



k a b i r i

The Official Journal of the

*North American
Schelling Society*

A Fissure is a Very Superficial Thing: Contrasting Oppositions in Schelling and Whitehead

Agustín Mercado Reyes and Violeta Aréchiga

opposition, experience, natural sciences, contrasts,
epigenesis, social dynamics

“We are outfitted with senses that convey the surfaces of things. Even when intellectual curiosity and technological ingenuity makes possible anatomy, geometry, the microscope, X-rays, and other ways of peering beneath surfaces, our way of probing the viscera of the world is to turn them into yet more surfaces.”

—Lorraine Daston, *Against Nature*, 2019

Introduction

The natural sciences influence our conception of what the world is. In the most unassuming accounts, it is argued that the sciences present us with objective descriptions of our internal and external environment. Another view of the role of science, decidedly more imposing in its scope, is that the sciences reveal reality itself, even beyond the mere appearances perceived by our natural senses. Science has become a paradoxical human activity that not only goes beyond everyday human sensory capabilities and commonsense views, but also

radically transforms the environment from which it emerged, all in its endeavor to unearth the truth of what is really real.

Since the birth of the modern sciences in the seventeenth century, the success of scientific practices has understandably molded our conception of reality and the ways in which we approach it. Such practices determine what is and what is not—the valid ways of intervening in the world and the limits and possibilities of our understanding—while deploying a grid of supposedly neutral categories. If the world and our thought have an intimate connection, the sciences have positioned themselves as the best tool to help us understand and mediate such a bond. However, it cannot be denied that scientific rationality carries with it a host of presuppositions and even predispositions. To give just one example (brilliantly portrayed by Isabelle Stengers),¹ Galileo’s rational mechanics, taken as a starting point for modern science, had its origins in a necessity to establish itself as a voice of authority—the authority of speaking in the name of the natural world—in front of a rival point of view. Indeed, in Stengers’ account, modern science is almost a weapon wielded by Galileo not only against religious orthodoxy but also against the Aristotelian-empiricist commonsensical view of basic physical phenomena such as the falling of bodies and the movement of stars. Indeed, according to Stengers, Galileo still offers an appropriate historical standpoint for talking about such origins, because his work inaugurated a new way of arguing that imposed a new kind of truth. With his inclined plane, “Galileo effaces himself in order to leave ‘speech’ to the thing that will silence the others.”² In other words, with his experimental device Galileo succeeded in making the phenomena speak and, simultaneously, in silencing his rivals. Thus, from its origin, modern science had the effect of silencing opponents with the authority of the voice of the world that speaks in facts. It goes without saying that an activity that has its inception in an agonistic mood can inform even our political stance: must the search for truth always be resolved in confrontation?

These are the main reasons for our present interest in exploring the web of effects between scientific endeavors and the vision of the world that philosophy wants to express. In Schelling’s case, some of the ways in which fundamental and novel scientific conceptions are present in his manner of conceiving being have a profound importance, not only in terms of their implications (for example, the new scientific concepts allow him to connect his primitive forces with the phenomena of nature, and they also stress the process of movement itself rather than the mere result of the process) but because such conceptions allowed him to consider radically different alternatives. Schelling’s interest in the natural sciences of his time expresses

¹ Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

² Stengers, *Invention of Modern Science*, 82.

itself well beyond a mere copying of their structure so as to cast a philosophical system in their image. His intention is to reveal the deeper meaning and underlying causes of the phenomena and processes that the empirical sciences account for without going beyond their surface. To this end, he elaborates a philosophy of the natural sciences and a philosophy of nature in a broad sense,³ which, taking natural forces as their starting point, delve into the content of the natural sciences and criticize the mechanistic views of his time. It is also clear, however, that this starting point and model for an important part of his philosophy has consequences ultimately expressed in a taxonomy of being that, while challenging accepted principles of the time, is characterized by dichotomy and confrontation.

There are a great many philosophers that could be contrasted with Schelling's position, which is so emphatic about the fundamental character of opposed principles. Here, we choose to contrast it with the ontological system of Alfred North Whitehead (an author who seldom mentions Schelling)—both because of his similarities with Schelling, some of which hopefully will be evident further on, and because of the disparities between them. Specifically, we center our discussion on two seemingly simple, implicit questions that reside in Whitehead's system: What if opposition is not the only, or even the most important, mode of relationship? And what if we consider a more complex mode of comparison, one not necessarily restricted to the interplay of two opposing forces? We have tried to explore the possible answers to these questions, as well as the consequences brought about by alternative ontological solutions, by developing our own notion of a *fissure*: a notion that brings to mind alternative possible arrangements between surfaces and depths, and that hopefully clarifies other modes of thinking that we consider viable and important. The alternative views that spring from these reflections touch upon every aspect of our particular lives—something that risks being forgotten when dealing with abstract, fundamental notions of ontology. Thus, after showing—in our discussion of the way nature itself was seen by the sciences that influenced Schelling's thought—the configuration of a fertile ground for thinking a fundamentally oppositional ontology, we then discuss the aforementioned alternative arrangements: a view of the world that thrives on contrast but not necessarily opposition. Lastly, we explore the possible consequences in yet another territory of being, the social realm, in which the difference between opposition and contrast can make or break the possibility of living together.

³ See Joan Steigerwald, *Experimenting at the Boundaries of Life: Organic Vitality in Germany around 1800* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

Schelling and the Natural Sciences

In line with the epistemological optimism that characterizes *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling claimed in 1797, in his introduction to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, that there is a homogeneity between spirit and nature—because both are characterized by their spontaneous activity, by an internal force through which they produce themselves, and by their configuration according to ends: “The system of nature is at the same time the system of our mind” (SW II: 39).⁴ However, this identity of nature and spirit is not only a sign of this epistemological optimism; it is also a sign of the deep interest Schelling’s philosophy takes in the science of his time.

This interest, clearly visible both in the various writings of *Naturphilosophie* and, fifteen years later, in *The Ages of the World*, allows us to recall that at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the profound separation between the natural sciences and philosophy that would later characterize modern science, at least in discourse, had not yet stabilized. The panorama at the time Schelling wrote was somewhat more complex: there was, on the one hand, a natural philosophy with inquiries directed toward the search for causes and, on the other, a natural history postulated as solely descriptive and classificatory. Simultaneously, what would later be known as biology was being born as a discipline with its own object and ends; chemistry was in the process of solidifying its revolution and separation from physics; and physics itself was becoming the “queen of the sciences,” superior in hierarchy to the others. But none of this had yet crystallized: within the field of natural philosophy there were various research activities aiming to offer causal explanations; by the beginning of the second half of the eighteenth century, Buffon would propose to rise to the challenge of making natural history likewise an enterprise of an explanatory nature.⁵

It is not strange, then, that the scientific theories of Schelling’s time—both those that concern physical movement and those that deal with life, and both those with a more experimental orientation and those with a more speculative tone—occupy such an important place in his thought. Now, this does not mean that he simply accepts what his contemporaries propose. Despite the fact that in his writings on *Naturphilosophie* he supports the intimate

⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 30. See also Jean-Christophe Lemaître, “Le statut de l’organisme dans la philosophie schellingienne de la nature,” *Philosophies de la nature. Klesis — revue philosophique* 25 (2013).

⁵ See Phillip Sloan, “Natural History, 1670–1802,” in *Companion to the History of Modern Science*, R. C. Olby, G. N. Cantor, J. R. R. Christie, and M. J. S. Hodge, eds. (London: Routledge, 1990).

link between what we know and nature as it is⁶—the possibility of going far beyond the regulative character that Kant had granted to knowledge of the living precisely because of this link—he announces, again optimistically, in *The Ages of the World* (1815) that

it is an advantage of our time that this [living, actual] being has been given back to science and, indeed, it may be asserted, in such a way that it may not be easily lost again. It is not too severe to have judged that, in the wake of the now awoken dynamic spirit, all philosophy that does not take its power from it can still only be regarded as an empty misuse of the noble gift of speaking and thinking. (SW VIII: 199)⁷

Schelling is acutely aware of the limitations of the natural-philosophical theories of his day. His criticism of mechanic-empiricist conceptions—among other things, for their linear conception of causal relationship, for their inability to adequately explain change and movement, and for their remaining with what appears to us as given—runs through an important part of his work. The present critique, directed mainly at areas of what today we would call physics and biology, seeks not only to inquire about the metaphysical presuppositions that characterize scientific thought both today and then, but also to show that science, as it is, does not tell the entire story. Indeed, accounting for movement when it comes to bodies that we consider inert, or when it comes to the formation of living beings, requires for Schelling considering a deep activity, constitutive of what exists, and not only to account for what appears before our eyes as given fact and, in that sense, fixed in more or less permanent results. The fundamentally active and interacting, changing character of the real is precisely what Schelling foregrounds and what makes his philosophy relevant for the current era—in the discourse about both scientific knowledge and accepted facts. Today, neglecting these dynamic characteristics of nature conditions proposals that result, for example, in reducing the complexity of the behavior and morphology of living beings to isolated traits, focusing solely on function in terms of survival, and ignoring the weight of evolutionary inheritance and the way in which this inheritance conditions currently present characters.⁸

⁶ “The ‘Highest Truth,’ the truth of speculative idealism, the identity of thought and being,” in the words of Žižek. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 10.

⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason M. Wirth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), xxxv.

⁸ Stephen Gould and Richard Lewontin, “The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme,” *Proc. R. Soc. London B* 205 (1979).

Faced with the shortcomings of mechanic-empiricist conceptions, Schelling presents an open path: not only is there an intimate correspondence between spirit and nature that allows knowing the latter; additionally, as he affirms in *The Ages of the World*, thanks to Kant there awoke a “dynamic spirit” that would allow both science and philosophy to be endowed with content. For Schelling, this course implies two main paths: one that takes contradiction as its axis, visibly linked to notions of the attractive and repulsive forces of the natural philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and one that perhaps less evidently presents a construction of the real linked to the notion of epigenesis.

The Two-Force Model

The topic of contradiction appears in *Naturphilosophie* linked to the question both of movement and the limits of science. In fact, in the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, movement occupies a prominent place, as if, in opposition to the picture of nature drawn by many researchers of his time, Schelling wanted to show all of its vitality and generative capacity and wanted to do this because, in his words, in the mechanistic framework, motion can only be caused by motion and so on *ad infinitum*. Empiricism, and with it mechanism, sees natural objects as something given, already finished, and not as something in constant change, in a process of becoming. Now, although change and permanence were of course an old problem in the field of philosophy, alongside the developments in science of the eighteenth century a multitude of new models for this duality were proposed. In particular, in natural philosophy there were by this time a number of approaches to the problem of motion in terms of a two-force model going back to, at least, Newton, followed by, among many others, Hales, Buffon, and of course Kant.

Newton, in the *Opticks*,⁹ speaks of attraction and repulsion as the two types of short-range forces between particles and gives examples of phenomena caused by them. His speculations gave rise to a research program in the theory of matter and in chemistry, within which Stephen Hales stands out as one of the first authors to speak of a force other than attraction. In his *Vegetable Staticks* of 1727 he makes the repulsive force an essential element of the economy of nature, claiming that if only the force of attraction existed, the whole of nature would soon be transformed into an “unactive cohering lump.”

Wherefore it was absolutely necessary, in order to the [sic] actuating and enlivening this vast mass of attracting matter, that there should be every where intermixed with it a due proportion of strongly repelling

⁹ Isaac Newton, *Opticks* (New York: Dover Publications, [1704] 1979).

elastick particles, which might enliven the whole mass, by the incessant action between them and the attracting particles.¹⁰

A series of authors elaborated speculations and even calculations about the interaction between these two forces in an endeavor that took form, during the second half of the eighteenth century, in the systems of Boscovich and Buffon. Specifically, the latter argued in 1774 that the fundamental forces of nature are two: gravity and heat; the equilibrium between these two diametrically opposed forces allows them to balance without destroying each other, thus originating all the phenomena of the universe.¹¹

According to Stengers, the history of science and philosophy is contingent in the sense that it cannot be explained in the traditional way of an orthodox philosophy of science, i.e., by making of description a mere deduction. But this does not mean that it is arbitrary: the problems and significations of science and philosophy cannot simply be reduced to context. “The contingent process invites us to ‘follow’ it, each effect being both a prolongation and a reinvention.”¹² Schelling’s interest in the sciences of his time itself does just that: it prolongs and reinvents models and propositions that are part of his milieu, making them a fertile ground for his own natural-philosophical conceptions.

Hence Schelling reinvents the two-force model. He criticizes its point of view, claiming that it considers only the product, or what already is, and cannot adequately account for change, i.e., the object in its becoming and movement. This concern leads him to postulate a dynamic system in which there is necessarily wavering between productivity and product, between activity and result. For Schelling it was necessary to account for a continuous re-production process in which absolute permanence is only a deceptive appearance. To address this, he intends to explain movement as a result of movement, yes, but also as a result of rest: “Nature is movement while also at rest; this is the foremost fundamental principle of dynamic philosophy” (SW III: 24–27).¹³ If for Buffon the equilibrium between heat and gravity, expansion and attraction, originates all the phenomena of the universe, for Schelling there is an alternation between contraction and expansion that is matter itself. In other words, forces are not something imposed on matter from outside, but are something whose alternation rather constitutes matter. In this process, productivity becomes product through a limitation of its

¹⁰ Stephen Hales, *Vegetable Staticks* (London: Oldbourne, [1727] 1961), 178.

¹¹ Georg-Louis Leclerc Buffon, “Des éléments : Introduction à l’histoire des minéraux,” in *Œuvres complètes de Buffon Tome I* (Paris: Furne et Cie., [1774] 1839).

¹² Stengers, *Invention of Modern Science*, 82.

¹³ F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 22 fn.

activity, which results in a rest that is, however, only apparent: the permanent in nature is only a relative and momentary limitation of its own activity, so that the product is never absolutely fixed, finished, but is continuously in reproduction. Here, movement and productivity are identified: the productive activity of nature is already movement. And from the beginning, for Schelling, the approach to the subject implies fundamental duplicities in contrast to which identity is equivalent to absolute permanence, rest, and inactivity, that is, to what Schelling considers the product of natural activity but not that activity itself.

Whether it is countless constant beginnings or a productivity that never stagnates—except ephemerally in the product—the duality of expansion and attraction and, more generally, of an expansive drive and a retarding one, is constituted as the starting point of this undertaking. If nature can be a unity of multiplicity and if something can be distinguished in it, it is because its original identity is canceled—that is, nature is canceled as pure productivity in the original diremption of nature.

The original diremption sets nature in motion. It establishes a fundamental dualism that is characterized—like the movement of forces in the natural philosophy of the time—by an encounter of opposing tendencies that waver and recur in alternation. They have to do so because otherwise they would only annihilate each other, as Schelling maintains in the *First Outline*. Wavering, in contrast, allows the outset of movement, of productivity: “In the pure productivity of nature absolutely nothing is distinguishable without diremption; it is only productivity dualized in itself that gives the product” (SW III: 297).¹⁴ In the world thus presented, dualization appears as necessary for the manifestation of productivity in the product and as the condition of all formation.

Movement in nature, Schelling explains, is a continuous effort to reach and recover the identity dissolved by the antithesis arising in the original productivity. Identity and cancellation of identity mutually require each other for movement to be; without the effort to achieve the first, or without the opposition to that effort that constitutes the second, everything would come to a standstill: “Nature is an activity that constantly strives toward identity, an activity, therefore, which in order to endure as such, constantly presupposes the antithesis” (SW III: 309).¹⁵ The product never cancels the original duality that permeates the entire process; on the contrary, it is the persistence of this duality that allows the constant emergence of new products, the development of an “infinitely progressive formation” (SW III: 310).¹⁶ Thus, the duality

¹⁴ Schelling, “Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature,” *First Outline*, 212.

¹⁵ Schelling, “Introduction to the Outline,” *First Outline*, 220 fn.

¹⁶ Schelling, “Introduction to the Outline,” *First Outline*, 221.

established from the original diremption functions as a motor that not only “enlivens the whole mass,” as Hales had described, but also enlivens the very existence and organization of the natural world.

Epigenesis and History

In *The Ages of the World* (1815), the question of movement with contradiction as its motor and, with it, the deeper significance of the account Kant provides in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), receives a slightly different treatment. The “infinitely progressive formation” of *Naturphilosophie* appears more clearly as a process in which something that follows is articulated with something that precedes: “Not only human events but the history of nature has its monuments”—says Schelling—“and one can surely say that they do not abandon on their wide path of creation any stage without leaving behind something to indicate them” (SW VIII: 202).¹⁷ In a history also marked by contradiction, he begins his narrative with the primal living being as something indeterminate capable of developing by itself—thanks its own impulse and will and according to laws of its own—to give rise to the present world in which we live.

It is a true organic construction, very close in its conception to the way in which Blumenbach, the naturalist who influenced Kant so much, theorized the formation of living beings. Now, in the field of the study of living beings, a controversy had been taking place since the middle of the eighteenth century. Some authors argued that the mechanic model was unable to explain, from only matter and movement conceived as external to them, the way living beings originate—that is, the model is incapable of explaining so immanently. Recognition of this inability led some mechanists to postulate a theory of preexisting germs according to which, rather than being produced or generated, the germs of all living beings—past, present, and future—had been created by God at the beginning of time, were encapsulated within each other, and were waiting only for the propitious moment to develop. Various naturalists opposed this view, and Blumenbach was among those who most clearly expressed themselves in this regard. “There is no such thing in nature as preexisting organized germs,”¹⁸ he maintained, instead proposing a gradual formation of living being from unorganized matter—a formation that occurs thanks to the fact that the unorganized matter of generation “falls under the influence” of a *nisus* or effort in such a way that “the prepared, but at the same time unorganized rudiments of the foetus, first begins to be gradually

¹⁷ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, xxxvii.

¹⁸ J. F. Blumenbach, *An Essay on Generation* (London: T. Cadell, Faulder, Murray, and Creech, 1792), 20.

organized when it arrives at its place of destination at a due time, and the necessary circumstances. This is the doctrine of Epigenesis [sic].”¹⁹

A central characteristic of epigenesis in these theories is the gradualness with which it conceives the formation of living being, the way in which, precisely as Schelling presents it, the past becomes the basis and material for the construction of the present and future. It could be said of epigenesis, as of the development of being, that “no present is possible that is not founded on a decisive past and that no past is possible that is not based on the present as something overcome” (SW VIII: 259).²⁰ Schelling pictures here a process in which things go through different moments, successive stages that lead them to maturity, and the examples he presents are often of living beings: “Every kind of life is a succession and concatenation of states in which everything prior is the ground, the mother, the birthing potency, of everything posterior” (SW VIII: 260).²¹

There is another aspect in which the development of being as presented by Schelling in *The Ages of the World* seems to take up and elaborate anew the processes of epigenesis. In order to account for the self-organizing capacity of living beings, Blumenbach proposes the existence of a *nisus formativus* or *Bildungstrieb*, a kind of drive or effort whose nature is as unknowable as Newtonian gravity.²² But it is only the existence of this drive, affirms the naturalist, that makes it possible to explain why unorganized matter acquires all those forms “corresponding to, and equally numerous with the endless differences in the purposes which organized bodies and their parts are destined to fulfill.”²³ The living being, unlike inert matter, has its own internal teleology, purposes, and laws according to which it produces itself and the members of its species. Similarly, the world’s becoming process in the past of the *Ages* is also characterized by an internal teleology. In the introduction to this text, speaking of primal nature, Schelling affirms the oldest being, the being that no other precedes:

It can develop itself, insofar as it develops itself, only freely, out of its own drive and conation, purely out of itself. But it does not develop lawlessly but only in accordance with laws. There is nothing arbitrary

¹⁹ Blumenbach, *An Essay on Generation*, 5.

²⁰ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 42.

²¹ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 43.

²² Blumenbach says so explicitly: “The expression Formative Nisus, like that of Attraction, serves only to denote a power, whose constant operation is known from experience but whose cause, like the causes of most of the qualities of matter, is a *qualitas occulta* to us” (Blumenbach, *An Essay on Generation*, 20–21). He quotes Newton in the footnote attached to these lines.

²³ J. F. Blumenbach, *A Manual of the Elements of Natural History* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1825), 11.

in it. It is a nature in the most complete understanding of the word.
(SW VIII: 199–200)²⁴

The primal nature, an aspect of God and finally its ground, needs to be, however, a nature “in the most complete understanding of the word”—to access expressibility, as Schelling will later call it—of a complex dynamic not only between spirit, nature, and the union of both, but, previously, of an interaction between its three powers (the affirmer, the denier, and the unity of both). This interaction gives rise to an eternal rotary movement of contractive and expansive forces from which arises in primal nature a longing: the “eternally commencing life” (SW VIII: 239)²⁵ wishes to get out of involuntary movement and distress. And then “that which is higher, magically, so to speak, rouses in that life the yearning for freedom” (SW VIII: 239),²⁶ the longing for being; the spirit represents to primal nature that against which it can become a being. With this longing, nature can then refer itself to something superior, and a separation takes place that becomes permanent when

eternal nature, placed into freedom by the confirmed cision itself, is able to decide. And now, by virtue of an eternal wanting or decision, it eternally and inseparably allies itself to the highest as its immediate subject and becomes its unwavering Being, its abiding substratum. (SW VIII: 241)²⁷

Thanks to this great decision, nature gains access to the possibility of expressing itself. Thus, in the process by which the world comes to be, desires and decisions of both primal nature and spirit intervene. According to Welchman and Norman, since both nature and the godhead are aspects of God, “the longing [of the primal nature] is really God longing for himself.”²⁸ On the other hand, they add, God freely makes the decision to recognize primal nature in his desire to be, and as a result it becomes the ground of God’s existence. If the life of the world is an involution of nature and spirit,²⁹ if the interaction between them gives rise to the world we know, the ends and laws of this development cannot be external to the very development of the natural world conditioned by that interaction.

²⁴ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, xxxv.

²⁵ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 27.

²⁶ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 28.

²⁷ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 29.

²⁸ Alistair Welchman and Judith Norman, “Creating the Past: Schelling’s *Ages of the World*,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 4 (2010): 34.

²⁹ See Steigerwald, *Experimenting at the Boundaries of Life*, 29.

This process of development of the natural world, torn by the contradictions that incessantly drive it, possesses its own immanent teleology: it is not subject to a necessity that inevitably had to be, but is rather a result of decisions that from a non-deliberate urgency go on progressing until becoming free decisions of the divinity. The course is not, then, predetermined, but is not arbitrary either. We are not here before Newton's capricious god,³⁰ nor before Leibniz's god subjected to the principle of sufficient reason. It is a development that has occurred and continues to occur, in which the divinity finds in itself a dynamic of opposition that—thanks to the interplay of the first potency, eternal nature; the second potency, spirit; and the third, the world soul that links them and through which God acts in the natural and spiritual world—gives it ground and consequently allows it to reveal itself freely, not canceling the necessity but giving it its rightful place in its self-construction process. As in *Naturphilosophie*, the architectonic model of nature in *The Ages of the World* is the living being that has its own ends and that, according to those ends, gradually develops and becomes complex.

Also, as in *Naturphilosophie*, the engine of this development is a contradiction, understood more generally as the opposition between forces or contrary drives. According to Schelling, without this general, non-logical contradiction there would be no movement, and there would be neither life nor progress. And this contradiction will here too receive epigenetic treatment. In effect, the architectonic and historical articulation in the development process—the way in which what comes later is linked to what came earlier— involves both the movement arising from the struggle of forces and the subsequent attempt of nature, at a given moment, to achieve peace, an attempt that in turn implies a separation of the opposing forces, that is, an articulation that takes place when they occupy their rightful place in one of them recognizing the other as superior. This struggle for a peace that can never be attained echoes, once more, the words of Hales mentioned above: if the force of attraction alone existed, everything would become an *inactive* lump. But now there is a relationship between forces that is not just hierarchical—that is, above all, a relationship in time. While “A is equal to x” and “B is equal to x” exclude each other if it is affirmed that this equality occurs at the same time—or if A and B are the same as x, or if x is A and x is B simultaneously—Schelling

³⁰ As can be seen, among other places, in the correspondence between Leibniz and Clarke, for Newton, God must exercise a continuous and vigilant action so the world does not degenerate into chaos; through this intervention, God becomes present in the world in the manner of a king who disposes and orders everything. In contrast to the Leibnizian god who adheres to the principle of sufficient reason, the Newtonian god seems to be a capricious being who only follows his own will in deciding, for example, to create a portion of matter in one place, and another in another. See G. W. Leibniz and Samuel Clarke, *Correspondence* (Hackett Publishing: Indianapolis, 2000); see also Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957).

is speaking of a relationship in which, given A, B subsists also as given—in which A and B, opposites, are at the same time in different times.

Different times [...] can certainly be, as different, at the same time, nay, to speak more accurately, they are necessarily at the same time. Past time is not sublimated time. What has past certainly cannot be as something present, but it must be as something past at the same time with the present. (SW VIII: 302)³¹

The notion of ground, the foundation on which living being and the whole of what exists is built, is essential here. Contradiction is resolved by the ground: God is an entity at the same time as a negation and as an affirmation, but the first precedes, grounds, the latter, which therefore remains as grounded. We are thus faced with a contradiction that is no longer just a relationship between two terms (each the logical negation of the other), but a relationship in which, in an epigenetic movement, one of the terms becomes the basis and antecedent of the other, which, consequently, becomes posterior to and fruit of the first. These are opposites that can exist at the same time, however, because existence in the presence of the second not only does not suppress the first but rather presupposes it. This motor that acts constructively from the undifferentiated to the differentiated also explains why the movement of being is always ascending, since time and time again it lays a base that will later be surpassed by a new development, and this development will in turn eventually be surpassed. The notion of ground also makes it possible to explain the unity of opposites in a way different from that of *Naturphilosophie*: negation and affirmation, recast as (for example) attraction and expansion, make up a unit not only because one would not exist without the other, but also because, thanks to the relation of grounding, it is possible for both to exist at the same time without cancelling each other or losing their differences.

We encounter here, then, a model for the relationship of mind and world—not only in terms of its structure but in the dynamic process of its construction from the interplay of opposites that can collide with each other or form a unit, all without ceasing to be mutually opposed. Both through the scission and in a tense unity, Schelling presents contradiction as that which allows movement again and again. It is this contradiction that brings life with it, that involves moments of violence and crisis, that causes fissures that pierce nature's entirety. It is thanks to opposition that the world develops and its different beings appear. But, at least when it comes to primordial nature, Schelling warns that “the scission of forces can never become a complete scission because the limit should be spared and the first negation and restriction should

³¹ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 76.

be retained” (SW VIII: 279).³² Although “everything that lives is only conceived and born in violent struggle” (SW VIII: 322),³³ and the multiplicity of nature is inexplicable for him from the peaceful coexistence of the various forces, it is the introduction of the epigenetic element that allows the system to continue being—and being dynamically productive—by using the strife of opposition as fuel for creativity. Indeed, even when Schelling seems to be in dialogue with Hales when he says that “in point of fact, everything in nature becomes only through development, that is, through the constant contradiction of a swathing, contracting force. Left to itself, nature would still lead everything back into that state of utter negation” (SW VIII: 244),³⁴ and agreeing with him that something is needed to balance attraction or else everything would stop, the truth is that if only the expansive force existed, everything would disintegrate and arrive, by this route also, at absolute rest—at death. In this sense, contradiction never causes wounds—fissures—that tear apart the real completely. The past acts as Blumenbach’s germinal matter, ensuring that the ground on which living being is built is always present, overcome but not canceled, and functioning as tissue conferring unity to the opposites while connecting, but never totally closing, the wounds opened by contradiction time and again in the course of the vital process of being.

In this process, and despite the connecting function of the past, the primal fissure and the successive ones are always present or opening. And these are fissures between yes and no, attraction and expansion, gravity and light, positive and negative, affirmation and negation; dualism is, as we have said, what drives the construction of reality. But what about hues and nuances? Is there a world whose construction is possible from the interplay not only of dualities but of multitudes? If, as Schelling claims, the opposites can be at the same time, that is, if they can constitute a productive unity, why not unities not limited to dichotomies, perhaps even more productive?

Indeed, Schelling struggles with conceptual elements that seem precluded from his vision; it seems particularly telling that in the middle of his most insistent presentation of the contrariety of the world in its different ages, there emerges a provocation to find “intermediate concepts” (SW VIII: 286),³⁵ the call to think beyond the false understanding that the conciliation of opposites is stating that “yes is no.” The productive wavering is clearly not the nonsensical collapse of contradiction; nevertheless, it seems necessary to avoid not only the “flagrant extremes” of the oppositions, but the flattening of the manifestation of the world into the single line between the extremes of contradiction that, even if it is subtly graduated, loses the opportunity of

³² Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 58.

³³ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 91.

³⁴ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 31.

³⁵ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 64.

thinking radically about the “merely various.” This is why we contrast Schelling’s system with that of Whitehead, taking into account their common trends but stressing the points in which the notion of contradiction, even when modulated into the oppositions that go beyond mere logical negation, seems to burst at the seams.

We have found it useful to think about what we have called *a fissure*. It is an ambiguous image: something that breaks, but neither completely nor cleanly. It can be mended relatively easily; and beneath it, even if it runs deep, the echo of continuity is never gone. A fissure can be shown superficially, but one can only speculate what goes on in its depths; and as Lorraine Daston notes in our epigraph, even if we had instruments to probe it, we would only be fabricating even more surfaces. If we tried to dig a fissure out, it would keep eluding. A fissure is also compatible with but not equivalent to an opposition; for the nature of a fissure calls for possible oppositions between the complementary surfaces on each side of it, but one side can never disappear or be reduced to a wavering between two opposed states, never ultimately resolved. The importance of each side is only relative, dictated by a valuation.

A fissure, despite what can be initially thought, is something that can unite: it is a shape on a surface that creates different zones that could have been otherwise and that puts those zones in contrast—not necessarily in opposition—with each other. The unity that it creates is the big picture. It is a notion that resonates deeply with different ideas suggested by Schelling. But here there is no yearning and no overcoming of the separation, and, above all, no ultimate way of considering the relationship of duality and unity. Unity is not a higher state, but an inseparable part of the process of constitution; everything (the fissure, the whole, the parts and the shapes) must be valued by everything and everyone involved. And we know well that two accounts of exactly the same fact will be radically, inescapably different, depending on the valuations of the different witnesses.

A Brief Meditation on Whitehead’s Concepts

To further explain the concept of fissure, and to contrast it with the notion of opposition, it is necessary to describe, at least in a cursory manner, some of Whitehead’s concepts. We will risk giving an account that simplifies the dense web of different ingredients that compose his system, and the multiplicity of ways that these ingredients interlock with each other; and then we will work toward the notion of contrast—a feature of Whitehead’s metaphysics that speaks of a unity between things that are different but in no way incompatible or opposed. We consider that this metaphysical element, and the notions associated with it, are a neuralgic point in the comparison of these two complicated systems. It gives rise to a series of similarities, in which Schelling

and Whitehead profoundly agree, but highlights the parts in which they stress different values of the constitution of reality.

For Whitehead, everything starts and ends with actual entities. In one of those insistent passages that sometimes surface in Whitehead's writing, he states his ontological principle thus: "In separation from actual entities there is nothing, merely nonentity—"The rest is silence."³⁶ In other words, "actual entities"—also termed 'actual occasions'—are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real."³⁷ But do not assume that any and everything we perceive as real and tangible (the cat and the mat she is sitting on, the light from a nebula, the invasion of a country or the country we know as Ukraine) is in itself an actual entity. True, these partake of and depend on the actual entities that compose it as a recognizable whole, and on their characteristics; they are indeed in a process of constant change. But they are not the drops of existence and experience that are the central point of Whitehead's system.

The nature of these drops of existence, these actual entities, can be better understood by considering the synonym stated in the quote above: "actual occasion." An actual entity is never a fixed thing, but is inseparable from the process that gives rise to it. It is a process that has an ordered series of steps: an actual entity first emerges as a nucleus of pure potentiality that gradually becomes more concrete, with the help of all of the feelings it feels when experiencing its surrounding universe. It then takes these feelings and gives them different importance, deciding what is relevant and how. This, and no other, is the famous "process" that titles Whitehead's technical masterwork, and it culminates with its "satisfaction": a point of pure actuality in which nothing else can be decided and all is determined. The entity is now ready to perish, but—a small consolation—it achieves immortality when it is felt by other entities that succeed it and integrate that specific feeling into their own constitution. This process is in some sense out of time; one cannot set up any instrument to catch the incomplete actual entity, red-handed, in some stage of its own constitution.

Already we can see some kinship with Schelling's ideas about the constitution of reality. The deep, radical past that Schelling sketched time and again is not a prehistorical but empirically accessible moment, but a primal point in time in which two forces find an unsteady balance in their opposition before they can be expressed fully in our world. Also, there is an unmistakable agreement in their willingness to allow the elements of reality at large the possibility of deciding.

³⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 43.

³⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

How can reality at large decide? Decision is supposed to be, at least colloquially, an election, meditated or visceral, between alternatives. It seems to presuppose knowledge—at least of said alternatives. But whereas in Schelling the decision goes on from a kind of blind urgency of the forces that initially make up reality to a free decision by God to express himself, in Whitehead's system a decision embodies that which we (and any other entity) receive from the world around us—something simply given, something that is a brute, irreducible fact. We can take this notion of the given in our hands and turn it to see some of its facets to better understand it. For example, this “givenness” is simply another name for the pure actuality, the final manifestation of the complicated process of the constitution of every drop of reality. As such, it forces us to land squarely in the realm of what William James called “stubborn facts,” leaving aside the urge to imbibe anything and everything with universals. It speaks of the importance of the particular fact; the notion of “grave injustice” might stir feelings in us, but if a particular injustice is done to us we experience it as a direct fact—and the results for everyone involved are radically different in their concreteness. “Bradley's³⁸ doctrine—Wolf-eating-Lamb as a universal qualifying the absolute—is a travesty of the evidence. That wolf eat that lamb at that spot at that time: the wolf knew it; the lamb knew it; and the carrion birds knew it.”³⁹

Contrary to the current understanding of the activity of science, which dictates that the sciences represent the real facts, Whitehead describes scientific endeavor as going beyond mere fact, as a way to unearth the web of relations (for example, of causality) that are not properly expressed in the final, actual presentation of any fact. Simply put, science makes theories. But it must always retain a link to that stubborn fact that is not informed by rational analysis but is just “given” and thus irrational. The reversal that this causes for Whitehead is almost comic; science is based on the hope that rationalism works ... and is, for that reason, a matter of pure faith.

This idea goes a long way toward structuring reality. Givenness is positioned as the correlative of potentiality. That is, something given is what really, in fact, happened at some point. It is not what might have happened; what has not happened but might have happened does not enter what is given. This is precisely the decision, the cutting off, the separating, of that which did happen from the rejected, infinite potential that might have but did not. This

³⁸ Francis Herbert Bradley (1846–1924) was harshly criticized by both Whitehead (as seen in this quote) and William James for his idealist views, in which he disparaged immediate, raw sense perception, preferring absolute and universal notions. See William James, *Writings, 1902–1910* (New York, N.Y.: Library of America, 1987), particularly his essay “Bradley or Bergson?,” 1266–271. As seen in this quote, for Whitehead and James, this left out a richness of the concrete, the all-important sheer fact.

³⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 43.

is how decision works in a dynamical, spontaneous but active fashion. It is the process by which the entities, in their concrescence, deplete bit by bit their own potentiality, sacrifice what will not be but could have been in order to achieve the final presentation of fact. In a way, the process of decision is indeed the past, since everything that we actually see (and generally feel) presupposes that it has already gone through this process. Like Schelling, this past is not the chronological sequential steps of actual reality, but something that cannot have been seen and yet still shimmers through everything in the present. In Whitehead's system, however, the past is not a primordial ordering of a dynamic of forces, but an atomized multitude of universes that were just here, almost within reach of our senses, but are now gone.

We must pause for a moment to make a crucial distinction between the notion of experience in the two systems that we are contrasting. Experience (including the experienced past) is, for Schelling and Whitehead both, the way that the world gives itself to that which experiences. For Whitehead, however, experience does not only participate in the process of building knowledge of the world, as Schelling would have it, but informs the very process of coalescing of each entity in the world. Experience is literally taken as an ingredient in every entity's being in the process of actualizing itself, and thus it has a particularly strong ontological role. Experience is not limited to the realm of knowledge or of consciousness. Its content is not only modified and structured by the experiencing entity, but *valued*; and in turn, the experienced entity is affected not only as the receiver of data about the world, but as the receiver of the ingredients for its own ontological becoming—including experiencing its own immediately past self. An important consequence is that the process of experiencing the world is, for each entity, a pre-individual event. From this, one can conclude two important things that may well be the key points of departure that reside in the base of our contrast of the two systems. Firstly, each entity needs to “feel” the experience of the whole world in all its complexity, and that means that there is no stage in which a simple, undifferentiated potency needs an opposing foil in order to develop the world, but instead each entity receives and values everything, all at once. And secondly, the ontological integration of the world in the process of the formation of each entity considers the “outside” world and integrates it in its own being, and thus the fundamental opposition between subject and objective world, between a being and its outside, becomes fluid and permeable, and must be reconceptualized.

All of the above does not mean, however, that deep, fundamental dichotomies and oppositions must be thrown out the window in favor of a fluid world with no clear distinctions. There are, to be sure, momentous decisions in ontological terms: to be, or not to be. Indeed, the posing of that question as an affirmation and negation (and implicitly as the opposition

between contradictory alternatives, and their coming together as one in the process of decision, akin to Schelling's ideas) is what marks higher forms of consciousness, according to Whitehead.⁴⁰ All of these ingredients form what Whitehead calls a contrast: a unity of differences, put together by the act of being experienced in togetherness. "Being" and "not being" is one of the most important contrasts. In the manner of Schelling, Whitehead suggests that affirmation and negation are completely meaningless without each other. There is a logical soundness to the idea that reality is made of opposed impulses, and to the mode in which these two primal forces integrate with each other and qualify anything.

For Schelling, the dynamics of opposites, cast in a productive tension, seems to be enough for the world to spring forth with its deep complexity, at least at a fundamental level. This gives nature immanent features, such as having a radical origin in an undifferentiated unity, as well as the possibility to keep reaching for it, but internally it is still produced by agonistic drives. The union must be between radically, undoubtedly distinct elements, so that productive tension is generated and, in later works, so that there can emerge a "strange logic of indifference" in which two elements of any given opposition can be absolutely in themselves, each in its own. Duality, then, is the seed of all differentiation, and beyond or below that, there is only the absolute of indifference (see SW VII: 406–407).⁴¹ The importance of the dual relationship of opposition is evident when he explicitly comments: the concept of a connection is "much too weak for the thoughts that should be expressed [in the *Ages*]" (SW VIII: 213).⁴² Different manifestations of a fact or an enduring element of reality are, for him, merely variations, and "the merely various can also connect" (SW VIII: 213), without being truly the opposition he strives for.

But why should the monumental pairs, freedom and nature, gravity and light, and ultimately affirmation and negation, be the only encounters that should be taken that seriously? With all of their shared features and among all the differences between them, this is one of the most radical ways in which Whitehead parts ways with Schelling. The "merely various" is an ingredient as important as God or as the last, completely decided, actual entities. "In order to discover some of the major categories," he says, "we must appeal to

⁴⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 267.

⁴¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). For further reflections contrasting Whitehead with Schelling, specifically a sketch of the conception of evil in Whitehead's philosophy, see Agustín Mercado Reyes and Siobhan Guerrero McManus, *Fragments: cuatro ensayos de pensamiento ambiental* (Mexico: CEIICH-UNAM, 2020), particularly chapter 4, "Mal Ecológico."

⁴² Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 7.

evidence relating to every variety of occasion. Nothing can be omitted, experience drunk and experience sober, experience drowsy and experience wide-awake, experience anxious and experience carefree, experience normal and experience abnormal.”⁴³ (We have omitted ten or so additional pairs that are as entertaining and interesting to think about as the ones we quoted.) One can plainly see that these modes of experience, and modes needed to think about them, are not as clear-cut as being/not-being. One cannot *be* “just a little,” but one can be tipsy, not sober but not drunk either. A contrast can unite the opposites, but also works on the different, on the merely various, to make them a feeling that an entity incorporates in its process of decision making. Briefly, for Whitehead, the dynamics in which forces enter a productive tension are equally important as to how these dynamics are felt by the entities that witness that encounter.

Furthermore, these forces are not necessarily oppositions. One contrast can be, for example, that which emerges when we witness something a particular shade of gold next to something a particular shade of red. That contrast “cannot be repeated as that contrast between any other pair of colours, or any pair of sounds, or between a colour and a sound.”⁴⁴ It is a unique, unrepeatably union in an experience. Yet it is open for everyone. Everyone can take it the way each pleases; that is to say, any entity can value its relevance and mode as it better suits it. It can also form complexes with other contrasts. Red-and-gold can inform, for example, contrasts between musical harmonies, as happens in the synaesthetic musical systems of Alexander Scriabin or of Olivier Messiaen, both of whom associated juxtapositions of chords with color progressions. In something superficial and apparently subjective, from a secondary quality, Whitehead finds a rich ontological universe that can produce infinite modes of being.

A Fissure in Reality

A fissure is a very superficial thing; by definition it does not separate fully, but creates a new organization on an otherwise continuous surface. This event in itself is momentous, because the surface instantly becomes part of a potential not fully expressed. A fissured continuity is no longer sustainable in absolute terms. A crack has appeared in actuality. But it is equally important to note that continuity still resides deep in the fissured material: as a past event from which the fissured present is derived, something may reappear in a reconfiguration of the fissure that can be fused or healed, and more importantly, as the

⁴³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1933), 226.

⁴⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 228.

potential for the emergence of more fissures, differently organized in the surface but related in the unseen depth.

Conceptually, this means that the facts and categories of both the world and our conception of the world can be carved in unlimited ways. A fissure marks a border between the two chunks of matter in which it has appeared, but it is a conceptual decision to regard each side as forming the sides of an opposition. Not only can the fissure appear in various ways in a surface and in doing so generate diverse structuring of the resulting plane; but once appeared, a fissure organizes sides that can be thought along the lines of different relationships.

Take, for example, the political division between us and them. If we say, “we have an interest in Schelling,” are you, reader, being included? Are you with us, or one of them? Should you be offended if you were not included? Yásnaya Aguilar⁴⁵ points out that in mixe, a language spoken in the northern part of the state of Oaxaca, there is indeed a separation between *ëëts*, a “we” that includes the listener, and *atom*, a “we” that excludes them. The fracture that appears in invoking a first-person plural reveals itself to be iridescent, precisely because of its plurality, of the process of “many becoming one and being increased by one.” Are you, reader, standing right on a fissure? Inside of the language we are conversing in right now, you only have contextual cues and guesswork to decide. A fissure can mark a separation. But in some conditions, this separation is revealed as superficial, while in the depths a host of unseen dynamics can happen. I can no longer even be sure if the relationship expressed in the fissure is one of opposition; it can be, in the most radical way, riddled with ambiguities that threaten the stability of the division. What is really happening, as Aguilar goes on to point out as she develops her account of the two pronouns, is that a fissure, regardless of the superficial separation, can problematize identity and self, even of the one who creates the fissure.

As is attested by someone who does not know where they are after the fissure cracks a surface—as you do not know where you stand when we say “we”—a fissure might be narrow, but it need not be empty. We don’t mean to delve into the labyrinth of the continuum, in which thinkers have been lost for centuries, but it is important to think what processes can take place (and are in effect taking place, being actualized) in a fissure.⁴⁶ The surface that divides opens the possibility of new processes on the inside, because a surface that cracks on a superficial level but remains in a state of exchange in the potential

⁴⁵ Elena Yásnaya Aguilar Gil, “Ëëts, Atom: Algunos apuntes sobre la identidad indígena,” *Revista de la Universidad* (September 2017), 17–24.

⁴⁶ Schelling has suggested as much in the passage cited above (SW VIII: 286), in which he calls for intermediate concepts that point to “the truth that does not lie in flagrant extremes” of, for example, being / not being.

depths opens the way for the integration of new elements in the gap that lies between. A fissure may be superficially empty, but it may very well be a zone of interchange between two individuals that are not distinguished except by a vague difference in pattern. In the actual, natural world, we can readily find that a fissure, far from being a mere emptiness in space, a momentary break in matter, can be the structuring and driving force behind a novel, as yet unheard of process in nature. A fissure may even become a nuclear reactor.⁴⁷

There is one last problematization of the character of opposition that the notion of fissure tries to think through and beyond. A fissure need not be a separation between two parts. Even in the most fundamental of apparent oppositions, the encounter between the two sides is felt as a contrast. A contrast is indeed a process in which two opposed elements become something unified, but that unification does not happen in itself, by virtue of an ontological transmutation caused by dueling forces, but by the feeling the contrast brings about in the entities that witness it—effectively, in every entity in the universe. Each opposition is contemplated in this way by a myriad regards, each of which synthesizes its own unified feeling of contrast. Thus, it is precisely unity (of the opposition) that is the place of the emergence of multiplicity and variety (as a feeling for each entity). This brings about a corollary: if contrasts are the unification of two different elements performed by a great number of different entities, each of these entities would place that contrast in a context; and in each of these contrasts different elements can be relevant for different entities. A contrast, moving beyond the agonistic tension of opposites, may incorporate different elements; a fissure, by its shape, can not only separate two sides but create ramifications that can delimit three or more elements.

To recap: the oppositional, productive tension between two fundamental forces of nature informs a way of thinking. It is only natural that it does so—especially in the realm of *Naturphilosophie*, in which thinkers try to take their cue from nature and mirror its order in their systems. However, it is inconvenient to reject the “merely various” as a fundamental point in the emergence of reality and experience, expressed as a fissure. The merely various are one of the clearer examples of gaining a foothold to understand that logical frameworks that turn around well-configured opposites are not completely appropriate to account for the richness of the world, with their inability to question the separation of the individual from its environment, the radical difference between active affirmation and active negation, and basic laws of

⁴⁷ We are thinking of the Oklo reactor in Gabon, a fissure in sandstone in which water has percolated and concentrated oxidized uranium from the ore embedded in the sedimentary rock, giving rise to a slow and self-controlled fission reaction. See John Maynard Smith and Eörs Szathmáry, *The Major Transitions in Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18–20.

logic. It will be evident that there are common grounds between the need of going beyond the usual logic and various consequences proposed by Schelling—his non-synchronic coexistence between contradictory states, his proposal of opposition arising from the possibility of being both A and B (SW VIII: 213–14),⁴⁸ and especially his idea of a logic of indifference—but, in the end, Schelling still depended fundamentally on an agonistic mode of view which resolved itself either by a motion-producing wavering or by the casting of opposites into a strife for unity. This is evident in various places. For example, as he failed to see a real opposition, and especially a real resolution, into a unity in Spinoza’s structuring notions of substance and attributes, Schelling deemed his predecessor’s system as lacking life and progression (SW VIII: 340).⁴⁹ This critical appraisal of Spinoza is derived from Schelling’s insistence on looking at the genesis and structure of beings through the lens of opposition; in the same passage, he tries to recast the attributes of extension (a contracting thesis) and thought (the expanding antithesis) as opposites, and then goes on to attempt the same movement with the general ordering of categories of substance as unity, and attributes as duality. In reality, one could say that Spinoza, at least in this respect, is a freer system, because it is not chained to the necessity of collapsing two opposites into a productive unity or mediation. Thought and extension can be, in a Cartesian mood, read as a couple of opposites; but for Spinoza, they are only the two exemplars of intelligibility that we humans are able to process. The realm of bodies and that of minds is not that of the ultimate two opposed drives, but of just two of an infinite variety of attributes of the substance. The only reason that they are all-important to us, and that they seem to be the fundamental pair, is that they are the only ones we can see.

Whitehead’s system does not require such a collapse. The moment of unification is not a clash of opposed forces but a sort of contemplation by a singular entity, which incorporates all the contrasts and the patterns they suggest in its own being. A patterned world is constantly changing; contrasts emerge and fizzle away constantly, and in some way remain. We know it through the bumpy, indirect line of thinkers that swear that the past is always here even though it has passed. Fissures, then, appear and disappear and leave their ghosts for future fissures to echo in some ways.

A Radical Difference

We put forth the concept that we call fissure to think about nature and our own thoughts, because we are in agreement with the dictum that nature and

⁴⁸ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 8.

⁴⁹ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 105.

thought co-construct each other in a radical identity. If the construction takes place as pure conflagration, the effects in what we can think, what we can do, and what we are, are profound. If opposition—one can even say, violent confrontation—is the starting point of being, it does not take a great leap to consider this kind of relationship as the standard, and the brunt of ceaseless unrest as the expected state of existence. Abstract concepts, which are related but may be seen as mutually exclusive, seem to be transmuted by this mood of violence. The infinite endlessly resists its finite manifestations, which in turn spring forth as a rejection of absolute freedom.

Schelling spells it out, as explicitly as possible:

It is futile to attempt to explain the diversity in nature by the peaceful eismplasy of various forces. Everything that becomes can only become in discontent. And just as anxiety is the fundamental sensation of every living creature, so, too, everything that lives is only conceived and born in violent struggle. (SW VIII: 322)⁵⁰

Whitehead, in our view, expands the monochromatic beginning of being, and this expansion brings consequences with it. Schelling, in placing a strife front and center for the understanding of thought and nature, leaves us with a cosmic paradox: how can God take part in a creation in which Godself is bound to the inescapable pull of the two striving forces? Schelling preserves the strife between finite manifestation and eternal potency even in God, but in them the strife is transfigured into a freedom to manifest; only God escapes the push and pull of opposition by freely deciding. He is manifested, but God could have not been. Here we have not a traditional omnipotent God, controlling his creation from a perspective from beyond, but a God that exercises power through decision. Whitehead's God, though still central to the functioning of the universe, has the role of mediator, of ordering "eternal objects" that inform actuality and of permitting them to interact with the actual, finite world. God does not decide, at least not omnipotently. God merely serves as a reason why a world, in which actual entities are the only reasons, can feel the influence of pure, eternal concepts. God is even described as a "derivative notion."⁵¹

Aside from theological meandering, the central point here is that the different concepts of God reveal the central point of our argument. For Schelling, potency is revealed through the power of autonomous, free decision, granted only to God. Whitehead, on the other side, conceptualized a God that

⁵⁰ Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, 91.

⁵¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31.

is important but, as Cobb⁵² argues, does not derive this importance from coercive power. This God is still an emperor who emits decisions, and Whitehead “thinks that finding God revealed in this kind of controlling power has done enormous damage in human history”—a timely warning, considering that still today humanity is bent on the idea that our power of intervention and the authority of scientific knowledge are our main tools for overcoming our various, global, current crises. Instead, Whitehead posits a God that does not control or coerce but finds its power in persuasion.

The placing of a diversity of relationships—of possible contrasts—as alternatives to the all-generating opposition reaches not only God, but the different facets of mind and matter: an open physical account that goes beyond attraction and repulsion; a view of life, not only in terms of an organism and its relationship with its own potencies, but also in its ecological potentiality; the manner in which we structure our account of the organic and inorganic world, no longer completely excised from each other; and the way that we manage our relationship with the others, which is to say, our political activities in the world.

Even when we are proposing looking beyond opposition, it should be clearly stated that we are not suggesting here that forceful power should not exist, or that, in itself, it carries the sign of an intrinsic moral character to be judged. This would be similar to thinking that Spinoza’s subtle distinction, the difference between *potestas* and *potentia* that Negri⁵³ so emphasized, leads us to a scenario in which the brute power of *potestas* is always an undesirable abuse. Power as force simply is; even opposition is, as can plainly be seen every day, a real fact of existence. But to think of opposition as the primeval motor of a confrontation that makes everything—the organic, the inorganic, matter and mind, the temporal dimensions, the one and the others—spring forth sets the stage for a peculiar way of navigating existence. Power is there to exercise itself, but a responsible acceptance of this fact should include the consideration that it is only one mode of a non-denumerable wealth of contrasts.

Hannah Arendt⁵⁴ detected three general modes of political relationships, and two of them (imposition of one side over the other by force; and prevailing due to authority over rivals) can be productive, but often seem incapable of resolving opposition. There is a third mode, surely just one alternative among many more, to contrast to pure force and authority; it still touches on opposition, but handles it a different way, even making it so that it

⁵² John B. Cobb, *Whitehead Word Book: A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality* (Anoka, MN: Process Century Press, 2015), 69.

⁵³ Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ Arendt, Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

is no longer recognizable as opposition. Though this mode is so seldom explored that we do not fully understand what it means exactly, it may lead us to other paths of inquiry and of being in the world with others; it is the possibility of patiently persuading, which requires accepting the risk of allowing ourselves to be persuaded.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Kabiri's editorial committee for their kind invitation, and Joan Steigerwald for her insightful comments, which greatly improved this text.