




# Schelling's Metametaphysical Critique of Hegel

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## ABSTRACT

This article defends Hegel against Schelling's critique that his system can only *comprehend* actuality but cannot *explain* it. It does so while granting Schelling's his basic premise, namely, that Hegel's system is entirely logical. Hegel's account of comprehension effectively answers Schelling's 'despairing' question: why is there something rather than nothing? In the first part, I reconstruct Schelling's critique, showing that he takes Hegel's system to be entirely logical; as logical, *a priori*, and as *a priori*, unable to explain existence. In the second part, I advance a moderately deflationary reading of Hegel on which philosophy, as comprehending cognition, guarantees the non-vacuity of its categories by deriving them through conceptually transforming the universals of empirical science. Given its compellingness as a response to Schelling's critique, this moderately deflationary reading warrants further development as an interpretation of Hegel's thought.

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## 1. Philosophy and Actuality

After attending Schelling's lectures on the philosophy of revelation in 1841, Kierkegaard recorded in his notebook: 'I'm so glad to have heard *Schelling's* 2nd lecture – indescribable. [...] [W]hen he mentioned the word *actuality* concerning philosophy's relation to the actual, the child of thought leaped for joy within me' (Kierkegaard 2010, 229). Kierkegaard's excitement for Schelling's promise to deliver a positive philosophy that descends from the realm of *a priori* abstractions to the '*actual world*' is palpable in these notes (PRR 42/PO 99).<sup>1</sup> Yet equally visceral is Kierkegaard's disappointment when he stops attending Schelling's lectures only three months later, writing in letters that 'Schelling's most recent lectures have not been of much significance' (Kierkegaard 2009, 125) and of his 'disappointed expectations of Schelling' (134–35), culminating in his declaration to abandon Schelling's

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lectures outright: ‘Schelling talks the most insufferable nonsense. [...] I have gotten the idea that I will not attend the lectures as long as I otherwise would have’ (141).<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard’s experience attending Schelling lectures cannot be reduced to idiosyncrasy. One can rather say that, in general terms, it charts the trajectory of German idealism through Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling, each of whom turns away from Kant’s transcendental idealism in part to establish a more thorough-going connection between philosophy and actuality, only to have his attempt at establishing this connection purportedly refuted by his immediate successor. Schelling, for example, charges Kant and Fichte with developing ‘a philosophy that excludes all actuality from its reflection,’ rendering philosophy ‘*insensitive to the actual*,’ and concludes that, after Fichte, ‘a time arrived when one began to realize that philosophy can only develop in *actuality*’ (PRR 242/PO 255). The precise meaning of a thorough-going connection between philosophy and actuality will emerge later in this article. But we can already appreciate that Kant, by reorienting metaphysics to be concerned with the conditions of the possibility of experience, not only denied speculative reason cognition of the objects of special metaphysics – God, the soul, and the world – but seemingly expelled *actual* experience, or actuality, from the domain of metaphysical inquiry.

Setting Kant and Fichte aside, it was certainly the aim of both Schelling and Hegel to reassert such a connection between philosophy and actuality without lapsing into the pre-critical metaphysics of the Wolffian school. This basic desire, common to both thinkers, that speculative philosophy come to grips with our natural and historical reality – that it be one’s time comprehended in thought, as Hegel so famously put it – sets the stage for Schelling’s mature critique of Hegel: Hegel’s philosophy is merely *negative* in the sense that it discloses the merely logical conditions of our actual world, its intelligibility, but cannot explain the necessity of its *positive* existence, despite its pretensions to having done so.<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of German idealism, this deficiency of actuality in Hegel’s philosophy, contrary to its stated intentions, came to be known as Hegel’s panlogism (*Panlogismus*), indicating that all of Hegel’s philosophy, not only its first part, is logical in character, and that it remains, despite itself, shut up in pure thinking, unable to ‘transition’ to natural and spiritual reality.<sup>4</sup>

However, the centrality of panlogism in Schelling’s Hegel-critique has been challenged by recent Anglophone scholarship.<sup>5</sup> By attending more closely to the enterprise of Schelling’s *Spätphilosophie*, this new literature has shifted the focus away from the traditional emphasis on logic in Schelling’s critique of Hegel, including the absolute idea’s ‘drive’ to ‘freely release’ itself into nature. Instead, this new scholarship demonstrates that the dispute between Schelling and Hegel concerning the idea’s ‘decision’ at the

end of the logic to liberate itself into nature is merely symptomatic of a more fundamental disagreement between the two idealists. This is evident, for example, in recent work by Bruno (2020) and Dews (2022).<sup>6</sup>

According to Bruno (2020), Schelling ultimately charges Hegel with being unable to answer varieties of the question ‘why is there something rather than nothing?’, which Bruno interprets as implicating the presuppositionlessness integral to Hegel’s project (187–90). This ‘why-something’ question is ‘deeper’ than Hegel’s problematic transition from logic to nature because even if Hegel justifies this transition, he still faces further questions: *why* is there thinking and nature for philosophy to grasp in the first place, and whence the *value* of this endeavor (200)? For Bruno, Hegel unjustifiably assumes answers to these questions, demonstrating that speculative philosophy cannot escape presupposing the radical fact of existence, despite its pretensions to being a closed and self-justifying system.

Similarly, Dews (2022) articulates a deeper rift between Schelling and Hegel than that suggested by panlogism, identifying a series of interlocking disagreements between the two thinkers that span theoretical and practical philosophy and within which no divergence has absolute priority over the others. For Dews, Schelling’s critique concerns not *whether* Hegel goes ‘beyond’ the idea but *how* he does so (154–55). Hegel’s fundamental error from a Schellingian standpoint was to have overlooked the constitutive tension between *necessity* and *freedom* in a genuine philosophical system (87–88) and, in attempting to derive being from the concept, to have sacrificed the latter for the former (185–93).

In my view, we can translate Bruno’s and Dews’ insights into Schelling’s critique of Hegel back into the vocabulary that had originally excited Kierkegaard. At stake between Hegel and Schelling, I submit, is whether conceptual and presuppositionless comprehension (*Begreifen*) suffices for establishing a thorough-going connection between philosophy and actuality or, instead, whether this demand requires a more metaphysically-laden yet *a posteriori* ‘explanation’ (*Erklärung*) of the existence of the finite world qua its radical facticity or thatness. Putting their dispute in terms of philosophy’s relation to actuality has a few advantages. First of all, It shows us that Hegel and Schelling share the *aim* of redirecting philosophical inquiry to the actual, but that they present competing philosophical *criteria* for evaluating whether this aim has been accomplished – it having been *comprehended* or *explained* – or in Schelling’s vocabulary, competing demands (*Forderungen*) placed upon reason (HMP 103/SW I,10:85; GPP 155–56/SW II,3:154). It also corroborates Bruno and Dews’ contention that the transition from logic to nature cannot be decisive in Schelling’s Hegel-critique because even a well-justified philosophy of nature would be, on my intended view, concerned only with the comprehension of nature, not its explanation, and so would be inadequate for responding to Schelling’s dissatisfaction with comprehension as such.

Finally, centering their diverging criteria for evaluating the philosophy–actuality relation also enables a more balanced interpretation of Schelling’s Hegel-critique, one which I hope to traverse: Schelling neither completely misunderstood Hegel’s philosophical project, nor did he entirely properly assess Hegel’s success in realizing it. One can acknowledge a genuine difference between the demand each philosopher places on philosophy, while also recognizing that Hegelian comprehension can satisfy at least some of the desiderata of Schellingian explanation.

Accordingly, I aim in this article to defend Hegel against Schelling’s critique while granting its basic premise. Although Hegel’s system retains a logical character, this does not cause the system to lose contact with actuality, as if it could remain true even if nothing existed at all (GPP 180/SW II,3:128). This contact with actuality turns on Hegel’s presentation of philosophy as a conceptual transformation of the representations of empirical science and ordinary cognition in the *Encyclopedia’s* Introduction (§§1–18). On Hegel’s view, philosophy participates in an intellectual division of labor, outsourcing, as it were, existential and explanatory questions (e.g. whether certain kinds of entities exist and how these entities came to be) to empirical science. However, philosophy nevertheless contributes to answering these extra-philosophical questions – it ‘indicates’ (*hinweist*) their answers, as Hegel puts it (MW 232–33/W 2:195) – by ameliorating the system of concepts that is necessarily used in their investigation. While within philosophy Hegel cannot causally *explain* the world as demanded by Schelling, Hegel’s purely logical system can, in cooperation with empirical science, *comprehend* this world in a manner that suffices for establishing the thorough-going connection between philosophy and actuality demanded by reason, and which sufficiently tethers the system to an existing reality that could not be destroyed without equally rupturing the system.

The article proceeds in two parts. In the first part, I reconstruct Schelling’s Hegel-critique in his *Spätphilosophie* as presenting the following line of reasoning: first, that the entirety of Hegel’s system is logical; second, that, as logical, it is *a priori*; finally, that as an *a priori* system, it cannot *explain* existence because existence stands outside the idea, graspable only *a posteriori*. This requires acquainting ourselves with the late Schelling’s views of positive and negative philosophy, logic, explanation, and apriority. In the second part, I turn to Hegel. Granting Schelling’s panlogist interpretation, Hegel appears to be in a bind: how can a purely logical philosophical system satisfy reason’s demand that philosophy be thoroughly connected to actuality? I argue that Hegel has a compelling answer to this question. Examining Hegel’s ‘Introduction’ to the 1830 *Encyclopedia*, I sketch a moderately deflationary reading of Hegel’s system, which I contrast with metaphysically inflationary readings, on the one hand, and strongly deflationary ones, on the other. On my

moderately deflationary reading, philosophy can be understood as a process of conceptual transformation of our empirical concepts which, cooperating with empirical science, conceptually grasps actuality. This reading, I suggest, better satisfies reason's demand than the alternatives and, given its compatibility with Schelling's basic insight into Hegel, warrants further development as an interpretation of Hegel's thought.

## 2. Explanation – The Schellingian Challenge

### 2.1. Approaching Schelling's Panlogism Charge

The critique of Hegel proves a common theme in Schelling's lectures in the 1830s and 40s.<sup>7</sup> Throughout these lectures, Schelling raises various criticisms of Hegel, primarily concerning his logic. Schelling challenges, for example, the validity of the logic's opening exposition (pure being, nothing becoming) and its concluding transition to *Naturphilosophie*; its pretense of being dialectically self-moving; and its assertion of presuppositionlessness. Yet keen as Schelling's objections may be when taken in isolation, it is not always clear what unifies them.

At the end of his Munich lecture on Hegel, indeed in its final sentence, Schelling clarifies that he takes the defectiveness of Hegel's system to rest on a single fundamental 'mistake' (*Mißgriff*): 'converting true relations which were true *in themselves*, namely when taken merely *logically*, into actual relations, whereby all necessity disappears from them' (HMP 160/SW I,10:161).<sup>8</sup> This is an obscure passage, but I take it as paradigmatic for Schelling's critique of Hegel. In particular, it outlines the basic commitment of Schelling's panlogist reading of Hegel: that all of Hegel's system, contrary to its intentions, is by necessity purely logical and that it errs in finding satisfaction in having only comprehended actuality, exhibiting merely logical relations between concepts, without having thereby explained it.

We can begin to clarify this charge of panlogism by considering the background of Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*. This project commences by taking up 'philosophy's relation to actuality,' which, for Schelling, can be understood in two radically distinct ways (PRR 41/PO 98). For any particular entity, philosophy can specify either *what it is* (*quid sit*) or *that it is* (*quod sit*). Schelling variously associates knowledge of the former with the entity's *essence*, concept, or nature 'in itself,' and the latter with its *existence* (*Existenz*). Originally, Schelling posits this distinction in terms of particular entities (PRR 41/PO 98.; GPP 128–29/SW II,3:57–58). However, it becomes clear in Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* that the higher purpose of this distinction is to define standpoints on actuality as a whole, not merely to particular entities. Elevated to sciences, these standpoints become Schelling's 'doubled sides' of philosophy: negative philosophy – the science of essence, pure

rational science – and positive philosophy – the science of existence, metaphysical empiricism (PRR 109–10/PO 150–51), further constituted by the philosophies of mythology and revelation.<sup>9</sup>

If we further examine negative philosophy, we notice that Schelling associates it with logic. He writes, for instance, that negative philosophy ‘is only a *philosophia ascendens*, from which one immediately realizes that it can only have a logical significance [Bedeutung]’ (GPP 196/SW II,3:151) and that it is ‘*the logic, the apriorism of empiricism*’ (PRR 102/PO 147). As ‘the logic,’ negative philosophy has four further interrelated features for Schelling.

First, as we have just seen, it is a strictly *a priori* science. However, Schelling imbues the *a priori* with a different meaning than the Kantian one, which I discuss in §2.3.

Second, its validity is merely hypothetical, in the sense that it can only tell us that *if* a thing exists, then it must have such-and-such a structure as a condition of its existence, but not that this thing exists as such (PRR 42/PO 99; GPP 131/SW II,3:61). In other words, negative philosophy or speculative logic cannot affirm the antecedent and so leaves it indeterminate whether actuality is so constituted. Schelling occasionally expresses reason’s dissatisfaction with the merely hypothetical validity of logic by reminding us that it ‘would be true even if nothing existed’ (GPP 180/SW II,3:128; cf. GPP 129–30/SW II,3:59) or ‘would be true even if nothing were to exist anywhere’ (PRR 102/PO 147). These ‘even if’ statements are intended to show the vacuity of logic in relation to actuality because they demonstrate that logic’s truth remains invariant under radical changes in actuality.

Third, logic is modally restricted to disclosing the *possibility* of actual things and their relations – it ‘just has the possible [. . .] as its object’ (HMP 134–35/SW I,10:127) or has as its content ‘*the entire actual world of possibilities*’ (PRR 80/PO 131). To be sure, the merely ‘logical significance’ that Schelling attributes to negative philosophy is more metaphysically robust than the significance of being merely logically possible, i.e. being free from contradiction, as it also demands that negative philosophy be essentially possible, i.e. that its content be possible in virtue of the essences of the things it exposit.<sup>10</sup> In the vocabulary of Schelling’s *Potenzlehre*, logic, as the ‘infinite potency of cognition,’ has its content restricted to the ‘infinite potency of being,’ the progressive hierarchy of the ways in which anything can be or ‘what is merely possible *a priori*’ (GPP 142/SW II,3:75). Within this sphere of possibility, thinking progressively unfolds this original potency as the ‘*innate content of reason*’ (PRR 43/PO 100) into a ‘*totality of potences*’ (PRR 48/PO 103) and thereby forms ‘an entirely *a priori*, closed-off, self-progressing science’ (PRR 45/PO 101).<sup>11</sup>

Finally, because logic investigates only the possibility of actual things in themselves, i.e. their essences or their ‘infinite ability to be,’ all of its propositions are ‘tautological or analytical’ and cannot synthetically extend beyond

the nature of things to their existence (PRR 64–65/PO 117). Invoking another of Schelling’s metaphors, logic demonstrates that the actual world lies in the ‘nets’ of reason but is unable to answer *how* it got into those nets or why there is something to be caught in reason’s nets at all (HMP 147/SW I,10:143). Logic’s ‘convergence with actuality’ is, in this sense, ‘*accidental*’ (PRR 102/PO 147), and reason’s demand for such a convergence calls forth positive philosophy.

## 2.2. Interpreting Schelling’s Panlogism Charge

With this background in hand, it is natural to interpret Schelling’s panlogism charge along the following lines: Hegel’s philosophy, because it is all logical, is exclusively negative philosophy; its fundamental deficiency was to have forgotten reason’s demand for the positive.

While this sketch captures the spirit of Schelling’s Hegel-critique, it is important to note that Schelling is at pains to avoid giving the impression that he criticizes Hegel for having remained solely within negative philosophy. Instead, Schelling indicates the abundance of positivity in Hegel’s system, e.g. in Hegel’s philosophy of religion, but regards Hegel as lacking the resources for justifying including the positive within it. Schelling clarifies this matter in nearly identical language in 1841–42 (PRR 88/PO 136–37) and 1842–43 (GPP 145/SW II,3:80). Contrary to what one might expect – indeed, contrary even to the expectations of Hegel’s pupils attending Schelling’s lectures – Schelling’s critique of Hegel’s system is not that it is solely negative philosophy, but rather that it expresses an extensive but illegitimate positivity: that it makes claims from within negative philosophy that can, given their extra-logical nature, only be justified by positive philosophy (cf. HMP 135/SW I,10:128).

With Schelling’s panlogism charge now in focus, we notice that Schelling is quite serious in interpreting all of Hegel’s system as logical, not merely its first part. In his Munich lectures, Schelling credits Hegel for having ‘understood’ the ‘*logical nature*’ of purely rational philosophy (HMP 134/SW I,10:126), calling Hegel’s ‘a logical philosophy’ (HMP 135/SW I,10:127). For the Munich Schelling, Hegel’s principal failure was hubris: an inability to ‘cognize’ (*erkennen*) or ‘confess’ (*bekennen*) that his philosophy was, *in toto*, merely logical, and to arrogantly subsume the positive within it (HMP 133/SW I,10:125; HMP 157–58/SW I,10:157).

Schelling’s panlogist reading of Hegel’s system becomes even more pronounced in the Berlin lectures, wherein he explicitly interprets Hegel’s philosophies of nature and spirit as logical sciences, composing an ‘absolute logic.’ Schelling’s reasoning seems to be as follows: if the science of logic is the science of *concepts as concepts* (HMP 144/SW I,10:139; PRR 77/PO 128), independent of their application to existing

things, then its domain should, for Hegel, extend to nature and spirit. This is because the sciences of nature and spirit do not ‘apply’ their concepts to existing things any more than the science of logic does; they, too, deal only with concepts. For example, the philosophy of spirit deals only with the concept of the state, not with any existing state, such as Prussia, nor does it judge whether a particular political community counts as a state (see, e.g. PR §3A/GW 14,1:25–31; §258Z/W 7:403). Consequently, the sciences of nature and spirit should be incorporated into the science of logic; or, in other words, because it everywhere deals only with concepts as concepts, Hegel should designate his whole system as logical – an ‘absolute logic’ (PRR 79/PO 129; GPP 151/SW II,3:88–89).<sup>12</sup>

What would it mean for the sciences of nature and spirit to be logic in Hegel? At least two things, according to Schelling. First, Hegel’s ‘objective logic’ would no longer correspond to the doctrines of being and essence but instead to the sciences of nature and spirit. ‘The truly objective logic,’ Schelling proclaims, ‘was laid down in the philosophies of nature and spirit; any logic treated differently was merely subjective’ (PRR 77/PO 128). Accordingly, what Hegel called logic consisted, in fact, only of subjective logic because it restricts itself to the domain of concepts pertaining to thinking as such, whereas objective logic encompasses the domains of concepts pertaining to nature and spirit.

Second, Hegel’s objective logic would require him to distinguish between ‘actually existing nature’ and ‘*a priori* nature’ (similarly for spirit) and to be satisfied with knowledge only of the *a priori* concepts governing nature *qua* possible, leaving knowledge of actually existing nature and spirit to positive science (PRR 79–80/PO 130–31). A logical science of the possible can thus incorporate a subjective and objective logic, the latter of which would exposit *a priori* nature and spirit. Schelling even sketches such an objective logic: it would ‘comprehend’ nature and spirit but not ‘explain’ them, in the sense that it would exposit the essential concepts of these domains ‘in the mode of eternity’ but not provide any account of *why* or *how* the spiritual and natural worlds exist (PRR 79–80/PO 130–31). Schelling thus adopts a more charitable attitude to Hegel’s logical philosophy in these pages: as a science of the possible, it makes an important contribution to knowledge; it is merely incomplete until supplemented by the positive philosophical sciences of mythology and revelation.

Hegel’s ‘fundamental error’ is thus *not* that he remains within negative philosophy with respect to content (GPP 145/SW II,3:80). His drive to include world history, religion, and the modern state within his system, for example, proves that his system ‘wants to be positive’ in this regard (GPP 145/SW II,3:80). Instead, Hegel’s error is *methodological*: in attempting to ‘subdue’ the positive within the negative, thereby ‘driving



the negative beyond its limits', Hegel fails to adapt his logical method to his positive subject matter (GPP 145/SW II,3:80). It is Hegel's unwillingness to renounce his merely logical method when encountering the positive that leads Hegel, in Schelling's view, to boast of 'borrowed riches rather than honorable poverty' (PRR 88/PO 136–37).

### 2.3. Explanation and the A Priori

What, then, is the methodological deficiency of purely logical philosophy? Schelling answers that although logic can *comprehend* the actual world, it cannot *explain* it. If we further ask why logic cannot explain actuality, Schelling responds that it is because logic is strictly *a priori* and that explanation must be, in some sense, *a posteriori*. Let us further examine Schelling's answers.

*Erklärung* and *Begreifen* define two kinds of philosophical explanations for Schelling. They generally map to his dualism between positive and negative philosophy: *Erklärung* causally explains the *thatness* of existence; *Begreifen* metaphysically explains the *whatness* of essence. We may say that reason makes two demands of philosophy: that it logically *comprehend* the world in its essence in such a way to be in principle compatible with human freedom and that it causally *explains* the genesis of this world as it actually exists (GPP 155/SW II,3:95). Explanation and comprehension thus express, in alternative form, Schelling's existence-essence dualism (PRR 94/PO 140–41).

Schelling's most illuminating discussion of their differences comes in an oft-quoted passage from his Munich lectures (HMP 147/SW I,10:143), in which he articulates it as consisting of two kinds of ontological dependence: the metaphysical conditions 'without' which a thing cannot exist (comprehension) and the causal conditions 'through' which it exists (explanation). We may call the first kind of ontological dependence 'what-dependence' and the second that-dependence,' as the first asserts dependence in the order of the essence, the latter in the order of existence.<sup>13</sup> Using Schelling's terminology, we can define two formulae: *Begreifen* metaphysically explains X by identifying the metaphysical conditions Y *without* which X could not be what it is. A stone cannot be what it is, for example, without it being comprehensible in terms of its quantitative and qualitative properties, such as being measurable, having a determinate existence, etc; the stone, therefore, ontologically 'what-dependes' on the quantitative and qualitative categories. The set of fundamental categories thus constitutes the 'nets' of reason because they exhaust all the possible ways a thing can be at the highest level of abstraction such that there could be no existent that 'escapes' these categories or forms of intelligibility. Actuality thus 'what-dependes' on the set of all such categories. But because these categories cannot determine anything about the

contingent and actual existence of particular things or states of affairs, pertaining only to the essences of things, their capacity as metaphysical explainers is, according to Schelling, radically incomplete.

*Erklärung*, by contrast, causally explains X by identifying the conditions Y *through* which X exists. This is a subtler notion. What Schelling seems to have in mind is that for any existing thing or phenomenon, we explain it by identifying the general causal conditions responsible for its existence in the present world. So, a stone is explained, it would seem, by there being *this* world of finite things governed by *these* laws of nature, etc. Unlike the categories, which cannot be thought to be otherwise, we *can* imagine different laws of nature, alternative worlds without stones, etc. The stone therefore ‘that-depends’ on this latter kind of conditions, and actuality ‘that-depends’ on the sum total of such conditions. The defining feature of these causal conditions is that since they are contingent, they cannot be known *a priori*, but only *a posteriori*, and must refer to ‘an actual occurrence, a happening’ (GPP 151/SW II,3:88–89). Fundamentally, the radically *a posteriori* nature of these causal conditions accounts for why ‘it is [...] impossible for pure reason alone to explain the contingent and actual features of things,’ as the contingency of these things, their features knowable only *a posteriori*, are ‘opaque to reason and in active opposition to the concept’ (ET 63/SW II,1:584).

One might think that Schelling’s conception of *Erklärung* as a *a posteriori* causal explanation comes quite close to the sort of explanation undertaken in the empirical sciences. There are indeed important similarities, and this similitude is indicated in Schelling’s designation of positive philosophy as ‘metaphysical empiricism’ (GPP 169/SW II,3:114; PRR 100/PO 145). Nonetheless, it would be a distortion of Schelling’s view to identify the two, as the empirical sciences, he clarifies, cannot explain in the required sense. This is because although the empirical sciences indeed explain actuality by investigating the causal relations between existing things, usually in terms of ‘forces,’ their explanations remain structurally deficient in two ways. First, the empirical sciences must presuppose their starting-points or basic principles (*archai*) and consequently cannot account for their purported necessity (GPP 92/SW II,3:4–5; HMP 130/SW I,10:121). Positive philosophy, by contrast, attempts to answer the questions: From where do these forces derive? What type of necessity do these forces have to exist? Second, the empirical sciences omit purposiveness from their explanations, restricting them to efficient causal relations. Positive philosophy, by contrast, asks: For what end or purpose do these forces exist? The contours of Schelling’s answers are well known: our world exists because of God’s free decision to create it, and its purposiveness derives from the necessity that this world accord with the exercise of our human freedom.

Nonetheless, the difference between positive philosophy and empirical science, or higher and lower empiricism (HMP 190/SW I,10:198; PRR 100–1/PO 145–46), should not be overstated and must be one of degree, not kind, for Schelling. That empirical scientists conduct their research with ‘religious conscientiousness’ indicates that they tacitly presuppose something akin to positive philosophy, assuming the validity of their science’s basic principle and the value of science as a human endeavor, presuppositions that can only be justified by positive philosophy, as otherwise the scientist’s devotion to the pursuit of knowledge, often at personal costs, would be inexplicable (GPP 165/SW II,3:109; PRR 99/PO 144). Moreover, the tendency of modern science to deploy invisible forces in its explanation as opposed to merely mechanical ones further indicates its progressive elevation toward positive philosophy, which also seeks ‘higher’ and ‘super-material’ causes in its explanations (PRR 290/PO 294; PRR 311/PO 311; GPP 168/SW II,3:113). ‘Philosophy can only distinguish itself from the other sciences,’ Schelling tells us, ‘by finding the *fact of the world*’ (GPPV 272); it is therefore *indistinguishable* from the other sciences with respect to its method of explanation. *Erklärung—a posteriori* explanation of existence through causes – remains a species of *philosophical* explanation only because of the generality of its *explananda*, and Schelling therefore brings philosophy much closer to empirical science than do Kant and Fichte, for example.

It is also now clear that our earlier example – the stone – is inappropriate for fully exhibiting the nature of explanation in positive philosophy, as this nature is expressed in large part by its choice of objects. In mythology, this object is the progression of consciousness through the three ‘epochs’ of pagan religion, viz., the ancient Egyptian religion, Hinduism, and the Greek Eleusinian mysteries (PRR 201–5/PO 221–25), as a *necessary process* in history; in revelation, it is the culmination of this process in the disclosure of God as the *free cause* of the world by Christianity and the Abrahamic tradition (PRR 236–40/PO 250–54). Positive philosophy thus has no interest in explaining the quotidian or the profane; it examines only phenomena of the highest spiritual significance. Schelling contends that these special phenomena grant us insight into the *modality* of existence – its transition in consciousness from being something necessitated to being freely given – that cannot be won through extra-philosophical studies of nature and history.

Returning to the deficiency of logical philosophy, we now understand that when Schelling asserts that it cannot ‘explain’ actuality but only comprehend it (PRR 80/PO 131), this holds because logical philosophy is *a priori* and is therefore unable to grasp causal relations between existing things. But what does it mean for logical philosophy to be *a priori*? At the very least, it means, as we have seen, to abstract from causal explanations between things located in space and time and to cognize objects only as objects of possible experience or their intelligible forms in the *modo aeterno* (GPP 133/SW II,3:64). So

far, Schelling generally agrees with Kant on the meaning of the *a priori*. However, Schelling ultimately rejects Kant's definition: '*Kant called any cognition a priori that is drawn merely from the nature of the faculty of cognition. With even greater justification, we call any knowledge a priori that develops from the nature of the infinite potency of being. [...] Cognizing a priori means not cognizing from existence, so as to presuppose the existence of the object.* Its starting-point is rather that which is the *prius* of all being' (PRR 64/PO 117).<sup>14</sup>

While it is not obvious in this passage, Schelling intends to diverge quite radically from Kantian apriority as he understands it.<sup>15</sup> According to Schelling, the Kantian *a priori* refers to the *cognitive source* of a judgment, namely, the faculty of cognition, and is known *absolutely* independently of experience, bearing universality and necessity. Similarly, the Kantian *a posteriori* pertains to judgments deriving at least in part from the faculty of sensibility, and these judgments depend on experience. By correlating the *a priori* with a particular faculty, Schelling notes, Kant interprets the 'a' in *a priori* as a '*terminus a quo*': the starting point from which a cognition originates (GPP 180/SW II,3:129–30). Consequently, the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* are, for Schelling's Kant, properties of judgments themselves, not properties of their demonstrations or justifications (Sala and Kabeshkin 2022, 800n6, 805–6). Additionally, the *a priori* and *a posteriori* must be mutually exclusive properties for Kant, since an *a priori* judgment must have its source solely in the faculty of cognition and cannot be mixed with another faculty. So, for example, the judgment that  $7 + 5 = 12$  is *a priori* for Kant because it expresses a cognition that has its source solely in the faculty of cognition. Although one can also demonstrate this judgment empirically, this empirical demonstrability does not alter the origin of the cognition expressed in the judgment.

For Schelling, by contrast, the *a priori* designates not the cognitive source but the *manner* in which a judgment is known or demonstrated.<sup>16</sup> A *priori* cognition moves 'per prius,' from God or the infinite potency of being to actuality, and a *posteriori* cognition 'per posterius,' from the actual consequences of this prius to possible being (GPP 180/SW II,3:129–30). It follows that the same judgment can be known *a priori* and *a posteriori*, that is, known according to its consequences and known according to its inhering in the prius.<sup>17</sup> Thus, *a priori* knowledge need not signify experience-independence for Schelling.

In this way, Schelling unambiguously places experience closer to the center of philosophy than does Kant. Although neither positive nor negative philosophy '*starts out*' (*ausgeht*) from experience, in the sense of a *terminus a quo*, each science goes '*toward*' (*zugeht*) it (GPP 179/SW II,3:128; PRR 102/PO 147), seeking either to find itself 'confirmed' in experience (negative philosophy) or 'grow' itself in experience

(positive philosophy). Schelling's relativization of the *a priori* thus accounts for his perplexing designation of negative and positive philosophy as, respectively, 'a priori empiricism' (*apriorischer Empirismus*) and 'empirical apriorism' (*empirischer Apriorismus*) (GPP 181/SW II,3:130). Broadly speaking, each science is both *a priori* and *a posteriori*, depending on whether it is taken from the standpoint of the world or being or from God or the concept. For example (GPP 181/SW II,3:130; PRR 103–4/PO 147–48; Kierkegaard 2010, 325), positive philosophy is, on the one hand, an *a priori* science from the perspective of the world because it starts out from the absolute prius or from being which is absolutely external to thought, the '*most transcendental being*' (*schlechterdings transscendente Seyn*) (GPP 179/SW II,3:127) or the '*absolute-transcendental*' (*Absolut-Transzendenten*) (PRR 101/PO 146); but, on the other hand, it is an *a posteriori* science from the perspective of God or the concept because it is known *per posterius*, from its consequences, not *per prius* since there is no further prius from which the absolute prius could be cognized.<sup>18</sup> Schelling also diverges from Kant in locating freedom on the side of the *a posteriori*. A free act, Schelling contends, can only be cognized *a posteriori* as a contingent but causally related happening in the actual world; any *a priori* cognition of freedom would, on Schelling's view, have to be necessitated by the progression inherent in the infinite potency of being, and so would refute the very freedom it attempts to cognize. If one had to decide, then, between rationalism and empiricism, one would choose the latter, as only it preserves the capacity for human freedom (HMP 190/SW I,10:198–99).

Summarizing Schelling's theory of *Erklärung*, we can say that explanation consists in identifying *a posteriori* the causal conditions *through* which certain phenomena of philosophical interest, such as God and human freedom, are known to exist. This activity is one of causal reconstruction: from the actual consequences of the phenomena, we establish the set of conditions on which the phenomenon 'that-depends.' Merely logical philosophy comprehends the same object or phenomenon by conceptually reconstructing the necessary conditions of its intelligibility, upon which it 'what-depends,' which are also the conditions of its possible experience. Logical philosophy fails to explain, in the sense of *erklären*, because although it is oriented toward experience, it unfolds only what inheres in the potency of being, excluding actual causal relations, which can only be cognized *a posteriori* by going 'beyond reason' to experience (GPP 196/SW II,3:152). Yet without an explanation of these higher phenomena, reason remains unsatisfied, and Hegelian philosophy gives way to the Schellingian.

### 3. Comprehension – The Hegelian Rejoinder

#### 3.1. *Defending Hegel: Towards a Moderately Deflationary Reading*

At this juncture, commentators have tended to defend Hegel against Schelling's critique in one of two ways.

One option has been to defend Hegel by *inflating* his metaphysics, arguing that it is a science of being itself or of actual being, not merely possible being. On this defense, Hegelian concepts are existentially committed and thereby vitiate Schelling's panlogist charge of the 'empty logical' (GPP 160/SW II,3:101). This is the route taken by Houlgate (1999) and, to a lesser degree, Rush (2014).<sup>19</sup> For Houlgate, Hegel's logic commences with an 'intellectual intuition of being' in which 'thought by itself [...] bring[s] being as such before the mind' (125–26). The ensuing thought-determinations of the logic are thus also the unfolding determinations of being, not qua *Potenzen* or progressive possibilities of being, as they are in Schelling's negative philosophy, nor as the forms of the intelligibility of an object of possible experience, but as its actual determination, i.e. what being *is*. Similarly, for Rush, the difference between Schelling and Hegel comes down to their disagreement over the 'nature of concepts' (225). Whereas Schelling maintains with Kant a strict separation between intuition and concept, Hegel dialectically intermingles concept and intuition in his notion of *Denken* (219). Hegel's logic, then, as a system of concepts, involves a kind of 'epistemically charged variant of intellectual intuition' of being insofar as these analyzed concepts, simply insofar as they are concepts, also involve intuition of being or that which exists (220). For Houlgate and Rush, Schelling's panlogist interpretation of Hegel grossly distorts him, and the disagreement between the two idealists should be understood as a metametaphysical one, concerning the method of metaphysics: whether it is possible to commence logical philosophy with an intellectual intuition of being.

The second route taken by friends of Hegel is *deflationary*. It involves more or less accepting Schelling's panlogist reading of Hegel but contending that this project nonetheless satisfies philosophical appetite. This strategy is adopted by White (1983, 1994) and Brinkmann (1976), both inspired by Hartmann's 'non-metaphysical' reading of Hegel. The key feature uniting these deflationary readings of Hegel is that Hegel's system, as a system of categories, *abstains* from making 'existential statements' about that which might be predicated by these categories (Hartmann 1972, 118; 1966, 227–28) and thus eschews the intellectual intuition of being supposed in the metaphysical readings of Hegel.

Both Brinkmann's and White's deflationary defenses of Hegel follow the same argumentative strategy: first, to *concede* that Hegel cannot answer Schelling's 'why-question' (Brinkmann 1976, 206; White 1994, 18); second, to take the *offensive*, showing that Schelling himself cannot adequately

answer his question in positive philosophy and that therefore his critique, insofar as it advances an alternative system whose superiority rests on providing such an answer, cannot be admitted (Brinkmann 1976, 207–8; White 1994, 18–19). For White, this attack consists in classifying Schelling's why-question as among reason's transcendental illusions *à la* Kant's transcendental dialectic, and, for Brinkmann, it consists in recognizing the structural impossibility of the pure *Daß* to lie outside thinking as any account of this *Daß* ultimately becomes a matter of thought.<sup>20</sup>

I call Brinkmann's and White's defensive strategy *strongly* deflationary. It is strong because it takes Hegel to have *no commitment* to answering Schelling's why-something question at all – it is simply an ill-posed question. Nor does it take Hegel to have any *resources* for answering it, as, according to it, Hegel's categories bear no necessary connection to existing things.<sup>21</sup> Against this strategy, I want to counterpose a *moderately* deflationary one. Such a defense grants the validity of Schelling's question as a matter of empirical inquiry and aims to support its investigation, albeit not within philosophy but indirectly through empirical science, and so not to Schelling's satisfaction. But our criterion for argumentative success is not Schelling's satisfaction but reason's, and in this latter regard, the moderately deflationary defense, unlike the strong one, suffices for meeting reason's demand for a thorough-going connection between philosophy and actuality by guaranteeing the non-vacuity of its categories.

But before sketching my alternative defense of Hegel, it is worthwhile to address what I take to be the principal challenges facing the two available strategies.<sup>22</sup> Starting with the inflationary reading, two connected issues stand out. First, if Hegel indeed commences philosophy with an immediate intuiting of being, this would seem to be an implausible metaphysical position for precisely the reasons that motivated Hegel to abandon *Identitätsphilosophie*, in which knowledge of the absolute is immediate, 'like a shot from a pistol' (PhG ¶27/GW 9:24), and to develop his circular form of systematic justification. In other words, intellectual intuition of being, if it is to be capable of Schellingian explanation, lapses into pre-critical metaphysics. Second and more seriously, I cannot see why, on such an inflationary reading, Hegel could deny philosophy the capacity to deduce the existence of particular finite things, such as Krug's pen. If thought immediately grasps being as such and unfolds being in its determinacy, and there is nothing in being that exceeds thought, then what halts the dialectic at relatively abstract determinations of being, preventing it from unfolding more concrete ones? Hegel would be in need of a principled account of why certain aspects of being are excluded from its systematic exposition. While Houlgate rightly acknowledges that Hegel does not *claim* for philosophy the capacity to deduce particular things, his reading of Hegel, in my view, cuts off any justification for this restriction (Houlgate 1999, 118).

By contrast, strongly deflationary readings face the threat of emptiness. That is, deflationary readings of Hegel's metaphysics struggle to account for how philosophy connects up with actuality with the desired thoroughness. The purely categorial and *a priori* account of thinking lapses, it would seem, into a merely regulative construal insofar as it no longer guarantees the determinacy of existing objects, extending our cognition of them, but merely organizes our thinking about them.<sup>23</sup> Or, put differently, if philosophy consists in the 'reconstruction' of the basic categories of thinking in 'a priori form' (Hartmann 1972, 104), then there can be no corresponding guarantee that the set of objects subsumable under a given category is not empty. Indeed, it seems possible that if the reconstruction is truly *a priori*, then *all* the reconstructed categories could be extensionally empty, contrary to the view's stated intentions (Hartmann 1972, 110), even if, as Hartmann contends (and Schelling concedes), nothing that exists could exceed the true categorial framework altogether (Hartmann 1972, 108; 1966, 239). But such a possibility of emptiness, even as an abstract possibility, is anathema to the thorough-going connection between philosophy and actuality that inspires Hegel, a connection in which 'philosophy [...] knows only what *is*; it does not know what only *ought* to be and this *is not there*' (EL §38A/W 8:108; cf. PhG ¶47/GW 9:34). As a consequence, proponents of strongly deflationary defenses of Hegel usually concede that Hegel cannot answer Schelling's why-something question. But by admitting that *if* Schelling's positive philosophy could satisfactorily answer this question, then Schelling's position would indeed be preferable to Hegel's, strongly deflationary defenses unnecessarily render the superiority of Hegel's standpoint dependent on Schelling's failure.

In sum, while inflationary defenses enable Hegel to 'explain' actuality, they do so at the cost of rendering Hegel's system implausible as a first-order philosophical position, whereas deflationary defenses, attractive as they might otherwise be, provide a form of comprehension too disconnected from actuality. It is worth noting that although inflationary defense strategies involve *metaphysical* disagreement, i.e. disagreement concerning a first-order metaphysical problem, they, along with deflationary strategies, primarily have the character of being *metametaphysical*. That is, these strategies are primarily concerned with the *aims* and *methodology* of metaphysics rather than its answers to first-order metaphysical questions (Tahko 2015, 5). On the inflationary defense, Schelling and Hegel's disagreement turns on *method*, namely our capacity to intellectually intuit being, and therefore concerns the epistemology of the methodology of metaphysics. On the deflationary defense, Schelling and Hegel share the *aim* of connecting philosophy to actuality, but they disagree about this aim's success criteria (explanation for Schelling, comprehension for Hegel).



In the space remaining, I will outline a moderately deflationary defense of Hegel, one which preserves the idea that Hegel's system is nothing but a theory of categories but alleviates worries about the system's lack of existential commitments, i.e. the possibility of its emptiness. This moderately deflationary defense differs from the strong ones because it requires *proving* that the categories are not existentially empty.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Hegel provides a *partial* answer to Schelling's question and therefore need not abandon this line of inquiry entirely to Schelling's positive philosophy. Yet a moderately deflationary Hegel also avoids commencing philosophy with the intellectual intuition of being and so avoids Krug-style objections that his system should deduce the existence of particular things from pure thinking.

### 3.2. Comprehending Cognition

I focus my moderately deflationary reading of Hegel on his account of comprehending cognition (*begreifendes Erkennen*) or comprehending thought (*begreifendes Denken*), which Hegel identifies with philosophy as such. I cannot defend it in full. I aim only to show two things. First, on such a reading, one need not reduce Hegel's system of thought-determinations into a purely *a priori* system, as Hartmann assumes (1972, 103; 1966, 238–39). This thesis remains true even granting Schelling's panlogist interpretation. Second, by abandoning apriority in his conception of comprehending cognition, Hegel ensures that the categories are not existentially empty, resolving Schelling's worry about the 'emptiness' of purely logical philosophy. Instead, comprehending cognition apprehends its content by conceptually transforming *representation*, that is, by transforming what is already known in empirical science<sup>25</sup> into the form of thinking or explicitly conceptual form.

Let us begin with Hegel's identification of philosophy with comprehending cognition. Most notably, this identification occurs throughout the 'Introduction' to the 1830 *Encyclopedia* (§§1–18) and explicitly in §2 (W 8:41–42). However, similar identifications are made, *inter alia*, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (PhG ¶60/W 3:57), the *Philosophy of Right* (PR 11/W 7:22; PR 21/W 7:27), the *Science of Logic* (SL 23/GW 21:27; SL 738/GW 12:239), and elsewhere in the *Encyclopedia* (EL §36Z/W 8:104; EL §160Z/W 8:307; EN §246Z/W 9:22; EG §379Z/W 10:16; EG §416Z/W 10:204; EG §449A/W 10:255). With this notion, Hegel aims to express that philosophy, including logic, constitutes a form of conceptual transformation or 'Veränderung' of our representations acquired in experience and empirical science (EL §3A/W 8:44; EL §9A/W 8:53). After acknowledging that philosophy 'presupposes familiarity with its objects,' Hegel tells us at the outset of the *Encyclopedia* that 'only by passing through representation and by turning towards it, does thinking spirit progress to thinking cognition and

comprehension' (EL §1/W 8:41). To simplify, comprehension consists in elevating the content of representation into the universal form of thinking, a process which, although it necessarily modifies this representational content on pain of dialectical one-sidedness, nonetheless preserves its referent and basic meaning. Hegel also calls this process *Nachdenken* or 'thinking over' to underscore that philosophy merely manifests the inherent rationality latent in our representational activity, both theoretically and practically (EL §2A/W 8:42; EL §7/W 8:49; EL §9/W 8:52). Because of philosophy's conceptual-transformative nature, its results depend on the logically antecedent successful activity of empirical science, and this dependence is what secures its adequate connection to being, not intellectual intuition.

The chief consequence of Hegel's identification of philosophy with comprehending cognition is that it posits knowledge to be the outcome of a cooperative division of intellectual labor between philosophy and empirical science.<sup>26</sup> The theories, laws, genera, and universals discovered by empirical science (EL §7A/W 8:50; §9A/W 8:52), which it arrives at through an 'analysis' of experience (EL §38Z/W 8:109–10), serve as the inputs or subject-matter of philosophical reconstruction. Empirical science thus 'prepares' [Verarbeiten] the 'content of the particular so that it can be taken up into philosophy' (EL §12A/W 8:57–58; cf. EL §117Z/W 8:241) and thereby supplies the desired guarantee that philosophy's reconstructed categorical scheme cannot be empty. It is also worth emphasizing the generality of this division of intellectual division of labor. Because Hegel's identification of philosophy with comprehending cognition occurs in the *Encyclopedia's* 'Introduction', it pertains univocally to all of the philosophical sciences (logic, nature, and spirit), not just the *Realphilosophie*. This univocity explains why in the 'Introduction' Hegel takes himself to have sketched the relationship between empirical sciences and philosophy as a whole, which, as Hegel reminds us later in the *Encyclopedia*, addresses 'the relation of philosophy to the empirical' in general (EN §248A/GW 20:236).<sup>27</sup>

This intellectual division of labor at the foundation of Hegelian science also helps clarify the murky relation between philosophy and the idea or the rational structure of actuality in Hegel's system. It is a common theme in the literature on Schelling's Hegel-critique to question whether philosophy goes 'beyond' the idea in transitioning to nature, as Hegel sometimes appears to suggest (Dews 2022, 154). But these suggestions are deceptive; although this transition indeed goes beyond the *logical* idea, it does not go beyond the idea *as such*. This is because, for Hegel, each philosophical science *is* the science of the idea *taken in a particular modality*: in itself (logic), in its externality (nature), and in its return to itself (spirit). Hegel persists on this point (EL §18/W 8:63–64; GW 13:22). There can really be no question of *Naturphilosophie* going beyond the idea for Hegel, but only overcoming

one of its modalities. The self-externalized idea is still the idea (EN §247/W 9:24).

However, there remains a systematic ambiguity within this vicinity. While there can be no doubt that, for Hegel, the idea is the sole content of philosophy (EL §6A/W 8:49; SL 735/GW 12:236), we may still wonder about sense-experience and non-philosophical science – do these, or their field of objects, lie outside the idea? If so, this would seemingly place contingent features of our world – the sixty-seven species of parrots (SL 605/GW 12:107) – outside of the idea, resisting it, and the Hegelian idea would indeed contain only the essences of things, not their existence, just as Schelling supposes. Hegel even names this extra-philosophical content the ‘positive’ to indicate that, within sense-experience and empirical science, the ‘determinations of concrete existence [...] are determined by external coincidence and playfulness rather than by reason’ (EL §16A/W 8:61–62; cf. PR §3/W 7:34).<sup>28</sup> But it would be a mistake to conclude that because the ‘positive’ is *outside of philosophy*, it also remains *outside the idea* for Hegel or is somehow irrational, impenetrable to reason. The inference instead runs the other way: philosophy alone cannot exhaust the idea, and empirical science *must also be part of the idea*, even given the radical contingency of its subject matter. The fully rational structure of the world, in other words, cannot be grasped without empirical science, given that philosophy consists of ‘thinking over’ this ‘prepared’ content. While philosophy concerns solely the idea, it does not exhaust it. And because philosophy on its own does not exhaust the idea, it must cooperate with empirical science if it wishes to comprehend the complete rational structure of existing things.

That the finite – the realm of external and contingent things – must be immanent to the idea can be further seen from its connection to Hegel’s systematic positions. Most notably, this connection underlies Hegel’s inversion of the Aristotelian adage that nothing arises in the intellect that was not first in the senses, in which Hegel equally affirms that ‘there is nothing in sensation that has not been in the intellect’ (EL §8A/W 8:51). Sense-experience is, for Hegel, already implicitly conceptual activity or thinking, and therefore that which occurs merely for sense-experience, i.e. the finite, cannot exceed thought.<sup>29</sup>

These threads come together, for example, in the ‘Introduction’ to the *Philosophy of Nature* (EN §§245–52). In §246, Hegel addresses the relation between *Naturphilosophie* and empirical physics, reminding us that, like all philosophical science, *Naturphilosophie* is an exercise in comprehending cognition or ‘comprehending consideration’ (*begreifendes Betrachtung*) cooperating with the empirical science by transforming its theoretical notions into the form of the concept (W 9:15). Because philosophy deals with finite objects only insofar as it consists in conceptually transforming the

empirical-scientific universals necessary for cognizing them, it does not itself causally explain these objects but leaves this task to empirical science, without thereby implying that actual nature and spirit are ‘beyond’ the idea (EN §250A/W 9:35).

This division of labor that Hegel sees between philosophical and empirical science, in which they work ‘hand in hand’ (GW 24,1:490), further informs his second response to Krug in the *Encyclopedia*, twenty-five years later.<sup>30</sup> Hegel’s response to Krug’s demand that philosophy deduce his pen is *not* that philosophy has *nothing* to say about its existence, as strongly deflationary readings suggest. Instead, Hegel offers a more modest response: on the one hand, philosophy has ‘more important things to comprehend,’ such as the universals of empirical science and the infinite objects particular to philosophy, such as God, spirit, and freedom (EL §8/W 8:51); on the other hand, philosophy nonetheless already ‘indicates’ how to fully comprehend the finite by distilling a categorial structure from actuality itself, thereby *partially* comprehending finite things.<sup>31</sup> On the moderately deflationary reading, Hegel thus restricts comprehension to the categorial structure of actuality without having to draw a line, seemingly arbitrarily, between what is an abstract (*a priori*) subject-matter, on the one hand, and that which is concrete (*a posteriori*), on the other, as it is usually glossed on such readings. Hegel thus does not dismiss *fully* comprehending finite things, or, in Schelling’s vocabulary, causally explaining them.<sup>32</sup> But to do so is to expand one’s horizon beyond just philosophy. Hegel, then, provides not a metaphysical but a *metametaphysical* response to Krug concerning the proper demands to be placed on philosophy. And this is equally the case in his response to Schelling.

### 3.3. Comprehension Contra Schelling

We are now in a position to see how Hegel’s identification of philosophy with comprehending cognition, on the moderately deflationary reading I have sketched, responds to Schelling’s critique that merely logical philosophy cannot provide an *a posteriori* causal explanation for *why* there is something rather than nothing. Unlike Krug, Schelling demands that philosophy deduce not a single finite thing but the existence of the world as such. To be sure, Schelling shows no skepticism concerning the world’s existence; rather, he seeks an explanation for its coming to be, which, because it could very well have not existed (GPP 129/SW II,3:59), its existence cannot be a ‘necessary truth’ (ET 58/SW II,1:577). A moderately deflated Hegel can help himself to two sorts of answers to Schelling’s ‘despairing’ question, depending on whether one understands the world as a finite object or an infinite one.

If one understands the world as a finite thing – as, say, the sum total of existing things – and wishes to causally explain its existence, then Hegel can provide a ‘naturalized’ or empirical-scientific answer. Hegel can happily admit the cosmogony developed in the best of the empirical sciences (e.g. the Big Bang) as an *a posteriori* causal explanation of the world’s existence. This is, then, Hegel’s Krug-response writ large, and from the standpoint of finite causality, it is indeed the best one can do. Unlike inflationary readings of Hegel, the deflationary ones need not deny the relative validity of empirical-scientific causal explanations, as philosophy has justified the use of its categories *in this context* through ‘critique’: expositing their ‘meaning’ (*Bedeutung*) and ‘value’ (*Wert*) in and for themselves (SL 42/GW 21:49; EL §41/W 8:113–14; EL §3/W 8:44), including the meaning of categories such as ‘existence,’ ‘causality,’ and ‘nothing.’ Insofar as Schelling’s why-question remains within the realm of finite causality, Hegel can outsource its answer to empirical science and its manner of adjudication, just as in other cases in which one seeks to causally explain a finite object or state of affairs.

While it is apparently obvious that a naturalized answer would fail to satisfy Schelling, it is worth recalling that Schelling’s notion of a ‘higher’ cause, accessible only philosophically or to a ‘higher’ empiricism, indicates not a difference in kind but only in degree, primarily with respect to supersensible causes.<sup>33</sup> These being granted, positive philosophy must be tested like any empirical hypothesis and is subject to similar kinds of empirical-scientific scrutiny.<sup>34</sup> Given that contemporary empirical-scientific explanation proceeds almost entirely from supersensible causes, there emerges an odd kinship between Schelling’s *explanandum* and the former’s *explanans*. Nevertheless, Hegel acknowledges that empirical science omits ‘infinite objects’ from its purview, and insofar Schelling wishes to avoid treating the world as a finite object, we must rise to the level of philosophy, where we encounter Hegel’s second answer to Schelling’s why-something question.

This second answer, occurring within philosophy, is already familiar from the strongly deflationary readings. It concerns the forms of the world’s intelligibility or its rational structure. Since we are taking the world as an infinite object, i.e. as a category, there can be no talk of its causal genesis but only of its conceptual genesis, either out of thinking itself or out of transforming the notions of empirical science. Philosophy answers the ‘why-something’ question in this regard by dialectically exhibiting the meaning of the category ‘world,’ and delimiting its legitimate uses in questions such as ‘Why does the world exist?’ It provides, in other words, the categorial framework in which such empirical-scientific questions can be asked and investigated. Strongly deflationary readings thus correctly observe that Hegel, at best, indirectly answers Schelling’s ‘why-something’ question, expressing a kind of quietism.<sup>35</sup> But, on the moderately deflationary reading, Hegel’s philosophical quietism entails neither that no direct answer to the

question can be given *at all* nor that what is being asked lies outside the idea, but only that its answer must also involve extra-philosophical investigations, explanation in addition to comprehension. In other words, Hegel's system provides a principled account of why Schelling's question cannot be answered within philosophy yet does not denounce it as a transcendental illusion but instead supports its investigation within empirical science, aided by philosophy.

Again, Schelling would obviously remain unsatisfied with our response. But we can now put into question his reticence. Underlying Schelling's why-something question is the metametaphysical demand that philosophy establish a thorough-going connection with actuality, that it step out of pure thinking and come to grips with nature and history without lapsing into pre-critical metaphysics. As we have seen, for Schelling, this connection requires that philosophy not only comprehend the essence of possible things but also explain the actually existing world as it has developed in nature and history; for Hegel, on the moderately deflationary reading I have proposed, it demands that the categories not merely be possibly instantiated but, with the aid of empirical science, are known to be so. Inflationary and strongly deflationary interpretations of Hegel's system indeed appear unlikely to meet this metametaphysical demand. However, on the moderately deflationary reading of Hegel's system I have sketched, one which grants Schelling's premise that Hegel's philosophy is logical throughout, Hegel does meet it. Given the insight and influence of Schelling's critique of Hegel, moderately deflationary readings of Hegel's system should therefore be given further consideration in interpretations of his thought.

## Notes

1. Abbreviations used: EL = Hegel (2010a); EN = Hegel (2004); ET = Schelling (1990); FO = Schelling (2004); GPP = Schelling (2007); GW = Hegel (1968); HMP = Schelling (1994); MW = Hegel (2002); PhG = Hegel (2018); PO = Schelling (1977); PR = Hegel (1991); PRR = Schelling (2020); SL = Hegel (2010b); SW = Schelling (1858); W = Hegel (1986).
2. This is not to say that Kierkegaard abandons Schelling entirely. See Kosch (2010, 122–38).
3. Schelling's critique of Hegel emerges only in his late philosophy, which begins roughly with his Munich lectures, *System der Weltalter* (1827–28). Accordingly, in this article I examine only Schelling's late philosophy. See also note 5 below.
4. See Ruge (1848, 146–52).
5. Arguably, German scholarship, such as Fuhmans' (1940) and Schulz's (1955), had already articulated a more nuanced understanding of Schelling's Hegel-critique. However, in this article, I focus primarily on the Anglophone reception of the late Schelling.
6. McGrath (2021, vii, 87) also decenters logic in Schelling's Hegel-critique.

7. I restrict my discussion of Schelling to his three introductory lecture courses: 1833–34 (HMP/SW I,10:1-200), 1841–41 or the *Paulus Nachschrift* (PRR/PO), and 1842–43 (GPP/SW II,3:1–174). While Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* extends beyond these texts, his critique of Hegel is generally confined to them (see McGrath 2021, 124n49).
8. Elsewhere, Schelling similarly contrasts 'the relations which objects take on in mere thinking' – a 'logical process' – with 'existence, that which actually exists' – a 'real process' (HMP 133/SW I,10:125; HMP 136/SW I,10:128; PRR 44/PO 101; PRR 83/PO 132).
9. Schelling's assertions about the relation between the 'two philosophies' are inconsistent, but this issue is inessential for my purposes. See Brinkmann (1976, 123–24).
10. Engels (2010, 236; 1967, 217) already observes that Schelling's negative philosophy must bear a metaphysical modality stronger than mere logical possibility but weaker than real possibility (i.e. that its content be possible in virtue of actually existing things). The former requirement makes negative philosophy 'empty and hollow,' since it would encompass any non-contradictory concept, while the latter renders positive philosophy 'superfluous,' since negative philosophy would already exhaust and contain only what is actual in nature and spirit.
11. On Schelling's *Potenzlehre*, see Dews (2022, 179–85); McGrath (2021, 71–86); Beach (1994, 116–36).
12. As Engels (2010, 183; 1967, 166) reports Schelling: 'Overall, one cannot conceive why logic is put first in the *Encyclopedia*, instead of permeating and animating the entire cycle.'
13. These terms, what- and that-dependence, come from Kreines (2020, 25). They closely align with 'essential' and 'existential' ontological dependence in contemporary metaphysics (Tahko 2015, 94–104).
14. Elsewhere, Schelling further criticizes 'Kant's doctrine of the *a priori* concepts' (HMP 104/SW I,10:86).
15. In this paragraph, I draw on Sala and Kabeshkin (2022).
16. In an early writing, Schelling explicitly differentiates his demonstrative view of the *a priori* from Kant's: '[T]he whole of our knowledge consists of the judgments of experience. These judgments become *a priori* principles when we become conscious of them as necessary, and thus every judgment, whatever its content may be, may be raised to that dignity, insofar as the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* judgments is not at all, as many people may have imagined, one originally cleaving to the judgments themselves, but is a distinction made solely *with respect to our knowing*, and the *kind* of our knowledge of these judgments, so that every judgment which is merely historical for me—i.e. a judgment of experience – becomes, notwithstanding, an *a priori* principle as soon as I arrive, whether directly or indirectly, at insight into its internal necessity' (FO 198/SW I,3:278; see Sala and Kabeshkin 2022, 807).
17. In this regard, Schelling appears to follow Fichte, who already relativized apriority in the *First Introduction* and the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*: 'For a full-blown idealism, *a priori* and *a posteriori* are not two different things, but are one and the same thing, simply looked at from two different sides, and they can be distinguished from each other only in terms of the different means one employs in order to arrive at

each' (Fichte 1994, 32); '[W]hat is *a priori* (in the Kantian sense) and what is *a posteriori* are entirely the same – merely viewed from different sides' (Fichte 1992, 381).

18. Negative philosophy, as the 'apriorism of the empirical' (*Apriorismus des Empirischen*) (GPP 181/SW II,3:130; PRR 102/PO 147), inverts this distinction: it is *a posteriori* relative to the world or being but *a priori* relative to God or the concept.
19. Some commentators even contend that a meaningful comparison between Hegel and Schelling is possible only on the assumption of a traditionally 'metaphysical' reading of Hegel (Rush 2014, 227n22; Dews 2022, 3–6, 11–12).
20. As Schelling acknowledges, 'against the pure *Daß*, thinking immediately rises up and asks for the *what* or for the *concept*' (GPP 211/SW II,3:173).
21. Some inflationary readings of Hegel also dismiss Schelling's why-something question and the existential commitment of the categories. See Kreines (2020, 35).
22. Of course, many commentators bent towards Schelling find his critique of Hegel to be successful. See Bowie (1993); Tritten (2012); McGrath (2021); Bruno (2020); Dews (2022). But my aim in this article is to defend Hegel from Schelling's attack.
23. In line with deflationary commentators, apriority here bears its traditional and Kantian-absolute sense, i.e. as experience-independence, not in its Schellingian-relative one.
24. As Hartmann qualifies (1972), category theory or ontology is not *incompatible* with existential commitments, it simply does not require them (118). However, in my view if Hegel is to defend himself against Schelling, his system must entail some existential commitment on pain of emptiness.
25. In what follows, I use 'empirical science' as shorthand for the non-philosophical sciences and sense-experience in general. Hegel's 'philosophy of science' actually contains a threefold distinction between representations, thoughts, and concepts, but the nature of the first transformative moment of representations into thoughts by empirical science is immaterial for my argument here.
26. See Renault (2019, 34–38, 42–43); Mooren and Rojek (2015, 68, 92–93); Buchdahl (1993, 62, 70).
27. Dunphy (2024) challenges the univocity of Hegel's account of comprehending cognition or thinking in the 'Introduction.' According to Dunphy, this account pertains only to theoretical spirit or Hegel's psychology, not to logic, which operates with a wholly independent and non-psychological notion thinking (208–9). Hegel's logical account of thinking, on Dunphy's view, thus follows a fundamentally different method than that proposed in the 'Introduction,' one which enables Hegel's logic to achieve *a priori* knowledge in the traditional, non-Schellingian sense. However, Dunphy's interpretation faces two significant challenges. First, in the many passages where Hegel identifies philosophy with comprehending cognition, he never qualifies this identification as pertaining only to the philosophies of nature and spirit. Rather, the context of these passages suggests that they apply univocally to all the philosophical sciences. Second, Dunphy's positing of a methodological dualism between logic and *Realphilosophie* contradicts a fundamental feature of Hegel's system, namely, that Hegel appears committed to, and really does



follow, a single unitary method throughout all of the philosophical sciences. Given these issues with Dunphy's competing interpretation, it seems to me best to take Hegel at his word: that *all* of philosophy can be classified as comprehending cognition, and therefore participates in the intellectual division of labor described in the *Encyclopedia's* 'Introduction.'

28. On the positivity of empirical science for Hegel, see Mooren and Rojek (2015, 83–86).
29. This dialectical interplay of experience and concept in comprehending cognition also guides Hegel in abandoning the a priori/a posteriori distinction (SL 42/GW 21:49). See Rand (2021, 4–9).
30. 'Mr. Krug once challenged natural philosophy [. . .] to accomplish the feat of deducing *only* his pen. - One could have given him hope for this achievement and respectful glorification of *his* pen, when one day science would be so far advanced and at peace with everything [. . .] that there would be nothing more important to comprehend' (EN §250A/W 9:35). Hegel added this footnote on Krug in the 1827 edition.
31. 'The philosophy of nature *indicates* [hinweist] to him how he has to comprehend such organizations as an oak, a rose, a dog or cat; and if he has the desire and the urge to contract his own human individuality to the level of the life of a rose or a dog in order to *fully* comprehend their living being and grasp it completely, then he may make the attempt, but he cannot expect others to do it. [. . .] But to this end he must completely renounce the demand for a deduction of his pen, and not trouble his head any more about idealism's ignorance in such matters' (MW 232–33/W 2:195, emphasis added).
32. '[J]ustice must be done to finite things as such inasmuch as they are to be considered to be other than ultimate and to point beyond themselves. [. . .] [I]n order to cognize this, one first has to get involved with their positive content.' (EL §205Z/W 8:362).
33. This is why Schelling asserts that the 'positive system [. . .] will flow together' with empirical science (HMP 191/SW I,10:200).
34. The status of positive philosophy as an empirical-scientific hypothesis is underscored by McGrath (2021, 136) and its ineliminable provisionality by Bruno (2020, 202).
35. 'The questions which philosophy does not answer are answered in that they should not be so posed' (MW 248/W 2:547; cf. EN §268Z/W 9:81–82).

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