

# Introduction

## A Crack in the Abyss

### 1.0. A Note in the Margins

The central hypothesis of this book is that Schelling's philosophical project can be fruitfully interpreted as what he referred to as "ideal-realism [*Ideal-Realismus*]"<sup>1</sup> in the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*.<sup>2</sup> To make this case, I take Schelling's engagement with Spinoza as my guiding thread. In the formulation "ideal-realism" we find two familiar terms, but we find them in a unique conjunction. The familiar yet still enigmatic terms *idealism* and *realism* are immediately invoked by this conjunction, yet there is a silent third that makes the formulation possible. Schelling's deliberate use of the hyphen shows that he is referencing not mere idealism, nor mere realism. Instead, he points our attention toward the possibility of some unity of the two that is dependent upon both a binding and a separating. For the early Schelling, realism and idealism are the only two consistent philosophical perspectives.<sup>3</sup> However, this does not imply that each alone is a *complete* philosophical perspective. Consequently, realism and idealism need each other because neither alone can constitute a systematic philosophy.

If it is the case, as Hegel suggested, that "with Spinozism everything goes into the abyss but nothing emerges from it,"<sup>4</sup> then after Spinoza one must carve out a space through which philosophy itself can emerge from this abyss. Throughout the chapters that follow, I turn to Schelling in order to mark this space within the abyss. In some of his earliest publications, Schelling uses dogmatism as a synonym for realism, and in 1800 Schelling claims that "a consistent dogmatism is to be found only in Spinozism."<sup>5</sup> This valorization of Spinozism as the

most consistent dogmatism echoes similar sentiments expressed by Kant, Jacobi, Fichte, and Hegel. However, whereas these thinkers generally saw Spinozism as a dead end, Schelling adds, “but as a real system Spinozism again can endure only as a *science of nature* [*Naturwissenschaft*], whose last outcome is once more the principle of transcendental philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> Schelling here is articulating a version of Kant’s claim that if we remain Spinozist, neither nature nor freedom can receive the philosophical treatment they deserve.<sup>7</sup> Spinozism is the highest form of dogmatism, and in this form it provides the philosophical ground for a science of nature.<sup>8</sup> The science of nature that emerges from Spinozism in turn points toward the necessity of reconsidering the place of the “principle of transcendental philosophy.” So, in short, to ground the principle of transcendental philosophy in a science of nature one must begin with Spinozism but not end therein. Many years after the publication of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, while lecturing on the history of philosophy Schelling claims that Spinozism is a vortex “around which everything moves, or rather the impoverishment of thought, from which thought has sought to emancipate itself by the succeeding systems without yet being able to do so.”<sup>9</sup> Schelling is clear that one does not just move past Spinozist realism by embracing a Kantian inspired idealism. One must develop an immanent critique of Spinozism in order to find an exit therefrom. It is exactly this that Schelling performs as he traverses his own *Identitätssystem*, which I will refer to as the identity philosophy.<sup>10</sup> He begins this period of his writings with a valorization of Spinoza’s monism yet ends it with a critique of Spinoza’s dualism.<sup>11</sup> The nuanced differences we can find in the identity philosophy offer deep practical insight into Schelling’s strategy for traversing Spinozism more generally.

Explicating Schelling’s ideal-realism by way of his encounters with Spinoza is not an arbitrary decision. In fact, my motivation for this approach is located in Kant’s final writings. Upon the disorganized and uncompleted pages that are now collected as the *Opus postumum*, Kant inscribed a quick note in his margin: “*System of Transcendental Idealism*, by Schelling” Kant scrawled upon the edge of one of the pages.<sup>12</sup> There is no direct evidence that Kant owned a copy of this particular work, so the exact reason for the explicit reference to Schelling’s 1800 text is unclear.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Kant is leaving a note to himself, marking down a brief reminder to acquire a book he had heard of but had yet to read. However, there is contextual evidence that the placement of Kant’s

note is not completely coincidental. Following this note in the margin, Kant writes in the main body of the manuscript that “we can know no object, either in us or as lying outside us, except insofar as we insert in ourselves the *actus* of cognition, according to certain laws.”<sup>14</sup> He then continues “the spirit of man is Spinoza’s God (so far as the formal elements of all sense-objects is concerned) and *transcendental idealism is realism in an absolute sense*.”<sup>15</sup> When taken in conjunction with the above note in the margin, Kant here binds together Schelling, Spinoza, transcendental idealism, and realism.<sup>16</sup>

The passage of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* in which we find Schelling’s usage of “ideal-realism” links Kant’s above comments regarding transcendental idealism as realism in an absolute sense to the concerns of the young Schelling. Schelling writes,

If I reflect merely upon the ideal activity, there arises for me idealism, or the claim that the boundary is posited solely by the self. If I reflect merely upon the real activity, there arises for me realism, or the claim that the boundary is independent of the self. If I reflect upon *the two together*, a third view arises from both, which may be termed ideal-realism [*Ideal-Realismus*], or what we have hitherto designated by the name of transcendental idealism.<sup>17</sup>

This passage is an effective lens through which we can understand Kant’s claim’s that transcendental idealism is a realism “in an absolute sense” as it frames Schelling’s project of overcoming Spinozist monism while avoiding a one-sided subjectivist idealism. When combined with Kant’s *Opus postumum*, Schelling’s above cited reflection on idealism, realism, and ideal-realism establishes the following transitive relationship: “realism in an absolute sense” = transcendental idealism = ideal-realism. I take the liberty of translating “realism in an absolute sense” into the idea of “absolute realism.” By absolute realism we are not to understand an overinflated realism that excludes what are generally thought to be the concerns of idealism. In the broadest sense, absolute realism is a metaphysical system within which the identity of identity and nonidentity (what both Schelling and Hegel call “the Absolute”) is *real* and not merely ideal. Importantly, the “merely” here is not used pejoratively. Absolute realism is *not* an anti-idealism and this is precisely what allows it to be absolute.

Schelling's ideal-realism is not a mere metaphilosophical classification; it is buttressed by a unique metaphysical framework. Because, as Hegel notes, in Schelling's thinking "philosophy and system coincide,"<sup>18</sup> any comments on realism and idealism must equally apply to the real and the ideal as they appear therein. Taking this one step further, we can apply the coincidence of philosophy and system to the hyphen in "ideal-realism" as well. The metaphysical expression of this hyphenated unity ought to be read as a shorthand for what Schelling and Hegel articulate as the dynamic self-relation of identity and nonidentity. It is precisely this strange form of self-relation that Schelling will come to call "Absolute identity" as opposed to the simple identity of Spinoza's monism. One way of understanding this claim is that the hyphen is a graphic representation of the indifference point between idealism and realism that binds the two together while preserving the distinctiveness of each. In other words, the hyphen is the site of the absolute synthesis, of the *Wechseldurchdringung*, of realism and idealism. The emphasis upon the function played by the hyphen in this formulation is intended to bring into focus the excess generated by the differentiated incongruity of the real and the ideal. In other words, highlighting the hyphen seeks to show how the fracture internal to the Absolute is in fact an excess or abundance (insofar as the Absolute contains both what it is and what it is not) and not a lack.

Schelling's hyphenated ideal-realism calls into question any efficacy for the categories of immanence and transcendence that scaffold the debate between realism, antirealism, and idealism. The dualism between immanence and transcendence is itself made intelligible by strict demarcations of interiority and exteriority. Each in turn depends upon the construction of a monistic, self-enclosed ontological register to which all things are either internal (immanence) or to which some things are external (transcendence). The notion of a hyphenated unity signaled by Schelling's deliberate usage of the hyphen in "ideal-realism" necessarily pushes past any conceptualization of either realism or idealism that relies on or presupposes a monistic ontological register. Though Schelling's notion of identity in the identity philosophy begins in close affinity with Spinoza (the advocate of a monistic ontological register in its most radical form) Schelling comes to realize what Spinoza could not: *Identity is not identical*, and unity is never simple. Further, we will see that identity is not the same thing as monism or immanence. Instead, identity is absolute and therefore consists of both what it is and what

it is not. If Spinoza's metaphysics can be seen as clean and orderly, then Schelling's must be understood as messy with blurred lines and shifting boundaries. The absolute identity of the identity philosophy is also a kind of fractured identity. Because the identity of the Absolute is a fractured identity, it entails a complex process of involution, differentiation, and augmentation. For this process to occur it is not enough that the ideal be real or the real be ideal. Instead, the two must be intertwined in a series of becomings. This becoming ideal of the real effected in conjunction with the living reality of the Idea can only be properly expressed by the hyphenated unity of ideal-realism, that is, a realism in an absolute sense.

## 2.0. Schelling and Spinoza

I'm interested in reconstructing a version of Schelling's philosophical project through the lens of his critique of Spinoza. This reconstruction is not motivated by a desire to show Spinoza as the wellspring from which all of Schelling's philosophy flows, a claim that is clearly false. One of the primary debates surrounding how we ought to read Schelling centers around questions of continuities and discontinuities in his work. Though on the surface Schelling's project seems to consist of distinct phases, some argue that there is a deeper continuity to the project rendering any discussion of Schellingean "phases" obsolete. Regardless of whether Schelling's philosophy is a single unified whole or a series of disparate parts, his fascination with Spinoza remains consistent. Schelling continuously returns to Spinoza as a resource, but we can trace significant differences in the lessons he draws from Spinoza. Allowing Schelling's own engagement with Spinoza to act as the guiding thread of this book brings to light both continuities and discontinuities within Schelling's philosophical development without hermeneutical privileging one interpretive strategy over the other. Additionally, my focus on Spinoza connects directly to my decision to emphasize the importance of realism throughout Schelling's project over the concept of naturalism. Much of the contemporary interest in Schelling comes from the conviction that his project can broaden our understanding of naturalism. Some commentators argue that Schelling's naturephilosophy can be seen as providing the underlying foundation for all of Schelling's work.<sup>19</sup> Though it is not false to emphasize the

importance of the naturephilosophy—something Schelling himself does—I believe that the generalization of the naturephilosophy that follows from this approach universalizes something Schelling intended to be more localized.<sup>20</sup> Schelling argues in the introduction to the 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (hereafter *Presentation*) that the identity philosophy endeavors to demonstrate that the early naturephilosophy was compatible with his transcendental philosophy, and not that transcendental philosophy was reducible to naturephilosophy. Though he attributes primacy to the idealism of the philosophy of nature in the essay “On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems” (hereafter “On the True Concept”), this does not imply that the philosophy of nature was a self-sufficient philosophical system.<sup>21</sup> In his attempt to demonstrate the continuity of his previous works Schelling turns to Spinoza in the *Presentation* not because he is a naturalist, but because his radical monism captured the most sublime form of realism. However, as we will see, this radical monism is precisely the reason Schelling will endeavor to leave Spinoza behind. Further, Schelling’s critique of Spinoza’s parallelism allows us to understand more precisely the complex relation between realism and idealism that Schelling articulates in and beyond the identity philosophy.

The philosophical influence of Spinoza on Schelling is not a settled matter. Vater describes Spinoza as “a lens or a filter for all of Schelling’s appropriations of past thinkers.”<sup>22</sup> Bernstein suggests that there is a “perpendicular relation that holds between the philosophies of Schelling and Spinoza.”<sup>23</sup> Lawrence (who does explicitly acknowledge “Schelling’s life-long fascination with Spinoza”) suggests that “Schelling’s Spinoza is a kind of honorary Greek.”<sup>24</sup> Regardless of the imagery invoked to map the relation between Schelling and Spinoza, two things are immediately clear. On the one hand, it is not possible to reduce Schelling’s work to a modified Spinozism and even less so to an unqualified, dogmatic one. Doing so overlooks Schelling’s idealism. On the other hand, it is impossible to deny the profound and continued influence that Spinoza has within Schelling’s vast body of work. Doing this would neglect Schelling’s transformation of what he once called “the most sublime and perfect realism.”<sup>25</sup> The influence of Spinoza on Schelling has not been ignored in the secondary literature.<sup>26</sup> Many works contain a few comments on Schelling and Spinoza, usually in a brief subsection dedicated to the pantheism controversy or in a

discussion of the influence of Spinoza's account of intuitive knowledge on Schelling's notion of intellectual intuition.<sup>27</sup> This approach leads to the assumption that Schelling's relation to Spinoza was simple, static, and continuous.<sup>28</sup> For example, Richard depicts Schelling as a faithful Spinozist conceiving nature "in Spinozistic fashion,"<sup>29</sup> and Deleuze claims that "Schelling is a Spinozist when he develops a theory of the absolute, representing God by the symbol 'A' which comprises the Real and the Ideal as its powers."<sup>30</sup> Alternatively, in his seminal lectures on Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (hereafter *Freedom* essay) Heidegger suggests that "if Schelling fundamentally fought against a system, it is Spinoza's system."<sup>31</sup> There is a consensus that Spinoza was of unique importance to Schelling, and there does seem to be some further consensus in recent Schelling scholarship that Schelling was either with or against Spinoza. For example, Wirth follows more in line with Richard's approach and uses Spinoza to connect Schelling to contemporary philosophy and Deleuze in particular.<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, Bowie shares Heidegger's assertion that it is Spinoza against whom Schelling consistently struggled.<sup>33</sup> Commentators such as Woodard and Nassar split the difference by outlining what Schelling borrows from Spinoza and what he leaves behind.<sup>34</sup> A more fine-grained analysis shows how Schelling labors both within and against the Spinozist system throughout his work—from his early essays all the way through to his final lectures on positive philosophy and the philosophy of revelation.

In the first two parts of this work, I will primarily be examining texts and lectures all composed in a short yet extremely productive period of Schelling's career. This period spans roughly from the 1795 *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (hereafter *Letters*) to the brief 1804 work *Philosophy and Religion*.<sup>35</sup> In this short span of time, Schelling composed works on this history of philosophy (most notable, the *Timaeus* commentary); he undertook explorations in transcendental philosophy (largely but not exclusively in the Fichtean tradition); he wrote and collected individual and collaborative experiments in nature-philosophy; and finally he undertook the geometric construction of a philosophical system grounded solely in the principle of identity. Focusing on this period may seem odd insofar as Schelling's most well-known engagement with Spinoza is in the 1809 *Freedom* essay. In fact, he calls this with marked excitement his "once and for all . . . definite opinion about Spinozism!"<sup>36</sup> However, understanding the role Spinoza plays in

the earlier excursions of Schelling's career deepens our understanding of his critique of Spinoza in the 1809 publication.<sup>37</sup> The context provided by these earlier works allows us to expand our understanding of the relevance of both the problems of Spinozism and the importance of Schelling's philosophy in the present day. Unlike commentaries that argue for Schelling's relevance by demonstrating resemblances between Schelling and the philosophers that followed in his footsteps either intentionally or unintentionally, I believe that the relevance of Schelling can be demonstrated through his critique of Spinoza alone. But again, I am not interested in proposing Spinoza as the key to Schelling's complex philosophical project. Instead, I argue that the contemporary relevance of Schelling's philosophical project is in large part dependent upon the *success* of his critique of Spinoza. That is, the future of Schellingianism relies on the surpassing of a certain type of Spinozism.

In the *Freedom* essay is also Schelling's most vivid description of the relation between realism and idealism. While reflecting upon his own philosophical development, Schelling transitions to his final and definite opinion of Spinozism. He writes of his earlier work that

[a] mutual saturation [*Wechseldurchdringung*] of realism and idealism in each other was the declared intent of his efforts. Spinoza's basic concept [*Grundbegriff*], when infused by spirit (and, in one essential point, changed) by the principle of idealism, received a living basis in the higher forms of investigation of nature and the recognized unity of the dynamic with the emotional and the spiritual; out of this grew the philosophy of nature [*Naturphilosophie*], which as pure physics was indeed able to stand for itself, yet at any time in regard to the whole of philosophy was only considered as a part, namely the real part that would be capable of rising up into the genuine system of reason only through completion by the ideal part in which freedom rules.<sup>38</sup>

Schelling often signals to his readers that his works are reconciliatory in their intent, but the precise nature of these reconciliations are by no means immediately apparent. In the *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling also invokes the term *Wechseldurchdringung* in the following claim: "*Kunst demnach eine absolute Synthese oder Wechseldurchdringung der Freiheit und der Nothwendigkeit* [Therefore, art is an absolute synthesis or mutual



saturation of freedom and necessity].”<sup>39</sup> What is interesting about this occurrence is the association of *Wechseldurchdringung* with an “absolute synthesis.” Extending this association, we can view the search for a mutual saturation of realism and idealism as striving for an absolute synthesis of the two doctrines. In the above quotation from the *Freedom* essay Schelling explicitly links his earlier attempts construct an absolute synthesis of realism and idealism to the transitional role played by Spinoza in the quest for “higher forms” of the investigation of nature. Spinoza’s articulation of thinking and being in a univocal ontological register intendeds to collapse realism and idealism by placing thinking and being on an equal ontological ground. However, this *Grundbegriff* (the idea that “all things are contained in God”)<sup>40</sup> on its own was insufficient and needed an idealism through which it could become a living basis for a philosophy of both nature and of freedom. Spinozism itself is not a *philosophy* of nature because it is incapable of realizing nature’s a priori status. This claim is obviously consistent with the one discussed above in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Thus, it must be emphasized that this discussion of Spinoza, realism, and idealism in the *Freedom* essay is the *conclusion* of Schelling’s prior engagement with Spinoza and not a novelty. Schelling continues his discussion of Spinoza and pantheism by turning to idealism. He writes:

[I]dealism itself, no matter how high it has taken us in this respect, and as certain as it is that we have it to thank for the first complete concept of formal freedom, is yet nothing less than a completed system for itself, and it leaves us no guidance in the doctrine of freedom as soon as we wish to enter into what is more exact and decisive.<sup>41</sup>

Here, Schelling once again articulates the codependency of realism and idealism: the philosophy of nature grows from Spinoza’s realist articulation of the ontological unity of thinking and being, yet in order to prepare itself for what it must become if it is to become real, the principle of idealism must be introduced *into* realism and not just added onto a realist framework. In other words, the mutual saturation of realism and idealism is not the result of a simple addition of one thing to another.

Without setting aside this criticism of realism, Schelling simultaneously argues that idealism alone is an ineffective guide to the

decisive and exact nature of freedom in its exemplary localization in the human. “Mere idealism,” Schelling explains, “does not reach far enough, therefore, in order to show the specific difference [*Differenz*], that is, precisely what is the distinctiveness, of human freedom.”<sup>42</sup> So, realism needs idealism to become the *philosophy* of nature, but idealism too is insufficient to articulate a doctrine of specifically human freedom. From this impasse, Schelling concludes that “idealism, if it does not have as its basis a living realism, becomes just as empty and abstract a system as that of Leibniz, Spinoza, or any other dogmatist.”<sup>43</sup> Schelling then generalizes this claim, writing:

The entire new European philosophy since its beginning (with Descartes) has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground. Spinoza’s realism is thereby as abstract as the idealism of Leibniz. Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is the body; only both together can constitute a living whole. The latter can never provide the principle but must be the ground and medium in which the former makes itself real and takes on flesh and blood. If a philosophy is lacking this living foundation, which is commonly a sign that the ideal principle was originally only weakly at work within it, then it loses itself in those systems whose abstract concepts of aseity, modifications, and so forth, stand in sharpest contrast with the living force and richness of reality.<sup>44</sup>

This passage is a further example of how it is idealism that expands the naturalist framework such that it can move past previous misconceptions of both nature and freedom. Realism is the flesh and blood, idealism is the soul, and only together can they accomplish their shared aim. This shared aim is systematic understanding of human freedom, the place of freedom in nature, and the relation of these to the Absolute. These remarks from the *Freedom* essay represent both a conclusion and a transition for Schelling. They conclude Schelling’s earlier analysis of the reciprocal needs of realism and idealism. Further, they signal a transition through the systems of abstract realism and idealism (represented most pointedly by Spinoza and Fichte), and toward an analysis of the progressive revelation of God in and through reality. Thus, despite its transitional position away from the identity philosophy and to the

analysis of the progressive revelation of God in nature and history, the *Freedom* essay itself depends upon the notion of ideal-realism as the capstone of its edifice.

Schelling's general critique of Spinoza at first appears as somewhat simple. Spinozism forecloses a robust account of dynamic nature and specifically human freedom, but these are symptoms of a larger issue. Spinozist monism, Schelling maintains, is lifeless. "The error of his system" Schelling writes of Spinoza, "lies by no means in his placing of things *in God* but in the fact that they are *things*. . . . Hence the lifelessness of his system, the sterility of its form, the poverty of concepts and expressions . . . hence his mechanistic view of nature follows quite naturally as well."<sup>45</sup> The immanence of Spinoza's system is inherently flawed not because it is a pantheism but instead because it is a *lifeless* pantheism. By positing the thing as the fundamental unit of existence, Spinoza appears to be committed to the kind of somatism that renders becoming subordinate to being.<sup>46</sup> In the simplest possible terms, this means that insofar as Spinoza's God or nature—*deus sive natura*—privileges products over processes, it only is and can never become. In other words, substance can never become subject because it can never be alive. Briefly, we must understand that for Schelling, life is a complex interrelating of unity and differentiation. It is not, as he explicitly points out in the 1810 "Stuttgart Seminars," a hylozoism that "postulates a *primordial* life in matter."<sup>47</sup> Life is not something primordial or something given. It is instead something generated by a fundamental conflict omnipresent in nature, humanity, and the Absolute itself. In the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (hereafter *First Outline*), Schelling writes of life (both vegetative and Life with a capital "L") that it is not "anything other than constant awakening of slumbering forces, a continual decombination of bound actants."<sup>48</sup> The *System of Transcendental Idealism* deepens our understanding of this awakening and decombining through the introduction of the notion of struggle. Schelling claims that "life must be thought of as engaged in a constant struggle against the course of nature, or in an endeavor to uphold identity against the latter."<sup>49</sup> Life in its "natural" form is an expression of the constant struggle between identity and dissolution, or between self-maintenance and self-laceration. This claim is echoed in the *Freedom* essay when Schelling writes "where there is no struggle, there is no life."<sup>50</sup> This struggle is further connected to the mechanism of contradiction. In the 1815 draft of the *Ages of*

*the World*, Schelling claims that “all life must pass through the fire of contradiction. Contradiction is the power mechanism and what is innermost of life. . . . Were there only unity everything would sink into lifelessness.”<sup>51</sup> Life, in short, is an expression of actual conflict between actually existing contraries. For this kind of conflict to be possible, there must be both unity and duality. As Schelling explains in *On the World Soul*, “[W]ithout opposing forces, no motion is possible. Real opposition is only thinkable, however, between *magnitudes of the same kind*. The original forces . . . would not be opposed to one another were they not originally *one and the same (positive) force*, which only acts *in opposite directions*.”<sup>52</sup> The actuality of life is dependent upon real opposition, but the intelligibility of this opposition is made possible by a unity between contraries. The exclusion of unity (the unifying endeavor to “uphold identity”) eliminates the possibility of real conflict. The exclusion of duality (the decombining of bound forms) denies the reality of actually existing contraries.<sup>53</sup>

With this general logic of the dynamics of life in mind, the next question we must ask is why Spinoza’s monism is necessarily lifeless and what follows from this lifelessness. It may appear at first as if the lifelessness of Spinoza’s pantheism is the result of a mereological error. How could the sum of finite, discrete parts ever come to equal a dynamic, and therefore living, whole? It is true that the reduction of the finite to the thing eliminates the possibility of any living or organic unity between parts and whole. However, concluding any discussion of Schelling’s critique of Spinoza here yields only weak dividends. First, this mereological approach implies a bad reading of Spinoza (for whom the notion of finite, individual things was simply absurd), and second, this mereological problem alone is not sufficient for understanding why Schelling believes Spinozism excludes the possibility of *both* productive nature and transcendental freedom. A second candidate for the lifelessness of Spinoza’s monism would be its necessitarian implications. If the goal is to allow for a philosophical account of both nature and freedom, then it seems sufficient to reject necessitarianism in favor of a richer modal metaphysics. However, were this the case, Schelling would not claim that “Spinozism is by no means in error because of the claim that there is such an unshakable necessity in God, but rather because it takes this necessity to be impersonal and inanimate.”<sup>54</sup> It is not necessitarianism per se that one must reject. Instead, Schelling comes to the unorthodox conclusion that Spinozism is lifeless and

inanimate because it is irreducibly dualistic. Because of the irreducible dualism between thinking and being, there can be no reality of conflict within Spinoza's monist metaphysic, and it follows from this that the minimal condition for a theory of life is absent from Spinoza's most sublime realism.

### 3.0. Realism and Antirealism in Jacobi and Contemporary Philosophy

Explicating Schelling's ideal-realism as an absolute realism allows us to call into question the dualism between realism and idealism that remains constitutive of contemporary philosophical discourse. The primary source of this erroneous dualism is the assumption that all idealism is necessarily antirealism. This belief that idealism is an antirealism is one with a long history as well a recent resurgence in a somewhat novel form. In general, when idealism is taken to be antirealist in its nature, then realism is viewed as an antidote to the errors of idealism. For the post-Kantian German Idealists, it is Jacobi who frames this dilemma most succinctly. Jacobi takes transcendental idealism to be nothing short of madness. Jacobi's challenge has by no means been overcome by the history of philosophy separating Jacobi and us. In fact, the fear of idealism's madness provides a punctual framing of a narrative that brings together the debate between realism and antirealism in analytic and continental philosophical circles. Further, these contemporary debates regarding realism and antirealism demonstrate that Jacobi's dramatic diagnosis of idealism is more timeless than his contemporaries might have hoped. I want to tell this story in a bit more detail, as it provides some context for the contemporary relevance of the reading of Schelling I propose herein.

Jacobi delivers his diagnosis of idealism as madness succinctly in his dialogue "David Hume on Faith or Realism and Idealism." The dialogue takes place between the characters "he" and "I." "He" makes the following claim with which "I" subsequently agrees:

You forget *Wahnsinn*, "madness" or being "out of one's senses," a word, whose meaning strikes upon me quite forcefully at the moment. We say that a man is out of his senses when he takes his images to be sensations or actual things. And

thus we deny that he is rational, because his representations, which he takes to be things, lack *the thing*, or *the sensible truth*—because he *regards* something as actual which is not.<sup>55</sup>

The two interlocutors find common ground in the idea that the idealist flirts with madness when individual representations are granted sufficient reality onto themselves. Thinking of this kind risks the loss of the thing. Without the thing, without the sensible truth, without actual content, philosophy is indistinguishable from hallucination. In order to combat this madness generated by the fervor of philosophy's unbounded rational pursuit, Jacobi turns not to irrationalism (as is often assumed) but instead to realism. Against those who would dismiss Jacobi as an unsophisticated reactionary, we can see that he in fact offers a deep insight into the persistent problem of idealism. Recent continental philosophy (what I will describe below as “postcontinental” philosophy) is largely motivated by a rejection of the allegedly antirealist epistemological commitments of a wide range of views that rely on contextualism or coherentism. The postcontinentals represent a renewed interest in metaphysical and ontological realism. Another more contemporary way of framing Jacobi's fear has to do with the role of mind-dependence in the constitution of reality. Brock and Mares broadly define realism through the following two theses. “Realism about a particular domain is the conjunction of the following two theses,” they write, “(i) there are facts or entities distinctive of that domain, and, (ii) their existence and nature is in some important sense objective and mind independent. Let us call the first thesis the ‘existence thesis’ and the second thesis the ‘independence thesis.’”<sup>56</sup> The existence thesis plays an important role in recent forms of New Realism,<sup>57</sup> but of primary importance for Jacobi is the second of these two theses. Idealism, Jacobi claims, takes images and sensations not to be of things that are ultimately mind independent. Instead, the idealist attributes reality to these sensations and images themselves thereby erasing the need for any mind-independent foundation for their actuality. So, without the independence thesis, representations can have no traction on the world as it actually is. To embrace the existence thesis while rejecting the independence thesis strongly implies a two-world metaphysical picture in which there are existing but inaccessible things, on one side, and our subjective representations of these things, on the other. The challenge the independence thesis brings with it is the problem of access. If it

is wrong to take one's own sensations and representations as objectively real on their own, how are we to bridge the gap between the subjective and the objective?

Christopher Norris argues that antirealism has become the norm in both analytic and continental philosophy. The general claim is that any philosophy that relies upon holist or coherentist theories of truth is susceptible to the charge of antirealism. Following the insights of thinkers such as Quine,<sup>58</sup> Wittgenstein,<sup>59</sup> Davidson,<sup>60</sup> and Rorty,<sup>61</sup> the doctrine of an immediate correspondence between the conceptual and the nonconceptual constitutive of previous empiricisms was no longer a viable epistemic option. As these twentieth-century criticisms of empiricism demonstrate, truth can no longer be grounded in an immediate correspondence between thought and world. Instead, the truth value of any claim must primarily be assessed in relation to the coherence of a conceptual scheme and not in relation to some extraconceptual, scheme-independent content. Norris frames the central shared claim of the antirealists as “the idea of scientific ‘truth’ or ‘reality’” is “relative to—or constructed within—some culture-specific discourse, framework of enquiry, historical paradigm, conceptual scheme, or whatever.”<sup>62</sup> Or, as Bhaskar frames the same point, “the postmodernist says basically that reality is a social construct. Reality is a construct of discourse, the text, the conversation, or, if you like, people or even power relations.”<sup>63</sup> The inheritance of this generally contextualist and allegedly postmodernist framework led to the dogma that truth can only be articulated within a self-referential network of discursive claims and commitments. Again, this antirealism is of a specific sort. It does not directly deny the existence of reality internal to discourses, texts, language-games, conceptual schemes, etc. Instead, it pushes aside the independence thesis. Consequently, if there is nothing material about the material inference, then this kind of constructivism is nothing but a new form of fatally bloated idealism.

This transitions us to the resurgence of realism in recent continental philosophy. In an attempt to resist the antirealist trend he saw during the close of the twentieth century by putting forth a kind of scientific realism (in the critical realist tradition), Norris offers readings of Derrida's work, and the essay “White Mythology”<sup>64</sup> in particular. Norris's strategy is intriguing in large part because of the role Derrida plays in the common narrative of the development of postcontinental theory. I draw the term *postcontinental* from Maoilearca's 2007 *Post-*

*Continental Philosophy: An Outline*, (a work that, he observes, “may have been written too early”).<sup>65</sup> Justifying his addition of the prefix *post* to the by no means homogenous discipline of continental philosophy, Maoilearca writes that the outline

concerns a new relationship between the perception of Continental philosophy and immanence. It examines the shift in European thought over the last ten years through the work of four central figures, Deleuze, Henry, Badiou and Laruelle. Though they follow seemingly different methodologies and agendas, each insists upon the need for a return to the category of immanence if philosophy is to have any future at all. Rejecting both the phenomenological tradition of transcendence (of Consciousness, the Ego, Being, or Alterity), as well as the post-structuralist valorisation of Language, they instead take the immanent categories of biology (Deleuze), mathematics (Badiou), affectivity (Henry), and science (Laruelle) as focal points for a renewal of philosophy. Consequently, Continental philosophy is taken in a new direction that engages with naturalism with a refreshingly critical and non-reductive approach to the sciences of life, set theory, embodiment and knowledge. Taken together, these strategies amount to a rekindled faith in the possibility of philosophy as a worldly and materialist thinking.<sup>66</sup>

Maoilearca differentiates postcontinental philosophy from previous continental philosophy, on the one hand, through the shared rejection of transcendence, and, on the other hand, through the rejection of what Norris characterized as the restriction of philosophical attention to the analysis of closed, self-referential discursive systems. As previously noted, this restriction brought with it the rejection of the correspondence between the conceptual and the extraconceptual in favor of a self-referential conceptual/linguistic nexus of meanings. The postcontinental philosophers seek to move beyond both the correspondence relation between conceptual and extraconceptual as well as to combat the perceived unreality of coherentist philosophies of discourse. To do this, Maoilearca argues, they turn to the notion of immanence in order to re-embed conceptual schemes within the real in turn giving privilege to the immanence of the real over the transcendence of the ideal.



Maoilearca's analysis focuses on philosophical developments that appeared in a series of works and conversations from 1988 by the authors mentioned in the above quotation.<sup>67</sup> This realist thread identified "too early" by Maoilearca surged forward even more acutely in what came to be grouped under the heading "speculative realism." This general philosophical approach was articulated by Harman, Grant, Brassier, and Meillassoux during a 2007 workshop of the same name.<sup>68</sup> Now, and here we return to Derrida, the broad-strokes narrative of this renewed interest in realism among those working in the continental tradition of the early twenty-first century is that the generation of students following the work of Derrida and his contemporaries tired of the deconstruction of texts. *Of Grammatology's* proclamation that "there is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]"<sup>69</sup> was taken to be read quite literally. In poststructuralism, so the story goes, there is *only* the text, there is *only* the language-game, there is *only* the conceptual scheme, and this self-enclosed discursive construction is completely without relation to an independent and external reality. In his 1985 Carus Lectures, Putnam refers to this as the "extreme relativism" of French philosophy.<sup>70</sup> However, as works like Norris's and more recently Goldgaber's show, this reading of Derrida in particular lacks any nuance.<sup>71</sup> But whatever the actual attitude was, following the structuralism and poststructuralism of the twentieth century, continental philosophy once again became interested in speculative enterprises conditioned by and responsive to real, nonlinguistic constraints.<sup>72</sup> Though the initial four speculative realists have further parted ways theoretically, initially the project of speculative realism was to offer ontological solutions that could circumnavigate this issue of the unquestioned primacy of thinking over being.<sup>73</sup> Each speculative realist takes up Meillassoux's challenge to the epistemological problem he terms "correlationism." Meillassoux sees idealism in both Berkeley and Kant as artificially limiting the capacities of thought insofar as these kinds of subject-centered idealism disqualify any rational consideration of objectivity apart from its relation to subjectivity. So, much like in Norris's telling, this return to realism was a push back against a philosophical milieu dominated by the analysis of subjectively and socially determined conceptual structures of intelligibility. The moral of this story is that in attempting to understand how we subjectively come to know the world we have erased the very objective world we wish to know.

The debate between realism and antirealism is scaffolded by the largely uncontested philosophical dualism of immanence and transcendence. I already noted Maoilearca's isolation of immanence as a key shared commitment of postcontinental philosophy. Robinson also turns to immanence in order to draw a strict division between two traditions or "trajectories" within continental philosophy. He classifies this demarcation in terms of a "transcendent trajectory" and an "immanent trajectory." He claims that "the transcendent (Heideggerian, Derridean, and Levinasian) trajectory corresponds with a range of 'anti' or 'non-realist' positions while the immanent (Nietzschean and Deleuzian) trajectory corresponds more with various forms of nonessentialist 'realism.'" <sup>74</sup> According to Robinson, the trajectory of transcendence leads to antirealism while the trajectory of immanence leads to realism. This seems to imply that the problems generated by antirealism can be solved through a more rigorous articulation of philosophical immanence. Tritten goes so far as to suggest that "post-Kantian realisms must take the form of monism: post-Kantian realisms can only exist as philosophies of immanence." <sup>75</sup> However, if we take Jacobi seriously, we can see that the division Robinson draws here is not so easily maintained. For Jacobi, it is *transcendence* that renders realism possible. As we will see, this is because Jacobi argues that any philosophy of immanence generates only internal, self-referential structures that relate to nothing outside of these closed systems.

Overall, these diagnoses from Jacobi, Maoilearca, Norris, Robinson, and others bind tightly the debates over realism and antirealism to the philosophical categories of immanence and transcendence. Moreover, the various positions articulated in both continental and analytic philosophy display the lack of any simple articulation of the battle between philosophies of immanence and philosophies of transcendence. The independence thesis introduces a gap between thought and being. This gap in turn must be bridged somehow, yet the options for doing so (such as intuitive knowing, experiential extrapolation, scientific investigation, a priori formalization, etc.) carry with them their own internal inconsistencies. The transcendence implied by the independence thesis generates just as many, if not more, problems than it sought to solve. In light of this, one returns to immanence, and we're back at where we started. So, in short, despite the two centuries separating contemporary philosophy from the inception of German Idealism and the subsequent backlash articulated by Jacobi, the fear of a lost world

persists. The madness of idealism and the hope that realism might act as an antidote to this madness remains.

#### 4.0. Idealism beyond Antirealism

If idealism is madness, and realism is taken to be the antidote to this madness, then it makes sense that the return to realism has pushed idealism out of favor. However, though idealism is often taken to be a variant of antirealism, closer examination shows that this association is not exhaustively correct. Take the following example. Foster outlines three possible forms of idealism that center around one of the following three claims:

- (1) Ultimate contingent reality is wholly mental.
- (2) Ultimate contingent reality is wholly nonphysical.
- (3) The physical world is the logical product of facts about human sense-experience.<sup>76</sup>

Looking at these characterizations of idealism allows us to better understand the conflicting demands of the realist. Of these three claims, only (2) can be taken as fully antirealist insofar as it wholly denies the reality of the physical. Against the assessment of someone like Ferraris,<sup>77</sup> it is difficult to find contemporary advocates for this radically antirealist form of idealism. Claim (1) can be taken as a realism regarding the mental in its absolute equation of the mental and the real. Though it may entail the threat of antirealism due to its emphasis on mindedness, this claim does not deny the *reality* of existence. Instead, it claims that what is ultimately real is “wholly mental.” Nothing can transcend the mental to which reality is entirely immanent, and this category of the mental can be broadly defined. Claim (1) may be antirealist insofar as it seems to fail the test of the independence thesis, but it does not follow that it is fully antirealist. For example, forms of panpsychism might fulfill both this criterion as well as the more traditional realist claim that there exists a world independent of *human* mindedness. In fact, by these criteria, one could argue that Spinoza himself, who fits cleanly into Robinson’s “realist trajectory” of continental philosophy, would in fact be an idealist.<sup>78</sup> Claim (3) evokes fears of antirealism

discussed in the previous section. Here we can see a more clear-cut failure to embrace the independence thesis. The problem is that what is real is real only insofar as it is constructed by “human sense-experience” or some other conceptual schematization. It is the logical schematization of sensual givens that constitutes reality. However, (3) is not *necessarily* a full-blown antirealism because it does not deny the existence of a mind-independent physical reality given through sense experience. Instead, the idea is that these givens can only be properly called real when they are related to specifically human forms of mindedness. Claim (3) may be a form of correlationism, but it is not necessarily a full-blown antirealism. When taken in conjunction with the independence thesis, we can see that antirealist pictures of idealism arise if there is nothing that transcends the spheres of human practices and schemas. Here, as Jacobi feared, it is immanence that carries with it the threat of antirealism. So, again, all of this puts on display the ineffectiveness of categories such as transcendence and immanence to justly conceptualize the debate between realism, antirealism, and idealism.

The association of idealism and antirealism is present within the literature on transcendental idealism. Take just the opening lines of Allison’s influential study of Kant’s transcendental idealism.<sup>79</sup> He writes,

In spite of some sympathy shown in recent years for a vaguely Kantian sort of idealism, or better, anti-realism, which argues for the dependence of our conception of reality on our concepts and/or linguistic practices, Kant’s transcendental idealism proper, with its distinction between appearances and things in themselves, remains highly unpopular.<sup>80</sup>

Allison’s focus on the centrality of what he calls the “discursively thesis” to Kant’s idealism nicely connects back to the discussion in the previous section. Allison defines the discursivity thesis as “the view that human cognition (as discursive) requires both concepts and sensible intuitions.”<sup>81</sup> It is the discursively thesis that makes claim (3) above both possible and problematic. As Davidson’s and Rorty’s critiques of empiricism make clear, there is no clean way of assembling concepts and intuitions into a rich account of discursive understanding. However, there are plenty of reasons to be attracted to the idea that linguistic and conceptual practices play a role in the determination of our experience of the world. In addition to dispelling the more complex errors and