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THE UNGROUNDING OF NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis will examine the critique of Kant which Schelling makes in his late work, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*. In it, Schelling argues that reason cannot, without recurring to what is outside it, sufficiently ground itself. While Kant's project purports to be a completely immanent critique of reason, Schelling insists that there is a moment in this critique that is, though still immanent, verging on transcendence: following Kant's critique of reason by reason alone, we are drawn out into unreason. Moreover, Schelling claims that this grounding unreason follows from the method and agenda of Kant's first *Critique*. As the central point of his criticism, Schelling has the distinction between positive and negative philosophies. Kant's, he insists, is purely negative, and therefore lacks a positive dimension. In this thesis, we will see that Kant's philosophy really is negative and that its negativity makes it vulnerable to Schelling's criticism. We will also see where Schelling's criticism of it and his plan for a positive philosophy will lead us.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Four Distinctions.....	3
B. The Murder of Metaphysics.....	5
II. THE DIALECTIC.....	9
A. Reason.....	11
B. The Three Ideas.....	13
III. THE ANALYTIC.....	25
A. Entirely Positive?.....	26
B. The Relationship of the Faculties.....	32
IV. THE IDEAL.....	35
A. The Lynchpin: Sum vs. Ground.....	35
B. Architectonics.....	43
V. SCHELLING'S CRITIQUE.....	48
A. The Necessary Terminus of Reason.....	48
B. A Hole in Kant's <i>Critique</i>	52
VI. WHERE TO NOW?.....	60
A. Tangency Point.....	64
B. Not an Empiricism.....	69

VII.UNPRETHINKABLE BEING.....	74
A. Necessity.....	75
B. Withdrawal.....	77
C. Contingency.....	81
VIII. CONCLUSION: CONTINGENTLY OPEN-ENDED.....	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	94

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1842, in his Berlin lectures entitled *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, Schelling launches a criticism of Kant and Hegel. He claims that the philosophies of both Kant and Hegel are not sufficient as the whole of philosophy. Schelling's position utilizes a distinction between what he calls positive and negative philosophies¹, and a subsequent critique of the negative which, according to Schelling, is inevitably drawn into the positive through its operations. Kant and Hegel's philosophies are then taken by Schelling to be negative, and they are shown to need a positive counterpart. This is what *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* is about – Schelling seeks to provide a new beginning for a positive philosophy. This thesis will be the mirror image of Schelling's project in *The Grounding* – Schelling seeks to ground a positive philosophy while we here seek to unground the negative – show, as explicitly as possible, that it is incomplete².

Schelling positive-negative distinction is central to his analysis. It is a distinction in both the subject and the method of philosophies. A negative philosophy adopts, as its method, setting limits for our thought; it tells us what things are *not* and what we *cannot* know. All determination for it is negation, and, since it operates at a

¹ See how Schelling presents this distinction in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, section entitled "The Difference between Negative and Positive Philosophy"

² This is necessary insofar as Schelling, in the lectures, only gives an outline of his argument against the negative, especially against Kant – assuming that the very beginning and progression of German idealism has invalidated Kant once and for all.

conceptual level, its instrument is reason. In its subject, and being a philosophy of reason, negative philosophy gives us that kind of knowledge about things which can be expressed conceptually, i.e., *what* they are, their essences. It, taken alone, cannot tell us *whether* things are. Negative philosophy concerns itself with only that which is possible and not necessarily actual, since we cannot know that something really is in actuality, we are able to know only what it is not and what it could be. We could know its essence, never its existence. A positive philosophy, on the other hand, is that which is able to access and know reality outside thought, and therefore able to tell us what really is – the existence of a thing. It is about what is actually, and not merely possibly. We must note that the specific mechanism of knowledge, and therefore, the method of positive philosophy remains open here, at least for now – at this point we can only say that the positive philosophy does not proceed to find out what things are conceptually like the negative, but instead adopts a historical method investigating that things are, through studying the historical progression of being³.

However, in order for the relevance of the distinction between positive and negative philosophies to be drawn out, it needs to be put in the foreground of Kant's own related core distinctions: those between thinking and being, between appearance

³ See *ibid*, p.181 for an example of how a positive philosophy would proceed in Schelling's view: "[...]his proof itself [the positive philosophy's "proof" for the existence of God] is not just the beginning or a part of a science (least of all some type of syllogistic proof posited at the apex of philosophy), it is the entire science, that is, the entire positive philosophy—and this is nothing other than the progressive, strengthening with every step, and continually growing proof of the actually existing God. Because the realm of reality in which this proof moves is not finished and complete— for even if nature is now at its end and stands still, there is, nonetheless, still the unrelenting advance and movement of history— because insofar as the realm of reality is not complete, but is a realm perpetually nearing its consummation, the proof is therefore also never finished, and for this very reason this science is only a Philo-sophie." - the point of this note here is not to show the supposed religious overtone of Schelling's philosophy (which can actually be read in a lot of ways – see Markus Gabriel's *Transcendental Ontology* for that), but to show that the positive philosophy is a progressive study of the growing and ever-expanding realm of reality, hence its positivity.

and thing-in-itself, between thinking and knowing and between phenomena and noumena. These distinctions are central to Kant's philosophy and it is with them in mind that Schelling will show its deficiency.

A. Four Distinctions

The core insight of Kant's philosophy can be put in its most basic form as follows: we cannot know things as they are, but only as they appear to us. The meaning of this insight lies within the four core distinctions enumerated above.

First, this insight is a reiteration of the ancient philosophical distinction between thought and being: our thought is of a nature different than being; thought operates in concepts while being is not necessarily inherently conceptual, and thus it is not obvious whether and how thought is able access and encompass being-as-it-is in knowledge. With Kant, this initial distinction becomes stronger – but is at the same time qualified - roughly as follows: there is no guarantee of certainty that the operation of the faculties of our mind reveals being as it is; rather certainty itself is only possible if our faculties are distinct from what being in-itself is independent of them. Kant makes this claim insofar as he is answering a crucial question for the possibility of human knowledge: how do the representations we have of things conform to objects of thought? This question, Kant claims, has two possible answers, or rather kinds of answers: it is either that the objects of thought shape our thought or that our thought shapes its own objects (without the one necessarily creating the other in the full sense of the word)⁴. The first of these possible answers – the dogmatic – is inadequate, since we

⁴ See Beatrice Longuenesse. Kant and the Capacity to Judge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.18-20

could never know with certainty how and if the world-as-it-is beyond our thought shapes thought, and thus we could never have any certain knowledge about the link between thought and its object. Any dogmatic answer, i.e, one that claims that external reality shapes our representations, is vulnerable to a rather vicious scepticism: it cannot give a sufficient demonstration of how an external reality in-itself, completely independent of our thought and different from it in nature can affect thinking. This would render the knowledge the first answer seeks to ground⁵ a mere speculation⁶ and raise the question: “is it not possible that all the objects of our experience are the products of our mind?” – a question the dogmatist cannot really answer. It then has to be that the second answer is the one we must give in order to justify why we have knowledge, which for Kant is conceptual, certain and intersubjective⁷. It is our faculties that create their own objects as phenomenal – appearances as opposed to that which appears, the thing-in-itself.

The distinction between thinking and being brought us to that between appearances and things-in-themselves, and this second distinction now brings us in turn to a third: that between thinking and knowing. Kant introduces this distinction in order to differentiate between that which we access in intuition and that which we do not. That which we can know comes to us in experience through intuition. We “process” an appearance by applying twelve categories (and any additional concepts, if we have

⁵ Throughout this thesis, “ground” will be taken to mean the relation between two ideas, concepts or entities whereby one of them can be used to explain the other such that it also makes the other possible.

⁶ As we’ll see, Kant doesn’t do any better with regard to the in-itself; the knowledge of the in-itself is a mere possibility even for him, and yet we are not speculating, we know with certainty that all we can have of the in-itself is a mere possibility and we can get to certainty, Kant argues, within our own experiences.

⁷ See *ibid.*, p.786.

formed them) to our intuition through judgements – only then do we know it. Thinking, on the other hand, is the domain of pure reason: it doesn't have to deal with sensibles. Nothing has to be given for there to be thinking about things: the things thought about have to simply be thinkable, i.e., non-contradictory. The source of the thought which pure reason thinks is the transcendental subject itself and the limits its transcendental subjectivity sets to thinking. All we can know then belongs to appearance, since only experience yields knowledge, and all that is experienced appears to us; the thing-in-itself cannot be known and is a mere speculative thought-entity we cannot help but postulate.

From this distinction, a refinement to the distinction appearance/thing-in-itself also follows: it translates into the distinction between phenomena and noumena: phenomena are those objects that are given in sensory intuition and can be really known, while noumena are the objects of (a merely possible) intellectual intuition, ones we cannot know, but can only think⁸.

B. The Murder of Metaphysics

It is the third distinction that brings us closer to the focus of this thesis. Metaphysics claims to be a science, the “knowledge” about things as they are independent from us, beyond us. “Beyond us” would here mean that the things metaphysics seeks to know are located outside our experience; it would mean “knowing” the supersensible. However, through the distinction between thinking and knowing, Kant demonstrates: that which is supersensible cannot be known by its very

⁸ See On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena, *ibid*, pp. 354-365.

definition – categories cannot be applied to it, concepts cannot be attached to it, temporal and spatial localizations become obsolete in relation to it. That which is supersensible can only be thought, and not known. Metaphysics cannot be a science, it can only be the pleasant, occasionally gratifying process of thinking being in-itself, a process of mental masturbation. It would seem that one can think anything about the world in-itself, since this thinking has no epistemic credit as knowledge. With this reasoning, Kant has apparently dealt a death blow to metaphysics. He has shown that thought does not need to depend on an absolute beyond it in order to ground itself, grounding reason and knowledge immanently along with it. Schelling steps in to demonstrate precisely the opposite. We can now put his distinction between positive and negative philosophies in focus.

Schelling's diagnosis of Kant runs roughly as follows: in Kant's we cannot definitely think anything apart from its manifestation for thought. This has established limits for our thinking and rendered Kantian philosophy negative. The real being of things in the world – the concern of positive philosophy – is precisely not a concern for Kant: it is not something that appears to us, we cannot know it, and therefore we cannot make any statements about it. Kant makes this clear with his disqualification of the ontological argument for the existence of God⁹: besides the fact that being is not a predicate, let alone one that grants reality to that of which it is predicated, Kant's refutation tells us that our concept of anything can never be extended beyond thought into the "realm" of being in order to tell us about the real existence of that anything. Because of this incapacity in reason, the derivation of an entity's being (let alone its necessary being) from the concept of the entity is shown to be impossible. In other

⁹ Ibid, pp.563-569.

words, nothing about the conceptual reality of a certain representation or concept could grant us access to real being, to something that is in reality. This is why Schelling says that reason cannot even be fully “dogmatic” – i.e, it cannot claim that something is – it has to be merely dogmatizing, for it cannot access being. So, it is not just the derivation of the necessary existence of an entity that the Kantian refutation invalidates, it is the derivation of any conclusions about the existence or non-existence of any entity. It follows from Kantian philosophy that our thinking cannot extend itself beyond what it is purely possible – “possible” here used in the sense of conceivable. We cannot say: “God does not exist” any more than we can say “God does exist” within the framework of Kantian philosophy. Strictly speaking, from within that framework we also cannot make statements like “trees really exist”, if what we mean by these statements is along the lines of: “in the in-itself, beyond our representation, in the *real* reality there really exist objects which have the characteristics of trees”. We also cannot make the same statements in the negative or make them about any entity or non-entity of our choice. We cannot even make statements about the physical possibility of the existence of an entity or a non-entity, but only about its conceivability, since statements like “There is a real possibility that God really exists” are still meaningless within a Kantian framework, as it might be that state of affairs in-itself is such that it necessitates the non-existence of God. We can only maintain that something is conceivable or inconceivable, the state of affairs inconceivable being a contradiction.

Schelling argues that this is not enough. According to him, negative philosophy is unable to demonstrate to us the very foundations of our thinking, or rather, presupposes them as it seeks to assume that it is critiquing thought completely from within itself. To be completed, the negative must be conjoined with a positive

philosophy, which is to tell us whether something is, not just whether it is conceivable or not. To be put simply, Schelling wants to open the doors for a new, post-Kantian metaphysics – a philosophy would deal with being, and not just with the conditions for our thought, and one which would moreover seek to be a knowledge, not just an empty thought-process.

This thesis will examine Schelling's position. It will begin by taking a close look at Kant's philosophy and determining whether it can properly be called negative, through an examination of the necessary dependence of the ideas of the seemingly positive transcendental analytic on the negative transcendental dialectic, and specifically on the transcendental ideal. It will then proceed to examine the role and function of the transcendental ideal in Kantian philosophy, revealing the emphasis Kant has to place on its negativity if his project is to stay consistent with its main principle of disallowing the reification of transcendent entities. Thereafter, it will dissect the conceptual movement with which Schelling reveals the need Kant has to violate the above principle in order for knowledge to be possible – a violation which will open the door to Schelling's positive project. Finally, it will examine the resulting starting-point of a positive philosophy, its relation to the negative, and whether it is really the positive answer Schelling insists we must seek.

CHAPTER II

THE DIALECTIC

In order to assess Schelling's criticism of Kant's negativity and his subsequent grounding of positive philosophy, we must first assure ourselves that Kant's philosophy is indeed negative. Its negativity is not obvious, since the philosophy against which Schelling argues most vehemently throughout *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* is best exemplified by Hegelianism¹⁰, and not Kant's critical system. After all, it is not the negative philosophy per se that Schelling wishes to criticize, but a certain kind of negative philosophy – one which does not accept its limitation as negative, but assumes its sufficiency. Moreover, if Schelling's main criticism is that the negative philosophy does not sufficiently address being, it is not obvious that the Kantian could not respond to this by arguing that being is merely being-as-positing in experience and thus nothing to address – at the very least, nothing conceptual. In order to make sure that Schelling's critique of Kant does not rest on a misreading, we will have to, in the first part of our work, demonstrate that the Kantian philosophy is a negative philosophy; as we do so, we will also see more clearly what a negative philosophy is. To this end, we must first examine the link between negative philosophy and reason.

A negative philosophy for Schelling is a science of reason. Reason is not only the faculty which engages in the act of philosophizing in a negative philosophy, reason

¹⁰ See Schelling's attacks on Hegel almost throughout *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*: see, for instance Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, section entitled "The Difference between Negative and Positive Philosophy" – for instance page 145.

– our cognitive process – is the primary object of such a philosophy¹¹. For a negative philosophy, all determination is negation, in accordance with Spinoza’s principle, and such a philosophy can only tell us *what* a thing is according to its concept, never *that* it is. Schelling insists that Kantian philosophy is precisely such a philosophy:

“This positive rationalism [*the dogmatic pre-Kantian rationalism, such as is there in Plato or Leibniz*] was so thoroughly undermined by Kant that it henceforth appeared as impossible so that, nowadays, even those theologians who gladly grab at anything to go on no longer look for help in the old metaphysics. But when that positive rationalism was undermined, a purer rationalism came into view – a purer rationalism that, however, we will not call a negative rationalism, since this would presuppose the positive as a possible rationalism¹²; also since Kant there has not been a positive rationalism. Rationalism can only be negative philosophy, and both concepts are completely synonymous. According to its subject matter, that *pure* rationalism was already contained within Kant’s critique. [...] Kant shows in general how futile it is for reason to attempt through inferences to reach beyond itself to existence (in this effort, however, reason is not dogmatic, since it does not reach its goal, but, rather, is simply dogmatizing). Kant thus leaves nothing other to reason than the science that encompasses within itself the pure whatness of the thing and his clearly stated position is that this pure rationalism is all that remains standing on the edifice of the old metaphysics. Kant, of course, extended what he had proved only of *reason* to *philosophy* and had tacitly assumed that there is no other philosophy than pure rational philosophy¹³.

Kant himself calls his philosophy a negative philosophy, since it serves to limit experience and prevent it from attempts to barge into the transcendent, that to which it

¹¹ It is the primary object of negative philosophy insofar as it this kind of philosophy studies the conceptual determinations our cognition gives to objects (objects it itself forms, of course). A negative philosophy will not tell us about the independent existence of things, it will merely tell us what we think things are. It can be replied to me that there are other faculties (namely, understanding) for such a philosophy to study, but I try to demonstrate the dependance of the understanding on reason. A negative philosophy would also be primarily a philosophy of reason insofar as – we can see this with Kant – it regulates our thought, tells us its limits of what we can think through the faculty of reason, having the limits of reason as its subject.

¹² We hereby can see that Schelling does not think that there can be a positive rationalism – we shall return to this point later in this thesis.

¹³ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, p.147.

has no access¹⁴. This should not be enough for us, however – Kant’s general admissions of negativity, though mentioned at the beginning of the First *Critique* as well, seem to apply to the role of reason only, since it is reason’s role to limit the understanding. Moreover, limiting experience, limiting being is just one element of negative philosophy¹⁵, and it could be the only sense in which Kant’s transcendental philosophy is negative; it may contain positivity within itself. We have, therefore, to examine the central elements of Kantian philosophy in order to be able to determine whether they really are negative. We will do this by looking at the *Transcendental Dialectic*, the uncontroversially negative part of the *Critique*, and examining the negativity of reason through the transcendental ideas of self and world, and the transcendental ideal. Then, we will examine the *Transcendental Analytic* and see that, while the operations of the understanding cannot be directly called “negative”, they are dependent on the negative ideas of reason for their function. However, first, we need to make sure that Kant’s reason is purely negative.

A. Reason

Schelling states, in the passage from *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* quoted above, that a negative philosophy encompasses the “whatness” of a thing as expressed in the concept of that thing. We will begin, then by examining how Kant’s restricts reason to knowing the whatness of a thing, and not its being, and see how this

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 114 and the *Transcendental Dialectic*, for instance pp. 590-591, where reason and its ideas are given only a “regulative” status, which in the *Dialectic* is for all purposes synonymous with negative.

¹⁵ A negative philosophy also gives even the whatness of a thing merely problematically, as what is possible rather than what is real.

restriction is applied to pure reason so that what Kant calls “regulative principles” of reason are uncovered.

Our reason cannot derive the existence of anything from concepts – Kant demonstrates this claim of his in several sections of the First *Critique*: in the *Systematic Representation of all Synthetic Principles*¹⁶ and in the *Critique of All Speculative Theology*. For Kant, being is not a real predicate; it cannot be added to a concept in order to cause a miraculous hypostasis of the concept’s object¹⁷. Attributing independent being from concepts is a positing, a mere attempt at a hypostasis, and one that naturally fails, since Kant affirms the division between thought and being in-itself, and therefore, there is no reason for whatever we think conceptually to correspond to being independently from our concepts. The only being we can access is the being of our appearances as appearances; that is, through experience. There is no way we can think independent existence, reason simply does not have access to knowing whether the object exists or not:

“In the mere concept of a thing no characteristic of its existence can be encountered at all. For even if this concept is so complete that it lacks nothing required for thinking of a thing with all of its inner determinations, still existence has nothing in the least to do with all of this, but only with the question of whether such a thing is given to us in such a way that the perception of it could in any case precede the concept. For that the concept precede the perception signifies its mere possibility; but perception, which yields the material for the concept, is the sole characteristic of actuality.”¹⁸

Also:

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.322-326

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.563-569

¹⁸ Ibid, p.325

“But if we were to think existence through the pure category alone, then we must not be surprised that we cannot indicate any mark whereby to distinguish existence from mere possibility.

Hence no matter what and how much our concept of an object may contain, we must yet go outside the concept in order to assign existence to the object.¹⁹”

So, to use Kant and apply the above directly to God – we cannot succeed in deriving his existence from our concept of him, and we cannot derive his existence-as-appearance from a direct sensory experience. Appealing to a necessity for postulating God as a proof of his existence also fails: we can speak about the “unconditioned necessity of judgments”²⁰, but never the absolute necessity of things – “[f]or the absolute necessity of a judgment is only a conditioned necessity of the thing [as subject] or of the predicate of the judgment²¹”. Even the necessity of an unconditioned judgment is a conditioned necessity; it is a necessity for-us, for our thought.

The inaccessibility of anything outside our experience and thus in its existence and the impossibility of reason to access being then lays the ground for Kant’s Transcendental Dialectic, where reason’s regulative status becomes clear.

B. The Three Ideas

The Dialectic is Kant’s answer to the problem of transcendental illusion – the question of why human reason cannot but reify certain ideas, granting them noumenal reality. The ideas Kant deals with are those of the “I” – the self, the world and the necessary being possessing highest reality (God). Throughout the Dialectic, Kant

¹⁹ Ibid, p.568

²⁰ Ibid, p.564

²¹ Ibid.

emphasizes that we are unable to access those ideas through experience and so we are unable to infer anything about the structure of reality from them. However, we are required to postulate them through our reason – if those ideas were doubted, reason would attain a state of deadlock²². Through the paralogisms and antinomies of pure reason, Kant shows that without those three postulations, reason hits a dead end, apparently running into otherwise insoluble contradictions. It is the ideas of reason which ultimately organize the judgments of the understanding. However, Kant is careful to specify that the postulation of those ideas is to be “regulative” only, i.e., they are to be postulated for the sake of the progress of reason only, and not hypostatized into the world of appearances. The self, the world and God do not transcendently exist, they are at most to be taken “as if existing” to ensure the functioning of our reason – in that regard, each has its role. We will now proceed to examining the three ideas of reason in more detail.

The first of those ideas, the “I” (soul) has its necessity shown to us through four paralogisms, logically valid syllogisms which are however unsound, and cannot apply to the real structure of our cognition. The first paralogism concludes that “I” is a substance, the second that it is simple, the third that it is a person, i.e, is conscious of its numerical identity over time and the fourth that the existence of the outer objects is dubitable and that therefore, the “I” is not a physical object. Those paralogisms are used by Kant to show how all attempts to think about the self positively inevitably result in error. As a result of the four paralogisms, we can only conclude that the inferences normally made from them become groundless if they are taken to be about what actually is in-itself as those inferences pertain merely to possible being, and serve as the limits of

²² Ibid, p.460

our thought. For all the four syllogisms, Kant's reasoning is as follows: any inference made about the self is based on our experience of the self, i.e., our phenomenal self as it appears to us²³. The four inferences, however, are generally taken to be truths of reason relating to a "noumenal" self, a self-as-it-is independent from our experience. This, however, is an unwarranted use of inference, an application of concepts onto that which is not given in experience and an attempt to deduce from mere inferences the real being of a thing. Thus, our reason cannot attribute to the self substance, unity, personality or difference from external object. The self rational philosophy deals with, an intelligible entity, is not given to us in experience, and in reifying it we seek to attribute to it predicates which can only be attributed to objects of judgment given in experience. We can only make judgments of our appearance of the self. Alternatively, we can form a concept of that which is a unified substance possessing personality and difference from external objects, and yet this concept would remain a concept –it could not be used to infer anything about the object of this concept and could not be reified to form this object. Whatever the self-as-it-is, the noumenal self is, we are ignorant of its attributes, and we therefore can attribute only the possibility of being a substance, unified, a person or different from external objects to it.

We can now see why the Kantian idea of self is a negative idea, its positive use forbidden. We think of our self as a condition of possible experience²⁴, and as a condition of experience, we think of it as substantial, unified and enduring through time. This is the regulative role of the idea of the self: we postulate it through reason only to enable us to think about possible experience. However, we then assume it is knowable,

²³ See *ibid*, pp.411-415

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.455

and reify it to make it knowable. Yet, a reification of this “enduring self” into the concept of a transcendent soul would be improper use of reason, as our “real” self in-itself has the characteristics of substantiality, unity and endurance through time only possibly, because we do not know anything about its existence independent from experience. Attempts to hypostatize it will fail, and reason which has reified the I will always end up in parallogism. Our experience is only possible as unified; therefore it seems necessary to think of us as a “self”. This idea of the self, however, at best enables us to claim that we need to postulate a self. Transcendental psychology – as Kant calls the study of the transcendental idea of the self – has then a negative benefit, insofar as it is a critical treatment of our inferences about the self. It is a purely negative science and its propositions are purely negative²⁵. It only reveals to us what our reason is not to do with our self – it is not to reify it, since our self is what transcendental psychology claims it is merely possibly.

The second idea Kant derives is that of the world, or of a series of appearances, and he derives it from the first two antinomies²⁶. Here, perhaps, a word should be said about the significance of the structure of the antinomies. The antinomies have their thesis and antithesis argued for through an indirect proof, i.e., a proof that proves the absurdity of an assertion opposite to the one that is sought to be proven. Those proofs do not give an argument for why a statement is true, they rather claim that the opposite view is false and entails a contradiction, and then show that the original statement entails no such contradiction. Therefore, those proofs are themselves negative proofs; telling us what something is not. Also, the four antinomies, as Kant states, rely on the

²⁵ Ibid, p.433

²⁶ See *ibid*, pp.445-458

principle that if a series of conditioned is given, then the condition is also given²⁷. In the four antinomies, we see that this principle is disproven. We are indeed given the series of conditioned: the series of our experiences of the world for the first, third and fourth antinomies and the series of divisions of a substance, also given in experience for the second antinomy. However, in each of the four antinomies, the search for the condition fails because it involves attributing to it what is only to be attributed to the conditioned, i.e., treating what is merely thinkable and outside the boundaries of experience as accessible to our judgment. The independent existent of the world in space and time, the ultimate nature of substance in-itself, the existence of the first cause and the existence of the necessary being are all non-derivable from the series of conditions given. While we are given the conditioned in our experience, we are not able to reach the condition since it is outside experience. The best we can do is a purely negative connection to the condition. The world can have a limit or have none and there may or may not be a first cause or a necessary being. We are unable to know, the condition in those cases is indefinite²⁸.

The first antinomy's thesis asserts that the world has a boundary in space and time, while the antithesis asserts that it does not²⁹. The whole approach towards the problem of the world's boundaries in both the thesis and the antithesis is contrary to the

²⁷ Ibid, p.461

²⁸ However, and this is very important: for the transcendental ideas of the first cause and the necessary being, our reason can postulate them, as regulative ideas, and it moreover seems that our reason has to postulate them in order to avoid falling into the antinomies Kant presents. The antinomies of limits of the world and the divisibility of matter can be solved by ceasing to treat the "unconditioned" to appearances as something that is not an appearance; for the cause and the necessary being, however, them offering a dynamic view of appearances, we can treat the series of appearances as having either a sensible condition (which does not work) or an intelligible condition (see *ibid*, p.531).

²⁹ Ibid, pp.470-472

spirit of critical philosophy: philosophers who are able to make the statements of the thesis and the antithesis treat the world as something that is there, revealed to us in our experience, and accessible to our discourse. So, when the assertion “The world has a boundary in space and time” is made, time and space are hypostatized into entities which continue beyond the limits of the world. There is the world, it has a limit in space and a beginning in time, and then, beyond those limits, there is empty time and empty space, both contradictory, since time and space are merely forms of our intuition. The antithesis, “The world has no boundary in space and time”, is not any better, since with it we are also hypostatizing time and space into infinite entities which exist with the infinite world, making them unintelligible infinitudes³⁰. The solution of the antinomy is that neither the thesis nor the antithesis is correct, since they both treat the “world” as a thing in-itself, thinkable outside our experience.

The second antinomy is that of divisibility of substance³¹. Its thesis states that composite substances consist of simple parts, which are the only existing things, all composites being merely aggregates. The antithesis, on the other hand, asserts that composite substances are not composed of simple parts and that nothing simple exists³². The root of this antinomy is also the fact that the philosophers who would make the claims of the thesis and of the antithesis both would speak of a hypostatized substance, and apply principles of pure reason which apply only to appearances to some sort of “outside” that is independent of our experience. So, if one is to say that nothing simple exists, he would be logically forced to admit that nothing exists at all because something

³⁰ Ibid, pp.472-475

³¹ Ibid, pp.476-483

³² Ibid, pp.476-479

simple has to exist for something complex to exist. On the other hand, if one is to say that everything is made of simple parts, then he would have to admit that those simple parts do not occupy space, since anything that occupies space can be further subdivided. Therefore, the philosopher who puts forward the antithesis has to acknowledge that composite extended parts are formed of non-extended simple entities. Once again, the solution to this antinomy is not to treat substance as something which is independent of our experience. Unless philosophers take caution not to hypostatize substance, they will think of it in terms of something that is actually in-itself composed of units that are in-themselves spatial and the antinomy will arise.

From those two antinomies, Kant derives the transcendental idea of the world. The world, for Kant, is indefinite – since we cannot determine its limits in space and time or the limits of its component parts of matter. It is a series of experienced events in time and objects in space which needs to be postulated for the coherence of possible experience, i.e., to prevent our reason from falling into antinomies when we are thinking about the experience that is merely possible and depends on our idea of the world. This is a purely negative idea: the world is a series of appearances which does not exist independently, but is merely postulated to give a limit to our thinking and forbid it from attempting to access the areas it cannot access, like the boundaries of space, time or phenomenal substance. This idea makes our thought stay within the limits of spatio-temporal causality. Thus, the transcendental idea of the world is also negative, just like the idea of the self: it does not tell us about something that definitely exists, but only allows us to postulate a regulative principle for our experience, leaving the existence of the world to our possibility of ignorance.

The third idea which Kant introduces is by far the most important – it is that of the necessary being, classically speaking God, which in Section II of Chapter III of the *Transcendental Dialectic*³³ becomes the transcendental ideal. The idea of a necessary being is shown through two antinomies as well, but those antinomies end with the possibility of combining the thesis and the antithesis in what needs to be postulated as a regulative idea of reason³⁴.

The third antinomy is that of the first cause³⁵. Through the thesis it is argued that there is causation through freedom, and therefore a first cause which is unconditioned, otherwise there would be no first beginning, and the chain of events of the world would have to extend indefinitely. Through the antithesis it is argued that there is no first cause and everything in nature happens according to natural laws³⁶. The antithesis, thus, implies that there is a causal chain which stops at some point, and that the first link in this causal chain is uncaused, which violates the causal law. This antinomy remains unresolved until it is acknowledged that causality cannot be applied to what is outside appearances and the concept of freedom cannot be applied to appearance. The solution is therefore to divide action into caused, which obeys natural laws completely, and free, which happens outside those laws³⁷. Notice, however, that Kant refuses to draw a positive conclusion from this division: the resolution of the

³³ Ibid, pp.553-559

³⁴ Ibid, p.531

³⁵ Ibid, pp.484-489

³⁶ Ibid, pp.484-487

³⁷ From the third antinomy, we conclude that our freedom – if it exists - is transcendent, outside experience. And Kant does argue for its existence – at least on p.562 of the *First Critique*, for all that argument is worth.

antinomy of freedom does not lead to a postulation of the existence of our freedom or even to the possibility of us being free – this naturally follows from our inability to access the being or even ontological possibility of something³⁸.

The fourth antinomy is that of the necessary being³⁹. The thesis asserts that there is a necessary being, since there has to be a beginning to a series of conditioned⁴⁰. However, this is an illegitimate proof which derives the existence of something purely from concepts. The antithesis asserts that there is no necessary being since it will be itself uncaused if it existed. The result demonstrates quite well what an antinomy is: from the very same concern – the necessity of there being a causal beginning to the universe makes us, if not restricted from access to the in-itself, both the existence and the non-existence of God.

From this last antinomy, we can see that whether we postulate that God exists or that he does not, we end up with a contradiction. Thus, in order to save our reason from such contradictions and in order to ground transcendental freedom, we have to posit a necessary being which exists outside the series of our appearances completely. This being is posited as a regulative transcendental ideal, and plays a role in determination. In determination, the thing-to-be-determined is determined as part of a whole, a thought-object containing within itself the sum of all possible predicates which is determined through mere idea and whose existence is not hypostatized – the ideal of pure reason. This ideal is the original being of all beings, the prototypon of reason. Again we can see that the transcendental ideal is a negative ideal. We cannot say

³⁸ Ibid, p.546

³⁹ Ibid, pp.490-495

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp.490-492

anything definitive about its existence as an unconditioned in-itself – we simply do not know anything about it; it is merely a tool our reason must postulate within itself in order to determine our experience.

The use of those three ideas, Kant tells us, is regulative: they are to prevent our faculties from “straying” beyond their boundaries⁴¹. Through Kant’s demonstrations, we are able to see: if those ideas are hypostatized, if they are used “constitutively”, i.e., if we actually postulate their existence, our reason will run into contradictions – those which Kant has laid bare in the paralogisms and the antinomies. This proves the necessity of restricting them to their regulative use: the very status of these ideas demonstrates to us that it is groundless to hypostatize them, and that even if we did hypostatize them, this hypostasis will lead reason into a deadlock with itself. The transcendental psychology has an “important negative benefit if it is supposed to count as nothing more than a critical treatment of our dialectical inferences viz. those of common and natural reason⁴²”, the cosmological principle is a regulative principle and its constitutive use is null⁴³ and transcendental theology has “an important negative use”⁴⁴ insofar as it can be use to determine negative the concept of the being that has highest reality and, again, forbid a transcendent hypostasis of that being. Putting this “regulative-ness” in the light of the division between concepts and being, Kant says:

⁴¹ The use of “regulative” and “constitutive” when applied to the ideas of reason parallels the use of positive and negative in Schelling. A regulative idea is an idea which determines something insofar as it tells us what it is not and how it should not be – it is a limit. A constitutive idea, on the other hand – if such a thing existed – would be a reified idea, an idea whose being is “out there”. It would be an actual entity rather than an idea.

⁴² Ibid, p.433

⁴³ Ibid, pp.520-521

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.588

Hence the regulative principle of reason regarding this problem of ours is the following: that everything in the world of sense has empirically conditioned existence, and that there is in that world no unconditioned necessity whatsoever with regard to any quality; that there is in the series of conditions no member of which one must not always expect – and, as far as one can, seek – the empirical condition in a possible experience, and that nothing entitles us to derive any existence from a condition outside the empirical series, or, for that matter, to regard such an existence as absolutely independent and self-sufficient in the series itself; yet that we hold all this without thereby disallowing that the whole series could be based on some intelligible being (which therefore is free from any empirical condition and contains, rather, the basis of the possibility of all these appearances)⁴⁵.

In other words: we cannot infer the existence of the self, the totality of appearances as world-in-itself or God based on our senses, but we cannot, at the same time, argue that the self, totality of appearances as world-in-itself or God do not exist: they could exist, they are a mere possibility. It is very important to note here, that Kant places special emphasis on this possibility: we cannot hypostatize the ideas of pure reason, but it is also unjustified to deny their transcendent existence – they are merely possible⁴⁶.

The ideas of pure reason, then, safeguard the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal at the points where this distinction is most threatened, where reason threatens to leave the empirical and stray into the realm of transcendent explanation. The regulative role performed by the ideas is very important for Kant, since the reason of any human being, striving to know and explain as much as possible, will attempt to expand its reach into the transcendent in order to answer inevitable

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.547

⁴⁶ We can see it with the self in A347 (ibid, p.415): "The proposition "I think" is, however, taken here only problematically; not insofar as it may contain a perception of an existence (the Cartesian cogito, ergo sum), a but only in its mere possibility, in order to see which properties might flow from so simple a proposition as this for its subject (whether or not such a thing might now exist).", with the world in B461 (ibid – p.475): "The mundus intelligibilis is nothing but the concept of a world in general, abstracting from all conditions of intuiting it, and in regard to which, consequently, no synthetic proposition at all, whether affirmative or negative, is possible.", and with God on p.588.

questions it posits to itself, questions such as “is there a necessary being?” or “is there a limit to the world?” Regulative ideals are an antidote to that; they are the limits of reason, they determine its scope, give it its unity⁴⁷ and set it in accordance with itself⁴⁸.

The regulative character and the ability to access solely the possibility of things is what Schelling finds limits Kant’s critical philosophy to a very specific role, one which isn’t at all the role of philosophy as a whole. Schelling comments on the negativity of Kant’s philosophy:

[I]n the science of reason, or, what is the same thing, the pure a priori science, only the possibility of things, not the reality, is comprehended. Reason, however, is the infinite potency of cognition and, as such, has nothing but the infinite potency of being as its content. Precisely because of this it can, from this content, arrive at nothing but what is possible a priori.⁴⁹

We are to see how Schelling will criticize such a restriction in Kant, but first we must see if the denomination “negative philosophy” applies to the transcendental analytic and Kant’s doctrine of the categories just as well as it applies to the transcendental dialectic. With the dialectic it seems clear and straightforward – Kant himself says that this part of his philosophy, the philosophy of pure reason, is negative and regulative. With the doctrine of the categories, however, Kant seems to give our understanding the power to create the being of experience in-experience, thus letting us access the *being* of appearances, and not determine it probabilistically or negatively. In the next section, we will see that it is the dependence of our understanding on the faculty of reason that renders Kant’s philosophy negative and Schelling’s critiques effective.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.594

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.607

⁴⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, p.142

CHAPTER III

THE ANALYTIC

Now that we have seen that the transcendental dialectic can be called negative: the transcendental ideas are not to be hypostatized, and we can know nothing about their existence or non-existence. They are inaccessible through our experience and they thus can serve only as limits to our knowledge and as regulators to experience, giving us only the possibility of their object – which gives us very little, since anything that is not contradictory is possible. The transcendental analytic and the doctrine of the categories, however, play a completely different role. One cannot just claim that those elements of Kant's philosophy are negative, since they, along with the forms of sensibility (space and time), seem to constitute our experience, form it, and thus play a role that is fundamentally positive.

Moreover, for Kant the faculty of pure reason is *pure*, and the three ideas which Kant speaks about in the dialectic are ideas of pure reason – it is impossible to access them in experience. Pure reason cannot at all access anything in experience, as this is the task of understanding. It follows that if we take Kant's claim that our only knowledge comes from experience seriously we will discover that our reason, by definition, cannot know anything. Our reason turns out to be a faculty for thinking, and not for knowing, and it is thus evident by the very definition of this faculty that we are unable to use it in order to discover existence. It seems we cannot criticize Kant for negativity after all, because he has divided his philosophy into two parts, the negative (dialectic) and the positive (analytic), precisely as Schelling wants to see philosophy

structured⁵⁰. It seems Kant is just following the guidelines of his own project, without committing himself to a restrictive use of the transcendental ideas: a regulative use is all they could have, and it is the understanding with its use of the categories that can function constitutively.

Our task in this section, then, is to show that the faculty of understanding is negative. There are two possible ways this can be done. The faculty of understanding could be found to be negative in the same sense in which the ideas of reason are, i.e. playing a limiting role in our experience, and giving us merely the possibilities of existing objects. Alternatively, the faculty of understanding can be shown to be dependent on the negative ideas of reason to an extent that the whole of Kant's program can be properly called a negative philosophy. It is the second which I will argue for.

A. Entirely Positive?

Kant's project in the analytic is to determine the conditions of possible experience. To that end, he examines our experience in order to establish its necessary conditions. He begins with the presupposition that all experience starts with our senses, and comes to the conclusion that experiencing anything is impossible without experiencing it in space and time. There is no way space and time can belong to the thing-in-itself because they must be intuited a priori. That space can only be intuited a priori is evidenced by geometry, which is nothing but an a priori science of space. That time is intuited a priori, on the other hand, is evidenced through motion: we wouldn't be

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, pp.151-152

able to understand any motion or temporal succession whatsoever if we haven't had beforehand intuited time. Moreover, time and space do not subsist independently; otherwise they would be empty, without object, beyond our sensory access to them. Time and space, moreover, are non-conceptual, because they are not abstractions from our experiences – they are presupposed in any given one. They are forms of our outer and inner sense, a priori intuitions – necessary a priori presentations which underlie our intuition⁵¹. Under them, our sensibility synthesizes the disjoint sensations it receives into a manifold, defined by spatial and temporal determinations. This synthesis is sooner or later⁵² brought under a second synthesis – the objective unity of apperception. The principle of the objective unity of apperception is the principle of the unity of the I, which accompanies all our thoughts, cognitions and perceptions. The unity of the I is not a cognition and it certainly doesn't mean that we have some sort of discursive knowledge of a self through it. It is simply our intuition of ourselves as a unified subject of experience, one that allows us to be self-conscious and therefore – for the purposes of our experience – allows us to form judgements. Judgments are the products of our faculty of understanding, and they constitute experience, as they set a variety of

⁵¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.157-165.

⁵² Later – if we follow Kant's transcendental deduction in the first edition of the *Critique*. There, the synthesis of experience happens along three stages: the synthesis of apprehension in the intuition, the synthesis of reproduction in the imagination, the synthesis of recognition in the concept. Sooner – if we follow the deduction of the second edition, where the three syntheses now become one three-fold synthesis constituted from the three interlocked processes of the first edition. The three syntheses are portrayed as much more heavily interdependent, to an extent that Kant does not speak about them as three separate syntheses anymore. It is probably more productive to treat the three synthesis as one threefold synthesis – for details on this, see Beatrice Longuenesse. *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998, pp.35-56

sensations under a common category or concept⁵³. There are, in all, twelve possible forms of judgment⁵⁴, therefore our understanding, in the synthesis of apperception, applies twelve categories⁵⁵ to the data of our sensation in order to generate experience. It is by structuring the human experience thus that Kant answers the questions of whether, how and why our experience corresponds to the laws of nature: of course it does – the laws of nature are constituted by our experience, they only apply to nature as it appears to us under space, time and the twelve categories⁵⁶. This – cognition under the twelve categories in the understanding through judgment is the only way to knowledge.

From this explanation, we can clearly see that the categories and the forms of intuition can be constitutive in the sense in which the ideas are not; constitutive here used in contrast with the regulative status of the transcendental ideas, to mean telling us what something is. Indeed, they are as constitutive as one can possibly imagine: they are what constitutes nature in the only way in which we can know it – as the sum of all possible experiences. Therefore, they seem to be positive: they tell us what it is we can know; they do not limit our experience, they form it, they are it. One could try to argue that categories are negative insofar as they limit the noumenal – however, Kant argues that the noumena are *nothing*: they are a concept without an object⁵⁷, a regulatory

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.205

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.206 – These are: universal, particular, singular, affirmative, negative, infinite, categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive, problematic, assertoric, apodeictic.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.212 – These are: unity, plurality, allness, reality, negation, limitation, inherence, causality, community, possibility, existence, necessity.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.283 and p.263

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.382

postulation which is not limited by anything, but itself limits our experience, forbidding it to overstep the borders of the directly sensible.

The understanding, however, does have one decidedly negative element; it is, as I mentioned above, the noumenon. While the phenomena are the objects of sense, accessible to us with the help of the categories and through the two forms of sensible intuition, real experiences synthetically produced by our imagination, the noumena are the intelligible objects postulated by reason. Kant uses the concept of a noumenon as one that is completely negative⁵⁸. Its negativity lies in the fact that it is explicitly posed as a limit to our experience and defined as that which is not a being of the senses. Precisely because there is something outside of our experience, precisely because our experience needs to be limited, precisely because it is not the whole of reality, the objects which lie beyond the experience's reach should be viewed as purely intelligible, whose existence is to be postulated through reason without this postulation bearing a relation to their actual existence⁵⁹. The noumenon can only be known through an intellectual intuition, i.e., outside our experience and it is impossible, according to Kant, to experience an object in that way – it would mean experiencing it without experiencing it. Therefore, the sole function of the noumenon in Kantian philosophy is that of a limit – of a special problematic object that is inaccessible to us. However, this

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.350

⁵⁹ Ibid: "In the end, however, we have no insight into the possibility of such noumena, and the domain outside of the sphere of appearances is empty (for us), i.e., we have an understanding that extends farther than sensibility problematically, but no intuition, indeed not even the concept of a possible intuition, through which objects outside of the field of sensibility could be given, and about which the understanding could be employed assertorically. The concept of a noumenon is therefore merely a boundary concept, in order to limit the pretension of sensibility, and therefore only of negative use."

is just one concept of the faculty of understanding, and its negativity hardly shows the negativity of the whole faculty.

Moreover, if we look at Kant's treatment of the most important element of the faculty of understanding, the categories, we can see that their role in determining experience is positive. They are all positive despite Kant's distinction between two groups of categories, mathematical and dynamical⁶⁰, the two groups playing different roles in cognition. The mathematical categories are those of quantity and quality – so: unity, plurality, allness, reality, negation, limitation. The dynamical ones are those of relation and modality: inherence, causality, community, possibility, existence, necessity. The distinction between them is the distinction between those categories and the corresponding principles of the understanding which pertain to the essence of an object, and those categories and principles which pertain to the object's existence⁶¹. The mathematical categories are directed to objects of intuition (both pure and empirical), while the dynamic are directed to the existence of these objects (these objects being referred either to each other or to the understanding). Of course, the existence to which the dynamic categories pertain is the existence of the object of experience as an appearance, and not its existence in-itself. So, to exemplify this, let's take the category of unity. When we judge something as being a unity, we can do it intuitively. We can

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.215

⁶¹ Ibid, p.297: "The preceding two principles [those of quantity and quality], which I named the mathematical one in consideration of the fact that they justified applying mathematics to appearances, pertained to appearances with regard to their mere possibility, and taught how both their intuition and the real in their perception could be generated in accordance with rules of a mathematical synthesis, hence how in both cases numerical magnitudes and, with them, the determination of the appearance as magnitude, could be used." and "These principles [those of relation and modality] have the peculiarity that they do not concern the appearances and the synthesis of their empirical intuition, but merely their existence and their relation to one another with regard to this their existence."

even do it without having to experience the object. For instance, if we imagine a thing, we can still judge that it is one. Dynamic categories, however, cannot but be applied to relations between objects (relation) or to relations of objects to the faculty of understanding itself (modality)⁶². So, if we take a dynamical category, such as that of causation, we notice that it cannot be applied to objects unless those objects actually exist in our experience. We have to experience a burning torch approached to a pile of wood in order to judge that fire causes wood to burn – all those objects: lit torch, wood and fire have to exist in our experience.

Kant calls mathematical categories constitutive of our intuition and dynamical categories regulative of our intuition⁶³. And yet, even here, we can see that the categories, all of them, are still constitutive of our experience – it is just our intuition that the dynamical categories are regulative with respect to. Moreover, the term “regulative” is applied to categories in a sense different than that in which it is used when applied to ideas of reason⁶⁴. Applied to the ideas of reason, the fact that they are regulative meant that they are unable to determine our experience, and instead only determine its limits. This sense of “regulative” is completely synonymous with the Schellingian “negative”. Applied to the dynamical categories, however, the term “regulative” means that it does not determine the objects of our experience directly and

⁶² See *ibid*, pp.284-286.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.602: “In the Transcendental Analytic we have distinguished among the principles of understanding the dynamical ones, as merely regulative principles of intuition, from the mathematical ones, which are constitutive in regard to intuition. Despite this, the dynamical laws we are thinking of are still constitutive in regard to experience, since they make possible a priori the concepts without which there is no experience.”

⁶⁴ For more about this, see Garry Banham, *Regulative Principles and Regulative Ideas*, in http://www.garybanham.net/PAPERS_files/Regulative%20Principles%20and%20Regulative%20Ideas.pdf

intuitively, constituting them – literally forming them. It rather determines the relations between these objects. Through those categories, we cannot know the object of our experience a priori; we need to know of its existence in appearance – this is how they are regulative of the object. They determine it⁶⁵ after it has been constituted, without however ceasing to be constitutive and not regulative of the experience.

B. The Relationship of the Faculties

We have seen in what sense categories can be called constitutive, and in what sense regulative. However, we can at best claim that they have a constitutive aspect when it comes to our experience (all categories) and the essence of the objects of our experience (with mathematical categories), while they have a regulative aspect when it comes to the relationship between our objects of experience (with the dynamical categories). Even that, however, will not necessarily imply that they even as much as have a negative aspect – they still constitute objects of experience with certainty⁶⁶. Therefore, it remains unclear so far why Schelling had considered Kant's whole philosophy negative, claiming that there is yet a positive philosophy to be developed.

We can get closer to Schelling's reasons, however, if we look at the relationship between the faculties of reason and understanding. Kant suggests that just as understanding is a faculty which is responsible for the the unity and ordering of

⁶⁵ They determine it, without being limiting like the ideas of reason.

⁶⁶ We can notice here that only our intuition can tell us about the existence of something, even the appearances, since mathematical categories tell us about the essence only and dynamical categories need the existence of the object given to us in experience.

perceptions, reason is a faculty responsible for unity and ordering of the experiences generated by the understanding.

“If the understanding may be a faculty of unity of appearances by means of rules, then reason is the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles. Thus it never applies directly to experience or to any object, but instead applies to the understanding, in order to give unity a priori through concepts to the understanding's manifold cognitions, which may be called "the unity of reason," and is of an altogether different kind than any unity that can be achieved by the understanding⁶⁷.”

“The understanding constitutes an object for reason, just as sensibility does for the understanding. To make systematic the unity of all possible empirical actions of the understanding is a business of reason, just as the understanding connects the manifold of appearances through concepts and brings it under empirical laws⁶⁸.”

“We call these faculties understanding and reason; chiefly the latter is distinguished quite properly and preeminently from all empirically conditioned powers, since it considers its objects merely according to ideas and in accordance with them determines the understanding, which then makes an empirical use of its own concepts (even the pure ones)⁶⁹.”

Reason, then, determines the understanding. We should deduce from the transcendental dialectic that it does so regulatively and negatively, by preventing our understanding from making claims about that which is outside of our experience and consequently outside the understanding's scope. Reason organizes understanding and brings to a unity much like the understanding organizes sensibility, except that reason does this to the understanding through organizing our judgements in syllogism. The particular premises in our syllogisms are always given to us by the understanding, but the general

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.389

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.602

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.540

premises are provided by reason⁷⁰. A lot of what we experience only seems to be immediate to us but instead is an inference. Any judgment which is made about any object of appearance besides the simple singular judgements made using the categories is one that involves the implicit use of the syllogistic faculty of reason⁷¹. It is perhaps for this reason that Kant claims that reason's negative rules are necessary for the coherent use of the understanding:

“For the law of reason to seek unity is necessary, since without it we would have no reason, and without that, no coherent use of the understanding, and, lacking that, no sufficient mark of empirical truth; thus in regard to the latter we simply have to presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary.”⁷²

It would then look like the faculty of reason and the faculty of understanding are very much connected to each other. Schelling, however, has an even stronger ground to overlook the alleged positivity of the doctrine of the categories and insist that Kantian philosophy is negative just because the ideas of pure reason are negative. In *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, Schelling almost exclusively focuses on the transcendental ideal. There is reason to believe that the transcendental ideal is the central point of Kant's whole critical system, and that its negativity is what allows Schelling to criticise Kant's philosophy as negative. It is the role and function of the transcendental ideal and its centrality for Kant's project that we turn to now.

⁷⁰ The general premises are quantifiers, therefore synthetic a priori: ex: All men are mortal.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.389

⁷² Ibid, p.595

CHAPTER IV

THE TRANSCENDENTAL IDEAL

I have suggested in the previous section that the operations of the understanding are dependent on the transcendental ideal. Moreover, Schelling, in his critique, focuses on the transcendental ideal. It seems, then, that the transcendental ideal is to be treated as a central point of Kant's system, and so its idea, as well as the part it plays must be clarified. The section to follow will look at the two roles that the transcendental ideal plays within Kant's philosophy in light of its methodological function for the determination of our appearances. The first role is related to direct conceptual determination of appearances, and in relation to this first role I will focus on the distinction between the transcendental ideal as sum of possible determinations and transcendental ideal as ground for determination, which is crucial both for Kant's project and for Schelling's critique of it. The second role is that of the ground for the architectonic function of reason. In relation to the second role I will then reexamine the strictly regulative status which Kant gives to the ideal.

A. The Lynchpin: Sum vs. Ground

Kant arrives to the transcendental ideal as the unconditioned for the disjunctive syllogism of reason. The disjunctive syllogism is one of the three major types of syllogisms which our reason applies to experiences in its operations as identified by

Kant⁷³. Kant claims that those syllogisms can be potentially extended as indefinite chains of reasoning, but that they must all end in unconditioneds which put a limit to this indefinite – potentially infinite – regress. The unconditioneds are ideas of reason – complex pure concepts that go beyond all possibility of experience⁷⁴. Their status as unconditioned means that they are “unconditioned in every relation”⁷⁵, therefore innocent of all direct relations to objects of intuition⁷⁶. The transcendental ideal holds a special status among those unconditioned ideas, however. In the case of the ideas of self and world, we do not have to posit the supersensible unconditioned; these first two ideas can remain entirely pure concepts of reason⁷⁷. Even if we did hypostatise them, all knowledge about them would be impossible, for knowledge is through judgment of the understanding, and those entities would be never given to our understanding for synthesis – they would remain an unwarranted assumption. And yet, Kant finds that he needs to assume the object of the fourth antinomy, the antinomy of the necessary being, in order for this object to act as a *prius* for our appearances:

“Nevertheless, among the cosmological ideas, the one occasioning the fourth antinomy presses us to venture so far as to take this step [of

⁷³ “Thus the relation between a cognition and its condition, which the major premise represents as the rule, constitutes the different kinds of syllogisms. They are therefore threefold - just as are all judgments in general - insofar as they are distinguished by the way they express the relation of cognition to the understanding: namely, categorical or hypothetical or disjunctive syllogisms.” - Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.390

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.399 – “A concept is either an empirical or a pure concept, and the pure concept, insofar as it has its origin solely in the understanding (not in a pure image of sensibility), is called *notio*. A concept made up of notions, which goes beyond the possibility of experience, is an idea or a concept of reason.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.401

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.549

postulating a transcendental object of the idea]. For the existence of appearances, not grounded in the least within itself but always conditioned, demands that we look around us for something different from all appearances, hence for an intelligible object, with which this contingency would stop⁷⁸.”

Kant is faced by a need, a transcendental demand of our reason, to postulate a certain transcendental object distinct from all appearances. The transcendental ideal is not the first transcendental object Kant insists on postulating (the in-itself comes to mind), and yet the role of this object, of the transcendental ideal is far greater than that of the in-itself: Kant makes it into the root of determination of experience as a whole, and therefore all phenomena.

Kant invokes the contingency of appearances as reason for this postulation. The appearances are contingent in the sense that they, without a transcendent as their ground, are conditioned by us. If the transcendental ideal was not part of the operations of our reason as an ideal, appearances would not be necessarily determined by anything, and thus they would not be really knowable insofar as knowledge presupposes certainty and therefore necessary determination of its objects. With the precise relation between the in-itself and the appearances left inaccessible to all articulation, the determinations that our understanding gives to appearances cannot be based on it. All conceptual determination, therefore, needs a unified whole within which it would be implemented; otherwise it would be groundless, a mere result of human understanding making arbitrary judgments. Without an unconditioned that shows us which concept is to be applied to which phenomenon we would not have a sufficient reason to attribute any

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.550

determination to the appearances. The transcendental ideal plays precisely this role of a unified “reference” in relation to which all phenomena are determined.

The mechanism according to which the transcendental ideal gives determination to all appearance follows from the above: in determining a thing⁷⁹, we cannot but consider it in relation to all possible predicates, to the totality of all possible experience. The totality of all possible experience determines every single possible experience by excluding from it all that it is not the case in this experience. Because the ideal is the whole of experience, it contains within itself every possible predicate, and thus each object we are to determine can be compared to this ideal in accordance with the principle of thoroughgoing determination⁸⁰. The object to be determined is examined in order to attribute to it, for each possible predicate, either the predicate itself, or its opposite, its negation:

“What it means is that in order to cognize a thing completely one has to cognize everything possible and determine the thing through it, whether affirmatively or negatively. Thoroughgoing determination is consequently a concept that we can never exhibit in concreto in its totality, and thus it is grounded on an idea which has its seat solely in reason, which prescribes to the understanding the rule of its complete use⁸¹.”

⁷⁹ And by things here (ibid, p.553) Kant means appearances – they are the only “things” besides concepts we may determine at all, and he is not talking about concepts here because he has treated them a paragraph earlier.

⁸⁰ “Every thing, however, as to its possibility, further stands under the principle of thoroughgoing determination; according to which, among all possible predicates of things, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it.” – ibid, p.553

⁸¹ Ibid, p.554; also Ibid p.558: “Now an object of sense can be thoroughly determined only if it is compared with all the predicates of appearance and is represented through them either affirmatively or negatively.”

So, the transcendental ideal determines the whole of experience, and by determining the whole of experiences it determines individual experiences. As Beatrice Longuenesse puts it:

“So this is how Kant can affirm on his own, critical grounds a “principle of complete determination”: any singular object of experience is fully determinate by virtue of its being comparable to every other possible object, i.e. by virtue of its belonging in the infinite sphere of the concept: “object of experience,” in which the concept can be related to all other concepts either positively or negatively⁸².”

However, an issue soon raises itself. The predicates we attribute to objects are concepts formed by us; we can however, form new concepts – science is a paradigmatic example of a discipline based upon constant expansion of our conceptual apparatus. The number and content of concepts is not fixed; in fact, the only non-contingent concepts are the twelve categories. In our process of determination, moreover, we can only determine the object with respect to the concepts we know of, only the ones we have formed. A complete thoroughgoing determination can never be attained because we will never be truly able to compare an object with the actual sum total of all possible predicates – we will never be able to cognize an actually infinite unconditioned totality of all possible predicates. In practice, therefore, we do not determine the object to be determined against the transcendental ideal itself as Kant defines it; we rather determine it against “the sphere of all other known concepts of things⁸³”. This “sphere of all other concepts” is related to the transcendental ideal like all other conceptual structures: they “fall

⁸² Beatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Human Standpoint*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.218

⁸³ *Ibid.*

infinitely short of reaching it”⁸⁴. They are themselves determined through limiting the reality of the transcendental ideal⁸⁵ and are merely aggregates no different from the series which they determine. The transcendental ideal, on the other hand, is different from the series it determines – it is merely composed of the sum total of its members. Herein lies the difference between it and the transcendental idea of the world: the transcendental idea of the world is the total of the series of world-events. The transcendental ideal, however, cannot possibly be the sum of all possible determinations, because then it would be circular. In order to determine the possible determinations that make up the transcendental ideal, we would have to use the very same transcendental ideal. If the ideal was merely the sum of determinations, then Kant would have no way to explain the determinations that make up the ideal. Determination always has to be applied to appearance, to the object of the synthesis of our faculties. And in order to constitute the determinations of the transcendental ideal, on this view, we would need the very transcendental ideal we are trying to constitute as a sum of determinations to determine its own determinations. This is why the ideal required by Kant’s philosophy is one that is not the sum of all possible predicates, but what Kant calls their “ground” – that which enables the predicates to be bestowed onto an object. A sum would be a merely negative limitation of the reality of the ground, one that presupposes the ground.

⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.557

⁸⁵ Thus all the possibility of things (as regards the synthesis of the manifold of their content) is regarded as derivative, and only that which includes all reality in it is regarded as original. For all negations (which are the sole predicates through which everything else is to be distinguished from the most real being) are mere limitations of a greater and finally of the highest reality; hence they presuppose it, and as regards their content they are merely derived from it. All manifoldness of things is only so many different ways of limiting the concept of the highest reality, which is their common substratum, just as all figures are possible only as different ways of limiting infinite space - *Ibid.*

The difference between ground and sum is of great importance, and it can be understood by drawing a parallel between space and time as positive infinities and space and time as merely indefinite progressions. In the transcendental Aesthetic Kant makes this latter distinction: space and time as positively infinite are unlimited, with individual spaces and time successions being merely limitations of the infinite whole. A view of space and time as a mere indefinite progression, on the other hand, is just an abstraction that, in effect, still presupposes space and time as positively infinite, since it is their limitation: it merely presents space and time as those whose limit is indefinitely withdrawn further, and yet still defines them in terms of this very limit⁸⁶, negatively. Similarly, the transcendental ideal viewed as sum is a limitation of transcendental ideal as ground, which is positively infinite. We can see that Kant views the transcendental ideal-as-ground as the concept of an infinite whole, since all other things “fall infinitely short of reaching it⁸⁷” and since it is the “**All** of reality⁸⁸” which contains within itself all possible predicates, themselves infinite in number⁸⁹. Since the transcendental ideal, contains within itself all predicates, moreover, our reason will never be able to grasp it as a whole because it is non-totaliseable. Kant claims that it is a thought-entity, a concept

⁸⁶ For instance, in case of time: The infinitude of time signifies nothing more than that every determinate magnitude of time is only possible through limitations of a single time grounding it. The original representation, time, must therefore be given as unlimited. But where the parts themselves and every magnitude of an object can be determinately represented only through limitation, there the entire representation cannot be given through concepts (for then the partial representations precede) but their immediate intuition must be the ground.” – Ibid, p.163. For space, see p.159.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.557

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.556

⁸⁹ We can deduce they are infinite in number because reason will never be able to determine an object left to its determination in a thoroughgoing manner. There will always remain more predicates – concepts – with regard to which objects would remain indeterminate.

of reason, and concepts are determined somewhat like objects are⁹⁰. A concept therefore contains a determinate set of characteristics. The transcendental ideal as ground, however, is indeterminate⁹¹ - it can never be a subject of a determinate set of characteristics because it is not a limited series of predicates, not even a series whose limit is indefinitely postponed in its positing, but an infinity of predicates⁹². The transcendental ideal is therefore non-conceptual. We have seen that it must be an idea that is completely unlimited; if there were a concept to determine it, it would be a contradiction in terms: a concept that is indeterminate like the postulated object which it is a concept of. Moreover, the transcendental ideal cannot be conceptualized because there is no other transcendental ideal to determine the first against. In other words: if the transcendental ideal were conceptualisable, it would have to be determinable against another transcendental ideal, resulting in a regress. This point, that the transcendental ideal is non-conceptualisable, will be brought back in the next chapter. For now, we move on with our examination of the transcendental ideal.

⁹⁰ "Every concept, in regard to what is not contained in it, is indeterminate, and stands under the principle of determinability: that of every two contradictorily opposed predicates only one can apply to it, which rests on the principle of contradiction and hence is a merely logical principle, which abstracts from every content of cognition, and has in view nothing but the logical form of cognition." Ibid, p.553

⁹¹ Kant himself calls it indeterminate: "Now although this idea of the sum total of all possibility, insofar as it grounds every thing as the condition of its thoroughgoing determination in regard to the predicates which may constitute the thing, is itself still indeterminate, and through it we think nothing beyond a sum total of all possible predicates in general, we nevertheless find on closer investigation that this idea, as an original concept, excludes a multiplicity of predicates, which, as derived through others, are already given, Or cannot coexist with one another; and that it refines itself to a concept thoroughly determined a priori, and thereby becomes the concept of an individual object that is thoroughly determined merely through the idea, and then must be called an ideal of pure reason." Ibid, p.554

⁹² It might be an anachronism to bring up Cantor while speaking about Kant, but it seems appropriate to me to note that the transcendental ideal is infinite, and an infinity, according to Cantor's insights, is untotalizable.

We have now seen the first role the transcendental ideal plays in Kant's system: it determines appearances with respect to all concepts and all judgements of the understanding. We have thus seen its indispensability for the understanding: without it, we would not be able to determine appearance. We have also seen its nature: in this respect, the transcendental ideal cannot be merely the sum of all concepts and determinations, because then it would need another transcendental ideal to determine it. The transcendental ideal is the object of an idea which is the ground of all determination, unlimited and unsusceptible to conceptual determination itself. We can now move to the second role of the transcendental ideal, that of grounding reason's architectonic capacity.

B. Architectonics

Having established our reason's relation to the transcendental ideal, to the ground, we can now look at its second role, that of systematizing cognition, and at the question of its ontological status along with it. Insofar as the transcendental ideal is the one thing that determines all of our appearances according to the whole of determinations, it is also that which allows our reason to function as a system. This leads Markus Gabriel to make a point important for this account of the importance of the transcendental ideal: even if the interpretation of the transcendental ideal I have given above is taken to be controversial, there is a relatively uncontroversial point that demonstrates its importance. Appearances, Gabriel says, cannot be determined without being given as part of a whole. This is not only because our reason naturally strives towards totality, but also because appearances are reciprocally determined by each other, and

this reciprocal determination can only take place within a whole⁹³. All pre-Kantian philosophy has naively viewed this whole as an entity or a set of entities⁹⁴. Kant's insight is that he reveals the inconsistency inherent in this view: the whole within which appearances appear cannot be a mere entity or a set of entities, i.e., it cannot be an appearance itself. For Kant' obviously, this unity is a mere idea.

As experience for Kant is unified, appearances are determined as being limits of one particular unity; as a result, they all parts of the whole which this unity forms. By determining all objects of experience against this "unity", our reason acts as if all objects of experience are organized according to the principles of a system, as if they "fit together" to complete one systematic framework. Our faculties tend to systematize our cognitions; this principle leads Kant to affirm that out of our judgments the system of natural laws and phenomena we call Nature arises⁹⁵; and this is because we treat all appearances and cognitions as if they issued forth from the same source:

⁹³ Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*. London: Continuum, 2011, p.8: "According to Kant, it is the nature of reason to reach out beyond itself to the whole, because, as the very organ of the pursuit of knowledge, it is oriented towards the "idea of absolute totality." Without the anticipation of a whole, that is, without a concept of the world, it could not be expected that our representations relate to a representable world, which always provides more information than we can grasp in any single moment or mode of knowledge. Any determinate concept of the world is a stand-in for the (nonexistent) unity of actuality as a whole. With regard to this unity of actuality as a whole, we must reckon, however, that if indeed everything that exists is in some manner or other determined, then it will be differentiated through its properties from all other existent things and consequently that it will stand in potentially predicable relations of inclusion and exclusion to all other things. Everything that exists stands in such exclusive or inclusive relations with everything else and therefore has, by definition, certain limits, in virtue of which it is differentiated from everything else."

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.9: "According to Kant, totality does not exist independently of the human project of knowledge, neither as a summum ens nor as a mere natural mechanism. The concept of the world itself thus has no objective reality, since the utter and total ontological context cannot be given in any intuition."

⁹⁵ Also, we must remember that for Kant, Nature is the totality of appearances, therefore a totality of conditions, and there it is only the unconditioned that can make the totality of conditions possible.

If we survey the cognitions of our understanding in their entire range, then we find that what reason quite uniquely prescribes and seeks to bring about concerning it is the **systematic** in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle. This unity of reason always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others. Accordingly, this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding's cognition, through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws. One cannot properly say that this idea is the concept of an object, but only that of the thoroughgoing unity of these concepts, insofar as the idea serves the understanding as a rule⁹⁶.

Our cognitions are then systematic, and transcendently so, since this systematic character is necessary for the possibility of experience and conceptual synthesis. Our reason often treats objects of experience as if there is one fundamental power underlying them⁹⁷, or organizes objects of experience in nature into genera for the sake of making inferences. The importance of systematic organization of reason is most evident when Kant discusses scientific experience: scientific inferences can only be made, and therefore science can only develop if the various objects of scientific experience are taken to interact with each other such that they obey certain laws that are complementary⁹⁸. Moreover, the transcendental ideal is useful for reason as the idea of God – it is often necessary, especially in biology, for reason to assume teleology in the

⁹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.592

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.593-594

⁹⁸ "This highest formal unity that alone rests on concepts of reason is the purposive unity of things; and the speculative interest of reason makes it necessary to regard every ordinance in the world as if it had sprouted from the intention of a highest reason. Such a principle, namely, opens up for our reason, as applied to the field of experience, entirely new prospects for connecting up things in the world in accordance with teleological laws, and thereby attaining to the greatest systematic unity among them. The presupposition of a supreme intelligence, as the sole cause of the world-whole, but of course merely in the idea, can therefore always be useful to reason and never harmful to it." *Ibid*, p.614

objects it is making inferences about in order to explain phenomena and advance scientifically:

But in this way (one will continue to ask) can we nevertheless assume a unique wise and all-powerful world author? Without any doubt; and not only that, but we must presuppose such a being⁹⁹.

And yet, the presupposition has to stop there – Kant repeatedly warns that the transcendental ideal is not to be turned into something that *is*, not to be reified. Reifying the ideal would violate Kant's definition of being: being is simply that which is posited in our experience, and save from experience, there is no way to access an object's being. The hiatus Kant installs between the concept of an object and its being stands: making the transcendental ideal into something which actually is, and is precisely as the sum of all reality, an entity which has all the possible predicates within itself – but is yet beyond a mere sum of them – is an unwarranted use of inference, not to mention that such an object would never present itself to our senses. The ontological status of the transcendental ideal, therefore, is that of “an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone¹⁰⁰”, the idea being “a concept made up of notions, which goes beyond the possibility of experience, [...] or a concept of reason¹⁰¹”, which is indeterminable through intuition or judgment.

The idea of the systematic unity of the Nature that we form is, therefore not a unity that is true in-itself either:

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.619

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.551

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.399

“Conversely, systematic unity (as mere idea) is only a projected unity, which one must regard not as given in itself, but only as a problem; this unity, however, helps to find a principle for the manifold and particular uses of the understanding, thereby guiding it even in those cases that are not given and making it coherently connected.¹⁰²”

Having the grounding status that it does, the transcendental ideal is, moreover, a necessary, natural idea of our reason¹⁰³. It is only from a misplaced extravagant transcendent use of it that human reason falls into transcendental illusion. If, however, reason persists in giving the ideal of pure reason a merely regulative role in its operations, the ideal grounds reliably not just all determinations of our faculties, but the unity of reason and all its concepts¹⁰⁴. So, the object of the idea that is the transcendental ideal is to be treated “as if” it is a unity, i.e., as if it is a real object. The sum of all appearances is taken to depend on it “as if” on a transcendental ground outside the series. We are to think of the transcendental ideal as if it was an actually entity, but we are to stop short of the reification. Insofar as we are to treat the ideal as if it were an actual entity, the reification however is not impossible, but is unwarranted – it can only be said to exist possibly as an entity.

We have seen that the transcendental ideal plays two important roles in Kant’s system: it serves as a measure indispensable for the determination of appearances and it also serves to unify all of reason in its architectonic function that allows our faculties to function systematically. We have thus seen that Kant’s system has a negative idea at its

¹⁰² Ibid, p.593

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.558

¹⁰⁴ “If we survey the cognitions of our understanding in their entire range, then we find that what reason quite uniquely prescribes and seeks to bring about concerning it is the systematic in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle.” Ibid, p.591

center – the function of understanding and judgments themselves depend on the negative transcendental ideal. Kant's system, therefore, can be called negative according to Schelling's diagnosis. We have also seen that Kant's system needs it to be something different from a mere sum of appearances, in order for it to provide the ground for their determination. Finally, we have seen that the transcendental ideal is a negative unconditioned: it is a limit for our reason and its ontological status is indeterminate – we can at best say that it possibly exists. Having seen all that, we will proceed to examine how Schelling criticizes the transcendental ideal.

CHAPTER V

SCHELLING'S CRITIQUE

In the previous section, we have established the indispensability of the transcendental ideal for Kant's project insofar as it determines appearances and systematizes cognition. In what follows, we will first look at Schelling's view of the transcendental ideal's function, which is almost entirely in agreement with Kant. We will then examine Schelling's criticism of Kant's transcendental ideal.

A. The Necessary Terminus of Reason

Our treatment of Schelling's criticism of the transcendental ideal should start from the role which, in Schelling's opinion the transcendental ideal plays. The transcendental ideal is reason's necessary terminus when it turns to itself as its own object. When a pure science of reason is to be constructed and reason turns inwards to examine itself, it finds within itself, within its own functioning something which is the "prius or the subject of all being."¹⁰⁵ Reason being a cognitive faculty, the status of the prius cannot but be cognitive; it cannot be an actual entity. Neither is it an actual

¹⁰⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, section entitled "The Difference between Negative and Positive Philosophy", p.128: "Reason, as soon as it directs itself to itself, becomes an object to itself, finds within itself the prius or the subject of all being [Seyns]—which is the same thing—and in this it also possesses the means, or rather the principle, of an a priori knowledge of everything that is [alles Seyenden]."

cognition insofar as it is unlimited and cannot be cognized. It is therefore what Schelling calls the infinite potential of cognition¹⁰⁶ – this is completely in line with Kant as Kant agrees that the transcendental ideal cannot be given any determination or hypostatized, but is simply a regulative ideal of reason. Thinking in line with Kant’s paradox of the transcendental ideal, whereby the ideal is a determinate idea which at the same time cannot be determined because it is unconditioned, Schelling wants to give the transcendental ideal some determination. The infinite potential for cognition, just like a cognition itself, needs an object which it will potentially cognize. Its object cannot be a real being, since it must be undetermined. Therefore, it is the infinite potential for being which corresponds to the infinite potential for cognition¹⁰⁷. It is to this infinite potential for being that the reason tends as its ultimate object. To put this in Kantian focus: reason keeps on tending to expand its reach until that it falls into the transcendental illusion as it tries to encompass this potential for being in knowledge and cannot “attain” it but illegitimately.

What we get here is the derivation of the transcendental ideal that runs in parallel to Kant’s derivation of it: we have an unlimited ideal which cannot be determined and cannot be entified. This ideal is what our reason tends to, unfolds toward, “wants” to attain. Reason strives towards this ideal because, through it, it can attain knowledge of being. This is also in line with Kant: we are able to thoroughly determine a thing only if we attain the complete set of determinations of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.132

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.133: “Since every cognition corresponds to a being—a real cognition to a real being—then nothing other than the infinite potential of being can correspond to the infinite potential for cognition, and this is then the innate and inborn content of reason.”

transcendental ideal, something we will never actually attain. Schelling agrees we are after knowledge when we are after the transcendental ideal, the infinite potential of cognition that is supposed to lead us to the infinite potential of being¹⁰⁸. And yet he raises the question of what the kind of knowledge our reason is after when it strives after the infinite potential.

Schelling distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge:

“Here we should note that in everything that is real there are two things to be known: it is two entirely different things to know what a being is, *quid sit*, and that it is, *quod sit*. The former—the answer to the question *what* it is—accords me insight into the *essence* of the thing, or it provides that I understand the thing, that I have an understanding or a concept of it, or have it *itself* within the concept. The other insight however, *that* it is, does not accord me just the concept, but rather something that goes beyond just the concept, which is existence [*Existenz*]¹⁰⁹.”

There also follows a “division of labour” of the faculties from this distinction between the two kinds of knowledge: what something is, its essence can only be determined by reason; and it is the only thing that reason can determine. In order to find whether something is or that it is, on the other hand, we do not and we cannot turn to reason to discover things like that; we need experiential input:

“[...A]s the question is of the *whatness* of a thing, this question directs itself to *reason*, whereas—*that* something is, even if it is something realized by reason from itself, *that* this is—that is, *that* it exists—can only be taught by experience. To prove *that* something exists cannot be an issue for reason, due to the simple fact that, by far, the most of what reason take cognizance of from itself [*von sich aus*] *occurs* in experience and what is a matter of experience requires no proof that it exists

¹⁰⁸ The infinite potential for cognition here being the principle and the infinite potential for being here being the object of the principle.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, pp.128-9

precisely because it is already determined as something that actually exists¹¹⁰. Thus, at least regarding everything that occurs in experience, it cannot be an issue for a science of reason to prove *that* it exists; to do so would be superfluous. *What* exists, or more precisely, what will exist (for the being derived from the *prius* relates to the *prius* as a being yet to come; from the standpoint of this *prius*, therefore, I can ask what will be, what will exist, if anything at all exists) is the task of the science of reason, which allows itself to be realized a priori. But *that* it exists does not follow from this, for there could very well be nothing at all that exists. That something exists at all, and, particularly, that this determinate thing exists in the world, can never be realized a priori and claimed by reason without experience.¹¹¹”

Here also Schelling follows Kant: in order to determine something, all we need is reason. Of course, in order to determine something that actually exists as an appearance, we would need experience as well, but in principle reason’s ability to determine something a priori should not be disputed: we can just as well think of a *pure* object for determination (say, a mathematical object) and determine it completely a priori through our reason. Had our reason attained the asymptotically impossible transcendental ideal

¹¹⁰ A more detailed reason for why that which is given in reason does not require any proof from the reason as to its being is given on p.133: “It must, as soon as it is thought in the concept pass over into being, since it is nothing other than the concept of being. It is, therefore, that which is not to be held back from being, and, therefore, that which immediately passes over from thinking into being. Because of this necessary transition, thinking cannot remain as that which has the capacity to be (therein lies the justification for all progress in philosophy).

Here, however, it cannot be avoided that some people will primarily think of a real transition, and imagine that the real becoming of things should now be explained. But this would completely miss the point. What a science of reason derives is of course, among other things, precisely that which occurs in experience and under its conditions in space and time as individual entities, and so on. However, the science of reason itself moves forward in mere thought, although the contents of the thought or concept are not, as in the Hegelian logic, once again mere concepts.” – Schelling is here introducing yet another mode of being, one that is distinct from the being of the thing – the being of the concept. We can know what something is and we can know that it is; also, when we are thinking about the concept of an object, about what it is, the whatness of the concept acquires the status of being, it is. This goes back to Plato and Parmenides: we cannot think non-being, whatever we are thinking necessarily is, however this is not to mean that there is a real transition from the concept to the real being of its object, as there is supposedly in the ontological argument. This “being” accessible from the concept is the proper being of the concept.”

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.129

as its ground of cognition, it would have been able to determine the object completely. With regards to whether something actually exists, however, we need to consult experience. A parallel can be drawn between this distinction and the distinction between mathematical and dynamical categories in Kant: mathematical categories do not pertain to the existence of an object, but only to its determinations, while dynamical categories pertain to the existence of an object as appearance. We do not need actual experience to apply mathematical categories, while we need it to apply the dynamical categories, because to apply them we need the being of two appearances¹¹² given in experience, in order to establish a relationship between them. So: we can give determinations to a pure or to an imagined object perfectly well thanks to the operations of our reason guided by the transcendental ideal.

B. A Hole in Kant's Critique

In all of the above, Schelling is upholding an infinite potential for being as an ideal of reason; this is precisely because, as long as we postulate an infinite potential of being as the object of an infinite potential for cognition through reason in order to determine objects, we only have a hold of the ideal negatively. We are treating this ideal, this infinite potential for being, as conceptually determined so that it could conceptually determine the objects of our experiences. We are treating it as a sum of total possible appearances. Therefore if we make the distinction between the transcendental ideal as a conceptually indeterminate ground and the ideal as sum which

¹¹² We cannot just postulate the imagined relation or modality between two imagined appearances, Kant insists, they need to be – be posited in order for us to be able to apply the categories.

actually determines our experiences, we can indeed see that here Schelling is treating the infinite potency of cognition as the sum, since it is that which allows us to conceptually determine anything and is itself conceptually determined. This is the infinite potency of being as seen from the side of negative philosophy. However, Kant requires the transcendental ideal not just as a determining sum, but also as a ground – he requires it to fulfil a certain role while staying within negative philosophy. It is this dual use of the transcendental ideal which Schelling objects to, in what follows:

That which necessarily exists is precisely that which exists not in consequence of an antecedent concept but rather exists *of itself*—as one used to express it, *a se*, that is, *sponte, ultra*, and which exists without an antecedent ground. Here lies the confusion of the former metaphysics, which is only to be resolved if both concepts are held apart. Kant was so close to achieving this resolution, since, on the one hand, he acknowledged the impossibility of denying of that which necessarily exists as an immediate concept of reason, and he, on the other hand, recognized the concept of the most supreme being [*Wesens*] as the final, lasting content of reason. In this way, Kant failed to connect the absolutely *immanent* concept, that of the most supreme being (for *everything else is only* relatively immanent to the extent that it can pass over into being), and the absolutely *transcendent* concept (of that which necessarily exists), leaving one *beside* the other, *both* as concepts of reason, but without being able to explain their *being* beside one another. Here there really is a hole in Kant’s critique. Yet both concepts must limit one another, because the first (that of the most supreme being) is the end of the negative philosophy, and the other (of that which necessarily exists) is the starting point of the positive philosophy¹¹³.”

Schelling here claims that there is a hole in Kant’s critique. Moreover, as the translator of *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* Bruce Matthews argues, it is a hole which stems from the incompatibility between the postulation of the transcendental ideal as the sum of all predicates (the supreme being, the being possessing highest reality) and its

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p.203

postulation as the ground (described in the passage above as “that which necessarily exists”)¹¹⁴. To quote the Matthews passage that will help clarify the above:

“Because Kant’s methodology can only synthesize this idea as the result of a process of complete determination *qua* negation, he is forced to presuppose this idea as the *positive ground* of his entire critical edifice (not to mention all predication, and therewith, language itself). Here we arrive at what Schelling considered to be the most serious problem in Kant’s conception of the transcendental ideal, namely, Kant’s failure to explain how the idea of God could be *both* ground and sum of his system. The root of this problem lies in Kant’s failure to distinguish between that which necessarily exists (ground) and the most supreme being (sum *qua* *Inbegriff*)¹¹⁵.”

But why does Schelling think that that Kant fails to explain how the transcendental ideal could be both ground and sum of his system? Schelling’s point rests on his insistence that the transcendental ideal as a ground is inexponible and non-conceptual, a positive infinity, while the transcendental ideal as a sum is perfectly conceptual insofar as it is determined by negation (like any other concept or idea) and is a negative infinity. It is not obvious that Kant’s philosophy can accomodate both “roles” of the transcendental ideal and deal with this paradox.

To clarify: Kant wants to insist that in order for our experiences to be determined, we must postulate¹¹⁶ the transcendental ideal. This means that the transcendental ideal is the necessary concept posited by our reason in order to determine and regulate experience, an asymptotic ideal of unity towards which our experience

¹¹⁴ For Matthews on the importance of the distinction sum-ground for Schelling, see *Ibid*, pp.39-47.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.45

¹¹⁶ It here remains unclear what “postulation” even means and whether we are able to say that the transcendental ideal is, insofar as being for Kant is positing – see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.567-568.

tends. The transcendental ideal we must postulate thus, being a concept of our reason and a merely logical ground of determination is obviously conceptual; it is the transcendental ideal-as-sum. Kant, however, also insists that the transcendental ideal is not a sum, but a ground for all our determination, one that is positively infinite and conceptually un-determinable. He needs this first to avoid the circularity of his ideal – if it were only a sum of all possible determinations, then every member determination of the sum would itself require another sum to ground it; he also needs it in order to set an architectonic goal towards which all systematic cognition must ideally tend in order for knowledge to be organized. There is no other way to address those systematic needs but to postulate a ground. And yet, such a ground cannot be given by our reason. When Kant insists that our reason has to postulate the transcendental ideal as a ground he insists that our reason, a faculty which deals in concepts, has to postulate a non-conceptual non-determinable “I-know-not-what”. It is not clear at all that our reason is able to make this postulation while staying within its limits and not going outside itself. Thus Schelling calls the transcendental ideal “the inverted idea [*Umgekehrte Idee*], the idea in which reason is set *outside* itself.¹¹⁷”, and continues:

Reason can posit being in which there is still nothing of a concept, of a whatness, only as something that is absolutely *outside itself* (of course only in order to acquire it thereafter, a posteriori, as its content, and in this way to return to itself at the same time). In this positing, reason is therefore set outside itself, absolutely ecstatic.¹¹⁸”

In other words, Schelling uncovers the conflict with Kant’s reason: in order to ground our determinations, our reason needs to postulate a ground which it itself is incapable of

¹¹⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, p.203

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

determining, and it is thus not clear at all that it is capable of postulating it. All it is capable of determining and postulating is the transcendental ideal as sum, which would be inadequate for grounding determinations. Kant is left to either postulate, through reason, an ideal inadequate for reason's purposes or attempt to somehow integrate into his system an ideal which is adequate, and is yet completely foreign to reason¹¹⁹; he cannot do both because he cannot articulate the relationship of our reason to the inexorable ideal his system demands. In this light, Kant's previously-quoted *Concluding Remark on the Entire Antinomy of Pure Reason* reads almost like an admission:

“As long as we, with our concepts of reason, have as our object merely the totality of the conditions in the world of sense, and what service reason can perform in respect of them, our ideas are transcendental but still cosmological. But as soon as we posit the unconditioned (which is what is really at issue) in that which lies outside the sensible world, and hence in that which is outside all possible experience, then the ideas come to be transcendent; they do not serve merely to complete the empirical use of reason (which always remains an idea, never to be completely carried out, but nevertheless to be followed), rather they separate themselves entirely from it and make themselves into objects whose matter is not drawn from experience, and whose objective reality rests not on the completion of the empirical series but on pure concepts a priori. Such transcendent ideas have a merely intelligible object, which one is of course allowed to admit as a transcendental object but about which one knows nothing; but for the assumption of such an object, in thinking it as a thing determinable by its distinguishing and inner predicates, we have on our side neither grounds of its possibility (since it is independent of all concepts of experience) nor the least justification, and so it is a mere thought-entity. Nevertheless, among the cosmological ideas, the one occasioning the fourth antinomy presses us to venture so far as to take this step. For the existence of appearances, not grounded in the least within itself

¹¹⁹ A-conceptuality and indeterminacy are not themselves conceptual determinations here for Kant, since it is the understanding which conceptually determines objects, while the transcendental ideal (or any transcendental idea for that matter) is not an object of the understanding. At most, what those two notions conceptually determine is the relation between our faculties and the transcendental ideal.

but always conditioned, demands that we look around us for something different from all appearances, hence for an intelligible object, with which this contingency would stop.¹²⁰”

Kant admits that his philosophy needs to postulate a transcendent idea of the highest being for the determination of appearances, and yet insists that this idea is to be merely an object of thought. However, it cannot be postulated by reason because reason is drawn outside itself just by postulating it. This transcendent idea cannot be a sum of concepts; it has to be independent of them and positively infinite in order to fulfill the positive role that Kant requires it to play. I call this role positive since the distinction between positive and negative philosophies comes in the above passage with the distinction between two different views of the transcendental ideal: the “cosmological” and the transcendent”. The cosmological use is its use as dependent on appearances and consisting of them, “a mere aggregate of derivative beings¹²¹”, each derivative being “a limitation of its highest reality and [...] a division¹²²”; and therefore negative¹²³¹²⁴. The transcendental ideal postulated as transcendent is, on the other hand, that which goes beyond the series of appearances and determines them from outside of their series.

¹²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.549-550

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.557

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007 - see p.137, for instance

¹²⁴ There can also be drawn a parallel between the transcendental ideal as sum and viewing time and space as a negative infinity. In the *Transcendental Aesthetic* Kant insists that time and space are not to be viewed as negative infinities, meaning, they are not to be viewed as limited series which can be yet extended further. The transcendental ideal as a sum of determinations is precisely a negative infinity: it is a series of all possible predicates which can nevertheless be extended further. Space and time and positive infinities are however really infinite, and are as well non-conceptual, just as the transcendental ideal viewed as ground.

Viewed thus, the ideal would necessarily have to be non-conceptual. Furthermore, with the negative ideal as-sum, reason had to either deny the non-conceptual or posit it outside itself, as something that is no longer an ideal of reason but an ideal of a knowledge that originates outside reason¹²⁵. Kant cannot deny the non-conceptual because he would leave reason without ground had he denied it; it also cannot be argued that Kant is positing the non-conceptual outside reason, since Kant cannot posit an idea outside our faculties of understanding and reason from within the specific confines of those faculties. Moreover, it cannot be argued that despite Kant's project, the transcendental ideal is a mere thought-entity. Not just is it that Kant makes it explicit that we need to postulate the object of the cosmological idea of the superior being¹²⁶, there is also no way for us to form a thought-entity except through the aggregation of the concepts of understanding. A thought-entity formed thus would only fulfill the function of a sum, never a ground, since it would be a mere aggregation of concepts, not an entity that makes conceptual determination possible.

The need to have something more than just a sum is raised in Markus Gabriel: if we recall the points I made in the previous chapter, appearances can only appear as part of the whole. The whole cannot be a mere appearance itself; it has to be their ground. However, we can also see that Kant's plan to make the whole a mere thought-entity fails: insofar as the whole is the basis of our judgment of things, it is the basis of thought. The basis of thought cannot be a thought entity; the ground of conceptual

¹²⁵ The parallel is here with Schelling's "In order for this philosophy to pull itself entirely back within the limits of the negative, of just the logical, and to confess itself as a negative philosophy, it would have to exclude the positive philosophy emphatically. This could happen in two ways: it could posit the positive outside itself or it could deny it outright and completely abandon or abolish it." – *ibid*, p.148

¹²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.549-550

determination has to be non-conceptual. It follows that the transcendental ideal has to be posited entirely outside reason. Nevertheless, it is to be posited. This positing is a positing-as-being, as that which is not a concept and is independent of our thought, and so it is different from the positing which Kant equates with being - the positing-in-experience, since the transcendental ideal is not in experience. Thus, we have finally replied to the question asked at the beginning of this thesis: can Kant's philosophy be called negative and if yes - why? I hope that in the above analysis, the answer has become clear. Kant's philosophy is indeed negative, because it excludes from itself that which it must address – the ground of all reason, that which is outside reason, being. We have also seen the major consequence of this negativity – Kantian philosophy becomes unable to ground reason, incapable as it is to address its own need to reify the transcendental ideal into a positive ground.

The question which is to naturally follow all those answers is “what now?” In the face of Kant's negativity which undermines his critique of pure reason, revealing it as an enterprise which can no longer be self-sufficient, Schelling, as a good critic, should offer a remedy, or at least an alternative: a possible path philosophy could take if the Kantian project is taken to be insufficient. As mentioned earlier, Schelling does indicate a path: that of the establishment of a positive philosophy to supplement the negative. This answer itself, however, does not make the question “where to now?” go away; it just raises more questions about the nature of the positive philosophy proposed. It is to this that we will now turn.

CHAPTER VI

WHERE TO NOW?

We have sought, at the very beginning of this thesis, to answer two questions: “is there sufficient reason for Schelling to argue that Kant’s philosophy is negative?” and “what are the consequences of Kant’s negativity upon his own philosophy?” We have answered these two questions throughout the first four chapters. Schelling does indeed have a good reason to argue that Kant’s philosophy is negative since the application of the constituents of its positive part depends on an ideal of reason which Kant insists must be regulative and inaccessible to knowledge – i.e., a negative ideal. Moreover, this negativity leads to a contradiction between the role that the transcendental ideal must play and that which it can play within Kant’s system. The transcendental ideal must be an a-conceptual positive ground if it is to ground all determination as it must, and it is precisely this that it cannot be if Kant is to steer clear from all positing of “mysterious” aconceptual entities. The immediate conclusion of this contradiction, we hope, is clear by now: in Kant’s supposed immanent critique of reason by reason, there is a blind spot, a hole which can only be filled by that which is outside reason. Reason cannot critique itself because it eventually stumbles upon the necessity to introduce a term it cannot think, let alone include within its own critique. At the ground of our reason, we have something that is outside reason and independent of it. This conclusion, moreover, leads us even further: there is something which Kant’s philosophy cannot adequately deal with and yet cannot but posit independently of reason and independently of thought (naturally being independent of understanding and conceptual determination, this

“something” is explicitly a-conceptual). In other words, in order to explain its own function, Kantian reason has to posit an absolute, something that is independent of reason. It is this absolute that is to serve, for Schelling, as the foundation of a new post-Kantian ontology. To Schelling, this new ontology is sorely needed: philosophy needs both to explain the foundation of reason and to become, once again, a science of being. This new ontology Schelling seeks to construct in his late philosophy is not “metaphysics” in the pejorative sense of the word, even though he calls it dogmatic. This is because he draws a distinction between a truly dogmatic and a dogmatizing philosophy:

“Yet even regarding the old metaphysics we must distinguish between a dogmatic and a dogmatizing philosophy. The old metaphysics was a dogmatizing philosophy and, through Kant, this form is irreparably destroyed. Kant’s critique, however, did not extend to the true dogmatic philosophy, that is, to what metaphysics actually should be, and not merely what it wanted to be, as in the old metaphysics, which, accordingly, I simply call the dogmatizing philosophy. The old metaphysics believed it could rationally prove, and had proved, the existence of God.¹²⁷”

The distinction is that between a philosophy which seeks to rationally prove the existence of an absolute, i.e., makes rational theology a part of itself and a philosophy which starts from the existence of an absolute, and thus does not make rational theology’s faulty move into the transcendent. The dogmatizing philosophy is “corrupt in Schelling’s eyes [...because it] remains blind to its inability to achieve what it seeks to prove: it does not realize that it fails in its efforts to extend reason, by means of inferences, to existence.¹²⁸” Kant forbids reason to make the move that, in old dogmatic

¹²⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, p.147

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.81

metaphysic, gave it access to being. Schelling claims that his philosophy does not make that move, but starts from being. As Bruce Matthews puts it:

“While Kant did forbid reason to reach out from within itself to an existence transcendent to its immanent essence, Schelling argues that Kant did not forbid transcendence when executed by the *dogmatic* use of reason, “to proceed conversely from that which *simply*, and thus infinitely exists, to the concept of the most supreme being as *posterius*” (II/3, 170). [...] If, as Schelling argues, existence precedes reason’s essence, then existence is transcendent to the immanence of reason. Far from beginning within the immanent world of pure thought and then seeking the transcendence of actual existence, positive philosophy starts from the ecstatic transcendence of simple existence, the absolute other of conceptual thought, and then in turn becomes immanent¹²⁹.”

Schelling finds himself justified to start from the absolute, from its being, because negative philosophy is consummated in the conclusion that reason cannot study itself by itself, but rather needs to postulate an absolute. The absolute is thus given to positive philosophy, which is to carry on from where the negative stopped, using a completely different method.

Schelling thus believes we have established the necessity of positive philosophy which is to start from an absolute being, an “ontological excess”. Its emergence in Schelling’s work and the whole necessity to construct a positive philosophy, however, raise a plethora of questions. The “excess” is to be used for the construction of a positive philosophy, thus the first question which raises itself is that of the relationship between the positive and the negative philosophies. While it is a real question, it is however the easiest to answer insofar as Schelling himself answers it, and we will see his answer in a little while. The other questions raised are significantly more complex.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.82

The absolute we have got ourselves here is a-conceptual and independent from thought. How, then, can we think it? How, if at all, can we know it? Schelling tries to argue that we at least must try to know, and if we do – what is its nature? How is it related to our experience? In short: how to construct an ontology starting from this absolute, a real positive philosophy? It seems metaphysics has been dead and buried for so long that we now do not know what to do with it and whether the construction of an ontology represents a real “progress” in philosophy, or just a regression to pre-critical terms. However, the questions must be answered – whether for the sake of a new metaphysics or for the sake of Schelling scholarship. This is what I will devote myself to presently. I will first answer the easy question – that of the relationship between positive and negative philosophies. I will then attempt to proceed to answer the questions which relate to the construction of an ontology in late Schelling, through a reading of both his late lectures on mythology and revelation and Markus Gabriel’s essays on Schelling in *Transcendental Ontology*. Unfortunately however, the questions posed above cannot be answered to satisfaction in a work of this scope. Probably, a sufficient answer cannot be extracted from Schelling’s work at all, and a positive philosophy would require one to take Schelling’s place in the construction of an ontology. That will remain to be seen and presently we will deal with the questions that can be answered in one way or the other.

We can now move to issues which are in the first place related to the process of constructing a positive philosophy. The first question we will deal with is that of the relationship between positive and negative philosophies. A positive philosophy is in no way a replacement of the negative, even though a negative philosophy is incomplete without the positive which consummates it. A positive philosophy, on the other hand,

can exist without the negative, but is however, unlikely to arise by itself. Moreover, without the negative, a positive philosophy stands without the checks of reason, vulnerable to declining into pre-Kantian metaphysics. We will see that the most fruitful relationship between the two philosophies is one in which the positive grows out of the needs of an advancing negative. Moreover, we will also attempt to look at the methods of both philosophies and examine Schelling's claims that a positive philosophy, despite having as its object that which is outside reason, is not merely an intuitionist or a mystical doctrine, but has to make use of reason in order to know the absolute.

A. The Tangency Point

The positive and the negative philosophies are independent in their subject matters and in their methodologies: the negative studies the whatness, the essences of the things through reason, while the positive is to study things in their real existence which is aconceptual and cannot be fully encompassed by reason. Yet, the two philosophies have a "tangency point" at which they "touch", if we view this tangency point from within their respective perspectives. This tangent point is that of the infinite potential for being. This infinite potential for being is the natural terminus for our reason as it advances in its science of essences towards the essence of being:

"Thus, at the highest point of its development, the propensity to understand that is so deeply embedded and insurmountable in humanity will also demand to get to the bottom of not merely this or that issue but to the bottom of being in general. [...] In this way, it comes to the point where man must liberate himself not merely from revelation but from everything that has reality in order to flee into a complete wasteland devoid of all being, where nothing is to be encountered but only the infinite potency of all being, the sole immediate content of thought in which it moves only within itself as

within its own ether. Yet in precisely this content, reason also possesses what provides it with the fully a priori position toward all being, such that from this content it can take cognizance not only of a being in general but of the entirety of being in all of its gradations. For in the infinite, that is, still undetermined potency, reason immediately discloses, not as contingent but, rather, as necessary, that inner organism of successive potencies through which it possesses the key to all being, and which is the inner organism of reason itself. To disclose this organism is the task of the rational philosophy¹³⁰.”

As the consummation of the negative philosophy then, reason gets to the “inner organism of reason itself”, the prius, what in Kant’s negative philosophy was the transcendental ideal – the sum of all possible predicates and the infinite potentiality of being. By arriving in its processes at this prius of being, the negative philosophy clears all that is contingent from being, and arrives at being in its own purity¹³¹ to find the essence that overlies all essences¹³². However, having arrived at this pure being, the negative philosophy cannot proceed to study it – insofar as it is pure being, it is not mediated in thought, and negative philosophy stands, at its highest point, “face to face with being exalted beyond all doubt¹³³.” This highest object of the negative, however, is

¹³⁰Ibid, p.142

¹³¹ “The science that accomplishes this elimination of what is contingent in the first concepts of being—and with this frees being itself—is critical, is of the negative type, and possesses in its result what we have called being itself [das Seyende selbst], yet still only in thought.” – Ibid, p.144

¹³² “Thus, at the highest point of its development, the propensity to understand that is so deeply embedded and insurmountable in humanity will also demand to get to the bottom of not merely this or that issue but to the bottom of being in general [das Seyn überhaupt]. Not to see what is above being, for this is an entirely different concept, but to see what lies on the other side of being [jenseits des Seyns]. In this way, it comes to the point where man must liberate himself not merely from revelation but from everything that has reality in order to flee into a complete wasteland devoid of all being, where nothing is to be encountered but only the infinite potency of all being, the sole immediate content of thought in which it moves only within itself as within its own ether. Yet in precisely this content, reason also possesses what provides it with the fully a priori position toward all being, such that from this content it can take cognizance not only of a being in general but of the entirety of being in all of its gradations.” – Ibid, p.142

¹³³ Ibid, p.145

not treated by it as cognizeable – this highest object, as we have seen in Kant’s philosophy, turns out to be a-conceptual and therefore not as cognitively accessible as the rest of the objects of reason. The infinite potency of being is posited outside reason, as an object for a philosophy whose starting point would not be conceptual and whose methods would not be exclusively conceptual either¹³⁴. What was unknowable for negative philosophy can thus become the object of a new positive science. In Schelling’s words:

“That which will be the proper object of the positive remains stuck in the preceding philosophy as that which is no longer capable of being known¹³⁵.”

Or, to have it put even more clearly, the negative philosophy gives the positive a demand, not a principle – the demand to know the prius of being¹³⁶. It is up to the positive philosophy to fulfill the demand.

This relationship demonstrates the interdependence between the two philosophies. The negative “hands over” to the positive its object of inquiry insofar as philosophy is a study which is to set its own subject for itself¹³⁷. However, this does not mean that the

¹³⁴ Ibid, 153 – “That which will be the proper object of the positive remains stuck in the preceding philosophy as that which is no longer capable of being known [das nicht mehr Erkennbare]. For in the negative philosophy everything is knowable only to the extent that it has a prius, yet this final object does not have a prius in the sense of everything else, since here the matter is turned on its head: that which in the purely rational philosophy was the prius here becomes the posterius.”

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “The foundation that we of course recognize from the perspective of the negative (but not of the positive) philosophy is not to be understood as though the end of the negative philosophy would be the beginning of the positive. This is not so. The former hands over its final concept to the positive only as a demand [Aufgabe], not as a principle. Yet, one will say, then it is nonetheless grounded by the negative to the extent it receives this demand from it. Quite right, but the positive philosophy must, entirely on its own, supply the means to satisfy this demand.” – Ibid, p.154

¹³⁷ “[...O]ne must realize that among all the sciences, philosophy is the only one that can receive its object from none of the others, which must provide its object for itself, must determine it for itself, and must therefore also create itself. Philosophy is indeed the only science that leaves in its wake nothing

two philosophies separately do not have cognitive import or are not independently worthy of pursuit. The negative philosophy does maintain its independency, separated from the positive by its method and perspective on the subject matter:

“As a pure science of reason, as something extracted from its own resources, a creation of the human spirit woven out of its own material, [the negative philosophy] will always endure and maintain its independent worth¹³⁸.”

The positive philosophy also can arise independently of the negative: we have seen that the negative gives the positive not a first principle, but a demand. A philosophy could, in principle begin with this demand alone as a valid foundation to drive philosophical knowledge:

“For the positive can begin purely of itself with even the simple words: I want that which is *above* being [*über dem Seyn*], that which is not merely being [*das bloße Seyende*], but rather what is more than this, the *Lord* of Being [*Herr des Seyns*]. Since it begins with a wanting [*Wollen*], it is already justified a philosophy, that is, as a science that itself freely determines its object, a philosophy that in itself, and even according to its name, is a wanting. It can therefore also receive this demand *solely* from itself, and, likewise, it can provide itself with its own actual beginning. For this beginning is of the type that requires no foundation: it is that which through itself is the certain and absolute beginning¹³⁹.”

Despite this relative independence, however, the positive and negative philosophies can really be called positive and negative only when the negative builds up to the positive

undiscussed and always proceeds to the ultimate causes; thus, it must first secure and ground its object, for philosophy cannot accept a merely contingent object, nor one provided by experience or from another higher science. From this standpoint, it can be said that the discovery and grounding of its object must be the first order of business for philosophy.” - Ibid, p.193

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.196

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.154

which flows out of it, and they coexist in contrast with each other in this particular manner:

“Only the correctly understood negative philosophy leads to the positive philosophy; conversely, the positive philosophy is first possible only in contrast to the correctly understood negative. Only the latter’s withdrawal back into its limits makes the former discernable and then, not only possible, but also necessary¹⁴⁰.”

The relationship between the negative and the positive philosophy is, moreover, not that of substitution: Schelling does not want to replace anything with anything, as he time and again reiterates being accused of seeking to reduce all philosophy to the positive¹⁴¹. He insists that “both philosophies are demanded—a science that grasps the essence of things and the content of all being and a science that explains the actual existence of things¹⁴².”

Then, both philosophies are needed for Schelling, and yet there is no real overlap between them: even this highest content of reason, the ontological remainder, is treated from completely different perspectives by the negative and the positive and is barely a tangent continuity: to the negative it is that which cannot be known, but needs

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.145 – the usage of the word “only”, in light of what Schelling says about the independence of the positive and negative philosophies probably means that they are only possible in relationship to each other as positive and negative, as what Schelling presents them to be in these lectures.

¹⁴¹“It often occurs even now that the partially schooled suggest I declared the former philosophy negative in order to put the positive in its place. It might, then, be worthwhile to speak of even a change of mind. But if a matter requires two elements, A and B, and I find myself at first only in possession of one, A, then the fact that B is added to A, or that I now no longer have merely A, but possess rather A + B, does not in fact change A. What is only prevented is that I believe through the mere possession of A to already possess or to be able to attain what is only first possible through the addition of B. Such is the relationship of the negative and positive philosophies. No alteration occurs to the first when the second is added to it. On the contrary, through the addition of the latter, the former engages its true essence so that it can no longer be tempted to surge over its borders, that is, to become positive itself.” – Ibid, p.146

¹⁴² Ibid, p.155

to be known; to the positive it is the ground and starting-point. We are now faced with the first of the complicated questions which Schelling's call for a positive philosophy leaves us with: if we take the different perspectives of the two philosophies into account, how do we proceed to construct a method for a positive philosophy?

B. Not an Empiricism

A negative philosophy studies the essences of things through reason; a positive philosophy, on the other hand, studies existences. Schelling suggests that the "thatness" of something, that it exists cannot be determined a priori and requires experience to be known¹⁴³. The question that arises is then the following: does Schelling's philosophy, apparently requiring experience to know the positive existing absolute get reduced to a mysticism or an intuitionism? Schelling answers the question with a no – reason must play a role in the positive philosophy's knowing of the absolute, and yet the role of reason is not clearly stated. We will see presently the reasons for Schelling's rejection of even experience as a starting point for a positive philosophy and we will try to see how he proceeds to give the positive philosophy a unique methodology. This last point, however, is not addressed with sufficient clarity even by Schelling himself; therefore this work cannot hope to provide anything like a full methodology. A brief sketch will have to suffice.

Addressing the apparent conclusion that positive philosophy would have to be an empiricism insofar as its object of study is being and being is known through

¹⁴³ "That something exists at all, and, particularly, that this determinate thing exists in the world, can never be realized a priori and claimed by reason without experience." – Ibid, p.129

experience, Schelling looks at all possible kinds of empiricism to show that it cannot be one of them. It is obvious that the positive philosophy cannot be an empiricism in the sense of British empiricism: “knowledge is limited to experience through the senses¹⁴⁴”, for absolute being cannot be known sensually. Schelling further discusses a “mystical empiricism” whereby the experienced is made into an object of divine revelation or a mystical feeling¹⁴⁵ and the highest kind of empiricism – theosophy – where an ecstatic reason is able to reach God and attain a “a necessary, infallible vision not merely into the divine essence, but into the essence of creation and every phase of that process as well¹⁴⁶.” Schelling argues that a positive philosophy cannot be any of those two empiricisms. It cannot be equivalent to a mystical empiricism, because a mystical empiricism is not even a speculative thought, let alone a philosophy that has a definite form and method. As a result of a mystical empiricism we simply cannot attain knowledge. Positive philosophy cannot be equal to theosophy either, since theosophy, though having speculative knowledge of God as its end, does not have a method either¹⁴⁷. Moreover, in addition to not having a method, it is still a philosophy that seeks out “the divine essence” and “the essence of creation”, thus rendering it, for Schelling, negative. It does not address the negative’s need to posit something outside itself, and

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.171

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.173

¹⁴⁷“It is, thus, all the more necessary to provide at least a provisional idea of how this positive philosophy we advance relates to these mystical teachings. For surely it cannot be identical with any of them since it claims to be a philosophy, and, thus, a science, whereas the others, if they have not dispensed with all speculative content, have nevertheless done so with all scientific form and method.” – Ibid, p.174

so, even though it strives to overcome rational philosophy, it fails to do so¹⁴⁸. And to play the concluding note on his treatment of empiricisms, Schelling states:

“I would now like only to briefly state—for it extends as far as a preliminary distinction, and we are concerned only with a preliminary distinction—that the positive philosophy starts out just as little from something that occurs merely in thought (for then it would fall back into the negative philosophy) as it starts out from some being that is present in *experience*. If it does not start out from something that occurs in thought [*im Denken Seyende*], and, thus, in no way from pure thought, then it will start out from that which is before and external to all thought, consequently from being [*Seyn*], but not from an empirical being.¹⁴⁹”

A positive philosophy cannot start from experience just as it cannot start from reason because our experience is not entirely independent of reason; it is already intelligible:

“For we have already excluded this, in that empirical being is external to thought only in the very relative sense, to the extent that *every* being that occurs in experience inherently carries with it the logical determinations of the understanding, without which it could never even be represented. If positive philosophy starts out from that which is external to all thought, it cannot begin with a being that is external to thought in a merely relative sense, but only with a being that is *absolutely* external to thought¹⁵⁰.”

The relation of positive philosophy to experience is that of “going towards experience”, as Schelling puts it. To make this somewhat cryptic phrase clearer: Kant clearly puts forward the transcendental ideal as a ground for all determinations – it is what makes determination possible. Therefore, we are to go towards experience in philosophy in the sense that we are to use the transcendental ideal, the absolute, in order to determine our experience, which is the only way we

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p.177

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p.178

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, pp.178-179

can determine experience anyway. The cryptic point turns out to be almost banal: we are to think.

But this cryptically banal point still does not resolve the question of the starting-point in positive philosophy. For Schelling, positive philosophy can only start with that which is, in its origin beyond both, with this transformed transcendental ideal which Schelling comes to call unprethinkable being [*unvordenkliche Sein*]¹⁵¹. It is not to start with the *concept* of this being, for then it would revert to being negative. If it began with the concept of the unprethinkable being, it would then only either be able to proceed from this concept with a purely rationalist deductive method and thus produce mere concept-play, or repeat the mistake of the dogmatists: attempt to attain being starting from the concept of unprethinkable being, attempt to think real existence from concepts. Kant himself has demonstrated either way to be untenable. Therefore, a positive philosophy has to start with something which precedes experience¹⁵² and precedes thought: with the bare awareness that there is this unprethinkable being – an insight which is of course brought over from the negative philosophy, but which has been a condition of thought since it existed.

A new question raises itself as soon as such a beginning for a supposedly positive philosophy is posited: is this kind of a beginning really a positive beginning? It seems Schelling's projected "positive philosophy" begins with a non-entity, something which cannot be thought or experienced, and is therefore negative par excellence. To

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.62 and Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph. *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*. Trans. Bruce Matthews. New York: SUNY Press, 2007, p.86

¹⁵² It is "a priori" in this sense.

answer this objection, I will now turn to Markus Gabriel's treatment of Schelling in his excellent book *Transcendental Ontology*

CHAPTER VII

UNPRETHINKABLE BEING

We have seen throughout our investigation that Kant's philosophy runs into a problem because of its negativity. Schelling proposes an alternative which he claims will solve this problem precisely because it is a positive philosophy, one that does give being a foundational role in thought. And yet, we have also seen that when seeking to describe our thought's starting point, we are left with something ineffable, a-conceptual, that which can be neither captured by reason nor experience, which is to be, moreover, a starting-point for positive philosophy. It is not directly obvious that such a starting point can really be positive – it seems that we cannot point out what it is as opposed to what it is not, or even think it positively. In order to assure ourselves that this unprethinkable being is indeed positive, and that Schelling's project succeeds in producing a positive alternative to Kant's negative philosophy we now turn to Markus Gabriel's book *Transcendental Ontology*, which seeks to explicate the central – and positively so – role which the unprethinkable being plays for all thought.

In order to demonstrate the status of the unprethinkable being as a positive “ground” for our thought, I will make use of Gabriel's insight into the necessity of the unprethinkable being. Gabriel argues that it is both epistemically and metaphysically necessary for our application of concepts and the existence of determinate objects. Gabriel also makes an even stronger point in support of the necessary positivity of the unprethinkable being, insofar as an attempt to negatively determine this being, i.e., call it

a-conceptual or indeterminate is as doomed to failure as an attempt to give it some kind of “positive determination” – if such a determination were possible at all. It turns out that the unprethinkable being cannot even be properly determined as “unprethinkable” – our thought just simply cannot think it, which is not a determination of it, but of our thought. Both these points will be examined in more detail in what follows. Moreover, we will then assure ourselves that, in making this unprethinkable being positive, we did not thereby make it a transcendent entity/pseudo-entity beyond our understanding which we cannot access because of our cognitive limitations.

A. The Necessity

Schelling’s unprethinkable being is, as we have seen, a modification of Kant’s concept of the transcendental ideal made central within Schelling’s own philosophy. Schelling completely accepts the insight that we can determine individual objects only with the whole in mind. Pace Kant, the totality of all objects, *the world*, is something we strive after and not a real thing, and not even a set of things. It is the condition of the “horizon of a whole¹⁵³” within which things appear to us, and are determined. Gabriel points out that this insight dates back to Plato¹⁵⁴, and puts it as follows:

“In order for the project of knowledge to go on, an unconditional horizon of expectation must at all times be set in place, which decides in advance what can appear as a thing in question, what can come into question in our

¹⁵³ “If there were no unconditioned, there would be for us, to wit, no things within the horizon of a whole: it is through the absolute alone that the promise of thoroughgoing determinacy can be made and a priori secured.” – Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, London: Continuum, 2011, p.9

¹⁵⁴ According to a central theory of determination, dating back at least to Plato, determinacy can only take place in a whole, in which everything determinate is so only by virtue of its being predicatively comprehensible and distinguishable from everything else. For Plato, being and logos thus belong together, are inextricably linked; he makes this plain in the *Sophist* in particular. While Plato was the first to clearly formulate this theorem, the same thought arises in modern philosophy with Spinoza’s famous formula according to which *omnis determinatio est negatio*.” - *Ibid*, p.61

investigation. But if things only exist for us in the horizon of an unconditioned upon which our world is grounded yet from which we are indeed cut off—for it cannot be determined as a content of the world or grasped in any propositional manner—one can say that things exist for us only insofar as we are always already beyond everything that is or could be given. Things exist for us, therefore, only on the basis of an inexorable transcendence that is the very motor of reason itself. This is why we are compelled and obliged to conceptually anticipate the whole in order to guarantee the systematic unity of our empirical data processing: without an image of the whole in mind, no authority could be derived on the basis of which we could make true statements about the whole (let alone identify false ones)¹⁵⁵.”

Determination is necessarily differentiation. Unprethinkable being, therefore, is epistemically necessary: it is a necessary condition for our thought to make determinations. Moreover, Gabriel also extends the point further to claim that unprethinkable being is metaphysically necessary. It is metaphysically necessary because it is radically different from everything else, and its necessity cannot be a mere epistemic necessity. We have already seen this earlier in our account: unprethinkable being cannot be merely a concept, cannot be just an idea of reason necessary for reason’s operations because it has to be more than that; neither is it just an object because it is the whole, a condition for the object’s very appearance. Everything that is – whether a concept or an object – is equal to itself and different from that which it is not. This much is a property of even the unknowable thing-in-itself in Kant’s system¹⁵⁶. The unprethinkable being cannot be determined, and is therefore not equal to itself or unequal to its other. There is no “itself” for it to be identical to because in order for it to have an identity it would have to be determined and therefore limited. There is also no “other” for it to differ from; it encompasses all otherness:

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p.11

¹⁵⁶ It is what it is; it is thinkable, therefore non-contradictory.

“As a presupposition of understanding determinacy, unprethinkable being turns out to be at the very least epistemically necessary. But it is also metaphysically necessary, because every single thing that exists is distinguished from everything else it is not. Otherwise, something could take place that could, potentially, not be itself. This condition cannot be satisfied by unprethinkable being that is thus paradoxically “unequal to itself.” For this reason, “unprethinkable being” is not a proper concept, because everything determinate that takes place, that is, everything that can be conceptualized in any manner whatsoever, must at least be itself, not anything else. Self-identity presupposes negation and therefore relationality. *Relation and difference determine existence.*

However—and here is the crucial move—this ontological axiom does not apply to unprethinkable being itself, to the unknown *x*. [...] Unprethinkable being is thus logical-ontological, which means: epistemically and metaphysically necessary. It can neither not be, nor not be thought¹⁵⁷.”

To restate: unprethinkable being is not a concept, and its necessity cannot be an epistemic necessity; it cannot but be metaphysical. Unprethinkable being is metaphysically necessary for thought, it is also independent of thought, and therefore plays a positive, constitutive role for our thought. It is what makes thought possible, not determines its limits. Insofar as, in Kant’s account, there is an equivalency between that which is constitutive and that which is positive and that which is regulative and that which is negative, Schelling’s unprethinkable being can be said to be positive in this Kantian sense.

B. Withdrawal

We have seen that there is a sense in which unprethinkable being can be called positive – it is a constitutive condition of possibility of thought. However, the points raised above could still be powerless in the face objections such as the following: “even if the unprethinkable being is metaphysically necessary, it is a negatively determined entity. It plays a constitutive role for our thought, and yet it is negative in the sense that

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.87

it must be thought in terms of that which it is not; it must be thought as that which is not conceptual, not an object, not given, et.c”. Gabriel himself poses this question:

“The *docta ignorantia* concerning the world or the absolute is itself a reflexive knowledge through which the constitutive ignorance of human knowledge is known. Yet, have we not thus merely made “the undefinable the definition of the absolute? Have we not overturned our claim that the absolute is not an entity or object of knowledge^{158?}”

Throughout the course of the book, Gabriel also answers the question – no, we haven’t.

And it is not that giving the unprethinkable being a negative determination would not make it knowable – it most definitely would. It is just that we cannot give the unprethinkable being even a negative determination. In other words, we cannot determine it as that which is not conceptual, not an object, not given. We cannot even determine it as undetermined (which would entail a contradiction, among other things). The unprethinkable being is not given “as” something for it to be determined or definite in the first place¹⁵⁹ and it therefore cannot be an object of a judgment. We seek to determine or define something by attributing to it predicates through judgment, and while judging, we seek to make the object definite or finite. The unprethinkable being, however, cannot be definite, because for every thought it grounds, it contains the thought’s other. No determination can be given to the unprethinkable being, whether these determinations were negative or “positive” – if truly positive determinations are even possible. Therefore, even if there were a judgment made about the unprethinkable being, this being – it, as it is, the ground of thought as it grounds thought – would not be

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p.17

¹⁵⁹ Markus Gabriel identifies Schelling’s unprethinkable being with his own “logical sense”, and says the following: We can only refer to the background as such under excessive and improper terms, failing, too, even in the present formulation. That is to say, our means of access to logical space as such are utterly limited. And that is so because logical space does not take place under apophantic conditions, that is, under the conditions in which “something as something” takes place. – Ibid, p.127

the object of a judgment. It can be made into the object of a judgment only after it is reified, and once it is reified, it is no longer the unprethinkable being that we were after, it is an entity already set against the background of the unprethinkable being which we tried to grasp through this entity, but ultimately could not¹⁶⁰.

The unprethinkable being, then, is only known to us in the process of a continuous “belated withdrawal¹⁶¹”. Belated withdrawal here simply means that if we attempt to determine unprethinkable being by abstracting from a thought we have and examining the ground of this thought, i.e., the unprethinkable being, there is no way we could determine it. Every time we abstract from a thought to arrive at its ground, the result is a reified ground, a ground-in-thought already thought against the background of unprethinkable being, which has “withdrawn” from our attempt to determine it into its initial position of unprethinkability. So:

¹⁶⁰ Gabriel reads Schelling’s absolute – the unprethinkable being – to be the very process of its own reification within thought: “The *docta ignorantia* concerning the world or the absolute is itself a reflexive knowledge through which the constitutive ignorance of human knowledge is known. Yet, have we not thus merely made “the undefinable the definition of the absolute? Have we not overturned our claim that the absolute is not an entity or object of knowledge? If so, the unconditioned would be determined as infinite in contradistinction to the finite, as “the negation of finitude. That means, however, that it would *faute de mieux* be determined through its opposition to the finite. Yet Schelling counters this “threat of negation” by seeking to solve the problem of “how unity can consist in coexistence with opposition and opposition with unity, or better, how for their own good, each necessitates the other. This complex dynamic is only possible if the unconditioned is understood as the very process of its reification in finite consciousness. The struggle with the inconsistencies of reification, thereby, ultimately serves the goal of forcing consciousness from the level of first-order knowledge to higher-order theorizing.” – Ibid, p.17 Also, see *ibid*, p.18: “Thus, human knowledge itself is the infinite, since on the one hand it seeks to determine the infinite, to grasp it as a specific object, while on the other hand it is always already beyond all that is given. The infinite is not set against human knowledge—neither as an ungraspable beyond nor an object too big to be grasped—for it would thus be determined through this opposition.”

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.19: “Thus, without the flawed view of knowledge of the world as a relation between two objects or two kinds of objects, we could not get to the correct view, which integrates the very indeterminacy of the transitory moments of knowledge into our conception of knowledge. All of this can be called an attempt of the infinite (aka the absolute, the world, the domain of all domains, eternal freedom, the unconditioned, etc.) to finitize itself in order to become aware of its true infinity, its being nothing but a belated withdrawal.”

“Th[e] “unprethinkable being” that Schelling speaks of here designates merely that whose determinate being (*Dasein*) is necessary for thought, that is, that which it would be impossible not to think. Unprethinkable being is therefore merely “that which, no matter how early we come on the scene, is already there. It signifies therefore the always-already as such: if anything whatsoever is, then unprethinkable being is always already there. It is crucial to note, however, that this does not in any way offer insight into the essence of unprethinkable being. The unprethinkability of being merely implies that all thought always already finds itself in being, in a situation that it has not itself set up in advance¹⁶².”

To put it even more simply, and once again in Gabriel’s terms: the unprethinkable being is only glimpsed whenever we determine something, it is always the background of our thought and cannot become the foreground without us generating another background¹⁶³. Thus, literally speaking, “unprethinkable being is precisely that about which no thought whatsoever can be presupposed¹⁶⁴.” “No thought whatsoever” – if taken strictly, this would actually mean that we cannot even think the unprethinkable being as a ground for thought, because a positing a ground of thought can only be retroactive; i.e. we could only posit a ground for thought in thought, after there was thought:

“Unprethinkable being can therefore not be understood as the *ground* of logical space, because the very concept of ground already presupposes the successful constitution of logical space. Unprethinkable being is consequently the paradoxical “ground of ground” in the full-blooded Heideggerian sense, what Heidegger also speaks of as the “abyss.” Schelling

¹⁶² Ibid, p.65

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.126: “Logical space as such can only be glimpsed in its withdrawal, that is, only when we determine something. We must not forget, too, that upon referring to logical space as the background of our determinations, qua that which retracts upon our determining something or other, we determine it as such (logical space qua background) only by ipso facto bringing it into the foreground and generating yet another background. We can only refer to the background as such under excessive and improper terms, failing, too, even in the present formulation. That is to say, our means of access to logical space as such are utterly limited. And that is so because logical space does not take place under apophantic conditions, that is, under the conditions in which “something as something” takes place.”

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.70

himself had suggested the expression “non-ground” in his *Freedom Essay*, a term which in his later philosophy is replaced by unprethinkable being¹⁶⁵.”

This is why the unprethinkable being is not just a withdrawal, but a *belated* withdrawal: not only are we unable capture it through thought, we moreover can only attempt to capture it when it is already too late: when thought is already grounded and retroactively seeks to discover its ground. The ground is posited after thought; before it, when it is simply unprethinkable being, it cannot be determined.

The unprethinkable being, therefore, cannot be cognitively accessed, and neither can the transition between unprethinkable being and thought:

Because the transition from unprethinkable being to any predicative setting in which our intentional relation to objects takes place cannot be accounted for from within the predicative setting, a “non-excludable contingency is unassailably constituted in precisely this unprethinkable being¹⁶⁶.”

In the light of this cognitive incapacity, we discover that the unprethinkable being cannot be negative, because it cannot be given to thought to be determined in the first place. It withdraws continuously and we can repeat Markus Gabriel’s words about it: “it can neither not be, nor not be thought¹⁶⁷.” It is, therefore, something which only is, and it can be safely called positive according to Schelling’s definition of positivity.

C. Contingency

The unprethinkable being’s positivity results from this being’s “presence” only as belated withdrawal. It being a belated withdrawal, however, does not make it into a transcendent beyond that is forbidden to all access. Unprethinkable being is most

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.86

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p.87

definitely transcendent – it is straightforwardly beyond all thought, thought cannot think it, at least not without making it withdraw – and yet it is “not some transcendent **je ne sais quoi**¹⁶⁸” – in that sense, Schelling’s unprethinkable being is not a return to pre-Kantian metaphysics. The only sense in which unprethinkable being is transcendent is that it eludes us, that no matter what predicates we use to define it, it withdraws from definition¹⁶⁹. Moreover, it is not absolute in the classical sense of an unconditional necessary being – the fact that its transcendence is specifically belated withdrawal clarifies this. The unprethinkable being is only sought for after thought has been given. This whole investigation shows that if there is thought, there is unprethinkable being, moreover, there cannot but be unprethinkable being – it is in this sense necessary. However, if it was not for thought, if thought *was not* – unprethinkable being *would not necessarily have to be*, and the existence of thought is contingent. Therefore: the unprethinkable being is contingent on the existence of thought; it is only posited retroactively of necessity once there is thought. Otherwise, it is contingent, i.e., not necessarily necessary, but facticiously necessary¹⁷⁰, dependent on predication:

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.85

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p.33: “Transcendence depends on immanence; it is nothing but the failure of absolute theoretical closure. Transcendence is the very contingency of all ways in which the infinite withdraws in our efforts of grasping it.”

¹⁷⁰ See *ibid* p. 66: “[T]he necessity of the *necessario* existens is itself contingent, because it depends on the existence of chance, the being-there of contingency, such that it can be determined over against contingency in the first place as necessity as such. For the *necessario* existens is necessary properly speaking only once the ontological modalities are distinguished. This means that the “possibility of another being,” and therefore the possibility of being’s own contingency, cannot be excluded from unprethinkable being. Yet, even stronger than this impossibility of excluding contingency, without this other and therefore contingent being, the *necessario* existens would not itself be necessary: contingency is thus shown as a logical-ontological condition of necessary being. The necessity of the absolute origin of all beings cannot therefore outstrip the fact that when something arises, it does so only by virtue of being always already in relation to something else. That is, anything that has originated is thus contingent, because it cannot exclude the fact that it has originated; the very structure of coming-to-be-determinate necessitates the contingency of determinacy. Yet, the most challenging thought of Schelling’s work here is this: this dialectic opens up the further possibility that even

“Unprethinkable being is thus logical-ontological, which means: epistemically and metaphysically necessary. It can neither not be, nor not be thought. And yet, and this is Schelling’s decisive point, it is contingent. For, it is presupposed for all determinate thought, that is, the set of all assertorical judgments $F(x)$, $G(y)$, and so forth. It is, however, only first established as a presupposition when a predicative ambience has been constituted¹⁷¹.”

We can see, then, that unprethinkable being is contingent, and the only sense in which it is an absolute is that it is independent from thought – it cannot be thought, and is instead thought’s ground. This makes it absolutely contingent, since when it is taken independently from thought, there is nothing to prove its necessity. It is not an absolute in the sense in which the word was used in classical metaphysical systems – these classical absolutes were certain and determinate; facts could encompass them¹⁷². All we experience with unprethinkable being is its withdrawal, and this does not mean that there is a fact which withdraws from our knowledge – what withdraws from us is a being since it exists independently from our thought, but it does not follow that there is an unknowable existing fact which withdraws from us; the being which eludes us is indefinite. In Gabriel’s words:

“We experience, again, only a withdrawal: it does not follow from this that there is in any way something that in actual fact eludes us. With an experience of contingency we recognize a limit, which does not imply that we are therefore beyond this limit. And if contingency is to truly have the last word, we cannot even claim that this is necessary: this means that there

unprethinkable being itself, that which affords all determinacy its being-there, could be a fortuitous, contingent being, since its own necessity is contingent, for it is determinate as necessary only through its difference from the possibility of another being.” and p.71: “Logical space could have not come to be:

it is *sensu stricto* contingent, because its other, that which it would be were it otherwise, that is, the eternally indeterminate, cannot be *a priori* ruled out.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.87

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 130: “The Absolute of a determinate theory is necessarily a certain, determinate Absolute and therefore not the Absolute *per se*, that which precedes all theories. Given that this is consistently elusive, all of our theories stay a step behind their ultimate object.”

is no theoretical operation that can guarantee even that at least contingency is necessary. For all claims, including this one, take place within the spielraum of contingency¹⁷³.”

The contingent “absolute” is then the only true absolute, “that which precedes all theories¹⁷⁴”, while all the absolutes generated in the course of the history of philosophy are absolute only in the sense that they are possible absolutes with the larger sphere of absolute contingency¹⁷⁵. Schelling’s unprethinkable being is different – it is the elusive withdrawal of the absolute, and is therefore not metaphysical in a pre-Kantian sense – it is the absolute of a post-Kantian metaphysics which has sprung from Kant’s criticism, demolishing it from within. Moreover, this is another indicator that this absolute is positive: for Schelling, the unprethinkable being cannot be a necessary being, for necessity is a rational determination of something and the unprethinkable being cannot be rationally determined if it is to be the positive that Schelling intends it to be. It can only be free – contingent – if it is to play the grounding role for thought. We have seen that it really is contingent and that Schelling overcomes necessity, showing that it can only be “belatedly established¹⁷⁶”.

We have now seen that unprethinkable being is not just another negative idea since it is metaphysically necessary. It is not even possible to turn it into a negative idea since it presents itself to our thought through its own withdrawal, a withdrawal which only starts in retrospect after there is thought. We have also seen that unprethinkable

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid: “No element of the set “all candidates for the absolute” is absolute save in the sense that it is generated as a candidate for the absolute in the spielraum of contingency.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p.83

being, despite being absolute, is not a pre-Kantian metaphysical absolute. It is absolute insofar as it is a withdrawing contingency absolutely independent from thought, but which is absolutely necessary for there to be thought. In this sense, it is the absolute of a properly post-Kantian transcendental ontology.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION: CONTINGENTLY OPEN-ENDED

This is where we get to. We have begun our investigation with the intention to examine Schelling's criticism of Kant's *First Critique*, which argues that Kant's philosophy is negative and insufficient – there has to be a positive philosophy to complement it. We have asked ourselves two things: whether Kant's philosophy is negative, and, if yes, whether this negativity poses any problem to Kant's philosophy. Seeing as that both our initial questions got answered with a “yes”, we then asked ourselves how it is that Schelling seeks to remedy the problem within Kant's philosophy – and saw that the remedy is unprethinkable being.

Through the course of our project, we have seen that there is a purely negative part in the *First Critique* – the Transcendental Dialectic. The Dialectic examines the function of reason, which operates through three transcendental ideas of reason – thought-entities which are to have a strictly regulative function: they are to serve as the boundaries which our cognition cannot overstep. There is a limit-breaking idea that we are a transcendently existing self – our mind tends to think it, but it is an illusion. There is a similarly functioning idea that there is a world, a totality of all physical-causal facts and also an illusion. Finally, there is the transcendental ideal – the idea of a superior being which encompasses within itself the whole of reality – also a regulative idea our reason seeks to turn into a transcendent entity, which is also – of course – an illusion.

These three ideas are negative; they do not actually exist, they merely indicate the points our cognition approaches, but never attains. We have also seen that there is an apparent positive counterpart to the Dialectic – the Transcendental Analytic. In the Analytic, Kant gives us an explanation of how we form experience with the use of twelve categories. Those categories, unlike the transcendental ideas of pure reason, are constitutive: they are conceptual determinations which make our experience what it is. Schelling, however, has the right to claim that Kant's philosophy is negative: he demonstrates the dependence of the categories upon the transcendental ideal of pure reason. The ideal of pure reason is an exceptional transcendental idea and an unavoidable transcendental illusion: we need to posit it if we are to make determinations. Kant himself makes the point that determinations are only intelligible as parts of a whole – thus we see that the allegedly “positive” part of Kant's philosophy is dependent on the negative. The conceptual apparatus of judgement erected in the Analytic would not function without a whole within which experience is determined. This whole, for Kant to be consistent, has to be a merely regulative idea of a whole which is continuously strived after by our reason, but is never attained. It has to be the sum of all determinations available to our reason – and yet, Kant also insists that it has to be the ground of all determination. This is where Kant's negativity leads him into a contradiction: he posits the transcendental idea as the ground of all determination and so the condition of all thought. But we have seen that he also requires it to be no more than a thought-entity. Kant requires a thought-entity to be the condition of all thought: the contradiction arises here. Schelling uses this contradiction and argues that all thought is only possible if there is always already a totality in which this thought takes place. This totality, the ground of thought, must itself be independent of thought, because it

determines all thought in the first place. Therefore, this ground of thought is thought-independent. Schelling has indeed re-discovered the lost Holy Grail of metaphysics: an absolute. It is also a positive absolute: it cannot be determined negatively through the standard procedure of conceptual determination (which negates what the thing-to-be determined is not), and it has to exist for there to be thought – it is a positive condition of thought. Schelling's discovery of an absolute does not mean reverting to pre-Kantian methods of philosophizing: the positive “unprethinkable being” cannot be accessed through reason, but neither can it be accessed through sensory experience or direct mystical intuition. It is to be presupposed at the beginning of thought as an existing condition of it. Moreover, we reaffirm that it is truly positive because it is metaphysically necessary for thought and because it is in principle conceptually indeterminate: it cannot be negativized. According to Markus Gabriel, Schelling's new absolute, unprethinkable being, withdraws from any attempt to capture it in thought because an attempt to capture it always keeps a presupposition of it at the back. We cannot determine it in any way because we would only be determining one of its possibilities if we actually tried to undertake the determination. It follows that there is nothing necessary about unprethinkable being, and that therefore we cannot give it any classical metaphysical determination (or any determination, for that matter). It is absolutely and completely contingent. This is where we find ourselves: Kant's philosophy is negative; moreover, it is negative in such a way that Kant lands in a contradiction. Schelling then finds the positive absolute that needs to be introduced into philosophy for Kant's contradiction to be avoided: the unprethinkable being.

Despite entitling a part of this work “Where to now?”, I am aware I have not given anything like the full answer to the question “where to?” Schelling has uncovered

an absolute, the wet dream of metaphysician-wannabes ever since Kant has crucified their long-abused mistress. It can now be taken off the cross and prepared for its eventual resurrection. Schelling, for one, has given metaphysics a strange resurrection at best - has used the absolute to construct what seems to be a thoroughly Christian metaphysics of revelation – though there is considerable doubt surrounding Schelling’s real intentions. However, there is nothing necessary about the course taken by Schelling. In fact, the absolute being completely contingent, there is no necessity at all about where a positive metaphysics which takes the unprethinkable being as its starting-point should head. This contingency of the absolute and the contingency of the paths which open and branch out from it make Schelling view the history of metaphysics as a progressive generation of possible absolutes, each of which is, however, constitutive of unprethinkable being as a possibility¹⁷⁷. The unprethinkable being is also in its use constitutive of knowledge, as we have seen. Human knowledge is taken by Schelling to be the project to determine the whole i.e. – the unprethinkable being, insofar as the whole is the ideal of cognition towards which reason tends (for Kant) and the “ultimate potency for cognition” we strive towards (for Schelling). It does not matter that the striving, in all its attempts, fails to capture the unprethinkable being and that unprethinkable being is in principle not capturable in thought. The failure of knowledge to capture its ultimate goal does not however mean that the search for knowledge is ipso facto an enterprise doomed to failure; rather this failure is constitutive of knowledge just as it is constitutive of thought. Moreover, it constitutes knowledge as that which is

¹⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, p.15: According to Schelling, all finite knowledge of the determinate is resultant of the effort to define the infinite. Thus, every successful predication misses its goal, as it were, but in a constitutive manner. Every predication aims at a definition of what was indefinite for knowledge before its attempt to grasp it in concepts. Therefore, knowledge claims delimit the infinite and always already miss it.”

immune to closure: since the “whole”, the unprethinkable being, which is the ultimate goal of knowledge is constantly withdrawing, the process of knowing ends not: there is no point at which there is a finite set of propositions (or even non-propositional elements, whatever those might be) that constitute the whole of our knowledge¹⁷⁸.

It is in this light that Schelling makes positive philosophy the study of the historical evolution of the unprethinkable being. Since there is no closure, this evolution is all a positive philosophy can study, and it is all it needs to study. Through studying this evolution, positive philosophy is studying the world, since the world is nothing but “a process of the constitution of determinacy¹⁷⁹.” The evolution of the unprethinkable being is the evolution of the world-whole, and thus the evolution of knowledge.

Moreover, being, according to Schelling, is not inherently meaningful¹⁸⁰. It is given sense only in its self-mediation in thought. A thinking being thinks other being and

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 15: “As the infinite is always only grasped in a certain “shape,” that is, as something, the infinite ipso facto “drives itself in front” of these shapes; by virtue of this excess of the infinite over its determination, the judging subject’s predicative practice must itself carry on ad infinitum. Skepticism teaches us that a constitutive ignorance lies at the heart of human knowledge; it also teaches us, however, that as a consequence of this ignorance, the attempt to bring knowledge to an unsurpassable closure is itself impossible.”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p.100: “On Schelling’s translation of this thought, this means that the world is not a thing, but is rather the place of the determinacy of everything that exists as a process of the constitution of determinacy for finite epistemic beings. The human and totality refer therefore to one another, for the totality does not itself exist as an independent thing (for it is not some spatiotemporally extended universe).”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, pp.95-96: “Because no thought, and therefore no dimension of sense, can anticipate or preempt being, being itself is, in a determinate sense, senseless. Being goes before all sense and is therefore the unassailable presupposition of all sense: only in this way does being as such have a meaning, that is, it can only be captured under a determinate description as that which is included as excluded. [...] The sense-making activity of subjectivity entails that the world in itself, that is, the world without subjects, must be senseless, subordinates the world once again to a category of sense, namely that of senselessness. The senselessness of existence itself comes into existence only belatedly, that is, only through and as a moment of the self-mediation of subjectivity as a field of sense. The starting point of self-mediation can itself be called senseless only from the vantage of self-mediation and its sense-making activity.”

gives it sense. On this view of being and meaning, the goal of knowledge – this “whole” knowledge seeks to attain – is being’s absolute self-mediation in thought. Our knowledge, then, attains absolute self-mediation through the evolution of the unprethinkable being. Each attempt to think unprethinkable being is a step forward in being’s self mediation, until we attain the very end of the evolution of unprethinkable being, where absolute self-mediation stands. It is unclear that we will ever attend absolute self-mediation – on one hand, Schelling does speak about a “God”¹⁸¹ at the end of the evolution of unprethinkable being¹⁸², but on the other hand, absolute self-mediation would involve a kind of closure of our knowledge, which Schelling argues against. In any case, we can see that the path towards absolute self-mediation and knowledge of the world is open-ended and has multiple metaphysical routes open for taking. In the end, the constitution of the world is to proceed historically, where as long as metaphysicians keep in mind the limitations of their attempts to encompass unprethinkable being, their attempts are constitutively valuable.

In short, we can conclude this: Schelling’s positive philosophy which seeks to investigate the historical progression of unprethinkable being investigates strives, through this progression to attain the ultimate goal of knowledge. The steps of the

¹⁸¹ God here not meaning the transcendent entity of religion, but, as Gabriel puts it: “Positive philosophy investigates the historical evolution of logical space. This evolution can be called “ God, ” insofar as we understand “ God ” to mean an autoepistemic process of reflexively becoming transparent. “ God ” is simply the name for a “ pure self ” 108 beyond all being, that is, a self that goes beyond all being as something. God is thus the name for an ultimate excess excessive over all being as something that which Schelling calls “ absolute spirit,” “ absolute personality,” or, in a word, “ freedom.” – *ibid*, p.94

¹⁸² See *ibid*, pp.100-101: The human will therefore goes beyond the human. Whether the human will ever reach the position of a fully established lord of being who has surpassed his precarious, historical existence once and for all cannot be considered a decided fact. In this sense, Schelling’s thought of the modesty of reason is a crucial part of a philosophy of hope, one which, in view of the progressive form of history, places a bet on philosophical reflection contributing to the future being a future in which God shall be.”

progression are ultimately metaphysical, and yet not determined insofar as there are myriads of possibilities for unprethinkable being. The evolutionary progression is a true positive philosophy for as long as it is aware of its limitations and as long as it aims to grant our thought access to “God” in the long run, if that will ever happen. But until then – we must think, and metaphysically at that.

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