

**“A Battle As Yet Not Fought”:
The Tragic Consequences of Early German Idealism**

by

Jonah M. Johnson

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Silke-Maria Weineck, Co-Chair
Professor James I. Porter, Co-Chair
Professor Vassilios Lambropoulos
Associate Professor Andreas Gailus
Associate Professor Mika T. Lavaque-Manty

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ABSTRACT

“A BATTLE AS YET NOT FOUGHT”: THE TRAGIC
CONSEQUENCES OF EARLY GERMAN IDEALISM

by

Jonah M. Johnson

Co-Chairs: Silke-Maria Weineck and James I. Porter

This dissertation articulates the relationship between Kant's critical philosophy and the discourse of tragedy that characterizes early German Romanticism and early German Idealism. Since Peter Szondi's *Essay on the Tragic* (1961), literary scholars as well as philosophers have located this “tragic turn” in the Tenth Letter of Friedrich Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795); from this shared premise, however, scholarship synthesizing both literary and philosophical approaches to the “tragic turn” has generally not resulted. This dissertation seeks to address that need.

Chapters 1 and 2 clarify the philosophical motivations for a "tragic turn" within eighteenth-century philosophy and isolate the discursive figure of "conflict" (*Kampf*), through which Schelling brokers a philosophical appeal to art from within the antinomies of freedom and theoretical reason. I first examine how Kant's philosophy was itself led to such dualisms, then how these dualisms led to an impasse within post-Kantian foundationalism, and, finally, how Schelling's frustration with the solutions offered to this impasse by Fichte's "Criticism" as well as Spinoza's Dogmatism led him to wonder in the *Philosophical Letters* whether the problems of philosophy could be solved by philosophy. The "tragic turn" thus emerges as a strategy for overcoming the self-alienation of philosophy's ends and means through an appeal to tragedy as a model for the sublation of the false dilemma between two absolutely opposed positions.

Chapter 3 examines the risks and rewards of this appeal to tragedy for Hegel's development of dialectic beyond the dualisms of Kant, raising questions about the relationship between Hegel's desire for the disciplinary autonomy of philosophy and his rationale concerning the "end of art." Chapter 4 concludes with an exploration of the consequences of the "tragic turn" for a tragedian, Heinrich von Kleist, whose ambivalence concerning the use-values of both philosophy and tragedy are legible in the relationship between his "Kant crisis" (*Kantkrise*) and his presentation of failed mediation in *Penthesilea* (1808). Through a close reading of *Penthesilea*, I show that the radicalization of the tragic medium by an artist could be employed to contest Idealism's utilization of tragedy for its own self-legitimizing, anti-aesthetic, and rather anti-tragic ends.

CHAPTER I

THE CONFLICT OF REPRESENTATION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF CONFLICT: THE ORIGINS OF AESTHETICS AND THE AESTHETICS OF ORIGINS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

I. Introduction

The German word *Kampf* can be rendered any number of ways into English: battle, campaign, combat, fight, match, struggle, bout, etc. Like the Latin *pugna*, it can designate a physical altercation between individuals or armies; like the Latin *certamen* or Greek *athlon* or *agon*, it can also designate competition or contest, whether rhetorical, artistic, or athletic. The entry for *Kampf*, together with its compounds (*Wettkampf*, *Zweikampf*, *Kampfdurst*) and verbal forms takes up nearly twenty pages in the Grimm *Wörterbuch*, and while no one has ever accused the Grimm of being laconic, this is garrulous even by its standards. The broad semantic range of *Kampf* owes largely to its ability, as with its Greek and Latin forebears, to articulate relationships and encounters of all sorts. Moreover, the Grimm entry assures us that the figurative use of *Kampf* is not simply derivative of or subordinate to its literal use. “*Kampf*,” we are told, “is not battle plain and simple (*Streit schlechthin*), but from the very beginning...one-on-one artistic contest.”¹

¹ “*Kampf*,” *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, ed. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 33 vols. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984) 11.138-57; 139.

Whether the relationship being articulated by *Kampf* is between physical parties such as pugilists or between psychic entities such as the ego and id, or even between physical and psychic entities such as the losing pugilist and his struggle to will himself to fight on; whether the encounters are real or ideal, whether the stakes are as concrete as life and death or as abstract as honor, the structuring capacities of *Kampf* allow not only for the organization of events within which a decisive outcome must be produced, but also for the production of criteria according to which outcomes *can* be produced. In its simplest form, a *Kampf* is a contest between two parties in terms of a third. When the mediating criteria are known to the competing parties, they can serve as the rubric according to which one of the two parties is declared superior to or victorious over the other; when the criteria are not known, however, the third can *itself* emerge as the actual outcome of a contest. This latter possibility is especially important in contests where the parties or positions are equally matched or equally valid, so that no decision in favor of either side appears possible.

In a representative citation taken from Peter Szondi's *Essay on the Tragic* (1961), Goethe tells us, "Everything tragic is based upon an irreconcilable opposition. As soon as reconciliation sets in or becomes possible, the tragic disappears."² This formula suggests that when conflict is brought to a highly structured impasse of equipoise or indifference, it is both the necessary and sufficient condition of tragedy. On the one hand, the

² Goethe, cited in Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 25. The original remark is taken from *Unterhaltungen mit Goethe*, ed. Ernst Grumach (Weimar, Böhlau, 1956), 118.

possibility of reconciliation marks the dissolution of the tragic situation; on the other hand, however, the possibility of reconciliation depends on structured conflict in order to recognize its own need.

It is my thesis that this dialectic of the tragic—the oscillation or tension between conflict as a necessary condition of its presence as well as a sufficient condition of its passing away—is what brings tragedy into the service of philosophy in the decades following Kant, and that the form and figure of conflict is the most productive point of articulation through which to capture this double-movement. During this period the greatest need of Idealism was to develop a means by which to settle two sets of debates: first, the external debate between itself and empirical skepticism over the foundational certainty of (primarily Kant's) systematic philosophy; second, internal debates in the decades following Kant between competing modes of "reflection" (Fichte and Schelling), on one side, and "speculation" (Hegel) on the other. From the standpoint of philosophy, the ability of tragedy to represent the mediation of highly structured conflict—a premise routinized by Schiller in his aesthetic essays from early 1790s—³ made it an especially valuable model for Idealism's own felt task, i.e., to mediate the insoluble, antinomous conflicts concerning the limitations of human reason inherited from Kant (primarily the conflict between the representation of conditions and the conditions of representation).

³ "With his great essays of 1792-5, which culminate in the aesthetic writings at the end of the Jacobin experiment in late 1794, Schiller concludes the immense transition from the empirical poetics of drama to a fully-fledged philosophy of tragedy, and prepares the way for the metaphysics of the Tragic, which the other Jena Romantics will develop during the rest of that decade." Vassilis Lamropoulos, *The Tragic Idea* (London: Duckworth, 2006), 36.

This task is put into words by Hegel in a section of *Differenzschrift* (1801) titled “The Need of Philosophy” (*Bedürfniss der Philosophie*), where he defines the task as recognizing, and in doing so, sublating such conflicts:

The cultures of various times have established opposites..., which were supposed to be products of Reason and absolutes, in various ways, and the intellect has labored over them as such. Antitheses such as spirit and matter, soul and body, faith and intellect, freedom and necessity, etc. used to be important; and in more limited spheres they appeared in a variety of other guises. The whole weight of human interests hung upon them. With the progress of culture they have passed over into such forms as the antithesis of Reason and sensibility, intelligence and nature and, with respect to the universal concept, of absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity. ...The sole interest of Reason is to suspend such rigid antitheses.⁴

By means of his exposition of the four antinomies in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had shown that theoretical reason was incapable of presiding as judge over such antitheses as 1) freedom and necessity and 2) whether or not there is a first cause. It was thus left to early Idealism to elaborate in a positive manner a means by which to reinterpret the nagging quality of such deeply felt conflicts as a symptom of their ripeness for suspension.

As I will discuss at length in the following chapter, this reinterpretation reaches an important, though still only implicit breakthrough in the early philosophy of Schelling, whose texts from 1794-5 culminate in the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795). The importance of the *Philosophical Letters* for philosophy lies in Schelling’s assertion that the long-standing antithesis of Dogmatism (or Realism) and Criticism (or Idealism) is in fact only an apparent opposition, and that no criterion exists

⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 90.

for a philosopher to prefer one system to the other. Because both systems are fettered to the premise that subject and object relate to one another in a causal or subordinate fashion, neither of them is capable of advancing past a state in which they remain “unrelated” to one another. By asserting the equally valid but mistakenly one-sided nature of both Dogmatism and Criticism, Schelling’s *Philosophical Letters* implicitly structure the entirety of post-Kantian philosophy as a tragedy structured along the lines of a conflict. The rhetoric of conflict is everywhere in the *Philosophical Letters*, and nowhere so much as in the Tenth Letter’s famous discussion of the philosophical importance of Greek tragedy.

This moment in the *Philosophical Letters* marks the “tragic turn” in the German philosophical tradition. Dennis Schmidt observes that, “*The reappearance of the topic of tragedy—now posed a matter of the tragic—is contemporaneous with the arrival of the end of metaphysics as a possibility,*”⁵ but the temporal overlap between the appearance of one phenomenon and the disappearance of another does not by itself articulate their relationship—or even prove that there is one. On the one hand, Schmidt is right that the appearance of the tragic coincides with the end of a certain ontotheological philosophical tradition rooted in the search for first causes and deductive certainty; on the other hand, he does not go far enough in his analysis of Schelling’s philosophical motivations toward a “tragic turn.” The motivations are scarcely legible without a clear and deliberate familiarity with the argumentative context against which Schelling’s philosophical insights develop in an initially sympathetic, but ultimately reactive manner.

⁵ Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 78.

What must be seen as inseparable from the tragic turn's departure from the metaphysical false dilemma of Dogmatism and Criticism are the philosophical developments within Idealism toward which it pointed and for which tragedy provided an early role model.

Though Schmidt does not explicitly draw the connection between tragic discourse and the developmental stages of Idealism, he does note the result:

...Hegel's interest in tragedy is not confined to the manner in which it completes the artistic education of the spirit; he is also greatly interested in the logic of the tragic because the tragic work replicates...the dialectical situation which belongs to the life of spirit in general. ...[T]ragedy is especially adept at illuminating the ethical dimensions of the conflicts and crises which spirit must endure.⁶

Tragedy, at least as an ideal type, thus *represents* a structure of conflict which it cannot itself move beyond and which—at least in the eyes of philosophy—actually necessitates philosophy through this very limitation. In this sense Hegelian dialectic is the historical opening up of tragedy's local structure of conflict; moreover, Schelling's insights in the *Philosophical Letters*, together with his resulting *Identitätsphilosophie*, can be seen to constitute a stage of philosophy which we can fairly call “tragic” in the sense that it was capable of representing the conflict between competing philosophical systems without being able—for better or for worse—to articulate a further, higher perspective. All of which raises the question: by what means *would* philosophy achieve this further, higher perspective?

Terry Pinkard characterizes this process in his study of Hegel's idiosyncratic conception of dialectic. Though his characterization at no point relates the development of dialectic

⁶ Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 120.

to the contemporaneous philosophical investment in tragedy, it nonetheless sounds remarkably like a narrative account of how a tragically structured conflict is capable of recognizing and thereby overcoming the impasse in which it finds itself—*by becoming philosophical*. He writes:

Hegel's understanding of dialectic can be reconstructed in something like the following way. Philosophy is the explanation of how things are possible. A philosophical explanation is called for when there is an apparent (*Schein*) incompatibility between two fundamental beliefs, each of which seems on its own to be true. The thesis of dialectical philosophy is that the basic incompatibilities of classical philosophy—and especially the ones presented by Kant in his “Transcendental Dialectic” [e.g., the Antinomies]—are only apparent ones (*Schein*) and can be reconciled by enlarging the categorial context in terms of which the original opposition was framed. Dialectical philosophy, that is, explains the possibility of apparently incompatible categorial beliefs by trying to show that the apparent incompatibility is *only* apparent, that the contradiction is avoided once one expands one's framework of the discourse in the appropriate way.⁷

One important question I will take up in Chapter Three is whether and to what degree tragedy, in the process of being rendered philosophically useful, becomes something incompatible with itself. For Hegel, the answer to this question lies clearly enough in his thesis of the end of art. Tragedy's structured conflict serves philosophy as a propaedeutic for dialectical reason—a ladder to be climbed and then kicked away. This re-subsumption of tragedy within the self-narration of philosophy's autonomy, however, proceeds in a manner that appears to regress to the very pre-dialectical logic of prioritization and causation against which Schelling's “tragic turn” arose as a proto-solution. As I will also show in Chapter Three, this regressive kernel within philosophy's

⁷ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 19.

self-narration of its own progress raises serious questions about the legitimacy of the claims philosophy comes to make about itself (and its own legitimacy).

Another question is whether tragedy's structured conflict ever produced the sorts of resolution or higher standpoint that formed the basis of its use-value to philosophy in the first place. To the degree that philosophy's assessment of tragedy is founded upon bad evidence, that is, its claims about its own relation to art become correspondingly questionable; and to the degree that this logical subordination of art to philosophy becomes questionable, a space opens up for other competing, perhaps equally valid accounts of this relation. If so, would this problematized priority and autonomy of philosophy over and against art lend itself to a critique akin to Schelling's tragic, coordinate structuring of Fichte's causally subordinate account of pure and empirical consciousness? Is it possible that Hegel's own philosophical method of overcoming the one-sidedness of tragic conflict was itself one-sided? And if so, would the contestation of philosophy's position emerge from within philosophy itself? From within art? And if from within art, how might it manifest itself?

This double movement of conflict as a structuring structure in tragedy means not only that resolution is possible where conflict is present, *but that without conflict resolution is not possible*. Hegel's approach, according to one of his most ardent critics,⁸ indeed abstracts the ideal form of structured conflict out of actual, less symmetrically structured tragedies, and in doing so, he creates what I have, following his own terminology, called

⁸ See Michelle Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict Since Aristotle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

the “need of philosophy.” If we want to imagine a means of contesting this self-legitimizing movement by philosophy, we need do nothing more than assert that, *pace* the philosophical tradition, no such resolution-demanding tragic structure is available in the works of tragedians to facilitate philosophy’s self-mediation beyond the confines of art. In fact, in order to present itself with such a mediating structure, I argue, philosophy must first misread tragedy, and in doing so become a curious sort of tragedian of ideal tragedies.

Be that as it may, there is another, more philosophically engaged means by which a tragedian might contest philosophy’s claim of autonomy: he might produce meticulously structured conflicts in his works and then represent the myriad possible missteps which can, and nearly always do, find dialectical mediation going awry. This, I argue, is precisely what Heinrich von Kleist does. Rather than skew or subtly leave the top button undone in the structured conflict in his tragedies, Kleist shows that the apparent oppositions in a given structure are not apparent because they can be overcome, but instead shows that they are never so thoroughly understood in their opposition such that reason can rise from their felt certainty to a standpoint from which it might, reflecting on its speculative success, smile to itself and think, “*only apparent.*” In Chapter 4 I will take up this responsiveness of Kleist in a two-fold manner: first, I will look at the critical reception of Kleist’s self-diagnosed Kant crisis, and in doing so show that the discourse surrounding this “crisis” reproduces the same sorts of anxieties and false dilemmas which both caused Kleist’s crisis and against which his works do battle; second, I will examine the consequences of post-Kantian philosophy’s progressive narration of its own

autonomy in light of Kleist's scathing parody of narcissism (and its desire for autonomy) in *Penthesilea* and *Das Kästchen von Heilbronn*.

II. Historical Background

Before I examine how the insolubility of certain structural problems within post-Kantian philosophy motivated Schelling's "tragic turn" over the course of his early writings, it is necessary to reconstruct the development of these problems, most of which were initially meant to be solutions to yet older sets of problems. For the purposes of my project, the two questions that guide the following historical narrative are these: first, how did the ends and means of German philosophy in eighteenth century develop in such a manner that the resolution of conflict repeatedly—if not inevitably—led philosophers to equally insoluble conflicts? Second, how did the frustration over this cycle of conflict—the need *of* philosophy—lead to the conclusion that recognizing conflict was not simply the problem, but part of the solution—the need *for* philosophy? In each of the following sections I will treat a particular philosopher, following his philosophical contribution from its appearance as "the latest solution" to its point of irresolution as "the latest problem." I will start with Alexander Baumgarten in the mid-1750s and end with the young Schelling, whom I will take up in much greater detail in the following chapter.

Baumgarten

The advantages of Kant's transcendental idealism over its philosophical predecessors as well as the disadvantages it shares with them must be understood against the historical confluence of two aspectually opposed philosophical approaches, Rationalism and Empiricism, each of which gradually, over the latter-third of the eighteenth-century—and then rather suddenly in the 1770s in the university town of Königsberg—became something greater than the sum of its parts. There was little room for “Aesthetics” in the modern sense of the word within the tradition of Continental Rationalism as it had developed since Descartes, and this exclusion was due largely to Rationalism's generally pathological account of the senses. In the cognitive framework of Leibniz and Wolff, for example, sense perceptions are not different in kind from thoughts but merely a less distinct realization thereof. Although the terminology of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school does differentiate a lower cognitive faculty of sense perception from a higher faculty of thought, and in doing so paves the way somewhat for an independent identity for the aesthetic sphere, the specific difference between the content of the higher and lower faculties is nonetheless the imperfection or “indistinctness” of the latter. “Sense perception cannot be made distinct without turning it into thought; lower cognition is only a preliminary stage of the same knowledge” and by virtue of its cognitive—and finally moral—dependence on thought the criterion of its perfection necessarily lies outside of it, i.e., within the faculty of thought.⁹

⁹ Werner S. Pluhar, “Introduction” to Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), xlxiii.

As far as sense perception is concerned, the cognitive taxonomy of Continental Rationalism undergoes a qualitative transformation in the middle of the eighteenth century with the publications of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750/8) and the far more popular, if somewhat diluted follow-up by Baumgarten's pupil, namely, Georg Friedrich Meier's *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (1754). To be sure, Baumgarten continues to speak of higher and lower faculties of cognition, each one of which is dedicated to a specific cognitive realm; moreover, the faculty of sense perception and the faculty of thought remain differentiated from one another as to their degree of "confusion" and "distinctness." The manner in which they do so in Baumgarten's work, however, is both more and less rigorous than his Leibnizian-Wolffian predecessors.¹⁰

On the one hand, Baumgarten's denial "that sense perception can be perfected only by making it distinct" can be seen as a form of emancipation of the higher faculty from unnecessary contact with the lower faculty—freeing the former, if your will, from a sort of cognitive *noblesse oblige*; on the other hand, it cannot do so without simultaneously asserting that "sense perfection...can have a perfection of its own."¹¹ The result is that, whereas the purity of the higher faculty is bolstered by its segregation from the concerns of the lower faculty, the means by which the lower faculty asserts its independence—its own perfectibility—cannot help but reproduce for itself the problem of how, independent

¹⁰ For an overview of the emergence of German Aesthetics out of the "school" tradition of Leibniz and Wolff, see Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Der Stellenwert des Briefwechsels in der Geschichte der deutschen Ästhetik," in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn, and Friedrich Nicolai, *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel*, ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Munich: Winkler, 1972), 168-237, especially 168-76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xlix.

from the higher faculty, it is supposed to account for this perfection. Where does its criterion lie? Within a higher part of the lower faculty? If so, how does this not merely defer the original topographical problem to a less macroscopic scale?

Perhaps this problem can be dismissed as the result of an unfortunate reliance on spatial metaphors in these accounts of cognition, but even if that is granted, it doesn't change the fact that the "landscape" convention within philosophical accounts of the mind are both well worn enough to have already been old by the time of Plato and durable enough to remain troublesome for Freud scholars today. In Baumgarten's case, the distinction between two qualitatively distinct modes of cognition amounted to a strategy for levering sense cognition (and eventually the objects associated with it) out from an epistemological-ontological continuum with rational cognition and onto a differentiated taxonomical field (*campus*). As a result of this conceptual rupture "there are two different kinds, rather than just stages, of cognition (knowledge), and two kinds of theory (or "science") of knowledge: logic and aesthetics."¹² The question, however, is whether and to what degree this solution does or doesn't simply reproduce the underlying problem of dualism within each genus of cognition and in doing so multiply the number of fronts on which the topographical problem must be faced. The risks of this strategy would seem to be potentially vertiginous: the taxonomical divisions of cognition reproducing by powers of two, and each new division replicating the dilemma of continuum and rupture, like shards of a hologram bearing the intact image from which they have been severed.

¹² Ibid.

As is the case with most ruptures in the history of thought, however, Baumgarten's declaration of independence for sensible cognition took time. H. R. Schweizer sums up the slow transition as follows:

In the *Meditations* [1735, §6] he [, Baumgarten,] stresses, following Wolff, the unity of the *cognitio*. He speaks of the *parts* of the *faculty of knowledge: partes facultatis cognoscitivae*. In the *Metaphysics* both faculties are already separated: a *facultas cognoscitiva inferior* stands over and against a corresponding *facultas superior*. But it is the *Aesthetics* that first departs at decisive points from the vertical gradation of the cognitive powers familiar from Leibniz and Wolff and treats the *cognitio sensitive* as self-reliant and independent from mathematical-logical knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] and as such must be taken seriously as a potentiality of cognition [*Möglichkeit des Erkennens*].

[In den *Meditationen* [1735, §6] betont er in Anlehnung an Wolff noch die Einheit der *cognitio*. Er spricht von den *Teilen* des einen *Erkenntnisvermögens: partes facultatis cognoscitivae*. In der *Metaphysik* sind die beiden Vermögen bereits getrennt: eine *facultas cognoscitiva inferior* steht einer entsprechenden *facultas superior* gegenüber. Aber erst die *Aesthetica* löst sich an entscheidenden Stellen von dieser bei Leibniz und Wolff geläufigen vertikalen Abstufung der Erkenntniskräfte und behandelt die *cognitio sensitive* als eine selbstständige und unabhängig von der mathematisch-logischen Erkenntnis ernst zu nehmende Möglichkeit des Erkennens.]¹³

The division of labor articulated by Baumgarten and Meier thus ends up solving one problem by creating another. While making space for a specifically sensible mode of cognition, which was in turn capable of accounting for a mode of perfection proper to sensible objects, they successfully address the difficulty of accounting for a fluid

¹³ H. R. Schweizer and A.G. Baumgarten, *Ästhetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis. Eine Interpretation der Aesthetica A. G. Baumgartens mit teilweiser Wiedergabe des lateinischen Textes und deutscher Übersetzung* (Basel: Schwabe, 1973), 21-2. Schweizer's interpretation opposes the tendency to situate Baumgarten within a teleology leading to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (13 ff.) and address the question why Baumgarten—even in his own time—has been so often invoked but so seldom read. The representative of the aforementioned tendency throughout Schweizer's text is Alfred Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974).

continuum of cognition. Such continua are structurally unable both to admit the senses into their account and to protect the rational end of the spectrum from being infected by the senses. This difficulty is, at least provisionally, solved by a more rigid taxonomical division of one from the other. In doing so, however, Baumgarten sets in motion a dialectic on both the intra- and interpersonal levels—and raises some sizable questions: If the distinction between higher and lower faculties is not one of quantity but rather one of quality, then in terms of what “third” faculty do they communicate with one another? Furthermore, if perfection can be found in objects of sensible perception just as validly as it can in the rational self-occupation of thought, how do these distinct modes of perfection relate to one another?¹⁴ As will be the case in my discussion of Hegel and the “end of art,” the answer at the dawn of Aesthetics is already ambivalent, if not paradoxically anti-aesthetic in its implications. Ernst Cassirer writes:

[Baumgarten] erects a new standard of sensibility whose function is not to destroy but to preserve the value of this mode of experience. He attributes new perfection to sensibility; ...such perfection, however, in no sense corresponds to that perfection for which logic and mathematics strive in the development of their “distinct concepts.” It asserts itself side by side with the perfection of logic and remains an irreducible and independent element. It still costs Baumgarten considerable pains to establish this coordination; and in the expression of his thought, in the terminology which he does not create but adopts largely from the schools, he relapses again and again into the language of subordination and mere subsumption. This terminology forces him to set up a definite scale, an arrangement according to rank and value; and on this scale, aesthetics is assigned to the lowest place.¹⁵

Baumgarten’s effort to carve out a space for the evaluation of sensible objects thus ends up conjuring the question of an inner-division of the unified cognitive sphere and, by

¹⁴ For Kant the beautiful is the free play of faculties, whereas the sublime is the dawning for-itself of this play.

¹⁵ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 341.

extension, projects the spectre of a inner-division onto those objects under evaluation.¹⁶

Kant

This taxonomy of subjects, objects, and their relationships—both to one another and to themselves—occupies Kant for the better part of the three Critiques.¹⁷ The solution he offers to this taxonomy, namely, the deduction of the transcendental unity of apperception, the thing-in-itself, the regulative Ideas of reason etc., itself becomes in turn the problem/solution for the generation of philosophers who followed him. Kant's unresolved ambivalence concerning the distinct yet related nature of higher and lower modes of cognition—apperception and intuition, the phenomenal and the noumenal etc.—produces a conceptually untidy consequence for his critical topography of consciousness, one which is comparable to—though perhaps an inversion of—Baumgarten's segregation of the higher and lower faculty of cognition.¹⁸ If in Baumgarten's case a division of the faculties implies an underlying unity, in Kant's case

¹⁶ This problem of taxonomic reproduction is homologous with Kant's inevitable retreat both to the transcendental unity of apperception and to the thing in itself as the two sides of his strategy to preserve the unity (of his account) of the subject- and object-oriented perspectives (if indeed the latter even makes any sense). For a recent discussion of Kant's reception of Baumgarten, see Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 117-34.

¹⁷ The self-relation of an object is the "external" problem of the "other," which is exacerbated in the case of the radical Other, viz., God. On the flip side of that dialectic is problem of the "internal" problem of the division implied by my own self-relation, i.e. self-consciousness.

¹⁸ This unresolved ambivalence dates back to Kant's pre-critical writings on the mind-body problem. "Kant," Frederick Beiser observes, "wanted a theory of mental-physical interaction that would do justice to the separate existence of the mind and body while also explaining the interaction between them." Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism: 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 30-31.

the demonstration of synthetic *a priori* judgments implies an irreducible dualism between the intelligible and sensible fields of inquiry.

The most explicit effort by Kant to bridge the taxonomical interstices produced by his transcendental epistemology are to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason's* "Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding" (A137/B176-A147/B187). The Schematism comes at a point in the Transcendental Analytic following the deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding—itsself something of an oxymoron—where the very success of the deduction presents a potentially fatal obstacle to the unity of consciousness. For, while the purification of the Categories of any empirical content is a Rationalist gesture on Kant's part, the "critical" insistence on the unity of the intellectual and sensible conditions of experience demands that even the "pure" elements of consciousness have synthesizing purchase on the sensible manifold. The Schematism is thus an attempt to explain how these competing aesthetic and anti-aesthetic requirements can be met within the self-same account of consciousness, and Kant is painstakingly aware that the two requirements must be compatible despite their apparent mutual exclusion. In the opening lines of the Schematism Kant sums up the problem as follows:

In all subsumptions of an object under a concept the representation of the object must be *homogeneous* with the concept; in other words, the concept must contain something which is represented in the object that is to be subsumed under it. This, in fact, is what is meant by the expression, "an object is contained under a concept." But pure concepts of understanding being quite heterogeneous from empirical intuitions, and indeed from all sensible intuitions, can never be met with in any intuition. For no one will say that a category, such as that of causality, can be intuited through sense and is itself contained in appearance. How, then, is the *subsumption* of intuitions under pure concepts, the *application* of a category to appearances, possible?

[In allen Subsumptionen eines Gegenstandes unter einen Begriff muß die Vorstellung des ersteren mit der letzteren gleichartig sein, d.i. der Begriff muß dasjenige enthalten was in dem darunter zu subsumierenden Gegenstände vorgestellt wird, denn daß bedeutet eben der Ausdruck: ein Gegenstand sei unter einem Begriff enthalten. . . .Nun sind aber reine Verstandesbegriffe, in Vergleichung mit empirischen (ja überhaupt sinnlichen) Anschauungen, ganz ungleichartig, and können niemals in irgend einer Anschauung angetroffen werden. Wie ist nun die Subsumption der letzteren unter die erste, mithin die Anwendung der Kategorie auf Erscheinungen möglich...?] ¹⁹

Kant must account for the fact that the same strategies by means of which he deduced the necessary unity of experience have apparently produced an either/or, both sides of which undermine one of the necessary requirements of his system. In this respect Norman Kemp Smith diagnoses Kant's felt dilemma, observing that "[i]f category and sensuous intuition are really heterogeneous, no subsumption is possible; and if they are not really heterogeneous, no such problem as Kant refers to will exist."²⁰

Thus, either there is a relational problem and it is insoluble, or there is no problem, which in turn might present—at least for a lingering dualist such as Kant—an even bigger problem. Despite Kant's efforts to bridge the inevitable divisions within his accounts—whether at the epistemological level of the Schematism or at the architectonic level of the *Critique of Judgment*—the unifying gestures within his account came to draw more and more attention from his critics to the underlying assumption that there was a prior

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 180 [A137/B176-A138/B177] and Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Jens Timmermann (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998). Unless otherwise noted, all English references in this chapter to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are to Kemp Smith's translation. Also, I will reference the original German with "A" and "B" edition pagination in brackets.

²⁰ Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,"* 2nd ed. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1992), 334.

division in need of unification. “The main problem after Kant,” writes Frederick Beiser, “then, was to find some means of uniting Kant’s disastrous dualisms.”²¹

Kant was right to recognize that the criteria of human knowledge lie within—or rather *are*—the structure of the human mind, and his early critics were right to add that unless the unconditionality of these criteria were satisfactorily explained then Kant’s reliance on them would become, oxymoronically, dogmatically idealistic.²² Kant himself, these critics argued, had offered no such account, due in part to a formulation of the problem (as a solution) which was itself problematic. This fusion of admiration and frustration is famously expressed in a letter from Johann Gottlieb Fichte to Friedrich Immanuel

Niethammer in October 1793:

It is my most fervent conviction that Kant merely intimated the truth but neither presented it nor proved it. This marvelous, unique man either has the gift of divination by which he knows the truth without knowing its grounds, or else he did not think well enough of his age and there did not want to communicate what he knew, or perhaps he did not want to attract, while still alive, the superhuman veneration which sooner or later must be bestowed on him. . . . There is only *one* original fact in the human mind; it will furnish the ground for a comprehensive philosophy and for its two branches, theoretical and practical. Kant surely knows it but he has nowhere expressed it. He who finds it will present philosophy as a science.

²¹ Frederick C. Beiser, “Introduction: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-24; 11. See also Beiser, *German Idealism*, 475-6. For a recent, extended treatment of the origins and consequences of Kant’s Dualism see Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 13-83.

²² Schelling’s early works are peppered with terminological inbreeding of this sort, in which various permutations of Idealism and Realism, Empiricism and Rationalism, Criticism and Dogmatism, etc. lead to the identity of opposites as well as the self-opposition of identities. See Schelling, *Of the I*, 106 [211], **I.2.139-40** and *Philosophical Letters* 188-9 [329-31], **I.3.99-101**.

Fichte's encomium struggles with the tall order of bringing theoretical and practical philosophy under a single yoke, but its reservations are nonetheless overpowered by an even stronger *Jagdlust*. Viewed as an admixture of Socrates and Jesus, Kant's failures are excused—even if only ironically—in the names of oracular wisdom, judiciousness and humility. Fichte's hopefulness, though, lay precisely in the daemonic stature of Kant's failure, i.e., in the belief that Kant had bequeathed to his followers a task that a) had definitely not been accomplished b) was infinitely worth accomplishing and c) could be accomplished—perhaps quickly.

The first years following the *Critique of Judgment* were dedicated to this task, most fervently among the university faculty in Tübingen and Jena. Making sense of this period of German philosophy can be as bewildering as untangling a string of Christmas lights that is still plugged in, and to make things both better and worse it has received an encyclopedic degree of attention in recent years by scholars such as Dieter Henrich, Manfred Frank, and Frederick C. Beiser, to name only a few. The most important aspect of these years for the discussion at hand, however, is that the optimism of the initial attempts at a foundational account of the unconditioned soon turned to a form of skepticism signaling the onset of the *Frühromantik*. On the one hand, Manfred Frank notes, “the post-Kantian mood in Germany was filled with a tendency to view philosophy as an activity which necessarily departed from an absolute principle”; on the other hand, however, the younger generation of “thinkers came to the conclusion that a philosophy,

which seeks to follow a method of deduction from some highest fundamental principle, is either dispensable or downright impossible.”²³

Reinhold

The most important of the early optimistic attempts to complete Kant’s philosophy through the foundational grounding of the subject is the *Elementarphilosophie* of Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Reinhold was a highly successful popularizer of Kant, and during his tenure as a professor in Jena (1787-94) he held the newly established chair dedicated to Critical Philosophy. Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie*, as it was called, is not the name of a single work, but refers rather to the philosophical stance, taken *in toto*, which he put forth in a series of three works from 1789-91: *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögen* (1789), *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Misverständnisse der Philosophen, Erster Band* (1790), and *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (1791). In these works Reinhold develops an account of the “first principle” from which both the theoretical and practical branches of Kant’s critical philosophy can be derived in a scientific, i.e., in a universal, necessary, and unified fashion. According to Reinhold this first principle is the Principle of Consciousness (*Satz des Bewußtseins*), which was supposed to help philosophy move beyond Kant, despite the

²³ Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 23.

fact that, up to a point, it bears a damning resemblance to Kant's characterization of the Transcendental Unity of Apperception.²⁴ Daniel Breazeale writes:

With the Principle of Consciousness Reinhold believed he had uncovered that "common root" of thought and sensibility, which Kant had declared to be unknowable. By commencing his analysis at the level of "representations as such," Reinhold was convinced that he had, so to speak, hit philosophical rock bottom, in as much as all consciousness is self-evidently "representational" in character.²⁵

In the *Beyträge* Reinhold writes that the Principle is the proposition that "in consciousness, the subject distinguishes the representation from the subject and the object and relates the representation to both," which seems less like an overcoming than a recapitulation of the quandary of Reason which Kant describes in the Transcendental Dialectic.²⁶

Because Reinhold conceived of all consciousness as the representation of a represented object, he was able to characterize the consciousness that we have of ourselves only as an object-relation. Thus the grounding element of subjectivity became for him an idea which was out of the reach of representation and which he—like Kant—was forced to describe in a merely regulative fashion. But as soon as we make self-consciousness a regulative idea, we can no longer ascribe Being and Cartesian self-evidence to it. "The absolute I" thus becomes for him, instead of a deductive foundation, a—as Novalis calls it—"principle of approximation."

[Da Reinhold aber alles Bewußtsein als Vorstellung von einem vorgestellten Gegenstand faßte, konnte er auch das Bewußtsein, das wir von unserem selbst haben, nur als Gegenstands-Bezug charakterisieren. So wurde ihm die gründende Subjektivität zu einer für die Vorstellung unerreichbaren Idee, die er—wie Kant—als bloß regulativ beschreiben mußte. Aber wer Selbstbewußtsein zu einer

²⁴ Cf. Manfred Frank, "Friedrich von Hardenbergs philosophischer Ausgangspunkt" in *Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre 1794: Philosophische Resonanzen*, ed. Wolfram Högrefe (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 13-34; 19.

²⁵ Daniel Breazeale, "Karl Leonhard Reinhold" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 4 April 2008 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/karl-reinhold/>>.

²⁶ Reinhold, *Beyträge* I.167 cited in *Ibid.*

regulativen Idee macht, verzichtet darauf, ihm Sein und cartesianische Evidenz zuzuschreiben. Und so wird ihm “das *absolute Ich*,” statt zu einem Deduktionsgrund, zu einem—wie Novalis es nennt—“Approximationsprincipe.”²⁷

The most important skeptical challenge from within the philosophical community to Reinhold’s efforts to systematize and ground Kant’s philosophy was articulated in G. E. L. Schulze’s “Aenesidemus,” which was published in 1792 without an indication of its publisher, place of publication, or author’s name.²⁸ To be sure, strident criticism of Kant and his proponents was being levied by extra- or anti-philosophical figures such as Friedrich Jacobi, whose irrationalist appeal to faith functioned a challenge to the enterprise of philosophy in general.²⁹ Schulze’s *Aenesidemus*, however, is the intramural

²⁷ Manfred Frank, “Friedrich von Hardenberg’s philosophischer Ausgangspunkt,” 19.

²⁸ Daniel Brezeale in J.G. Fichte, *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Brezeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 53, note 1. Schulze’s essay is named for the first-century founder of Pyrrhonic Skepticism and takes the form of an epistolary exchange between Hermias, a proponent of the Kantian philosophy, and Aenesidemus, its skeptical opponent.

²⁹ The views of Jacobi (1743 -1819) were generally critical of the Enlightenment’s over-investment in the cure-all powers of reason, and his argument against the sufficiency of Kant’s critical system was directed “in particular against the idea that a rational ‘system’ of philosophy could adequately capture what was at stake in human existence.” Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy: 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91. It isn’t in fact necessary to dwell analytically on what Jacobi meant by the stakes of human existence, since this was in fact the very thing that frustrated Jacobi about the philosophical instinct, viz., that even at its best it always led away from what mattered most, and at its usual worst it led, even perhaps despite itself, consequentially, i.e., philosophically, toward atheism. For Jacobi, the stakes of human existence, which are clear enough to unaided reason, get blurred when looked at through a rationalized lens and overexposed by the pyrotechnic flash of enlightened critique. In the hands of philosophers, he insisted, reason is transformed from a tool of the understanding to an autotelic, narcissistic work of art. For a very brief overview of Jacobi’s role in the reception of Kant, including the “Pantheism Controversy,” see Karl Ameriks’ “Introduction” in Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xvi-xviii. In this Introduction Ameriks point out that, “For Jacobi the lesson of mainstream theoretical philosophy was that it led at best to a ‘so-called’ knowledge of representations that could never be fulfilling. Jacobi’s aim was to bring his readers back to the satisfying non-

attack of a professional philosopher against Kant's philosophy *on its own terms*, challenging both the supposed philosophical advancements by Kant himself as well as the allegedly more systematic presentation of the Critical Philosophy put forth by Reinhold in his *Philosophy of Elements*.³⁰

The full reach of Schulze's criticism is too multi-faceted to capture here, but a significant part of it concerns Reinhold's attempt to ground Kant's epistemology on the irreducible "principle of consciousness," a strategy which, according to Schulze, suffers fatally from the very problem it was trying foundationally to cure—infinite regression. There was a massive inconsistency in Reinhold's account of self-consciousness, according to Schulze, since Reinhold required all consciousness to involve representations, and a self-conscious subject therefore had to have a representation of itself, which, in turn, required a subject to relate the representation of the subject to itself, which, in turn, implied...infinite regress.³¹

In both its form as well as its content, this criticism captures the emerging state of German philosophy in the early 1790s, both among "Kantians" as well as their adversaries. As a diagnosis of Reinhold's "infinite regress," Schulze's argument represents the growing suspicions surrounding the Enlightenment ideal concerning the perfectibility of reason and the temporality of progress. As a problematization of the role of representation within the subject/object dialectic of selfhood, it expresses the

demonstrative beliefs that they had always held, in such a way that even in a modern context they could continue to lead a life of belief open to others and to faith" (xviii).

³⁰ See Breazeale in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 53.

³¹ Pinkard, *German Philosophy: 1760-1860*, p.106.

increasingly acute obsession-compulsion manifested by German thinkers' accounts of self-consciousness (and the self-consciousness of their accounts). This is not to say, however, that Schulze's diagnosis put an end to the search for "first principles." As much as Reinhold's fame faded in the aftermath of *Aenesidemus*, the wagon of foundationalism was soon hitched to a rising star.

Fichte

In the February 11 and 12, 1794 editions of Jena's popular *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762 – 1814) responded to Schulze's essay with his "Review of *Aenesidemus*," in which he countered Schulze's skepticism with gestures toward a new, more durable, i.e., scientific, grounding of Kant's transcendental system.³² In doing so, Fichte loudly recommended himself to the German intellectual public as a worthy successor to Reinhold, whose recently vacated chair he had just filled in Jena. Ironically, this air of unbroken succession would quickly win him more recrimination and disappointment than praise.³³

In a letter from December 1793, only a couple of months before his review of *Aenesidemus* was published, Fichte acknowledges the merits of Schulze's criticisms, but he nonetheless maintains that the nature of their success lay in exposing the *particular*

³² Fichte's relationship with Schulze was already complicated by the latter's "very harsh and sarcastic review of [his] *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*." Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte's *Aenesidemus* Review and the Transformation of German Idealism" *The Review of Metaphysics*, 34 (1981: March): 545-68, 547.

³³ For an account of Fichte's time in Jena (1794-99), see Breazeale, *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 1-49.

errors into which Reinhold and, by extension, Kant had gotten themselves. The more *general* task of providing a principled foundation for philosophy remains an uncritically felt necessity for Fichte—no less real, say, than the necessity felt by a freezing mountaineer at dusk in search of a spruce hut. Fichte writes:

[Aenesidemus] has overthrown Reinhold in my eyes, has made me suspicious of Kant, and has overturned my whole system from the ground up. One cannot live under the open sky. It cannot be helped; the system must be rebuilt. And this what I have been faithfully doing for the past six weeks or so. Come celebrate the harvest with me! I have discovered a new foundation, out of which it will be easy to develop the whole of philosophy. Kant's philosophy, as such, is correct—but only in the results and not its reasons.³⁴

However willing Fichte is to abandon Reinhold's system, "he does not abandon Reinhold's systematic vision, nor does he conclude with the skeptic that the quest for a 'first principle' must be abandoned."³⁵ In light of his soon to begin engagement with the articulation of his Doctrine of Science (*Wissenschaftslehre*), it is understandable why he was not in a position to abandon this quest: the Review of *Aenesidemus* is the first adumbration of his novel effort to prioritize practical reason within a scientifically grounded account of self-consciousness. This is, so to speak, Fichte's "discovery," namely, "That philosophy can become scientific only if it is presented as a system founded upon a single first principle, a first principle that it itself founded upon nothing but the indubitably certain self-positing Act of the I."³⁶

³⁴ Fichte to H. Stephani, December 1793. Cited in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 56.

³⁵ Breazeale, *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 57.

³⁶ *Ibid.* The use of "discovery" in this context is Breazeale's.

From the perspective of many of the students in Jena—or at least the circle of students who would make up the vanguard of German philosophy—Fichte’s purported discovery of a solution to Reinhold’s unsuccessful account of the self-relatedness of human consciousness had an unforeseen effect. Rather than being received as an improvement, it instead ended up drawing attention to the very validity of the problem, thereby lending unintentional momentum to the growing suspicion that the question about foundations wasn’t being asked right—if it could in fact be asked at all. This resulted in an atmosphere of increasing doubt surrounding the foundationalist trajectory of Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* as well as the growing assurance that attempts to rehabilitate it would bring diminishing returns. But while it is true that thinkers such as Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, Friedrich Hölderlin, Isaac Sinclair, and Novalis—all students of Reinhold in Jena—were among the already vocal vanguard of critics of the *Elementarphilosophie*, the impetus to, as Kierkegaard would put it, “go further” than Kant by means of Kant was not itself being called into question.³⁷ At least not by the teachers. At least not yet.

The general frustration with the impetus to “go further” was its tendency (specifically in terms of the attempt to bridge the transcendental-empirical divide) to solve Kant’s problems by means of the very same solutions Kant had used to create more problems for himself in the first place. It was as though the embattled proponents of first principles had decided that, if only they upped the wattage, the blind would finally see the light.

³⁷ Cf. Rüdiger Bubner, “Von Fichte zu Schlegel” in *Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre 1794*, 35-49; 37: “Bekanntlich hat die auf Kant folgende und seinem kritischen Bemühen antwortende Spekulation *mit Kant über Kant hinausgehen* wollen.”

This was the atmosphere in Jena when Fichte arrived in May 1794 as Reinhold's replacement:

The students of Reinhold were prepared to be given new arguments against the possibility of philosophizing in terms of a highest principle. Instead, Fichte entered the stage in Jena with a mission in mind, namely, to show Reinhold's adherents what was what as far as the philosophy of first principles went. As a result Fichte's arrival—with all due respect for his notably superior intellectual ability—was perceived as an anachronism over and against the deeply rooted state of general metaphilosophical conviction.

[Die Reinhold Studenten waren darauf gefaßt, von Reinholds Nachfolger neue Argumente gegen die Möglichkeit eines Philosophierens aus oberstem Grundsatz zu erfahren. Statt dessen trat Fichte in Jena mit dem Bewußtsein einer Mission auf, nämlich den Renholdianern zeigen zu müssen, was eine Harke in Grundsatzphilosophie sei. So wurde Fichtes Auftritt—bei allem Respekt vor seiner bedeutend überlegenen intellektuellen Kraft—als ein Anachronismus gegenüber dem Stand der allgemeinen metaphilosophischen Grundüberzeugung wahrgenommen.]³⁸

The self-assurance with which Fichte undertook the completion of Kant's critical system was thus, to put it mildly, not entirely shared by his younger—and in some cases soon to be more illustrious—counterparts in Jena. There is clear evidence, however, that as late as 1795 there remained some hope for a philosophy of first principles, at least among thinkers who were not entirely privy to the skeptical upheavals that were taking place at the time in Jena. Nothing perhaps makes this clearer than the often cited exchange of letters between Schelling and Hegel beginning just before Christmas of 1794, in which the two bemoan the state of affairs concerning the philosophical conservatism at the *Stift* in Tübingen, where Hegel had been—and the younger Schelling remained—a student.³⁹

Hegel writes on December 24th, 1794:

³⁸ Frank in *Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre 1794*, p. 22. Translation mine.

³⁹ See F. W. J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente*, ed. Horst Fuhrmans, 3 vols. (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1973), II.53 ff.

Besides that, how do things look in Tübingen? Until the likes of Reinhold or Fichte sits there at the lectern, nothing of substance will come out of that place. Nowhere is the old system so faithfully propagated as there, and even though this might not have any influence on the odd maven, its effects are widespread among the majority of students, whose minds are by and large mechanical. In view of this it is extremely important what sort of system and spirit a professor possesses....

[Wie sieht es denn sonst in Tübingen aus? Ehe nicht eine Art von Reinhold oder Fichte dort auf einem Katheder sitzt, wird nichts Reelles herauskommen. Nirgends wird wohl so getreulich als dort das alte System fortgepflanzt; --und wenn dies auch auf einzelne gute Köpfe keinen Einfluß hat, so behauptet sich die Sache doch in dem größeren Teil, in den mechanischen Köpfen; --in Ansehung dieser ist es sehr wichtig, was ein Professor für ein System, für einen Geist hat....]⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid., 54. Hegel's pedagogical observation about the impressionability of students—especially weaker ones—is primarily concerned with the conservative theological criticism/appropriation of Kant by two of the leading members of the Tübingen faculty, Gottlob Christian Storr and his star pupil, Johann Friedrich Flatt. This concern was rooted in the censorious atmosphere that reigned at many German universities in the late-eighteenth century, especially in the reactionary wake of the French Revolution. Against this background it is understandable that Hegel, along with many intellectuals of his generation, would reject any philosophical position stemming from or reminiscent of the aging representatives of Rationalist orthodoxy. What remained to be seen, however, was whether the partisanship he and his descried in Storr and Flatt would immediately be overcome by the installment of more free-thinking professors “the likes of Reinhold and Fichte.” In fact, the answer to this question lay on the horizon: the hopefulness accompanying the Revolution in France yielded to the Terror of 1793-4, and among German intellectuals there reigned a strong sense of disappointment in the face of this failed marriage of political theory and its application. This is directly reflected in the politically quietist retreat into high aesthetics called for by Schiller in the *Ankündigung* to his literary journal, *Die Horen*, but it is also, if less directly, reflected in early-Romanticism's over-compensatory leanings toward irony and Catholicism. For an overview of the intellectual atmosphere at the Tübinger Stift during this period and its impact on the philosophical development of early Idealism, see Dieter Henrich, “Philosophisch-theologische Problemlagen im Tübinger Stift zur Studienzeit Hegels, Hölderlins und Schellings,” *Hölderlin Jahrbuch* 25 (1986-7): 60-92 and Dieter Henrich, *Grundlegung aus dem Ich: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus, Tübingen – Jena (1790-1794)*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), I.28-72. For Schiller's *Ankündigung*, see *Die Horen*, vols. 1/2 (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1959), iii-ix. See also Paul Hocks and Peter Schmidt, *Literarische und politische Zeitschriften: 1789-1805* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1975), 103-7. For a succinct account of changing attitudes among German intellectuals in the wake of the French Revolution, see Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, 164-71, where he discusses what he calls the “ambiguities of republicanism.”

What is interesting about the belated optimism of the outsiders, Schelling and Hegel, is that they will themselves soon become the most consequential critics of the catch twenty-two that faced Fichte just as insolubly as it had faced all previous attempts to found systems of philosophy on a first principle: how is an absolute principle supposed to relate to the system it is grounding while remaining *absolute*? If, as was the case with Fichte, this principle is an absolutized abstraction of the “I,” then the problem facing a systematic account of self-consciousness is how one element within the “I” is both a) sufficiently unlike the other elements to count as a principle while remaining b) sufficiently like them to somehow relate to them. In retrospect, it is not difficult to imagine why this “solution” began to remind Fichte’s students of the very problem Schulze had diagnosed in Fichte’s predecessor, Reinhold.

In *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* Manfred Frank explores this turn away from foundationalism as a tipping point in the development of Idealism, one at which a generational divide opened among post-Kantian philosophers and as a result of which Fichte, despite his revolutionary zeal, was relegated to the intellectual *ancien régime*. Fichte’s philosophy during this period was an instance of vital innovation within a dying technology, namely, the philosophy of first principles. As a result, rightly or wrongly, the up and coming generation in Jena began to view Fichte as a talented racer who had unfortunately showed up to Le Mans in a Conestoga. This perception appears to have faced his defecting acolytes—which by 1795 would include figures such as Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Hölderlin, Schelling, and Ludwig Tieck—

with a sincerely felt dilemma concerning the ends and means of philosophy: if a philosophy of first principles is downright impossible, is it because “the absolute” is entirely out of reach or because philosophy is the wrong way of going about reaching it? If the former, what if anything is the appropriate task of philosophy? And if the latter, does that mean that the use-value of philosophy must be called into question?

After Fichte

These are the questions that Schelling takes up in his early philosophical writings from 1794-5, in which the grounding, prior role of the absolute within the project of systematizing philosophy will take a gradual, yet decisively antifoundationalist turn.⁴¹

What makes Schelling’s two major works from 1795 so important within the development of early Idealism is the fragile coexistence of speculative Idealism—still in its infancy—and the persistence of an already obsolete discursive reliance on the trope of “first principles.” Dieter Henrich writes in *Konstellationen* that

Schelling’s text *Of the I* is the first publication whose thoughts enter into speculative Idealist thought’s field of gravity. However, in terms of the clarity of its departure from the Kant-oriented basis of Fichte’s *Doctrine of Science* and, correspondingly, in terms of the clarity of its fundamental criticism (*Grundkritik*) of this line of thought [Schelling’s] text lags behind those documents which have become familiar to us through Hölderlin’s circle of friends.

⁴¹ For the purposes of my argument, I have limited my account here to a narrow historical moment. If I were to broaden it, i.e., if I were to follow it only a short distance further into the future, Fichte’s own growing antifoundationalism would itself become apparent. See Tom Rockmore, “Hegel, German Idealism, and Antifoundationalism,” in *Antifoundationalism Old and New*, ed. Tom Rockmore and Beth J. Singer (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 105-25 (especially 114-6).

[Schellings Schrift *Vom Ich* ist die erste Publikation, deren Gedanken in das Gravitationsfeld des spekulativ idealistischen Denkens eingetreten sind. In der Klarheit des Abgehens von der an Kant orientierten Grundlage von Fichtes *Wissenschaftslehre* und somit in der Klarheit ihrer Grundkritik an deren Gedankenführung bleibt diese Schrift aber hinter den Dokumenten zurück, die uns aus Hölderlins Freundeskreis bekannt geworden sind.]⁴²

Had Schelling belonged to the vanguard of young intellectuals in Jena, for whom any philosophy of first principles had become *passé*, he likely would not have expended the intellectual energy required to reconfigure Fichte's early arguments for the "absolute I" into a prototype of dialectical philosophy concerned less with a) the relationship between the absolute and a system than with b) the problem of "relation" in general. Because he did undertake this reconfiguration, however, it can be observed in painstaking detail in his philosophical writings from 1794-5.

Having drawn attention to the philosophical context out of which and over and against which these writings emerged, I will now turn to an account of the evolution of the themes of "relation" and "the absolute" in Schelling's transition away from foundationalism, tracing their development from the theoretical impasse of his *Form* essay to the *Philosophical Letters*' practical answer to the "riddle of the world." In the course of these early texts Schelling undertakes a tortuous, at times retrograde ascent toward a dialectical conception of relation. In doing so he abandons a hierarchical model of relation that is grounded in causality in favor of a coordinate or interdependent model of immanent opposition that hovers in reciprocity. The drama of this movement is on full, if oftentimes only implicit, display in Schelling's early works, but an account of how

⁴² Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 120.

Schelling reached this point has never fully been given by scholars. This account within Schelling is worth giving, however. For, as I will show, such an account provides us a propaedeutic for his period's by no means sudden "turn" to a philosophical conception of Greek tragedy.

CHAPTER II

FREEDOM FROM THE UNCONDITIONED: THE “TRAGIC TURN” AWAY FROM FOUNDATIONALISM IN SCHELLING’S EARLY PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS (1794-5)

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter I characterized the alienated relationship of post-Kantian philosophy with its own ends, noting that the goal of systematicity was bound up with the criterion of “groundedness,” and that this criterion was in turn bound to the task of identifying an absolute first principle which was both a) unconditioned and b) from which the entire system would unfold continuously. The difficulty of this first principle, however, lay precisely in the curious relation it was supposed to have with the system it was meant to ground, viz., it was to be *neither* merely internal to the system *nor* altogether absent from it. In 1794-5 Schelling takes up this problem in three works: *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy* (1794), *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (1795); and the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795). When taken together, these works trace their own idiosyncratic arc within the trajectory of early Idealism.

The arc comes to rest in the famous discussion of Greek Tragedy in the tenth and final letter of the *Philosophical Letters*, but the significance of Schelling’s “tragic turn”

becomes clear only when we understand it as part of his response to an escalating crisis in post-Kantian thought.⁴³ Thus, as we observe Schelling struggling more and more in the *Form* essay to answer the problem “of the *possibility of philosophy as such*,” we cannot help but notice how, over the course of this struggle, he grows less and less sure that this problem *of philosophy* can be answered *by philosophy*.⁴⁴ The alienation of philosophy as a means from its own ends is ironically inseparable from the increasingly reflexive nature of philosophy during the modern period, i.e., the alienation of its ends and means approaches its crisis at the pace with which philosophy come to take *itself* as its own end.

The young Schelling is one of the first German thinkers to begin recognizing this conflict of ends and means and the manner in which it reproduced itself at nearly every level of philosophical inquiry. For Schelling, systemic or “macro” divisions, e.g., among philosophical schools such as Dogmatism and Criticism, and topographical or “micro”

⁴³ Cf. Jan Mieszkowski, “Tragedy and the War of the Aesthetic,” in *Schelling and Romanticism*, ed. David S. Ferris. April 2000: 1-12. *Romantic Circles Practice Series*. 22 July 2008. <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/schelling/>>. p. 5.

⁴⁴Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy in The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays, 1794-1796*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 39, **[I, 88]**, **I.1.267**. Unless otherwise noted, all English references in this chapter to Schelling’s *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy*, *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, and the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* are taken from this collection. Marti embeds the pagination of the German edition throughout the collection in bold brackets, e.g., **[123]**, but the edition of Schelling’s work that he uses [*Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings Sämmtliche Werke*, 14 vols. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856)] has since been superceded both by the 1927 “Münchener Jubiläumsdruckes” [reprinted as *Schellings Werke*, 6 vols. (München: Beck, 1958-9)], which would have been available to Marti, as well as the still-incomplete *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ? vols. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, (1976-). For each English citation I will give the information for three paginations: 1) the pagination in Marti’s translation; 2) the corresponding pagination from the Cotta edition as given by Marti in bold between brackets (with volume number where possible); and finally 3) and the corresponding pagination from the *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe* in bold as **Section.Volume.Page**, but unbracketed.

divisions, e.g., among accounts of the relation between the empirical and transcendental “I,” were in truth part of a single, self-same, immanent, autotelic “system” or “science.” An improper conception of how the most minute points of articulation in this system related to one another was inseparable from how the system as a whole was bound to relate to itself, and the manner in which competing systems articulated their opposition to one another was inseparable from the articulated self-identity of each.

For Schelling and his fellow early Idealists, the trend was toward viewing these divisions more in terms of their common underlying mode of relation than in terms of the differentiating characteristics of the opposed parties. As I will argue in this chapter, this trend toward a “relational” understanding of difference and identity is part of the overall strategy by early Idealism to overcome the Dualistic underpinnings of post-Kantian foundationalism. Moreover, I will argue that dialectic, as the formal manifestation of this strategy for the overcoming of Dualism, develops in such close proximity to the “tragic turn” in Schelling’s *Philosophical Letters* because tragedy’s structure is, as it were, the inspiration for early Idealism’s exit strategy from the dualistic impasse of reflection. Moreover, I will pay special attention to the manner in which philosophy in the late-eighteenth century, as it grew increasingly more explicit (or self-conscious) about its occupation with accounts of self-consciousness (or being explicit), became more and more a historically invested, and thus in practice historiographical enterprise.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn: Philosophy as Critical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-33.

Remarkably, this can be observed in miniature within Schelling's three major texts from 1794-5, over the course of which three different philosophical positions emerge: 1) An eager acolyte of Fichtean foundationalism becomes 2) a convinced (if only temporary) enemy of theoretical philosophy becomes 3) the supposed founding father of the philosophy of tragedy (and therewith the founding father of a tragic model of philosophical history). Despite the fact that dramatic transformations were necessary in order for Schelling to begin where he began and end up at the "tragic turn" a year later, both of the two predominate trends of scholarship on the young Schelling have tended to ignore the developmental importance of his earliest works.⁴⁶ Following these trends, the early works of Schelling are thus treated either 1) as a minor episode in post-Kantianism—or Schelling's own career, for that matter—with little attempt to account for the "tragic turn" of the Tenth Letter or 2) the Tenth Letter is privileged as a point of departure for the discourse of aesthetics, but without any account of what the tragic turn was *turning from*.

In order to make my argument about the cognate emergence of dialectic and the "tragic turn," it will be necessary to show how Schelling's philosophical transformation in his

⁴⁶ Some notable exceptions to this tendency include Dieter Jähnig, *Schelling: Die Kunst in der Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1966), I.9-20; Dieter Henrich, *Grundlegung aus dem Ich: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus, Tübingen – Jena (1790-1794)*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), II.1551-1699; Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 73-89; Theodore D. George, "A Monstrous Absolute: Schelling, Kant, and the Poetic Turn in Philosophy," in *Schelling Now*, ed. Jason M Wirth (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 135-46; Leonardo V. Distaso, *The Paradox of Existence: Philosophy and Aesthetics in the Young Schelling* (Boston: Kluwer, 2004); as well as a collection of source materials for the study of Schelling's early philosophy, *Materialien zu Schellings Philosophischen Anfängen*, ed. Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1975).

early works lay the foundation for this double birth. In what follows I will thus offer a close reading of these three early texts from the perspective of the “tragic turn,” which has to this point remained unexamined by literary and philosophical scholars alike.

II. Leveling the Playing Field: The *Form* Essay and Schelling’s Ambivalence toward Fichte’s *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*

In *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy* Schelling writes that “the newest publications in the philosophical world” have renewed in his mind thoughts in need of closer examination. On the one hand Schelling has in mind skeptical objections against Kant’s critical philosophy, primarily the *Aenesidemus* text of G. E. Schulze and Salomon Maimon’s *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*. On the other hand he has in mind those thinkers, such as Reinhold and Fichte—and at this point Schelling himself—whose efforts were directed toward bolstering the core insights of Kant’s philosophy against precisely those particular shortcomings which exposed it to the largely valid attacks by skeptics. Schelling recognizes the validity of many of these attacks, acknowledging in the *Form* essay that his own ambivalence toward the Kantian philosophy came

...through the study of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which nothing seemed more obscure and harder to understand—from the very start—than the attempt to lay the foundation for a form of all philosophy without having anywhere established a principle that would not only furnish an original form as the root of all particular forms but also give the reason for its necessary connection with the particular forms that depended on it.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Schelling, *Form*, 38, [I, 87], I.1.265.

Schelling's concern with form cannot be underestimated as a mere species of the form/content problem, because the "form of all philosophy" does not contain the content of a particular philosophy the way that a crucible contains coal or iron. Rather, the problem is how philosophical systems such as Kant's, which are themselves supposed to be purely formal *critiques* of philosophical thinking in general, can be provided with a "form" which is *a priori* in the Kantian sense of being both universal and necessary. Even on the assumption that this burden of universality is met, however, there remains the second problem with which Schelling is struggling, viz., how does this form of forms *relate* to the particular forms it has grounded?

These same concerns were put forth by Fichte himself earlier that same year in *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), the text on which Schelling largely based his early interpretation of Fichte and from which he largely inherited the agenda of the *Form* essay.⁴⁸ In *Concerning the Concept*, Fichte defines the task facing post-Kantian philosophy in the following terms:

In short, how can *the certainty of the first principle itself* be established? And what is *the warrant for the specific kind of inference by which we infer the certainty of other propositions from the certainty of the first principle?* ...It would take a science to answer these questions: *the science of science as such.*⁴⁹

In both Schelling's and Fichte's cases the problem is the same: a first principle is required which is both a) unconditioned by any other principle and yet somehow b)

⁴⁸ See Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism : The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 473.

⁴⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre in Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 105.

necessarily related to all other principles in the system. On the face of it, this is a paradox, in so far as it demands both a) a qualitative difference between the first principle and the system and b) a causal (at least logically) relationship to the system which is highly intimate, demanding a sort of proximity that is at odds with its exceptional status.

A. At the Level of the System

This paradox, moreover, is not only not avoided at the meta level of *science of science as such*, but is in fact fully reproduced. In the Preface to the second edition (1797) of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) Fichte revisits his call for a more pure critique of philosophy, and in doing so he demonstrates the structural similarities (and the growing consciousness thereof) between philosophy's ends and means. "One can philosophize about metaphysics itself.... And this is very advantageous for the cultivation of the science of metaphysics itself. The philosophical name for this sort of inquiry is 'critique.' This, anyway, is all that ought to be called by that name."⁵⁰ The most famous "critique," of course, is Kant's, but Fichte is explicit in the Preface to the second edition about the fact that, in so far as Kant's works contain any

⁵⁰ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 97. The second edition of *Concerning the Concept* did not, of course, appear until after Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. I have not been able to establish whether Fichte's stance against Kant's "critique" here is or is not meant as a rejoinder to Schelling's elevation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to a true meta-system, i.e., in explicit contrast with Fichte's *Concerning the Concept*. Cf. *Philosophical Letters* (p. 171, [304], I.3.72.), where Schelling writes, "By itself the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, or contains, the genuine science of knowledge [die eigentliche Wissenschaftslehre] because it is valid for all *knowledge* [Wissenschaft]."

metaphysical content whatsoever, they contain far too much to be called “pure.”⁵¹

“Critique,” Fichte insists,

is not metaphysics, but lies beyond metaphysics. It is related to metaphysics in exactly the same way that metaphysics is related to the ordinary point of view of natural understanding. Metaphysics explains the ordinary point of view, and metaphysics is itself explained by critique.⁵²

If Fichte’s analogy raises more concerns than it settles, it nonetheless captures—perhaps unwittingly—the difficulty and felt importance of arriving at a canon over and against which to judge the apparent mutual exclusivity of competing metaphysical systems.

Kant had defined the task of philosophy along similar lines, writing in the Preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that it must “decide as to the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics in general, and determine its sources, its extent, and its limits—all in accordance with principles. . . . This tribunal is no other than the *critique of pure reason*.”⁵³ The problem, as Fichte himself puts it, is that Kant’s “critique of pure reason” was not entirely pure, leaving the philosophical community in need of a more formal account of the conditions under which metaphysics is able to relate both a) to the “ordinary point of view,” i.e., consciousness not occupied with itself, as well as b) itself from a formal, redoubled “meta” perspective. As with the particular problem of an absolute first principle, the general project of what Fichte calls “critique” suffers from the

⁵¹ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 97.

⁵² Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 97.

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Boston: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), p. 9 [A xii]. Unless otherwise noted, all English references in this chapter to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* are to Kemp Smith’s translation. I have provided Roman numeral pagination for the English edition as well as the standard marginal A/B pagination in brackets, e.g. “9 [Axii].” Kant offers a rather elaborate, stylized biography of Metaphysics in the first Preface, which culminates in a call to theology and lawmakers (*Gesetzgebung*) to feely submit themselves to trial at the hands of “critique” (p. 9 [A xi, note “a”]).

fact that its felt necessity was as certain as its possibility was dubious. Schelling, for instance, remarks in the Postscript to the *Form* essay:

What the author wishes is that no reader may be a stranger to the great feeling of necessity evoked by the hope of an ultimate unity of knowledge, faith, and of will, which is the ultimate heritage of mankind.⁵⁴

This underlying unity, something Kant had tried to provide in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), is the goal put forth by Fichte and Schelling alike in *Concerning the Concept* and the *Form* essay, respectively, but in both cases there is conscious acknowledgement that the goal, while it *has* been brought to the point of articulation in these texts, has by no means been realized.⁵⁵ Fichte, for his part, “asks the public’s forgiveness for the preliminary and incomplete character” of his text, looking forward to “such a time as he himself or someone else can complete this job.”⁵⁶ Schelling’s assessment of the state of the field in the *Form*’s Postscript attests to the fact that, at least from the perspective of its protagonists, the job remained unfinished. He notes that philosophers lament the lack of worldly influence enjoyed by their science, but he wonders: *Have they pondered what they are complaining about?*

They lament the lack of influence on the part of a science which, as such, has existed nowhere, and they complain that one makes no use of axioms held to be true by only one part of mankind, and even that part acknowledges them only under very different aspects.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Schelling, *Form* 55, [I, 112], I.1.299-300.

⁵⁵ The mutual determination of articulation and realization is itself a developing issue within Idealism. See Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵⁶ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 98 [I, 34]. This problem is taken up at great length in §3 and especially §5, “What Is the Boundary Separating the Universal *Wissenschaftslehre* from the Particular Sciences Which Are Based On It?”

⁵⁷ Schelling, *Form* 55, [I, 112], I.1.300.

This non-existence of a scientifically presentable mode of philosophy circulates back onto Fichte's analogy concerning the relationship of critique, metaphysics, and the ordinary point of view: minus a successful instance of critique, there cannot be a scientifically grounded metaphysics, without which philosophy cannot rightly insist on a substantial or specific differentiation of its own perspective from "common sense." This predicament would in turn seem to suggest that critique *does in fact*, if only ironically, stand in the same relation to metaphysics that metaphysics stands to the ordinary point of view: a skeptic might say that one isn't significantly different from the other; another might say there isn't much of a relation at all to be found between any of them.

Thus, in their provisional attempts to define a possible way out for philosophy, Schelling and Fichte had rearticulated the terms of the impasse. In all fairness to them, this was bound to be the fate of critical philosophy, given the skeptical posture that it insisted on taking over and against itself. As Fichte had recently declaimed in his "Review of *Aenesidemus*" (1794), philosophical reasoning owes every step forward it has taken to skepticism for the tireless watch it has kept over philosophy's self-satisfied slumbers. "[N]othing is more to be desired," he insists, "than that skepticism might crown its labors and drive inquiring reason on to the attainment of its lofty goal."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Fichte, "Review of *Aenesidemus*" in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 59 [I, 3].

B. Within the System

The first edition of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* concludes with a short section titled “Part III: Hypothetical Division of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.” Fichte omits the section from the second edition, but it was of great importance for Schelling’s *Form* essay and *Of the I*.⁵⁹ The basic concern of this section is, as elsewhere in *Concerning the Concept*, the problem of relation. Regardless of what level Fichte’s discussion is operating on at any given moment, the primary concern—as with Kant before him—is how the formal structure of philosophy accommodates itself to its own content (not to mention the content of human experience). Just as with the absolute, which can neither simply be a part of the system nor altogether separate from it, it was incumbent upon Fichte to explain how the *Wissenschaftslehre*, grounded upon the absolute first principle and grounding with respect to all other sciences, related to itself as well as to “others.” Fichte’s concern with this explanation is evident from the last few sections of Part II, which offer assurances that the *Wissenschaftslehre* will relate to the other sciences along the paradoxical lines of an absolute first principle: 1) It will be something different from and superordinate to or meta with respect to the sciences (§5. What Is the Boundary Separating the Universal *Wissenschaftslehre* from the Particular Sciences Which Are Based On It?); 2) Moreover, it will be something not only not superfluous within the genus of meta-sciences but will indeed be *the* meta-science (§6. “How is the General *Wissenschaftslehre* Related to Logic in Particular?”); 3) And yet, despite being perched at the apex of formal thinking, it will not be abstracted to the point

⁵⁹ See Schelling, *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, 133-4.

that it runs the risk of losing purchase (§7. “How is the *Wissenschaftslehre*, qua Science, Related to Its Object?”).

The tenuousness of articulating the “(both/and)/ (neither/nor)” relationality of the *Wissenschaftslehre* belongs to the conundrum of the absolute, the problematic nature of which it seeks to capture and reproduce as its form as well as its content. Daniel Breazeale emphasizes that one of the most compelling tasks of *Concerning the Concept* is explaining the difference between the Act of absolute self-positing and all other acts of empirical consciousness. A sovereign obstacle for Fichte on this front is the fact that this Act, by virtue of its absoluteness, is “an Act of which, Fichte freely admits, we may never actually be (directly) conscious at all.”⁶⁰ What is perhaps most fascinating about the obstacle facing Fichte here are the grounds upon which he defends its circumnavigation. “To be sure,” Breazeale writes.

Philosophy must [according to Fichte] deal with “representations,” and the act of representation is the “highest act” in which the philosopher as such can engage. But from this it does not follow that representation is the highest act of the human mind. Against Reinhold, Fichte insists that we can and must form the concept of a still higher act and that the principle expressing this highest act of the mind will be the required first principle of our new science.⁶¹

This is a summary of Part II, §7, in which Fichte grapples with the problem he had taken up in the *Aenesidemus* review, viz., that Reinhold’s Elementary Philosophy was a) worth imitating based on its desire for foundational certainty and systematicity, but was b) doomed in so far as its Principle of Consciousness—taken on its own terms an admirable description of empirical consciousness—was too bound to the empirical rigors of

⁶⁰ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 91.

⁶¹ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 91.

representation to ever be an *absolute* first principle. The search for the absolute within empirical consciousness will always remain disappointed, because the conditions of representation do not permit the absolute isolation of either subject or object. Fichte acknowledges this impasse of the Elementary Philosophy, and in doing so hints at his own impending succession of Reinhold as the torchbearer of what—at least until Schelling’s *Philosophical Letters*—counted as “the Kantian philosophy”:

The absolute subject, the I, is not given by empirical intuition; it is, instead, posited by intellectual intuition. And the absolute object, the not-I, is that which is posited in opposition to the I. Neither of these occurs in empirical consciousness except when a representation is related to them. In empirical consciousness they are both present only indirectly, as the representing subject and was that is represented. One is never conscious of the *absolute* subject (the representing subject which would not be represented) or of the *absolute* object (a thing in itself, independent of all representation) as something empirically given. Reinhold might well be reserving discussion of such topics for some future time.⁶²

The end of Part II and Part III of *Concerning the Concept* are an important return to this dialectic (or perhaps more accurately the *anti-dialectic*) of the absolute subject and absolute object. Here, Fichte delineates the three “absolutes” from which will follow “new and thoroughly elaborated theories of the pleasant, the beautiful, the sublime, the free obedience of nature to its own laws, God...new theories of natural law and morality,” i.e., the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a unified theory of theoretical, practical, and aesthetic philosophy. These absolutes must of course be drawn from our experience of empirical consciousness, but they must not be located therein, lest they make easy prey for the likes of *Aenesidemus*. Fichte defines these three absolutes as 1) the absolute I, 2)

⁶² Fichte, “Review of *Aenesidemus*,” 65.

the absolute not-I and 3) “an absolute capacity (*Vermögen*) within ourselves to determine ourselves absolutely according to the effect of both the not-I and the I.”⁶³

In all three cases Fichte qualifies his definition of the absolute in terms of the manner in which it may be brought into representation, i.e., how its absoluteness is limited. The absolute I, which autonomously provides itself with its own laws, “can be represented only under the condition of an affection (*Einwirkung*) by the not-I, i.e., a heteronomous force, whereas the absolute not-I, which is independent of human laws, can be represented only in terms of these laws. For both the absolute I and the absolute not-I, which are absolutely opposed to one another, the conditions of their representation lie in the point of contact at which they are “of a kind.” For Fichte this point of contact or “third term”⁶⁴ is, taken generally, the realm of empirical experience or phenomena taken as a whole. His third absolute, which would seem to be nothing other than a formal abstraction of the coming together of the I and the not-I, amounts to an absolute capacity for synthesis, which is precisely the use Kant makes of the Productive Imagination in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he defines it as a “capacity for synthesis a priori...by means of which we connect the manifold of intuition from one direction and the condition of the necessary unity of pure apperception from the other.”⁶⁵

This connection of the unity of pure apperception and a pre-synthesized manifold is homologous with Fichte’s third absolute, which enters representation only insofar as it

⁶³ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 135.

⁶⁴ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 134.

⁶⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A124. Translation mine.

differentiates between the effect of the I and the effect of the not-I, a situation which would seem to be the highest possible standpoint within philosophy, at once bound to the subject-object admixture of empirical consciousness and yet conscious of the conditions under which consciousness is possible: consciousness of self-consciousness. Fichte himself, at least in *Concerning the Concept*, does not think that philosophy has any other absolutes at its disposal than these three. In fact, he ends Part III by categorically insisting that “No philosophy can go beyond these three absolutes.” In doing so, he presents the options available to any philosophy of first principles: foundation upon the I; the not-I; or the capacity for self-determination through synthesis.

As we have seen, the third possibility is synonymous with Reinhold’s failed attempt to derive the I and the not I from the faculty of representation, a concept which Fichte insists cannot serve as an unconditioned point of departure for the system because it is “derived from (and thus is to be demonstrated by means of) the first principles.”⁶⁶ The remaining two options are the I and the not-I. Which of the two is ultimately prior to the other is the question over which German philosophy will struggle quite a bit around the turn of the nineteenth century. Those who hold to a program of foundationalism based on a single, absolute principle (Fichte)⁶⁷ will pursue the derivation of the not-I from the I; others, however, and among them Schelling, will begin questioning whether the opposition of the I and the not-I might be less a matter of subordination and causation than of coordinate opposition and dialectic. At its earliest moments in the *Form* essay,

⁶⁶ Fichte, *Concerning the Concept*, 134.

⁶⁷ Proper to Foundationalism itself there was, of course, an internal dialectic, which Schelling will take up in the *Philosophical Letters*.

however, Schelling's departure toward a dialectical model of self-consciousness manifests itself only indirectly through his failure to appropriate fully Fichte's hierarchical derivation from the I.

On one level, Fichte's outline of the three possible candidates for the role of absolute first principle has a determining effect on the organization of Schelling's *Form* essay. At the point Schelling announces that "the problem which was the real topic of this essay is solved," all he has done is reiterate Fichte's conclusion that a) a "science of science" was necessary in order to guard philosophy against the justifiable attacks of skeptics such as *Aenesidemus* and that b) this meta-science or "critique" or "form of all philosophy" would consist of the presentation of the absolute first principle governing all other sciences, including itself.⁶⁸ Schelling's full embrace of the tripartite aspectualization of the absolute first principle is evident throughout the *Form* essay, both in so far as he adduces three axioms (*Grundsätze*) and, more pointedly, in so far as they are the same three adduced by Fichte. Schelling writes, "In short, anything whatsoever that can become the content of a science is covered, insofar as it given as unconditional, as conditional, or as both simultaneously. A fourth possibility does not exist."⁶⁹ In this respect the affinity with Fichte's position is clear.

⁶⁸ Fichte calls all three candidates—the I, the not-I and the capacity for synthesis—absolutes, whereas Schelling refers to each of them in the *Form* essay as an "axiom" (*Grundsatz*). The role they play in the each thinker's presentation is, I think, in effect the same.

⁶⁹ Schelling, *Form*, 47-8, [I, 101], I.1.285.

Already here in the *Form* essay, however, and at the very points where the young Schelling appears to be merely parroting Fichte, he is implicitly opening a line of inquiry which will lead him away from the Fichtean trajectory of subjective Idealism. Frederick Beiser notes that, “despite his earlier Fichtean convictions, Schelling’s early tract departs from his mentor in important respects. In subtle and unconscious ways the ground is already laid for the later break with Fichte.”⁷⁰ The early tract Beiser has in mind is *Of the I*, in which a fully developed opposition between Dogmatism (Spinoza, the not-I) and Criticism (“Kant,” the I)—an opposition Fichte himself often discusses—takes shape. This agreement over the terms of the problematic facing philosophy is, to be sure, undermined at points by the growing lack of assurance about which side of the opposition can rightly claim priority, but despite this ambivalence “Fichte’s system was preferable...because it gave a foundation for the belief in freedom...[which] was precious for Schelling for political as well as moral reasons.”⁷¹

Only later, in the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, will Schelling relocate freedom to a position a) over and against philosophical systems rather than b) a discursive position within them, and by that time his sense of dependence on the ineluctable priority of criticism as a system will have dissolved. What is already clear within the *Form* essay, however, is that the movement away from Fichte’s hierarchical articulation of the absolute is underway in this *still earlier* work. In a more lengthy

⁷⁰ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 472. It should in all fairness be noted that it is due to the research of scholars such as Frederick Beiser that the chronology of this debate—itsself a hunt after an originary event—can continue to be pushed backwards and forwards. Nonetheless, this process is productive in so far as it relies on a continual renegotiation of the thinkers in question in terms of contemporary, self-reflective scholarship.

⁷¹ Ibid.

definition of the three axioms, Schelling does oppose the "...form which is absolutely unconditional" to the one which is "...conditioned, which can become possible only through the content of a superior axiom."⁷² In this respect, Schelling follows Fichte, as he does when he defines the third axiom as "the form which combines the [other] two forms [as] the form of conditionality determined by unconditionality."⁷³ He begins to differ from Fichte, however, when he writes that "the third, which combines both, could not furnish a new form as such, but it could amount to a form no less important."⁷⁴ I take this qualification of his own concession to be Schelling beginning to hedge on his acceptance of the demotion of the third axiom or absolute to a merely derivative status, and I think that it is here that Schelling, in the act of recapitulating Fichte's argument, encounters a point of resistance concerning the concept of relation which begins driving him a) away from Fichte and b) in his own, more dialectical direction.

Schelling, like Fichte, recognizes the need to locate the absolute somewhere other than within empirical consciousness, but unlike Fichte he does not seem as clear (even to himself) about where to locate "the third" within a hierarchical account of the form of all philosophy. Fichte seems rather sure that synthesis or the capacity thereof is dependent on a subject-object opposition which emerges only within empirical consciousness. Schelling, however, is beginning here to show signs of an inclination toward the quasi-speculative position according to which the opposition of the I and the not-I, rather than merely being the condition for any capacity for synthesis, is in fact itself conditioned by a

⁷² Schelling, *Form*, 50, [I, 104], I.1.290.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

prior identity whose nature does not permit of any “I” whatsoever, no matter how “absolute” that I may be. With this in mind, Schelling returns to the third axiom—Fichte’s point of departure—as a promising way out. When Schelling characterizes the third axiom as offering “a form no less important,” he is gesturing toward a dialectical understanding of the relation between the conditioned and the unconditioned, the I and the not-I, form and content, etc. which sublates the linear (albeit circular) movement of Fichte’s account, though without entirely forfeiting the ultimate dependence on a subjective (philosophically speculative) position.

It is both ironic and not at all ironic that Schelling turns to Kant to motivate this gesture. After the elaborate definitions of the three axioms, at the end of which he remarks on the “no less important” value of the third axiom, he writes:

It is surprising indeed that the great philosopher who had pointed out those two terms [i.e., the first and second axioms according to Schelling]⁷⁵, did not add the third, especially since he always mentioned a third one when he counted the particular form of thought dependent on the original form. *And that third is possible only through the original connection between [the first two forms], that is, though a third mode of the original form.*⁷⁶

What exactly Schelling means or thinks he means by “original” in this context is not altogether immediately evident. Whether he means that the “original form” is itself prior to or cognate with the forms of the I and the not-I is difficult to decide, but the undecidability is itself at the root of the problem being worked out by Schelling at this

⁷⁵ The two terms Schelling has in mind are actually “analytic” and “synthetic.” Because Schelling’s piece is in its own right an intervention with respect to Kant’s rigid distinction between these two terms, and because of the dense and highly contested reception of the analytic/synthetic distinction, I have, as far as possible, kept them out of this discussion.

⁷⁶ Schelling, *Form*, 50, [I, 104-5], I.1.291.

point.⁷⁷ Fichte's hierarchical, deductive arrangement of things presents a departure from the subject-object admixture characteristic of representation, but the flipside of this characteristic was the fact that not only a) is representation necessarily marked by this admixture, but b) this admixture was sufficient to blur the horizon of absoluteness. Put another way, Fichte's reaction to Reinhold, which accepts the shortcomings of a reliance on representation, but which remains tied to a project of first principles, could establish this principle *as* absolute only in so far as it maintained a sharp distinction between subject and object, the I and the not-I.

Kant himself faces this dilemma throughout his critical works, and Schelling's surprise in the passage above reflects the persistent approach toward (and deferral of) this problem within the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Like Fichte, Schelling " marvels that [Kant] does not specifically indicate the connection of the particular forms of knowledge" with an original form, but unlike him Schelling is referring to a form which is the mode of relation between the first two—but which does not a) lie ontologically downstream from the them or b) assert the subordination of one to the other.⁷⁸ We have strong evidence that this is the direction Schelling is taking from his footnote to this section, in which he directs our attention to a moment in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant seems to suggest a position consistent with the one Schelling is developing in the *Form* essay. The note reads:

⁷⁷ Motokiyo Fukaya, *Anschauung des Absoluten in Schellings früher Philosophie (1794 – 1800)* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 15-23.

⁷⁸ Schelling *Form*, 50, [I, 104-5], I.1.290-1.

One passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (§ 11) actually contains a reference to this connection and to its importance in regard to the form of all science. Such passages in which *such* references occur—like single rays of light which this admirable genius sheds on the whole [corpus] of the sciences—vouch for the correctness of those traits by which Fichte (in the preface of his above-mentioned essay) tries to characterize Kant.⁷⁹

Paragraph 11 (§11), to which Schelling is here referring, is a series of notes, which Kant appended in the B edition to his presentation of the Table of Categories. In the third note Kant takes up the correspondence between 1) the category of community (*Gemeinschaft*) in the Table of Categories and 2) the class of disjunctive judgments in the Table of Judgments (A70/B95).⁸⁰ This third note is without doubt the passage Schelling has in mind in his footnote, and its relevance to his concerns is clear from the fact that, following the presentation of his three axioms (50 [104]), the remainder of the essay (50-54 [105-110]) functions as an application of his insight about the third axiom's cognate status with the first two, i.e., his insight about the cognate status of synthesis, to each class within the Table of Judgments. The purpose of this application is the demonstration of Kant's implicit claim concerning the coordinate status of synthesis with that of either unconditionality (Schelling's first axiom) or conditionality (his second axiom). In the third note Kant writes:

To gain assurance that they do actually accord, we must observe that in all disjunctive judgments the sphere (that is, the multiplicity which is contained in any one judgment) is represented as a whole divided into parts (the subordinate concepts), and that since no one of them can be contained under any other, they

⁷⁹ Schelling, *Form*, 50, note **, [I, 105], I.1.291-2.

⁸⁰ In many respects Kant's tables have been consigned to the margins of scholarship, and a somewhat specialized knowledge of eighteenth-century ideas about logic is necessary to make much sense of what is supposed to be at stake in them, but it is hard to get around the fact that their importance for the *Form* essay's structure is no less great than—and indeed the inspiration for a departure from—Fichte's *Concerning the Concept*.

are thought as coordinated with, not subordinated to, each other, and so as determining each other, not in one direction only, as in a series, but reciprocally, as in an aggregate—if one member of the division is posited, all the rest are excluded, and conversely. Now in a *whole* which is made up of *things*, a similar combination is being thought; for one thing is not subordinated, as effect, to another, as cause of its existence, but, simultaneously and reciprocally, is coordinated with it, as cause of the determination of the other (as, for instance, in a body the parts of which reciprocally attract and repel each other). This is a quite different kind of connection from that which is found in the mere relation of cause to effect (of ground to consequence), for in the latter relation the consequence does not in its turn reciprocally determine the ground, and therefore does not constitute with it a whole—thus the world, for instance, does not with its Creator serve to constitute a whole. The procedure which the understanding follows in representing to itself the sphere of a divided concept it likewise follows when it thinks a thing as divisible; and just as, in the former case, the members of a division exclude each other, and yet are combined in one sphere, so the understanding represents to itself the parts of the latter as existing (as substances) in such a way that, while each exists independently of the others, they are yet combined together in one whole.⁸¹

Taken in the context of Schelling's essay and its relation to Fichte's *Concerning the Concept*, this otherwise abstruse passage becomes a valuable clue for understanding the overlaps and interstices between Schelling and Fichte. Fichte's commitment to unearthing systematicity and foundational certitude within Kant lingers loudly in Schelling's essay as he surveys Kant's tables, and he seems unable to make sense of why the latter seems so sure that all of the classes of judgment (quantity, quality, relation, modality) do have something in common but then refrains from saying exactly what that commonality is. There is, as Kant notes in the passage above, a robust structural symmetry between the Table of Categories and the Table of Judgments as well as, as Schelling notes in the *Form* essay, between the classes within each table. Schelling observes this pattern—four classes in each table, three forms in each class, and in each class the third form combines the first two—and argues that this pattern “in itself

⁸¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 117-8 [B 112-3].

implicitly points to an original form, under which all of them stand together, and which imparts to them all they have in common with regard to their form.”⁸² What seems to separate or at least begin separating him from Fichte on this point, however, is that his reading of Kant’s implication locates this original form *not apart* from the system, but rather *within* the system itself. As we saw above, the structure of Fichte’s *Concerning the Concept* and his discussion of “critique” tended to reproduce the dualisms it was trying to overcome by means of an absolute first principle; here at this early phase of his philosophical career we see Schelling, by contrast, reinvesting his concept of the absolute with a sort of immanence that prefigures his attraction to aspects of Spinozism.⁸³

The original form that Schelling gleans from Kant’s Tables remains part of the project of foundationalism while at the same time incorporating unmistakable traits of a new phase of Idealist thought. The “path toward Absolute Idealism,” as Frederick Beiser calls this early period of Schelling’s philosophy, is a gradual working out of oppositions whose underlying unity could not be expressed by means of the priority of one element over another, i.e., as cause and effect, but only in terms of the immanent relation in which they stand over and against one another.⁸⁴ Concerning Kant’s Table of Judgments, Schelling writes:

⁸² Schelling, *Form*, 51, [I, 105], I.1.292.

⁸³ See Beiser, *German Idealism*, 465-71.

⁸⁴ Whether this phase was itself novel or simply reflected a more accurate assessment of Kant’s own ideas is its own scholarly debate. In his *Commentary to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith cites a long tradition of recognizing Kant’s nuanced approach to foundationalism. “Principles are never self-evident [according to Kant],” he writes, “and yet principles are indispensable. Such was Kant’s unwavering conviction as regards the fundamental postulates alike of knowledge and of conduct. This is only another way of stating that Kant is the real founder of the *Coherence* theory of truth.”

If one looks closely at Kant's table of these forms, then indeed one finds that, instead of placing the original form as the principle of the other forms, Kant placed it among the other, as one on par with them. On more careful investigation one finds not only that the forms of *relation* are the foundation of all the other but also that they are really identical with the original form (the analytic, the synthetic, and the two combined).⁸⁵

Kant's explicit concern in the passage cited earlier is the self-relation of his own system, specifically the Table of Categories and the Table of Judgments. Within his presentation of this concern, however, lies a more general problematic for the account of absolute first principles. Kant's Third Note is a proleptic explanation of how—despite appearances—the category of community (*Gemeinschaft*) does in fact correspond to the schematically corresponding form of disjunctive judgment in the Table of Judgments. As far as the other classes and their forms go, Kant doesn't think that their correspondence warrants a lengthy discussion; as for community and disjunctive judgment, however, he grants that the correspondence “is not as evident as in the case of the others” (*nicht so in die Augen fallend, als bei den übrigen*).⁸⁶

What draws Schelling to this concession must at least in part be the compounded anxiety over a) the relation between seemingly incommensurable elements and b) how this

Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,"* 2nd ed. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1992), 36. See also xxxvi ff.

⁸⁵ Schelling, *Form*, 52, [I, 107], I.1.293-4.. It is clear from the German that Schelling's point is that the original form underlies all three forms: “Wenn man die Kantische Tafel dieser Formen genauer betrachtet, so findet man wirklich, daß Kant, anstatt die Urform als Princip der übrigen aufzustellen, sie unter den andern—in einer gleichen Reihe—gesetzt hat. Denn, daß die Formen der *Relation* nicht nur allen übrigen zu Grunde liegen, sondern wirklich identisch mit der Urform, (der analytischen, synthetischen, und der gemischten), seien, findet man sogleich bei genauerer Untersuchung.”

⁸⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 117 [B112].

relation, if possible, might be more dialectical than unilateral. Both community and disjunctive judgment are the third form in the class of relation, which is itself in turn the third class in each of the Tables. This intensification of “thirds,” the relation between the third forms (itself a relation of the first two) within the class of relation, makes it a remarkably promising place to look for answers within the symbolic economy of German philosophy. Within the context of Schelling’s *Form* essay and the atmosphere within which it was written, its promise only grows. But if Schelling finds it curious that Kant doesn’t elaborate further on the original form which both 1) unites the tables without 2) falling outside of them and thus 3) begging the question of how it relates to them in the first place, *we* should find it curious that Schelling himself doesn’t bother elaborating further on how Kant’s text does in fact present its preoccupation with this problem.

It is, after all, Schelling himself who tells us that looking closely at the table of forms helps motivate his claims, and a closer look seems to bear out his assertion to an unforeseeable degree. The full entry under the class of relation in the Table of Categories, for example, expands on the term community, reading: [Relation] of Community (reciprocity of agent and patient). This reciprocity of agent and patient (*Wechselwirkung zwischen dem Handelnden und Leidenden*) rather than the subordination of either subject or object to the other provides Schelling with a way to begin thinking about a way out of the double-bind of Fichte’s hierarchical system. The first two forms of judgment under the class of relation are categorical and hypothetical, which correspond to the relational categories of subsistence and causality, respectively. Kant tells us at A73/B98 that all relations of thought in judgments fall into one of three

groups: either 1) of predicate to subject; 2) ground (*Grund*) to consequent; or 3) of the divided knowledge and of the members of the division, taken together, to each other.

In the case of the relation of predicate to subject, the single judgment consists of two concepts, e.g., the ball is red;⁸⁷ in the case of the relation of ground to consequent, however, there are two judgments brought together within a dependent hierarchy, e.g., “If there is a perfect justice, the obstinately wicked are punished.”⁸⁸ In the case of disjunctive judgment and community, by contrast, the relation is not simply one of a judgment binding two concepts or a concept (of causation) binding two judgments, but rather the relation between particular judgments and the act of judging itself. This model of competing claims being weighed against one another, not merely in terms of their particular content but in terms of the particularity itself of their content, is the very structure of tragedy, and it is precisely in the direction of this structural model that Schelling’s thought is headed leading up to the “tragic turn” in the *Philosophical Letters*.

Kant’s remarks further suggest an affinity between this conception of judgment and the thematic concerns of the *Philosophical Letters*, in particular by means of the example he employs to illustrate it:

The disjunctive judgment expresses, therefore, a relation of the parts of the sphere of such knowledge, since the sphere of each part is a complement of the sphere of the others, yielding together the sum-total of the divided knowledge. Take, for instance, the judgment, ‘The world exists either through blind chance, or through

⁸⁷ It would complicate matters at this point even further to raise the question of analytic judgments versus synthetic judgments. I have chosen “The ball is red,” i.e., a synthetic judgment. Kant does not himself offer an example, which is curious.

⁸⁸ This is Kant’s own example. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, 109 [A73/B98].

inner necessity, or through an external cause'. Each of these propositions occupies a part of the sphere of the possible knowledge concerning the existence of a world in general; all of them together occupy the whole sphere.

Kant's example of a disjunctive judgment here could hardly be less innocuous. He could have just as easily written "The ball has no color, or is black, or is white," and in doing so he would have illustrated the manner in which the mutual exclusivity of each judgment in the disjunction contributes to a holistic picture of "balls in general." Instead, he broaches the question of existence! The example seems even less accidental if we consider that the image resurfaces in his third remark from §11, in which he discusses the coordinate status of judgments within the category of community. There he contrasts this coordination with the subordinate relationship proper to causality. His innocuous example here? The Creator and the world. "The world," he writes, "does not with its Creator serve to constitute a whole," because the world does not reciprocally impact its Creator.⁸⁹ When we follow Schelling's directive and look closely at Kant's remarks in §11, it is clear why the Fichtean organization of the *Form* essay gets overtaken by an interruptive reservation about how the first principle is supposed to relate to the system that it is grounding. If the Creator, as Kant writes, does not constitute a whole together with its creation, then how is the absolute first principle conceivable *as* both absolute and *as* a first principle?

Brought to bear on one another, Kant's example of a disjunctive judgment and his example of a causally structured relationship seem to imply that the best possible approach to the problem of groundedness and systematicity would be one that recognizes

⁸⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 117 [B112].

the interrelatedness of the mutually opposed systems of accounting for “the world.” That having been said, and assuming we do not pursue the path of mere chance, the only account that will satisfy the further need for logical continuity is one which dispenses with a causal account that is dependent on a transcendent or absolute agent. The anxiety produced by this new approach, however, is that, for all its problems, the transcendent causal principle, e.g., God, does offer a somewhat conceivable place—logically, if not topographically—for agency, i.e. freedom. Schelling will pursue this anxiety to its limit in *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, and in doing so he will draw into full relief the insolubility of preserving a role for freedom within a systematic presentation of human knowledge.

III. *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, or On the Unconditioned in Human Knowledge*

In contrast to the *Form* essay, Schelling’s *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, or On the Unconditioned in Human Knowledge* (1795) has received a fair amount of scholarly attention. Ironically, one of the most stable elements of scholarship on *Of the I* is this: that Schelling’s conclusions concerning the I as a principle of philosophy are at least confused, if not self-contradictory.⁹⁰ My own sense of the text is twofold: 1) there is

⁹⁰ See Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 109-110; Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein: Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-5)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 126-35; Michael G. Vater, “Schelling’s *Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie* as a Reading of Fichte’s *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*,” in *New Essays in Fichte’s Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Human Knowledge*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001), 183-96; 190; Beiser, *German Idealism*, 471-6.

more than a little confusion in the text concerning Schelling's account of the I, but 2) this confusion reflects the set of competing tendencies that are at the center of his works from this period. Judging from the title, *Of the I* belongs generally to the foundationalist inquiry into a philosophy of first principles inherited from Reinhold, and more specifically to a development of Fichte's determination of the "I" as the highest such principle. However, as I argued in my discussion of the *Form* essay, Schelling's efforts to articulate a coherent account of the I as an absolute first principle never cease from running aground on the question of how such a principle might relate to its system. How is such an I supposed to relate to a world of objects? How is such an I supposed to relate to a world within which it continuously finds an empirical aspect of itself? Schelling's ends are thus at odds with his means in *Of the I*. His sustained (though perhaps strained) commitment to pursue the ends of foundationalism, itself an ironically dogmatic stance by the young thinker, struggles to coexist with his commitment to Kant's critical limitation of theoretical reason to the conditions of reflective consciousness.

Scholars have tended to give priority either to one set of commitments or the other, but I would argue that it is precisely Schelling's ambivalence over and against these commitments that is perhaps the most important observation to be made in *Of the I*. One recent scholar has observed:

If one reviews *On the I's* argument as a whole, one finds two distinct (not easily reconciled) styles of thought in play. On the one hand, there is the transcendental idealism of Kant and Fichte that demands that the thinkable be limited to the conditions of the phenomenal subject-objectivity, and on the other, the metaphysical monism of Spinoza that does not hesitate to characterize the whole

as such, or even to take the *principle* for the explanation of entities *inside* experience as itself an item of philosophical investigation.⁹¹

From this perspective, the confusion that marks *Of the I* is an index of Schelling's impending break with the false dilemma of Criticism and Dogmatism, a position which he will take up fully that same year in the *Philosophical Letters*.⁹² What I will try to show is that this confusion is not something that can be pared away from the presentation of Schelling's argument without doing violence to its dawning insight. Schelling is seizing upon the limitations of the Fichtean trajectory of post-Kantian thought, but he happens to be doing so from within a rigorously developed, if ambivalent, working through of its implications. It therefore risks flattening out the very dialectic that is just coming into relief in Schelling's early works if we reduce their ambivalence or

⁹¹ Vater, "Schelling's *Vom Ich*," 190. The discourse and debate surrounding Spinoza among German intellectuals in the late-eighteenth century is both part of a more general pattern of Spinoza reception in Europe as well as a specific moment within German philosophy. This specifically German moment manifests itself as the "Pantheism Controversy," which erupted following the publication in 1785 of a series of letters between Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn concerning G. E. Lessing's confession that he had become a Spinozist. The correspondence is contained in Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2000). For a more general account of the early reception of Spinoza, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁹² Cf. also Beiser, *German Idealism*: "That Schelling gives the absolute ego a constitutive status in *Vom Ich als Princip* becomes perfectly clear from several passages. ... He ascribes to the absolute ego all the characteristics of Spinoza's substance: it is *causi sui*, infinite, the immanent cause of all things, and it has absolute power and infinite attributes. Just as Spinoza held that his substance exists necessarily, so Schelling holds the same for his ego. For Schelling, the fallacy of Spinoza lay not in thinking that such an infinite being exists—in mistaking a regulative for a constitutive principle—but in projecting a being outside us when it really should be placed inside us," p. 473.

subordinate one of their competing positions to another, e.g., to whichever of the competing positions is more consistent with Schelling's later thought.⁹³

A. *At the Micro Level: Constitutive Freedom and Intellectual Intuition as Strategies for Communion*

⁹³ Manfred Frank, for instance, does just this when taking issue with Dieter Henrich's interpretation of Schelling's *Of the I*. Frank attributes a two-fold oversight to Henrich's reading: on the one hand, Frank contends, Henrich mistakenly divests Schelling's text of its lingering commitment to a philosophy of first principles; on the other hand, he fails to recognize the movement of Schelling's argument "beyond the relations of self-consciousness and having found there an unconditioned to which not even consciousness, and the unity typical of it, could be attributed" (*Philosophical Foundations*, 109-110). Frank's reading, by contrast, is that *Of the I* persists as a foundationalist enterprise, but one that abandons Fichte's reflective approach for one positing the "transcendence of Being over consciousness" (Ibid. 110). Henrich, Frank might say, goes both too far and not far enough. The most justifiable criticism levied by Frank is that, quite simply, Henrich gets his dates mixed up. Henrich's star witness on behalf of his anti-foundationalist reading of *Of the I* is none other than Schelling himself; the problem is that the text in question is Schelling's so-called "Antikritik" (see *Of the I* 127-8 [242-4], I.3.191-5), which was written in December, 1796 in response to a harsh review of *Of the I* by Johann Benjamin Erhard (1766 – 1826). The difficulty is that between the publication of *Of the I* and the "Antikritik" there stands a stretch of time within which Schelling will have composed the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. Given the nature of the changes Schelling's thought undergoes in this interim, Frank is right to challenge Henrich's use of it either for or against Schelling's position in *Of the I*. That having been said, Frank seems wrong to imply that evidence for Schelling's anti-foundationalist tendencies can be limited to the "Antikritik." As I have argued, these tendencies are already legible in the *Form* essay. Furthermore, if one is to view Schelling's early works in light of his later positions, one could just as easily assert that his ideas concerning the primacy of Being over consciousness, though apparently gaining momentum at this point, are not only *not* fully articulated, but can be seen as the temporary counterpoint to subjective Idealism, i.e. more of a phase in his own rapid working through of dialectic than a considered opinion. Thus, while Frank is right that Henrich, in his own way, goes both too far and not far enough, Frank would seem to have done something similar by prematurely forcing the "either/or" facing Schelling out of its actual abeyance.

At the micro level or the level of the topography of consciousness, the two most important strategies in Schelling's *Of the I* for accommodating the competing tendencies of a) foundationalism and b) a Kantian adherence to the "bounds of sense," i.e., a) what we want to do and b) what we are able to do, are 1) the constitutive role of freedom and 2) the concept of *intellectual intuition*. From a topographical standpoint, these two strategies accomplish the same goal, but they do so from opposed directions. In each case the paradoxical element of the strategy is designed to overcome the impasse facing a phenomenally bound philosophy of first principles, according to which the founding principle is either merely one among other principles *within* the system or a robust principle whose alterity raises question about its radical *withoutness*. Furthermore, both strategies essentially concern freedom: on the one hand, establishing freedom's constitutive role is an attempt to provide a coherent characterization of the absolute I as an unconditioned first principle, as opposed to a mere practical postulate of reason. In doing so, it explains how the absolute can relate to the phenomenal world *from the outside*; on the other hand, establishing intellectual intuition is an attempt to account for the possibility of grasping the absolute I or freedom *from the inside* of consciousness. Because these two strategies for bridging a qualitative divide constitute a dialectical whole, I will discuss them together rather than apart.

Schelling employs the concept of intellectual intuition for the first time in *Of the I* in an effort to bring the empirical I of consciousness, the subject, into contact with the absolute

I or freedom taken as a sort of object.⁹⁴ This amounts to a strategic arrangement, according to which the conditioned is the subject and its condition the object, and Schelling is at pains to explain how this is supposed to happen. For instance, *where* is it supposed to happen? Clearly it cannot take place within consciousness, but where else then could it take place? Schelling anticipates this objection:

You insist that you should be conscious of this freedom? But are you bearing in mind that all your consciousness is possible only through this freedom, and that the condition cannot be contained in the conditioned?⁹⁵

Schelling is aware that intellectual intuition is something against which Kant steadfastly argued on the grounds that, in so far as intuition can take place only within the conditioned, sensible world, it has no place—literally—and no application when directed toward either its intellectual conditions (e.g., the Categories) or even its sensible conditions (space and time). Put simply, intellectual intuition is a *contradictio in adjecto*. That having been said, Schelling is able to acknowledge Kant's disapproval without letting it stop him, in large part because he is convinced that this disapproval is the result of Kant's failure to uncover the implicit presuppositions that form the basis of his own account of the underlying activity of human subjectivity. In §VIII Schelling writes:

I know very well that Kant denied all intellectual intuition, but I also know the context in which he denied it. It was in an investigation which only *presupposes* the *absolute* I at every step and which, on the basis of presupposed higher principles, determines only the empirically conditioned I and the not-I in its synthesis with the I. I also know that intellectual intuition must be completely incomprehensible as soon as one tries to liken it to sensuous intuition. Furthermore, it can occur in consciousness just as little as can absolute freedom,

⁹⁴ Cf. Fukaya, *Anschauung des Absoluten*, 27, where he discusses Schelling's nomenclature concerning the absolute I.

⁹⁵ Schelling, *Of the I*, 84 [180], I.2.104.

since consciousness presupposes an object, and since intellectual intuition is possible inasmuch as it has no object.⁹⁶

This passage shows how committed Schelling both is and is not to Kant. It is one thing for Kant to have claimed he was pursuing the *a priori* conditions of possible experience, but it is another thing altogether whether or not his pursuit was complete. Schelling and his contemporaries are fairly certain that it was not complete, a sentiment which Schelling famously expresses in a letter to Hegel from January 6, 1795, writing that “Philos[ophy] is not yet at an end. Kant has provided the results: the premises are lacking. And who can understand results without premises? Perhaps a Kant, but what is the rabble supposed to do with them?”⁹⁷

By “results” here I think we should understand Schelling as meaning more than any given proposition within Kant’s works. Rather, he means something more broadly conceived, such as Kant’s seemingly incompatible accounts of theoretical and practical reason. In the same letter from January 1795, Schelling announces to Hegel that he is “working on an Ethics à la Spinoza. It should establish the highest principles of all philosophy—those principles, namely, in which theoretical and practical reason unite.” Clearly, at the time of *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, Schelling is still arguing—or trying to argue—that the unity of theoretical and practical reason was discoverable in terms reducible to the I. This task, however, amounts to finding a means by which to bring together two seemingly incompatible aspects of the I: the empirical I, which is the object of theoretical reason; and the absolute I, which cannot ever be an object as such, but whose

⁹⁶ Schelling, *Of the I*, 85 [181-2], I.2.106.

⁹⁷ Schelling, “Letter to Hegel from January 6, 1795” in *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, III.1.16. Translation mine.

nature belongs to the realm of practical reason. It strikes me that this way of phrasing the matter sounds incoherent, but that's precisely the problem Schelling was facing between the *Form* essay and *Of the I*. Motokiyo Fukaya perfectly captures this transition in the young Schelling's thought, writing:

Schelling, in my opinion, is still trying in the *Form* essay to *know* the unconditioned by means of finding a form of knowledge which corresponds to this unconditioned. In *Of the I*, by contrast, he tries to explain not only the form of knowledge, but knowing in general in terms of the unconditioned.

[Schelling versucht also m.E. in der "Formschrift" noch das Unbedingte dadurch zu *wissen*, dass er die diesem Unbedingten entsprechende Form des Wissens findet, während er in der "Ichschrift" aus dem Unbedingten nicht nur die Form, sondern das Wissen überhaupt zu begründen versucht.]⁹⁸

The transition in question amounts to the growing recognition by Schelling that overcoming the subject/object divide by means of theoretical reason may well be impossible, but that holding theoretical reason as the highest standpoint of philosophy is itself unwarranted. In fact, looking for the unconditioned by means of theoretical reason is a performative contradiction.

In order to ground knowledge in general, Schelling insists that one must ground the act of knowing—not in the sense of any given object in particular, but in the sense of the *a priori* possibility of "objects" in general. In the Foreword to the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant writes that "the concept of freedom... is the cornerstone of the entire edifice of the system of pure—or even speculative—reason," but in doing so he reinforces the conflict between the means of establishing freedom and freedom's necessary nature.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Fukaya, *Anschauung des Absoluten*, 25. Translation mine.

⁹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. Horst D. Brandt and Heiner F. Klemme (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), 4. Translation mine.

Schelling protests against this mistaken approach in *Of the I*, writing that “the I cannot be given by a mere *concept*. Concepts are possible only in the sphere of the conditional; concepts of objects only are possible.”¹⁰⁰

Regardless of how else one defines concepts within a Kantian framework, they are always understandable only from the perspective of a further synthesis, which is itself somehow equally “above” all concepts. Freedom as such cannot be a mere member of the class of concepts which stand below this further synthesis, and indeed it is more so the case that freedom is only intelligible *as* this further synthesis just as much as this further synthesis is only intelligible *as* freedom, i.e., as the absolute or the I.¹⁰¹ Kant’s reliance on the “concept of freedom” is thus symptomatic of the simultaneous partition and conflation of theoretical and practical reason in his works. Schelling’s intellectual intuition counters this with a conflation/partition of his own: If freedom doesn’t make sense as a concept, and synthesis doesn’t make sense without freedom, then the relationship between the subject and freedom as an object—if considered from the “inside” perspective of the empirical I or subject—only makes sense in terms of an activity that is neither conceptual nor sensible, i.e., in terms of a paradox. Schelling concludes:

Therefore the I can be determined only in an intuition (*Anschauung*). But since the I is I only because it can never become an object, it cannot occur in an intuition of sense, but only in an intuition which grasps no object at all and is in no way a sensation, in short in an *intellectual* intuition. Where there is an object there is sensuous intuition, and vice versa. Where there is no object, that is, in the

¹⁰⁰ Schelling, *Of the I*, 85 [181], I.2.106.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Vater, “Schelling’s *Vom Ich*,” 186: “In *On the I as a Principle*, Schelling uses the terms ‘I’ and ‘the absolute’ interchangeably.”

absolute I, there is no sense intuition, therefore either no intuition at all or else intellectual intuition.¹⁰²

The virtue of a conceptual approach to the problem of the absolute I would have been the fact it presupposes that the two relata in question are of a kind, thereby solving the problem of incommensurability. Kant ventures this solution in the Schematism section of the first Critique (A137/B176 – A147-B187), where he faces the task of explaining how the pure concepts of the understanding (the Categories) are both “pure” and yet maintain empirical purchase. Qua concepts, Kant argues, they *must* relate to the sensible sphere, because “In all subsumptions of an object under a concept the representation of the object must be *homogeneous* with the concept.”¹⁰³ This move by Kant, however, is not without ironic consequences, the most piqued of which is the fact that he invokes this formula in the face of the serious problem facing any coherent account of how something could be both “pure” and of a kind with sensibility. To be sure, conceptualization presupposes *that* a concept and its object relate to one another, but it doesn’t in and of itself answer *how* they do. A positive characterization of the relation between pure concepts and their objects, however, would seem to be as imperative for Kant as it would be tricky. After all, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is first and foremost an attempt to wean philosophy away from its speculations about the supersensible by demonstrating that we *cannot* relate to or determine it.

Kant’s position in the Schematism, however, does differ from Schelling’s position concerning intellectual intuition in that Kant’s attempt to reconcile the pure concepts with

¹⁰² Schelling, *Of the I*, 85 [181], I.2.106.

¹⁰³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 180 [A137/B176].

the manifold is not burdened by Schelling's absolute perspective. Because the categories stand below the yet higher synthesis of the unity of apperception, their determination within the Schematism as objects—though highly problematic—does not pose the same topographical problem Schelling faces with the determination of freedom or the absolute I. Schelling's problem is that the virtues of a conceptual approach are, as we have seen, qualitatively outweighed by the viciousness of allowing that the absolute I could in any sense be determined.

Schelling's predicament forces him instead to rely on the risks and rewards of an approach based on intuition. The virtue of intuition is that it is defined, in opposition to conceptualization, as having an immediate relationship with its object.¹⁰⁴ On the one hand, this immediacy short-circuits the problems facing a conceptual approach: it allows the empirical I and the absolute I to be in contact with one another, but in an indefinite manner that minimizes the risk of determining the absolute I. On the other hand, in so far as it minimizes any commitment as to *how* the two entities relate to one another (by removing it altogether from the jurisdiction of conceptual knowledge) it maximizes doubt as to whether or not any such relationship can attest to itself. As Schelling rightly points out, if there is any level of determination in an object, its relationship to a subject is mediated by concepts; if there is no level of determination, then the only apparent alternative means of relating to an object is through the immediacy of intuition. In the case of the absolute I, however, this immediate means of relating must be further

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A109 and A320/B377. For an overview of Kant's account of intuition and its problematic relationship with conceptualization, see Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 66-8.

developed in order to account for the fact that freedom is not—and cannot be—an object. Not even a little bit. Not at all.

Thus, when Schelling writes that “where there is no object, that is, in the absolute I, there is no sense intuition, therefore either no intuition at all or else intellectual intuition,” he is making an ultimatum of sorts. If all relating is either mediate or immediate, and if the only option here is a mode of immediacy, then the only options are a) sensuous intuition or b) a sort of intuition which is paradoxical. Schelling isn’t arguing that intellectual intuition makes a lot of sense, but he is arguing that it is the best means of coping with the conflicting tasks of post-Kantian foundationalism. Either intellectual intuition or no intuition at all, which amounts to saying that the only options remaining for a *philosophy of first principles* are 1) a topographical compromise that resembles both a bridge and an abyss (a *salto mortale* on the far side of a moebius strip) or 2) a further critique of the foundationalist project.

Schelling’s use of intellectual intuition and the constitutive role of freedom can thus be viewed as means to draw out into the open problems Kant had recognized but left in abeyance. To be sure, neither intellectual intuition nor constitutive freedom solved these problems, but their failure to do so did force a confrontation with a better articulation of the problem—which would in turn be the beginning of moving beyond it. Whether this amounted to 1) finding a more coherent way to account for the conditions of

consciousness from within the limitations set by Kant or in 2) arguing one's way past these limitations is the dilemma Schelling begins masticating at this point.¹⁰⁵

In my discussion of *Of the I I* I have isolated two strategies by means of which Schelling tried to harmonize the two-fold dialectic at work between the demands and limitations of theoretical and practical reason:

1. On the theoretical front, reason is a) limited to cognition within the world of appearances but b) faces the demand to establish a first principle which will account for the underlying unity of subject and object, i.e., the unconditioned condition of the conditioned world. Assuming that the only alternative to theoretical reason is practical reason, the risks and rewards of a practical approach must be weighed.

¹⁰⁵ As I suggested in a lengthy footnote at the beginning of my reading of *Of the I*, it undermines the importance of *Of the I* when we force a reductive teleology onto an argument, the content of which reflects, if nothing else, a desire to articulate dialectic. In and of itself, any argument concerning Schelling's stated foundationalist goals in *Of the I* (Manfred Frank points especially to the preface and introductory paragraphs. See *Philosophical Foundations*, 110) is altogether right; as are claims that Schelling is implicitly moving in the direction of convictions concerning the priority of Being over consciousness; but, within the text itself there is a palpable tension between what Schelling says/thinks he is doing and what's on the page. And even if Manfred Frank is correct in calling the revisionist stance of Schelling's "Antikritik" toward his own foundationalist gestures in *Of the I* a "curious retrospective self-(re)interpretation," that does not help us understand what primed Schelling to misrepresent (or misrecognize) his own stated position in *Of the I*. Manfred Frank and Dieter Henrich, both luminaries in the field of late-eighteenth century German philosophy, take Schelling's remarks from the "Antikritik" in completely opposite directions, but in the case of *Of the I I* I think it is worth considering that the "truth" (Hegel's "in-itself or for us") of their positions lies in the disagreement itself.

2. On the practical front, reason faces the same demands it faced on the theoretical front. Unlike theoretical reason, however, it is not limited to the conditioned world of appearances. In fact, the virtue of practical reason is that its jurisdiction is precisely *not* that of theoretical reason.¹⁰⁶ In its attempt, however, to meet the demand of establishing a first principle, practical reason ends up facing limitations that are the structural inverse of those faced by theoretical reason. Though practical reason can avail itself of the supersensible, it can do so only as a regulative principle, i.e., as a principle the existence of which cannot be demonstrated. The reason for this is simple: the demonstration of existence is a matter for theoretical reason, and if theoretical reason were capable of proving the existence of “things” lying beyond the subject/object realm of appearances, practical reason would not provide anything theoretical reason could not provide on its own. Short of demonstrability, however, the claims of freedom must fall short of certainty.

Intellectual intuition is thus understandable as a strategy from the “inside” perspective of theoretical reason, which is designed to establish contact with freedom as an *absolute* first principle. The strategy of a constitutive role for freedom, by contrast, is designed to establish contact with a system as an absolute *first principle*. Both strategies reflect Schelling’s ongoing struggle to offer a coherent account of a single system from within that very system (or *as that system*), and the concluding lines of *Of the I* make it clear how optimistic Schelling remains that the pros and cons of Kant and Spinoza can be harmonized into a systematic account of the relationship between the absolute I and the

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 167 [299], I.3.65-6.

empirical I. “What is *absolute* harmony for the absolute I,” he writes, “is for the finite I *elicited* harmony, and the principle of unity is for the former the *constitutive* principle of *immanent* unity but for the latter only a *regulative* principle of *objective* unity which ought to *become* immanent.”¹⁰⁷

In and of itself, this closing gesture of *Of the I* is consistent with what Schelling has been saying and doing for the entire essay. The rub is that it sounds more like a recapitulation of the original problem than a solution. To be sure, the constitutive role of freedom *would be* the principle of unity for freedom itself, but the “immanence” Schelling speaks of begs the question of its relationship to the empirical I; moreover, nothing *is* for the absolute I. And to be sure, intellectual intuition *would do* the job of a regulative principle of objective unity with the absolute I, but it begs the question of the existence of the absolute I, lest there be nothing with which to make contact in the first place. Schelling knew that he hadn’t solved this conundrum in *Of the I*, but he had made an important discovery in the course of failing to do so: he had shown that, starting from a hypothesis about the absolute I, philosophical systems—theoretical as well as practical—end up having accomplished just as much and having failed to do just as much as they would have had they begun with the absolute not-I. This discovery remains implicit in *Of the I*, but it is taken up explicitly in the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, where Schelling’s previous failures to reconcile the limitations and demands of foundationalism leads not only to a departure from Fichte and Reinhold, but to a

¹⁰⁷ Schelling, *Of the I*, 127 [242], I.2.175.

productive reassessment of the problem, as he had put it early in the *Form* essay, “of the possibility of philosophy as such.”¹⁰⁸

IV. The *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*

The *Philosophical Letters* are the developmental outcome of the *Form* essay and *Of the I* in the following sense: in the *Form* essay Schelling’s conception of how opposed elements within a given system are related to one another takes on a more coordinate and less hierarchical form; in *Of the I* Schelling consequentially pursues Fichteian “Criticism,” i.e., a system grounded hierarchically upon the I as an absolute first principle, to its logical conclusions—conclusions which don’t turn out to be very logical. In his pursuit of the only seemingly viable option for the presentation of a system that can both preserve freedom and account for the relationship between an absolute first principle and “the world,” Schelling had by the end of *Of the I* unwittingly proven that “Criticism” could at best manage to give with one hand what it had taken away with the other. Whether a given presentation resorts to the fallacy of constitutive freedom or intellectual intuition is ultimately a matter of indifference: in both cases the fallacy represents the mistaken rubric according to which the criterion of “systematicity” amounts to the overcoming of the subject/object opposition from the perspective of theoretical reason.

In the *Philosophical Letters* Schelling takes reflexive aim at this false rubric, saying of the “genuine philosopher” that “the whole sublimity of his science has consisted in just

¹⁰⁸ Schelling, *Form*, 39, [I, 88], I.1.267.

this, that it would never be complete. He would become unbearable to himself the moment he came to believe that he had completed his system.”¹⁰⁹ In *Of the I*—or rather as the result of it—Schelling’s unwavering commitment to the value of freedom was constantly under threat from his competing commitment to foundationalism, but in the *Philosophical Letters* Schelling begins to question the value of any commitment capable of tempering freedom’s, as it were, autonomy. “The highest dignity of philosophy,” Schelling declares, “is precisely to expect everything of human *freedom*. Hence, nothing can be more detrimental to philosophy than the attempt to confine it in the cage of a system universally valid by theory.”¹¹⁰

Throughout the *Philosophical Letters* Schelling drives home the point that there are two—and only two—such systems for philosophy: Criticism and Dogmatism. One of the most insightful positions taken by Schelling in the *Philosophical Letters*, and the one that positions Dogmatism and Criticism as alienated protagonists within a tragically structured account of systematic philosophy, is that both of them are a) equally valid up to the point of their complete realization and that b) both of them are proven to be equally and untenably one-sided once they believe that they have been realized. Schelling writes:

As for myself, I believe that there is a system of dogmatism as well as a system of criticism; I even believe that, in this very criticism, I have found the solution of the riddle as to why these two systems should necessarily exist side by side, why there must be two systems directly opposed to each other as long as there are any finite beings, and why no man can convince himself of any system except *pragmatically* [praktisch], that is, by realizing either system *in himself*.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 172 [306], I.3.74. Here and throughout my reading of the *Philosophical Letters*, I identify the narrator with Schelling.

¹¹⁰ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 172 [306-7], I.3.74.

¹¹¹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 171-2 [306], I.3.73-4.

The three claims made in this passage, taken together, draw out the primary movements of the problematic at work in the *Philosophical Letters*: 1) Criticism and Dogmatism are coordinate systems; 2) but necessarily and directly opposed; and 3) resolving this opposition in favor of one system or the other cannot be achieved in a theoretical, objective manner, but only *practically*.

A. *Coordination and Opposition*

Schelling's presentation of the coordination and opposition of Dogmatism and Criticism recalls his fascination in the *Form* essay with Kant's remarks on his own presentation of the Tables of Categories and Judgments (§11 in the *Critique of Pure Reason*). On the one hand, Kant's discussion of disjunctive judgments uses the example "The world exists either through blind chance, or through inner necessity, or through an external cause" in order to show how mutually exclusive accounts of an event do in fact supplement one another in terms of exhausting *how* we account for the event—both on what terms and over and against what. On the other hand, his discussion of the category of community—the reciprocity of agent and patient—uses the assertion that "the world, for instance, does not with its Creator serve to constitute a whole" in order to intonate the dialectic of sameness and difference in a complimentary direction. Instead of presenting accounts of an event which, from the standpoint of actuality, are mutually exclusive, but which, from a hypothetical standpoint, present a sort of "discursive holism," the relation of Creator and world presents the absolute relational opposite: a causal event in which two seemingly intertwined elements become in fact radically alienated from one another.

When we hold these two examples from the two Tables (it should be remembered that Schelling placed a great deal of importance on how the two Tables related not only to themselves, but also to one another) side by side, we see the importance of Kant's note for Schelling's shifting stance regarding a philosophy of first principles. Kant's two-fold implication is this: 1) the world has a cause, but 2) this cause is immanent to the world.

If we understand the movement of Schelling's thought along these lines, it is understandable why he increasingly pressed his own argument toward a position that could accommodate an account of immanent causation that was at the same time compatible with—or rather driven by—*freedom*. He recognizes this account, however, as a synthesis of Spinoza's monistic heteronomy and Fichte's autonomous dualism, and he further recognizes that a proper account of this synthesis must rise above the one-sidedness of either side and account for itself *as* synthesis through the analytic activity of accounting for the coordinate opposition (or indifference) of its component parts, viz., the individuated systems of Dogmatism and Criticism.

Criticism and Dogmatism, Schelling writes in the Third Letter, “are opposed to each other in their first principle but they *must* meet at some common point some time or other. No line of distinction could be drawn between different systems except in a field they had in common.”¹¹² The field they have in common is the absolute, from which and toward which both systems proceed. In that sense, the structure of philosophical systems is homologous with the structure of human consciousness. This structural

¹¹² Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 163 [293], I.3.59.

homology is at the heart of the increased attention Schelling pays in the *Philosophical Letters* to the reproduction of articulations and impasses within philosophy as a form as well as philosophy as its own content. Schelling's self-criticism over and against "Criticism" as a mode of philosophy is that, by limiting itself to an epistemological account of its own limited capacity, it hurts its own case directly while divesting itself of the direct means to combat its dogmatic counterparts. "The time has come, my friend," he writes, "...to state plainly and resolutely that criticism means to do more than merely deduce the weakness of reason, and prove only *this much*, that dogmatism cannot be proved."¹¹³

What Criticism has failed to do is treat reason's limitations as productive and necessary, rather than as arbitrary and merely limiting, and in doing so it has both a) unstrung its ability to meet Dogmatism at the crux of the debate over freedom and b) invited Dogmatism to attack it at its foundationless roots. By allowing himself in *Of the I* to be driven by the felt need to answer dogmatism's charge and anchor freedom in the absolute, Schelling recognizes that he himself had taken the bait in this respect. The judgment of reason's weakness implies that it could (and should) be stronger, and in doing so it mistakenly smuggles the structure of judgment beyond its jurisdiction and into the absolute.

Just as reason's limitations are the result of its dependence on the medium of experience, so too is the opposition of Criticism and Dogmatism "a necessary consequence of the

¹¹³ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 162 [292], I.3.58.

very concept of philosophy.”¹¹⁴ Moreover, the failure to recognize the necessity of this opposition reduces any supposed philosophical critique to a merely one-sided reproduction of one side of the debate or the other. “Philosophy,” says Schelling, “must present the course of the human mind itself, not only the march of an individual. And this course must pass through fields common to all parties.”¹¹⁵ This is the remarkable dawning recognition by early Idealism of the onto- and phylogenetic intra- and interrelatedness of dialectic—put simply, the self-recognition of dialectic.¹¹⁶ The importance, Schelling tells us, of establishing the common denominator of otherwise opposed philosophical systems is that, “Only at this meeting does the time come for their proper separation.”¹¹⁷

As much as Dogmatism and Criticism can only be separated once they have been brought together, their absolute separation reveals both their cognate status as well as their shared telos. Much of the middle sections of the *Philosophical Letters* is devoted to following both Criticism and Dogmatism from their absolutely opposed points of departure—the I and the not-I, respectively—through their one-sided development and on toward the inevitable confrontation by both with an indigestible kernel of absolute otherness. This kernel haunts both enterprises from the outset in theoretically opposite but practically

¹¹⁴ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 163 [293], I.3.59.

¹¹⁵ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 163 [293], I.3.59.

¹¹⁶ Articulating dialectic in a simple manner is not something for which philosophers of any age have been celebrated. Schelling’s effort to articulate it at all is surely part of the reason why he followed Hölderlin’s suggestion to adopt an epistolary form for the presentation of a “better way,” i.e., the presentation of an argument away from foundationalism in the *Philosophical Letters*. See Frank, *Philosophical Foundations*, 110.

¹¹⁷ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 175 [311], I.3.80.

equivalent fashions: Criticism's absolute priority of the subject over all objectivity leads to intellectual intuition at the point that no objectivity whatsoever is permitted; Dogmatism's absolute priority of the object over the subject leads to self-annihilation at the point that no subjectivity whatsoever is permitted. In effect, both outcomes amount to the same undifferentiated state described from two opposed perspectives.

B. Choosing a System

Having argued forcefully for the theoretical indifference of Criticism and Dogmatism, Schelling must account for why one might or should adhere to one system or the other.

Either of the two absolutely opposed systems, dogmatism and criticism, is just as possible as the other, and both will coexist as long as finite beings do not all stand on the same level of freedom. That is my thesis, and this, briefly, is my reason: both systems have the same problem, and this problem cannot be solved theoretically, but only practically, that is, through freedom. Now, only two solutions are possible; one of them leads to criticism, the other to dogmatism. ... Which of the two we choose depends on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired.¹¹⁸

By Schelling's reckoning, our disposition to side with a solution leading toward Criticism is in proportion to the degree of our freedom of spirit, because he is convinced that no "free spirit," faced with the theoretical indifference of two philosophical options, could reconcile a practical solution with the limitation of freedom. This conviction makes Spinoza's Dogmatism a source of fascination for Schelling, and despite the eventual incompatibility of Spinoza's philosophy with his own, Schelling's sympathies with and

¹¹⁸ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 173 [307-8], I.3.75.

for the dogmatist of dogmatists run deep. Spinoza, according to Schelling, began from a position of theoretical discomfort. He was “troubled by...the riddle of the world, the question of how the absolute could come out of itself and oppose to itself a world.”¹¹⁹ Put perhaps too simply, Spinoza concluded that it could not.¹²⁰ As a result, his monism developed into the ethical principle of reasserting the self-sameness of the absolute through the negation of subjectivity. Schelling’s ambivalence toward this unwaveringly consequential reasoning is clear when he says of the ethical principle of Dogmatism that that “most sacred thoughts of antiquity and the phantoms of human insanity meet on this spot,” but he gently acknowledges that Spinoza’s commitment to the dictates of his own principles was worthy of respect. “A natural,” he writes,

and unavoidable deception had made that principle bearable for him and for all those nobler spirits who believed in it. For him, intellectual intuition of the absolute is the highest attainment, the last grade of cognition to which a finite being can rise, the very life of the spirit.¹²¹

Based on his own consequential pursuit of a one-sided system in *Of the I*, Schelling is not unmoved by the allure exercised by intellectual intuition. However, its use value for him there was as a strategy for indexing freedom from the standpoint of theoretical reason. Having abandoned this end in the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling abandons the

¹¹⁹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 173-4 [310], I.3.77-8. See also p. 178 [315], I.3.83-4.

¹²⁰ Spinoza’s conception of God as an immanent and not “transitive” cause (*causa transiens*) is crucial to Schelling’s growing dissatisfaction with foundationalism. See Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. G. H. R Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 93 [Part One: On God, Proposition 18]. See also Henry E. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 63-78.

¹²¹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 179-80 [317], I.3.86. The motif of “bearable” (*erträglich*) is crucial to Schelling’s account of which system one chooses in the *Philosophical Letters*, and it figures heavily in the Tenth Letter’s discussion of Greek tragedy.

corresponding means. Nonetheless, he does not fail to appreciate the fact that his own theoretical use of intellectual intuition was only one possibility. The other, of course, was Spinoza's. Intellectual intuition for Spinoza, in which "the absolute is no longer an object for him...was an experience which admitted of two interpretations; either he had become identical with the absolute, or else the absolute had become identical with him."¹²² Spinoza, as Schelling puts it, "preferred" the former. That does not mean, of course, that the latter is in itself any more preferable. Both paths eventually lead to enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) at the point that they imagine themselves having realized their systems in the absolute. "Absolute freedom," Schelling assures us, "and absolute necessity are identical."¹²³

Absolute freedom is the implicit goal of criticism, "but with absolute freedom no consciousness of self is compatible. An activity without any object, an activity to which there is no resistance, never returns into itself."¹²⁴ In order for consciousness to remain actual, it must have something of which to be conscious,¹²⁵ which means that Criticism must recognize and implement the limitation of its own drive in order to preserve itself. "On this very account," Schelling writes,

¹²² Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 181 [319], I.3.88.

¹²³ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 189 [331], I.3.101.

¹²⁴ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 184 [324], I.3.94.

¹²⁵ More recent phenomenologists such as Husserl will refer to this as the "intentionality" of consciousness. For a discussion of Husserl and intentionality very much in the vein of Schelling's discussion here, see Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 17th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), 47-8. For an English translation, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 44-5.

Criticism must regard the ultimate goal merely as the object of an endless task. *Criticism itself necessarily turns into Dogmatism as soon as it sets up the ultimate goal as realized (in an object), or as realizable (in any particular time).*¹²⁶

Freedom is absolute as an activity (*Handlung*), but the conditions of its activity are the spatio-temporal confines of experience. The supposition that its activity has been exhausted must either rest on the prefiguration of its goal as realized—which is the starting point of Dogmatism—or as realizable over time—which is implicit endpoint of both Dogmatism and Criticism if one imagines them coming full circle. In either of the two cases, Schelling insists, “Philosophy is abandoned to all the horrors (*Schrecken*) of ecstasy [*Schwärmerei*].”¹²⁷

The manner in which Criticism is able to differentiate itself from Dogmatism as a viable, livable alternative lies “not in the ultimate goal which both of them set up, but in the approach to it, in the realization of it, in the spirit of criticism’s own practical postulates.”¹²⁸ Schelling identifies this practical postulate of criticism as a style or manner of solving the theoretical problem precisely by refusing to approach it theoretically. Philosophy not only can’t solve the theoretical problem of the self-opposition of subject and object, it does well to remember that it owes its own interminable existence to this insolubility. “If we had had to deal with the absolute alone,” Schelling writes,

¹²⁶ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 189 [331], I.3.102.

¹²⁷ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 189 [332], I.3.102. The theme of unrealizability in time or “infinite approximation” is a leitmotiv in post-Kantian thought and has been treated at great length by Manfred Frank in “*Unendliche Annäherung*”: *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998) as well as *Philosophical Foundations*, which is an abridged translation of “*Unendliche Annäherung*.”

¹²⁸ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 190 [332], I.3.103.

the strife of different systems would never have arisen. Only as we come forth from the absolute does opposition to it originate, and only through this *original* opposition in the human does any opposition between philosophers originate. And if there should ever be success, not for the philosophers indeed, but for man, in an attempt at leaving this field into which he entered by egressing from the absolute, then all philosophy, and the field itself, would cease to be. For that field comes about only through that opposition and the field has reality only as long as the opposition lasts.¹²⁹

In accordance with the practical postulate Schelling is championing, the integrity of philosophers—and mankind!—depends on the necessary and universal failure of philosophy to fulfill its foundationalist desires. Determining the absolute first principle of consciousness and, *a fortiori* (at least for Criticism) of systematic philosophy itself, had been an organizing principle of the philosophical landscape of Germany since the appearance of Kant's critical works in the 1780s, and yet in the ninth of the *Philosophical Letters* Schelling has reached the point where such determination amounts to siding with the dogmatic enemy, i.e., it amounts to a form of intellectual suicide. Both systems are theoretically dependent on the opposition of subject and object, but Criticism is able to and should differentiate itself through its refusal to allow, we might say, that a ship sails any less well because we don't know the origins of the wind.

Schelling in fact takes it further. “[I]f I presuppose the absolute as *object* of my knowledge,” he reasons, “it exists independently of my causality, that is, I exist as dependent on its causality. Its causality annihilates me.”¹³⁰ Doing away with an object-oriented approach is of course not in any way possible within Dogmatism, and it is not possible within any species of Criticism fettered by the rubric of systematicity /

¹²⁹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 163 [294], I.3.59.

¹³⁰ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 191 [334], I.3.104.

groundedness upon an absolute first principle. The task of Criticism must therefore be to “solve the conflict of theoretical philosophy by the practical demand that the absolute cease to be *object for me*.”¹³¹ What is both crucial to and peculiar about this practical demand, however, is that this strategy for the maximization of human autonomy becomes a catalyst for enthusiasm—and thus no more serviceable to autonomy than Dogmatism—at the very point that one imagines it to have been realized. Schelling addresses this point at the end of the Ninth Letter with a note of tempering—thought hardly tempered—optimism:

I should be absolute. However, criticism would deteriorate into Utopianism [*Schwärmerei*] if it should represent this ultimate goal as attainable at all (even though not as attained). Therefore it makes a mere practical use of the idea for the determination of the moral being. If criticism stops there, it is certain to be eternally distinct from dogmatism.¹³²

This practical imperative of absolute subjectivity thus reaches an impasse, common to all “true” philosophers, at the horizon of the conditions of representation. All those who transgress this boundary are false philosophers; all those who do not push the envelope are not philosophers at all. The task of true philosophers is to demarcate and inhabit this boundary space, and one of Schelling’s talents in his early works—what makes him disposed to dialectic—is his imaginative capacity to undertake this demarcation by means of trying on radically opposed philosophical positions and relating them to one another in his own thoughts. In setting this task for philosophy and beginning to recognize that the absolute was nothing other than the “higher” perspective of reason and freedom itself, he was without role models among his philosopher peers. But he did not consider himself

¹³¹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 192 [335], I.3.105.

¹³² Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 192 [335], I.3.106.

nonpareil. At the outmost edge of—but still firmly within!—the empirical world, this perspective is the perspective of the tragedian, for whom tragedy is over before it has actually begun. The task of philosophers, starting now with Schelling but by no means ending with him, was 1) to build on tragedy’s formal capacity to bring opposed elements into contact and/by recognizing and/by rising above this conflict within a strict adherence to representational limits as well as 2) recognizing and/by rising above tragedy’s own limited opposition of sensibility and freedom. This is the essential meaning of the tragic turn in the *Philosophical Letters*, which in fact began much earlier in the *Form* essay’s wavering commitment to foundationalism’s inherent Dualism and became negatively manifest in *Of the I*, which serves as a swan song of sorts for Schelling’s attempt to rehabilitate a philosophy of first principles.

V. The Tragic Turn in the *Philosophical Letters*

If one moves directly from the closing passages of *Of the I* and into the opening passages of the *Philosophical Letters*, the contrast between the two texts is most immediately legible as a difference in tone. The final pages of *Of the I* stall ambivalently over and against the conflict between the practical need of and theoretical unfeasibility of asserting the priority of the absolute I over the empirical I. Schelling’s provisional solution to this impasse is a half-hearted sort of perspectivalism or aspect dualism, which seems to say to his peers, “We know what we want. We just don’t know how to say it so that it makes sense.” He relies on the trope of “harmony” to articulate the state of Being out of which philosophy arose and toward which it necessarily strives, saying that the “highest

vocation of man” is striving to elicit in the finite world what is the case in the nonfinite.¹³³ He then ends the text with a teleological formula for the accommodation of opposition (and non-opposition), writing that this vocation of man is nothing other than the call “to turn the unity of aims in the world into mechanism, and to turn mechanism into a unity of aims.”¹³⁴

The contrast in tone between this finale and the opening lines of the *Philosophical Letters* is strident. “I understand you, dear friend!” the First Letters begins, “You deem it greater to struggle (*kämpfen*) against an absolute power and to perish in the struggle (*kämpfend*) than to guarantee one’s safety from any future danger by positing a moral god.”¹³⁵ Here and throughout the *Philosophical Letters*, the trope of harmony is extirpated by the rhetorical leverage of struggle, conflict, contest—*Kampf*. And one of the most important ways that Schelling articulates the one-sidedness of both Criticism and Dogmatism is the way in which neither position is capable of truly engaging in a contest with the other, precisely because each position is strategically structured in order to make a decisive encounter with the other impossible.

The concept of a “moral god,” which Schelling attributes to Criticism, is exemplary of this strategy, and Schelling’s objections to it are as much theoretical as they are practical.¹³⁶ His theoretical objection is that the concept of a moral god requires the

¹³³ Schelling, *Of the I*, 127 [242], I.2.175.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 156 [284], I.3.50.

¹³⁶ Here Schelling means those versions of “Criticism” which, he would argue, do not deserve the name. Cf. The young Schelling’s outburst from January 1795, “Oh, the great

concept of a god who is a person, which is at bottom—just like intellectual intuition from the human side of things—a *contradictio in adjecto*. In a letter to Hegel from early 1795 he writes,

Personality arises through the unity of consciousness. Consciousness, however, is not possible without an object, and for God, i.e., for the absolute I, there is no object whatsoever, since in that case it would cease to be absolute. Therefore, there is no such thing as a personal god.¹³⁷

In addition to this theoretical objection, Schelling argues that, despite the good intentions of its theoreticians, a moral god is a detriment to human freedom no less pernicious than Dogmatism. A moral god forestalls the true presentation of freedom because, qua moral and thus personal god, it is no longer absolute, and if it is not absolute, then it forestalls the collision with the absolute through which the light of freedom is sparked. Under the aegis of a moral god, one's freedom can never be "put on the line," and as such can never be fully exhibited.

The same is in fact the case with Dogmatism, only from the opposite direction. "I ask you," Schelling writes, "how dogmatism can ever explain that power by which man takes a stand against the absolute, and how it can explain the feeling which accompanies this contest (*Kampf*)."¹³⁸ In short, it cannot. Consummate Dogmatism forestalls struggle or

Kantians, that are everywhere these days!...I am fully convinced that the old superstition not only of the positive, but also the so-called natural religion is still combined with a Kantian vocabulary in the heads of most," cited in Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 14. Translation mine. The full letter, dated January 6, 1795, can be found in Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, **III.1.16**.

¹³⁷ Schelling, "Letter to Hegel from February 4, 1795" in *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, **III.1.23**. Translation mine.

¹³⁸ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 157 [284], **I.3.50**.

contest precisely in so far as it is “bent not on contest (*geht nicht auf Kampf*) but upon surrender...of oneself to the absolute object.”¹³⁹ In both Criticism and Dogmatism, contest or struggle is precluded because of their opposed—and yet nonetheless equally unsuitable—structuring of the relation between the absolute subject and the absolute object from within the confines of theoretical reason.

At the close of *Of the I* this relation is resolved by means of an idealized schema of harmony, but it is already clear from his agonistic rhetoric in the First Letter that Schelling has abandoned this solution. The dissatisfaction with turning “the unity of aims in the world into mechanism...and...mechanism into a unity of aims” is that it only manages to mediate the dualism of theoretical and practical concerns by reducing one of the opposed terms to the other. In that sense it follows the same pattern which will become the explicit object of Schelling’s critique in the *Philosophical Letters*, where he seeks to positively identify the common failure of both Dogmatism and Criticism without the outcome becoming in turn a mere version of one system or the other. This common failure of both systems is a mistaken account of the relation of subject to object, and this account, as I have argued, is mistaken in so far as it proceeds from the premise that one side of this relation *must* be prior to the other, rather than allowing for the possibility that the “priority” or “absolute” in their relation to one another might lie instead in the mode of their relation itself. This mode of relation is coordinate interdependence and mutual

¹³⁹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 157 [284], I.3.50.

determination, and Schelling's structuring of subject and object in relationship to one another in this manner is, at least loosely, "dialectical."¹⁴⁰

Schelling uses the figures of struggle and contest in the *Philosophical Letters* as a strategy for structuring a more dialectical relation of subject and object, and this use-value of struggle is based on its structural capacity to position two equivalent parties over and against one another in such a way that they neither subsist in mere isolation nor become conflated *nor* become—as they did at the end of *Of the I*—reduced to a common identity. Subsistence in isolation (the absolute I and the empirical I or the absolute first principle and the system it is supposed to ground) and conflation (intellectual intuition) and reduction to one side or the other (Fichte's "absolute I" as well as both Dogmatism and Criticism), however, are for Schelling the sum total of what philosophy has up to that point been able to produce. Accordingly, when he looks to carve out a space for the mode of relation he is after, he turns elsewhere, specifically to the realm of art. "True art," he writes,

Or rather, the divine (θεῖον) in art, is an inward principle that creates its own material from within and all-powerfully opposes any sheer mechanism, any sheer aggregation of stuff from the outside lacking inner order. This inward principle we lose simultaneously with the intellectual intuition of the world, an intuition which arises in us by means of an instantaneous unification of two opposing principles and is lost when neither the contest (*Kampfe*) nor the unification is any longer possible in us.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 16-21; 26-31; 152-74. Schelling's "leveling" of Fichte's hierarchical model of explanation will undergo a re-verticalization in Hegel's account of/through dialectic, in which "priority" will again have an important role to play. This "priority" will not, however, reside in either the subject or the object, but instead in the movement of human consciousness in/as historical progress.

¹⁴¹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 157 [285], I.3.51.

What art is able to present—and what must be present in all true art—is a certain sort of structure. The logic of this structure must be immanent, on the one hand; on the other hand, it must be free, and in the context of Schelling’s early works this sounds remarkably like the ideal marriage of Spinoza and Kant. Furthermore, the logic of this structure must sustain itself wholly on the “lapsed” side of the diremption of Being into subject and object, i.e., within the confines of the world of representation, and it must do so in such a manner that it does not lead to a false overcoming the opposition of subject and object, freedom and necessity, etc. through intellectual intuition. This is precisely the error into which Dogmatism/Criticism are doomed to fall, and the problem Schelling sees for philosophy in his own time is that, as long as it remains fettered within the false opposition of Dogmatism and Criticism, philosophy cannot hope to aspire to art’s divine “inward principle.” What philosophy must do is practically move beyond this false opposition, and no art form presents this possibility more forcefully for Schelling than Greek tragedy.

“Schelling’s turn towards Greek tragedy,” notes David Ferris, “[taken] as a model for his understanding of freedom repeats the frequent gesture of his work towards art as the place in which the historical development of philosophy can be fulfilled.”¹⁴² This gesture is without question most readily apparent in the Tenth Letter of the *Philosophical Letters*, but, as we have seen, the figure of struggle and contest prefigure the “tragic turn” long before Greek tragedy ever explicitly steps into the limelight. Schelling enters the

¹⁴² David S. Ferris, “Indifferent Freedom,” in *Schelling and Romanticism*, ed. David S. Ferris. April 2000: 1-9. *Romantic Circles Practice Series* <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/schelling/>>. p. 1.

Philosophical Letters weighed down by the seemingly irreconcilable commitments to a) the preservation of freedom within b) a philosophical account limited by the bounds of sense, and these conflicted commitments recognize themselves in the structure of Greek tragedy. The next move for Schelling is to begin recognizing the tragic structure of philosophy, and once he does so, he recognizes it everywhere—in its form, in its content, and as the two taken together in its self-articulated historical narrative.

At the end of the Ninth Letter, after Schelling has absolutely opposed Dogmatism and Criticism as theoretical systems, he emerges with a rehabilitated, practical concept of Criticism. This concept cannot be confused with what Schelling has, up to this point, polemically been calling “Criticism” in order to demonstrate its indifference from Dogmatism. True Criticism (for Schelling this means “in the spirit of Kant”) remains focused on the realization of autonomy without overstepping the bounds of sense, and it does not seek to prove freedom as foundationalism had done so much as it recognizes itself *as* free in the act of recognizing the impossibility of such a proof. With the false dilemma of Dogmatism and Criticism in his rear-view mirror and the methodological false dilemma of theoretical and practical reason a cloud of dust in his wake, Schelling thunders, “Be! Is the supreme demand of criticism.”¹⁴³

He does not, of course, mean “Be!” in just any sense. He means “Be human!” in the sense that we are neither beasts nor gods, neither merely free nor merely not. In the Eighth Letter he writes,

¹⁴³ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 192 [335], I.3.106.

Man ought to be neither lifeless nor merely alive. His activity is necessarily intent upon objects, but with equal necessity it returns to itself. The latter distinguishes him from the merely living (animal) being, the former from the lifeless.¹⁴⁴

The state of existence within which one maximizes one's being is the state within which one is most fully conscious of and observant of the conditions under which humans beings are *human*. This state, it turns out, is the state of utmost struggle—the state of a tragic hero—and Schelling undoubtedly has the structure of tragedy in mind already in the First Letter. After he uncovers the non-aggression pact between Dogmatism and Criticism, by means of which their own positions are secured at the cost of the realization of freedom through struggle (*Kampf*), Schelling writes, “While the spectacle of struggle (*das Schauspiel des Kampfs*) presents man at the climax of his self-assertion (*Selbstmacht*), the quiet vision (*Anschauung*) of that rest on the contrary finds him at the climax of simply being alive.”¹⁴⁵ On the one hand, bringing the systems of Dogmatism and Criticism onto stage as combatants with one another brings philosophy to a “climax of self-assertion”; on the other hand, the moment of realized conflict marks a suspension of the conditions under which the contest is possible—just as much as the presumed victory of one side over the other is proof only that the two sides never came face to face.

Criticism, for its part, “...masters dogmatism only within the domain of the synthesis; as soon as it leaves this domain (and the critique must leave it just as necessarily as it had to enter it) the contest (*Kampf*) begins anew.” Criticism has no difficulty outflanking Dogmatism within the realm of theoretical reason, because the subjective position from

¹⁴⁴ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 185 [325], I.3.94.

¹⁴⁵ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 157 [284-5], I.3.50.

which it proceeds is free from the burden of accounting for the objective side of things just up to and exactly at the point that it has synthesized the entirety of the world and is left with no other move but thesis. At this point it must, as Schelling puts it, “take leave of” the domain of synthesis, and in doing so it falls into the clutches of Dogmatism. “[Criticism] must admit,” Schelling writes, “that theoretical reason necessarily seeks what is not conditioned, and that the very striving which produces a synthesis demands an absolute thesis as goal of all philosophy.”¹⁴⁶ Dogmatism, for its part, begins precisely with a thesis and, as it runs its full course, comes up against its own diametrically opposed “goal,” i.e., synthesis. “In order to realize its claim,” writes Schelling, “dogmatism itself must appeal to a jurisdiction other than that of theoretical reason.”¹⁴⁷ The self-undermining irony of this predicament, of course, is that the jurisdiction Schelling has in mind is practical reason or freedom, and “freedom” being the arbiter on behalf of Dogmatism is like a black swan arguing on behalf of universal statements. At this very moment where it must appeal to its supposed counterpart, Dogmatism—just as Criticism does at the threshold of its own “objective” realization—re-enters the *real* conflict, where the underlying unity of Dogmatism and Criticism as equally valid—and untenable—philosophical systems emerges. At this moment they are cast as equivalent and competing co-stars in a discursive tragedy, each one an amalgam of pro- and antagonist. The irony of this structuring strategy of dialectic, however, is that the mis-en-

¹⁴⁶ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 166 [297], I.3.63-4.

¹⁴⁷ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 167 [299], I.3.65.

scene is no sooner finished than the tragic conflict itself begins to dissolve within a higher standpoint.¹⁴⁸

Schelling's reliance on the structure of tragedy as a role model for dialectic is a rhetorical conceit throughout the *Philosophical Letters*. As I have just argued, though, the structuring structure of tragic conflict contains a double-movement, which, while highly potent for the articulation of dialectic, cannot for that very reason help but raise questions about how durable the "tragic turn" will be for philosophy. Specifically, the structure of tragic conflict appears to be both a) the necessary condition of the recognition of false opposition but also b) the sufficient condition of the opposition's resolution. If this is the case, what does it mean for philosophy's understanding of tragedy as a model for its own practice? In the next chapter I will examine how the logic of this double-movement begins to play itself out already in the famous Tenth Letter and how, if one may put it this way, the dialectic of dialectic plays itself out in the fraught relationship between philosophy and art in the decades following the *Philosophical Letters*. If the "tragic turn" marks a decisive turn in Schelling's movement away from a logic of cause and effect, subject and object, etc. within the confines of theoretical reason, then the ensuing self-articulation of dialectic, especially in the works of Hegel, will not fail to recognize that,

¹⁴⁸ In the *Philosophical Letters* Schelling equates this higher standpoint with a correct understanding of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant's limitation of theoretical reason is to be taken as productive, rather than "merely" limiting. In the Fourth Letter he writes, "And just this far has the *Critique of Pure Reason* brought us. It has proved that the controversy [between Dogmatism and Criticism] cannot be *closed* in theoretical philosophy (*daß jener Streit in der theoretischen Philosophie nicht entschieden werden könne*)," p. 167 [299], I.3.65. For Schelling, Kant's critique thus *is* the criterion in so far as it structures the claims of other positions as indifferently opposed and lacking their *own* proper criterion.

from a robustly dialectical standpoint, the explication of the “tragic turn” is cognate with the implicit “death of tragedy.”

CHAPTER III

UNCONDITIONAL FREEDOM: THE “DEATH OF ART” AS SELF-NARRATION OF THE AUTONOMY OF PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

In the previous chapter I offered an account of the philosophical turn toward tragedy among German intellectuals during the mid-1790s, with special attention to how the paradoxical shape of this turn reflects the state of German philosophy during the period. In the previous chapters I have argued that the felt need of post-Kantian philosophers to produce a systematic account of consciousness reached a critical impasse in the mid-1790s. The task of systematicity was ineluctably bound to the rubric of “groundedness,” and this rubric was itself bound in turn to the task of grounding philosophical accounts upon an absolute first principle. The difficulty of this first principle, I argued, lay in the curious relation it needed to have with the system it was supposed to ground, viz., it was to be *neither* merely internal to the system *nor* altogether absent from it: if the former, then the principle was not sufficiently *ab-solute*; if the latter, then it exceeded the bounds of human reason and its philosophical use would be illicit. The *ends* of philosophy had thus become alienated from its *means*, and the frustration over this incommensurability

eventually led many thinkers to mine extra-philosophical media to overcome philosophy's seemingly self-incurred tutelage.

Beginning with F. W. J. Schelling's early works from the mid-1790s, the privileged source in this respect was art and, in particular, tragedy. Why tragedy in particular was seen to offer the promise of a solution to this impasse is a question I will investigate in greater depth below, together with the question of how and why some of the same thinkers who first recognized tragedy's utility eventually theorized that the use-value of tragedy as a solution to the impasse—together with the impasse itself—was only temporary. The contradiction philosophy begins to recognize in its own self-narration is that the realization of its disciplinary autonomy through art amounted to a compromise of this very autonomy. The realization of autonomy through heteronomy is in fact the structural inverse of the situation that Schelling stages in the Fourth Letter of the *Philosophical Letters*, where Dogmatism and Criticism are lodged in a state of dramatic irony. Neither side can realize its claims absolutely, because in order to do so it must, ironically, leave its own jurisdiction and forfeit the conditions under which its claims would be valid. Criticism, for its part, must dissolve itself in the not-I in order to pass judgment on its adversary, whereas Dogmatism “must appeal to a jurisdiction other than that of theoretical reason.”¹⁴⁹ At the end of the previous chapter I argued that the irony of this predicament is that the jurisdiction Schelling has in mind is practical reason or freedom, and that “freedom” being the arbiter on behalf of Dogmatism is like a black swan arguing on behalf of universal statements.

¹⁴⁹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 167 [299], I.3.65.

What I did not argue at that point was that the general irony of Dogmatism seeking to realize its claims to autonomy over and against Criticism has another side, namely, Criticism's constant struggle to realize its own claims to autonomy—we might say realize its own meaning—over and against Dogmatism. This other side of things is in some sense the matter at hand in post-Kantian philosophy: can autonomy be realized within the determinations of an external world? In Schelling's *Philosophical Letters* the affirmation of this question no longer comes in the form of a retreat to Spinoza's resigned comfort, but it also does not come in the form of the subject's enthusiastic (*schwärmerisch*) declaration of independence. It comes, rather, through the resistance of freedom to the outside world and the resistance of the outside world to freedom. As Schelling says of man within "the spectacle of struggle" who is "at the climax of his self-assertion": "To be, to be! Is the cry that resounds within him; he would rather fall into the arms of the world than into the arms of death."¹⁵⁰

This existential fall into the arms of the world reflects the philosophical insight by Schelling that human freedom realizes itself only "in context," and that this contextualization means in relation to a world that is not itself. If the realization of Dogmatism through the subject is a mere contradiction, the realization of Criticism through the object is more of a paradox or, as Schelling puts it, a "riddle."¹⁵¹ In what follows I will examine the consequences of this insight not only in so far as they motivate and were motivated by the "tragic turn," but also in so far as this turn *toward* tragedy

¹⁵⁰ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 157 [284-5], I.3.50.

¹⁵¹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 171-2 [306], I.3.73-4.

quickly becomes a double-edged sword for philosophy. If philosophy appeals to tragedy as a means of presenting the possibility of realizing freedom (reason) through the mediation of the senses (understanding), was the mediating role of tragedy in philosophy's presentation of its own autonomy a threat to philosophy's ends? And would philosophy's efforts to purify itself of this mediation by tragedy mean a more authentic realization of itself as "the science of science" or would it mean a narcissistic sort of kicking away of the ladder? Or is putting it that way just one more false dilemma?

I. The Tragic Turn Away from Tragedy

In *Versuch über das Tragische* [*An Essay on the Tragic*] (1961) Peter Szondi describes a turning point in the conceptualization of tragedy. At the end of the eighteenth century a shift takes place *away* from a dynamic conception of tragedy as a practice focused primarily on the effect of staged works of art on an audience *toward* a more static, contemplative conception of "the tragic" as a theoretical problem not limited to (or even primarily localized within) an actual theater.¹⁵² Following the lead of Emil Staiger, his former teacher, Peter Szondi locates the emergence of the shift toward the tragic within the Tenth Letter of Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795). The passage Szondi cites from the Tenth Letter reads:

¹⁵² Peter Szondi, *Versuch über das Tragische* in *Schriften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1978), 151-3. Unless otherwise noted, all English references to this text are from Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). For each citation I will give the German pagination first, separated from the English by a backslash. The full pagination for this citation is thus 151-3/1-3.

It has often been asked how Greek reason could bear the contradictions of Greek tragedy. A mortal, destined by fate to become a criminal, fights *against* this fate, and yet he is horribly punished for the crime, which is the work of fate! The *reason* for this contradiction, which made it bearable, lay deeper than the level at which it has been sought: It lay in the conflict of human freedom with the power of the objective world. In this conflict, the mortal necessarily had to succumb if the power was a superior power—a *fatum*. And yet, since he did not succumb *without a fight*, he had to be *punished* for this very defeat. The fact that the criminal, who only succumbed to the superior power of fate, was *punished* all the same—this was the recognition of human freedom, an *honor* owed to freedom. It was by *allowing* its hero to *fight* against the superior power of fate that Greek tragedy honored human freedom. In order not to exceed the limits of art, Greek tragedy was obliged to have the hero *succumb*; but in order to compensate for this humiliation of human freedom imposed by art, it also had to allow him to *atone* and *make amends*—even for a crime committed through *fate*.... It was a *great* thought: To willingly endure punishment even for an *unavoidable* crime, so as to prove one's freedom precisely through the loss of this freedom and perish with a declaration of free will.

[Man hat oft gefragt, wie die griechische Vernunft die Widersprüche ihrer Tragödie ertragen konnte. Ein Sterblicher – vom Verhängniß zum Verbrecher bestimmt, selbst *gegen* das Verhängniß kämpfend, und doch fürchterlich bestraft für das Verbrechen, das ein Werk des Schicksals war! *Der Grund* dieses Widerspruchs, das, was ihn erträglich machte, lag tiefer, als man ihn suchte, lag im Streit menschlicher Freiheit mit der Macht der objectiven Welt, in welchem der Sterbliche, wenn jene Macht eine Übermacht—(ein *Fatum*)—ist, *notwendig* unterliegen, und doch, weil er nicht *ohne Kampf* unterlag, für sein Unterliegen selbst *bestraft* werden mußte. Daß der Verbrecher, der doch nur der Übermacht des Schicksals unterlag, doch noch *bestraft* wurde, war Anerkennung menschlicher Freiheit, *Ehre* die der Freiheit gebührte. Die griechische Tragödie ehrte menschliche Freiheit dadurch, daß sie ihren Helden gegen die Übermacht des Schicksals *kämpfen* ließ: um nicht über die Schranken der Kunst zu springen, mußte sie ihn *unterliegen*, aber, um auch diese, durch die Kunst abgedrungne, Demüthigung menschlicher Freiheit wieder gut zu machen, mußte sie ihn – auch für das durch's *Schicksal* begangne Verbrechen—*büßen* lassen. So lange er noch *frei* ist, hält er sich gegen die Macht des Verhängnisses aufrecht. So wie er unterliegt, hört er auch auf, frei zu sein. Unterliegend klagt er noch das Schicksal wegen Verlustes seiner Freiheit an. Freiheit und Untergang konnte auch die griechische Tragödie nicht zusammenreimen. Nur ein Wesen, das der Freiheit *beraubt* war, konnte dem Schicksal unterliegen. –Es war ein *großer* Gedanke, willig auch die Strafe für ein *unvermeidliches* Verbrechen zu tragen, um so durch

den Verlust seiner Freiheit selbst eben diese Freiheit zu beweisen, und noch mit einer Erklärung des freien Willens unterzugehen.]¹⁵³

Staiger had himself taken up the last three lines of this passage in his discussion of the Tenth Letter in *Der Geist der Liebe und das Schicksal* (1935), laying the foundation for Szondi's chronology by arguing that these lines mark a first step away from the treatment of drama in terms of the relations of its component parts and toward an abstracted examination of the conceptual stakes underlying tragedy's essence. "In a manner altogether worthy of Schelling's acuteness," he writes, "this handful of words offers the first more deeply penetrating interpretation—not so much perhaps of the *mechane* of Greek drama, but of the tragic in general."¹⁵⁴ Staiger's opposition between "the tragic in general" and "the *mechane* of Greek drama" is a redoubling gesture. Not only does it undo the cultural and historical specificity of a phenomenon limited to Ancient Greece, but it also implies the independence of "the tragic" from the empirical manifestation or "mechanics" of staged drama.

The unhinging of the tragic from theatrical drama, attributed by Staiger to Schelling, represents the first stage of an ever-widening conception of the locus of "the tragic" in the *Essay*, but already here in Staiger's text there is a hitch or a lurch in the differentiation of tragedy from the tragic. In particular there is his seemingly overdetermined appeal to the "*mechane*" of Greek drama, which seems to resonate within two registers: on the one hand, he surely means the "mechanics" of drama, i.e., how, in Aristotle's sense, a drama

¹⁵³ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, (Marti translation 192-3) [336], I.3.106-7, cited in Szondi, *Essay*, 157/7.

¹⁵⁴ Emil Staiger, *Der Geist der Liebe und das Schicksal* (Leipzig: Huber & Co., 1935), 41.

was put together and operated; on the other hand, he surely cannot help but mean the “mechane” of Greek theater, i.e., the crane often used to lift divine characters onto the stage from above, from which we have inherited the Latin term “deus ex machina.”

Within the first register there is the Aristotelian sense. Here, the idea of the “mechanics” of theatre belongs to a theorization of drama as an empirical object made up of component parts and processes that can be observed and inductively extrapolated into a representative or ideal account. In the *Poetics*, this observation becomes focused first and foremost on *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but the canonical status of Sophocles’ play is not the result of the efficacy it should have had, but rather the efficacy it did in fact have already/still in Aristotle’s day.¹⁵⁵ This sense of “mechanics,” which belongs to the theorization of tragedy prior to Schelling, is qualitatively unlike Schelling’s increasingly philosophically invested theorization of tragedy as “the tragic,” which belongs to a theorization of drama as the manifestation of a potent metaphysical problem, the *a priori* conditions of which require something more like a transcendental deduction à la Kant than a typology à la Aristotle. Staiger recognizes this shift in Schelling, which corresponds to a more general reading of “mechane” and is not unlike the shift in emphasis undertaken by Kant himself as he passes from an account of appearances in

¹⁵⁵ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), p. 17 [53b3-7]. Though Aristotle’s preference in the *Poetics* for *Oedipus* has been a relatively stable feature of the reception of both texts, the evidence is not at all conclusive. See, for example, Christopher S. Morrissey, “Oedipus the Cliché: Aristotle on Tragic Form and Content”, *Anthropoetics* 9:1 (2003:Spring/Summer): 1-14. My point has less to do with Aristotle’s personal assessment than with his sense of public consensus surrounding the efficacy of a given tragedy. To be sure, these two are in many ways inseparable.

terms of natural law in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to an account of the supersensible in terms of freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

The “deus ex machina” as a device has been criticized since Plato as a form of “cheating,” due to the manner in which it smuggles in solutions to problems without making the solutions answerable to the same impasses which gave rise to the very problems they are supposed to address. In Plato’s *Cratylus*, for instance, the problem at hand is how to account for the origin of language, and in the following citation we find Socrates growing frustrated with Hermogenes’ strategic appeal to divine agency as a means of anchoring his proposed account:

SOCRATES: That objects should be imitated in letters and syllables, and so find expression, may appear ridiculous, Hermogenes, but it cannot be avoided—there is no better principle to which we can look for the truth of first names. Deprived of this, we must have recourse to divine help, like the tragic poets, who in any perplexity have their gods waiting in the air [*epi tes mechanas*]; and must get out of our difficulty in like fashion, by saying that “the Gods gave the first names, and therefore they are right.” This will be the best contrivance, or perhaps that other notion may be even better still, of deriving them from some barbarous people, for the barbarians are older than we are; or we may say that antiquity has cast a veil over them, which is the same sort of excuse as the last; for all these are not reasons but only ingenious excuses for having no reasons concerning the truth of words. And yet any sort of ignorance of first or primitive names involves an ignorance of secondary words; for they can only be explained by the primary. Clearly then the professor of languages should be able to give a very lucid explanation of first names, or let him be assured he will only talk nonsense about the rest. Do you not suppose this to be true?¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett in *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 460, [425d - 426b]. See also *Clitiphon* 407a. Though I will not pursue it here directly, the renewal of interest in Plato at the end of the eighteenth century had a decisive impact on the development of Schelling and his contemporaries. See Christoph Asmuth, *Interpretation, Transformation: das Platonbild bei Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher und Schopenhauer und das Legitimationsproblem der Philosophiegeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

In this passage Socrates puts his finger directly on the hub through which a whole series of axes pass, each one of which in turn governs a “master” dichotomy. The most explicit axis in the *Cratylus* marks the dichotomy between linguistic and extra- or pre- linguistic, the result of which is the difficulty of accounting for the emergence of language by means of language itself. Another division—analytically like the first, Socrates tells us—is the division between the representational “unities” of tragedy and the presentation of a necessarily supersensible divinity, the very appearance of whom gives with the one hand what it takes away with the other. The literal “deus ex machina” is a strategy for overcoming an impasse within the immanent logic of a tragedy by means of an appeal to anthropomorphized divinities, but in doing so it raises the question: if the gods are available, has the tragic horizon been blurred? And while we’re at it, if the gods are so available, are they really gods?

This is precisely the question Schelling broaches in the *Philosophical Letters* when he rails against “false” Criticism’s appeal to a moral god. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of a “moral” god is problematic for Schelling because of its dependence on the concept of a personal god. One cannot make sense of such a concept, he insists, without upending the necessary conditions under which subjects *make sense*.

To those who uphold the need for a moral god Schelling asks,

2006) and Distaso, “Schelling’s Timaeus: Between the Visible and the Invisible,” in *The Paradox of Existence*, 37-47. For a wide-ranging collection of essays on this topic, see *Platonismus im Idealismus: Die platonische Tradition in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2003). For an examination focused primarily on Neoplatonism—particularly Plotinus and Proclus—see Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972).

Pray, where did you get that idea of God which you must have before you can have the idea of a *moral* God? ... You may give me a thousand revelations of an absolute causality outside of myself, and a thousand demands for it on behalf of an intensified practical reason, yet I shall never be able to believe in it as long as my theoretical reason remains the same!"¹⁵⁷

Schelling's words are a less than subtle challenge to positive religion, the most egregious characteristic of which is that it conflates the mutually exclusive conditions under which an absolute causality could exist and those under which it could be the object of human cognition. As we have seen, the confinement of tragedy—in its form as well as its content—to the medium of representation, taken together with its capacity to present the activity of freedom, make it an especially useful alternative to positive religion.

Tragedy's appeal to external causality in order to preserve its heroes or to resolve its dilemmas is stigmatized as "cheating," because, in robbing itself and its audience of the immanent disclosure of freedom, it forfeits what it truly sublime about itself. For Schelling, the same can be said of philosophy, and it is thus fitting that his tirade against the philosophical appeal to an absolute external cause continues with the sarcastic flourish, "Still, I shall not inconvenience you your *Deus ex machina!*"¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 158-9, [286-8], I.3.52.

¹⁵⁸ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 159, [288], I.3.54. Schelling's identification of dogmatic Criticism's personal, moral god with a "Deus ex machina" can be traced to a letter to Hegel from January 6, 1795, in which he accuses the lion's share of self-identifying "Kantians" of being rebranded dogmatists. He writes, "It is a delight to watch how deftly they string together the moral proof. Premise this, premise that, and before you know it—voilà!—the Deus ex machina jumps out—that personal, individual being sitting up there in the heavens (*im Himmel!*)" Translation mine. The full letter, dated January 6, 1795, can be found in Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, III.1.16.

On the one hand, the “deus ex machina” is a viciously circular device. It relies on a domesticated representation of the absolute in order to do the work which only a robustly undomestic idea of the absolute could rightfully accomplish. On the other hand, it presents us, as it did Plato, with a meta-problem about the means and ends of tragedy: in so far as it counts as a boundary violation for tragedians, it situates the medium of tragedy itself in the same position as the tragic hero himself, who must, as Schelling imagines it, crash headlong against an objective power and, having done so, “willingly accept punishment even for an inevitable crime.” This situation is, moreover, homologous with the position in which Schelling, the philosopher-hero, finds himself in the *Philosophical Letters*, in which his efforts are directed toward reconciling the empirically determined subject position of philosophy with the preservation of an account of freedom. This conflict between the conditions of philosophy and the philosophical pursuit of its own conditions is at the bottom of Schelling’s comments concerning the “limits of art” in the Tenth Letter. When Schelling writes that, “In order not to exceed the limits of art, Greek tragedy was obliged to have the hero *succumb*; but in order to compensate for this humiliation of human freedom imposed by art, it also had to allow him to *atone* and *make amends*—even for a crime committed through *fate*,” the limits he has in mind are the limits of representation, which are precisely those of theoretical reason. Art is not virtuous simply because it remains within its limitations, for it cannot help but do so; art does however, become unvirtuous at the moment that it tries to short-circuit its limitations through the “use” of a phenomenally rendered agent whose role is *as* an absolute. This is exactly the role of the “deus ex machina,” (a “transitive cause” in Spinoza’s sense) and one of the most demonstrative means by which to eliminate all

suspicion of its impending arrival and to foreclose the false temporal horizon of salvation is to have the hero *succumb* to fate.¹⁵⁹

The concerns with origins in general and with the origin of language in particular (as well as the relation of humanity to the divine and the relation of culture to its barbaric other) are thus drawn together in a highly unified concern over a socio-historical account of consciousness in Plato's *Cratylus*. This account seems to hint, however unwittingly, at Schelling's tragic turn in so far as it recognizes that the dilemma faced by tragedians is not at all unlike the one faced by any philosopher, whose search for an absolute "first principle" is caught in the endless pursuit of pulling itself up by its bootstraps. To be sure, Plato's account of the illicit strategy of the "deus ex machina" remains focused on the manner in which tragedians and philosophers resort to similar solutions, never stopping to ask whether this homologous solution implies a homologous dilemma. In the *Cratylus* Plato characterizes the "deus ex machina" as the inevitable crime that tragedy as a whole, frustrated by its own limitations, is bound to commit. But in the act of appealing to the situation of tragedy for analogical insight, can he help but imply that

¹⁵⁹ Schelling's emphasis on "fate," rather than a divinity, is the result of Ancient Greece's thoroughly anthropomorphic theology. In a note to the Tenth Letter he writes: "The Greek gods were still within nature. Their power was not *invisible*, not out of reach of human freedom. ... for the Greeks the supernatural realm begins with fate, the invisible power out of reach of every natural power, a power upon which even the immortal gods cannot prevail. The Greeks are the more natural themselves, the more terrible we find them in the realm of the supernatural. The more sweetly a people dreams of the supersensuous world, the more despicable, the more unnatural it is itself," 193 [337-8], **I.3.108**. Schelling certainly has in mind here his own period's entrapment within the false dilemma of Dogmatism and (dogmatic) Criticism. Both systems dream sweetly of the supersensuous world and thereby lead to the annihilation of freedom, whether through the idealization of intellectual intuition (Dogmatism) or through the postulate of a moral god (dogmatic Criticism).

the plight of tragedy is not unlike that of philosophy and that, for better or worse, tragedy literally has a lot more to “show” for it? This implication will lie dormant until Schelling’s early works being to make it more explicit; moreover, Schelling will direct his attention not so much to the failures of Greek tragedy as to its victories (though exactly how different the two really are remains questionable).

The foremost of these victories was the very fact that Greek drama conspired to represent the unrepresentable, in particular the representation of freedom within the medium of human action. To be sure, some actual tragedians failed from a formal perspective to reconcile representation and freedom, either short-circuiting the dilemma by employing a “deus ex machina” or retreating from the dilemma by never bringing the tension between opposed sides of the tragic conflict to a point of crisis. Whether these actual cases represent the norm or the exception, however, is not Schelling’s concern. As we have seen, his interest lies more in the potential offered by the medium of tragedy, i.e., the tragic, than any particular instance thereof (though he, following Aristotle’s lead, leans heavily on *Oedipus Tyrannus*). This potential lies in what Schiller calls art’s “disclosure of the absolute (as beauty) within the realm of appearances,” a disclosure which tragedy accomplishes better than any other art form because of its explicit reliance on “conflict” to realize the relation between the two paradoxically incommensurable / self-same realms of 1) the absolute and 2) appearances.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ See Friedrich Schiller, *Über die tragische Kunst*, translated as *On the Art of Tragedy* in *Friedrich Schiller: Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), 1-21. The essay appeared in Schiller’s *Neue Thalia* in 1792, but as a lecture it dates to the summer of 1790. See *On the Art of Tragedy*, 1.

“Conflict” is such a useful figure because it both realizes boundaries while at the same time regulating them.¹⁶¹ In the case of tragedy, the figure of conflict is an antidote to the false promises of the “deus ex machina” because, as the term “god out of/in terms of the machine” implies, the representation of a figure who is already itself the overcoming of the divide between the sensible and supersensible undermines art’s task, which Schiller famously defines in *On the Pathetic* (1793) as the “presentation of the supersensible.”¹⁶² This presentation [*Darstellung*] is, for Schiller as well as Schelling, concerned primarily with freedom, and in both cases the same dilemma faces its presentation: *nothing other than the supersensible can be free and freedom itself can never as such fall within the senses.*¹⁶³ This formulation, taken from Schiller’s *Kallias or On Beauty* (1793), sums up the difficulty facing any discourse which is both limited to the bounds of sense and yet depends on—whether as its starting point or goal, assuming the two are not the same (though not necessarily identical)—something supersensible. This has always been true of tragedy, but only true of philosophy since Kant, whose limitation of theoretical reason to the bounds of sense did not fully dispense with an “outside” of reason, viz., the thing in itself. The dependence of these discourses on the absolute produced an imperative from

¹⁶¹ How does Schelling’s use of “conflict” (*Kampf*) relate to Schiller’s use of play (*Spiel*) in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which appeared in three installments of Schiller’s journal, *Die Horen*, throughout 1795? See *Friedrich Schiller: Essays*, 86-178.

¹⁶² “Der letzte Zweck der Kunst ist die Darstellung des Übersinnlichen.” Friedrich Schiller, *Über das Pathetische in Werke in drei Bänden*, vol. 2 (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1966), 425. For an English translation of this text, see *On the Pathetic* in *Friedrich Schiller: Essays*, 45-69.

¹⁶³ Schiller, *Kallias oder Über die Schönheit*, in *Werke in drei Bänden*, vol. 2, p. 356. Translation mine. For a complete English translation of this text, see “Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner” in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145-83. The passage I have cited is from the essay’s second letter, dated “Jena, Feb. 8 [Friday], 1793.”

the direction of post-Kantian philosophy to account for the possibility of a mode of relation between the supersensible and the sensible: on the one hand, the relation was taken to be impossible; on the other hand, it was deemed necessary. Given this antinomous logic surrounding the absolute, it is not surprising that, as the *Philosophical Letters* begin to approach their tragic turn, Schelling takes to calling the representation of the absolute the “riddle.”¹⁶⁴ And though the imperative I have just introduced was common to both philosophy and tragedy, a significant difference between the two is that tragedy, by its very existence, seemed to demonstrate that it had solved the “riddle,” whereas the continued existence of philosophy seemed to demonstrate that philosophy had not.

II. The Death of (the Death of) Tragedy

No one is more acutely aware of this implication than Hegel, and if we are to understand his thorough subordination of tragedy to philosophy, we must understand his localization of tragedy at the horizon between art and philosophy. To do this here it will not be necessary to recapitulate the entirety of his lectures on aesthetics from the 1820s. For one thing, these lectures are later than the period I am here considering; for another, Hegel’s appropriation and subsumption of art is already at work in his Jena writings from the turn of the century. What is important to bear in mind is that, for Hegel, both art and

¹⁶⁴ See Theodore. D. George, “A Monstrous Absolute: Schelling, Kant, and the Poetic Turn in Philosophy,” in *Schelling Now*, p. 146, n. 24.

philosophy are modes of expression which serve, while doing so at different stages of development, the very same cultural goal of full self-realization.¹⁶⁵

Though they share the self-same goal, art and philosophy are sharply differentiated by their proper media of expression. Whereas art resides in the medium of sensation, philosophy resides wholly apart from sensibility, in what Hegel calls “the concept.” Within his taxonomy of the arts, the gradation of dependency on the medium of sensation corresponds directly to a hierarchical continuum of “less” and “more” philosophical forms of art. Owing to its nearly absolute dependence on and inability to gesture away from sensation, the lowest of the art forms is thus architecture. “As one moves from architecture,” however, “to sculpture, to painting, to music, to poetry, the sensuous medium becomes less and less conspicuous within the aesthetic experience.”¹⁶⁶ At its utmost limit within poetry, this anti-aestheticization of art faces a “riddle.” Moreover, this riddle reproduces the same conflict between sensibility and supersensibility that had plagued foundationalism’s project of grounding theoretical reason in an absolute—the very conflict art was supposed to help philosophy solve. As Robert Wicks writes,

Hegel locates poetry at the very edge of art. Poetry approaches this ideal form of expression, but it remains tied to the specificity of language through its use of figurative expression. The deepest aim of poetry, the very aim of the human spirit in general, thus conflicts with the very conditions for artistic expression. Poetry ultimately strives to become philosophy.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ See Robert Wicks, “Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 348-77; 351.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 359.

¹⁶⁷ Wicks, “Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview,” 359.

Entirely unlike architecture, poetry is only just barely dependent on the medium of sensation, while being ever so close to being able to gesture beyond it. This makes poetry the art form most amenable to the task set forth by Schiller in his aesthetic essays and most useful to Schelling in his early philosophical works. In its very gesturing toward the absolute, however, poetry cannot help confessing its original, aesthetic sin. In its figuration of the overcoming of the bounds of sense, it remains a prisoner to the empirical world.

This conflict between the ends and means of poetry mirrors the conflict of post-Kantian philosophy, and the strategy by means of which poetry comes closest to overcoming this conflict is structurally related to—if not the very same as—the one Schelling began thinking through in his early works from the mid-1790s. As I suggested in my discussion of the *Philosophical Letters*, the moral and political necessity of preserving freedom within a philosophical topography of consciousness found a practical application in Schelling's abandonment of the argumentative structure—and strictures—of post-Kantian efforts to “conjure” the absolute from within the confines of theoretical reason. Schelling's abandonment of this structure, especially Fichte's deductive, causal subordination of his system to a first principle, marks a decisive turn toward the adoption of dialectic as a more viable organizational tool and the refusal of the “one-sidedness” of both Dogmatism and Criticism.

Hegel develops this theme further in his early essay, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801). “The basic character of Fichte's principle,”

he writes, "...is that the Subject-Object steps out of its identity and is unable to reestablish itself in it because the different [i.e., pure and empirical consciousness] gets transposed into the causal relation."¹⁶⁸ For Hegel, Schelling's conception of the relation between the opposed elements of empirical and pure consciousness as coordinate, i.e., as mutually determining, counts as a definite advancement on Fichte's more causal conception, which, by contrast, remains undialectically one-sided. The task of philosophical exposition is to articulate, at as many levels as possible, a system of interrelated oppositions, each of which stands in a "separate but equal" relationship to the others. Fichte fails this second requirement precisely in so far as he achieves the first: empirical and pure consciousness, the I and the not-I, are related to one another through the subordination of causality, and by means of this imbalance of power they can never be equals. Hegel presents this element of Fichte's philosophy in his text as a sort of political drama, writing:

In its separating, philosophy cannot posit the separated [opposites] without positing them in the [*higher unity of the*] Absolute. Otherwise they would be pure opposites, having no character save that the one is not if the other is. This connection with the Absolute is not [the same as] their being suspended again, for then there would be no separation. Rather, they are to remain separate and must not lose this character when they are posited in the Absolute or the Absolute in them. Indeed, both must be posited in the Absolute, for what right could one of them have to priority over the other? And it is not only a matter of equal right, but of equal necessity; for if only one of them were connected with the Absolute and not the other, they would be posited as essentially unequal, their union would be impossible, and so would philosophy's task of suspending the dichotomy. Fichte

¹⁶⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie in Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden*, vol. 1 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999), 62. Unless otherwise noted, all English references this text have been taken from G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977). For each citation I will give the German pagination first, separated from the English by a backslash. The full pagination for this citation is thus 62/155.

posited only one of the opposites in the Absolute, or in other words, as the Absolute.¹⁶⁹

If Fichte's philosophy remains one-sided because it absolutizes of one element within a dichotomy rather than absolutizing the dichotomy itself, Schelling's philosophy from the mid to late 1790s improves upon Fichte by means of its strategic reliance on "identification." As Hegel himself puts it, "The reality of opposites and real opposition only happen because of the identity of opposites."¹⁷⁰

Hegel's assertion of the "equal rights" of opposed elements is the assertion of a tragic structure, and the imperative to recognize these elements as opposed in a structured manner is the imperative to occupy the perspective of a "tragedian." The movement from artifact to artist is a necessary stage for Hegel in the ongoing development of philosophy as it articulates its own self-narration as history, but it is not sufficient. Hegel credits Schelling for the realization, for instance, that Criticism and Dogmatism were on equal footing with respect to their desire/inability to puzzle out the "riddle" of freedom from within the confines of theoretical reason. Moreover, he certainly sympathizes with the interrelatedness of Schelling's insight concerning dialectic and his "tragic turn," but only up to a point. For despite Hegel's recognition that art and philosophy must recognize themselves in one another, he also maintains that, just as an edified species of Criticism emerged in the *Philosophical Letters* as *primer inter pares*, so too must Idealism emerge from its encounter with art with a renewed sense of disciplinary superiority and autonomy. On the one hand, we see Hegel stopping to smell the first blooms of dialectic

¹⁶⁹ Hegel, *Difference*, 64/156-7.

¹⁷⁰ Hegel, *Difference*, 65/157-8.

in Schelling's early works; on the other hand, we see the roots of his eventual subordination of art to philosophy clamoring to take hold.

In the section of the *Difference* essay titled "The Need of Philosophy" ["*Bedürfniss der Philosophie*"], Hegel frames this double-movement of philosophy over and against art. Playing on the subjective and objective senses of the genitive case—the need *of* and the need *for* philosophy, he articulates the necessity and insufficiency of Schelling's advancements on Fichte, and in doing so he articulates the necessity and insufficiency of tragedy for philosophy. He writes:

The cultures of various times have established opposites..., which were supposed to be products of Reason and absolutes, in various ways, and the intellect has labored over them as such. Antitheses such as spirit and matter, soul and body, faith an intellect, freedom and necessity, etc. used to be important; and in more limited spheres they appeared in a variety of other guises. The whole weight of human interests hung upon them. With the progress of culture they have passed over into such forms as the antithesis of Reason and sensibility, intelligence and nature and, with respect to the universal concept, of absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity.

The sole interest of Reason is to suspend such rigid antitheses. But this does not mean that Reason is altogether opposed to opposition and limitation. For the necessary dichotomy is One factor in life. Life eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality at the highest pitch of living energy (*in der höchsten Lebendigkeit*) is only possible through its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission. What Reason opposes, rather, is just the absolute fixity which the intellect gives to the dichotomy; and it does so all the more if the absolute opposites themselves originated in Reason.¹⁷¹

Hegel's criticism of Schelling is that, after the admittedly grand suspension of a long-standing antithesis in philosophy, the "sole interest of Reason" remains abeyant. To be sure, it reaches the point of negating the difference between Criticism and Dogmatism,

¹⁷¹ Hegel, *Difference*, 13-14/90-1.

two systems of thought previously considered mutually exclusive. Within the movement of philosophy, however, Schelling's "tragic turn" remains—like art compared with philosophy, like all other art forms compared with poetry, and like tragedy over and against comedy—still reflective and not yet speculative. It stops short of fully moving beyond the negation of difference and reinscribing Reason's negation of indifference, and in doing so Schelling's dialectic remains reflected "in itself" and is not yet speculatively "for itself." In this sense Schelling's overcoming of one-sidedness is, when viewed speculatively, itself one-sided.

Within poetry the "need" of tragedy is to mediate the one-sidedness of epic and lyric. Epic is "objectively" one-sided: the absolute is immanent within the epic mode of representation, but not in a self-reflective manner. Lyric, on the other hand, is "subjectively" one-sided: it is fully given over to self-reflection, but to such an absolute degree that the subject, trapped within self-reflection, cannot—just as Criticism cannot—ever reconcile itself to the absolute, the other, the object. In tragedy this one-sidedness is overcome in so far as it 1) is conscious of the conflict that epic cannot recognize, but 2) instead of residing within the conflict of representation, i.e., within the subject position of lyric it 3) makes this conflict the very content of its representation. The fact that tragedy represents the overcoming of one-sidedness makes it superior to the other modes of poetry and, *a fortiori*, all other art forms; the fact that it cannot recognize that its successful representation of this conflict sublates its own necessity, however, is what ultimately marks and indelibly marks tragedy and, *a fortiori*, all other art forms as lesser, i.e., less free, modes of expression than philosophy. Wicks writes,

As successive material dimensions of the artistic medium dissolve, so are lifted the veils that obscure our comprehension of the ideal artistic subject matter, namely, human self-consciousness as it is in itself. As the ideal subject-matter of art slowly presents itself in its truest form, the very form of art itself gradually fades away.¹⁷²

In the broadest possible sense, Hegel considers this slow self-presentation of human consciousness in/as its truest form “Philosophy.” The question is whether and to what degree philosophy is liable to fall prey to its own all-consuming negation of one-sidedness and whether, in the end, this negation of one-sidedness is itself bound to remain, if not increasingly become, one-sided.

Once tragedy has been truly appreciated and recognized in its truth, the resulting perspective is no longer from within a self-alienated, one-sided, partisan subject position and towards a prospective synthesis, but rather the perspective from the future perfect sublatedness of the conflict. This philosophical standpoint is no longer compatible with tragedy, but neither its realization in history possible without tragedy. In *Metahistory* Hayden White examines the implication of tragedy’s structure for the “plot structures” of Hegel’s historical account of upwardly developing human thought, noting that

Dramatic action rises above and comprehends the Epic or objective, and the Lyric or subjective, points of view; the Drama as such adopts as its standpoint neither one nor the other, but moves between them in such a way as to keep both present to consciousness. ...According to Hegel, Drama begins in the apprehension of the one-sidedness of all perspectives on reality....¹⁷³

¹⁷² Wicks, “Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview,” 357.

¹⁷³ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 94.

If drama in general begins in the apprehension of one-sidedness, tragedy is the representation of this apprehension prior to, leading up to, and even at the moment of the resolution of conflicted ends and means—but never quite from the vantage point of their full reconciliation. White points out that Hegel thus “regards Tragedy and Comedy, not as opposed ways of looking at reality, but as perceptions of situations of conflict from different sides of the action.”¹⁷⁴

What this raises is the question of the relationship between comic and philosophical perspectives. On the one hand, scholars such as Otto Pöggeler and, more recently, Rodolphe Gasché have pointed to the affinity between these perspectives in Hegel.¹⁷⁵ Tragedy, by means of its implicit but unfulfilled reconciliation of its ends and means, is not as fully conscious as comedy, which “calls for a resolution and dissolution not only of its *dramatis personae*, but also of itself as an art form, and even of art itself.”¹⁷⁶ This imperative toward self-recognition through self-dissolution is at the heart of comedy, and as such it would appear to be, at least logically or schematically, *higher* than tragedy. Short of a further means of differentiating the comic perspective from the philosophical perspective, however, this account fails to explain how the self-articulation of philosophy through its own practice amounts to more than a self-alienated, sentimental form of comedy.

¹⁷⁴ White, *Metahistory*, 94.

¹⁷⁵ Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber, 1973), 90-5; Rodolphe Gasché, “Self-dissolving Seriousness: On the Comic in the Hegelian Concept of Tragedy,” in *Philosophy and Tragedy*, ed. Miguel de Beistegui and Simon Sparks (London: Routledge, 2000), 38-56. See note 9 for Gasché’s discussion of Pöggeler’s interpretation of the comic in Hegel.

¹⁷⁶ Gasché, “Self-dissolving Seriousness,” 52.

Gasché observes of comedy that, “within this concern with self-dissolution by one kind of dramatic art, in whose world everything has already dissolved, a principle reveals itself that is presupposed not only by tragedy but, ultimately, by dialectic itself.”¹⁷⁷ The force of this observation is that it underscores the analogous relationship between comedy and tragedy, on one level, and—implicitly—philosophy and art on another. If the principle of dissolution explicit within comedy is the truth of tragedy, then the same principle at work both through *and as* dialectic in Hegel’s thought marks philosophy as the truth of art. “The comic,” Gasché concludes, “in the sense of a susceptibility...for self-dissolution, is the pervading trait of drama, the very condition of possibility without which there would be no such things as the art forms of the tragic and the comic, to name only them.”¹⁷⁸

Gasché’s account is meant primarily to contest the supposed preeminence of tragic within Hegel’s philosophy, and as such it is an intervention more into Hegelian scholarship than into Hegel’s philosophy itself. If we take Hegel at his word, Gasché is telling us, we ought to grant comedy the pride of place in Hegel’s thought normally accorded to tragedy. Once we have granted this pride of place, however, the question resurfaces all the more pointedly: Is moving beyond the inchoate dialectic of tragedy and its dependence on the medium of sensibility, i.e., of all forms of art, a necessary task of philosophy for its self-articulation? And even if so, is it possible? Provisionally? Finally?

¹⁷⁷ Gasché, “Self-dissolving Seriousness,” 52.

¹⁷⁸ Gasché, “Self-dissolving Seriousness,” 53.

By the end of his discussion of Hegel, White seems to suggest that it is possible, but only under the further condition that philosophy must itself acknowledge its own coordinate status—though perhaps still as *primer inter pares*—with art, religion, and science.

Earlier, however, he notes that, because world history achieves its synchronic character as history only through the medium of conflict, “the spectacle of history, when viewed from *within* the process of its own unfolding...is conceivable as a specifically Tragic Drama.”¹⁷⁹ Does this mean that the departure from a conception of world history as tragic would mean viewing it from *without* the process of its own unfolding? Absolutely, that is? This would seem to be the case.¹⁸⁰

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* Terry Eagleton takes up this problematically “absolute” stance of philosophy over and against the realm of sensibility—of which tragedy is the sentinel, though perhaps with its back turned to the other arts—remarking that “the absolute would seem distanced from us by the very discourse sent out to pursue it.”¹⁸¹

This possibility raises serious questions for philosophy’s narrative of progress (as self-narration), one of which is whether its narration of/as success can ever be uncoupled from a narrative of/as failure. Early in the *Form* essay Schelling had taken his fellow philosophers to task for lamenting how little influence their “science” had enjoyed.

¹⁷⁹ White, *Metahistory*, 110.

¹⁸⁰ White, *Metahistory*. 131. In the end, White’s position adopts a descriptive outlook on Hegel’s claims for philosophy. By subsuming philosophy itself under the viewpoint of “philosophical history,” White accommodates the historical specificity out of which Hegel’s claims emerged as well as their ongoing development after the latter’s death. At points such as this in his work, White terms this synthesizing but not fully synthesized or self-reconciled vantage point “ironic.” I hesitate to incorporate this use of “ironic” in my own discussion for fear it would bring about more confusion than clarity.

¹⁸¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 138.

“What science?” Schelling wondered. There has never been such a “science,” and so far none has managed to come into existence.¹⁸² Schelling embraced this need optimistically and set out to realize just such a science. Hegel of course subsequently took *him* to task for stopping short of the goal, but the question remains whether the need “for” philosophy can ever be uncoupled from the need “of” philosophy. Eagleton notes that

The fact that we have need of such as discourse in the first place already suggests that something has gone awry, that philosophy comes about because of a Fall which it repeats in the very act of trying to repair. If all were as well as the theory suggests, then why are we reading at all, rather than just revelling in the rich plenitude of our intuitions? If philosophy exists, then we can already deduce at least one other existent, namely contradiction.... That there *is* conflict is made clear by philosophy’s very existence.¹⁸³

This would seem to be a reversal of the reconfigured position Gasché assigns to Hegel, according to which self-dissolution, or the movement beyond tragedy and toward philosophy, is the precondition of tragedy. In Eagleton’s argument, something like the opposite turns out to be the case: philosophy can only subsist over time—can only be actual—based on the condition of unresolved divisions and one-sidedness within Spirit. If this is the case, Eagleton argues, “it is because Hegel has subsumed the historical conflicts which necessitate his theory, and so threaten to relativize it, into the theory itself, converting its preconditions into its very dialectical form.”¹⁸⁴

In terms of discursive modes of expression, this amounts to the eternal recurrence of a) art’s conflicted (re)presentation of freedom and b) philosophy’s tireless rearticulation of its own identity in terms of art’s historically one-sided view of the overcoming of one-

¹⁸² Schelling, *Form* 55 [I, 112], I.1.300.

¹⁸³ Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 138.

¹⁸⁴ Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 139.

sidedness. “The *Phenomenology of Mind*,” writes Eagleton, “is thus doomed to repeat the very negations it strives to overcome; and every reader of the text will have to enact this process afresh, in the ceaseless repetition which is now all that is left of philosophy.”¹⁸⁵ If philosophy is consigned to ceaseless repetition, and if philosophy narrates its own becoming in terms of the movement beyond tragedy’s conflicted perspective, then must not this movement itself be ceaselessly repeated? This is exactly Robert Wicks’ conclusion concerning the “end of art.” “If there were only one human civilization,” he writes,

then art would indeed have no resurrection. But there are many civilizations, each of which has its own rise and fall. ...Hegel’s “end of art” thesis thus indicates a perennial, or timeless, “end” of art. If we combine this with Hegel’s more well known claim that successive epochs always stand at higher levels of self-consciousness than the previous ones, we uncover within history two distinct rhythms of change, one progressive and the other cyclical.¹⁸⁶

Thus, as a consequence of the same strategy Hegel used to generate the dialectical unhinging of philosophy from art and thereby set it, like Archimedes with a long-enough lever, free to dwell contemplatively in the Concept, philosophy remains—so long as it asserts its own discrete autonomy—bound to undermine its own project.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 139.

¹⁸⁶ Wicks, “Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview,” 370.

¹⁸⁷ For a recent discussion of Adorno’s critique of Hegel along similar, though not explicitly “tragic” lines, see Brian O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 76-81.

Conclusion

And so, barring an eschatological or utopian interruption of history, how are we supposed to make sense of this account of philosophy as being beyond tragedy without recourse to a structure, which is indelibly tragic? Unless philosophy accounts for its own differentiated and repetitious movement, and unless it accounts for the subsequent renegotiations of art and religion (that are always impending), how is philosophy's pronouncement of the "end of art" anything other than a one-sided, myopic view of history? As Eva Geulen writes in *The End of Art*,

The end of art is not only the hinge between aesthetics and anti-aesthetics, but it also falls between the disciplines that have competence to address it. Art history and literary studies are each here as competent and incompetent as intellectual history and philosophy. The relation between aesthetic theory and practice is particularly problematic, a relation whose inclusion within the purview of the end of art finds its historical emblem in the proximity of Hegel's and Goethe's deaths. The virulent competition, at least since Plato, between philosophy and art is sharpened under the conditions of the end of art as discourse to an antagonistic principle that binds the competitors firmly to one another. The topos has a philosophical origin, but Hegel himself already had to admit that a turn to aesthetics presupposes the existence of genuine poetical works. As a philosophical decree, the end of art always arrives too late or too soon. And yet art cannot end itself, for it would then no longer be art. It requires therefore a prior philosophy, or art itself becomes philosophy where it strives to reach its end.¹⁸⁸

The temporality of philosophy's pronouncement becomes problematic the moment it leaves its lips, and even more so if it happens to echo. How are we supposed to understand philosophy's endless pronouncement of autonomy as anything other than the content of a world-historically tragic form? At the very least, how are we supposed to

¹⁸⁸ Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 16.

understand the end of art as anything other than the local state of affairs within the always relatively minute group of humans who self-identify as “Hegelians?” Finally, how are we to understand *them* except in terms of their mistaken adherence to the ideal of a “singular modernity,” the validity of which was at best only punctually valid at the moment of its birth and at worst—and in fact—not even then?¹⁸⁹

If the proliferation of a rhetoric of conflict together with the growing philosophical investment in a discourse of “the tragic” are essential moments in early Idealism’s articulation of itself as/through dialectic, and if this articulation is bound to develop in a direction which ultimately depotentializes art, the potentialization of which was a necessary means of realizing this articulation, then the question must be raised: what, if anything should have been or actually was the response of art and its practitioners to this ongoing development? If the abstract structure of tragic conflict provided philosophy with the ideal model for what Hegel deemed the “sole interest of Reason,” namely, the suspension of rigid antitheses, it was because the need *for* philosophy is dependent on the need *of* philosophy to recognize antitheses that “demand” and are capable of suspension. Hegel’s optimistic reading of Schelling’s *Philosophical Letters* is that, by structuring positions which appeared to be mutually exclusive within a conflict or struggle, the underlying criterion emerges in terms of which their equi-valent (in)validity becomes manifest. But what if it doesn’t? Hegel might say that one had only proved that the opposition had not been driven far enough; that the “conflict” had not taken place.

¹⁸⁹ See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).

In the works of Heinrich von Kleist, however, a “competing” position is articulated, but one which cannot be easily subsumed as an opposition over and against Idealism. Such a subsumption would require a “higher” standpoint from which a) Kleist’s position and b) Idealism could be brought to a point of indifference, but this sublating movement would amount to nothing more than an edified species of Idealism. Just as Schelling’s opposition of Dogmatism and Criticism resulted in an edified species of Criticism, and just as Hegel’s opposition of art and philosophy resulted in an edified species of philosophy, the self-articulating movement of dialectic, which determines itself differentially through the act of asserting the identity of identity and difference, cannot be brought to a point of indifference with its own opponents without already being declared the victor. In the next chapter I will examine Kleist’s appropriation and disfiguration of structured conflict in his works as a possible critique of this progressive closure/opening of Idealism’s dialectic. Kleist’s relationship with philosophy has been a constant theme in Kleist reception since the early nineteenth century, and in my examination of Kleist’s appropriation of “the tragic” I will also explore the ways in which this reception has both 1) mirrored the sort of methodological false dilemma out of which Schelling’s use of “conflict” emerged as well as 2) glossed over Kleist’s critique of the means by which post-Kantian philosophy strategized the defeat of its skeptical counterparts and narrated its own discursive autonomy.

CHAPTER IV

KLEIST'S "SO-CALLED KANT CRISIS" AND "SHE NOT TO BE NAMED": TRAGEDY'S CRITIQUE OF THE WAKE OF KANT

"He has made me a byword of the peoples... My days are
past, my plans are broken off, the desires of my heart."
Job 17.6-11

"And now I have become their song, I am a byword to them. ...when I
looked for good, evil came; and when I waited for light, darkness came."
Job 30.9-26

I. Introduction: Between the Antinomies and a False Dilemma

In February and March of 1801 Kleist writes a handful of letters to his fiancé, Wilhelmine von Zenge, and his sister, Ulrike, in which he communicates a growing sense of skepticism towards, among other things, 1) his future occupation, 2) the possibility of a secure foundation for knowledge, and, not surprisingly, 3) the (im)possibility of communication itself.¹⁹⁰ This phase of Kleist's life, during which he relocates, together with Ulrike, first to Paris in the summer of 1801 and eventually to Switzerland without her at the year's end, is so highly valued by Kleist scholars because there is no disputing that it is the phase during which he suddenly and dramatically transforms from Heinrich von Kleist, forgettable underling in the Prussian military bureaucracy, to Heinrich von

¹⁹⁰ See especially the letters from 5 February and 23 March, 1801. Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, 2 vols. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993), II/625-30 and II/636-7. Translation mine. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Kleist's work are taken from this edition.

Kleist, literary luminary of the post-Enlightenment. What is disputed, however, are two things: first, what, if anything, caused this transformation? and second, is this transformation understood more productively as a rupture or as something that had been evolving over time?

This two-fold disagreement about the nature and character of this phase of Kleist's life is reflected in the long-standing scholarly dispute surrounding the “‘so-called’ Kant(-)crisis.” One can hardly write the term without insinuating oneself onto one side of the debate or another. Every possibly combination of scare quotes, “so-called,” and hyphenation has been at some point employed by scholars either to engage or parry the debate, and with each new permutation Kleist scholarship becomes a more taxonomically diverse series of interactions between the variables at play: post-Kantian literature and philosophy; Kleist's autobiographical representation; not to mention Kleist scholarship itself as an unfolding discourse.

Was there a crisis in the first place? If so, was Kant or Kant's philosophy the cause of it? Was philosophy of any description the cause of it? If so, was it perhaps not really Kant, but one of the post-Kantian philosophers to whom one, e.g., Kleist himself, might refer to as “Kantian”? And if none of these is the case, why has this so-called *Kant* crisis or *Kant crisis* persisted to the point that it remains to this day a *sine qua non* of Kleist scholarship, even if it is often only introduced as a straw man? At a certain point the very rhetorical device used to signal the questionability of the problem becomes itself questionable, i.e., the “so-called” Kant crisis turn on itself so entirely that one starts to wonder about the

“so-called so-called Kant crisis.”

In her discussion of the *Kantkrise*¹⁹¹ in *Immediacy and Mediation in the Work of Heinrich von Kleist*, Bettina Schulte identifies two competing tendencies within Kleist scholarship since the mid-twentieth century.¹⁹² On the one hand, there are those scholars who have privileged the causal role played by philosophy in Kleist’s transition, first toward a state of epistemological disillusionment and later to one of aesthetic optimism; on the other hand, there are those scholars who find this causal account misleading. For this second group of scholars the role played by philosophy in Kleist’s transition from frustrated army officer and bureaucrat to professional artist was not so much causal as perhaps symptomatic both of his age and the age in which he lived—it was, so to speak, “in the air.” She characterizes the two camps as follows: “It surrounds...the question of the significance of the so-called *Kantkrise*, which was much discussed by Kleist scholarship until a few years ago, but which has been cast aside (*ad acta gelegte*) as irrelevant by the more recent, predominantly “positivistic” era.”¹⁹³

Schulte notes that the first group of scholars represents a long-standing position within Kleist scholarship, whereas the second group is both more representative of recent scholarship *and* tends to consider the “Kant question” a one-dimensional, silver bullet

¹⁹¹ In this chapter I will primarily use the German *Kantkrise* (minus scare quotes and minus “so-called”) when referring to the particular reconceptualization of the term toward which I am arguing.

¹⁹² Bettina Schulte, *Unmittelbarkeit und Vermittlung im Werk Heinrich von Kleist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1988), 59-69.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 59. “Es geht um...die von der Kleist-Forschung bis vor einigen Jahren vieldiskutierte, von der neueren weitgehend ‘positivistisch’ orientierten Ära als irrelevant ad acta gelegte Frage nach dem Stellenwert der sogenannten Kantkrise.”

solution to the complex problem of Kleist's abrupt turn toward literary—and more specifically *tragic*—composition. The *ad acta* camp, as I will call it throughout this chapter, is thus most easily defined negatively, i.e., as those scholars who would like once and for all to repress the monopoly which “Kant” and/as philosophy exercises over accounts of Kleist's literary conversion. What is interesting about this reactive stance to “Kant” is the degree to which it is, as we will see, directed less directly toward Kant, the individual philosopher, as it is to Kant, the representative of the tendency to foreground philosophy as a motive force within Kleist's personal development. In this sense, “Kant” is the exemplar of a trend with which he has to a large degree become synonymous.

In contrast to the *ad acta* camp, the “Kant” camp, as I will call it, proceeds from the shared assumption that philosophy is in fact *the* place to look for a causal narrative with respect to Kleist's transition. As we will see, though, this shared assumption about the nature of the account (causal) and the nature of the causal agent (philosophical) has not led to a consensus concerning the identity of the particular philosophical text or even the particular philosopher whose agency best fits the narrative. In fact, the history of the Kant camp has itself been a story of internal fragmentation, largely over questions of connoisseurship: Was it *this* work of Kant that drove him to despair? Or *this* one? Or perhaps it was a work of one of Kant's followers? Or perhaps it was more diffuse and osmotic than any of these possibilities, though nonetheless still principally philosophical in nature? One can see with this last possibility how easily the “Kant” camp, at its extreme, can be transmuted into its opposite, though the same can just as easily be said of the *ad acta* camp as well. Because of its essentially negative identity, the *ad acta* camp

must pursue its targets wherever they may roam in order to engage them in a positive fashion, and at the point that the Kant camp itself moves beyond the restricted field of Kant's works and the field of philosophy in general, the *ad acta* camp finds itself—in the same ironic manner that Schelling imagines Dogmatism appealing to freedom—arguing against the same “socially contextualized” direction from which it had originally launched its sortie.

Rather than dispute the merits of either camp or favor one camp's account over the other, I will present examples of each side and in doing so show how both approaches to the *Kantkrise* are trapped within the same ambivalence toward the significance of the terms “Kant” and “Kantian.” Though I will by no means be able to offer a resolution to this problem in the context of my current project, I can suggest that the difficulty of accounting for the *Kantkrise* stems in large part from the overdetermination of the term “Kantian,” which functions as a microcosm of sorts for the general set of problems facing the self-narration of the emergence of modernity. Whether modernity's emergence is being treated through the lens of Kleist's own self-narration over and against Kant or through the meta-lens of the history of Kleist scholarship's account of this self-narration, the structural problems at play are very much the same here as they were both in Schelling's “tragic turn” in the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* as well as Hegel's turn away from art in the decades that followed.

With this in mind, I will reconstruct the discourse of the *Kantkrise* along two lines: first, I will retrace biographical accounts of Kleist from Ludwig Tieck's early effort (1826) up to

Ludwig Muth's canonical work on Kleist and Kant (1954);¹⁹⁴ second, I will shift away from scholars devoted exclusively to Kleist in order to show how the methodological pitfalls which led to the divisions within Kleist scholarship have been, at least to some degree, addressed by contemporary scholars working on similar problems within the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Kleist did suffer a Kant crisis, I contend, and it is worth cultivating a semantic field for "Kant" and "Kantian" that is sufficiently fertile for this proposition to be fruitful.

II. *Keinmal ist Einmal, or The Stories of Kleist's Life*

Ernst Cassirer's essay "Heinrich von Kleist und die Kantische Philosophie" is the point of departure for the contemporary, philosophically-oriented discourse on Kleist's *Kantkrise*. In it he provides a typology of responses to Kant's critical philosophy. Within this typology, Kleist serves as a sort of neither/nor over and against Goethe and Schiller, both of whom had significant, if quite different, relationships to Kant's philosophy. He writes:

Wenn Goethe der Kantischen Philosophie von Anfang an mit einer gewissen heiteren Gelassenheit und Sicherheit gegenübersteht, um dann durch Motive, die in seiner eigenen Entwicklung lagen, mehr und mehr in ihren Bannkreis zu geraten, wenn Schiller sich ihr, nach der ersten genaueren Kenntnis, mit unbedingtem Eifer hingibt und nicht eher ruht, als bis er sie in eindringendem methodischen Studium ganz durchdringen und bewältigt hat; --so scheint Kleist weder zu dem einen noch zum andern die Kraft zu besitzen. Er sträubt sich gegen den Gedanken, daß auch er eines von den "Opfern der Torheit" werden solle, deren die Kantische Philosophie schon so viele auf dem Gewissen habe, aber er

¹⁹⁴ Ludwig Muth, *Kleist und Kant: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation* (Cologne: Kölner Universitäts-Verlag, 1954).

fühlt sich andererseits ohnmächtig, das dialektische Netz, das sich dichter um ihn legt, mit einem raschen Entschluß zu zerreißen.¹⁹⁵

Cassirer's typology offers a three-fold division of literary responses to the Kantian philosophy: 1) one maintains one's independence from it; 2) one recognizes one's dependence on it and works toward asserting oneself over it; or 3) one tarries somewhere in between the two. Goethe represents the first possibility, exemplifying a relationship between philosophy and literature which could be called the autonomy of recognition. From the standpoint of this position, there is no conflict (*Kampf*) with the critical philosophy, i.e., there is no need for reconciliation because there is never any intermediating conflict.

Schiller, on the other hand, represents the second possibility. He quickly recognizes the critical philosophy as a worthy adversary on whom he is—and will be for the first half of the 1790s—intellectually dependent. Nonetheless, by means of what Cassirer calls the “unconditional zeal of self-dedication” and a refusal to rest until the other, i.e., Kant's critical insight, has been “penetrated and mastered,” this dependence is sublated over time through what can rightly be seen as a rarified sort of agonistic struggle. If one considers his philosophical essays on tragedy from the early 1790s and the tragic compositions which followed immediately thereafter, viz., the *Wallenstein* trilogy, it appears as though Schiller and the critical philosophy were both better off for having known one another. Frederick Beiser writes,

¹⁹⁵ Ernst Cassirer, “Heinrich von Kleist und die Kantische Philosophie” in *Idee und Gestalt: Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Kleist* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 157-202; 160.

Prima facie Schiller's theory of tragedy seems to be little more than an application of Kant's concept of the sublime to drama. The theory makes no sense apart from the ethics of duty, the Kantian dualism between reason and sensibility, and the Kantian concepts of freedom. Still, it would be a grave mistake to reduce the theory down to its Kantian parameters alone. For Schiller's theory is at its most innovative and interesting precisely when it breaks outside the confines of Kant's ethics.¹⁹⁶

The question, then, is why Kleist neither passed *on* Kant nor passed *through* him. If one accepts Cassirer's characterization, it appears as though Goethe was smart enough not to need Kant and Schiller was smart enough to use Kant. Kleist, by contrast, managed neither. Why? Because he didn't *get* Kant? Or because he got him in ways that differed from Goethe and Schiller, both of whom encountered Kant as adults and not, as Kleist did, as students?¹⁹⁷ Either way, Kleist was disposed neither to Goethe's more casual, arm's length approach to the critical philosophy nor to the *Segenskampf* undertaken by Schiller.¹⁹⁸ This in-betweenness with respect to the contemporary (or slightly outdated) developments in German philosophy situates Kleist in a tarrying typological interstice, but, as my account makes its way back from Kleist's time to the mid-twentieth century, it

¹⁹⁶ Frederick Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 239. See also pp. 2-4, where Beiser puts forth six propositions meant to summarize "the chief merits of Schiller's philosophy *vis-à-vis* Kant's."

¹⁹⁷ In this sense, as I have said, Kleist represents not so much a distinct third alternative to the first two as perhaps an instance of the new generation—the first of its kind—for whom a confrontation with Kant had already become, at many German universities, a curricular right of passage.

¹⁹⁸ For a comparative reading of Schiller's and Kleist's literary incorporation of the Kantian sublime, see Eric Baker, "Fables of the Sublime: Kant, Schiller, Kleist," in *Modern Language Notes* 113:3 (1998: April): 524-36. The term "Segenskampf" describes Jacob's wrestling match with an otherwise transcendent God/angel in Genesis 32. The divine being worries about the approaching dawn, lest the light of day fall on his "appearance," and Jacob, who has survived the ordeal to that point, agrees to release the divine being on the condition that he be blessed. The divine being obliges, asking him his name in the process. Upon hearing "Jacob," the being says, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" [Du sollst nicht mehr Jakob heißen, sondern Israel; denn du hast mit Gott und mit Menschen gekämpft und hast gewonnen] (Genesis 32:29).

will become clear why Kleist's response to Kant is misunderstood if we simplify it as indecisiveness, as loitering.

A. Tieck: Kant as Context

It is hard to imagine that Kleist's interest in Kant seemed any more abnormal to his contemporaries than his life's work and death seemed normal. It is thus hardly surprising that early biographical assessments of Kleist generally acknowledge the presence of something like a psychic rupture, but do so without much effort at explaining the rupture in terms of Kant or any other philosopher. Already in the Preface to the second edition of Kleist's collected works (1826), however, Ludwig Tieck speaks of Kleist's growing investment in philosophy as though Kleist were a sorcerer's apprentice tinkering with forces too powerful for his underdeveloped constitution. While Tieck's assessment now stands as an early and unmistakably important step in the genealogy of Kant-oriented readings of Kleist, it—and the same will hold true of others, especially Cassirer—nonetheless allows “Kantian philosophy” to operate on many levels: as a cause and effect within contemporary German culture; as an instance of philosophy as well as a philosophically special case; as a cipher for “Bildung,” both in the positive sense of a vehicle for upward mobility as well the negative sense of commodified dilettantism; and as a symptom of the ambivalent and mutually exacerbating tendencies toward philology and misology within the age in general—and in particular in Kleist.

The following citation from Tieck's Preface takes up Kleist's life near the end of 1800.

At this point Kleist has already returned to Berlin in order to assume a minor

administrative post, but the announcement of his *Kantkrise* in March 1801 is still looming on the far side of winter. I cite from it here at some length:

His disposition became more and more agitated. It is natural that the majority of autodidacts over-invest themselves in whatever they happen to be learning, which is itself more the product of idiosyncrasy, chance, and an inclination towards exaggeration than anything else. It is even conceivable that in those hours, whenever knowledge and learning fail to provide them with the modesty that gently broadens our soul and enriches us unawares—at those moments they deeply despise every sort of knowledge, thought, and learning and everything that comes from them, projecting above the entire realm of culture a fantastic and impossible state of nature that becomes their standard of both truth and happiness. In this unhappiest of moods our friend found himself, and he did not become calmer, but all the more agitated, as he got to know the Kantian philosophy, to which he dedicated himself for some time with the utmost zeal.

Whether it was well suited to him, whether he was ripe for it or well prepared enough for it—those are questions which can only be answered with great difficulty. Ever since Kant we have seen students of the ever alternating systems, who, precisely as students, swear by the word of the latest master and over time lose, as a rule, a sense or appreciation for art and scholarship as well as for the manifold appearances of life. Only seldom does it happen that—which, after all, is the true task of any course of study—one feels his spirit truly awakened and learns to think for himself. It is so convenient

when just one voice is heard;

And you swear only by the master's word.

In sum—have words to lean upon etc.

When the student has gotten to the point where he has screened himself off from life, history, science, and everything around him, but then loosens the strictures that have narrowed his view, then everything that doesn't fit into his so-called system is there for him to judge, discard, and laugh off with all the more confidence. Everyone should learn to think, but that does not mean that philosophy is everyone's vocation.

Even Kleist became prouder and more arrogant on this path, without becoming any more confident within. At this point, rendering himself free and living only for the sake of the loftiest *Wissenschaft* seemed to him a duty. He was of a mind that it was degrading to be a subject of the state and that every office he held could only hinder his most sacred vocation, viz., to cultivate himself (*sich auszubilden*). Also, he raved on, it would be unseemly for a noble person to act in any capacity on behalf of a state to which he had not himself given assent and risk letting himself be used as its blind instrument. Thus one confusion alternated with another.

His agitation and impassioned angst grew so great that his uttermost wish was to alter his current situation at any price, come what may.

[Sein Gemüth aber wurde immer unruhiger. Es ist natürlich, daß die meisten Autodidakten dasjenige, was sie auf ihre eigentümliche, zufällige und heftige Weise erlernen, viel zu hoch anschlagen; es ist eben so begreiflich, daß sie in anderen Stunden, wenn ihnen Wissen und Lernen nicht diese Genügsamkeit giebt, die unsre Seele gelinde erweitert, und unvermerkt bereichert, dann alles Wissen, Denken und Lernen, alle Kenntnisse und Gelehrsamkeit tief verachten, und einen geträumten und unmöglichen Naturstand höher stellen, als alle Cultur, ja für ihn den wahrsten und glücklichsten halten. In dieser unglücklichen Stimmung befand sich damals unser Freund, und er wurde nicht ruhiger, sondern nur noch aufgeregter, als er die Kantische Philosophie kennen lernte, der er sich einige Zeit mit dem größten Eifer ergab.

Ob sie ihm angeeignet, ob er reif für sie war und vorbereitet genug, das sind Fragen, die sich nur schwer beantworten lassen. Seit Kant sahn wir Schüler der sich ablösenden Systeme, die eben als Schüler immer auf das Wort des letzten Meisters schwören und in der Regel auf lange für die Wissenschaft und Kunst, so wie für die mannigfaltigen Erscheinungen des Lebens Sinn und Verständnis verlieren. Selten, daß einer (was doch die wahre Aufgabe des Studiums ist) seinen Geist wahrhaft erwacht fühlt und selbst denken lernt. Es ist so bequem

Daß ihr nur Einen hört

Und auf des Meisters Worte schwört

Im Ganzen haltet euch an Worte, u. s. w.

Hat der Schüler sich das Leben, Geschichte, Wissenschaft und Alles um ihn her recht verdeckt, geht er mit seiner Binde, die ihn nur wenig Raum sehen läßt, recht gerade aus, so kann er um so sicherer Alles beurtheilen, verwerfen und verlachen, was seinem sogenannten Systeme nicht anpaßt. Alle Menschen sollen denken lernen, aber nicht alle sind zu Philosophen berufen.

Auch Kleist wurde auf diesem Wege stolzer und anmaßender, ohne in seinem Innern sicherer zu werden. Jetzt schien es ihm Pflicht, sich ganz frei zu machen, und nur der höchsten Wissenschaft zu leben. Es dünkte ihn nun erniedrigend, ein Staatsbürger zu sein, der durch jedes Amt, in seinem heiligsten Beruf, sich auszubliden, nur gehindert werden könne. Auch sei es dem edlen Menschen ungeziemend, so schwärmte er, für den Staat irgend zu wirken, wozu er nicht selbst seine Einwilligung gegeben habe, und sich zum blinden Werkzeuge gebrauchen zu lassen. So löste eine Verwirrung die andere ab.

Seine Unruhe und die leidenschaftliche Beängstigung wurden so groß, daß sein heftigster Wunsch war, nur um jeden Preis seine jetztige Lage zu verändern,

erfolge auch, was da wolle.]¹⁹⁹

Tieck's account vacillates continuously between *ad hominem* and more genetic, social assessments of Kleist's anxiety. On the one hand, Kleist is a typical autodidact: prone to overly invest and naturalize his investment in whatever object of inquiry happens to present itself; moreover, he exhibits a lack of authenticity associated with the autodidact, whose only real authenticity lies in the uttermost wish, as Tieck finally says of Kleist, "to change his current situation, come what may." This negative relation to *Bildung* leaves the autodidact in a constant state of ambivalence; instead of being a propaedeutic for coping with an incommensurate world, *Bildung* becomes a struggle to forestall or even overcome this incommensurability. When *Bildung* as a means cannot fulfill its mistakenly assigned task, Tieck imagines, learning and learnedness transmute into objects of derision, and a Rousseauian state of nature is projected onto the far side of culture as more true, more happy than our hopeless misconstructions.

From Tieck's perspective Kleist's problem—though in this respect Kleist was by no means alone—was that his relation to *Bildung*, culture, etc. was a paradoxical effort to cultivate autonomy by means of dogmatism. While Kleist struggled with the thought of being a cog in the machinery of the Prussian state, he struggled no less with the fact that Kantian philosophy offered, at its most radical points, assurances only about the immanence of human thought and being. Kleist appeared to want a maximum of freedom with respect to society along with a minimum degree of responsibility for the

¹⁹⁹ Ludwig Tieck cited in Heinrich von Kleist, *Heinrich von Kleists gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Ludwig Tieck, 3 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1826), I.vi-vii. Translation mine.

underlying epistemological structure, i.e., a de-naturalization of actual society and a thoroughgoing naturalization of its conditions. The problem with this desideratum is that what it most resembles is a Kantian world turned inside out. Kant's answer to the question "What is Enlightenment?" (1784) is that it is "human being's egress out of its self-incurred infancy."²⁰⁰ What Kleist appeared to want, however, was a dogmatic treasure map to lead the way, which cannot help but produce the "dogmatic Criticism" against which Schelling rails in his *Philosophical Letters*.

If Kleist's problem was typical, then so too was his solution. Tieck complains about the mistaken faith of students in the cure-all powers of philosophical systems. More often than not, these students vainly seek for a sense of certainty in the revolving door of post-Kantian philosophy, each new manifestation of which blossomed with promises of realizing Kant's spirit on the written page—but were soon trampled by the next "final" system. In this context Tieck plays on the ambiguity of the German "letzt," which means both "last" and "latest," writing that "since Kant we've seen students of the alternating systems, who, in their capacity as students, swear by the word of the latest/last master (*des letzten Meisters*)."²⁰⁰ It's bad enough that students, who are perhaps disposed to this submissive stance toward their teachers, are confronted with teachers who reinforce this "infancy," but to make matters worse, the *letzte Meister* turn out only to be temporary solutions to a persisting problem. This leads, Tieck observes, to a further—

²⁰⁰ Immanuel Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" in *Immanuel Kant: Was ist Aufklärung? Ausgewählte kleine Schriften*, ed. Horst D. Brandt (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999). Translation mine. For a full English translation of this text, see Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11-22.

and much more serious—problem. The pattern of over-investment in any given alternation within post-Kantian philosophy and the inevitable disappointment which follows (along with the subsequent reinvestment in the succeeding alternation) over time leads students “as a rule to a loss of sense or appreciation for art and scholarship as well as the manifold appearances of life.” What seldom happens, by contrast, is that a student’s spirit is awakened by a given philosophy and through it learns to think for itself.

If Kant’s answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) was the egress from mankind’s self-incurred tutelage or infancy (*Unmündigkeit*), it is not without irony that Tieck assures us that the study of Kantian philosophy was among the least likely paths toward intellectual autonomy. Kant’s *sapere aude!* had, in the ensuing decades, undergone a curious reversal. This ironizing dialectic of enlightenment, by means of which the means to an end becomes its own obstacle, appears to be just what Tieck has in mind here. The awakening of the spirit and the cultivation of what we would now call “critical thinking skills” are the principle tasks of a student’s studies, and yet neither is likely to flourish in the pale light of philosophical inquiry.

Tieck’s prejudice is consistent with the anti-Enlightenment tendency of the Romantics, many of whom had at one time or another submitted to and been frustrated by one species of Kantianism (or another). Moreover, this *a posteriori* judgment had already been forecasted, as Cassirer suggests in his typology of responses to Kant, by Goethe, who indeed typified a measured response to the risks and rewards of engagement with Kant’s philosophy. It is therefore hardly surprising that Tieck drives his point home about the

philosophy by selectively citing lines from the scene in *Faust* where Mephistopheles helps the student “pick his major.” The impressionable student wishes to become learned with respect to all things on earth and in heaven, and Mephistopheles pulls the poor boy’s leg this way and that. Tieck recognizes in Goethe’s characterization of the young student a lifelike representation of the intellectually ambitious Kleist. The lines he cites from *Faust* capture the dogmatic tendency within the supposedly emancipatory discipline of philosophy, and all of it has been placed by Goethe in the mouth of Mephistopheles, the guidance counselor from Hell—literally.

Every bit as important as the lines Tieck cites from *Faust*, however, are the lines that frame his citation (I have highlighted the lines which were cited in the passage above):

Mephistopholes:

I would not give the wrong impression
As it concerns this discipline.
It’s all too easy to get sidetracked in,
So much of poison lies concealed within
That’s scarce distinguishable from the medicine.
Here too the risk is least **when just one voice is heard;**
Swear only by the master’s word.
In sum—have words to lean upon,
And through that trusty gateway, lexicon,
You pass into the shrine of certainty.²⁰¹

[Mephistopholes:

Ich wünschte nicht euch irre zu führen.
Was diese Wissenschaft betrifft,
Es ist so schwer den falschen Weg zu meiden,
Es liegt in ihr so viel verborgnes Gift,
Und von der Arznei ist's kaum zu unterscheiden.
Am besten ist's auch hier, **wenn ihr nur Einen hört,**

²⁰¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), p. 47 [lines 1983 – 92].

**Und auf des Meisters Worte schwört.
Im Ganzen -- haltet euch an Worte!**
Dann geht ihr durch die sichre Pforte
Zum Tempel der Gewißheit ein.²⁰²

Though Derrida does not reference this passage in his discussion of the *pharmakon* in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” the logic circulates along the same lines.²⁰³ Mephistopheles warns the student that the science of theology (in this sense it is no different from philosophy) harbors within itself a poison that is nearly impossible to tell apart from its antidote, but that the surest way to arrive in one piece at the gates to the temple of certainty is to submit oneself to the voice of a single master. Following Tieck, in Kleist’s case it was the hunger for certainty that drove him to overeat at the buffet of post-Kantian philosophy. Above all else, perhaps, it was less significant that one given system left him too full or another too empty. The crisis-inspiring problem—the tragic structure in which Kleist found himself—was the growing sense that there was no immediate way to differentiate between the swollen bellies of gluttony and malnutrition.

So long, however, as the desire for heteronomy persists side by side with the Kantian foreclosure on the epistemological conditions for securing a supersensible, “outside” foothold, the cycle of renewed expectation and disappointment remains insoluble. Freud will later capture the structure of this cycle in his characterization of melancholy, but

²⁰² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*, 143 vols. (Weimar: H Böhlau, 1887 – 1919), 14: 93 [lines 1983 – 92].

²⁰³ Both Derrida’s text and *Faust* also handle the problem of defining (and translating) *logos* in ways that warrant comparison. See, for instance, Faust’s debate with the lexicon (“In the beginning was the Word...” lines 1224-37) and the entirety of the scene between the Student and Mephistopheles (lines 1886 – 2050). See also “Plato’s Pharmacy” in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61- 181.

Kleist, as manifestly as any figure in the post-Kantian period, typified it a century in advance. And despite Tieck's Romantic prejudice, he seems to me to have put his finger on the enabling relation between post-Kantian philosophy and the generation of scholars who came of age in its wake. Twice in the passage I cited Tieck uses the term "sich ablösen" as a description for an unfolding alternation: the first for his "same as it ever was" description of the alternating variations on Kantianism (*Seit Kant sahn wir Schüler der sich ablösenden Systeme*); the second for the occasions of Kleist's confusion (*So löste eine Verwirrung die andere ab*). In this sense Tieck characterizes the supposed progress of post-Kantian efforts toward systematicity as a state of confusion which is mirrored in the scattered psyches of its adherents.

In another, more multivalent sense, however, Tieck's characterization begins unfolding in any number of directions once we resist the urge to resolve the ambiguity of his use of "confusion" (*Verwirrung*). The alternating "confusions" in this passage are just as much a) the professional frustration Kleist faced over and against the Prussian government, b) Kleist's intellectual frustration over and against philosophy's inability to legitimize his declaration of freedom from civil duties (without, that is, becoming dogmatic) as well as c) the mirror image of philosophy's failed struggle with an ideal of systematicity in Kleist's own failing attempt to subsume his conjoined desires for self-determination and certainty within a single worldview. All of these confusions are of a piece.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ This needs to be fleshed out further, though putting it that way seems like a mixed metaphor. All of these valences exhibit a fear of the given, of an Absolute. This is the very logic Mephistopholes uses to scare the student away from studying law, based on the fact that it is the area of study most necessarily received within the context of a tradition.

B. A Crisis by Any Other Name, or How Kant Became a Byword

Up to a certain point, Tieck's biographical Preface is a synthetic handling of the philosophically-oriented (the Kant camp) and the social (the *ad acta* camp) accounts of Kleist's crisis, but its logic differs in some important respects from subsequent scholarship on the *Kantkrise*. On the one hand, there is a pessimism within Tieck's account, which suggests that, Kant or no Kant, Kleist was disposed to psychic instability and that, however decisive his encounter with the critical philosophy may have been, it was more of a last straw than a thunderbolt. The relation of Kant to a "rupture" in Kleist's worldview does not really become a readily available premise of scholarship until Otto Brahm's late-nineteenth century work, *Heinrich von Kleist* (1885).²⁰⁵ This premise was brought further into the foreground by H. Gaudig in a biographical sketch of Kleist in his *Guide to the Curricular Classics of Drama* (1899), but it was only in the years following the Minde-Pouet edition of Kleist's works, Muth tells us, that the *Kantkrise* reached the forefront of Kleist scholarship, a time when the "hypothesis" concerning the centrality of the *Critique of Pure Reason* gained considerable momentum.²⁰⁶

According to Muth's chronology, the decade from Wilhelm Herzog's biography,

²⁰⁵ Otto Brahm, *Heinrich von Kleist* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1885), 46 ff.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Wilhelm Herzog, *Heinrich von Kleist: sein Leben und sein Werk* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1911), 116 ff. It is perhaps worth noting that Herzog anticipates Cassirer's typology of literary responses to Kant, though he excuses himself from developing the schema in any great detail. See pp. 158-9.

Heinrich von Kleist: sein Leben und sein Werk (1911) to the appearance of Cassirer's essay on Kleist (1921) marks the period of routinization for the "Kant" hypothesis. It is tempting to read this growing emphasis on the *Kantkrise* as related to the general rise of the humanistic reception of Kant in Germany, which flourished throughout this decade in the writings of the younger generation of Neo-Kantians in Marburg. This temptation, however, runs somewhat aground on the fact that one of the leading figures within this group was none other than Ernst Cassirer, whose Kleist essay concludes that it was *not* Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, but rather Fichte's *Vocation of Man* which occasioned the so-called *Kantkrise*. For Muth, the combined effect of Minde-Pouet and Cassirer is both a confirmation of the general thrust of the positivist approach to Kleist as well as the further, irresistible invitation to set the record straight regarding the *Kantkrise*. If, according to Muth, Minde-Pouet presents an underargued version of his own thesis concerning the efficacy of Kant in Kleist's transformation, Cassirer presents a well-argued, but mistaken alternative over and against which to reassert Kant's role.

It is unnecessary for my argument to follow Muth's lengthy demonstration much further. More interesting than his demonstration of Cassirer's erroneous preference for Fichte in the whodunit of the *Kantkrise* is the manner in which his study situates itself at a particular moment within the history of Kleist scholarship. At this moment the relation between Kantian philosophy and Kleist was taken as a given, and the only real work left to be done—even if the scholars themselves did not see it this way—surrounded the semantics of the term "Kantian." Despite their competing verdicts, Muth and Cassirer share an underlying assumption about the causal efficacy of philosophy in Kleist's

“crisis,” and this assumption is what is common to all subsequent scholars belonging to the “Kant” camp. The lasting importance of Muth’s study for Kleist scholarship is the fact that it consolidated so much of the previous work on Kleist into the narrative of a progressively conscious recognition of the relation of Kant to Kleist’s development. Even in the instance of Cassirer, who at first glance is an exception to this trend, the underlying assumption of philosophy’s power—the validity of a certain type of causal narrative moving in a certain direction—is all the more strengthened by an alternative interpretation as to *which* “Kantian” philosopher was responsible for the *Kantkrise*. In this sense Cassirer was the exception that proved the rule.

It is against the grain of this *idée fixe* that the social (*ad acta*) camp of Kleist scholarship emerged. When characterizing the *ad acta* camp, however, it is important not to place too much emphasis on its recognition of the importance of social forces and institutions for Kleist’s shift. If it were a matter of simply supplementing the overly narrow Kant camp with a more broadly construed context, the *ad acta* camp would be superfluous. Most, if not all of the Kantian readings of the *Kantkrise* include elaborate characterizations of contemporary German culture and the political, social, and professional structures from which Kleist sought solace in the arms of philosophy. The *ad acta* camp, as I have argued, is best characterized negatively as a reaction against the increasingly homogenous focus on the *Kantkrise* within Kleist scholarship. This reaction has typically taken one of two related lines of argumentation.

The first line turns on the logic that, even if Kleist (or anyone) seriously engaged Kantian

philosophy and, at around the same time, experienced a crisis, it does not follow that philosophy *caused* that crisis. Jochen Schmidt is a leading example of this line of reasoning among Kleist scholars, writing, “Muth’s investigation—that was its greatest service—merely demonstrates that certain philosophical positions *are consistent with* Kleist’s position at that time.”²⁰⁷ It seems to me that it would amount to outguessing Muth to attribute to him a position which divested philosophy of its causal role in Kleist’s paradigm shift, but Schmidt is altogether right to raise the question of the legitimacy of privileging philosophy in “Kantian” accounts to such a degree that philosophy becomes positioned merely as a subject or agent over and against Kleist, the passive object. What Schmidt does not do, however, is raise the question of philosophy’s own bid for power within the intellectual landscape of nineteenth-century Germany and the *felt agency* it possessed, rightly or wrongly, among German intellectuals of the time.²⁰⁸

The second line turns on the logic that, even if philosophy does (or did) possess efficacy of the sort attributed to it by the Kant camp, and even if Kleist did engage Kantian philosophy, the “Kantian” camp still must assume—and the assumption is false—that Kleist was intellectually disposed to have been affected by it in manner which deserves to be called “philosophical.” This line of argumentation differs from the first in so far as the emphasis is placed less directly on the debate over the causal efficacy of philosophy than it is on the fact that causal narratives require a certain relational structure, i.e., a

²⁰⁷ [Muths Untersuchung—das war ihr großes Verdienst—weist nur nach, daß bestimmte philosophische Positionen zu Kleist’s jeweiliger Position *passen*]. Jochen Schmidt, *Heinrich von Kleist: Studien zu seiner poetischen Verfahrensweise* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1974), p. 6, note 32.

²⁰⁸ I’ve simplified Schmidt’s insight here. It’s potentially much more radical than I’m allowing, though I do not think he himself acts on this potential.

cause and an effect must enjoy a degree of proximity and be sufficiently of a kind to permit the latter to be acted on by the former. The best example I have found of this line of reasoning comes from a contemporary review of Muth's book, in which the reviewer makes his *ad acta* gesture without the barest hint of ambiguity:

Let us ignore the fact that Kleist's unhappy life unfolds as a succession of crises. Let us forget all about the psychological impasse in which Kleist found himself in Berlin in the spring of 1801, when conflicting impulses had led to his finding himself on the bottom rung of the bureaucratic ladder that would at best train him for the post of a rather obscure functionary in the Prussian state economy and eventually enable him to marry Wilhelmine von Zenge, the girl of average parts and less than average means upon whom he had vented his fanatical pedagogic bent during his three semesters of study at his native Frankfurt. Let us look at this crisis from which he made a dramatic escape by invoking the name of Kant, as though it had been the purely intellectual experience of a very earnest thinker equipped to wrestle with the toughest problems of abstract philosophy. This is in fact Ludwig Muth's approach to Kleist's much discussed Kant crisis.²⁰⁹

From the standpoint of this reviewer—who was, incidentally, not a philosopher by profession²¹⁰—there is no discernable hesitancy about philosophy's causal potency, just so long as one has come into contact with it. The question rests primarily with establishing contact. The reviewer clearly does not think that any such contact took place, but despite his compellingly farcical interpretation of Kleist's misadventures in 1801, he only spares Kleist scholarship from the *Kantkrise* by putting philosophy on the top shelf and out of Kleist's reach.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Hermann J. Weigand, Review of *Kleist und Kant* in *Modern Language Notes*, 71:6 (1956: June): 470-472.

²¹⁰ At the time of the review, Weigand, who was educated at the University of Michigan, was a Professor of German Literature at Yale University. See Jeffery L. Sammons, "In Memorium: Hermann J. Weigand (1892-1985)," *The German Quarterly*, 59:1 (1986: Winter): 177-179.

²¹¹ In this manner the two lines of *ad acta* argumentation both complement and undermine one another.

C. The Work of Philosophy in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

In the case of Kant at the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the question is not even as simple as hunting down an inventory of Kleist's library or surveying his library account or university course schedule—to say nothing about worrying whether Kleist was disposed toward being receptive to philosophical stimulus. The “Kantian philosophy” at that time encompasses a discursive phenomenon in Germany, which managed to accommodate numerous and even self-contradictory philosophical as well as pragmatic positions (often problematizing this very distinction), the sum total of which presented the impression of, if nothing else, a chronic lack of consensus on fundamental questions concerning epistemology, theology, and, increasingly, art. In this sense the reviewer of Muth's work is right to question Muth's “chapter and verse” approach to Kleist's relationship to Kant, but he goes too far when he questions its general “Kantian” tenor. How to ask—let alone answer—whether or not Kleist's work in this period reflects anxieties related to Kantian (or so-called Kantian) philosophical problems turns very much on how one accounts for the term “Kantian.” I would argue that “Kantian” cannot be reduced either to the body of texts written by Kant (or any other philosopher of the period) or to the contextualizing elements of post-Enlightenment German society; rather, it emerges out of an overdetermined confluence of the properness and commonness of the two sides, which meet in the term—“Kantian.”

“Kantian” is thus one of the first eponyms under which modernity circulates in European culture. As with contemporary American English eponyms, such as Kleenex, Frisbee, or

Xerox,²¹² “Kantian” very quickly became a term used to describe texts and, more broadly, modes of philosophizing bearing a loosely sufficient resemblance to Kant’s own. How and where the threshold of sufficiency was determined is a matter of historiographical subtlety, but in its early phases it took the form of a centripetal reduction of all things “Kantian” to Kant himself. Perhaps no case better illustrates this initial movement than Fichte, a “Kantian” philosopher who saw his star rise meteorically into the firmament based on the initial, mistaken assumption by the reading public that his anonymously published *Critique of All Revelation* (1792) was in fact a radical attack of positive theology by the master himself. The technical terminology and generally critical tendency of Fichte’s *Critique* were felt to be so unmistakably those of Kant that a reviewer in Jena’s *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, the most important scholarly journal of its day, wrote, “Anyone who has read even the least of [Kant’s] writings... will immediately recognize the sublime author of this text!”²¹³ Even K. L. Reinhold, who was the inaugural Chair of Critical Philosophy at the university in Jena and could rightly be considered in his day the most Kantian of Kantians, mistook the text as Kant’s on the bases of both form and content. “The idea,” he writes, “the design, and the vast majority of execution as it stands are *without question* from him, the *great one and only*.”²¹⁴

²¹² Xerox, of course, conjures a complex set of associations related to mechanical reproduction and authenticity.

²¹³ Reinhard Lauth and Hans Jacob, “Introduction,” in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Jacob, ? vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1964), I.1.11. Translation mine.

²¹⁴ K. L. Reinhold cited in *Ibid.* Translation mine.

Beginning already with Reinhold, though, and without interruption until the present day, a correspondingly centrifugal reduction has led to the name-branding of individual texts, thinkers, periods, etc. as “Kantian,” which not only weren’t written by Kant but whose presumed or assumed “Kantianness” is matter of, at best, strained resemblance. Thus, in a letter to Hegel from early 1795, a young Schelling bemoans the knock-off “Kantians” who are “Kantian” in name and name only, sighing, “Oh, the great Kantians, that are everywhere these days!...I am fully convinced that the old superstition not only of the positive, but also the so-called natural religion is still combined with a Kantian vocabulary in the heads of most.”²¹⁵ Taken together, these anecdotes of misrecognition and contested identification by Fichte, Reinhold, and Schelling do not resolve the terms “Kantian” either to the “objective” realm of authorship or the “subjective” realm of intellectual authenticity. What they constitute is a stubborn in-betweenness, a sense that there is no criterion to decide between the obvious Kantianness and the considered non-Kantianness of a given text, thinker, etc. And this sense of undecidability concerning the very concept which is supposed to function as the criterion, the “third,” the way out of a dilemma or antinomy rather than an entrée onto yet another, possibly more difficult problem—this is very, *very* “Kantian.” At the levels of both form and content—and at the level of the relationship between the two—the questions raised by Kant’s philosophy were repeatedly reasked and left unanswered by his followers, whose efforts to be the “last masters” left them, without fail, merely the “latest.”

²¹⁵ Schelling cited in Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 14. Translation mine. The full letter, dated January 6, 1795, can be found in Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), **III.1.16**.

On the one hand, the interplay between substantive and predicative uses of “Kantian” is, formally, a dialectic of enlightenment not unique to Kant or the late-eighteenth century. The subject position of the philosopher or scientist, for example, is always positioned over and against an object from which it distinguishes itself, and, as a result of this opposition, the absolute whole, which is the *desideratum* of systematized knowledge, is already lacking, at best, one of its parts, viz., the subject position of the philosopher or scientist. And things only get worse when one tries to solve the problem of the lacking subject by making the subject the very object of inquiry. “It was always clear,” Gadamer reminds us,

that this was logically a circular argument, in as far as the whole, in terms of which the individual element is to be understood, is not given before the individual element, unless in the manner of a dogmatic canon...or of some analogous preconception of the spirit of an age.²¹⁶

On the other hand, the generally circular shape—whether closed or open—of epistemological movement—what from Schleiermacher onwards will be referred to as the “hermeneutic circle”—is nowhere better staged in the history of European thought than in the particular circulation of the term “Kantian.” It *is*, as it were, the protagonist and script of *the* Dialectic of Enlightenment. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer bring both of these senses together in their work of that name when they characterize the gulf that opened following the critical turn between metaphysical and scientific modes of inquiry. Forever after, they write, “There is no Being in the world that *Wissenschaft*

²¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 167. Two forms of dogmatism pattern onto the Kant and *ad acta*, “Zeitgeist” camps. Whether or not this circularity is taken to be vicious or not is an important distinction between pre- and post-critical thought. Already Fichte acknowledges circularity as a necessary structure of philosophical thinking.

could not penetrate; however, that which can be penetrated by *Wissenschaft* is not Being.²¹⁷

The same point that Adorno and Horkheimer make concerning the dialectic of Being and *Wissenschaft* holds true for attempts to define and redefine “Kantian” philosophy in the late-eighteenth century. If we substitute the word “Absolute” for “Being,” it is immediately clear how much this was the case, at varying degrees of awareness, in Fichte’s *Concerning the Concept* and Schelling’s early philosophical works. Dieter Henrich has indeed shown that it is possible to present a fairly exhaustive picture of late-eighteenth century German philosophy precisely in terms of a taxonomy of Kant reception.²¹⁸ The shared impulse of these thinkers, Henrich notes, was to outdo Kant in terms of the (self-)limitation of human reason, an impulse which arrived at the paradoxical conclusion that progress could be best measured in terms of its lack, i.e., in terms of failure.²¹⁹ This paradox is at the heart of Kleist’s *Kantkrise* as well as the critical reevaluations it has undergone since Kleist’s own reflections on it in his letters from 1801.

²¹⁷ [Kein Sein ist in der Welt, das Wissenschaft nicht durchdringen könnte, aber was von Wissenschaft durchdrungen werden kann, ist nicht das Sein.] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 47. Just as the emerging self-awareness of the Dialectic of Enlightenment following Kant coincides with the rise of modernity, the appearance of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* coincides with the move toward postmodernity following World War II. See Jorge Larrain, *Ideology and Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1994), 54-8; 90-118.

²¹⁸ Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 61.

²¹⁹ See Ewa Ziarek, *The Rhetoric of Failure: Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).

Within the confines of my project and in light of the previous chapters, the double conclusion that emerges out of this consideration of the *Kantkrise* and Modernity is this: 1) the philosophical turn toward the problem of autonomy, which is inseparable from the turn to philosophy as the autonomous arbiter of the modernity problem, exists side-by-side with 2) the sudden appeal to the aesthetic as a necessary part of philosophy's effort to carry out this task. Not only this, but the appeal to the aesthetic was most loudly directed toward tragedy, precisely in so far as tragedy was thought of as being capable of producing an intuition of human freedom by means of the representation of a conflict (*Kampf*) between the human subject and an increasingly out-of-reach Object. Schelling's insistence at the beginning of the Tenth Letter that all that remains is to know that there is an objective power must be understood in this light, viz., that the establishment of contact with an Object, which was less and less taken for granted, was indispensable to the project of establishing freedom. For in the absence of limitation, the realization of autonomy is a hollow victory. I will now turn to the representation (often failed) of the risks and rewards of this sort of realized autonomy in Kleist's dramatic works.

III. Kleist's Allegories of Desire

A. Conflicted Autonomy: The Dialectic of Narcissism

A recent work of Kleist scholarship which handles the *Kantkrise* directly and perhaps comes closest to marrying philosophical and literary approaches beneath a single reading is Bernhard Greiner's *Kleists Dramen und Erzählungen* [*Kleist's Dramas and Stories*] (2000). In this work Greiner treats the whole of Kleist's literary output from a

standpoint that a) asserts a thoroughgoing occupation with “the Kantian philosophy” while at the same time asserting b) that this occupation was a deliberate strategy on Kleist’s part to overcome aesthetically the limitations of post-Kantian philosophy.²²⁰ In the chapter of his work titled “Im Horizont Kants,” which is a sort of condensed revisit of his earlier study, *Eine Art Wahnsinn: Dichtung im Horizont Kants: Studien zu Goethe und Kleist* (1994), Greiner treats Kleist’s aesthetic program as a radicalization of the philosophical appeal to an aesthetic solution, which despite its lip service to art was destined to remain a discourse mediated by and for philosophers.²²¹ This notion of “art as self-reflection of the turn to art”²²² is put into practice by Kleist in a manner that is at once entirely in keeping with both Classical and Romantic appeals to the mediating power of the aesthetic and yet as out of step with the one as it is with the other. Appropriately, it seems, this leaves us with a picture of Kleist himself as being, at least in theory, perfectly positioned to play a mediating role between the two periods, whereas in practice his writings serve more to irritate the logic of this transition than bear it out—unless perhaps in a paradoxical manner. Greiner writes:

Long before Hegel will close this chapter of art [i.e., Weimar Classicism taken together with German Romanticism] as the “period of art” chapter in his lectures on aesthetics with his dictum of the “end of art” and open the new chapter of an art which is only any longer concerned with itself, Kleist has already brought this redoubling gesture to an impasse: by showing that art is to be rendered only in terms of the impossibility of art (i.e., of the breakdown of its promise of mediation). And in so far as we are accustomed to adopt as a foundational

²²⁰ In and of itself, that way of putting it is too general, i.e., it does not make Kleist any different from either Schiller or the coming Romantics.

²²¹ Bernhard Greiner, *Eine Art Wahnsinn: Dichtung im Horizont Kants: Studien zu Goethe und Kleist* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1994).

²²² The title of the first section of Greiner’s *Kleist’s Dramas and Stories* is “Der Rahmen: Kunst als Selbstreflexion der Wende zur Kunst” (“The Frame: Art as Self-reflection of the Turn to Art”).

theorem of “classical Modernism” the position that art can only be made out of the negation of art, Kleist’s “modernity” proves itself in this perspective.

[Lange ehe Hegel in seinen Vorlesungen zur Ästhetik mit seinem Diktum vom “Ende der Kunst” dieses Kapitel der Kunst [d.h., Klassik und Romantik in einem] als das der “Kunstperiode” schließen und das neue Kapitel einer nur noch sich um sich selbst bekümmern Kunst eröffnen wird, ist dieser Doppelakt von Kleist schon zusammen- und “in die Enge” geführt worden: indem er Kunst als nur noch aus der Unmöglichkeit der Kunst (des Scheiterns ihrer Vermittlungsversprechen) zu leistende aufweist. Insofern wir gewohnt sind, diese Position, daß Kunst nur noch aus der Negation der Kunst gemacht werden könne, als Grundtheorem der “klassischen Moderne” anzusetzen, erweist sich auch in dieser Perspektive Kleists “Modernität.”]²²³

Greiner’s claim is that Kleist’s modernity lies in the problematization of Hegel’s neat distinction between art as consciousness pure and simple and art as pure consciousness. However, the claim that Kleist manifests this critique by means of a firm conviction concerning the “breakdown of the promise of mediation” (*des Scheiterns ihrer Vermittlungsversprechen*) presents a problem: by what means, through what medium etc. does one communicate a breakdown of communication?²²⁴ On the one hand, the problem is not unlike the one faced by proponents of negative theology, e.g., Kierkegaard, for whom the task lies in demonstrating that the nature of the divine consists necessarily in its ineffability; nor, on the other hand, is it unlike the problem faced by proponents of negative dialectics, e.g., Adorno, for whom the task lies in not allowing the possible mediation of subject and object to become an objectified process of ineluctably higher and higher orders of difference-consuming “standpoints.”²²⁵ For Kleist, however, the problem lies in a redoubled skepticism over and against the entire

²²³ Bernhard Greiner, *Kleists Dramen und Erzählungen* (Tübingen: Franke, 2000), 14-15.

²²⁴ See Kleist’s letter to Ulrike from 5 February, 1801. *SW* II/626.

²²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 6 (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1970), 16-27. For an English translation of these pages, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2000), 4-15.

machinery of mediation: where it is objectively possible, it tends to go awry due to the one-sidedness of competing subjective interests; where the one-sidedness of subjective interests nears a point of structural, “tragic” balance, the mediating forces on which their resolution would depend turn out not to be dependable. Mediation thus fails to foster intersubjective agreement based on a shared social context as much as it fails to foster emancipatory contestation of this context based on an egalitarian sense of intersubjectivity.

This skeptical recognition of the false promise of mediation positions Kleist in the crosshairs of the emergent discourse of “the tragic” in the early nineteenth century, which brings the structural possibilities of tragedy to bear on the structural needs of philosophy through/as a dialectical rendering of the figure of conflict (*Kampf*). The frequency of conflict in Kleist’s works is so great that an exhaustive treatment of them would stretch out into a text far more lengthy than all of Kleist’s put together. This is not accidental, however. Not by any means. Conflicts are not generally resolved in Kleist, and the scholarly attempt to offer a “positive” presentation of conflict in Kleist would merely run aground in the same way that the literary representation of conflict more than merely runs aground in Kleist’s texts. Conflicts are not resolved in Kleist, but they are structured in such a manner that their resolution appears entirely possible—if not likely—with the result that their irresolution or dissolution itself communicates disappointment, missed opportunity, or even irony. If tragedy is a structure whose potential energy lies in the opposition of entities, it does not therefore mean that this opposition must be overcome. The lesson of tragedy need not, as philosophy would have it, be taught or learned from

the outside; there is—especially for Kleist—just as much energy to be generated from within, through the presentation of non-synthesis, of the nearly insurmountable obstacles—whether contingent or inherent—that face synthesis even when time and space are properly aligned, i.e., even when every cog of the tragic dynamo is in place and *kairos* hasn't started glancing at his watch.

This structuring of conflict is so central to Kleist's works that the *Kleist Jahrbuch* required two successive volumes in order to treat what it termed "Kleists Duelle."²²⁶ In the Foreword to the first volume, Günther Blamberger notes,

Battle is, so it seems, in Kleist's life and especially in his work the father of all things—as duel, in which one can "grasp" words for weapons and weapons for words, or as war, which, as Clausewitz reckons, is really nothing other than an "expanded duel."

[Der Kampf ist, so scheint es, in Kleists Leben und vor allem in seinem Werk der Vater aller Dinge—als Zweikampf, in dem man Worte für Waffen "greifen" kann und Waffen für Worte, oder als Krieg, welcher, wie Clausewitz meint, doch nichts anderes ist als ein "erweiterter Zweikampf."]²²⁷

In fact, figuring *Kampf* as the "father of all things" is somewhat unhelpful, unless by "all things" we mean Kleist's works as representations of failed mediation. For Kleist, conflict is not the father of anything in a generational sense any more than it is the child of anything besides itself. Conflict is at best a mule—load-bearing but, as a rule, infertile.

That is not to say that Kleist did (or did not) think that such mediation was undesirable.

Either way, though, his literary and aesthetic writings are a consistent source of testimony

²²⁶ See *Kleist Jahrbuch* (1998) and (1999).

²²⁷ Günther Blamberger, *Kleist Jahrbuch* (1998): vii.

to the belief that, desirable or not, this mediation rarely, if ever, actually takes place. This belief was, of course, borne out by his own professional, intellectual, and personal experiences, but his “aesthetic” turn is noteworthy over and against Schelling’s or Hegel’s because of the degree to which, instead of turning to art as a idealized medium of resolution, it becomes for Kleist the medium by means of which to reflect the actual predominance of unproductive conflict—the mere free for all of competing teleologies. “Out of the theoretical optimist,” Günther Blamberger writes, “and moral philosopher of adolescence developed, after the Kant crisis, a skeptical moralist, who was no longer interested in how humans *ought* to act among one another, but rather how they *do*.”²²⁸

The currents of skeptical realism of in Kleist’s works thus tend to produce failure in one of the two moral-epistemological formulae presented above: either the situation has been brought to a state of conflict suitable for resolution, in which case the agents themselves, external forces, or chance intervene and the situation is disfigured; or the agents and the context all appear suitably cooperative, but by chance the situation never presents itself in a sufficiently structured manner.²²⁹

²²⁸ [Aus dem theoretischen Optimisten und Moralphilosophen der Jugendzeit wird nach der Kant-Krise ein skeptischer Moralist, der sich nicht mehr dafür interessiert, wie unter Menschen gehandelt werden soll, sondern wie unter Menschen gehandelt wird.] Günther Blamberger, “Agonalität und Theatralität,” *Kleist Jahrbuch* (1999). 25-40; 25.

²²⁹ Andreas Gailus notes that “...the quality of actions is to be measured by its effectiveness in a world conceived of as fundamentally agonistic and extramoral. The duel, for Kleist, thus becomes the paradigm of both intersubjectivity and self-actualization. ...[W]hat matters for Kleist is not simply the victory of one subject over the other but the effect of this agonistic act (or speech act) of self-preservation on the (textual, political, social) context in which it takes place.” Andreas Gailus, *Passions of the Sign: Revolution and Language in Kant, Goethe, and Kleist* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 159.

This asymptotal approach toward the necessary and sufficient conditions of resolution present what I think is one of the greatest obstacles to the interpretation of Kleist's texts. On the one hand, the lack of resolution tempts us to think it must not have ever been possible in the first place; on the other hand, the abundance of promising outcomes even amid the most calamitous of situations tempts us to think that on some level—perhaps sublimely out of reach of the boringly beautiful—resolution must have taken place. My argument concerning the false dilemma underlying the discourse of Kleist's *Kantkrise* resurfaces here as an argument against reading Kleist's skepticism as a means by which to cast him as either chaotically nihilistic or utopically hopeful. Kleist's interest lies, I think, in telling it like it is or rather how it's been done. But in order to do so, he often tells it like it can't or rather couldn't be.

This is nowhere more so the case than in *Penthesilea* and *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*. Kleist himself was the first critic to suggest that these two plays represent two sides of a single problem, writing in a letter from 1808,

For whoever loves Käthchen cannot find Penthesilea altogether inconceivable. They belong together just like the + and – of algebra and are one and the same being, only considered from an opposed set of relations.

[Denn wer das Käthchen liebt, dem kann die Penthesilea nicht ganz unbegreiflich sein, sie gehören ja wie das + and – der Algebra zusammen, und sind ein und dasselbe Wesen, nur unter entgegengesetzten Beziehungen bedacht]²³⁰

In a letter to his cousin, Marie von Kleist, Kleist elaborates the particular set of opposed relations (*entgegengesetzten Beziehungen*) under which the two plays should be considered, writing that Käthchen, “is the flipside of Penthesilea, its other pole, a being which is just

²³⁰ SW II/818.

as powerful through total devotion as Penthesilea is through action” (*ist die Kehrseite der Penthesilea, ihr anderer Pol, ein Wesen, das ebenso mächtig ist durch gänzliche Hingebung, als jene durch Handeln*).²³¹

Due perhaps in large part to Kleist’s guidance on this point, comparative and contrastive readings of *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen* are a regular approach within Kleist scholarship.²³²

As Séan Allan points out, many of these readings find themselves mired in a back and forth between competing “archetypal notions of femininity.” As a result these readings end up helping to ossify the very logic that Kleist is trying to break apart, largely through their fixation on a particular—and arguably the most superficial—manifestation of dichotomy and opposition within the two plays.²³³

This fixation is taken up and problematized by Allan, who recognizes that both *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen* are not only what he calls “fictions of femininity” but also meditations on how social constructs such as gender belong to a wide-ranging field of structuring structures within/as a given social context. Kleist’s character studies of pure and anti-femininity are thus self-aware critiques of the general mode of subjectivity

²³¹ SW II/797.

²³² See, for example, Séan Allan, *The Plays of Heinrich von Kleist: Ideals and Illusions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 181-2; Chris Cullens and Dorothea von Mücke, “Love in Kleist’s *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen von Heilbronn*,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 63:3 (1989: Sept.): 461-93; and Valentine C. Hubbs, “The Plus and Minus of *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen*,” *Seminar*, 6:3 (1970: Oct.): 187-94.

²³³ Allan, *The Plays of Heinrich von Kleist*, 292. Some examples of this tendency pointed out by Allan include Hubbs, “Plus and Minus”; Robert M. Browning, “Kleist’s *Kätchen* and the Monomyth,” in *Studies in the German Drama: A Festschrift in Honor of Walter Silz*, ed. Donald H. Crosby and George C. Schoolfield (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1974), 115-23; and Edith Borchardt, *Mythische Strukturen im Werk Heinrich von Kleists* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

implied by both sides of the dialectic delineated by his diametrical opposition of the two heroines, not to mention the literary conventions of Kleist's time within which this dialectic of femininity tended to be brokered. Allan writes of these conventions,

For if 'woman' is not as she is portrayed in these comforting man-made fictions, the highly uncomfortable question remains: what *is* the nature of woman? This was the question that Kleist set out to answer in so radical a fashion in...*Penthesilea* and *Das Kätschen von Heilbronn*.²³⁴

It is difficult to imagine anyone taking the anti-ideal of femininity presented by *Penthesilea* at face value, but the same cannot be said of *Kätschen*, about whom "very few, if any" of the critics present at the play's opening performance on March 17th, 1810 in Vienna "doubted that it was to be taken as a straightforward celebration of the power of unconditional love."²³⁵ This lack of doubt is arguably the unfortunate but rather predictable consequence of the changes Kleist made to the play precisely in order to bring it into conformity with the early-nineteenth century stage—changes he famously did not make to *Penthesilea*, which in effect went unstaged until over half a century after his death.²³⁶ By softening the edges of his parody of the historical romance, Kleist risked *Kätschen* being misrecognized as the flipside of *Penthesilea* in a merely oppositional, rather than dialectical sense, and as a result of this Kleist got himself into considerable genre as well as gender trouble.

²³⁴ Ibid., 142

²³⁵ Ibid., 178.

²³⁶ See SW I/932-3 as well as Allan, *The Plays of Heinrich von Kleist*, 178-9. For a full treatment of the staging (or lack thereof) of Kleist's plays, see William C. Reeve, *Kleist on Stage: 1804-1987* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

My reading of these plays is an attempt to reassert the oppositional nature of Penthesilea and Kätchen, but from a perspective that treats the dialectic of femininity as the particular manifestation of a less gender-specific dialectic of devotion and action embodied by the plays' eponymous heroines. The dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy was the central concern of Schelling's critique of Criticism and Dogmatism, and it surfaced in my critique of the "tragic turn" and the "end of art" as the ironic consequence of philosophy's attempt to narrate its own autonomy both from and in terms of art. What is central to Kleist's presentation of this dialectic is that the two absolutely opposed situations—Penthesilea's desire for absolute agency and Kätchen's subsistence in its deferral—do not present an ideal and anti-ideal of femininity, but, rather, when taken together, present two equally untenable modes subjectivity as well as a common failure—untenability aside—to produce satisfaction. This dissatisfaction, moreover, is not limited to the heroines themselves. Due to the skewed subject/object economy at work in these plays, the male counterparts of Penthesilea and Kätchen, Achilles and Graf von Strahl, become reduced, through the imbalanced subjectivities of the plays' heroines, to an absolute object (beloved) and absolute subject (lover), respectively, and are thus situated in a manner that equally precludes their satisfaction. That is, unless we take Kätchen at face value and fall prey to the temptation of autonomy.

The virtue of reading *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen* against one another in this fashion is that it produces conclusions about the risks and rewards of autonomy, which both a) recognize the social reality of power imbalances within categories such as class and gender while also b) aspiring to an ideal of recognition which, while it might not

overcome these imbalances, does demand that we consider the cost of living with social “realities” that are otherwise so easily naturalized.²³⁷ Furthermore, it removes from Penthesilea the stigma of being the purely negative “other” to the ideal of Kätchen, while also removing from Penthesilea’s relationship with Achilles the stigma of being the purely negative “other” to the matrimonial resolution “arrived at” by Kätchen and von Strahl. Through the lens of interpersonal desire, each play tells us—and this maybe sound a bit un-Kleistean—something about how to love and be loved by giving us one side of the “how not to” coin.

Chris Cullen’s and Dorothea von Mucked suggest this approach at the end of their incomparable article, “Love in Kleist’s *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen von Heilbronn*,” where they write:

In our attempt to examine Kleist’s two dramas...one key difference has emerged, a difference which is ultimately responsible for turning one work into the “minus” of an undoubted tragedy and the other into the “plus” of a near comedy. This difference consists in the fact that, whereas *Penthesilea* represents the attempt to *think beyond the limits* of a “normal,” patriarchally-grounded symbolic order, *Kätchen von Heilbronn* presents a fictional realm in which every character is

²³⁷ Though I will not explicitly follow the implications of this argument into any of Kleist’s other works, it is worth noting that the interpersonal dialectic of love at work in both plays could certainly be read in terms of a larger intersocietal frame. This is perhaps most clearly the case in Kleist’s *Die Hermannsschlacht* or in Kleist’s optimistic essay, “What Are We Fighting for in This War?” (*Was gilt es in diesem Krieg?*), where he valorizes the notion that, “A form of society which, having no truck with notions of domination and conquest, deserves to exist and be tolerated by others; [this is] a state which cannot harbour thoughts of its own glory without simultaneously taking due account of the glory and well-being of all the other states in the world.” [Eine Gemeinschaft, die, unbekannt mit dem Geist der Herrschsucht und der Eroberung, des Daseins und der Duldung so würdig ist, wie irgend eine; die ihren Ruhm nicht einmal denken kann, sie müßte denn den Ruhn zugleich und das Heil aller übrigen denken, die den Erdkreis bewohnen] (*SW II/378*). Cited in Allan, *The Plays of Heinrich von Kleist*, 203.

firmly embedded within the same symbolic order and functions according to the same categories of meaning. This is not, however, to say that the author uncritically reproduces these categories of meaning. Indeed, he plays with them; the grotesqueness, the patent artificiality of the piece, its gleeful indulgence in melodrama and hyperbole, and its strategy of resorting to the primary power of images to sustain its nostalgia all hint at the ideological strain under which the play labors, in trying to produce a straight-faced testimony to the power of unconditional love.²³⁸

Cullens and von Mücke rely heavily on the discourse of Lacanian psychoanalysis in their reading of love in Kleist, and while I find their reading altogether convincing, I do not think that it is the most effective means by which to draw out the stakes of or role played by autonomy within Kleist's literary response to the philosophical context in which he found himself. Instead, I will employ a slightly different psychoanalytic approach to the problem of intra- and interpersonal desire in (post-)Enlightenment German culture in order to situate my own readings of *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen*.

In his intellectual biography of J. J. Winckelmann, *Flesh and the Ideal*, Alex Potts explains the central role of the Greek ideal in Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity (Geschichte der Kunst des Altherthums)*, doing so in terms of this ideal's capacity to project "the very image of a free self, of an ideal sovereign subject."²³⁹ For Winckelmann, the principle medium for the expression of this ideal was sculpture, such as the Belvedere Antinous or the Borghese Genius. Ironically, however, Winckelmann's influence had consequences that not only led to a subordination of sculpture within the

²³⁸ Cullens and von Mücke, "Love in Kleist's *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen von Heilbronn*," 492.

²³⁹ Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 145.

hierarchy of the arts, but the to the intellectual subordination of art in general. As Potts' study demonstrates, the use-value—and potential costs—of the investment made by eighteenth-century humanists such as Winckelmann in Greek sculpture is analogous with, if not largely responsible for, the intellectual trajectory which passes through early Idealism's "tragic turn," but also onto the subsequent efforts by Hegel to articulate the autonomy of contemporary philosophy from its artistic roots. The self-actualized, sovereign subject is an ideal, which presents itself within Winckelmann's analyses only at the moment that it is "totally autonomous, either through withdrawing from the world or confronting it."²⁴⁰ That absolute autonomy can be sought by means of two seemingly opposed strategies, and that both of these strategies end up undermining the very conditions of possibility for autonomy, namely, the self, is a "riddle" which will present itself for Schelling in the false dilemma between Dogmatism and Criticism. For Winckelmann as much as for Schelling three decades later, the realization of "autonomy" through withdrawal is a performative contradiction of sorts, within which one achieves sovereignty not through victory, but rather through a refusal to enter the contest.

Potts calls this outcome of withdrawal "'passive' freedom," which, as he notes, "is a achieved at a huge cost, and in the end comes closer to self-annihilation than self-affirmation."²⁴¹ As a result of the unsuitability of "withdrawal" as a figuration for autonomy, "another quite different form of image was required to figure the active self-realization of a free sovereign subject."²⁴² This alternative figuration is very much like

²⁴⁰ Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 146.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

Schelling's rehabilitated Criticism, which cleaves to the preservation of freedom without simply cutting ties with "the world," e.g., by means of intellectual intuition. "When Winckelmann," Potts writes

presented an image of ideal masculinity actively asserting itself, he configured it in explicitly violent terms, as in a way the sadistic or masochistic mirror of narcissistic withdrawal. Statues such as the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoön were imagined in scenes of violent confrontation whose only issue could be a subjugation of the outside world's resistance to the self or the annihilation of the self by the forces confronting it.²⁴³

The two possible outcomes of a violent confrontation with the world are "indifferent" no less so than the more generally considered "passive" and "active" strategies for figuring autonomy. On the one hand, withdrawal from the world is narcissistic in the Freudian sense that it imagines an anterior state prior to an "awareness of conflict between internal desire and the external world;" within the alternative model, on the other hand, confrontation would seem to be the means for its own dissolution, namely, by means of the removal of one side of the I/not-I diad or the other.²⁴⁴ The two sides of the figuration of active autonomy—the sadistic and masochistic—thus do not escape narcissism, but instead reproduce its logic and cannot help but to do so, if for no other reason than the fact that the false dilemma between absolute sadism and masochism itself arises here out of the dialectic of narcissism, i.e., out of the attempt to solve the false dilemma between withdrawal and confrontation by means of "choosing" one over the other.

In his discussion of Greek tragedy in the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling seeks to avoid this dilemma, and in doing so seeks to have his cake and eat it too: on the one hand, he

²⁴³ Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 146.

²⁴⁴ Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 150.

unambiguously advocates the figuration of freedom through conflict, but he limits the practical consequences of this advocacy by stringently limiting its figuration within the realm of art. In the Tenth Letter Schelling praises the Greeks for locating the ultimate objective power, fate, above and beyond the gods. By subjecting the gods themselves to a “law,” and, furthermore, by integrating them into the sensible world, human freedom is protected from the compromises to which it is subjected within the Christian economy of reward and punishment. “The invisible power [of fate],” he writes, “is too sublime to be bribed by adulation; their heroes are too noble to be saved by cowardice. There is nothing left but to fight and fall.”²⁴⁵ Fighting and falling, however, are incompatible with the continued existence of the human subject, and it is one of the most remarkable aspects of Schelling’s appeal to Greek tragedy that it essentially ends with the strict delimitation of art from activity in “the real world.” After declaring the ineluctability of the hero's fall, he writes

But such a fight (*Kampf*) is thinkable only for the purpose of tragic art. It could not become a system of action even for this reason alone, that such a system would presuppose a race of titans, and that, without this presupposition, it would turn out to be utterly detrimental to humanity.²⁴⁶

Schelling’s reasoning is that the fight between the subject and the absolute object must either presuppose an ontological continuum within the concept of “the gods” or it must presuppose an absolutized concept. If the former, then a battle against, i.e., among, the “object” is possible, such as the Titanomachy between the Olympians and Titans as described by Hesiod in his *Theogony*. If the latter, then no such battle is possible.

²⁴⁵ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 193 [337-8], I.3.108.

²⁴⁶ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 194, [338], I.3.108.

Schelling equates this latter possibility with Dogmatism (and the monotheistic tradition in general) and imagines the only possible outcome to be servility before the idea of an all-powerful arbiter of entry into the afterlife. Anticipating Nietzsche's characterization of Christianity as a form of hatred of the world, Schelling imagines that the equal but opposite consequence of this obeisance before a personal god would be a vengeful brutality against one's fellow humans, none of whom, ironically, is invested with the power to weigh one's fate (for better or for worse). As Schelling writes,

The man who would obtain his existence in the supersensuous world by begging, will become the tormentor of humanity in this world, raging against himself and others. Power in this world will compensate him for the humiliation in that. Waking up from the delights of that world, he returns into this one to make it a hell.²⁴⁷

By imagining the "fight" of Greek tragedy being made into a "system of action" (*System des Handelns*), Schelling imagines a perverse alternative to narcissistic withdrawal. Either one must carry out the fight all the way to the highest peak of the conceptual food chain, or one must assert a ruptured ontology where the minimization of sovereignty in the beyond becomes the desire for its maximization in "the world." Schelling favors neither of these alternatives, for they represent a practical analog to the two possible modes of relation between the absolute and its system, which had plagued his more epistemological undertakings in the *Form* essay and *Of the I*. Taken together, the practical possibilities of Schelling's "battle" represent the conceptual problems that befall the theoretical extremities of Criticism and Dogmatism. In the case of the presupposed Titans, even the gods themselves are absolute only in a relative sense and offer no possibility for anything more than a relativized sense of victory. In the case of the sado-

²⁴⁷ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, 194, [338], I.3.108.

masochistic enthusiast, a version of the double-movement of narcissism emerges: victory here is relativized by means of its possibility only within a restricted ontological sphere. Absolute sovereignty over non-absolute combatants—one's fellow humans—compensates for absolute submission to an absolute combatant, whose undefeatability belongs to its very concept. In the former case, freedom cannot be proved either in victory or defeat; in the latter its proof would be a contradiction.

Schelling's examples of the "active" strategy of narcissism are complicated by the fact that, whereas in the example of the "Titans" one imagines oneself able to occupy the position of sovereignty, the second, more Christian example does not. Rather, it presents the conundrum of how to conceive of narcissism within the dogmatic frame of a presumed "personal god," where the preservation of freedom is strategized within an ontologically divided world through the occupation of a split subject position. One side of this subject position strives for the disavowal of the self (because only the next world matters absolutely), while the other side strives to avow the self over all others (despite the fact that this world does not matter absolutely). This difference between the stakes of the Greek and Christian situation requires in turn a further development of the concept of narcissism than the one presented earlier by Potts. In the context of Winckelmann's engagement with Greek sculpture, the structure of narcissism operates within the tension of self-absorbed withdrawal and self-assertive confrontation with the outside world. In the more Christian context of a presumed "personal god," however, we have seen that the dogmatic recognition of an absolutely sovereign other interferes with the possibility of achieving autonomy by either of these two means.

In fact, Freud develops his own theory of narcissism in a direction meant to account for the conflict between the “state” of primary narcissism and narcissism as a strategy employed by developed, self-conscious psyches. Near the end of *Zur Einführung des Narzißmus* (1914) Freud notes that the infantile or “primary” stage of narcissism is undone by the growing awareness of one’s individual identity over and against an external world of desired objects and competing desires. Part of this undoing of the pre-oedipal unity of the autonomous, but not yet self-conscious psyche is the emergence of the concept of an ideal-ego (*Idealich*), which represents a projected ideal of the very omnipotent autonomy which, in exchange for its sense of self, the self must relinquish. Freud describes this transition in the following manner:

This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced on to this new ideal ego, which, like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection that is of value. As always where the libido is concerned, man has here again shown himself incapable of giving up a satisfaction he had once enjoyed. He is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgement, so that he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal.²⁴⁸

[Diesem Idealich gilt nun die Selbstliebe, welche in der Kindheit das wirkliche Ich genoß. Der Narzißmus erscheint auf dieses neue ideale Ich verschoben, welches sich wie das infantile im Besitz aller wertvollen Vollkommenheiten befindet. Der Mensch hat sich hier, wie jedesmal auf dem Gebiete der Libido, unfähig erwiesen, auf die einmal genossene Befriedigung zu verzichten. Er will die narzißtische Vollkommenheit seiner Kindheit nicht entbehren, und wenn er diese nicht festhalten konnte, durch die Mahnungen während seiner

²⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953 -), 94.

Entwicklungszeit gestört und in seinem Urteil geweckt, sucht er sie in der neuen Form des Ichideals wiederzugewinnen. Was er als sein Ideal vor sich hin projiziert, ist der Ersatz für den verlorenen Narzißmus seiner Kindheit, in der er sein eigenes Ideal war.]²⁴⁹

In Freud's account the emergence of the ideal-ego is cognate with the departure from primary narcissism and consequent, emerging desire to reestablish it. Under normal developmental circumstances, the ideal-ego is a regulative ideal of subjective plenitude, but along the spectrum of more pathological manifestations, the ideal-ego represents a subject position which one might actually seek to inhabit or by which one might actually in turn wish to be desired. In the case of Schelling's critique of Dogmatism and Criticism we can see how much these alternating misconceptions of the ideal-ego have in common with 1) Criticism's overly-subjectivized ideal of autonomy through the notion of constitutive freedom and 2) Dogmatism's paranoid ideal of heteronomy through the notion of intellectual intuition.

In the case of Kleist's complementary heroines, these extremes pattern onto the narcissistic strategies of Penthesilea and Kätchen, whose equally powerful efforts to realize opposing versions of narcissism end up undermining the ends they set out to achieve. In the case of Penthesilea, the effort to occupy the position of the ideal-ego forces her to annihilate the object of her desire who, she imagines, inhabits that position and who is therefore most desirable. In the case of Kätchen, the same misattribution of ideality projected onto Graf von Strahl leads to her effort to submit absolutely to the desire to be desired by a virtually transcendent lover. As Cullens and von Mücke note,

²⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Zur Einführung des Narzißmus* in *Studienausgabe*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2000), 60-1.

“Kätchen can only assert her own identity, and her own ‘truth’ by largely renouncing the recourse to independent verbal self-expression.”²⁵⁰ Because of this primarily negative determination of her identity, Kätchen is more difficult to write about than Penthesilea—it is as though one only writes about her once one has written about everyone else in the play. Having indicated the manner in which the plays relate to one another, however, I hope that this same sort of negative determination will manifest itself by means of a positive determination of Penthesilea’s narcissistic pursuit of absolute autonomy.

A. Undercutting a Figure/Overfiguring a Cut: Penthesilea’s Sidereal Conceit

The term “star-crossed lovers” is likely to turn our thoughts to the Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the term makes its debut. It is also likely, however, to turn our thoughts to more contemporary figures: Scarlett and Rhett in *Gone with the Wind* or Rick and Ilsa in *Casablanca*. Or perhaps less contemporary figures: Pyramus and Thisbe or Troilus and Cressida. We are perhaps just as likely to think of someone from our own persistent past or someone from this morning’s headlines. What we are not altogether likely to think of is Kleist’s *Penthesilea*. And perhaps that is fair. Nonetheless, Kleist’s cautionary tale of desire and its undesirability has something perhaps unexpected to tell us about being star-crossed, viz., that it could be worse. Much worse.

Kleist’s social tableau is one where intersubjective recognition is highly desirable, endlessly contested and endlessly brokered. The world he and his characters inhabit is

²⁵⁰ Cullens and von Mücke, “Love in Kleist’s *Penthesilea* and *Kätchen von Heilbronn*,” 479.

one “conceived of as fundamentally agonistic and extramoral.”²⁵¹ The notion of autonomy he presents in *Penthesilea* is most certainly not the one first elaborated by Kant in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, according to which each individual sees herself as the subject of the universal law, both in the sense of being its author and in the sense of being beholden to it. When Kant imagines “the will of every rational being as a *will giving universal law*,” his reasoning is that

...when we think a will of this kind, then although a will that *stands under law* may be bound to this law by means of some interest, a will that is itself the supreme lawgiver cannot possibly, as such, depend upon some interest; for, a will that is dependent in this way would itself need yet another law that would limit the interest of its self-love to the condition of a validity for universal law.²⁵²

Kant recognizes that autonomy cannot serve his *a priori* purposes if it is thought of as pertaining to any given individual, for in that case it becomes a force of division between subjects rather than a universal and necessary basis of subjectivity. In *Penthesilea*, by contrast, autonomy is not a condition of experience, but rather the idealized experience of being the unconditioned-condition, an *a posteriori* prize belonging to the victors in the unending struggle to subject competing subjects. *Penthesilea* is a representation of this scarce economy of recognition—an anti-ideal of the everyday world—and through its highly ironic resolution Kleist works against the grain of the philosophical idea of “the tragic,” according to which tragedy is invested with the power to provide alternative medicine for theoretical reason’s incapacity to establish autonomy as well as practical reason’s inability to stabilize it. As James Phillips writes of *Penthesilea*, “It does not

²⁵¹ Gailus, *Passions of the Sign*, 159.

²⁵² Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 82.

defy a norm and thereby attest to it (as in the case of antinomianism); it precedes the norm and refuses to be exhausted by it.”²⁵³

The metaphor of light, and particularly sidereal imagery, is a primary vehicle for the plot development of *Penthesilea* and its corresponding articulation of the paradox of autonomy and desire.²⁵⁴ The main plot line of the play is at bottom rather simple: The Amazonian army, led by their queen, Penthesilea, arrive in the midst of the Greek/Trojan conflict sometime after the *Iliad* has left off and before the fall of Troy.²⁵⁵ Because Amazonian society has for some time consisted only of women, maintaining the population requires the periodic acquisition of temporary “mates.” They accomplish this through battle, capturing warriors whom they have defeated in one-on-one combat and

²⁵³ James Phillips, *The Equivocation of Reason: Kleist Reading Kant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 72. Phillips’ reading of *Penthesilea* is highly organized around the discourse of “the law.” While I find his reading by and large convincing, there comes a point in it past which the “the law” seems to rise to the level of a methodological stand in for “the law.” It is difficult to engage it point-by-point without reconstructing the broader framework of the book as a whole, so that, its affinities with my own project notwithstanding, I have not integrated his reading more fully into my own.

²⁵⁴ Michel Chaouli discusses the tropological use of sun imagery in *Penthesilea*, arguing that “Metaphor—and thus the sun—is indispensable to any literary (more generally: aesthetic) discourse, not merely for the empirical reason that literary texts use metaphors, but because metaphor replicates, in its structure of substitution, the very notion of distance and distinction that are at the foundation of aesthetics.” Michel Chaouli, “Devouring Metaphor: Disgust and Taste in Kleist’s *Penthesilea*,” *The German Quarterly* 69.2 (1996: Spring): 125-43; 130. Chaouli’s discussion of metaphor is itself based on Derrida’s “White Mythology” essay, for which see Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207-71; 251. For an extended (and earlier—1957) treatment of the metaphors of light within the development of Western philosophy, see Hans Blumenberg, “Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung,” in *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), 139-76.

²⁵⁵ For a comparison of the formal structure of the *Iliad* and *Penthesilea*, see Linda Hoff-Purviance, “The Form of Kleist’s *Penthesilea* and the *Iliad*,” *The German Quarterly* 55.1 (1982: Jan.): 39-48.

then kidnapping them long enough to “ensure the future of the race.” In Penthesilea’s case, the adversary is Achilles.

Now comes the paradox: Achilles is, due to his preeminence in battle, the most desirable of all the Greek princes. Due to his preeminence in battle, however, he is also the Greek prince least likely to be defeated in one-on-one combat. This presents Penthesilea with a problem: her sense that Achilles should belong to *her* in particular depends her on desire for a monopolization of value—the idea that another soldier, man or woman, is superior to her is a threat to her sense of independence—but her sense that *Achilles* in particular should belong to her depends on her recognition of the heteronomous force of Achilles, whose touchstone value is out of her control.

Kleist is heavy handed with his coding of Achilles as the figure in terms of whom all others are evaluated. Within a metaphoric of light, he is the *tertium*, and throughout the play he is likened to and figured as the sun. Penthesilea, by contrast, spends the better part of the play struggling to wrest this symbolic centrality away from him. The paradox of this aspect of her struggle for autonomy, however, is perhaps an order of magnitude greater than her paradoxical desire to be desired by the Object of desire. In her struggle not merely to win Achilles’ desire but to supplant him as “the sun,” she risks devaluing him in such a way that will make his desire unworthy. More importantly, however, her desire to occupy the absolute subject position of the sun within a heliocentric symbol system risks short circuiting the amalgam of autonomy and heteronomy, control and lack thereof, which makes us human. By getting the object of her desire, Penthesilea destroys

the object of desire as desirable (and finally as object). More importantly, though, her replacement of Achilles undermines the conditions of self-consciousness under which it is possible to the subject of desire. She would have been better off “star-crossed.”

A. Setting the Sun

On the one hand, Romeo and Juliet are “star-crossed” in the literal or real sense that heteronomous forces beyond their control prove to be determining factors at odds with their desires; in a somewhat more metaphorical sense, on the other hand, their desire to carve out an autonomous space for themselves apart from the clan politics of Verona is articulated through a rhetoric of professed heteronomy in which their eroticism is, interestingly, brokered along sidereal lines. The opening gambit of this negotiation is made by Romeo, who, famously unbeknownst to Juliet, is standing below her balcony:

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. /
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, /
Who is already sick and pale with grief /
That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she. (II.ii.2-6).²⁵⁶

Romeo’s metaphor is no mere comparison. By comparing his beloved to the sun, he transforms Juliet into the *tertium* or third thing in terms of which he has begun teleologically organizing himself. Later in the third act Juliet reciprocates the image, but she trumps her beloved by going yet a heavenly sphere further:

Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night, /

²⁵⁶ All citations from *Romeo and Juliet* are from William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 28 September 2008 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/s/shakespeare>>.

Give me my Romeo, and, when I shall die, /
Take him and cut him out in little stars, /
And he will make the face of heaven so fine /
That all the world will be in love with night, /
And pay no worship to the garish sun. (III.ii.20-5).

Juliet's sidereal metaphor contests Romeo's, but unlike the way in which Penthesilea contests the recognition of Achilles' "star status," it does so without undermining it. Both Romeo and Juliet employ the metaphor as a means of demonstrating the other-centeredness of their love, and in doing so they forge a sympathetic ideal of romantic desire. Kleist's *Penthesilea* turns these sidereal metaphors inside out. Romeo and Juliet each commit suicide as a result of the perceived and then actual loss of the irreplaceable "other," whose uniqueness was based on the vocally articulated surrender of autonomy and consequent recognition of the other as the condition of self-identity. As a result of their suicides, the lovers are reabsorbed into the social fabric, and their incomplete union serves the future didactically as the counterfactual *tertium* through which the Montagues and Capulets might have been reconciled to one another. Recognizing this missed opportunity, however, the families in Shakespeare's play pledge a truce, and through the symmetry of their shared loss the sublation of progress asserts itself, and closure is offered in terms of an optimistic sort of historical openness.

Romeo and Juliet presents the double-suicide of other-centered lovers, and already in his first play, *The Family Schroffenstein*, Kleist transmutes this symmetry of dead lovers into a double-murder. In *Penthesilea* Kleist rounds out the taxonomy of horrific ways to end a love affair by shoving things off their axis of symmetry: a murder-suicide. What differentiates a double-murder from a double-suicide is really only a matter of which side

of the subject/object divide the lovers have ended up on. A murder-suicide is altogether different. It is the monopolization of subjectivity as well as objectivity by one half of the pair, and as such it disqualifies the act as an act of love because it reduces solidarity to solitariness, followed by solitude. What differentiates *Romeo and Juliet* from *Penthesilea*, though, is not merely the inverse manner in which eroticism and violence are metaphorized and literalized in diametrically opposed directions in their final scenes—for instance, the metaphorical “little death” of actual sexual intercourse becomes the metaphorical union in actual death in the finale of *Romeo and Juliet*, whereas Penthesilea “really” unites with Achilles as she eats him and then metaphorically fortifies the union with her famous pun on “Küsse” and “Bisse” at the end of Kleist’s play.²⁵⁷ It is not only this. It is also the manner in which the economy of intersubjectivity—which in *Penthesilea* is likewise brokered in terms of a sidereal conceit—results in a more “tragic” conclusion—in our modern sense—than *Romeo and Juliet* because it offers no actual or prospective synthesis: not at the level of individuals, not at the level of cultures, and not at the level of language. At the end of the play, the lovers have done everything except be lovers, Greece and Troy and the Amazons are all at war, and literal and figurative language have become ghoulishly wedded in the “union” of Achilles and Penthesilea. There is historical openness here as well, to be sure, but *only* openness.

The dim prospects of any final synthesis are adumbrated already in the opening scene of the play, where Odysseus exclaims... “in Nature there is only force and its resistance—

²⁵⁷ SW I/425, line 2981.

no third thing (*in der Natur...kein Drittes*).”²⁵⁸ Odysseus, an anti-tragic figure par excellence,²⁵⁹ cannot fathom the possibility that Penthesilea and her army could enter into the binary opposition between the Greeks and Trojans as a “third party.” He is not interested in a higher resolution of opposites, but rather the immine/ant closure of success for one side at the expense of the other. “War,” Jochen Schmidt notes, “implies that the world is ordered along binary lines. There is assertion and counterassertion, no third thing, friend or foe, up or down, victory or defeat....”²⁶⁰ From Odysseus’ perspective, the arrival of Penthesilea is troubling not simply because they are chauvinists and she is a female warrior, but because she represents a thoroughgoing challenge to binary oppositions of all sorts. On the one hand, this challenge threatens the resolvability to one side or the other, which is both desired by Odysseus and afforded by warfare; on the other hand, however, Penthesilea presents an equally problematic, more general challenge to the genre of tragedy: without binary oppositions there is also no opposition to overcome, and with no looming sublation, tragedy (as well as the corresponding, dialectic-driven conception of historical movement) loses its dynamo.

Tragedy demands a certain admixture of equipoise and opposition, which itself can only be determined in terms of a “third thing” or “tertium.” Without this mediating criterion, there is no means of establishing the underlying unity in terms of which the two sides of a tragic conflict might achieve reconciliation. Tragedy thus depends on a closed logic if it

²⁵⁸ *SW* I/326, lines 126-7.

²⁵⁹ See Jeffrey N. Cox, “Romantic Redefinitions of the Tragic,” in *Romantic Drama*, ed. Gerald Gillespie (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 153-56; 154.

²⁶⁰ [Krieg besagt, daß die Welt binär geordnet ist. Da gibt es nur Satz und Gegensatz, kein Drittes; Freund oder Feind, oben oder unten, Sieg oder Niederlage....]. Schmidt, *Heinrich von Kleist*, 177.

is supposed to produce tidy results. It is very difficult, however, to force *Penthesilea*, whether we are talking about the play or the protagonist, and whether or not we are willing to recognize a sharp distinction between the two, into a framework where a discernable criterion can be used to plot such a resolution. Incapable of tolerating ambiguity, Odysseus stands little chance of understanding her. And ironically, Penthesilea is alienated from understanding her own actions in the play because of her unceasing desire for recognition from people whose binary taxonomy she cannot inhabit. Rather than rising toward the resolution of opposites, *Penthesilea* settles downward into a fluid state of neither this nor that, both that and this, of plentitude and emptiness, of narcissism realized, of the absolute, of death.²⁶¹

Kleist's figuration of Achilles as the sun by both Greeks and Amazons allows him to establish the high degree to which the Greek warrior is a shared criterion within two otherwise largely incongruous systems of value. From the first battle onwards Penthesilea registers this collective recognition, and what finally makes her tragic is her unquenchable desire to occupy his *particular* structural position as though it were a *universal* one. If Romeo and Juliet freely surrender their autonomy to one another through equitable exchange, Penthesilea seeks the recognition of her autonomy by means of coercion, a *modus operandi* that is most clearly visible in her effort to appropriate from Achilles his real and symbolic star power.

²⁶¹ In his reading of the *Penthesilea* over and against Kantian aesthetics, Greiner stresses the play's repeated confrontation with and gestures toward the transgression of the limits of representation, i.e., as a dramatic rendering of the sublime. See Greiner, *Kleists Dramen und Erzählungen*, 148-73.

As he emerges in his chariot in Scene 3 from his first battle with Penthesilea, Achilles' fellow Greeks liken him to the sun on a spring morning. This Greek-centered figuration, however, is not one-sided. It is mirrored and developed in scene 7, in which a young Amazon and an Amazonian priestess report on the second battle between the two sides—the one in which Penthesilea is defeated. The girl is asked whether she can see Penthesilea on the battlefield and at first responds: “Nothing! We can't see a thing! We can't tell one helmet from the other.”²⁶² This undifferentiated manifold, however, is soon brought into relief as the girl cries, “Look, look how through a tear in the storm clouds, with a mass of light, the sun falls directly on the crown of Achilles' head!” “*Whose head?*” asks the high priestess. “*His*, I said. Whose else?” the girl answers, tying off her vignette with an exalted shadow portrait of the Greek warrior, gasping that “the surrounding earth, the colorful and blooming earth, lies sunken in black night beneath storm clouds; nothing more than a background, a mere foil setting off the glimmering one and only.”²⁶³

²⁶² SW I/355, lines 1011-12. [Nichts, gar nichts sehen wir! / Es läßt kein Federbusch sich unterscheiden.]

²⁶³ SW I/356, taken from lines 1034-43. I am including the untranslated passage here in its entirety: DAS ERSTE MÄDCHEN:

Seht, seht, wie durch der Wetterwolken Riß,
Mit einer Masse Licht, die Sonne eben
Auf des Peliden Scheitel niederfällt!

DIE OBERPRIESTERIN:

Auf wessen?

DAS ERSTE MÄDCHEN:

Seine, sagt ich! Wessen sonst?
Auf einem Hügel leuchtend steht er da,
In Stahl geschient sein Roß und er, der Saphir,
Der Chrysolith wirft solche Strahlen nicht!
Die Erde rings, die bunte, blühende,
In Schwärze der Gewitternacht gehüllt;
Nichts als ein dunkler Grund nur, eine Folie,

The high priestess is offended by this star worship and its failure to attend to the collective interests of the Amazons. “What does the son of Peleus matter to our people?” she thunders. “Is it at all seemly for a daughter of Ares, a queen, to put herself into battle (*Kampf*) for the sake of a name?”²⁶⁴ The other Amazons, however, are not swayed by this rebuke. One of them, spotting Penthesilea on the battlefield, shouts

[There she is] At the forefront! Look how she, scintillating in the golden trappings of war, look how she, full of the desire for battle, dances at him! Is it not as though she, spurned on by jealousy, wished to overtake the sun in its flight as it kisses his young head?!”²⁶⁵

This Amazon is more right than she knows. She is right that Penthesilea is jealous, though she is perhaps wrong about what. Either way, her enthusiastic jest about her queen's desire to literally displace the sun will soon materialize itself in the wake of Penthesilea's failed effort to win real or symbolic preeminence in battle.

Penthesilea's battle for recognition reaches its peak at this point, just as she reaches Achilles on the battlefield and the two prepare to engage one another. An Amazon cries from her hilltop vantage, “Ha, now they're upon one another! You gods! Hold onto your earth. Now, just this instant as I'm saying this, they're smashing into one another like

Die Funkelpracht des Einzigen zu heben!

²⁶⁴ SW I/356, lines 1044-5. [Was geht dem Volke der Pelide an? / - Ziemt's einer Tochter Ares', Königin, / Im Kampf auf einen Namen sich zu stellen?]

²⁶⁵ SW I/357, lines 1057 – 62. [An aller Jungfrau Spitze! / Seht, wie sie in dem goldnen Kriegsschmuck funkelnd, / Voll Kampf lust ihm entgegen tanzt! Ist's nicht, / Als ob sie, heiß von Eifersucht gespornt, / Die Sonn im Fluge übereilen wollte, / Die seine jungen Scheitel küßt!]

two stars!”²⁶⁶ This is a point of indifference between Achilles and Penthesilea: he is no longer the sole *tertium*. In fact, their battle over who *is* the *tertium* has itself become, if only for a moment, the matter at hand: there is no sun, but rather two stars. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the celestial sphere to which Juliet compares Romeo at the expense of the “garish sun” is her figurative trump card in their symbolic duel of self-decentering, according to which the least self-centered combatant is proved victorious through surrender. In *Penthesilea*, by contrast, the turn from “sun” to “stars” figures the momentary possibility that Penthesilea will emerge from the equipoise of contest as the sole, victorious *tertium*.

In fact, Penthesilea is defeated and things go downhill for her. She falls into and back out of unconsciousness as a result of her “fall” and is led to temporary safety by her closest comrades, Prothoe and Meroe. Until this point in the play a system of equivalences has operated within a fairly well-defined economy, according to which Achilles is likened to the sun and, as such, presents an ideal-ego which, at least in theory, could be supplanted. Following Penthesilea’s recognition of the practical impossibility of defeating Achilles, however, her compensatory game plan quickly turns its attention to a more superordinate ideal-ego, oscillating quickly between the strategies of transcendence and identification. There will not really come another point where Penthesilea has an opportunity to vie for the symbolic “star role,” and having failed to fulfill her desire symbolically, she turns her attention to accomplishing it by fantastically—*schwärmerisch*—literal means, plotting to

²⁶⁶ SW I/357, lines 1078-80. [Ha, jetzt treffen sie einander! / Ihr Götter! Haltet eure Erde fest - / Jetzt, eben jetzt, da ich dies sage, schmetterten / Sie, wie zwei Sterne, aufeinander ein!]

“roll Ida onto Ossa” and pull Helios down from the heavens as he flies overhead.²⁶⁷ That Penthesilea’s strategy involves the literal displacement of the sun is a characteristically Kleistian reversal, but it also echoes Schelling’s delimitation of absolute conflict to the medium of art. His claim that, in order to imagine such a battle within a system of action, we would have to assume a race of Titans capable of storming heaven, is precisely what Penthesilea here has in mind. “Piling Ida onto Ossa” in order to displace an Olympian deity is very much like the strategy employed by the mythological Aloades, Otos and Ephialtes, whose plot to invade heaven involved piling Mount Ossa onto Mount Olympus and then Mount Pelion onto Mount Ossa.²⁶⁸ Her plot, however, is quickly forgotten. Perhaps even she knows she is too tired for that.

The game plan of Penthesilea’s closest confidant, Prothoe, is to convince her queen that the soundest course of action is a retreat from the proximity of battle, and what follows is an inversion of the famous embassy in book 9 of the *Iliad*, where Phoenix tries to coax Achilles back *into* action. Penthesilea interrupts her matter of factly. “Where is the sun?” she asks. “There,” Prothoe answers just as matter of factly, “directly in the crown of your head.”²⁶⁹ Prothoe takes the question at face value, using it simply to reinforce how much daylight in fact remains for them to retreat to a safe rendezvous point for the Amazonian

²⁶⁷ SW I/368, line 1375 ff.

²⁶⁸ Benjamin Hederich, *Gründliches mythologisches Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1770), 187. Penthesilea’s plan directly contradicts her assurance to Prothoe from earlier in Scene 9, where she insists that, “Good fortune (*Glück*) would be great. But still, just because it doesn’t drop down out of the clouds doesn’t mean I want to storm heaven” (SW I/362, lines 1202-4).

²⁶⁹ SW I/366, lines 1319-20. [- Wo steht die Sonne? PROTHOE: Dort, dir grad im Scheitel]

army. My clumsily rendered “in the crown of your head,” however, is meant to convey the double-meaning of the German *Scheitel*, which both suggests that the sun is at its apex and also that it is *in* Penthesilea’s head. This, in fact, is a turning point or trope of the entire play.

Here Penthesilea’s practical pursuit of narcissistic autonomy spills psychotically over into the natural world and *its* law, where freedom has no jurisdiction. The tipping point comes directly thereafter as Prothoe devises a display of devotion for her troubled queen and friend. She proposes that the retreat will be provisional. After they are safely out of harm’s way, the Amazons will make a secret pact with the Trojans to overwhelm the Greeks. It will be two against one, and Achilles will belong to Penthesilea.²⁷⁰ At this point Prothoe has begun echoing Odysseus’ logic: in nature there is no third. Odysseus’s postulate is motivated by his observation that a battle has broken out “as yet not fought on the earth’s surface since the Furies reigned,” and his either/or formulation is meant to martial dialectic out of the picture.²⁷¹ Prothoe’s echoing gesture, however, suggests that the conditions under which resolution might have been available for Penthesilea are no longer available within or without battle, through fight or flight. She can return and join the Trojans and defeat the Greeks, but only by surrendering to their *tertium non datur* worldview. What Penthesilea cannot do, though, is stop wanting to be the *tertium* at every level—as a queen, as a warrior against enemies, as the lover of the white hot Achilles. And standing in direct conflict with this wanting is the fact that, at this point,

²⁷⁰ SW I/366, lines 1320 ff.

²⁷¹ [Jetzt hebt / Ein Kampf an, wie er, seit die Furien walten, / Noch nicht gekämpft ward auf der Erde Rücken]. SW I/326, lines 122-4.

she can no longer fail to recognize the incommensurability between her desire for the unconditional and the conditionality of desire.

As Prothoe is making her sales pitch, Penthesilea is not listening. Kleist's stage directions here read: PENTHESILEA: *who in the meantime has been looking unrelatedly (unverwandt) into the sun.*²⁷² This is one extreme of narcissism in the form of intellectual intuition. Penthesilea emerges from this state of unrelatedness to Prothoe's conceit on the nature of freedom (which would seem to be a gesture to Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*²⁷³) only, as we shall see, to fall into the corresponding and opposite extreme. Prothoe promises her that all they need to do is climb a nearby hill and their safety will be assured, but in between them and the hill stands a bridge. Kleist's stage directions at this point are explicit, and their meaning cannot be overstated. He writes: "PENTHESILEA *as she suddenly arrives at a bridge, stands still.*"²⁷⁴ The importance of Kleist's phrasing is that it makes clear that Penthesilea "arrives at" a bridge (*kommt auf eine Brücke*) but stops short of being "on" it (*auf einer Brücke*). The bridge

²⁷² SW I, 366.

²⁷³ For example, Chaouli, "Devouring Metaphor," 134-7. See also Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. Horst D. Brandt and Heiner F. Klemme (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003), 3-4. Kleist's image of the arch (*Gewölbe*) and keystone (*Schlußstein*) technically appears in his letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge from 18 November, 1800, but actually dates from an addition to the letter made on 30 December. It thus appears on what would have then been considered the penultimate day of the eighteenth century. Kleist notes as much beneath his sketch of the falling/not-falling arch, and to my knowledge no scholar has noted the significance of this Kantian image over and against the final lines of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant enjoins his contemporaries to follow the critical path with him and thereby "achieve before the end of the present century what many centuries have not been able to accomplish; namely, to secure for human reason complete satisfaction in regard to that with which it has all along so eagerly occupied itself, though hitherto in vain." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 669 [A856/B884].

²⁷⁴ SW I/367.

here is an almost insuperably obvious reference to mediation, the possibility of which is so tantalizingly close that we are almost tempted to read its consummation into the action. Chaouli does precisely this, staging Penthesilea's "scene of utter madness... on the literalized arch—that is, the bridge."²⁷⁵

But she never steps foot on the bridge. Her plot to pile Ida onto Ossa and pull Helios from the sky takes place at the foot of the bridge by the water, as does her subsequent disfiguration of the Narcissus motif.²⁷⁶ When Penthesilea looks down into the river and imagines that Helios isn't an "Ida on top of Ossa" away after all, the moment is anything but one of mediation or disambiguation. Seeing the sun's reflection in the water and saying "take me" (*Nimm mich*), she descends into the water beneath the bridge, giving herself over to an interstitial no-place that is neither on the side of conflict nor its escape. She falls out of consciousness and is taken for dead.

Kleist's bridge is not simply an aesthetic prop, however. This is made apparent by the fact that, shortly thereafter, Diomedes leads his men over the bridge from the other side, thus pinning in Penthesilea and her army for good.²⁷⁷ Kleist's bridge thus facilitates the passage of Greeks and their binary logic, but the traffic is one way. Structurally, this is the mid-point of the play.

²⁷⁵ Chaouli, "Devouring Metaphor," 137.

²⁷⁶ The Narcissus motif in Kleist's works is treated at length in Anthony Stephens, "Verzerrungen im Spiegel. Das Narziß-Motiv bei Heinrich von Kleist," in *Heinrich von Kleist: Rechtsfall-Kriegsfall-Sündenfall*, ed. Gerhard Neumann (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1994), 249-97.

²⁷⁷ *SW I/372*. Scene 12 opens with Diomedes commanding his men forth. Kleist's stage direction reads, "*He leads them over the bridge.*" [*Er führt sie über die Brücke.*]

B. The Setting Sun

From this point forward, Penthesilea's bid for sovereignty is played out in terms of an extended presentation of dramatic irony. Following her rescue from the river by Prothoe and Meroe, a deal is struck with Achilles to make the still unconscious (and so to be amnesiac) Penthesilea believe that she in fact defeated Achilles in their previous encounter. The sidereal conceit is taken up mid-ruse as the happy couple lie about beneath an oak tree, and Kleist is as heavy-handed as ever with cueing the false cadences at work. Though her companions know that the situation is anything but resolved, they acquiesce to Penthesilea's demand to consummate the victory with hymns and epithalamia.²⁷⁸ The arrival of the Eumenides promises resolution, both as simple allusion to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, but also as a more general gesture to the presumed mediating possibilities of tragedy, an undoing of Odysseus' proclamation concerning the "battle as yet not fought." The delayed arrival of Hymen, however, promises a less co(s)mic development.

²⁷⁸ SW I/382, lines 1335-42:

CHOR DER JUNGFRAUN *mit Musik*

Ares entweicht!

Seht, wie sein weißes Gespann

Fernhin dampfend zum Orkus niedereilt!

Die Eumeniden öffnen, die scheußlichen:

Sie schließen die Tore wieder hinter ihm zu.

EINE JUNGFRAU:

Hymen! Wo weilst du?

Zünde die Fackel an, und leuchte! leuchte!

Hymen! wo weilst du?

CHOR:

Ares entweicht! usw.

Penthesilea asks Achilles whether he fears the woman who has laid him low in the dust.²⁷⁹ He answers, “As flowers do sunshine.” Penthesilea congratulates her captive on his eloquence, first and foremost because she interprets his use of the sun image as evidence that 1) he and she are working within the same figurative economy and that 2) he recognizes her appropriation of the central position within their solar system. “In that case look at me as your sun,” she says, and for an instant it appears as though her project has come to fruition. It hardly lasts longer than a dash on the page, however. Even in the act of uttering this gentle command to her satellite of love, she blurts out, “Diana, my ruler, he is injured!”

Penthesilea notices a minor scratch on Achilles’ arm, and she immediately begins to apologize, assuring him that she would never have dealt him a fatal blow. The scene is pathetic, primarily because of the conflict, on the one hand, between Penthesilea’s presumed command of things and reality and, on the other hand, between her intentions and her own words. She can hardly finish telling Achilles to view her as his sun before she contradictorily invokes the lunar goddess Diana as her ruler. Moreover, as she basks

²⁷⁹ SW I/382, lines 1749-55:

PENTHESILEA:

Komm jetzt, du süßer Nereïdensohn,
 Komm, lege dich zu Füßen mir - Ganz her!
 Nur dreist heran! -- Du fürchtest mich doch nicht?
 - Verhaßt nicht, weil ich siegte, bin ich dir?
 Sprich! Fürchtest du, die dich in Staub gelegt?

ACHILLES (zu ihren Füßen:)

Wie Blumen Sonnenschein.

PENTHESILEA: Gut, gut gesagt!

So sieh mich auch wie deine Sonne an. –
 Diana, meine Herrscherin, er ist Verletzt!

in the satisfaction of having conquered the untouchable hero Achilles, she notices that he is physically violable—but on a rather unheroic scale. This is the final false cadence before Penthesilea is disabused of her false sovereignty by the interruption of the Greek army, led (of course) by Odysseus.²⁸⁰ Achilles is dismayed by the intrusion and assures Penthesilea that, though he cannot follow her to the Festival of Roses, she will return home with him and, “bear me the god of Earth” (*den Gott der Erde mir gebären*).²⁸¹

Penthesilea, however, is not interested in supplementing the one part of Achilles’ autonomy that is dependent on someone else—he was in fact supposed to play that role for her. She is not interested in being a medium for the reproduction of his authority as a Greek, which would necessarily come at the cost of her own as an Amazon. He misunderstands this, and the most erroneous part of Achilles artfully challenging Penthesilea to a duel is that he thinks that Penthesilea’s interest in a “symbolic” victory is merely symbolic.

Within the twenty-four scene, epic structure of *Penthesilea*, Achilles’ “rise” in Scene 3 is mirrored by his “sunset” in Scene 22. Despite the sun that is presumably still bathing the inhabitants of Kleist’s play, the disappearance of Achilles at Penthesilea’s hands is figured by the uninterrupted sequence of nocturnal images attending her from that point forward. In Scene 23 a priestess laments her broken queen, likening her to a “nightingale”,²⁸² when Penthesilea sees Achilles’ corpse in Scene 24 and demands to

²⁸⁰ SW I/397, line 2227.

²⁸¹ SW I/397, line 2230.

²⁸² SW I/414, line 2683.

know who has committed such a terrible deed, Prothoe cries, “Oh, you unlucky thing, it were better for you to walk about in a total eclipse of the understanding, forever, and ever, and ever than to see this horrible day”,²⁸³ and finally, the high priestess, in response to Penthesilea’s question, “Did I kiss him dead?” screams, “Woe! Woe! I call to you. Hide yourself! Cover yourself henceforth in unending Midnight!”²⁸⁴

From the standpoint of the sidereal conceit, the high priestess’ command is too late. By consuming the sun, Penthesilea has rendered her world symbolically dark; at the moment of physical incorporation and utmost proximity, her symbolic Helios is fixed at a point of utmost and permanent opposition. Even the fire inside her, the embers of misery (*Glut des Jammers*) with which she steels her annihilating feeling (*vernichtendes Gefühl*) into a suicide’s dagger, is utterly un-Olympian.²⁸⁵ It is a pinpoint heat emitting no brightness, like the space Milton imagines for the fallen Lucifer, the bringer of light:

“A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round /
As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames /
No light, but rather darkness visible....
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost pole.”²⁸⁶

This prison cell of the mutinous angel could well describe Penthesilea, except that, without any stars left to be crossed or uncrossed, she, unlike even Satan in Hell, is at

²⁸³ SW I/423, lines 2901-4. [O dir war besser, du Unglückliche, / In des Verstandes Sonnenfinsternis / Umher zu wandeln, ewig, ewig, ewig, / Als diesen fürchterlichen Tag zu sehn!]

²⁸⁴ SW I/425, lines 2977; 2979-80. [Küßt ich ihn tot? ...Weh! Wehe! Ruf ich dir. Verberge dich! / Laß fürder ewge Mitternacht dich decken!]

²⁸⁵ SW I/427, lines 3025-34.

²⁸⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), I. 60-3; 73-4.

home neither there nor anywhere else at all. That is her autonomy, the price of the crown
(*Krone*).²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ SW I/428, line 3043.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I will begin by taking up a question, which to this point I have left largely unasked: Is dialectic tragic? The other side of this question it would seem is whether or not tragedy is dialectical, and in both cases the answer is “no.” At least the answer is not “yes” in an absolute sense, however mistaken it might be to ask either dialectic or tragedy to be as much. In my first two chapters I worked forward toward the uncontroversial fact that a young German thinker wrote a text in epistolary form in the year 1795, in which the (slightly less uncontroversial) emergence the dialectical method of philosophy took part side by side with the mobilization of Greek tragedy for the purposes of resolving the “tragic” structure of post-Kantian philosophy. In working forward toward this fact, only rarely did I stop to ask whether or not this “tragic turn” was a legitimate act on the part of philosophy. What was clear was that it *did* happen, and that scholars have not devoted enough attention to the shape that this turn took during the year or so that separates Schelling’s *Form* essay from his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. The shape of this turn, at least in terms of how it is figured in Schelling’s texts, is the shape of “conflict.” Not just any conflict, though, but one in which dialectic recognizes itself—though perhaps not fully or too much so. What exactly does this mean?

Vassilis Lambropoulos observes that,

Initially, within the framework of the antinomies of modern liberty, the tragic stands for the contradiction within human autonomy, for the conflict of freedom and necessity, liberation and legislation. Later, once dialectics grows more systematic and absorbs contradiction into its very operation, the idea is also identified with what overflows, surpasses, oversteps human horizons—with whatever exceeds reason, knowledge, understanding, history, justice, kinship and so on. The tragic represents what goes beyond but does not and cannot transcend.²⁸⁸

This homology between the intra-personal divisions of consciousness and those of interpersonal, social phenomena such as “history, justice, kinship” etc. is a structural dynamic native to tragedy. It is ambiguous and ambiguating, a tarrying movement at the threshold of immanence and transcendence, diremption and synthesis, answer and question. The absorption of contradiction into its movement by dialectics noted by Lambropoulos is inseparable from that period in the last decade of the eighteenth century during which the discursive confluence of tragedy and philosophy gave birth to the cognate concepts of 1) “the tragic” and 2) our modern—Hegelian—understanding of dialectic, so much so that we are likely asking a bad question when we isolate them and attempt to deduce one from the other. Have philosophers and literary critics made claims on behalf of one concept in favor of one and perhaps at the expense of other? Certainly. As I tried to show in my chapters on the end of art (Chapter 3) and Kleist (Chapter 4), however, those claims tend to tell us more about the disciplinary interests of their proponents than about the concepts themselves.

²⁸⁸ Lambropoulos, *The Tragic Idea*, 10.

The scholar who—aside from the early Schelling himself—has argued most forcefully for the mutual determination of tragedy and dialectic (in the form of “the tragic”) is Peter Szondi. In *An Essay on the Tragic* (*Versuch über das Tragische*), he describes the Tenth Letter’s uptake of tragedy’s structure, together with its imagined presentation of freedom through battle (*Kampf*) against an absolute Other, as “dialectic.” He glosses this use of dialectic with a loose definition, which, taken as a whole, characterizes the modality of tragedy, whether in its possibility, actuality, or impending necessity. “Throughout this book,” he writes

the words “dialectic” and “dialectical” adhere to Hegel’s usage and designate (without any implications of his system) the following elements and processes: the unity of opposites, the change into one’s opposite, the negative positing of oneself, self-division.

[>Dialektik< and >dialektisch< bezeichnen in der ganzen Studie nach Hegels Wortgebrauch, jedoch ohne Implikationen seines Systems, folgende Tatbestände und Vorgänge: Einheit der Gegensätze, Umschlag des Einen in sein Gegenteil, Negativsetzen seiner selbst, Selbstentzweiung.]²⁸⁹

The modal range of Szondi’s determination of dialectic is helpful in so far as it avoids locating it within a hierarchy of philosophy and art, which is precisely what Hegel will do with it in his lectures on aesthetics. By both associating his use of dialectic with Hegel’s, but also by distancing himself from an all-too-specifically Hegelian set of dialectical ends, Szondi opens a view onto the historical space I have tried to carve out in my dissertation, where the inbetween of human consciousness and history has, on the one hand, taken leave of its anxiety of origins without, on the other hand, arriving at a compensatory sense of “mission accomplished.” Szondi’s definition performs Hegel’s own dialectic of the Need of/for Philosophy in its movement from the unity of opposites

²⁸⁹ Szondi, *Versuch*, 159, note 8/102.

to self-division, and in doing so he gestures backwards to what I think is a fragile moment in the relationship between philosophy and art, which pirouetted through early German Idealism for a short while during and after the mid-1790s. In his own series of lectures from the early 1960s (contemporaneous with *An Essay on the Tragic*) on the history of aesthetics, *Antike und Moderne in der Ästhetik der Goethezeit*, Szondi revisits this moment in a discussion of Schelling and Hegel's differing views on art's relationship with philosophy. "Schelling," he writes

unlike Hegel...did not give philosophy pride of place over and against art. He did not see in thought a higher synthesis emancipated from the material realm, which left the synthesis of art behind as something mired in material content. Because, for Schelling, identity isn't something, as it is for Hegel, that produces itself only in the dialectical process of the mind within world history, but is rather something always already given and actualized, philosophy and art stand beside one another equally as codeterminations of the ideal and real: philosophy as the codetermination of the two in the ideal; art as the codetermination of the two in the real.

[Schelling hat, anders als Hegel...der Philosophie, gegenüber der Kunst, nicht den Vorrang gegeben, er sah im Denken nicht die höhere, von der Materie emanzipierte Synthese, welche die Synthese der Kunst als eine in der Stofflichkeit befangene hinter sich läßt. Weil bei Schelling die Identität nicht wie bei Hegel allein im dialektischen Prozeß des Geistes, in der Weltgeschichte, sich herstellt, sondern immer schon gegeben und verwirklicht ist, stehen Philosophie und Kunst als Ineinsbildungen des Idealen und Realen gleichrangig nebeneinander: die Philosophie als Ineinsbildung beider im Idealen, die Kunst als Ineinsbildung beider im Realen.]²⁹⁰

To be sure, this moment did not last. Nor could it have lasted, because the hovering equipoise of art within Schelling's conception of philosophy during this period is ultimately a state of indifference, which is inimical to the movement of history. In so far as philosophy's self-narration is a progressive one, it can only abide recognition of itself

²⁹⁰ Peter Szondi, *Antike und Moderne in der Ästhetik der Goethezeit*, in *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie I*, ed. Senta Metz and Hans-Hagen Hildebrandt (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), 13-265; 223.

in its other as an impetus toward self-differentiating reform. The task of philosophy for Hegel, Dennis Schmidt notes, becomes

To grasp the spirit of truth speculatively, that is, as a unity which is a unity precisely because it is lodged in the antinomy of its own contradictions. The idea of the tragic stands as a sort of acid test of the capacity of spirit to grasp itself in its radical complexity. And so the question becomes whether or not spirit can take the idea of the tragic into itself without thereby extinguishing the truth of the tragic.²⁹¹

If one assumes, as Hegel does, that the truth of the tragic is the need for, if not the possibility of a “higher standpoint” over and against a context within which “conflict” has reached a point of saturation and stagnation, then it is perhaps unreasonable to ask “whether or not spirit can take the idea of the tragic into itself without thereby extinguishing the truth of the tragic.” In this case the truth of the tragic just *is* the extinguishing of its “truth.” If one assumes, on the other hand, that the truth of the tragic lies in presenting a condition under which “conflict” of the sort that needs/is needed by dialectic never arrives within experience, then the answer to Schmidt’s question is decidedly “no.” Not only that, but the reproduction of “spirit” would seem to be a living artwork that kindles itself through the endless extinguishing of the truth of tragedy.

This latter possibility is idea behind Michelle Gellrich’s *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict Since Aristotle*, in which she examines the relationship between the practice and theorization of tragedy in terms of “conflict.” Her purpose, she tells us, “is to explore how seminal documents in the history of dramatic theory have typically excluded from their formulations of tragedy material that is not amenable to the theoretician’s

²⁹¹ Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 90.

conceptual framework.”²⁹² According to Gellrich’s narrative there is a gaping historical gap, lasting from Aristotle to the Romantic period, during which inclusion of “conflict” within theories of tragedy is largely missing, which raises the question of why it suddenly reappeared after such a long period of dormancy. This long-standing failure to include conflict in accounts of tragedy is seemingly at odds with its presumed omnipresence by more recent theoreticians of the genre, and Gellrich rightly asks why it is that theoreticians and writers of tragedy have so often managed to skew one another’s representation of the problem: whereas theoreticians in the Aristotelian vein stressed and restressed the ideal of formal unity and narrative resolution within tragedy, the tragedians themselves seemed to produce plays whose outcomes remained fraught with unevenness and prevailing disorder. The question is whether the endemically unsanitary openness of tragic endings was inherent to the genre or whether it could be redeemed. Was tragedy being stubborn or slow? Or was it just being tragedy?

The possibility of edification through theory hinges on assigning a prescriptive tone to theory—one which is decidedly absent from the *Poetics* itself. Moreover, the likelihood that tragedy would heed theory’s call would appear to be low given Gellrich’s assessment. On the contrary, Gellrich documents philosophy’s rich tradition of casting tragedy as an agent of subversion. Already in Plato’s *Republic* this tendency is couched in terms of the harmful role of tragedy within social contexts. “At several levels,” Gellrich writes, “poetry in general and tragedy in particular are regarded [by Plato] as threats to stability and unity; they are subversive of standards essential to the creation of

²⁹² Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, 7.

maintenance of a good commonwealth.”²⁹³ The crucial aspect of Plato’s condemnation is that it rests on a diagnosis of tragedy as unfixable. There is no room in Plato for debate concerning the possible rehabilitation of the tragic form, and Plato’s interest lies in laying bare its social and psychological dangers.

This two-fold danger is articulated by Plato along the *Republic*’s ever-present axes of individuation and socialization, at the intersection of which lies a dialectic of *mimesis*. It is bad enough, Plato argues, that epic poets such as Homer and Hesiod represent portrayals of discord and conflict where there ought to be unity and harmony, namely, among divine role-models; it is altogether scandalous, however, that the efficacy of tragic drama depends on the inspiration of conflict among its practitioners and patients alike. Mimetic behavior risks blurring a unified sense of self in so far as it demands playing at that which one is not, and the better one is to begin with, the more harmful the effects will thus be for oneself and the polity. In Book III of the *Republic*, Socrates nudges Adimantus toward this conclusion:

Do we wish our guardians to be good mimics or not? Or is this also a consequence of what we said before, that each one could practice well only one pursuit and not many, but if he attempted the latter, dabbling in many things, he would fail of distinction in all?

Of course it is.

And does not the same rule hold for imitation, that the same man is not able to imitate many things as well as he can one?

No, he is not.

Still less, then, will he be able to combine the practice of any worthy pursuit with the imitation of many things and the quality of a mimic, since, unless I mistake, the same men cannot practice well at once even the two forms of imitation that appear most nearly akin, as the writing of tragedy and comedy. Did you not just call these two imitations?

²⁹³ Ibid., 96.

I did, and you are right in saying that the same men are not able to succeed in both.

Nor yet to be at once good rhapsodists and actors?

True.

But neither can the same men be actors for tragedies and comedies—and all these are imitations, are they not?

Yes, imitations.

And to still smaller coinage than this, in my opinion, Adimantus, proceeds the fractioning of human faculty, so as to be incapable of imitating many things or of doing the things themselves of which the imitations are likenesses.

Most, true, he replied.

If, then, we are to maintain our original principle, that our guardians, released from all other crafts, are to be expert craftsmen of civic liberty, and pursue nothing else that does not conduce to this, it would not be fitting for these to do nor yet to imitate anything else. But if they imitate they should from childhood up imitate what is appropriate to them—men, that is, whose are brave, sober, pious, free, and all things of that kind—but things unbecoming the free man they should neither do nor be clever at imitating, lest from the imitation they imbibe the reality. Or have you not observed that imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and second nature in the body, the speech, and the thought?

Yes, indeed, said he.²⁹⁴

At this point in the *Republic* Plato is still, if only for the sake of argument, willing to admit that imitation is perhaps unavoidable—especially for children—but that, at any rate, it should be confined to the imitation of people and practices one rightly desires to *do* and *become*. The first-order danger of imitation is that when we imitate unbecoming or shameful behavior we risk becoming more unbecoming or shameful ourselves; that over time these imitations become a hard habit to break. The second-order danger of imitation, however, is no longer content specific. Even when the people and practices we imitate are desirable models, imitation harbors within its very structure the danger of self-alienation. Imitation is representative action and, by definition, at odds with reality. In so

²⁹⁴ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 639-40 [394e-395d].

far as we engage in mimetic behavior modeled on appropriate action and to a limited extent, it can be a stepping stone in our individual development, but over time mimetic behavior *even of appropriate action* can be an impediment toward the cultivation of a unified character.

Socrates asks whether the guardians within the Republic should or should not be good mimics, and in the final analysis the answer is that they should not.

In the instance of the guardian, diversified mimesis gradually erodes the integrity of his identity. . . . The danger of losing one's sense of selfhood is less when one does not enter into other roles and instead keeps a distance from the object being represented. But it is not only unity of character that is endangered by miming different types. Social order is also shaken by such mimesis, which destroys the principle of differentiation essential to the hierarchy of the state.²⁹⁵

The interpersonal disturbance brought about by mimesis within the social order is homologous with the intrapersonal disturbance brought about by it within the individual. In both cases it is not merely, as Gellrich suggests, the possible representation of conflict that makes art—and above all other arts tragedy—so problematic, but rather the necessary conflict of representation with reality that, for Plato, figures as the ontological debt that both gives birth to and is further nurtured by art.²⁹⁶

Aristotle, on the other hand, does not appear willing to invest art with an absolute lack of ontological priority. That is not, however, to say that Aristotle is any more interested than Plato in embracing a disorderly phenomenon. The differences between their conceptions

²⁹⁵ Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, 98-9.

²⁹⁶ Plato goes so far as to compare the effect of tragic representation to a contagion, which threatens “to contaminate the entire community” (Ibid., 102). See also Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 5-37.

of tragedy lie to some degree, oddly enough, in their unspoken agreement about tragedy's role within Greek society. Whereas Plato's *Republic* can be read as a critique of the cultural foundations of Athenian society, Aristotle's *Poetics* strikes a more scientifically neutral tone.²⁹⁷ In both instances it is not the importance of tragedy that is called into question but rather the meaning of that importance. Plato seized on it as a means of leveraging a speculative attack against actual Greek culture; Aristotle, on the other hand, took the fact of tragedy within Greek culture as a point of departure for a descriptive, empirical inquiry into why certain actual plays, such as *Oedipus Tyrannus*, had been so effective.

Neither Plato nor Aristotle is arguing for a subversive or socially progressive theater, but it is clear that the former recognized that the dominant thematic clusters on the tragic palette were saturated with political and familial conflict. In the case of Aristotle, Gellrich argues,

We seem to be dealing with a systematically motivated exclusion. ...[Aristotle] continues to think about *stasis* in the same formal and ethical terms as his predecessor does. Consequently, this aspect of tragic drama assumes a problematic status for the kind of rationalizing project he launches in the *Poetics*.²⁹⁸

The charge Gellrich levies against Aristotle is willful negligence. There is no way that anyone even superficially acquainted with the extant corpus could arrive at an account of Greek tragedy which failed to include the rampant disorder and failed resolution that characterizes many—if not the majority—of the plays. What, then, is his motivation?

²⁹⁷ Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, 102.

²⁹⁸ Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, 103.

Answering this question brings Gellrich's insight—and blindness—into focus:

Although Aristotle's non-agonistic orientation sets him apart from Hegel, its effect nonetheless is to order drama in a way similar to the teleological rationalizations of struggle characteristic of the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* [*Lectures on Aesthetics*]. Both philosophers subdue the challenges tragedy poses for social, moral, and metaphysical order by containing them within the limiting terms of a theoretical framework.²⁹⁹

The common denominator of both agonistic as well as non-agonistically conceived theories of tragedy is that they are *theories*. In the case of Aristotle, the ubiquity of unstructured or unresolved conflict in tragedy is systematically overlooked, and this strategy brings the philosopher's conservative empiricism into line with the facticity of tragedy (despite the facts). In the case of Hegel, conflict is seized upon due to the need of/for sublated opposition as fuel for the forward motion of world spirit.

The antagonistic side of dramatic character is the one that interests Hegel and leads him to call an action genuinely tragic only when it calls up "other opposing aims and passions in other individuals." What saves the conflict from becoming an expression of a serious, unmediated cleavage in the moral structure of the universe is the resolution at the end, which shows that truth resides in a reintegration of opposing claims, in recapturing the unity of the "ethical substance."³⁰⁰

In both cases, then, the presence or absence of conflict and resolution within each philosopher's account of tragedy is, above all else, a reflection of that philosopher's theoretical needs, rather than a reflection of the content of the tragedies themselves.

Even Plato's account of tragedy belongs to this conspiracy of theorization, despite the fact that tragedy's use-value for him lies precisely in its banishment from the ideal

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 96.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 159.

State.³⁰¹ Plato, like Hegel and unlike Aristotle, asserts the presence of disorder and irresolution within tragedy, with the result that “the philosophical objections to tragedy raised in the *Republic* are paradoxically more in tune than the *Poetics* is with [these] important features of classical drama.”³⁰² Nonetheless, he does not grant them a positive role in the overcoming of difference. In all three cases, and ultimately in the case of nearly every theoretician of tragedy in between, the result is that tragedy is not had on its own terms.³⁰³ To take up Schmidt’s earlier remark once more, tragedy would seem to be subsumable under a theoretical point of view only in so far as it becomes *untragic*.

For conflict of the sort Schelling conceptualized in the *Philosophical Letters* to be possible, the *mise-en-scene* must be idealized in so far as individual freedom can only emerge through the equal-but-opposite encounter with a recalcitrant non-self. The intractable unevenness of this encounter, however, is due as much to the problematic construction of that sort of “other” as it is to the socially decontextualized pursuit of freedom at the level of the individual.³⁰⁴ Schelling writes at the outset of the Tenth Letter: “You are right, one thing remains—to know that there is an objective power

³⁰¹ See *Republic*, Book X.

³⁰² Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, 158.

³⁰³ In Chapter 3 of *Tragedy and Theory* Gellrich follows the Aristotelian tradition of literary theory during the Renaissance and Neoclassical periods, largely confirming a communicative gap between theoreticians and writers of tragedy. See especially pp. 229 ff. One notable exception (which deserves further consideration) is Corneille, whose *Discours de la tragédie* and numerous dramatic works make him an unusual instance of writer/theorist. In this respect, he should perhaps be read over and against Schiller, Kleist, and Hebbel.

³⁰⁴ For the political role of socially mediated one-on-one combat, i.e. duels, in the ideological formation of modern Europe, see Mika LaVaque-Manty, “Dueling for Equality: Masculine Honor and the Modern Politics of Dignity,” *Political Theory* 34:6 (2006: Dec.): 715-40.

which threatens our freedom with extermination, and with this firm and certain conviction in our heart to battle (*kämpfen*) *against* it...and to perish.”³⁰⁵ But again—why do we need *Kampf* to prove freedom?

Conflict or battle is necessary because mere submission to an objective power would be injurious to the value of humanity. This value, it seems, lies in the capacity to consider the condition of existence, namely, life itself, a fair price—the only price—to pay for a belief in the value of this very value itself. This is how Schelling conjures the spectre of human freedom, a trick which he attributes to the Greeks themselves when he argues that willingly bearing the punishment for an *unavoidable* crime was a “great idea” (*ein großer Gedanke*). Its greatness for Schelling lay precisely in the high price the Greeks were willing to pay in exchange for something priceless: they were willing to have their heroes bear so much—too much—in order that, through the loss of freedom, freedom itself would be proven. I was robbed, therefore I owned. I am being punished, therefore I am free.

What then if I am not being punished? Is it because I am not free? Is it because there is no “objective power” capable of framing a satisfying conception of freedom? It is tempting to read Schelling’s clarion call that “one thing remains—to know that there is an objective power” as a paranoid symptom of the felt lack of any such power in late-eighteenth century German culture, the alteration, replacement, or annihilation of which could offer the promise of change. Terry Pinkard observes that

³⁰⁵ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters*, [336], I.III.106.

In fragmented “Germany,” there was not a single court, a single church, nor even a single economy to which responsibility could be ascribed. There was no Bastille in which dissidents to “German” life were imprisoned. There was no “German” life....[until] In 1781, [when] things did change. ...Overthrowing the old metaphysics, [Kant’s critical philosophy] inserted a new idea into the vocabulary in terms of which modern Germans and Europeans spoke about their lives: self-determination. After Kant, nothing would be the same again.”³⁰⁶

The strange consequence of this conclusion, however, is that, whereas the dissatisfactions of late-Enlightenment “Germany” were largely focused on the very inability to locate an Object against which to struggle, Kant somehow addressed these dissatisfactions *not* by helping to locate the Object, but by imposing the same structure that would presumably underlie it onto the (soon to be even more dissatisfied) subject itself.

Kant’s critical philosophy embodied or performed the dialectic of Enlightenment to the degree that it “solved” the problem of the absent, unified “Object” by assigning world-determining responsibility to human consciousness. In doing so, however, the missing external unity of the empirical world became problematically reproduced in the very structure of consciousness itself, most notably in the form of the transcendental unity of apperception and the spectre of the thing-in-itself. As a consequence of Kant’s subjective turn, the internal divisions within society were no longer so much to blame for the sense of self-alienation among individuals. Rather, the opposite was the case. Filling this void³⁰⁷ is the single most pressing concern of German philosophy in the decades that

³⁰⁶ Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, 15.

³⁰⁷ For a discussion of the ways in which Kant’s transcendental Idealism unwittingly reproduced many of the problems it had originally set out to solve, see Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 50-73.

followed Kant, and the various strategies—both nominally pro- and anti-Kant—employed toward this end all belong to what ends up being meant by those who “invoked” the “the Kantian philosophy.”

This issue of invocation lies at the heart of the problem surrounding Kant, “the Kantian philosophy,” the “so-called *Kantkrise*,” and the historical point in late-eighteenth century which was itself suddenly overcome with an impulse toward reflection (about reflection), and to which Modernity has repeatedly, compulsively turned ever since in order to reflect on this impulse.³⁰⁸ As can be seen from the scholarship I cited in the previous chapter in the context of Kleist’s *Kantkrise*, a common strategy of those scholars who have sought to de-emphasize the causal efficacy of Kant’s philosophy in that phase of Kleist’s life has been to insist that Kleist’s occasional mention of Kant is not nearly so much a one-dimensional reportage as it is a sort of strategy—a rhetorically affected “invocation.” This assertion is, to be sure, consistent with the qualification of Kleist’s crisis as a “so-called” *Kantkrise*, but it is also more than that. It is a failure to appreciate the thoroughly modern problem that immediately arises when one speaks of “invoking Kant.”

The paradox of the *Kantkrise*—both as an event and as a scholarly discourse—is part of the more general problem that surrounds the effort—both in Kant’s own time and today—to determine the character of the “Kantian philosophy.” The paradox is that the very figure who did perhaps more than anyone before him to divest philosophy of its

³⁰⁸ Cf. Georg Lukács, “‘*Die Leiden des jungen Werther*’. Goethe und seine Zeit” in *Goethes “Werther” : Kritik und Forschung*, ed. Hans Peter Herrmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), 39-57.

capacity to appeal to God, Nature, or any other transcendently projected guarantor, became himself appealed to in “ask for it by name!” fashion for this sense of divestment. In the process of making the projector itself, i.e., the unified subject, its ownmost guarantor, he ended up exacerbating the sense of dissatisfaction among his contemporaries out of which context his philosophy emerged and achieved currency, and for the next couple of decades—and off and on ever since—Kant became, in ersatz fashion, the godlike subject-object invoked on behalf of both the promises and broken promises of Modernity.

Kant, more simply put, was the first thoroughgoing “philosophical modernist” and so also first manifests some of the deepest *aporiai* in modernity. He rejects *the very possibility* of what had been the foundation of pre-modern and early modern thought—rationalist and theological metaphysics, on the one hand, and empiricism on the other—and insists on a thorough critical or self-determining reflection. Reason can now completely determine for itself what is to count as nature itself; but (and this is the beginning of the *aporia*) *in some sense cannot* be satisfied with the result.³⁰⁹

Pippin is, I think, right to characterize the give and take nature of Kant’s critical turn in this manner. He concludes, moreover, that “The Kantian name for that issue, the great, single modernity problem in the German tradition, is ‘autonomy.’”³¹⁰ On the one hand, Pippin’s words ring true, as I tried to show in nearly every chapter of my dissertation. On the other hand, I would add that it is equally characteristic of the modernity problem that there *is no* great, single problem, other than perhaps the anxiety that attends the apparent difficulty and felt necessity of identifying a great, single problem—let alone solving it.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Pippin, *Modernism*, 11. This issue of “satisfaction” as the rubric of Reason’s self-evaluation occurs elsewhere in Pippin, notably in *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³¹⁰ Pippin, *Modernism*, 12.

³¹¹ See Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (New York: Verso, 2002).

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