The Barbarian Principle

Merleau-Ponty, Schelling, and the Question of Nature

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with

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SUNY PRESS

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Art of Nature

On the Agony of the Will in Schelling and Merleau-Ponty

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Abstract

This essay takes up the problem of Nature in Schelling and Merleau-Ponty (especially in his late lecture course on Nature) as it comes to be thought from the perspective of the problem of art. The problem of the kinship (*Verwandtschaft*) of art and Nature is developed through an analysis not only of their respective writings on the problems of *Naturphilosophie* and *Kunstphilosophie*, but also through the related problems of the relationship between the polarizing forces of light and gravity as well as the unity of willing and knowing in artistic creation.

The moralist desires to see Nature not as living, but as dead, so that he can tread upon it with his feet.

—Schelling (I/7, 17)

It is not only remarkable that Merleau-Ponty, near the end of his life, turned to Schelling, but that he turned to Schelling at the moment that he did. Merleau-Ponty turned to Schelling, albeit not without some reservations, as a companion to help him think through the question of Nature. At this time, Merleau-Ponty was also again engaged with the

question of art, working on the remarkable late essay, *Eye and Mind* (1961). The Western philosophical tradition has, with scant but notable exceptions, long subscribed to the bifurcation of Nature and art. (Nature does what Nature does while art has its provenance in human activity; art imitates Nature by representing natural things, etc.) In Merleau-Ponty's thinking, however, this bifurcation is untenable. If one looks at Schelling's enterprise, one sees that his preoccupation with *Naturphilosophie* (1797–1801) and his so-called *Indentitätsphilosophie* (1800–1803) included the watershed work of his *Kunstphilosophie* (1802–1804 as well as an important public address in 1807). Schelling's philosophy of art was not a break or change of itinerary from his *Naturphilosophie*. It was not another example of Schelling, as Hegel accused him, pursuing his education in public. For Schelling, the *Kunstphilosophie* was another manner of retrieving and reactivating the question of Nature. In what follows, I pursue the fundamental relationship and kinship of art and Nature as it figures in the philosophies of Schelling and Merleau-Ponty and I do so through a consideration of the experience of thinking that opens up in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Schelling.

I. The Guiding Question

I pursue an articulation of this relationship between Nature and art across two opposing forces that exemplify for Schelling and Merleau-Ponty the composite unity of Nature, namely *light and gravity*. I pay special attention to this "*and*"—the circle of Nature itself—that conjoins as a single process light and gravity in their opposition. This expanding and contracting, diastolic and systolic circle, which Merleau-Ponty argues that in Schelling "places us not in front of, but rather in the middle of the absolute" (N2, 47), is located in the complex activities of art and philosophy. These two activities do not surrender their autonomy to each other. As Merleau-Ponty argues, "The access to the Absolute by philosophy is thus not exclusive. There are experiences that teach something to philosophy, but that does not mean that philosophy has to lose its autonomy" (N2, 46).

Nonetheless there is something in philosophy that draws it into proximity with art and there is something in art that draws it into proximity with philosophy. In *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling names this proximity a *Verwandtschaft* (I/3, 628), an affinity or kinship. Art and philosophy are kindred spirits. In what way, however, are they related? What is their common blood, given that they are not the same activities? What is their shared parentage?

Their kindred lights are united by their shared original darkness—"the Absolute was Night" (N2, 45).

How then do philosophical reflection and artistic production preserve their respective autonomies given their kinship? How do they reflect their shared parentage differently?

Merleau-Ponty provocatively characterizes Schelling's philosophy of philosophy itself not as a "science of Nature," not as a theory about Nature as a discernable object for a thinking subject, but as a thinking of the *Ungewußt*, as a "phenomenology of pre-reflexive Being" (N2, 41). Thinking attempts to retrieve its original oblivion, not as something wholly other and utterly elsewhere, but rather as its interior shadow, its ever concealed yet ever manifesting soul (*Seele*, *anima*, ψυχή). It is a kind of radical ἀνάμνησις, the endeavor to remember that one has always forgotten, to somehow become conscious again of the unconscious of Nature itself. Schelling spoke of this ἀνάμνησις in his unfinished magnum opus, *The Ages of the World*. Nature is not in front of us nor is it lying about somewhere else as a purely present object. Nature is not environment. I quote from the third or 1815 draft:

> Therefore everything known, in accord with its Nature, is narrated. But the known is not here something lying about finished and at hand since the beginning. Rather, it is that which is always first emerging out of the interior through a process entirely specific to itself. The light of knowledge must rise through an internal cision and liberation before it can illuminate. What we call knowledge is only the striving towards ἀνάμνησις [*Wiederbewußtwerden*] and hence more of a striving toward knowledge than knowledge itself. For this reason, the name Philosophy had been bestowed upon it incontrovertibly by that great man of antiquity. (I/8, 201; AW, xxxvii)

The known is narrated, that is, it is known as it progresses. It cannot be known as a determinate object because its ground does not become present as a presence to thinking. As Schelling articulates it at the beginning of *Von der Weltseele* (1798): "Because the principle is *everywhere* present, it is *nowhere*; and because it is *everything*, it cannot be anything *determinate* or *particular*; language has no appropriate term for it, and the earliest philosophies . . . have handed down to us an idea of it only in a figurative sense [*dichterische Vorstellungen*]" (I/2, 347).[1] It can only as such be spoken, as in *Timaeus*, in accordance with the likely account (κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα) (30b-c), by recourse to

images.[2] This ground, so to speak, can only be known as that which is not itself to be known, as that which escapes knowing in the very production of meaning itself. It is the non-meaningful source of all meaning and its barbarian life exceeds every meaning that it generates. It is the dark barbarian life of *natura naturans*—an immemorial absence at the ground of every presence—an abyssal and unknowable past given simultaneously in each present. "Oh, the past, you abyss of thoughts!" exclaimed Schelling in an early draft of *The Ages of the World*. Yet this present absence is not only immemorial. It is simultaneously the unprethinkable future of all presence.[3] As Schelling articulated the nonconceptual ground (freedom) of every concept in the *Erlangen* lectures (1820–1821): The barbarian ground is the concealed interior of presence. It "would remain in no form and is fettered by no form. We therefore expressly presuppose that in taking form, but only in taking form to emerge again victoriously out of every form, it shows itself as the in itself incomprehensible and infinite."[4] Philosophy is therefore aptly called the love of wisdom, the desire and willing for knowledge, not the possession of absolute knowledge. This willing emerges in its initial alienation from wisdom and the simultaneous remembering of its desire for what it does not have. *Natura naturata*, on the other hand, is natural history, the narration of the life of Nature's dark ground.[5] Narration belongs to the philosopher's ecstasy, but it cannot arrest the animistic force of the ongoing desire that precipitates philosophical reflection. This desire is not satisfied in the mere accumulation of facts. Desire's erotic wealth is its poverty—its inability to take possession of the beloved.[6] It wills what it cannot directly have and it seeks it with concepts that cannot appropriate it and settle its barbarian vitality. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty quotes Karl Jaspers: "philosophy is 'reflection on what is not reflection'" (N2, 45).

Because philosophy cannot attain to this dark night from within the domain of ideas, philosophy must undergo an experience of a ground internal to the domain of the ideas themselves. The barbarian principle can neither be deduced nor induced. Thinking must come into relationship with its shadow in order for thinking to continue to produce concepts for the progressive history of difference, that is, for an archaic ground that is also already the unprethinkability (*Unvordenklichkeit*) of thinking's future.[7] Art, which does not need to reflect on the dark night that is the origin of its light, offers philosophy access to its common parentage. Philosophy seeks to become conscious of the irreducible remainder that exceeds every effort of reason to resolve it into a concept (I/7, 360). Artistic production, on the other hand, is the "document" or "product" of the irreducible remainder and, as such, is what Schelling

in 1800 called "an unconscious infinity" (I/3, 619). Philosophy desires a reflective and originary lucidity that art does not need because art's very presence assumes the vitality of the ground that philosophy seeks. "The philosopher looks to express the world, the artist seeks to create it" (N2, 46). Philosophy seeks the infinite, whereas art becomes art in its emergence from the infinite. Hence, art is "supreme to the philosopher because it opens the Holy of Holies to the philosopher. What is sundered in Nature and history, and what in life, action, and even thinking must eternally flee from itself, in art burns in a single flame as an eternal and originary unity" (I/3, 628).

Artistic production partakes in the productivity of Nature itself. Philosophy has a much harder time. Reflection, the necessary evil that makes possible philosophical activity, begins by sundering itself from Nature. As such, it paradoxically runs the risk of losing the source of thinking as the condition for the possibility of thinking. Schelling was particularly lucid about this problem in the introduction to his 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. In reflection we abruptly break from the shackles of our absorption in Nature, that is, from an experience of Nature in which the thoughts that we have are the thoughts that we unreflectively find already operating in our thinking. In wonder, for instance, thinking takes the first step toward becoming aware of Nature because it finds itself suddenly suspicious of the concepts that it heretofore had taken for granted. This was one of the great lessons of Plato's cave: reflection, in the infancy of the inaugurating the interrogative mode, "strives to wrench oneself away from the shackles of Nature and her provisions" (I/2, 12). In this respect, David Wood has felicitously called reflection "the step back, the promulgation of negative capability" that resists "unthinking identifications."[8]

However, the abdication of our first experience of Nature (its seemingly inviolable necessity) is not an end in itself. Otherwise, all that we have done is replace the seeming rules of Nature with our own unmoored reflections. The domain of necessity becomes the domain of the arbitrary. One must complete the movement and return more deeply and more fully to Nature, which, prior to the emancipation of reflection, we had only known superficially. One abdicates the grip of Nature in order to retrieve it more fully as a *whole* (not one-sidedly as the press of necessity). Mere reflection, reflection for its own sake, not only retards the movement of thinking, but it plunges more deeply into the sickness of thinking. Reflection obsessed with its own activity, anticipating the *Freedom* essay, is a special kind of sickness, namely, *eine Geisteskrankheit des Menschen* (I/2, 13). A *Geisteskrankheit* is a psychopathology or mental disease, literally, a sickness of the spirit. One pulls away from

the center of Nature and its stubborn hold only to lose oneself in its periphery; when reflection reaches "dominion over the whole person," it "kills" her "spiritual life at its root" (I/2, 13). Philosophy, born of the denial of Nature, is most fully the art of the return to Nature.

Philosophy seeks to return to where art is always already beginning. In a sense, one could say that the kinship between art and philosophy makes them mirror images of each other. Each moves toward the other from opposite directions. As soon as the artist reflects, the philosophical mood enters creative work. As soon as the philosopher completes the movement of reflection and returns to the Nature that it had to at first reject, the philosopher becomes creative and participates in the creativity of the sovereign ground of Nature.

The retrieval of this sovereign ground, however, demands that thinking weigh the whole of Nature, both its (to use Hölderlin's phrase from "The Ground of Empedocles") *aorgic* (unrepresentable, unorganizable, nonformalizable) interiority and its formal manifestation. The gods can only appear, Schelling claimed in the *Kunstphilosophie*, when the "purely formless, darkness, the monstrous [*Ungeheure*] is suppressed [*verdrungen*]. To this region of darkness and the formless still belongs everything that immediately recalls eternity, the first ground of existence" (I/5, 394). In art, as in Nature in general, darkness becomes light through its own internal delimitation. Indeed, the ongoing progression of appearance can only appear in the ongoing progression of its suppression of its anterior chaos. "The mystery of all life is the synthesis of the absolute with delimitation" (I/5, 393).

This suppression is not a cessation but rather an ongoing displacement that is the progression of both natural and artistic creation. As such, it is not something that the artist consciously does. It is, rather, something like the creative discovery of new forms through a solicitation of the darkness of one's own solitude.[9] In his brilliant 1945 essay "Cézanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty makes this point when he describes Cézanne's technique of landscape painting:

> "The landscape thinks itself in me," he would say, "and I am its consciousness." Nothing could be farther from naturalism than this intuitive science. Art is not imitation, nor is it something manufactured according to the wishes of instinct or good taste. It is a process of expression. (MPA, 67–68)[10]

Artistic creativity, its exploration of what is not yet, solicits the nonmeaningful ground of Nature for new productions of meaning. "The meaning of what the artist is going to say *does not exist* anywhere—not in things, which as yet have no meaning, nor in the artist himself, in his unformulated life" (MPA, 69). In a sense, the artist expresses Nature in the way that Nature expresses Nature: *by becoming Nature*. "Everything happens as if thinking were a natural thing. . . . Art is this experience of the identity of subject and object. We no longer know what is fact and what is idea: everything is linked together in one production" (N2, 46). When asked about the supposed bifurcation between Nature and human production, Cézanne retorted that he was attempting to make art and Nature the same (MPA, 63).

One might already say at this point that art demands, even desires, a kind of submission. The arbitrariness that emerges in the abdication of Nature must overcome itself in its solicitation of the sovereignty of Nature. When the artwork only speaks to the ego of the creator (i.e., the experience of myself as sundered from Nature), it is false and, in a deep and nonobvious sense, unnatural. Adapting language from Schelling's *Freedom* essay, one might say that the particular will of the artist must surrender to the general will of Nature. This is not to surrender to something in front of one, or to something particular that is somehow there. It is to die to oneself and therefore be born again as the becoming of Nature. As Nishida Kitarō put it in his masterful *Zen no kenkyū* (1911): "As in the artist's imagination, if we attain to the realm of inspiration, we totally submerge the self in the thing; consequently the self and the thing are in complete congruence, and we feel the action of the thing to be the activity of our own will."[11] My will becomes the will of Nature itself and hence true art expresses my freedom as the freedom of Nature itself.

II. Light

> . . . a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity.
>
> —Merleau-Ponty (VI2, 130)[12]

I now turn to the *shared source* of art and philosophy in Nature itself. The question that animates and occupies Merleau-Ponty's *La Nature*, his striking 1956–1957 course at the Collège de France, is deceptively simple and straightforward: "Can we validly study the notion of Nature" (N, 3)? The answer to such a question can be palpated[13] when we ask what we mean by "study." Typically, we study things in order to know them. That is, we experience ourselves as desiring (wanting to know)

and discerning (having faith that we are able to know) subjects. The desideratum in knowledge is the identification of heretofore unknown objects. We knowers attempt to know what is not yet known. We attempt to "discover" the truth.

To study Nature, then, assumes that Nature is an object and that we are subjects within it. For both Schelling and Merleau-Ponty, however, this perspective makes it impossible to study Nature. Moreover, such a perspective as such destroys Nature. For Schelling, modernity is marked precisely by the utter disappearance of the question of Nature. Natural science in the classical modern sense is in some very rigorous sense an oxymoron. This does not mean, therefore, that one can or should abandon science. Rather knowing itself must be recovered from within contemporary practices of knowing. In a sense, there must be a doing of science in which there is within science a self-overcoming of science itself.

This self-overcoming involves the overcoming of the modern construction of scientific perception, that is, the cold and impartial analysis of discrete objects. In the same way that the artist must die to herself in order to be reborn in the becoming of Nature, the discerning scientist-subject must surrender him or herself to the narration of Nature. They must, to use Schelling's language of the *Freedom* essay, surrender the radical evil of discrete subjectivity itself. The object "Nature," when analyzed does not preserve the one who would analyze it. In this sense, we might recognize in Schelling and even in Merleau-Ponty a kind of "science" more dramatically practiced by someone like Georges Bataille: "Certainly, it is dangerous, in extending the frigid research of the sciences, to come to a point where one's object no longer leaves one unaffected, where, on the contrary, it is what inflames. Indeed, the ebullition I consider, which animates the globe, is also *my* ebullition. Thus, the object of my research cannot be distinguished *from the subject at its boiling point.*"[14]

The object that is Nature does not preserve its status as an object nor does it preserve the subjectivity of the inquirer. "Nature is an enigmatic object, an object that is not an object at all; it is not really set out in front of us. It is our soil [*sol*]—not that which is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that which carries us" (N2 4). *Le sol* speaks of both ground and soil, as if the ground of Nature and ourselves were the fleshly expression of an earth that in its speaking also retained its absolute silence. Nature is the kind of object that resists all objectivity and human subjectivity. "Nature resists. It cannot be entirely established in front of us" (N2, 83). To attempt to study Nature within the modern scientific attitude, that is, to prop it before ourselves as discerning subjects, is to alienate oneself

from Nature and to alienate philosophy from its natural desires. To be clear: by modern I mean the conception of science that Schelling was criticizing. I do not mean all of contemporary science, which, in almost wholly its own terms, has found a way out of the confines of the modern flat-lining of Nature in fields like quantum mechanics, string theory, and many striking developments in contemporary biology and neuroscience. One need only look at the recent work of Catherine Malabou, especially her *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* to see an example of this as it bears directly on the Continental tradition. The "modern" scientific attitude, on the other hand, is the *Geisteskrankheit* of mere reflection, the spiritual sickness of thinking on the periphery of Nature. Or one might say, this is the madness of thinking the Earth as an environment, as if we were the measure and reference point for Nature. Merleau-Ponty notes, "In Fichte, Jaspers says, there is a 'hatred for Nature'" (N2, 48). In Marx: "Never does the resistance of Nature appear as an essential fact" (N2, 50).

The philosopher palpates the light of Nature in order to touch indirectly the barbarian principle. The latter is a phrase that Merleau-Ponty borrows from Karl Löwith—"a barbarian principle that can be overcome but never eliminated." It is borrowed from Löwith's discussion of a remarkable passage at the end of the third draft of *The Ages of the World*. Speaking of the primordiality of the "self-lacerating madness" of Dionysus, Schelling argued:

> Only when it is governed and, so to speak, verified [*zugutgesprochen*], through the light of a higher intellect, is it the real force of Nature and of all its products. Since Aristotle it is even customary to say of people that nothing great can be accomplished without a touch of madness. In place of this, we would like to say: nothing great can be accomplished without a constant solicitation of madness, which should always be overcome, but should never be utterly lacking. One might do well to assess people as follows. One could say that there is a kind of person in which there is no madness whatsoever. These would be the uncreative people incapable of procreation, the ones that call themselves sober spirits. These are the so-called intellectuals [*Verstandesmenschen*] whose works and deeds are nothing but cold intellectual works and intellectual deeds. Some people in philosophy have misunderstood this expression in utterly strange ways. For because they heard it said of intellectuals that they are, so to speak, low and inferior, and because they themselves did not want to be like this,

> they good-naturedly opposed reason [*Vernunft*] to intellect instead of opposing reason to madness. But where there is no madness, there is also certainly no proper, active, living intellect (and consequently there is just the dead intellect, dead intellectuals). For in what does the intellect prove itself than in the coping with and governance and regulation of madness? Hence the utter lack of madness leads to another extreme, to imbecility (idiocy), which is an absolute lack of all madness. But there are two other kinds of persons in which there really is madness. There is one kind of person that governs madness and precisely in this overwhelming shows the highest force of the intellect. The other kind of person is governed by madness and is someone who really is mad. (I/8, 338–339)

Modern science is born of the *Verstandesmensch* and he is for Schelling an imbecile, a bureaucrat, and an ideologue amid the miraculous natality of Nature's ground. Imbecility, furthermore, is the desire to find in Nature a fundamental identity and not the ceaseless life of difference. (This is the *Geisteskrankheit* of mere reflection.) The barbarian, Dionysian principle of Nature is the irretrievable remoteness of its absolute interiority to itself. The philosopher and the artist, sharing a common parentage, are not called to the imbecility of ideology. They are called to shape difference artistically and to provide concepts for it. To know Nature, to study Nature, is to see it as a distanciated conceptual object. Merleau-Ponty here quotes Schelling: "Philosophers in their vision become Nature." This is a fragment from a text that itself was called *Kritische Fragmente*. It had originally appeared as part of Schelling's remarkable 1806 *Jahrücher der Medicin als Wissenschaft*. A return to this source reveals even more clearly this resuscitation and ἀνάμνησις of knowing.

> The time will come in which the sciences more and more cease to be and immediate knowledge emerges. All sciences as such are merely invented out of a lack of immediate knowledge. . . . There have been and will be some individuals who do not require science in order to see Nature. They become Nature in their seeing. These are the true seers, the genuine empiricists. . . . (I/7, 246)

This immediate knowledge is not a kind of epistemically privileged super-science in which one acquires powers to see what others cannot see. (In this sense, I believe that Merleau-Ponty's reservations about Schelling's intellectual intuition are misplaced.) One does not assume a special ability in order to see a special object. Seeing itself is rather no longer truncated in the artificial subject–object dichotomy and Nature itself continues to breathe through the artist and Nature sees its own life through human artistic production. The seer lives in Nature. As Merleau-Ponty remarked in *Eye and Mind*: "Science manipulates things and gives up living in them" (MPA, 121).

The seer, therefore, does not see things in light. Rather the seer sees things as light. "Intuition shall accompany light in its development" (N2, 44–45). It is to this issue that I now turn.

III. Gravity

> Panthers or tigers do not pull the carriage of Dionysus in vain.
>
> —Schelling (I/8, 337)

As we can also clearly see in the essay by Annette Hilt in this volume, Schelling argued that the discussion of light was ruinously underserved by modern natural science. Moreover, it cannot be so easily sundered from a philosophical, ethical and aesthetic consideration of gravity. That is, in the seer's vision, action, and sensibility, light and gravity, that is, Nature itself, comprise the complex that is the unity of the true, good, and beautiful.

Three years before the appearance of the *Freedom* essay, in the 1806 *Aphorismen über die Naturphilosophie*, we find a most curious and remarkable claim.

> Gravity is the silent celebration of Nature, in which Nature celebrates unity within infinity, that is, in which Nature celebrates its consummation. [*Die Schwere ist die stille Feier der Natur, damit sie die Einheit in der Unendlichkeit, d. h. ihre Vollendung, feiert.*] (I/7, 230)

For Schelling, gravity had a scientific, ethical, and poetic register and a properly philosophical treatment of it embraced all three dimensions of this single insight, without confusing the respective domains of each manner of address. Gravity indicates the movement within all discrete entities by which the pretense to discretion, to independence, to being free-standing entities, was contested and brought back into a general

circulation in which no entity stands entirely by itself in some purported integrity. If one knows the Mahāyāna tradition, gravity is a sign that draws things away from their integrity and thereby attests to what is called *pratītyasamutpāda*, the dependent co-origination of things.[15] Gravity contests what Thomas Kasulis has called the integrity tradition of philosophy. "In short: integrity means being able to stand alone, having a self-contained identity without dependence on, or infringement by, the outside."[16] Schelling is quite clear about this. "For movement within gravity is a sign of the lack of independence of the individual, or a sign that the individual does not objectively grasp its center within itself but rather outside of itself in other things" (I/7, 237).[17]

In a sense, then, gravity is the counter pull, a counteracting attraction, to a thing's propensity, found within the inert force of thingliness itself, toward itself and away from a center that does not lie within itself. As such, gravity permanently threatens a thing's integrity, nay, exposes its integrity as a lie born of inertia and contested by the counterforce of gravity. The latter is the attracting force, the force that magnetically pulls things away from themselves and into the general economy of Nature. Gravity is a general center that attracts away from the inertia by which a thing strives to maintain its center of gravity within itself. Yet the individual center of gravity, the fallenness of light, resists the general gravity that contests it. The more the individual contests contestation itself, the more it swells within itself on the periphery. As Schelling describes this double contestation in *The Ages of the World*:

> But even now, intensified into selfhood (into Being-in-itself), these wholes are still retained by the attracting force. Yet, precisely because they are now selfish and because they have their own point of foundation (center of gravity) within themselves, they strive, precisely by dint of this selfhood, to evade the pressure of the attracting power. Hence they strive to distance themselves on all sides from the center of force and to become themselves away from it. Hence, the highest turgor of the whole emerges here, since each particular thing seeks to withdraw itself from the universal center and eccentrically seeks its own center of gravity or foundational point. (I/8, 323–324)

The more an individual insists on its own individuality, the more it seeks gravity within itself, the sicker it becomes. For humans, the celebration of the self in flight from the "silent celebration of Nature" is the experience of evil and the possibility of such uniquely human perversity marks the very *humanity of humanity*. Resistance to gravity is

the light of humanity's attempt to center itself within itself, to imagine itself as a subject for which freedom is a predicate. Freedom is what it repressed in light's obliviousness to its original darkness, in its attempt to locate its center of gravity within itself, in its delusion that it is most fundamentally attracted to itself. It is humanity's sense of itself as a subject, as fundamentally centered within itself and thereby on some kind of adventure in which it seeks to appreciate both its essential and accidental predicates. The human, in its flight from Nature itself, seeks itself as the fundamental point of reference for all predicates. Sin is the flight from the general economy to which general gravity pulls the creaturely.

Sin affirms one's own center of gravity, thereby holding gravity as such in abeyance. "The beginning of sin is when the human steps out of authentic being into non-being, out of truth into the lie, out of light into darkness in order to become a self-creating ground and to dominate all things with the power of the center that they have within themselves" (I/7, 391).[18] The desire to be oneself, to be a discrete being, is the flight away from being itself, into the lie that is the fallenness of Nature that cannot yet know itself as such.

Yet the oblivion of gravity in the flight to the integrity of humanity does not vitiate the attracting force. Rather gravity in the ethical dimension erupts as a monstrous secret within, pulling one away from oneself in a vortex of heretofore concealed madness. Freedom returns as the screaming, to lift a phrase from Georg Büchner's *Lenz*, that ordinary humans call silence.[19] Perhaps one is "seized by dizziness on a high and precipitous summit" and "a mysterious (*geheim*) voice seems to cry out that one plunge from it." Or perhaps it is like that "old fable" (*The Odyssey*) in which "the irresistible song of the Sirens rings out from the depths in order to attract the passing sailors down into the whirlpool" (I/7, 382). In any case, within the cool, silent evil that is the narcissism nascent in every self-understanding, the monstrosity of freedom can suddenly erupt, as if from nowhere, deducible from no conception of the comprehensible self. This is the explosion of integrity into the orgiastic abandon of the Maenads, the frenzied reassertion of the A^2, by which Pentheus is not recognizable by his mother as her son. This is the rage that Homer laments in the *Iliad*, in which the dogs of war rule and one is blinded by one's own rage, thinking oneself invincible and killing without limit. This is the "murky and wild enthusiasm that breaks out in self-mutilation or, as with the priests of the Phrygian goddess, auto-castration" (I/7, 357).

Schwerkraft speaks to a suddenly present but always at least implicitly persistent weightiness to life. As such, this sounds like another hopelessly dreary and humorless German account of the implacable

gravity of life. Perhaps one longs immediately for Nietzsche's levity, for his flight and airiness. But for Nietzsche, as well as for Schelling, the *Übergang* of the *Übermensch*'s levity was the self-overcoming born of an initial *Untergang*, a decline and perishing and going under by which one overcomes the false weightiness of human integrity. The weightiness of humanity itself is its insistence upon itself as its own center of gravity. One goes up only through going down and all flight is that other beginning released in the great fall occasioned by gravity itself. The journey to laughter and gratitude is through the hell of an omni-destructive sadness.

In a manner of speaking, all "natural" *Schwerkraft* is saturnalian, experienced by creatures in the same way that a seemingly self-possessed sea registers the gravitational pull from the moon, whose sway pulls the calm of the sea away from itself and tosses it beyond itself. In the tradition, of which Schelling is fully aware, the sway of Saturn also precipitated *Schwermut*, which, along with *die Melancholie*, is one of the two German terms for melancholy. *Schwermut* is literally a heavy mood, a gravitational mood, the governance of the moon over all things, including the melancholic and all the affairs in their world. Zarathustra, too, sang songs of melancholy. Schelling speaks directly to the eruption of a saturnalian sensibility, of the attractive force of a virulent nihilism that pulls all things into its vortex, when he reflects in the *Freedom* essay that "The human never receives the condition within their power, although they strive to do so in evil. . . . Hence, the veil of melancholy that is spread out over all of Nature, the deep, indestructible melancholy of all life" (I/7, 399).[20]

Yet lest we become unduly mawkish, we should remember that Schelling also claimed in the *Freedom* essay, "Joy must have suffering in order to be transfigured into joy [*Freude mu Leid haben, Leid in Freude verklärt werden*]" (I/7, 399). *Leid*, the word for suffering, also carries the connotation of passivity, of being pulled away from itself and being formed into something else, of the free activation of the *ewige Anfang*, the eternal beginning, of a sea under the silent governance of the moon.

As Schelling also argued in the *Freedom* essay, this living copula that holds together the secret dialogue of sickness and health, sadness and joy, hate and love, silence and expressivity, is "the relation of gravity and light in Nature." Furthermore, gravity "precedes light as its eternally dark ground" (I/7, 358). In an essay published three years earlier (the 1806 *On the Relationship of the Real and the Ideal in Nature or Development of the First Principles of the Philosophy of Nature through the Principles of Gravity and Light*), Schelling expounded this mysterious relationship at greater length. Gravity is the attractive force of a lost freedom, whereas

light is the expulsive and generative force of the ideal, the dark ground's eternally regenerative birth into light. As we all know, the origin of light is not itself light. As Merleau-Ponty articulates it: "Light does not know the world, but I see the world thanks to light" (N, 43). Light is the transfigurative darkness of the ground, its eternal beginning. In becoming light, it does not cease also to be darkness, allowing us to say that in the same manner in which Good *is* evil, darkness *is* light. The dark night is also a sun. In the *Stuttgart Lectures*, Schelling called light "positive darkness—evolution"[21] "All birth is birth out of darkness and into light" (I/7, 360–361) and that consequently the "birth of light is the realm of Nature" (I/7, 377–378). Nature, the splendor of light, is also rife with the darkness of its secrets. Light is *natura naturans*, Nature naturing, and hence Nature is in no way to be confused with natural objects, but is its unbidden mode of appearing, its very coming to light, so to speak.

Gravity, on the other hand, is the counter pull to *natura naturata*, pulling it away from the inertia of its objectivity. Gravity's positivity lies in the concealed and counteracting life of matter, which Schelling in the *Naturphilosophie* period called "the darkest of all things" and the "unknown root out of whose elevation all images and living appearances of Nature go forth" (I/2, 359). The moon holds sway and in the dark night of the light of day, suddenly the ardent Tea party devotee runs naked through the streets, demanding more taxes and less guns. Perhaps one then gives his factory to one's workers like the father in Pasolini's great film, *Teorama* (1968), who then walked naked through the Milan train station in a quiet but mounting and rueful agony, until he later found himself alone in the desert, screaming at the sky.

IV. Art as the Unity of Willing and Knowing

> Hegel is the museum. He is if you wish all philosophies, but deprived of their finiteness and power of impact, embalmed, transformed, he believes into themselves, but really transformed into Hegel.
>
> —Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" (MPA, 119)

In conclusion, I argue that explicitly for Schelling and in a way for Merleau-Ponty, art is the cessation of the agony of the will. This manner of phrasing, implicit in Schelling and altogether foreign to Merleau-Ponty's voice, nonetheless, I think, offers a vantage point

into philosophy's discovery of its own in its capacity to articulate the relationship of art to Nature. It is implicit when Merleau-Ponty claims in *Eye and Mind* that "we cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings" (MPA, 123).

The novelist Hermann Hesse in a 1925 letter wrote Ina Seidel that although his watercolor paintings were those of a "self-proclaimed dilettante," they had kept him from committing suicide. "I would have not lived any longer if my attempts to paint had not first consoled and rescued me in the gravest hours of my life."[22] Hesse here speaks of the *schwerste Zeit*, the heaviest, gravest, most gravitational time, a time so weighed down that it only has itself. The heaviest time is a time of maximum alienation. It is the separation of the human will from the will that is the progression of Nature. It knows only itself. It settles into itself. (It is important when speaking of the will, however, not to get bogged down in the metaphysical voluntarism of the tradition inaugurated by Augustine. The will is a poetic image. It is a not a metaphysical doctrine in which we locate the cause of our choices within ourselves. Furthermore, as an image, the will only manifests in the *Geisteskrankheit* in which, having forsaken Nature in reflection, I falsely conclude that freedom is a property of the human being, that it is *something that I have*. I mistakenly assume that I am willing and that willing is an active cause. The pretense of the individual will is the symptom of a sickness.)

The heaviest of times of which Hesse speaks are times of despair, which is the paramount case of willfulness. The will only knows itself and can only recognize itself when it finds itself in conflict with knowing.[23] Modern science, the seeing specific to the alienated will, is the despair of a maximum of gravity and therefore the recession of Nature itself. Despair is to find oneself wholly alone because one finds oneself not *as* Nature, but rather *in* Nature. This is the point in which Schelling, and Nietzsche after him, most dramatically part from Schopenhauer's will,[24] "the sole kernel of every phenomenon" (WW, 118) the thing-in-itself that stands outside of the plurality produced by the *principium individuationis* of space and time (WW, 128). For Schopenhauer, the ceaseless strivings of the will admit of no satiation and the experience of the will is the experience of something coming into being once and for all. In response, there is only the turning of the will against itself. How does one mask the implacable anguish and craving of one's selfishness? The *Aufhebung* of the will is tantamount to a kind of metaphysical annihilation and, as such, the question of Nature is wholly absent to Schopenhauer, despite his admirable sobriety about matters metaphysical.

> We freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete sublation [*Aufhebung*] of the will is, for all who are still full of the will, assuredly nothing. But also conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all of its suns and galaxies, is—nothing. (WW, 412)

For Schelling, in both art and philosophy, there is no *Aufhebung* of the general will, but rather submission to it, that is, a return to the indivision of general and particular, freedom and necessity, (un) ground and manifestation. Moreover, Schopenhauer's will, despite its fourfold specifications, is in itself homogeneous. One might even say that Schopenhauer's frequent criticism that Schelling could not adequately distinguish between ground and cause (the fourfold root of the principle of sufficient reason that explains *why* things are what they are) itself rests on a confusion between a thing and the *Unbedingte*, what Schelling reminds is neither a thing in itself nor a representation (*Vorstellung*) because it cannot be thought of as a thing of any kind (I/3, 375), not even as the rarefied abstraction of a fourfold sufficient cause. It is literally that which has in itself not become a thing at the heart of all things. When one thinks the *Unbedingte* as something in particular, it is reduced to and confused with, as it is with Schopenhauer, something fundamentally unitary. In resisting this in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche unknowingly rediscovers, albeit in his own singular idiom, Schelling's adaptation of Böhme's multifarious, self-differentiating *Ungrund* as the soul of Nature. There is nothing in particular in the depths of Nature but rather depths as such mark difference at the ground of Nature. As Deleuze felicitously frames the problem:

> And Nietzsche's break with Schopenhauer rests on one precise point; it is a matter of knowing whether the will is unitary or multiple. Everything else flows from this. Indeed, if Schopenhauer is led to deny the will it is primarily because he believes in the unity of willing. Because the will, according to Schopenhauer, is essentially unitary, the executioner comes to understand that he is one with his own victim. The consciousness of the identity of the will in all of its manifestations leads the will to deny itself, to suppress itself in pity, morality and asceticism. Nietzsche discovers what seems to him the authentically Schopenhauerian mystification; when we posit the unity, the identity, of the will we must necessarily repudiate the will itself.[25]

Schelling sought not to quiet or repudiate the will (gravity eludes capture by a determinate article like "the" as in "the will" as if there were something determinate or even determinable at stake). It was a question rather of atoning the gravity of the individual will to the general economy of Nature (to the circulation of gravity and light). An artist who creates in order to see herself in art creates in despair. An artist who attempts to repudiate the will also acts in despair. The will that creates, that is, the will that is the movement of Nature itself, knows the nothingness that expresses itself as the progression of Nature as the movement of love itself. The love of wisdom, that is, the will in its initial desire to overcome its alienation from Nature, becomes the wisdom of love, that is, the immediate knowledge of love itself. Such love is the beginning of an artistic philosophy, a philosophy whose completed sciences, as Schelling once dramatically urged, "flow back like many individual streams into the general ocean of poesy, from which they started out" (I/3, 629).

Notes

1. This is in the fine translation by Iain Hamilton Grant, which has recently appeared in *Collapse*, volume VI: *Geo/Philosophy* (January 2010), 89. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Schelling are my own responsibility.

2. For more on the relationship of the "likely story" to the image, see John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's* Timaeus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). For a discussion of this issue in relationship to Schelling, particularly the *Freedom* essay, see Bernard Freydberg's *Schelling's Dialogical* Freedom Essay: *Provocative Philosophy Then and Now* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).

3. Compare, The 1809 *Freedom* essay, "It must be before every ground and before everything that exists and therefore must be a *Wesen before* any kind of duality whatsoever. How could we call it anything else other than the primordial ground or better so the *non-ground*? [*Es muß* vor *allem Grund und vor allem Existierenden, also überhaupt vor aller Dualität, ein Wesen sein; wie können wir es anders nennen als den Urgrund oder vielmehr* Ungrund]?" (I/7, 406)

4. F.W.J. Schelling, *Initia Philosophiæ Universæ* (1820–1821), ed. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1969), 21.

5. For more on this issue of natural history, see my "Mass Extinction: Schelling and Natural History," *Poligrafi: Journal for Interdisciplinary Study of Religion* (special issue: Natural History with special guest editor, David Michael Levin), number 61–62, volume 16 (2011), 43–63.

6. This poetic image comes from Plato's *Symposium* and it is an image that Schelling uses in *The Ages of the World*. "Considered in itself, Nature is like Penia showing up at Zeus' feast. From the outside, Penia was the picture of poverty and extreme need. On the inside, she shut away divine plenitude which she could not reveal until she had wed Wealth, Excess himself, that effusively and inexhaustibly garrulous being (A2). Even then, however, the child wrested from her womb appears under the form and, so to speak, press, of that originary negation. It was the bastard child of Need and Excess" (I/8, 244).

7. My use of the image of the shadow, of course, is derived from Merleau-Ponty's use of the image in "The Philosopher and His Shadow." "What resists phenomenology within us—natural being, the 'barbarian' source Schelling spoke of—cannot remain outside phenomenology and should have its place within it. The philosopher must bear his shadow, which is not simply the factual absence of future light" (S2, 178).

8. David Wood, *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 7.

9. Merleau-Ponty's three essays on aesthetics are collected together in MPA. The experience of these depths occasioned Cézanne's doubt—for he knew that "we never see ideas or freedom face to face" (MPA, 75). They must be continuously palpated.

10. The claim that art is not imitation, discussed also in Schuback's analysis of the problem of μίμησις in chapter 15, is, admittedly a bit of hyperbole. Of course there have been plenty of art works content to imitate Nature, please patrons, and so on. One need only think of the notoriously inflexible rules of the Salon style for an obvious example. The art that is at stake for both Schelling and Merleau-Ponty is not the kind of art that reproduces and represents the sensory and intellectual habits that comprise the prevailing tastes of a given time and culture. At stake is the kind of art whose repetition imitates (in the radical sense of μίμησις) Nature's own sovereign creativity.

11. *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Abe Masao and Christopher Ives (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 90. (Note that I respectfully follow the Japanese practice of citing the Japanese family name first.) Henceforth IG. For more on the Kyoto School and the problem of art, see my essay, "Truly Nothing: The Kyoto School and Art" in *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 286–304.

12. Merleau-Ponty clearly has in mind Schelling's discussion of light and gravity, which carried over from the Nature lecture to *The Visible and the Invisible*.

13. I take the term *palpation* not only from Merleau-Ponty, but from Todd May's *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). "If a doctor palpates something that cannot directly be perceived, philosophy palpates something that cannot be directly comprehended. . . . Concepts palpate difference and by doing so they give voice to it" (20).

14. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 10.

15. For more on Merleau-Ponty's ripeness for Mahāyāna, see the fine collection, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*, ed. Jin Y. Park and Gereon Kopf (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

16. Thomas P. Kasulis, *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 53.

17. Da die Bewegung in der Schwere ein Zeichen der Unselbständigkeit des Einzelnen, oder davon ist, daß es sein Centrum nicht objektiv in sich selbst begreift, sondern außer sich in andern Dingen hat.

18. So ist denn der Anfang der Sünde, daß der Mensch aus dem eigentlichen Sein in das Nichtsein, aus der Wahrheit in die Lüge, aus dem Licht in die Finsternis übertritt, um selbst schaffender Grund zu werden, und mit der Macht des Centri, das er in sich hat, über alle Dinge zu herrschen.

19. "Hören Sie denn nichts? hören Sie denn nicht die entsetzliche Stimme, die um den ganzen Horizont schreit und die man gewöhnlich die Stille heißt? Seit ich in dem stillen Tal bin, hör ich's immer, es läßt mich nicht schlafen. [Do you hear nothing? Do you not hear that horrible voice that screams across the entire horizon, the one that one usually calls silence? I always hear it, it does not let me sleep]." Georg Büchner, *Lenz*, in *Werke und Briefe*, volume 1, ed. Fritz Bergemann (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1982), 110.

20. Der Mensch bekommt die Bedingung nie in seine Gewalt, ob er gleich im Bösen danach strebt . . . Daher der Schleier der Schwermut, der über die ganze Natur ausgebreitet ist, die tiefe unzerstörliche Melancholie alles Lebens.

21. *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* (1810), unedited version, ed. Miklos Vetö (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1973), 152. Henceforth SP.

22. Hermann Hesse, *Magie der Farben*, ed. Volker Michels (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1980), 93–94.

23. See Nishida: "When we have matured in an art, that is, when we have attained to the unity of reality, we are unconscious and do not know our own unity. As we try to advance to even greater depths, conflicts arise with that which has already been attained, and in this encounter we become conscious again, for consciousness is always born of such conflicts" (IG, 75).

24. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, volume one, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York, Dover, 1969). Henceforth WW.

25. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 7.