outside of him, but within (I/3 628/232).

Nature is the manifestation of the spirit attempting to find itself. To find itself it must become objective, it must embark on an odyssey in order to discover itself. Once departed from itself it produces a world in which to carry out this discovery. Marvelously deluded, it searches through this world to find itself. But in searching through this world of nature it actually *flies from itself*. And yet this world does hold forth the truth, but only as a poem composed in a mysterious script. Only the artist and the philosopher can decipher this script, and provide therewith an answer to this riddle. But only the artist has the ability to *communicate* the resolution of this riddle, for only the artist can objectify this truth.

Only the work of art can pierce the mists of our delusion, and remove the barrier that forever sets the self in opposition to the world and itself; a delusion which also cuts us off from the ideal, from the world of fantasy, from the world of the imagination. And it is only the work of art that can resolve these oppositions and overcome this separation, by displaying the infinite in the finite through the beautiful.

But once this mist has been temporarily cleared, and we perceive the oppositions resolved in a product of the imagination, we are also faced with the realm of the moral law. For it is through the imagination that the ideas of reason, *qua* "imagination in the service of freedom" come to present themselves to us through the schematism of the ideal. Through the objectification of this subjective, intellectual intuition, it now becomes possible for the self to know itself completely, not just intellectually, for "the identity expressed in the [art-]product is an identity whose principle lies in the intelligence itself" and whose ground is ultimately discovered "in a complete intuition of itself" (I/3 614/221). Because of its reliance on the subjective vehicle of an *intellectual* intuition, philosophy only brings "a fraction of the man" to

the summit of truth. Art on the other hand, because it has objectified what the philosopher intuits internally, "brings *the whole man*, as he is, to that point, namely to a knowledge of the highest" (I/3 631/233). And it is only when the self may intuit itself via this objectified concrete manifestation, that the apex of knowledge, the absolute identity of the subjective and the objective, has been reached. And with this, art has succeeded in "objectifying with universal validity what the philosopher is able to present in a merely subjective fashion" (I/3 628/232).

Thus *through the autonomy of art*, as a result of art's purity of purpose, the self is granted a complete intuition of itself, and therewith, the work of art ultimately serves the subjective moral law.²¹ One could thus say that the *moral law* is the subjective correlate of the work of art, or conversely that the moral law objectively expressed is the work of art. The objective answer to the paradox of the moral law is the work of art, for it alone is capable of resolving its contradictions. The *beautiful* work of art objectifies the will in its highest potency, presenting the infinite in the finite, and thereby resolving the contradiction of the moral law, of how freedom and necessity relate in a concrete form. With this, *truth*, in its most supreme potency, has been attained, for the condition of knowing is the absolute identity, and only in the work of art do we have an objective manifestation of the truth which is given to the philosopher subjectively in intellectual intuition.

This reconception of truth does not deny the validity and functionality of representational thought, it rather attempts to delineate the domain of its applicability. In this sense it denies absolute truth to propositional knowledge determined by the relational structures of conceptual thought. At this height, truth occurs neither in the correspondence of an empirical object to the subject, or in the formal unity which grounds Kant's synthetic judgments in the grammar of the subject-predicate proposition. To make the jump from the level of a strictly oppositional model of knowing to the identity which unites those oppositions, there must be an element of *quantitative variation* introduced which will enable the self to know objectively the identity of its own conscious-unconscious ground. Until such a quantitative variation is introduced into the

²¹ The autonomy of art is linked to the autonomy of philosophy. Aristotle was the first to point out the pointlessness of philosophy: one searches for wisdom only *in order to* know wisdom (*Nic. Ethics* X. vii. 4-7). Likewise, one searches for beauty only *in order to* witness beauty. There can be no external purpose for either enterprise save its own realization. But because of this, the truth of the ideas will be seen as the same as absolute beauty, and vice versa. One is merely the subjective presentation of the other, whereas the latter is the objectification of the former.

cycle of reflective knowing, this mode of consciousness will forever reflect itself in an infinite hall of mirrors. Consciousness of self as the knower constructing its self as known: the self *qua* knower knowing that *qua* knower it constructs the very object that is known. From a Fichtean angle, in the generation of the I, this self is both the producer and the product. Can the before and after of the self so produced be self-identical? Obviously not, for no *recognizably new* knowledge would have been produced. Without the introduction of the variance of *difference* between the two states of before and after, the *I* would have merely reflected itself as selfsame, incapable of recognizing itself as itself in the absence of a *difference* introduced. The result therefore is an infinite reflection which produces nothing. But if in the generation of the self something *new* has indeed been produced, then there must be a mediating criterion to identify what has been introduced between the before and after.

The mediating criterion for determining the relation between these two phases of the self is the *temporal progression* of this very activity objectified; it is the introduction of the historical dimension into the reflective schema, which enables the self to recognize itself in that objectification. Schelling's realm of practical philosophy is the realm of the freely acting self, whose genesis is the coming to awareness of the moral law. The actions of the self constitute the sphere of the objectified -- experience *qua* history -- through which the self comes to recognize and know itself. With this it becomes clear the extent to which Schelling's *System* is determined by temporality: the identity of the self is not a primordial unity, of a timeless origin, that somehow subsists ready made in atemporal/parallel fashion to the development of the empirical self. Rather the entire dynamic of Schelling's project rests on the *possibility* of the *development* or of the *construction* of this identity; and with this his entire construct reveals itself as thoroughly historical. Because of the infinite and inexhaustible nature of freedom, this domain of action must always remain open-ended and incapable of closure. For to attain closure would be to realize the absolute; an action that would result on the level of the self in a perfected nature, and on the level of the species in the end of history. Either way, our existence would cease to be characterized by freedom. In the absence of such closure, humanity lives as the *Mitdichter* who mediates between the ideal self of the moral law and his objectified self of experience. But this sphere is itself dependent on and grounded in yet another. For the condition of the possibility of moral action is not just the knowledge of the moral law, but also the knowledge that the paradox this law sets for us, namely, of a freedom which is necessary, that this paradox is itself capable of being resolved.

The appearance of freedom necessitates that the objective and unconscious elements of our moral action appear to us as somehow separate and distinct from our conscious will. Yet for us to act morally and freely, we must have reason to believe that our actions will somehow approach and unite with those demanded by the moral law. Thus we require a knowledge that this type of unity is possible. Subjectively we are aware of this possibility, but we do not know it, for to know it, we must encounter it objectively. And this encounter is capable only through the work of art. The aesthetic production thus presents objectively, in a sensible and finite object, the identity of freedom and necessity, conscious and unconscious, and subject and object. As a finite manifestation of the infinite, the work of art thereby manifests an Absolute radically conceived as a "this-worldly" phenomenon, determined and characterized by the specific historical factors of the time in which it is created. This humanized conception of the Absolute discloses itself *not* in a transcendental world *jenseits* of our finite existence, but rather centers its revelation in this particular world of this particular moment in time. The artist *qua* *Mitdichter* thereby functions as the midwife in the act of creation, while *time*, "the universal mediating factor (*das allgemein Vermittelnde*), provides the variance of *difference* which the self employs to mediate its identity in its reflection:

The work of art merely reflects to me what is otherwise not reflected by anything, namely that absolutely identical which has already divided itself even in the self (I/3 625/230).

It is only through the mediation of time *qua* work of art, that the self comes finally to "know itself completely", and is thereby capable of recognizing its own image radiating back from its products. *Time* has thereby provided the *variational difference* that accounts for the development of the self, whereas the consequent possibility of history accounts for the self's ability to recognize its *transformed* self as its self. The artist thus stands to his self as reflected in his product as one might describe how a traditional God is said to stand to his Being reflected in creation. And in knowing itself completely, the self unites the trinity of truth, beauty and the good, in the act of aesthetic intuition.

In the closing paragraph of the *System*, Schelling states that this highest power of self-intuition reveals to the self its "absolute contingency", and designates this highest potency of intuition by the "idea of *genius*" (I/3 634/236). As we have seen, this self-intuition must grasp the original identity of the consciously free activity *and* its unconscious correlate, which in free activity must then objectify itself so as to oppose that act. The intuition of this identity *in its acting* is "utterly impossible" on the level of free activity accompanied by consciousness. Only the intuition of the genius, and thus the aesthetic intuition, is capable of intuiting this union of

conscious and unconscious activity in its acting. And this highest level of intuition "is indeed itself the consciousness that creates itself *ab initio*", which "must appear, where it exists, as absolutely contingent" (I/3 634/236). The genius in self-intuition thus creates itself as the geometrician constructs a line in intellectual intuition. Hence, when confronted with the question "What is the self?" Schelling responds: "What is the straight line?" To wit:

This is precisely what it seeks, namely, for you to experience what the straight line is by *constructing it*. The same [is the case] with our philosophy. We postulate the self. Concerning the question: "What is this [self]? we urge you to answer it *for yourselves*. The answer is the *'I' itself*, which shall *originate in you*, and which shall be constructed by *you*. It does not exist somewhere outside of you so that we may point it out. By virtue of constructing it you will *know* it, for it is nothing but your construct (I/450/136).

This is the highest possible level of self-intuition, that of the *genius*, who in aesthetic intuition and production realizes the highest potency of the will through the poetic gift of imagination. In this act, the artist unites the ideas of truth and the good in a product of the poetic gift, the beautiful work of art. The artist thereby *momentarily* attains to a complete knowledge of the self *qua* absolute. But this is a knowledge of itself which illuminates the self as embarked upon an "odyssey of the spirit, which, marvelously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself" (I/3 628/232). The momentary nature of this aesthetic intuition lasts long enough to sustain the process of practical philosophy, to sustain the transformation of the sphere of experience according to the ideals of the imagination, yet it dissipates just as quickly in the name of freedom, so that the autonomy of the self may have the opportunity to know itself more fully. The open-ended and irreducibly historical nature of Schelling's system is attested to in the concluding paragraph of his discussion on the relationship of art and philosophy. Here he states that we are in need of a "new mythology" in which imagination and reason would join forces; a new mythology which "must stand in the service of the ideas," and thereby function as "a mythology of reason". This entreaty illustrates the inextricable entwinement of imagination and these Ideas of Reason; a sentiment appealed to in the following passage, in which the propositional truth of philosophical assertions is made to submit to, and derive from, the more primordial truth of poetic and figurative expression:

Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge, and with it all those sciences it has guided toward perfection; we may thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source. Nor is it in general difficult to say what the medium for this science of poetry will be; for in mythology such a medium existed, before the occurrence of a breach now seemingly beyond repair. But how a new mythology is itself

to arise, which shall be the creation, not of some individual author, but of a new race, personifying, as it were, one single poet--that is a problem whose solution can be looked for only in the future destinies of the world, and in the course of history to come (I/3 629f/232f).