SCHELLING’S EMPIRICISM: A TRANSCENDENTALIST’S CONVERSION

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Abstract: The viability of Schelling’s Philosophy of Identity depends on the maintenance and cultivation of a reciprocal relationship between internal and objective reality. To stay on course Schelling assiduously checked the conceptual answers he derived from subjective thought against the objective measurements of contemporary physics. As the physicists of his day came to question the materiality of light, Schelling conceptualized it as the outer limit of what the intelligence is capable of grasping intuitively. At the same time he criticized Hegel for ignoring knowledge altogether and for propagating a philosophy of ignorance. More than a century later Jacques Derrida recognized this characteristic in Hegel, but drew a contrary conclusion. Where Schelling counseled that rational philosophy should alter course and set sail toward a higher empiricism, Derrida insisted that in pushing rationality beyond its limits Hegel had sprung a trap of incomprehension and indeterminacy from which no one would or could henceforward escape.

This essay evaluates the competing claims of Schelling and Derrida in light of the revolutionary advances of twentieth-century physics. Is this work indeed bringing forth a new world the mind qua mind cannot conceive or measure and liberating man from a prior constraint, or are the emerging physical directives of four dimensional space-time and a flat universe themselves possible only within the cloture de la representation where Derrida presumes to detain human kind indefinitely?

Even a normal person is more than can be grasped a priori.—Schelling

I shall discuss human actions and appetites just as if the inquiry concerned lines, planes or bodies.—Spinoza

Introduction

The viability of Schelling’s Philosophy of Identity depends on the maintenance and cultivation of a reciprocal relationship between internal and objective reality. What the thinking subject intuits and what actually is must correspond. To stay on course Schelling assiduously checked the conceptual answers he derived from subjective thought against the objective measurements of contemporary physics.

For the mature Schelling, circa 1833, the physical evidence had about exhausted the capacity of his philosophy, and he began to acknowledge an impasse. As the physicists of
his day came to question the materiality of light, Schelling conceptualized it as the outer limit of what the intelligence is capable of grasping intuitively.

At the same time Schelling recognized that his system was foundering on the physics of light, he criticized Hegel for ignoring knowledge altogether and for propagating a philosophy of ignorance so fundamentally incompatible with the actual appearance of things as to be wholly incomprehensible.

More than a century later, Jacques Derrida seized upon and elaborated that incomprehensibility, but drew a conclusion diametrically opposed to Schelling’s. Where Schelling counseled that rational philosophy should alter course and set sail toward a higher empiricism, Derrida insisted that in pushing rationality to its limit Hegel had sprung a trap from which no one would or could henceforward escape. Incomprehension, contradiction, negation and indeterminacy, far from being symptoms of a disease that can be cured, are irremediable and emblematic of an inescapably deficient human condition.

The ambition of this essay is to evaluate the competing claims of Schelling and Derrida in light of the revolutionary advances of twentieth-century physics. Is this work indeed bringing forth a new world the mind qua mind cannot conceive or measure and liberating man from a prior constraint, or are the emerging physical directives of four dimensional space-time and a flat universe themselves possible only within the cloture de la représentation where Derrida presumes to detain human kind indefinitely?

Schelling’s Critique of Hegel

Hegel famously heralded Descartes’s inaugural launch of self-consciousness as a maiden voyage of discovery no less transcendental than that of Columbus sailing a flat sea to locate a New World on a round earth where as inexorably as that globe soon afterwards began—as if commanded by man—to rotate on its axis and revolve around the sun, Absolute Knowing, or pure Spirit would likewise come back to be around the circle of Truth which contains its end at its beginning.

Far from acknowledging Descartes’s achievement as a spiritual sighting of epochal proportion, Schelling decried it. While Descartes claimed to doubt everything at the outset, his incredulity extended only to empirical things. So, when Descartes offers, as an example of delusion, the fact that people feel pain in amputated limbs, what he fails to add is that these people once had full use of those appendages, and are merely remembering something, albeit with regret. There is, after all, “no example of anyone who felt pain in limbs they never had.”

For Schelling nothing could be more legitimate or understandable than that a man should awaken every morning to the searing memory of the absent leg he once took for granted as certain presence. To philosophize by grounding a posteriori doubt in a priori certainty is more akin to what magicians do when they privately hide rabbits in their hats and then pull them out to the astonishment of a crowd as amazed as it is misinformed. The certainty of Descartes’s I think is attributable to the same prestidigitation. When I say I think, I presuppose that I already am in some fashion. How this always already confirms the reality of anything new is difficult to fathom.

In Schelling’s estimation, Hegel’s method is no different, only he never lost a leg. By beginning with pure being Hegel is stuck with nothing, and cannot legitimately precipi-
tate anything from it. In nothing, there is nothing to find, neither being nor anything else. When Hegel asks us to believe being and nothing are a unity, that being can find itself in nothing, he has worked a sleight of hand. What has actually occurred is a “transition” from “nothing” to “real being” with the consequence that “nothing is left behind.” Hegel’s concession that the indeterminate cannot precipitate, sua sponte, what is determined because nothing “is productive of nothing,” would seem to confirm Schelling’s conclusion that Hegel “gives one nothing” in the same way that “to carry water in cupped hands [] also gives one nothing.”

Becoming for Hegel is an idyll, an insubstantial reverie about nothing that must be distinguished from legitimate thinking which accepts the challenge of confronting reality. In the same way that real “poetry . . . represent[s] a poetic soul in relation to and in conflict with reality, and . . . thereby has a really objective content,” as distinguished from “poetry about poetry” which takes “poetry in general and in abstracto as its object,” and which “noone has held . . . to be real,” pure thought, “the logical Idea,” reason about reason, may provide the “nets” for “grasping” the “whole world,” but cannot explain “how exactly it got into those nets, since there is obviously something other and more than mere reason in the world, indeed there is something which strives beyond those barriers.” Rousseau sensed as much in decrying man as free but everywhere in chains.

Hegel casts his nets to hunt divine freedom, but unlike the angler scooping out an edible catch Hegel’s manna is not sustenance. No sooner does Hegel put his system to the test of reality than its insufficiency becomes manifest. Hegel asserts that the “finality of decision is rooted” in self-consciousness, “subjectivity sure of itself,” and that “the truth of subjectivity [] is attained only in a subject.” But not any subject. Only a subject not subject to any one else, the hereditary monarch, is the true one. This a priori reign of primogeniture (first in time, first in right) is, Hegel insists, neither arbitrary nor contingent: The “rights of birth and inheritance constitute the basis of legitimacy, the basis of a right not purely positive but contained in the Idea.” Nor are the hereditary monarch’s decisions in any way “capricious.” Other people actually deliberate and make them! “In a well organized monarchy,” the monarch “has often no more to do than sign his name.” Like his nets devoid of bounty, Hegel’s monarchical trappings clothe nothing.

**Derrida’s Incorporation of Hegel**

The news of Hegel’s *Absolute* went largely unheard in France until 1941, when Jean Hyppolite’s translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* appeared. A generation later, an ambitious young *philosophe* resolved to proselytize Hegel’s message in much the same way that William Blake had proselytized John Milton: as an unwitting partisan of Satan in his failed insurrection against God almighty. Thus was deconstruction born. With Derrida the inner might of the Idea that Hegel championed as mind’s deliverance from the externalities of servitude, injustice, destruction, and death, instead facilitates its indentured “passage from one interdiction to another” in the overwhelmingly totalitarian conception of truth as everything forbidden.

Derrida does not endorse and promulgate the monarch’s empty imprint as absolute law because it is a good, just, right or correct science of politics. Rather—in a philosophical adoption of Sartre’s theatrical *No Exit*—absolute authority, actualized in the rubber
stamp of empty form is as inevitable as it is arbitrary. An authoritative signature is necessary because the signatory cannot be present in person. The king’s edicts disseminate throughout his kingdom in his name. Yet, as Hegel foresee and Derrida makes explicit in opposition to J. L. Austin’s argument for plain meaning, this signature is inauthentic. It is a mechanical reproduction. Like paper money, it can be proliferated ad infinitum. The signature, for Hegel’s absent-minded hereditary monarch and Derrida’s vacuously automatic writer is mechanical, “detached” from “intentionality.” In the industrial reproduction of its sameness the official seal is external form “as ungrounded immediacy and ultimate inwardness” which is “the majesty of the throne,” the pure internality of the Idea entirely disassociated from the personal attributes of the monarch himself. “Men,” Hegel insists, “are not so stupid” as to “allow themselves to be ruled” in this manner against their self-interest. “Millions submit” in “their need” for “the inner might of the Idea which even against what they appear to think, constrains them to obedience and keeps them in that relation.”

In Derrida’s no less autocratic rendering, the diachronic elaboration of justice in compendious volume is, by law, reduced to the few flat words on the two flat tablets, simultaneously intuitable as one and only—the single, immediately accessible word of God—which Moses dutifully retrieved from on high and lay before his people, spellbound by the illusory totality in two simple dimensions of three dimensional complexity. What Jesus Christ perpetuated by electing to be killed under this rough form of justice duly administered by Pilate who could thus wash his hands clean, Derrida rests in the Hegelian blood from which Schelling had recoiled in horror.

If Kant imprisons man with God, Hegel imprisons him in freedom: Absolute freedom is synonymous with self-destruction. In absolute freedom the self suffers absolute “loss,” a “death that is without meaning, the sheer terror of the negative that contains nothing positive, nothing that fills it with a content.” This predicament is not limited to one moment of being in objective history or in the subjective becoming of self-consciousness.

Hegel’s freedom, as “the act of free externalization,” by self, qua King qua God, qua Mosaic law is, “at the same time the grave of His freedom” and ours as well. “His life” and ours, “is a cycle of forms in which he perpetually externalizes himself in order to return to Himself again, and always returns to himself, only in order to externalize Himself anew” in a succession of death warrants signed by an automatic writing machine in His name to authorize and carry out the Calvary of absolute Spirit. Hegel says so explicitly: “Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality (jene Unwirklichkeit), is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead (das Tote festzuhalten) requires the greatest [force] (der groste Kraft erfordert).” The “life of spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures itself and maintains itself in it.”

At this limit of rationality political freedom is equivalent to hereditary monarchy; philosophical freedom the same as a morbid obsession with the beyond; justice reduced to the dead hand of the law, and spiritual freedom only attainable in crucifixion and death. Surely, Schelling suggests, anyone truly appreciative of his liberty would elect to opt out in favor of a straight forward empirical approach where freedom is separate and distinct from necessity, and equally accessible to all.
Empiricism

For every Hegel tapping the essence of rationality to uncover an unhappy and broken conscience which renounces earthly happiness in favor of the grave, there corresponds a Locke asserting that “we desire is only to be happy”; and a Hume considering men as beings who successfully learn real lessons from real engagements with experience so that “[p]retexes and appearances no longer deceive” and oppress them.

Unlike Hegel who celebrates the Calvary as the apex of liberty, Locke insists that “[a] man on the rack is not” free, not “at liberty to lay by the idea of pain, and divert himself with other contemplations.” Only when “the mind regains the power to stop or continue, begin or forbear . . . according as it thinks fit to prefer either to the other, we then consider the man as a free agent again.”

Derrida desists. The forms that restrain us and render us impotent are a force of emancipation. Like Hegel insisting that we recognize nothing as something, Derrida would have us fall for the sham of a Potemkin village whose only relationship to life is an eerie reminiscence. As forms, the crucifix of Hegelian freedom and Locke’s rack that deprives man of it are no less threatening than this ghost town or Descartes’s mutilated war hero. They all identically announce and focus the mind on horror. The actual form employed to inflict the pain and death that inevitably follows is irrelevant.

If this is all Derrida means, he is correct to insist that force is qualitatively other than the methods employed to impart it. Whether one conceives force as the free act of organic spirit subjecting itself to torture and resurrection on the cross, or as compelled suffering and bodily death on the mechanical rack, there is nothing remarkable in the fact that, as Derrida insists, no critic can bring himself to endorse it. Under any reasonable means of discernment or judgment force is violence that can be recognized as such and should be “made to stop.” But Derrida has no such actual interest or intention. Quite to the contrary Derrida submits to the status quo. In a world where only forms appear, force cannot be even be accessed, no less abated.

In asserting that “form fascinates when one no longer possess the force to understand force itself, which means to say to create,” Derrida dons the hood of a sick, sadistic executioner publicly devising and actively reveling in ever more sophisticated forms of abuse; and extolling his victims’ murders as his own triumphant creations. When he asserts in the same paragraph that we are sleep-walkers lost in a “structuralist fecundity but that it is too early to rouse us” he becomes an accomplice, an active and knowing conspirator in the killings: “Maybe tomorrow,” he concedes, we will be called to account for this “lapsus,” this disregard for force itself; but not today; and it’s not his responsibility.

No differently than Locke’s prisoner flattened on the rack and literally reduced to the horizontal and vertical extensions inherent in the line as form, philosophy is determined by geometry, which is to say formal necessity. Derrida says he would like to know or to get to know force itself and to join with Schelling in an unequivocal endorsement of Dionysos. Alas, he cannot. Necessity compels Derrida to reduce Dionysos to a structure as well, a “visible form” that can only appear and be seen as such in what Derrida names, in remembrance of Hegel, the all encompassing “enclosure of representation.” It was after all, Derrida hastens to remind us, Hegel who first cautioned that “to explain a phenomenon by a force is a tautology.”
In this detention camp which Derrida surveils like an autocratic Foucauldian warden, mankind’s terrible power over life and death becomes a game of rise and fall (Aufhebung)\textsuperscript{31} to be indulged from left to right or from right to left: as a “reactionary” (like Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*); as a “revolutionary” (like Marx in his *Critique of the Philosophy of Right*), or, as Derrida would have it for himself, “both ways at once,”\textsuperscript{32} now one, then the other, in the simultaneity of their difference and the difference of their simultaneity: Catch me if you can!

“One thing,” Schelling might have asked, “you leave unexplained; to what end all these measures themselves are taken, how is it that nature likes such conjuring tricks.”\textsuperscript{33} If the illusions and conceits are indeed without end should we not, in the exercise of free choice, “really desire to get beyond thinking, to be redeemed from the torment of thinking,” and so come “to want to know *nothing* about it,” and have nothing to do with it?\textsuperscript{34} Must we really keep playing the game of rational philosophy like solitaire in the vain hope that it will become something else?

Derrida denies any alternative. The necessity of form apodictically constrains the freedom of thought. All that is ever possible is to observe the circularity of their interchangeability. Which is not to say that anything different will occur. The very best one could ever hope to achieve would be that “in the faithful repetition of the difference” between form and meaning, “an *elliptical* displacement,” some kind of bulge in the circle might occur. By what process this displacement will be made to happen Derrida does not say. Undeterred, he imagines the result he seeks but has no means to find: “Neither matter nor form,” nothing that “philosophy, which is to say a dialectic, can reappropriate in any sense that one chooses to determine it.” Derrida’s hypothetical ellipse would rather, trace the orbit “of more and less, neither more nor less,” would “pose or allow us to pose, maybe, a totally other question.”\textsuperscript{35}

Schelling would likely have condemned this pronouncement as sheer nonsense. No one, he urged, should ever maintain that it is possible to achieve what has been proven to be unattainable. Because it contradicts the proven laws of physics, Derrida’s ellipse cannot survive the straight-face test of complementary between science and philosophy.

*The Laws of Physics*

“More than half a century before Newton... the German astronomer Johannes Kepler had worked out a detailed description of the planets about the Sun.” Contrary to the belief that their orbits were circular, Kepler’s First Law states that “the path of each planet about the Sun is an ellipse, with the Sun at one focus.”\textsuperscript{36} A circle is not qualitatively different from but inherent to the more generic and comprehensive form of the ellipse.\textsuperscript{37} Whether a movement is circular or elliptical, the laws of gravitation that determines it remain constant.

Schelling consistently held to the principle that “what has reality merely in our intuition,” must be “reflected to us as something present outside us.”\textsuperscript{38} Like Freud who put a placard above his desk on which the cautionary words of his French master Charcot were inscribed, Schelling was insistent in reminding himself and others that while “*la theorie, c’est bon, ca n’empeche pas d’exister.*” Speculation and empiricism should not be permitted to contradict one another, but must remain in harmony: “Just as natural science brings forth idealism out of realism... so transcendental philosophy brings forth realism
out of idealism.” The task of philosophy is to “materialize[] the laws of mind into laws of nature,” not to make things up.\textsuperscript{39} Schelling condemned this latter practice or “doctrine of not knowing as poor and empty of content.”\textsuperscript{40}

“As the philosophy of non-knowledge suffers from a lack of knowledge,”\textsuperscript{41} so the ellipse Derrida proposes to break the law which determines circularity is a mere “ruse of grounding” which, had it “been tested,” would have been entirely debunked. While the assertion of “a prejudice by a mere word is admittedly more easy than scientific investigation,”\textsuperscript{42} it is “the true mark of mysticism,” the “hatred of clear knowledge—of understanding, which has received such a welcome predominance in our time—of science in general.”\textsuperscript{43} The “most apt view” of Derrida, like the mystic or the theosopher, “would be to regard him as standing on the border of two times, one of which lay before him as a desolate, fruitless desert, which he in fact felt to be as such, into the other of which he only looked as if into a Promised Land from a great distance; but there is the big difference between him and the Israelite law-giver who led his people through the desert: that Moses himself was admittedly not to enter the Promised Land, but foresaw with certainty and the greatest confidence that his people would enter it and one day would dwell in it,” whereas Derrida “did not only not enter it himself, but also maintained that” it was unlikely if not “impossible for anybody else to enter it.”\textsuperscript{44}

For Schelling “the assumption that things are just what we take them to be, so that we are acquainted with them as they are \textit{in themselves}, underlies the possibility of all experience (for what would experience be, and to what aberrations would physics, for example be subject, without this presupposition of absolute identity between appearance and reality?).”\textsuperscript{45} The solution to “how our presentations can absolutely coincide with objects wholly independent of them,” is “identical with \textit{theoretical} philosophy whose task is to investigate the possibility of experience.”\textsuperscript{46} If “the highest goal, which philosophy can . . . certainly reach, is precisely to grasp the world as freely produced and created, then philosophy, with regard to the main thing it can achieve, or precisely by reaching its highest goal, would be a science of experience.”\textsuperscript{47}

In contrast to Hegel for whom the “goal” is “Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit,”\textsuperscript{48} Schelling’s absolute would be Spirit that knows itself as knowledge of the world. This insistence on the identity of “appearance and reality” may have provided Hegel the rhetorical opening to condemn Schelling’s philosophy as the “night in which all cows are black,”\textsuperscript{49} but surely an investigation after daybreak to acquire, \textit{a posteriori}, knowledge of their actual colors is preferable to the deliberately uninformed judgment of an omniscient being which as pure spirit presumes to see everything \textit{a priori}. After all, Schelling retorts, “Darkness which was seen would not be darkness any more.”\textsuperscript{50}

Hegel’s conception of truth (\textit{das Wahre}) as a closed circle which contains its end at its beginning\textsuperscript{51} is the precipitate of a law of identity in difference equally determinative of the ellipse Derrida aspires to draw as the fallacious exception to the principles of motion and gravitation which govern uniform and non-uniform circular motion alike.\textsuperscript{52} The philosophers’ metaphysical orbits also defy physics because they exclude the element necessary to maintain circular movement—an \textit{object} within the circle applying “a centripetal force” upon it at every point along its circumference.\textsuperscript{53} That force is gravity.
Unlike electromagnetic force that can be "either attractive or repulsive," gravity is uniquely attractive, a one way ratchet.

Consonant with the laws of physics Schelling’s “subject or I,” in “its pure substantiality or essentiality,” is not Hegel’s nothing, but rather “as nothing.” The “as designates, a gravitation, an attraction”: “As it attracts itself, it is no more as nothing but as something—in this self-gravitation it makes itself into something; the origin of all becoming something, or of objective, concrete being, then, lies in this self-gravitation.” The pull of objects toward the self is volition, the self or “pure” being which is seeking to “have itself.” To the extent “it is something . . . it goes beyond itself.” It “grasps and knows itself in this being something.” This gravitational “subject has the necessary tendency to the objective.”

From his earliest writing Schelling named “gravitation” the “true synthesizing force of nature,” and he clung to it throughout. Unlike Hegel holding “fast” to the “non-actuality” of “death,” Schelling insisted that “whatever way the self determines itself, whether through the subjective determining the objective, or vice versa, the outgoing activity (inclination) is in any case the sole vehicle whereby anything can make its way from the self into the external world.” The “I makes itself into an object,” in “only one direction; I can only go from A to B and not back again from B to A.” The return only becomes possible “through reciprocity” whereby “every particle in the universe attracts every other particle with a force that is proportional to the product of their masses, and inversely proportional to the square of the distances between them.” Indeed every person attracts every other person but the “magnitude of the gravitational force each exerts on the other . . . is unnoticeably small unless very delicate instruments are used.” Through this reciprocal exertion of a unitary force “all directions become equally possible.” As a consequence, Schelling can assert that “Nowhere, not in any sphere, is there anything merely subjective or merely objective, but only a unity of the two.”

Schelling insists that “if this story of the subject which posits itself . . . is a true, a real story,” then this first being something of the subject [as object] as well as that which is opposed to it, in which it is subject . . . must be able to be proven in reality or must have a corresponding expression in reality.” The “first being—something at all of the subject” is “explained as matter” in its “beginning and first potential as next to nothing (das Nachste am Nichts).” To “this first Real, to this first being something, is opposed the Ideal; not nothing itself, but what is “as nothing against matter” namely “light.”

“These days,” Schelling correctly asserted (in 1833), “observational physics is more inclined to assert the immateriality of light than its materiality” according to the “theory of undulation.” Schelling reserved judgment. Uncannily presaging Einstein’s “new theory of light” which suggests that “perhaps light is transmitted as tiny particles, or photons as they are now called,” and that the “photon theory makes completely different predictions” than the “wave theory,” Schelling questioned whether undulation might be understood as the approximate measure of some virtually ineffable material in the same way that stoichiometry can determine the weight of invisible atoms. The fact that light moves predominantly in a straight line, after all, is difficult to square with the concept of a wave. Light, Schelling concluded is “the concept of matter, not just inwardly or merely subjectively, but it is itself the objectively posited concept of matter.”
In so privileging the movement of light in a straight line, Schelling would join company with “the thoughtless multitude” who “account[] for seeing by means of lightrays,” were it not for his further inquiry: “What is a lightray, in fact?” And his answer: “It is itself already a seeing, and the original seeing at that, namely intuition itself.” The light ray is “in no sense external to its construction, it exists at all only in being constructed, and has no more existence in the abstraction from the construction than does the geometer’s line.—And this line also is nothing existent, for the line on the blackboard is by no means the line itself, and is only recognized as linear by relating it to the original intuition of the line itself.” The “phenomena of optics are nothing but a geometry whose lines are drawn by light, and this light itself is already of doubtful materiality.”

Granting that “there must be an absolute boundary to the intuiting of the intelligence,” Schelling confidently affirms that this “this boundary” is “light.” Although it “extends our sphere almost into the immeasurable, the light boundary cannot be the boundary of the universe, and it is no mere hypothesis that beyond the world of light there shines with a radiance unknown to us a world which no longer falls within the sphere of our intuition.” To the extent it cannot be presupposed as known, and intuition cannot comprehend it, its objective appearance would indeed constitute a superior empiricism.

In asking “What is a light ray,” Schelling reached the limit of “transcendental cognition” or intuited simultaneity. In this “knowing of knowing” Schelling perceives three simultaneous yet distinct flashes of lightning: 1) “the presented is at the same time that presents”; 2) “one always remain[s] at the same time both the intuited (the producer) and the intuitant”; and 3) “the intuited is also the intuitant.”

Einstein, in his further inquiry—“What would I see if I rode a light beam?”—traveled beyond to find “alternating magnetic fields at rest whose magnitude changed in space but did not change in time,” and shattered the mirror of intuition into pieces no physicist has figured out how to put back together.

The “speed of light” as “independent of the speed of the source or observer,” such that 1) “two events which take place at different locations and are simultaneous to one observer are actually not simultaneous to a second observer who moves relative to the first”; 2) “time passes differently” for a timer on earth and one traveling away from the earth on a spaceship in what is known as “time dilation”; 3) the distance between Earth and a planet is greater when measured from Earth than from a spaceship traveling between Earth and the planet according to “length contraction”; and 4) viewed from the Earth, what an object seems to lose in size it gains in length,” suggests a world of four dimensions where “space takes up three dimensions and time is a fourth dimension.”

When asked to choose between the materiality and immateriality of light, Schelling opted for materiality because that conception coincided with his intuition of linearity producing the externality of light as a beam or line. Such temporal linearity is essential to the production of simultaneity as the “union” of space and time: “Space is static while time flows.” Their “adjacency” transforms into simultaneity at the point time flows into space. This is the “point at which the object and its concept, the thing and its presentation, are originally, absolutely and immediately, one.”

While Schelling showed an earnest willingness to reassess—in light of intervening advances in the science of physics—the assertion of Leibniz that since the universe is
spatially identical and temporally simultaneous to itself all its clocks must keep identical
time, intuition compelled him ultimately to concur with Leibniz. “The concept of nature,”
Schelling mused, “does not entail that there should also be an intelligence that is aware of
it. Nature it seems, would exist even if there were nothing that was aware of it.”85 Conceptually,
subjective awareness and objective nature differ. So why couldn’t their two exclusive
clocks “while knowing nothing of each other and being completely separated, agree
together that each goes regularly on its own?” Because, that “objective world, lying quite
outside the presentations of the intelligence, can still, since it is the expression of concepts,
exist once more only through and for an intelligence.”86 Like Derrida unable to conceive
a non-representational Dionysos, Schelling could not entertain a non-representational
objectivity. As if in direct response to them both, Einstein is said to have remarked: Not
only is the universe queerer than we know. It is queerer than we can know.
Schelling’s judgment to the contrary that what defies intuition is “utterly superfluous,”87
drove his insistence upon a reciprocal relationship between natural science and philosophy: “How the objective world accommodates to presentations in us, and presentations
in us to the objective world, is unintelligible unless between the two worlds, the real and
the ideal, there exists a “pre-determined harmony.” This “is unthinkable unless the two
activities are “at bottom identical.”88

If Schelling failed ultimately to acknowledge the non-simultaneity of intuition and
existence, the question arises whether, for all his efforts, he succeeded any better than Hegel
or Derrida in strict solidarity with Hegel,89 to elude the closed circle of transcendental
truth? One might, at first blush, be tempted to conclude the opposite.

Derrida purports to reject the structuralist claim that “simultaneity” propagates “surprises,” by asserting a seemingly contrary proposition—that surprises arise from the
“dialogue between non-simultaneity and simultaneity.”90 Yet these competing constructs do
no more than reveal the two sides of the iconic Bergsonian coin of intuition: Sometimes I
see the lightning bolts as a unitary perception, sometimes as divided. Sometimes I hear the
orchestra, sometimes the instruments. Sometimes I read the words on one page sometimes
the book as an entire volume. Sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I rely on myself.
The surprise comes whenever there is an alteration. The structuralist is surprised by the
coin flip from difference to identity, Derrida, the post-structuralist, by the flip back from
identity to difference which he then overdetermines by minting a counterfeit ducat with
the identity of difference predictably coming up every time as differance.91

What cannot be known is how Schelling would have responded to Einstein. We do
know that Schelling had settled upon the phenomenon of light as “obviously an analogy
in the extended world for spirit or thought”: “It = I,” whence “follows that nature is not
merely something objective—not merely not-I.”92 We also know that Schelling had entor-
tained as a hypothesis of his productive intuition the opposite proposition: that time and
time keeping in the intelligence and in nature defy equivalence. He did not know that the
speed of light makes this so in fact. Had he been apprised that light shatters the sequential
flow of time through the concurrent adjacencies of “it” and “I” in space, whose union,
reciprocity and simultaneity make “all directions equally possible”93 in the extension of
three dimensions, would he not have been led to reconsider his position as inexorably as
today’s cutting edge physicists are driven into four-dimensional space-time?
We also know that while Schelling experienced difficulty getting past intuition, he did not consider it the be all and end all of the universe. To do so would be contrary to intuition itself which says that if the universe is limited by what the intuiting subject can produce as an object of intuition, then the universe itself must be finite: leading to the discomfiting conclusion that there must be something else beyond it.\textsuperscript{94} At the end of the intuiting subject “victorious over everything,” because it has succeeded in objectifying everything, Schelling posited the subject “which itself no longer becomes objective, but instead always remains subject, and which man can no longer recognize, as he could in knowledge, as himself.” This last subject lives “as if in an inaccessible light, and its nature is inaccessible . . . to human consciousness” because “it cannot become an object” of consciousness. Here “no further relationship to human consciousness can be thought than that of simple manifestation.”\textsuperscript{95}

In this vein Schelling applauded “the discoveries of recent experimental physics” for adding “to those deeper views of nature which had been achieved by philosophy” by “which nature as well is something autonomous, something self-positing and self activating” and for giving “signs of a deeper life” revealing “the secrets of its hiddenmost processes.” What philosophers “had hardly dared to think” was, through physics, fast becoming “an empirical question.”\textsuperscript{96}

Schelling was revolted by all emperors of pure thought, peremptorily dismissing the evidence of what is and presuming to pass judgment by divining the “heart of things.”\textsuperscript{97} He was reticent to stray from Spinoza’s teaching that everyone and everything is subject to the “universal rules and laws of Nature.”\textsuperscript{98} In his profound respect for the order of things as revealed by science he kept faith with the Galilean revolution whose non-compliant implications Hegel denied and Derrida ignored, Einstein’s contemporaneous proofs notwithstanding. As the sun does not revolve around the earth so mind has no place of privilege in nature.

As misinformed as the ancients were, in their blindness, born of memory, custom, habit, and superstition that the earth was flat, so Hegel and Derrida have deceived themselves into believing that the universe is spherical such that a particle moving in a straight line in a particular direction would, like Truth, “eventually return to the starting point—perhaps eons of time later.”\textsuperscript{99} Schelling wavered when he suggested that the objectless subject of “inaccessible light” would, as Providence, “show at the end what already was at the beginning.”\textsuperscript{100} but turned back into the maelstrom when he conceded that if “this God” which “was already at the beginning” must “after all be determined at the end,” then the intervening process is “itself illusory. Nothing has really happened, everything happened only in thoughts and this whole movement was only a movement of thinking,” a “negative philosophy” of subject masquerading in objects. The recognition of this circular trap prompted Schelling to leave possibility open for a “philosophy which relates to existence”:\textsuperscript{101} the manifestation of the “Real” without its moniker the “Ideal”\textsuperscript{102} marking out and locking targets onto a screen for intuition to assess.

The resultant non-circular space of space has today come into existence through the overwhelmingly persuasive empirical evidence that the universe—unlike the Earth whose perceived shape, Galileo notwithstanding, still delimits our consciousness—is flat.\textsuperscript{103}
Conclusion

Where Schelling fell short was in failing to appreciate how difficult, how rigorously challenging empiricism really is. Schelling was mistaken to demean Hume for peddling habit as empiricism’s lowest and basest common denominator. Like Einstein insisting that the simultaneity of events is an exclusively mental construction, born of memory and perpetuated by repetition, or like Schelling himself insisting that the simultaneity of being and thinking championed by Hegel as freedom is rather an abject “necessity” that “lies” only “in the philosopher and is imposed upon him by his memory,” Hume insisted that the connection between events—as by the shock of two billiard balls—is an acquisition of thought uniquely occasioned by the recollection of “a number of similar instances.”

If Hegel, in his reading of Hume, was able to grasp this much, and entertain the conception—impenetrably alien to Schelling and Leibniz—of unconnected things (even clocks) indifferently “presenting themselves alongside of one another” like unconnected parallel universes, why couldn’t Schelling?

Perhaps for the same reason that Einstein, for all his empiricism, sought out a unified theory which would confirm his intuition that God does not play with dice; or that today’s physicists confronting the Anthropic Principle, which “says that if the universe were even a little different than it is,” life “as we know it could not exist” and “we could not be here,” are led, despite themselves, to postulate that “the universe is exquisitely tuned, almost as if to accommodate us.”

An extraordinary and unfailingly strict discipline of vigilant attention in the moment and at every moment is required to resist the safe harbor of intuition and memory and remain forever unmoored. David Hume, as unflappable in his life of billiards pursued with cues, and balls and chalk on felt and tables utterly disconnected from him and from one another as in his death without the last rights offered by those seeking to connect him, in the last instance, to God, provides the rare example.

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Notes

2. Ibid., p. 141 (emphasis in original).
5. Ibid., p. 146 (emphasis in original).
6. Ibid., p. 147 (emphasis in original).
8. “Louis XV wanted to test the wit of one of his courtiers, of whose talent he had been told. At the first opportunity he commanded the gentleman to make a joke of which he, the king, should be the ‘sujet [subject].’ The courtier at once made the clever reply, ‘Le roi n’est pas sujet.’ [‘The king is not a subject’]. S. Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, Standard Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), p. 37.

9. Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, para. 281, p. 185.

10. Ibid., Additions, para. 171, pp. 288–289.

11. Ibid., Additions, para. 170, p. 288.


15. Ibid., Additions, para. 172, p. 289.


19. The Reign of Terror in revolutionary France where “[b]eing suspected . . . takes the place, or has the significance and effect of being guilty,” which results “in the cold, matter-of-fact annihilation of this existent self, from which nothing else can be taken away but its mere being.” Ibid., p. 360 (emphasis in original).

20. While Hegel credits Rousseau with first “adducing the will as a principle of the state,” he insists that Rousseau’s conception of the will was fatally limited to the “determinate form” of “the individual will. . . . The result is that he reduces the union of the individuals in the state to a contract and therefore to something based on their arbitrary wills, their opinions and their capriciously given express consent.” The practical application of this theory “afforded for the first time in human history the prodigious spectacle of the overthrow of the constitution of a great state and its complete reconstruction ab initio on the basis of pure thought alone . . . and the experiment ended in the maximum of frightfulness and terror.” Philosophy of Right, para. 258, pp. 156–157.


22. Phenomenology of Mind, p. 19. The English translation understates the situation in translating the German Kraft as “strength.” Hegel means force as he later presents it in relation to understanding (Kraft und Verstand).


26. Force et Signification, p. 44.

27. Ibid., p. 11.


29. See La Cloture de la Representation, in L’Ecriture et la Difference, p. 341.
30. *Force et Signification*, p. 45. See also *La Forme et le Vouloir-Dire*, in *Marges*, Edition de Minuit (1972), p. 188. “Only a form is evident, only a form has or is an essence, only a form presents itself as itself. That is a point of certitude that no Platonic or Aristotelian conceptuality can displace. . . . Form is presence itself. . . . Metaphysical thought is the thought of being as form. . . . In it thought thinks itself as thought of form” (emphasis in original).

31. In his first encounter with the word, Jean Hyppolite, the legendary French translator of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, nearly threw up his hands in despair: “The translation of the Hegelian terms ‘Aufheben, Aufhebung’ is particularly delicate in French. In common usage the meanings are diverse, even contradictory: to suppress, to conserve, to raise, to raise up, to revolt.” *La Phenomenologie de l’Esprit*, Traduit par Jean Hyppolite, Aubier (1941), Tome I, p. 19, n. 34 (my translation).


34. Ibid., p. 167.


36. Giancoli, *Physics*, sixth edition (Prentice Hall), p. 125. An ellipse is “a closed curve such that the sum of the distances from any point on the curve to two fixed points called the foci F(1) and F(2) remains constant. That is, the sum of the distances, F(1)P + F(2)P is the same for all points on the curve.”


39. Ibid. (emphasis in original).


41. Ibid., p. 183.

42. Ibid., p. 184.

43. Ibid., p. 185 (emphasis in original).

44. Ibid., p. 177 (emphasis in original). Schelling addressed these remarks to the work of Jacobi.

45. Ibid., p. 10 (emphasis in original).

46. Ibid. (emphasis in original).

47. Ibid., p. 190.


49. Ibid., p. 9.


51. “Only this self-restoring sameness or this reflection of otherness within itself—not an original or immediate unity as such—is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end is it actual.” *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 10 (emphasis in original; highlighting added).

53. Ibid., p. 109. The difference between a circle and an ellipse is that in the perfect circle that object is at the dead center of the circle. Ibid., p. 115.

54. Ibid., vol. II, p. 926.


56. Ibid., p. 116.

57. Ibid., p. 117.

58. Ibid., p. 121.


60. *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 19.

61. Ibid., p. 193.


67. Ibid., pp. 117–118 (emphasis and highlight in original).

68. Ibid., p. 118. “Historically, this question has turned out to be a difficult one. For one thing, light does not reveal itself in any obvious way of being made up of tiny particles, nor do we see tiny light waves passing by as we do water waves. The evidence seemed to favor first one side and then the other until about 1830, when most physicists had accepted the wave theory.” Giancoli, *Physics*, vol. II, p. 665.


72. “A great deal of evidence suggests that light travels in straight lines under a wide variety of circumstances. Our orientation to the physical world is based on this assumption. This reasonable assumption has led to the ray model of light. This model assumes that light travels in straight-line paths called light rays. Actually, a ray is an idealization; it is meant to represent an extremely narrow beam of light. When we see an object according to the ray model, light reaches our eyes from each point on the object.” Giancoli, *Physics*, vol. II, pp. 632–633 (emphasis and highlight in original).


74. Ibid., p. 29.

75. Ibid., p. 6.

76. Ibid., p. 125 (emphasis in original).

77. Ibid., p. 28 (emphasis in original).

78. Ibid., p. 9.

79. Ibid., pp. 9, 13, 24 (emphasis in original).


81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., pp. 731–734, 740 (highlights added).
84. Ibid., p. 23 (emphasis in original).
86. Ibid., p. 154.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., pp. 11–12 (emphasis in original; my highlight).
91. “I will speak about a letter; the first letter if one believes the alphabet. . . . I will speak about the letter a in the writing of the word difference . . . in the course of writing about writing, writing in writing.” *La Differance*, in *Marges*, p. 3 (emphasis in original). What “resists this opposition by bringing it about announces itself in the movement of differance (with an a) between two differances, two letters . . . between word and writing beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to them as one, even as it sometimes reassures us in the illusion that they are two.” *Marges*, p. 5 (emphasis in original).
94. The capacity of modern physics to conceive and study this phenomenon empirically is why “many scientists” are calling contemporary astrophysics a “Golden Age for cosmology.” Giancoli, *Physics*, p. 915.
96. Ibid., p. 130–131.
101. Ibid., pp. 132–133 (emphasis in original).
102. Ibid., p. 125.
105. Ibid., p. 138.