

Nature and Freedom: Repetition as Supplement in the Late Schelling

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Abstract F.W.J. von Schelling's positive philosophy of mythology and revelation questions how one can move from the natural (the negative or mythology) to freedom (the positive or revelation), i.e. from the natural to the supernatural. The move from nature to freedom surpasses the traditional metaphysics of presence. Being is not simply the presencing of nature but the result of a decisive deed surpassing and supplementing nature. Nature can do nothing other than presence. Freedom, however, could also not be. It could remain in concealment and must not necessarily presence as nature does. The origin is a supplement because an unnecessary excess extraneous to nature. In other words, origins always supplement the natural, i.e. they are supernatural and revelatory. Origins bring something novel, i.e. something original, into being but origins themselves remain in non-being and consequently remain un-revealed. The origin cannot exist, i.e. cannot become present, because it is always qualitatively Past. The origin never *was* but always already *has been*. Primal repetition was freedom's subjection of nature to the Past and a deferral of this deed's consequences to the indefinite Future.

Keywords Schelling · Nature · Freedom · Repetition · Supplement

In F.W.J. von Schelling's late positive philosophy of mythology and revelation the question is how one can, if at all, move from the natural (the negative or mythology) to freedom (the positive or revelation), i.e., from the natural to the supernatural. The task of this paper is to show how an explication of the late Schelling's move from nature to freedom can illuminate the task of overcoming the traditional metaphysics of presence. Is being simply the blossoming and bodying forth, i.e., presencing, of nature or is being the result of a decisive deed surpassing and supplementing nature? The first step is to

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question the hidden assumption behind the move from nature to freedom, namely, the directionality of the question. Why not rather move from freedom to nature?

From Nature to Freedom or Freedom to Nature?

That which is the first is the most original and, for Schelling, the most original is not God but the eternally mobile that is never a self-same, the eternal nature itself (Schelling 1972, 324). The eternally mobile cannot account for the permanence necessary for identity, for any self-same to subsist. The eternal nature itself is not yet α life but pure life or pure motion. This pure ocean of difference precluding all permanence and identity gives the eternal nature an ambivalent, amphibolous and duplicitous character. That which is pure life or libido can to the creaturely self-same also be its death. The eternal nature itself corresponds to the Pythagorean *Dias* preceding the *Monas*; life as pure difference precedes life as identity. This precursor constitutes both the necessary precondition and possible dissolution of all subsequent life. Pure life is dyadic, undecided as to life or death. The only possible move is from indecisiveness to decisiveness, from two-facedness to character. If the eternal nature is described as potential, chaotic, ungrounded, abysmal freedom, then the only possible move is to actual, decisive freedom by means of an actual and decisive deed. The move is from the absolute, i.e., contextless, life of indifferent possibility to an existent life with its environ.

Eternal nature, thus far, only appears negatively, i.e., as that which is not not to be posited, albeit also not yet actually posited, in order that something, a specific, concrete life, may be positively posited. Schelling defines the positive as everything for which the will is decisive (*Ibid.* 83). Both the merely logical and the blind *physis* of nature are therefore negative, bereft of that which has to do with will, deed and personality. The opposite of deed is nature (Schelling I/10, 259). Even if the eternal nature, as *Ursein*, is defined as will, one must ask whether it is a will to power or a will demanding actual decisiveness. In other words, is it a will that necessarily hodies forth and passes over into its effect or is it a will that, at least in principle, could have remained a will at rest? For the former any real distinction between a will in potency, i.e., a will at rest, and a positively enacted will, i.e., a deed, is ephemeral. The nature of the former will, i.e., a will to power, is simply to be and to will/show its own nature. The nature of the latter type of will demands a positive deed in order for the transition from potency to actuality, from negativity to positivity, from nature to actual freedom to occur. For the Schellingian will, the eternal nature is neither a beginning nor a ground but an *Ungrund*. The eternal nature only becomes a beginning and a ground once it has been positively posited as one but as negative it is only a necessary moment (not actually) that is not not to be posited. For this will, the primal decision is not a beginning but it first posits the origin (Hutter 1996, 239).

The positive movement only occurs with the separation of ground and consequent transitory. In other words, real movement is always a transition and all transition is transitory. The negative does not know this separation of ground and consequent because the ground flows immediately into the consequent without the possibility of doing otherwise. This, then, is why the timeless, i.e., the intransitive and non-transient is called nature. Nature, insofar as she is the opposite of deed, is contraposed to time

and freedom. The positive, in Schelling's positive philosophy, is not the eternally mobile—in Schelling's language, the *Das* without *Was*—but the deed positing a temporal rupture in the eternal nature. Events or happenings and not noetic objects comprise the object of Schelling's late positive philosophy, in short, decisions or deeds. When a cause surfaces (*geht auf*) immediately into its effect, then the temporal and historical is lost. This indicates the defining characteristic of the traditional metaphysics of presence because there is no indivisible remainder (*nie aufgehender Rest*). For traditional metaphysics, that which should indivisibly remain, will instead immanently and imminently presence in its effect, i.e., in its appearance.

Is the move then from nature as negative to freedom as positive or vice versa? For the late Schelling there is no transition from the negative to the positive but one must always begin from the positive, i.e., from the absolute prius and move outwards. The positive, as has been seen, is that which brings time/transience/transitoriness/transitivity into being. Eternal nature, as that moment which was not not to be posited, is only positively posited as Past, i.e., as the always already foregone entailed in the essential structure of time. Real movement must be transition because only transition is transitory and transitive, and eternal nature is not in and of itself the beginning but only becomes the beginning/ground when the deed posits it as that which always already has been, i.e., when the deed posits it as Past. Eternal nature, as the chaotic and eternally mobile, never 'was' but always already 'has been.'

Description of Nature and Freedom as That Which Can Be

Concerning the meaning of nature, Heidegger asks and answers,

Now what does the word $\phi\upsilon\omicron\rho\tau\varsigma$ say? It says that which arises (*das Aufgehende*) from out of itself (e.g. the blossoming (*das Aufgehen*) of a rose), the disclosing unfolding, the stepping into appearance in such unfolding and holding itself in and enduring in appearance, in short, holding sway in presencing (*aufgehend*) and enduring. (Heidegger 1983, 16)

$\phi\upsilon\omicron\rho\tau\varsigma$ is stepping forth (*das Ent-stehen*), bringing itself forth out of the concealed and thus coming to a stand (*in den Stand bringen*). (*Ibid.* 17)¹

Nature, or rather $\phi\upsilon\omicron\rho\tau\varsigma$, according to Heidegger, is not that which *can* be, *can* appear or *can* presence, but rather it is that which *must* presence or body forth, that which cannot do otherwise. If nature is that which had to pass over into its appearance, then nature is not what Schelling calls that which can be (*das Seinkönnende*) but that which *was* able to be (*das, was sein konnte*) (Schelling 1969, 89). Eternal nature, according to Schelling, is not yet potency or ground because as a chaotic *Ungrund* it is destructive of all potential actuality; it is a consuming fire. Freedom, however, is *das Seinkönnende*. On the other hand, how could eternal nature as eternally mobile and therefore violent towards all identity

¹ Was sagt nun das Wort $\phi\upsilon\omicron\rho\tau\varsigma$? Es sagt das von sich aus Aufgehende (z.B. das Aufgehen einer Rose), das sich eröffnende Entfalten, das in solcher Entfaltung in die Erscheinung-Treten und in ihr sich Halten und Verbleiben, kurz, das aufgehend-verweilende Walten. ... $\phi\upsilon\omicron\rho\tau\varsigma$ ist das Ent-stehen, aus dem Vorborgen sich heraus-und dieses so erst in den Stand bringen.

and itself not yet a self-same be anything less than pure potency? Indeed, Schelling names eternal nature, the unprethinkable *Dass*, *das Seinkönnen*, which is to be distinguished from *das Seinkönnende*. The latter is a gerund or participle expressing generalized or uncompleted action but nevertheless action, i.e., *actus*. This grammatical form can take a tense, i.e., it is temporal and transitive. The former is an infinitive and intransitive. Eternal nature, not as *das Seinkönnende* but as mere *Seinkönnen*, is void of any sort of temporal structure, be it the quantitative one of history or the qualitative one of eternity as the fullness of time. Eternal nature, in and of itself, is timeless and thus *stricto sensu* not even included in the time of eternity.

Freedom, at least actual freedom exercisable in the deed, is *das Seinkönnende*. This is the first real potency, i.e., this is first potency *as* potency, and it necessarily entails a temporal structure. The 'move,' so-called, from nature to freedom is a move from that which cannot be thought in and of itself, i.e., blind being as the unprethinkable (*das Unvordenkliche*) to cognoscibility. Said differently, a move from that bereft of essence to essence, from the *Dass* to the *Was*, from the naked That to a What. As Schelling contends, the unprethinkable, namely eternal nature, first makes it possible for the primal potency to appear (Schelling IV/4, 338). This again denotes the ambivalent character of eternal nature insofar as that which is not yet properly potency nevertheless *possibilizes* something, namely, potency itself. The unbounded freedom of eternal nature is the precondition of actual freedom, of the deed. Eternal nature, however, is only actually posited, i.e., posited as Past, once the temporal structure of the primal potency, *das Seinkönnende*, is there. Before this it is as nought. As has been seen, the will of eternal nature in and of itself as an unbounded will, one that is not self-contained, is one that must will and one that necessarily bodies forth. It is merely *Seinkönnen* and nothing more, meaning that it is only what can be but not also that which could abstain from being. Freedom, on the other hand, is not merely *das Seinkönnende* but *das Sein- und Nichtseinkönnende*. Freedom is that which can *and* cannot be; it could not be. *If* it is, then it is only due to a decisive deed that just as easily could have not been. That the eternal nature *is*, i.e., that it always already *has been* and is not nought, is only the result of freedom's factual deed. That something is rather than nothing, that the primal potency, the *Was*, is rather than nothing, the naked *Dass*, that sense (*Sinn*) is rather than chaos (*Wahnsinn*), is only the result of that which just as easily could not *have been*.

Not mere blind will but freedom, namely, that which can *and* cannot be, Schelling thinks as the cause. The cause, however, neither indicates something *a se*, namely, a self-caused cause, nor a first cause that would appear as the first being or cause in the chain of entities. The cause (1) is not nature because it does not act according to an inner necessity but is also free to not act (Schelling I/10, 253), (2) is positive because it actually posits something and does not just presuppose as a necessary moment what is not to be assumed, (3) is not a ground or something itself existent but it posits both ground and existent(s). Regarding the last point, if the cause were something in being, then it would not be that which *could* be but either that which *was* or that which *is*. That which is free, that which can be, does not presence and then fall into the past but indivisibly remains as that which still can be again, that which can always repeat. The cause is not a freedom that loses itself as freedom by falling into its consequence as soon as it acts but it always remains as freedom. The cause can therefore never be caught up into the chain of beings. A true

cause is neither a principle, because a principle must presence, i.e., must be efficacious, nor substance, because a substance is both something in being and something lifeless and therefore not free (*Ibid.* 254). That the cause *is* can only be shown factually, i.e., empirically or *per posterius*.

Freedom is *das Sein- und Nichtseinkönnende* or, in short, the cause. Positive causality is without a ground (because it must first posit the ground, namely, eternal nature as actually Past) and without a reason.² If one says that the cause's reason for acting is to bring forth the primal potency, namely, the image of the faceless, imageless eternal nature, then one can only say this *post factum*, i.e., *per posterius*. A more elaborate discussion of the relation between ground/substance and cause will occur shortly but for now one should suffice with further confirmation that to speak of a move from nature to freedom is already fallacious. There is not a transition from the negative to the positive or from nature to freedom just as the Past never 'was' and then flowed into the 'Present.' The Past did not precede the Present and the Present is not earlier than the Future but all are posited at once. The Past always and already 'has been' from time immemorial, i.e., not before the Future has always and already been 'to come' from time immemorial. Freedom, the cause, was not in a past time, namely, in the beginning, but the cause first brought time and the beginning into being.

The Incomprehensibility of the Origin and its Cognoscibility *Per Posterius*

Before the beginning was the nought, timeless and inscrutable nature, but in the beginning was the deed. The deed is personal and intelligible. Empiricism is not to be equivocated with sensiblistism. One only knows the personality of another via the other's words and deeds (Schelling 1972, 95), yet the will of the other as such never becomes sensible. Schelling's earlier philosophy contended that the origin was knowable either in intellectual intuition or in the art of the genius, both forms of knowledge coming *tout court* in one fell swoop. The later Schelling, recognizing radical temporality and therefore historicity, saw that this was no longer adequate. Consciousness' own past is something that falls outside of consciousness itself. Likewise reason's own past is not reason's beginning but something before it. Nature's primal will is not in the system but before it (*Ibid.* 99). Freedom's decisive deed severed eternal and chaotic nature from the orderly system that devoid of all essence and identity was essentially severed from and excluded from essence and identity. The origin can therefore only be known historically, which means empirically. Empirical here does not mean *a posteriori*, i.e., from the posterior but *per posterius*, through the posterior. Just as the will of a person is only known in this fashion, likewise is the cause or origin known. Immediate knowledge has been substituted for historical knowledge, the immediacy of the speech act for the deferral of writing. With the deed history took priority over nature. The oldest history is neither immediate, innate nor inborn but supplementary.³ If the origin is only known

² Note that in German the word '*Grund*' can denote both ground and/or reason.

³ Psychoanalysis makes use of the fact that the consequences of the past are not knowable until their time and that the full consequences of an act are always still to come. A person is known *per posterius* and that means also that a person is never fully known because the future still promises something novel.

per posterius, then it is only known via its effects and the effects may be delayed. Knowledge of the totality is always precluded because the future withholds novel origins and consequences that have yet to be revealed.

The totality is no longer foreseeable. Eternal nature escapes the totality insofar as she marks not the beginning but that before the beginning, before the totality. The Future too escapes totality because the cause is not a principle, i.e., not a nature that simply bodies forth and by presenting shows its essence in its totality. The Future is not the end of presenting/realization (*Vergegenwärtigung*) but that which always comes after and post-dates the totality. As Axel Hutter has shown, beginnings and endings are termini of wholes but here the problematic concerns a before and after, i.e., a pre-and post-history (Hutter 1996, 308). The question does not concern the *quantity* subsisting between two termini but rather the *qualitative* before and after. In the rhetoric of this article, the point is not a past that was and a future that will be but the essential Past that always already has been and the essential Future that is always to come. These determinations are not parts of the chain of time but the essential characteristics determining any temporal structure, nothing in transition but the essential components of transition.

Original is that which is first conceived as possible through its actuality (Schelling 1972, 128). This definition of originality corresponds perfectly to freedom. A free deed is a deed that could neither be derived nor foreseen but one that first appears as possible only after it has been enacted. Just as all origins are origins of something actual, accordingly the free deed is the actualization of something novel, something that was not there before. That which came to blind nature, to the naked *Dass*, was the *Was*, namely, essence or *das Sein-kommen*. The appearance of the primal potency is a repetition of the 'same' but not of a 'self-same,' not of an identity. Repetition is not the reduplication of a model by a copy but repetition is the original willing and repeating of freedom. Freedom's deed did not reduplicate nature as a copy to a model but it repeated it and thereby brought something entirely novel, i.e., original, into being. Philosophies of presence show what was already there before but a philosophy surpassing presence does not give a copy of the same but originally repeats and in repeating creates novelty. True repetition, the repetition enacted not by blind nature but freedom, is not the reduplicative presenting of an already given but the creation of novelty and originality. The original repetition brought forth cognoscibility and this only by bringing forth time. Freedom is always supplemental to nature. Freedom supplemented blind, chaotic nature with essence but only by excluding it in order to posit it as the essential Past of essence.

The Exemplary Repetition

God is the exemplary repetition insofar as He is both the limit study and the original repetition. God is the first de-cision (*Ent-scheidung*). Nature is not that through which God is God but that without which He could not be God (Schelling 1990, 129). Nature is an impersonal neuter, a pure substantial 'It.' Schelling asserts that God is not the 'It,' i.e., Nature, but 'He,' i.e., the cause superior to the natural, the super-natural (*Ibid.* 130). God is not *das Eine* but *der Eine*. Schelling draws upon the Old Testament in support of his argument, pointing to the fact that the immediate

content of Jewish consciousness was not the differentiated, self-identical and true God, Jehovah, but the plural Elohim. '... (T)he God, who is the immediate content of consciousness, Elohim, the God, who is distinguished as the true one is named Jehovah' (Schelling II/I, 145).⁴ Yahweh/Jehovah is He whom Elohim will be, Elohim named, known and secured from darkness. God cannot be the neuter and chaotic substance. This, nature, is pure objectivity without a principle of subjectivity, pure darkness without a principle of light. God is the cause who gives predominance to the subjective over the objective only by subjecting nature in order that it may actually be as sub-stance or ground. God is not the *Dass* but the *Monas*, namely, the identity of subjectivity and objectivity but only insofar as He explicitly posits each (Schelling I/10, 255–256). Nature only is as substance once it has been subjected by the cause: it only grounds once it has been undergirded.

Eternal nature is not God Himself but only the substance of His and all being. However, as has been repeatedly mentioned, this nature only actually is and is as substance once it has been positively posited as such by the cause. Nature is not that through which God is God but that without which He could not be Himself. God is not *physis* but the super-natural who cannot be without the natural above which He raises Himself. Nature thus means ground or substance in the sense of foundation (*Unterlage*) or that which carries (*das Tragende*). A ground without a cause is pure materialism but, to the contrary, that God would be a cause without in some sense also being ground is the assertion of theism (as opposed to *monotheism*) (Schelling 1972, 332). Schelling asserts, however, that God is only cause insofar as He is ground and vice versa. A substance only grounds rather than unravels and dissembles if it has been posited as an enduring substantiality. Nothing, even the eternal nature, is in and of itself grounding because all ground presupposes a cause that who would posit it as non-being. God, however, is only cause by actually positing the ground as ground rather than as the abyss (*Abgrund*) that the eternal nature would be in and of itself. God can only posit the ground of being by first positing His own nature as ground, i.e., as non-being, as potent, as matter, as subjected. Only then is God as subject and *de facto* a being. God's deed preceded God proper, i.e., it preceded His essence and nature.

Blind being, i.e., nature or ground, before it has been posited as such by the primal deed is nothing according to actual time. This is the momentum thought prior to the divine essence proper and thus prior even to eternity. In this sense divinity is from eternity because there is no *time*, even the time of eternity, when blind being subsisted. How could it? Time is concomitant with a process of selfness and identity, entailing a Past, Present, and Future. Eternity, the time of pure divinity, has this temporal structure as qualitative and not as quantitative duration. God has no duration insofar as He does not change and de-velop, i.e., undergo an accouchement process, but He is 'un-veloped,' i.e., unveiled or revealed in the primal, anonymous clearing. God does not clear but God is who was cleared or ex-posed (set forth) in the original deed. The first deed did not have an actor but unveiled, un-veloped rather than de-veloped, the first actor. The first de-cision (*Ent-scheidung*) excluded (*Schließ aus*), i.e., shut out, nature from being by positing it as the ground that cannot

⁴... (Der Gott, der der unmittelbare Inhalt des Bewußtseyns ist, Elohim, der Gott, der als der wahre unterschieden wird, Jehovah genannt wird.)

come to light but this resolution (*Erschlossenheit*) was also an unveiling opening or unveiling. The primal deed shuts out only by opening, excludes only by unveiling, conceals only by revealing and vice versa.

After the deed freedom is no longer unbounded, undetermined and indecisive but actual and decisive because it is liberated from its own law, from its own divine necessity. Eternal nature, before actually posited as substance/ground, was not yet godly. It was only the pure naturalness of a blind will until it decisively rejected being for itself, i.e., until it became super-natural and above being (*überseiend*). Only via the supernatural did the natural become essentially and not just accidentally non-being. God is not the natural Elohim, the natural *Dias*, but Jehovah the supernatural *Monas*. God is only God and freedom is only freedom by decisively rejecting what by its very nature is undecided, namely, blind nature. Blind nature was blind will or blind freedom. Both God and man, for Schelling, are properties of freedom but their task is to bring undecided, unbounded, indifferent freedom to decisiveness. This can only occur through transition. The transitive deed, though, cannot be apart from temporality.

Concluding Remarks

For the late Schelling Being itself is blind nature and blind necessity. In order that something be rather than nothing, something unnecessary, i.e., excessive and extraneous, must supplement nature. That supplementing chaotic nature brings forth essence from chaos. One could say with Derrida, 'The supplement is the image... of Nature. The image is neither in nor out of Nature' (Derrida 1976, 149). The supplement is a repetition of nature but not a copy of a model. Nature's supplement is revelation, unveiling. That known by means of revelation is that which could not be known apart from revelation, meaning that revelation is more than a simple exposing of what was already there but a repetition bringing forth novelty, a supplemental manifestation and embodiment of that which was not there before. Revelation is never natural but always only the supernatural, the supplement to the natural.

The traditional metaphysics of presence asked not why is there something rather than nothing but first and foremost: 'What is?' Schelling does not first ask for what is and then ask how it natures, bodies forth, appears or presences. There is no origin that presences but first blind nature, a non-origin that via the supplement must first be made into an origin. Nature is only made into an origin by being posited as a substantial ground. This only occurs insofar as it is subjected and excluded from being in order to be the ground of being. The ground is never present but has only always already been Past. The task was to bring indifferent, and therefore undecided, nature to decisiveness and the Past is what is decided, i.e., cut away and subjected to the Past. The Past is not a 'beginning' that was at one point present only to fall into the past but the beginningless Past is a qualitative 'before.' Nature in God, i.e., His Past, is what was expelled from God. God shi out⁵ nature in order to expropriate it from Himself. The deed by which this shifting out

(*Ausscheidung*) occurred could only be appropriated by God *post factum* because God proper was not before the deed but only after it. Nature is not appropriate for God; it is rather that which God is not, that which God expels and expropriates because inappropriate. God was never a subject receiving properties but God Himself is only the indivisible remainder surviving the excretion of nature in order that He remain as purified supernaturalness. In no manner is God a part of being, for being is what is excreted. Not only does God not presence but, if He did, then He would cease to be God, the never-presenting remainder (*der nie aufgehender Rest*).

The highest moral act is to become a person but to become a person is to become refined, pure and singular, i.e., to expel everything from oneself that one is not. This expelling of one's Past from oneself is always the unveiling of one's Future. The personal, i.e., revelation or nature's supplement, cannot be known in present intuition but only historically. True temporality does not consist in beginnings and endings but in qualitatively positing a 'has been' and a 'to come.' The decisive moment affirms the Present only by rejecting nature into the Past and casting one's entire liberation from nature into an ever-advancing, yet never-presenting, Future.

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⁵ The term 'shi out' has its precedence in Slavoj Žižek who employs it as a translation of *ausscheiden* because *Ausscheidungsorgane* in German indicate the digestive system in English. Nature is that which God excretes, that which He is not but nevertheless that by which He shows Himself as who He is only by expelling what He is not as excrement. The excrement presences but God cannot.