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## Kant and Early Schelling on the Contingent Duality of Logic and Nature

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Kant and Schelling offer markedly different approaches to the problem of the duality between logic and nature, and the imperative to unify them. According to Kant’s “transcendental logic,” logic and nature are reciprocally unified in a two-directional sense: (1) the concepts of the faculty of the understanding are needed if the spatiotemporal intuitions from the faculty of sensibility are to correspond to determinable objects in nature, whereas (2) the understanding would lack truth or significance if it did not synthesize those intuitions by means of its *a priori* concepts. In contrast, the early Schelling proposes what we call a “logic of evolution” in which both logic and nature evolve from a common original synthetic unity of subject and object (i.e., original intuition). A shared underlying logic explains the unity of logic and nature. Therefore, while for Kant there is a necessary unity of fundamentally *heterogenous* faculties of the human mind (*Gemüt*)—sensibility and understanding—for Schelling, there is a necessarily emergent duality between two realms—of nature and logic—originating from within one fundamentally *homogenous* evolution. This, of course, is connected to how both philosophers view the nature of logic: for Kant the intellect is fundamentally *discursive*, while for Schelling it is primordially *intuitive*.

We argue, however, that despite these famously different lines of thought regarding the duality and unity of logic and nature, it has all too often been neglected that both Kant and Schelling view human intelligence as

fundamentally contingent and organic. More precisely, for both Kant and Schelling, there is an irreducible contingency in the self-knowledge or self-intuition of human intelligence. We argue that both philosophers maintain that human intelligence self-reflectively comes to the point of viewing itself as a living organization in order to give a systematic account of the contingency of its inner workings (i.e., its necessary forms and concepts). In and through such endeavor, both thinkers contend with a persistent duality between logic and nature. It is precisely around this structural tension that the interplay of contingency and organicism takes place—or so we will show. Moreover, we specifically address two moments when this tension (between logic and nature) and interplay (between contingency and organicism) appear most palpable in both philosophies: in the acquisition of *a priori* representations on the one hand, and in the construction of matter on the other.

## Contingency and Organicism in Kant’s Transcendental Logic of Nature

In Kant’s transcendental philosophy, the mediation between logic and nature is structured by the discursive representational capacities of the faculties of the human “mind,” each governed by its distinct *a priori* forms. These include (a) space and time, as *a priori* forms of sensibility; (b) the categories of the understanding as *a priori* forms of pure thinking; and (c) schemata of the imagination that mediate between sensibility and understanding. Alongside the constitutive principles of nature resulting from (a)–(c), Kant also identifies regulative principles, namely ideas of reason such as the soul, the world, and God, which guide the understanding’s systematic use (KrV, A645/B673),<sup>1 2</sup> and the idea of the purposiveness of nature, for the use of the power of judgment in the absence of determinate concepts (KU, AA 05: 179–181). The systematic articulation of these principles is the task of transcendental logic.

Yet, despite its systematicity, Kant’s transcendental logic is also significantly contingent. Reason—the logical faculty by means of which the intellect reflects on itself—cannot account for why the human mind possesses these *a priori* capacities and forms rather than others. We will start with an

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<sup>1</sup> The citation of Kant follows the *Akademie-Ausgabe*, cited as AA, followed by volume number and page numbers—except for the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (KrV), where we follow the A/B system. The other abbreviations of Kant’s works are Br for *Briefe*, EEKU for *Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilskraft*, HN for *Handschriftlicher Nachlass*, KpV for *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, KU for *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, MAN for *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*, and ÜE for *Über eine Entdeckung, nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll*.

<sup>2</sup> The English translations of Kant are cited from the *Cambridge Edition of Kant’s Works*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1992–).

explanation of this contingent constitution of human discursivity.

### The contingent constitution of human discursivity

According to Kant, reason cannot explain why our sensibility is structured by space and time, or why our understanding is structured by precisely the twelve categories grouped under the four headings of quantity, quality, relation, and modality (KrV, B145–146). Space and time are not necessarily the only possible forms of sensibility, nor are they necessarily limited to *human* sensibility. As Kant shows, reason can always conceive of non-human faculties of sensibility that share our spatiotemporal *a priori* forms, as well as ones that operate with entirely different forms (B72). Similarly, reason can always conceive of an understanding that possesses the same categories as ours yet is non-human, or one that has more, fewer, or entirely different categories, or even none at all, such as an intuitive, non-discursive understanding (B139). Moreover, reason can *conceive* of a hybrid combination such as a human-like discursive understanding paired with a non-human sensibility (B139). In short, human reason finds no necessary *a priori* ground for such a configuration of sensibility and understanding, of time, space, and the categories. Human discursivity, despite its internal systematic unity, is radically contingent.

Three structural results follow from this contingent configuration of human discursivity.

*First*, the self-knowledge of human discursivity is *regressive*. This, as we shall explain, is connected to the fact that the human discursive intellect only cognizes an object through the modal concepts of possibility, existence, and necessity (i.e., the categories of modality). As Kant highlights in §76 of the third *Critique*, this modal triad is the most general feature of human thought. Important in this regard is that “there can be no inference at all from mere possibility to actuality” (KU, AA 05: 401–402). The *conceptual* possibility of an object does not imply its *intuitive* actuality. For objective knowledge to be possible, the understanding must prescribe rules to sensibility, but sensibility also needs to supply the understanding with “data” if the latter is to carry out its task. The human intellect is therefore not able *immediately* to observe itself as a pure intelligence outside of its domain of application. Kant deals with this issue in the Paralogisms chapter of the first *Critique*. Here, he speaks of the “very illuminating” conundrum that “I cannot cognize as an object itself that which I must presuppose in order to cognize an object at all” (KrV, A402).<sup>3</sup> Reason always *regressively* posits *that* certain faculties are necessary to constitute experience, and it can only carry out this kind of reflection from within an

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<sup>3</sup> As such, as Kant says in a handwritten note to the KrV, the categories are “incomprehensible,” which is due to “the fact that we cannot have insight into the synthetic unity of apperception” (HN, AA 23: 27).

experience already constituted by those faculties. This aspect of Kant’s transcendental philosophy is also reflected in the “Refutation of Idealism” section of the first *Critique*, where Kant insists that “even our inner experience ... is [only] possible under the presupposition of outer experience” (KrV, B275). As we will show below, Kant repeatedly emphasizes this regressive aspect of transcendental logic (notwithstanding its systematicity) by means of the metaphor of epigenesis: it is from the observable effect—experience—that we infer the underlying grounds—i.e., the sensible forms of space and time, and the categories of the understanding—which are self-organized in such a way that they *progressively produce* said effect (B1, A66/B91, A135–136/B174–175, A139–140/B178–179, B422–423). Reason is only prompted to reflect on its own inner forms after realizing that they are thoroughly embedded in the materiality of nature. For instance, although Kant is able to show the *a priori* nature of the categories, he would never be able to do so if not by first investigating the conditions of possibility of *empirical* objects (see A82/B108). Put differently, the discovery and significance of *a priori* forms are contingent on reason’s departure from and return to a *given* experience.<sup>4</sup> But to have insight into the ultimate ground of this givenness itself is extravagant (*überfliegend*) for reason. Thus, transcendental philosophy is characterized by an opacity it cannot avoid (which, as we will see, works through in Schelling). As promised, let us now make this more concrete by highlighting two intimately connected “cases”: (1) the acquisition of *a priori* concepts in and through (2) the construction of matter as the application of these *a priori* concepts.

That is, according to Kant,

- 1) There is no theoretical insight into the ground or condition of the conditions of possibility of nature, besides the empirical recognition of innate fundamental forces and faculties (*Grundvermögen*) such as sensibility, imagination, and apperception or thought (see KrV, A94). As Kant explains in the KpV, “all human insight is at an end as soon as we have arrived at basic powers or basic faculties, for there is nothing through which their possibility can be conceived, and yet it may not be invented and assumed at one’s discretion. Therefore, in the theoretical use of reason[,] only experience can justify us in assuming them” (KpV, AA 05: 46–47). Space, time, and the categories are not innate, but originally acquired (ÜE, AA 08: 221–223) *from those faculties*, the ground of which is unknown to us. That is, as per this legal metaphor, they are enacted *in their role qua* conditions of possibility of nature, and they cannot be understood in isolation from this

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<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed treatment of this reciprocity, see James Conant, “Why Kant Is Not a Kantian,” *Philosophical Topics* 44, no. 1 (2016): 75–125.

constitutive role. Thus, whether the “two stems of human cognition”—the faculties of sensibility and understanding *as such*—“may perhaps arise from a common [root],” will forever remain unknown to us (A15).

- 2) The application of the categories presupposes external sense impressions (i.e., the receptivity of the human mind) as its condition. It is the *sense of feeling* (*Sinn des Gefühls*) that furnishes the subject with the sensation of a filled space—or more precisely, of the repulsive force—by virtue of which the first application of the categories (primarily, the categories of quantity) to external data is made possible (MAN, AA 04: 510, 524). The empirical concept of matter is then dynamically constructed as the synthetic combination of this repulsive force with the force of attraction, the former being immediately certain while the latter being “adjoined to” the concept of matter “through inference” (MAN, AA 04: 509).<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Kant’s theories, both of the original acquisition of *a priori* forms and of the dynamic construction of matter, constitute two manifestations of *one* single moment that eludes theoretical philosophy. For the original acquisition of the *a priori forms* takes place precisely in an original application whereby it is to be assumed that some external “impression would always be required in order to determine the cognitive faculty to the representation of an object (which is always a specific act) in the first place” (ÜE, AA 08: 222).

The *second* result is that transcendental logic, *qua* transcendental, seems inevitably open to transcendence. As Kant presents in KrV, transcendental logic turns out to split, necessarily, into the logic of truth in the Analytic and the logic of illusion in the Dialectic (KrV, A 62/B87, A131/B170). The former explains the principles of the *immanent* empirical use of *a priori* representations, while the latter addresses their *transcendent* use in hypostatizing a pure representation that has no corresponding object. In parallel, the concept of nature also splits into immanent concepts (categories) and transcendent ones (ideas). Logic is thus both immanent to nature (*qua* understanding) as well as outside of it (*qua* reason). Kant traces the root of such bifurcation of logic vis-à-vis nature to the discursive, logical procedures of the human mind itself.

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<sup>5</sup> Friedman notably underscores that this section about the dynamical construction of matter, though systematic, is merely a contingent component of Kant’s theory of matter. See Michael Friedman, *Kant’s Construction of Nature: A Reading of the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 569. This contingency of the dynamical character of matter, for Kant, marks the contingency of the empirical content of nature for reason. Our account suggests that reason’s awareness of this contingency of nature is also the awareness of its own contingency.

What the Dialectic of KrV reveals is that the *a priori* concepts of nature—which are only objectively valid in their empirical, immanent use—have the unavoidable logical tendency to think up (*erdenken*) transcendent objects under the metaphysical demand of reason’s search for the *unconditioned*. This transcendental use gives rise to transcendental illusions rather than cognitions. But transcendental illusions are so natural and unavoidable, being “not only warranted but even compelled” (A677/B705), that they *allude* to a kind of immanence, to “something true and positive” in the “production of a coherent illusory order.”<sup>6</sup> Due to this, a transcendental illusion never ceases even if it no longer deceives after being critiqued (A297/B353–354). Moreover, when a transcendental logic of truth spells out the *a priori* elements immanent to experience, it must be presupposed that these *a priori* elements have already been used in accordance with a transcendental logic of illusion as well. The reflective-dialectical core of every transcendental move, the ground of what Kant calls the “fate [*Schicksal*]” of reason (Avii), is this split of immanence into immanence and transcendence.

*Thirdly*, Kant acknowledges that human reason, aware of its contingency, inevitably posits an alternative faculty: the *intellectus archetypus*—an intuitive, non-discursive intellect. While human reason cannot know (or appropriate) such a faculty, it must think it (it is structurally unavoidable). This idea plays a critical role: it reveals reason’s inherent striving to overcome its own limits (*qua* discursive intellect). As Clinton Tolley notes, this alternative faculty marks “the self-overcoming of the understanding by the understanding.”<sup>7</sup>

### The organicism of reason and (biological, juridical) metaphors

This contingency of the constitution of human discursivity immediately raises a pressing question: how does human reason come to know itself, and come to know itself as a contingent faculty? As already noted, Kant employs two metaphors to account for the possibility of this self-knowledge—namely, the biological metaphor of *epigenesis* and the legal metaphor of *original acquisition*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jörg Noller, “Logik Des Scheins. Kant Über Theoretische Und Praktische Selbsttäuschung,” *Kant-Studien* 112, no. 1 (2021): 23–50.

<sup>7</sup> Clinton Tolley, “The Relation between Ontology and Logic in Kant,” *International Yearbook for German Idealism* 12 (2016): 75–98.

<sup>8</sup> For Kant’s biological metaphor, see, e.g., KrV, Bxxiii, Bxxxvii–xxxviii, A66/B91, B167, A832–835/B860–863. For the juridical metaphor, see, e.g., ÜE, AA 08: 221–223. Although we use the term “metaphor,” we concur with Mensch that these two ideas bear more than a mere metaphorical value. See Jennifer Mensch, *Kant’s Organicism: Epigenesis and the Development of Critical Philosophy* (The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 215. We keep the term to highlight that such self-references of reason occur through mutual transpositions between its own different uses. The biological metaphor is transposed from its theoretical-teleological

The common weight of these two metaphors, we argue, consists in their appeal to a retrospective, teleological analysis of an original synthetic unity. On this account, the *a priori* forms of the human mind are not simply given or innate but disclosed as the necessary components of the understanding's *activity* in synthesizing the manifold of sensible intuitions, which Kant famously puts forward under the name of the "original synthetic unity of apperception [*ursprüngliche synthetische Einheit der Apperception*]" (KrV, B136). We focus here a bit more on the biological metaphor Kant uses to characterize what is at stake in this activity.

It is in the theoretical determination of how an organism generates itself (through epigenesis) that reason notes *in concreto* the very purposive and normative character of lawgiving (*Gesetzgebung*) pertaining to its own system. Reason's theoretical reflection on the possibility of organisms gives rise to the idea of a natural purpose (*Naturzweck*). That is, the organism is reflectively judged as "cause and effect of itself" (KU, AA 05: 370), thereby displaying an internal and material purposiveness expressing a "lawfulness of the contingent" (KU, AA 05: 404; EEKU, 20: 217). Analogously, the self-knowledge of reason unfolds organically—*per intus susceptionem* rather than *per appositionem* (KrV, A833/B861)—exhibiting purposiveness, which, therefore, is nothing but a contingent lawfulness as well. This is how we understand the fact that Kant, in a letter to Marcus Herz from 1771, suggests that the categories "*divide themselves into classes [quantity, quality, etc.] by a few basic laws of the intellect*" (Br, AA 10: 131; our translation and italics). In other words, in dealing with the nature of the categories and the way in which they synthesize sensible intuitions, we must acknowledge the fact that we are dealing with a *self-organizing* system. But, as we know from the previous section, we must accept that the *ultimate ground* of those "few basic laws" will forever remain unknown to us.<sup>9</sup>

It is this biological metaphor of organic epigenesis—or more precisely, the organicism of reason—that bears on reason's theoretical pursuit of *self-knowledge* in confrontation with its own contingency.<sup>10</sup> In reflecting upon the

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treatment of a metaphysics of nature, and the juridical metaphor is transposed from the practical treatment of a metaphysics of morals.

<sup>9</sup> On this point, see Daniela Helbig and Dalia Nassar, "The Metaphor of Epigenesis: Kant, Blumenbach and Herder," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science, Part A* 58 (2016): 98–107; cf. Huaping Lu-Adler, "The Subjective Deduction and Kant's Methodological Skepticism," in *Kant's Transcendental Deduction and the Theory of Apperception: New Interpretations*, ed. Giuseppe Motta et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 341–360; and Zonnekeyn, Benjamin and Levi Haeck Gormez, "Varieties of Physiology in Kant: A Lockean Inspiration?" *Studi Lockiani. Ricerche sull'eta moderna*, 6.1 (2025): 119–146.

<sup>10</sup> For another argument for the priority of the organic model, see Mensch, *Kant's Organicism*, 125–131. Mensch argues that only the model of epigenesis allows Kant to address the issue of *origin* and *unity* with which he sets out to challenge empiricism and innatism. In contrast,

organism, reason simultaneously reflects upon its own purposive unity and the contingent constitution thereof.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Kant's transcendental idealism advances the organicism of reason as the necessary consequence of its appreciation of the irreducible contingency of the discursive constitution of the human intellect.

Now, while incorporating Kant's conceptual apparatus, we will observe that Schelling radicalizes its conceptual dynamics, gesturing toward a (purportedly) more complete integration of logic and nature. First, in Kant's negative notion of the *intellectus archetypus*, Schelling sees the latent ground of reason's discursive self-articulation, namely the common "unknown root" (KrV, A15/B29) of sensibility and the understanding, along with their *a priori* forms. Second, in Kant's depiction of logic as both immanently constituting nature as well as simultaneously standing opposed to nature, Schelling sees a lawful genetic account of both logic and nature from one and the same original synthesis.<sup>12</sup> Third, in Kant's regressive program of reason's self-critique, Schelling sees a viable method for intelligence to unravel and recollect its natural history.

## The Contingency and Organicism in Early Schelling's Logic of Evolution

Schelling's approach to the unity of logic and nature takes the form of a genetic account of mind or self-consciousness on the one hand, and of nature on the other. From this perspective, both are conceived not as static entities but rather as infinite processes of becoming (*Werden*) or evolution (*Evolution*). Their unity consists in their shared logic of evolution—the necessary forms and principles of their parallel geneses. This logic, articulated in both Schelling's transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie*, defines how self-consciousness and nature must be thought by self-conscious intelligence itself.

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we emphasize here the continuity of the theoretical use of reason in understanding the lawfulness of the contingent shown in a natural product as well as in reason itself.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this point, see Gertrudis Van de Vijver and Levi Haeck, "Judging Organization: A Plea for Transcendental Logic in Philosophy of Biology," in *Organization in Biology*, ed. Matteo Mossio (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2024), 59–84.

<sup>12</sup> Although Matthews does not directly engage with Kant's transcendental logic of illusion, he illuminatingly presents Schelling's organic form of philosophy, as an alternative to Kant, as positing "an ideal of immanent transcendence realized through a logic of production." See Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 28. However, Matthews problematically characterizes the organization almost as nothing more than a correlate of the dynamical category of community and reciprocity (14–20), which may explain his tendency to downplay the role of the teleological idea of organism but favor that of the aesthetic idea of the sublime in reason's self-grounding (79, 92–102).

In what follows, we elaborate this logic of evolution and demonstrate how it captures the contingency and organicism of human intelligence in its self-consciousness. We show that, similarly to Kant's transcendental logic, Schelling's genetic account acknowledges these features as structural tensions intrinsic to idealist thinking. Yet, unlike Kant, who treats this contingency as bound to the fact that a discursive mind can only know the conditions of possibility of nature, but not the condition of the conditions—Schelling sees it as “intellectual gravitation [*Schwere*]” (SW III: 525),<sup>13</sup> around which intelligence moves, produces, and recollects its intellectual and, moreover, natural history.

### The logic of evolution of self-consciousness and nature

According to Schelling, the evolution of both self-consciousness and nature originates in the original identity and duality of an infinite activity and its limitation (*Begrenzung*), within an original intuition. It is a dual relation, since the limitation curtails the activity; yet it expresses identity, since the limitation arises not extraneously but as an immanent moment of self-limitation within the activity itself.

In the case of nature, the original identity and duality is articulated in the relation of the infinite productivity of nature and its inhibition (*Hemmung*). The inhibition of nature is crucially a self-limitation: “if Nature is absolute productivity, then the ground of this limitation cannot lie outside of it” (SW III: 287, also 308).<sup>14</sup> In the case of self-consciousness, the same structure is articulated in the relation of the infinite self-intuiting and self-objectifying activity of the ideal I and its self-intuition as real and objective. Here too, the self-intuition of the ideal I is a self-limitation: “Intuiting and limiting are originally one” (III: 403).<sup>15</sup> The logic of evolution thus accounts for the emergence of determinate products of nature and determinate acts of intuition from the dynamic structure of such an original synthesis, that is, from the infinite activity and its limitation combined in their identity. That is, it accounts for how the single infinite evolution unfolds into determinacy (intensity) and manifoldness (extension) in finitude. In the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*—and its separately published *Introduction*—and in *System of Transcendental Philosophy*, Schelling articulates the evolution of nature and of self-consciousness precisely along these two interwoven lines.

With respect to determinacy and intensity, the logic of evolution

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<sup>13</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 149.

<sup>14</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 204, 218–219.

<sup>15</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 54.

determines the rule by which the infinite evolution is retarded to an infinitely small velocity (*Geschwindigkeit*), although it does not cease:

- 1) Considered absolutely, the original infinite activity would generate an *infinite evolution* proceeding with *infinite velocity*. In such absolute infinity and immediacy, nature and the I would not appear as the object of intuition and would not attain reality.
- 2) By virtue of the original limitation, the original infinite activity would generate an *infinite evolution* proceeding with *finite velocity*. This evolution would yield the continuous formation of nature and the complete intuition of the I as both subject and object—but it would not yield determinate natural products such as inorganic and organic products, nor determinate acts of the I such as sensation, productive intuition, and reflection.
- 3) Now, for determinate products of nature and acts of intuition to emerge, the original infinite activity must generate an *infinite evolution* proceeding with *the infinitely small velocity*. This is only possible, Schelling maintains, through the infinite bifurcation (*Entzweiung*) of the infinite activity at the point of limitation—or equivalently, through the limitation and the simultaneous “infinite extension of the limit [*unendlichen Erweiterung der Schranke*]” (SW III: 384).<sup>16</sup>

With respect to manifoldness and extension, the logic of evolution determines the rule by means of which the single original duality and evolution multiplies into a series of subordinated dualities and evolutions.

- 1) The *original duality* determines the *outermost limit* of evolution’s extension.
- 2) By virtue of the original limitation, i.e., the synthesization of the original duality, the original single infinite activity would generate a single evolution of one single product as the absolute synthesis of the original duality; it would yield an original product (*Urprodukt*) of nature or a complete intuition of the I as both subject and object.
- 3) For the manifold products of nature and acts of intuition to emerge, the limitation must always be partial—or equivalently, the limit must always be extended, so that there always arises a new, subordinate duality as the residue or surplus of the original duality at the point of

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<sup>16</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 39. In this article, we opt for “limit” rather than “boundary” to translate “Schranke” in the sense of “Grenze.” For the corresponding articulation in *Naturphilosophie*, see SW III: 19, 287–291 (*First Outline*, 19, 204–207).

limitation. This subordinate duality resides within the limit of the original duality and remains sustained by it. It is to be synthesized, again partially, so that a further subordinate duality arises as confined and sustained by the antecedent, partially synthesized duality. The process continues *ad infinitum*.<sup>17</sup>

It is now clear that the same logic of the *infinite extension of the limit* determines the rule of retardation (intensity) and multiplication (extension) for nature and self-consciousness. To illustrate this logic, we take the first epoch of the evolution of self-consciousness as an example.

In the evolution of self-consciousness, the original act of self-consciousness posits the original limit. This limit separates two activities of the I: (1) the ideal I in the illimitable self-intuition, and (2) the real I that becomes the object of intuition, i.e., limited. Now the ideal I, as the infinite activity of self-intuition, seeks to intuit itself as being limited as such. That is, it strives to bring the limit itself into intuition. As a result, the limit that originally separates the ideal I and the real I is admitted into the ideal I. And moreover, the ideal activity bifurcates into two: (1) the infinite ideal activity that continues to transcend any limit, and (2) the finite activity that is separated from the infinite activity by the newly admitted limit and thereby becomes the real. What is crucial is that the “limit is still always the same” (SW III: 425),<sup>18</sup> but it is continuously intuited and admitted by the infinite ideal I. In this repeated ideal admission of one and the same original limit, the limit itself is never completely brought into intuition as an object, as real, but is extended into the ideal I itself, over and over again. Thus, the evolution of self-consciousness proceeds by means of the *infinite extension of the limit*, and each extension (i.e., admission) leads to a new limitation and bifurcation of the ideal I. This is the genetic approach to “the task of theoretical philosophy”—that is, to explain “the ideality of limit,” i.e., to explain “how even the ideal activity, hitherto assumed as illimitable, can in fact be limited” (III: 399).<sup>19</sup>

In accordance with this logic of evolution, self-consciousness unfolds through a series of determinate acts of self-intuition, each re-idealizing the original limit and thereby producing a new significance or determination of that limit. The original limit is the postulate of the primordial act of self-consciousness, separating the ideal I and the real I. The self-intuition of the I in this original limitation, that is, the synthesization of this original duality, is

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<sup>17</sup> For corresponding articulations in *Naturphilosophie*, see SW III: 309–317 (*First Outline*, 219–225); for those in transcendental philosophy, III: 411–412 (*System of Transcendental Idealism*, 60–61).

<sup>18</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 50.

sensation (SW III: 405).<sup>20</sup> In sensation, the limit appears to the ideal I as the distinction between the sensing (*Empfindendes*) and the sensed (*Empfundenes*). This limit, however, is further idealized by the act of productive intuition. Productive intuition is thus “sensation with consciousness” (III: 462),<sup>21</sup> and the self-intuition of the I in sensation as both sensing and sensed. In productive intuition, the limit is reconfigured yet again as the distinction of the thing in itself and the I in itself.<sup>22</sup> Thus, from the original act of self-consciousness, through sensation, and to productive intuition, self-consciousness unfolds the first epoch of its intellectual history.

Despite the hitherto parallel presentation of self-consciousness and nature, it should be noted that Schelling, in the *Universal Deduction of the Dynamic Process* and *On the True Concept of the Philosophy of Nature*, advances the primordially of nature and the priority of *Naturphilosophie*. Along this line, the entire evolution of nature is a “constant self-construction of matter that is only recapitulated at different stages” (SW IV: 4).<sup>23</sup> Self-consciousness is thus only one—though the highest—potency of the production of nature, following the potencies of matter and organism. Therefore, self-consciousness is “a process of coming to awareness through which nature becomes partially transparent to itself in the form of the rational individual.”<sup>24</sup> As we show below, this partial transparency of nature is made possible precisely against (and thus alludes to) the persistent opacity of natural history, of which a rational individual becomes aware only as its own contingency.

### The contingency in evolution

It is in terms of this logic of evolution that Schelling recognizes the contingency of intelligence vis-à-vis nature, yet in a different way from Kant. According to Schelling, the contingency irreducibly lies in the relationship between the *original limitation in general* and the *determinate limitation* of intuition.

As outlined above, the original limitation is the primordial act of self-consciousness that posits itself in self-intuition. The infinite ideal I thereby appears to itself as a series of determinate acts and unfolds into finitude. In this sense, the original limitation expresses nothing but the general finitude of

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<sup>20</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 55–56.

<sup>21</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 100.

<sup>22</sup> For the place of the thing in itself in the logic of evolution, see SW III: 417–424 (*System of Transcendental Idealism*, 65–71). The thing in itself is nothing but “the shadow of the ideal activity, now over the limit, which is thrown back to the self through intuition, and is to this extent a product of the self” (III: 422 (*System of Transcendental Idealism*, 68)).

<sup>23</sup> Schelling, *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes*.

<sup>24</sup> Dieter Sturma, “The Nature of Subjectivity: The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling’s Philosophy of Nature,” in *Debates in Nineteenth-Century European Philosophy*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Routledge, 2015), 109–20.

human intelligence: “The original limitation, which we have in common with all rational beings, consists in the fact of our intrinsic finitude [*wir überhaupt endlich sind*]” (SW III: 409).<sup>25</sup> This general finitude means that human intelligence is necessarily situated—it must have a temporality, a viewpoint, and an order of representations, that is, a history and a universe.

By contrast, the determinate limitation is that by virtue of which empirical consciousness emerges. Intelligence thereby assumes *this* specific history, viewpoint, and order of representations as its universe rather than another. Intelligence is thus *determinately* situated in our world of gravity, life, and historical contingency. In this sense, the determinate limitation is the limitation of the original limitation, namely the second, particular limitation of intelligence.

A problem arises, however, provided that the *determinate, particular, second* limitation arises in intelligence simultaneously with *the original limitation in general* in a single act. For a limitation is determinate, but no *a priori* deduction of this determinacy follows from the general structure of limitation itself. Therefore, for an intelligence already determinately limited, this determinate limitation itself appears sheerly contingent. In Schelling’s words, determinate limitation “exists absolutely [*schlechthin*] because it exists, and is as it is because that is how it is” (SW III: 425).<sup>26</sup> It denotes a pure *thisness*, in which intelligence necessarily finds itself *determined* yet not *grounded*. For Schelling, this situation of contingency is what realists describe as “destiny or fate [*Schicksal*]” (III: 482).<sup>27</sup>

This contingency continually structures the entire evolution of self-consciousness. Intelligence strives to intuit—to limit and determine—the original limitation through the act of *productive intuition* but simply finds it contingent. Namely, intelligence cannot but continually re-enact its self-intuition at the limit and cannot but repeatedly intuit this limit as both internal and external to the ideal I. In accordance with the logic of evolution, a series of productive intuitions arises, each partially synthesizing the duality that conditions it. Meanwhile, within this series of productive intuitions, the limit successively assumes a series of distinctions: first, between the *thing in itself* and the *I in itself*, then between the *sensible object* and *inner sense*, and lastly between space and time. In this most recent consciousness of temporality, the perceived contingency is manifested in the constant feeling of the present (*Gegenwart*) as its self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*) of intelligence (SW III: 466),<sup>28</sup> a feeling of compulsion to seek the ground of its presence in the past (*Vergangenheit*). The determinate limitation, repeatedly unfolded in the productive intuition, is now

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<sup>25</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 71.

<sup>27</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 116.

<sup>28</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 103.

“precisely that by virtue of which the intelligence, at the very outset of empirical consciousness, must appear to itself as in a present, as held fast in a particular moment of the time series” (III: 482).<sup>29</sup> In this time series, intelligence proceeds to produce its object first as *substance* and *accident* in space and time, then as *cause* and *effect* in temporal succession, and lastly as a *community* in reciprocal causation. The contingency is thus continually confronted in the series of acts of productive intuition—namely, in the repeated production of objects as spatiotemporal and as structured by the Kantian categories of relation.

This sense of contingency also fundamentally structures the evolution of nature. Genetically corresponding to the intellectual act of productive intuition, the production of matter in nature primarily demonstrates the very same paradox between the original and the determinate limitations. The original limitation in the production of matter is the attractive (retarding) force that limits the repulsive (expanding) force—that is, the infinite productivity of nature. Through this original limitation, the two forces fill a space and produce matter. Yet, Schelling points out, for a space to be filled to a determinate degree so that matter possesses determinate qualities, the limiting act of the attractive force must itself be determinately limited. This determinate limitation, however, is not entailed by the original limitation itself and thus appears entirely contingent. Schelling argues that insofar as this determinate limitation must be self-positing in the productivity of nature, it can be nothing other than “the universal concatenation [*allgemeine Verkettung*] of all matters” and the resultant reciprocal limitation among them (SW IV: 29).<sup>30</sup> This universal reciprocal limitation among different matters, marked by their qualities, is the “empirical datum” in the production of matter (IV: 29).<sup>31</sup> It is the irreducible contingency of nature in which the intuiting and reflecting intelligences find themselves entangled. In such an entanglement, intelligence cannot reach the pure originality of nature.

In the organic production of nature, this contingency becomes more pronounced. Following Kant, Schelling characterizes the organism as a self-organizing whole, a unity of lawfulness and contingency (SW II: 40–42, 515–529, III: 65–66).<sup>32</sup> What Schelling brings beyond the critical Kant is, as is well known, the ontological-genetic twist of idealism. The organic production is

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<sup>29</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> Schelling, *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. “Quality is originally absolutely inconstructible, and it must be, because it is the limit of all construction by virtue of which every construction is a determinate one” (Schelling, *First Outline*, 22).

<sup>32</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 30–33; *Von der Weltseele*, SW II: 515–529; *First Outline*, 51.

now one potency of nature, and indeed “the symbol [*Sinnbild*] of the original construction of all [natural] products” (III: 306),<sup>33</sup> including matter and self-consciousness. It is precisely because organic production is the second potency of natural production that it opens a perspective for the dynamic evolution of nature that lies obscure, at the first potency (matter), in the already qualitatively determined matter. For, at the second potency, the evolution of nature is limited by *real synthetic products* of the first potency; the organic product is thus a “doubled [*doublirtes*] product” (III: 304),<sup>34</sup> since what has already been a product (inorganic) of nature *becomes* a product (organic) of nature again. Accordingly, the stages of dynamic evolution from its occasioning to its recapitulation are itself recapitulated in the empirically observable phenomena of metamorphosis, self-reproduction, and procreation of organic products *in* nature.

The contingency inherent in the logic of evolution is thus nested at every stage of evolution, from the production of matter, through the production of organic beings, to the production of self-consciousness.

### **The necessary organicism and self-reflection**

Given the contingency of empirical determinacy, and in consequence of the logic of evolution, Schelling concludes that intelligence is organic. Organicism is precisely the third limitation that necessarily limits the second, determinate limitation.

Through the second limitation, intelligence has found itself placed in the infinite succession of representations in time. In this succession, the objects appear as substances and accidents, as causes and effects, in relations of reciprocal determination. Yet the illimitable ideal activity of self-intuition continuously strives to intuit its own *whole* succession as its object. To achieve this, the third limitation is necessary—the limitation of succession. This third limitation must on the one hand be part of the succession, since intelligence is now the succession itself and its limitation is always self-limitation, and on the other hand, it must be the intuition of the whole succession. In this way, it cannot but arise as a self-returning activity of succession itself. Univocally defined in transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie*, this “self-reverting succession, statically represented” is organization (SW III: 491);<sup>35</sup> and if sustained by an inner principle of motion, it is life or living organization. The organism as a living organization is on this account the necessary form of (self-)intuition (*Anschauungsart*) that intelligence assumes so as to intuit the totality of its production as an object. Moreover, insofar as each moment of

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<sup>33</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 217, translation modified.

<sup>34</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 216.

<sup>35</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 122. Cf. *Von der Weltseele*, SW II: 349.

organization is a new moment of succession, intelligence thus extends itself to intuit this moment within its organism. Its organism is therefore continually restored as much as it is re-configured, *ad infinitum*. Now, infinite determination is nothing other than individualization. The third limitation is therefore that “the intelligence must appear to itself as an organic individual” (III: 495).<sup>36</sup>

There are two crucial results of this third limitation. First, the deduction of organism as a necessary form of intelligence also constitutes the transcendental deduction of organic nature as the necessary organ of self-consciousness. It is in intuiting the whole universe—as a universal organism—and its different organic products that the productive intelligence is so extended and organized that it intuits itself as “identical with” (SW III: 494)<sup>37</sup> a productive individual organism. This identical organic individual is the organized body in which intelligence dwells. Being identical to intelligence, this particular body in turn constitutes the perfect organ of intelligence that offers “at every moment the perfect expression of its inner nature” (SW III: 497, cf. 490–91).<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, the organism of intelligence closes its production within intuition, since the organism is the identity of the intuiting and the intuited in an infinite activity. It follows that the ideal activity of self-intuition, striving to transcend the organism (the third limitation) to intuit this organism of intelligence as an object, gives rise to a new act, distinct from productive intuition. This new act is free reflection. Therefore, the organism marks the shift between the *standpoint of reflection* and the *standpoint of intuition*. Between reflection and organism (an intuition) as two acts of intelligence, “there lies as intermediate stage the whole multiplicity of the objective world, its products and phenomena” (SW III: 455).<sup>39</sup> However, the reflection is nothing other than the “free imitation, free recapitulation of the original series of acts into which the one act of self-consciousness evolves” (III: 397).<sup>40</sup> It is the free capacity to *abstract* from and, by virtue of that, to *accompany* and *recapture* the evolution of intelligence in intuition. If the productive intuition of intelligence has to be an organism, as Schelling deduces, philosophical reflection as a retrospective analysis must take the organism as its symbol.

Let us now, on this basis, return to the two specific moments of contingency by which we have characterized Kant’s transcendental logic and examine how Schelling responds to them.

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<sup>36</sup> In *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling maintains the metaphysical and epistemological equivalence of organization, interiority, and individuality. See *Von der Weltseele*, SW II: 518–520, and *First Outline*, SW III: 69–70, 83.

<sup>37</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 125.

<sup>38</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 127, 121–123.

<sup>39</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 49.

- 1) *On the acquisition of a priori forms*: Schelling maintains that a higher principle must ground the seemingly contingent origin and configuration of the *a priori* forms of human reason. That is, the mechanism of the Kantian original acquisition can and must be articulated. Theoretically speaking, this mechanism (which would have to be a mechanism of intuition), as Schelling explains, is the yet-to-be-disclosed evolution, by means of which the original I epigenetically comes to a series of self-intuitions, which is to say that the universe epigenetically produces its full metamorphosis. Methodologically, any person can undertake this idealist inquiry for and from within itself—“everyone can regard himself as the object of these investigations” (SW III: 483).<sup>41</sup> The logic of this evolution is disclosed by one’s progressive abstraction, via reflection, from one’s developed intellectual intuition, that is, from the serial limitations of intelligence.

First, one abstracts from the *third* limitation of intelligence (one’s organic individuality) and obtains the absolute intelligence as productive intuition; second, one abstracts from the *second* limitation (productive intuition) and obtains the absolute I as the unity of subject-object in the original synthetic act of self-intuition. Through this progressive abstraction within the domain of transcendental philosophy, one brings to the reflective view the starting point of the evolution of self-consciousness, from whence it unfolds to successive epochs and acts of self-intuition.

However, this abstraction has a twofold sense. On the one hand, it is a retrospective abstraction in transcendental philosophy, whereby the intellectual intuition of the I gradually abstracts from its progressively unfolded determinations to expose its unconscious origin. Schelling articulates this transcendental sense of abstraction in his *System of Transcendental Philosophy*. On the other hand, it is also the entire abstraction from the idealism of the I, namely from the constantly self-conscious “identity of the activity and the intuition of this activity” (SW IV: 85)<sup>42</sup> as the determining principle of the intellectual evolution of self-consciousness. In this second sense, abstraction initiates *Naturphilosophie*, namely an idealism of nature. From the persistent standpoint of idealism, one now inquires into “the pure subject-object” (IV: 86)—pure from the subjective side of the subject-object already “potentized” to self-consciousness (=I)—and thereby into “the pure objective” side of this subject-object. This pure

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<sup>41</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 116.

<sup>42</sup> Schelling, *Ueber den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie*.

objective subject-object is what one calls nature and where *Naturphilosophie* begins. In light of *Naturphilosophie*, the self-intuition of the I is revealed as a potentized evolution of nature. The act of abstraction is in this sense an act of de-potentization. Schelling elaborates on this dynamical sense of abstraction in *On the True Concept of the Philosophy of Nature*.

This is how intelligence, from its organism of intuition and via transcendental abstraction, reflects upon its original act of self-consciousness. This is also how intelligence, from one and the same organism of intuition and via dynamical abstraction, reveals to itself its physical provenance and natural history. The Kantian and Fichtean transcendental ego, which otherwise sees its epigenesis from nowhere other than the intellectual vantage point of self-knowledge, will now become a subject that recollects the “transcendental memory [*Gedächtniß*]” (SW IV: 77)<sup>43</sup> of its own natural history and finally realizes its original identity with nature.

- 2) *On the construction of matter*. Schelling takes issue with the “empirical datum” in the construction of matter, as does, as we have seen, Kant. For Schelling, this empirical register lies not in the subject’s sense of feeling (*Sinn des Gefühls*), behind the opacity and obscurity of which Kant, according to Schelling, hides the very synthetic moment of *filling space* that is more than a mere concurrence of expansive and attractive forces. It is rather the universal concatenation of all matters external to one another yet synthesized in a single self-producing nature that really counts (SW IV: 29).<sup>44</sup> According to Schelling, Kant indeed points to the original duality by constructing matter out of two original forces. But his pure analysis of an empirical concept of matter into two forces presupposes and thus *overlooks* the synthetic moment of constructing matter by too quickly resorting to sensation. Schelling sees Kant’s definition of sensibility—the capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through affectation by objects (KrV, A19/B33)—as an all too quick shortcut. It eludes the central question to be first studied: How are things represented at all? How does the affectation happen at all? According to Schelling, philosophical reflection finds here only a parallel, or rather, an anti-parallel move of (1) the real side of self-consciousness (i.e., the objective side of the subjective subject-object in intellectual intuition) towards nature and of (2) the ideal side of

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<sup>43</sup> Schelling, *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes*.

<sup>44</sup> Schelling, *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes*.

nature (i.e., the subjective side of the objective subject-object in the unconscious intuition) towards the I.

Lastly, the organism holds a crucial status in Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental philosophy. From the perspective of the evolution of nature, the organism is one potency of the production of nature, on the basis of which intelligence arises at a higher potency, yet with which it always remains entangled. There exists no pure intelligence that is not entangled with an organism, just as there exists no pure organism that is not entangled with matter (SW IV: 77).<sup>45</sup> From the perspective of the evolution of intelligence, the organism is the third limitation of the I, at which the act of *self-intuition* of intelligence becomes the *self-identification* with organic nature and at which intelligence shifts from the standpoint of intuition to that of free reflection. Again, there exists no pure intelligence that does not identify itself with an organic individual and that does not begin to reflect itself as such. Organism is the real in nature, *in* which one necessarily sees the inextricable ideal that makes it the real it is. It is the ideal in intelligence, *in* which one necessarily sees the inextricable real that makes it the ideal it is. Organism is such a middle point of the idealism of our finitude, empiricity, and contingency, the *Monogramm* (III: 611)<sup>46</sup> of the original identity of the unconscious and conscious productions in nature and intelligence. From here, human intelligence takes issue with both nature and logic, in view of their unity, in terms of their logic of evolution.

However, an opacity remains in early Schelling's system. It is the opacity of both nature and intelligence, at the very point of their coming into one. On the side of nature, the original duality of nature, in which the organism has its final condition, can only receive a transcendental rather than natural-philosophical treatment. Here comes the unavoidable "turning point [*Wendepunkt*]" (SW III: 268)<sup>47</sup> between *Naturphilosophie* and transcendental philosophy. But on the side of intelligence, it is only through the unconscious self-identification with an individual organism that intelligence shifts from intuition to reflection, and led by reflection (abstraction), obtains this "turning point" from thinking intelligence as intelligence to thinking nature as nature. It is the same opacity that characterized Kant's project, in which all transcendental reflection remained conditioned by its empirical playing field. It is also the opacity that echoes in what Foucault calls the "anthropological postulate" of man as an "empirico-transcendental doublet" in the analytic of finitude. That is, man becomes "a being such that knowledge will be attained

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<sup>45</sup> Schelling, *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes*.

<sup>46</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 218.

<sup>47</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 192.

in him of what renders all knowledge possible” and for the very same reason, man also becomes “the locus of misunderstanding—of misunderstanding that constantly exposes his thought to the risk of being swamped by his own being, and also enables him to recover his integrity on the basis of what eludes him.”<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

We articulated in this article how Kant and Schelling address the issue of the duality of logic and nature. Although their approaches diverge, they nevertheless foreground the contingency and organicism of human intelligence as the inherent tension that fundamentally structures idealist thinking. Crucially, for both, organisms in nature offer an image (*Bild*) for the “secret bond” and “hidden organ” (SW II: 55)<sup>49</sup> that brings logic and nature together. In thinking the organism, and especially our own organism, we glimpse this secrecy and hiddenness of nature, and of our own nature as part of it.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Routledge, 2005), 350, 347, 352.

<sup>49</sup> Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 41.

<sup>50</sup> This paper is based on the PhD dissertations of the authors; see Xuansong Liu, *A Transcendental Conception of Living Organisation: Kant, Schelling, and their Relevance to Darwin* (Diss. Ghent University, 2025); Levi Haeck, *Kant’s Epigenetic Segue into the Synthetic A Priori: Deriving the Categories as a Critique of Predication* (Diss. Ghent University, 2024).