

SCHELLING'S ACCOUNT OF PRIMAL NATURE IN *THE AGES OF THE WORLD*

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In this paper I aim to show how Schelling's use of the law of contradiction and his employment of the concept of the unitary principle to overcome the problem of contradiction entails certain difficulties from the very start. Due to the complexity of *The Ages of the World*, I will concentrate on just the beginning of this work. This should be sufficient to bring out the problems involved. In the course of my exposition and critique I will put forward an amendment to Schelling's concept of the unity which, I believe, will render his thought in this text more coherent. As can be ascertained by the title of this paper, my main concern will be with the concept of primal nature in *The Ages of the World*. I will first of all explain why Schelling entitles this work as *The Ages of the World* and introduce the term "primal nature." I do not intend to criticize the reasons for which Schelling decides that any investigation must be grounded in primal nature. For the sake of argument I will merely expound these reasons and then take them as given.

So, what is "primal nature" and why does Schelling entitle his work as *The Ages of the World*? On the opening page of *The Ages of the World* Schelling claims that:

The conception of science [*Wissenschaft*] hitherto accepted was that it is a mere consequence and development of its own concepts and thoughts. The true conception is that it is the development of a living, actual essence [*Wesen*], which is represented in it.¹

In this passage, then, Schelling is saying that science, in its development, is traditionally thought of as a progression of its own concepts and ideas. Science uses one schema of interpretation and over time its framework of interpretation will change. However, he says, this continual development within science of its own concepts and thoughts, when properly understood, should really be seen as an illustration of how thought itself changes. When we trace the developments in science, we are effectively following a progression of thought. Thus, thought itself — what Schelling calls the "living, actual essence" — is represented in science. Consequently, Schelling claims that the "highest" or most fundamental science discovers the nature of the "primal living reality" — i.e., it will discover the essence and the beginning of all things.² And a science whose aim is to find the fundamental principles will thereby uncover the fundamental essence of life, of thought.

If, then, philosophy is to seek and base itself upon a true foundation, it must discover the nature of this primal living reality. And this fundamental nature, this principle which is above all others, Schelling says, "must be conceded to man."³ Why must this principle be conceded to Man? Schelling provides a clue as to why the fundamental essence must be intrinsic to Man himself, when, directly after claiming that it must be conceded to Man he asks "how

Nevertheless, even though God is both necessary and free, Schelling argues that the *necessity* of God's existence must be prior to His freedom, because God must *be* before He can be that being who is characterized as free. God cannot be free unless He *is*. Consequently, Schelling claims that God's being is *prior* to His freedom. And God's *being* is necessary. So, if Schelling is to investigate that which is the very first, he has to find out what is intrinsic to God's *necessary* being, rather than what constitutes God's freedom. Schelling calls God's necessary being His "nature." Primal nature, then, is that which is both necessary and first and for Schelling this is primarily the nature of God's being.

What sort of being, then, does God necessarily have? Schelling claims that God's nature is, by definition (i.e., necessarily), one of love and emanation. God's nature is one which *lives*. Again, if one wanted to see this in a less theological light, it could be said that primal nature is necessarily something which *lives* in view of the fact that life itself is something which progresses. If primal nature were not itself intrinsically living, there could be no life. Indeed, if we return to Schelling's analogy with science, he says that "What is essential in science is movement; deprived of this vital principle, its assertions die like fruit from the living tree."⁷ Necessary to science, then, in which primal reality is also represented, is movement. It would only be a small step to infer from this that movement — life — is necessary to primal nature as well. Primal nature — whether or not it is understood as *God's* necessary being — is something which lives and emanates.

However, this characterization of primal nature alone is insufficient. Schelling notes that primal nature (God) cannot be pure emanation, for if He were emanation alone, He would not be something which *is*. In order to *be*, Schelling says, there must be seclusion and oneness. For Schelling, it is this oneness and seclusion which renders God *personal*. Thus, intrinsic to God's being there is not only emanation, but there is also an element of restraint and of selfhood. These latter are necessary if God is to *be* at all and God's being is indeed a necessary one. Once more, if one wishes to have this line of argument in a more general framework so that we remain purely with an undefined concept of primal nature (i.e., so that we no longer define primal nature as God), then we can argue as follows. Namely, if primal nature lives and emanates (and I have suggested above that we can say that it does without necessarily having to refer to God), then, if primal nature really *is*, it cannot be pure emanation, for then it would not *be* at all. That is, Schelling's point about seclusion and restraint as being necessary for anything which is at all will hold for primal nature whether or not primal nature is defined as God. Indeed, Schelling's text itself implicitly allows primal nature to be understood either as defined (i.e., as God's being) or as undefined (i.e., as more generalistic). I will from now on use the blanket term "primal nature" alone to designate both interpretations.

It follows, then, that for Schelling primal nature is composed of two equiprimordial but opposed principles. On the one hand there is a principle which

could be (man) alone of all creatures . . . ascend to the beginning of the ages if there were not in him a principle of the beginning of the ages?"⁴ For Schelling, then, it is because we have the principle of primal nature within us that we are able to trace back to the beginning. The beginning would remain incomprehensible if the principle of the beginning were not internalized within us.⁵ No other animal can look back into its own history. We humans alone can access the history of the world and the history of the world commences with primal nature. The title *The Ages of the World* thus refers to a special kind of history — it is the history of the awakening of Man's spirit — of thought — and this history is the history of the universe in microcosm.

Nevertheless, Schelling is going to claim that "As certainly as there is life, there is contradiction in primal nature."⁶ The history with which he is concerned is one which is founded in a contradiction. I will now explain why he thinks that the fundamental principle of life is one of contradiction. This explanation will form my more detailed analysis of Schelling's account of primal nature. After having provided such an account I will argue a) that, strictly speaking, there is no such contradiction in primal nature and b) that it is necessary to make certain distinctions if Schelling's account of primal nature is to hold. These two points will form my critique of Schelling. First, however, I will introduce what precisely primal nature is and what leads Schelling to think that it consists of a contradiction.

As I have said, Schelling wishes to trace back to primal nature — to that which is first in itself. This primal nature is that upon which all life is founded; it lies at the beginning of the universe and its essence can also be found within us. But what is this beginning — what is it that is necessarily first? What is it from which everything else has developed and from which everything has been created? Schelling claims that that being which is ultimately the first is God. It is God who is "the oldest of beings." For Schelling it is God who lies at the very beginning, from whom all existence stems and who is thus the primal reality. If, then, Schelling is to discover the nature of primal reality, he must attempt to find out what is intrinsic to God's nature. In less theological terms, one could say that if there must be something which is first in itself and from which everything else has sprung, then Schelling's aim must be to discover what the nature of this primal reality is. The search for the beginning and the desire to understand what this beginning must be like, is, in effect, the search for the nature of primal reality.

Schelling now makes the focus of his inquiries more precise by appealing to the generally held opinion that God's being — primal reality — is both necessary and free. Primal reality is necessary, presumably, because there has to be some explanation of how the universe came into being and how life continues to develop. In theological terms God is He who *necessarily* is. Moreover, Schelling says, God has to be free as well as necessary because God is the creator and creation is not something which can be intrinsically necessary, but can come about out of free will alone. If creation were pure necessity, it would not be *creation* at all.

emanates and on the other hand there is one which confines. Both principles for Schelling are as *essential* as each other to the nature of primal reality. Neither one nor the other is *more* primordial, or more original. They are both "as old as the world" itself. It is because primal nature needs to be able both to confine itself in order to be and to emanate in order to make life and progress possible, and it is because these two principles are mutually opposed that Schelling claims that "as certainly as there is life, there is contradiction in primal nature."

Nevertheless, primal nature cannot consist of these two equiprimordial but opposed principles, for the law of contradiction does not permit anything to be both A and ~A. Primal nature cannot be both emanating and confining. And yet, according to the arguments given above, both of these principles are necessarily present in primal nature. Schelling overcomes the problem of their mutual exclusivity by explaining that "... the principle of contradiction, correctly understood, really only says . . . that one and the same *as such* cannot be something and its opposite." He notes that when the law of contradiction is so understood, the law of contradiction in fact "does not preclude what is A from being able to be something else not A."⁸ Schelling explains his position further by example. He says:

The same man may be called, for example, "good" with respect to his disposition or in action, thus *as such*, that is, with respect to his disposition or in action, he cannot be evil. This does not preclude, however, that he may be evil with respect to what is not disposition, or what is inactive in him, and that in this way two completely opposed predicates can quite well be ascribed to him."⁹

If we now place this explanation in the context of primal nature, then what Schelling is maintaining is that A itself cannot be ~A as well. That is, for example, the emanating essence itself cannot also be a confining essence. But although the emanating essence itself cannot be a confining essence, it remains possible for whatever exhibits principle A — that is, for example, *whatever it is* that emanates — from *being able* to exhibit the opposite principle — for example, from also being able to confine itself. Thus, although A *itself* cannot be ~A, it is possible for something to be such that in one respect it can be A and that in another respect it can be ~A. Consequently, Schelling says that we must not merely discern the two contraries, we must also recognize that it is the "one and the same" which is the affirmation and the negation, the outspreading and the restraining."¹⁰ That which is the one and the same Schelling calls the "unity." The unity is that which can be both A and ~A. Thus primal nature consists not of two principles, but three — the two opposing essences and their unity. But what is this unity?

Schelling argues that the unitary principle is discovered *after* the principles of emanation and restraint.¹¹ That is, it is only *after* we have discovered that whatever it is that emanates is also that which is able to confine itself that we can determine that it is the *same* thing which can exhibit both principles. However, although it is the *same* thing which can exhibit both principles, this

unity is not something which makes both principles identical to each other. If this were the case, then, Schelling says, there would be no opposition at all. If the unity were merely an identity of opposites A and ~A would have to be the same and their opposition would disappear. The unity is itself a principle quite distinct from the two opposites. And there must be a unitary principle, for the law of contradiction does not permit a pure opposition to be. There thus has to be another principle — the unity — which is that which it is which can be both emanating and confining. The original opposition is thereby retained and equiprimordial with this opposition is the unity. Without the unity the two contraries could not oppose each other and unless there was an opposition, there could not be a unity.

Yet the opposition described so far is, for Schelling, purely the level of simple opposition. We have the two opposites — the emanating principle and the confining principle — and the unity which allows this simple opposition to be. On closer analysis, though, Schelling says, this simple opposition dissolves into a double opposition. That is, if we consider what it is for each of the two opposites to be, then we find that each opposite itself requires an opposition within it. He now takes each of the two opposing principles in turn to show how this is the case.

Starting, then, with the emanating principle, it is clear that if primal nature consists of the equiprimordially of the two opposites and the unity, then the emanating principle can take precedence and thereby actually *be*, only if its opposite — the principle of restraint — is no longer equiprimordial with it. If there really is an emanating principle, then the emanating essence has to be dominant and its contrary — the essence of restraint — must be passive and secondary. Thus there can be an emanating principle only if the original balance of the opposites is overturned in the emanating principle's favour. Moreover, even though the emanating essence is that which dominates and which is the more primordial when it is the emanating principle which is, a latent essence of restraint nevertheless still remains. Indeed, the essence of restraint has to remain in the emanating principle in at least a minimal way so that the principle of emanation has something from out of which it can spread. The essence of restraint is intrinsically required by the emanating principle. Thus, Schelling claims that even when that which is emanating takes precedence, there remains an intrinsic opposition. This opposition itself will, furthermore, require a unitary principle in order to permit the co-existence of the two contraries. The unity which is present in the being of the principle of emanation will be *that which it is* which is more generally outspreading than confining. Consequently, Schelling argues, when we consider the side of the simple opposition which consists of the principle of emanation, then we discover that intrinsic to this one principle alone there is already an opposition of the essence of restraint and the essence of emanation. And, of course, this principle has its own unifying essence.

Schelling now proceeds by considering the other side of the simple opposition — the principle of restraint. Here too, he finds another opposition, only

... it still remains that the one and the same ... is both principles ... Not merely conceptually, however, but really, actually. Thus must the same ... which is the two unities, also be the unity of the two unities; and the unity is found enhanced [*gesteigert*] with the enhanced antithesis.¹²

When Schelling considers the double opposition, then, each side of the double opposition requires a unity and this unity is the same on both sides. That is, the two unities are really the same unity. When we realize that the two unities are the same on both sides, we arrive at the *enhanced* unity. The enhanced unity is a unity which is the unity of both that which it is which is A and that which it is which is $\sim A$; it is a unity which is both affirmation and negation and which is nevertheless itself a separate and distinct principle. There is unity and antithesis. In Schelling's words "the two opposites, the eternally negating and eternally affirming potency, and the unity of the two, constitute the one, indivisible primordial essence."¹³ It is when we can understand how the being of all three principles are essentially bound up with each other, how it is that the unity is an intrinsic part of the two opposites themselves and how the two opposites are likewise intrinsic to the unity that we can understand what primal nature is.

This ends my more detailed exposition of Schelling's account of primal nature. I will now enter into some criticism of Schelling's account. I will introduce my critique by a brief discussion of Schelling's application of the law of contradiction. This discussion will then lead me to discuss the problematic concepts of "contradiction" and "unity" around which my main criticisms will be based.

What, then, is Schelling's relation to the law of contradiction? Is Schelling effectively refuting the law of contradiction when he says that contradiction lies at the heart of primal nature? There does seem to be some sort of basis for thinking that Schelling is challenging the universal validity of the law of contradiction. Firstly, as I have said, Schelling claims that contradiction is a necessity; it lies at the basis of life itself. Thus, if contradiction is a necessity, it is impossible to say that the law of contradiction which does not allow such a situation to be is one which is *universally* valid. Secondly, Schelling himself directly asks "... how is a law to be established for something which can never be in any way? In knowing that there can be no contradiction, it must nevertheless be known that in a certain way there is one."¹⁴ Similarly, he says that "As surely as the nature of science consists in progress, the positing of a contradiction is necessarily its first postulate."¹⁵ It is clear from these two passages alone that Schelling believes that contradiction is a necessity. To this extent, then, it seems that he must be claiming that the law of contradiction is not universally valid since in primal nature, at least, contradiction is necessary.

Nevertheless, although Schelling believes that contradiction exists at the very basis of life itself, he understands this contradiction not as something which rules out the law of contradiction altogether, but rather as something which supports it. For Schelling it is only *because* there is a contradiction that we can know that we cannot allow a contradiction to be. Science can progress

the situation is reversed. When it is the restraining principle which is, then it is the restraining essence which will be dominant and it will be the restraining essence which will take priority. The balance of the opposites is once again overturned, but this time it is in the favour of the restraining principle. Yet even when it is the principle of restraint which is, an opposition of sorts remains intrinsic to its being, for the principle of restraint requires the essence of emanation to be at least minimally present so that it has something to restrain. Thus, once more, the intrinsic opposition between the two contraries is retained. And, again, there has to be a unity to allow the two opposites to co-exist; only this time the unity will be *that which it is* which is more generally restraining than emanating. On the side of the simple opposition which consists of the restraining principle, then, there is also an intrinsic opposition and another unitary principle. Consequently, Schelling says, there is not really a simple opposition at all; rather there is a double opposition, for each contrary on either side of the simple opposition will already contain an opposition within itself. Likewise, there is not really one unity but two, for the being of each opposite will require its own unifying essence.

However, even though the oppositions on either side of the simple opposition are ones in which one principle is accorded primordially over the other, Schelling still claims that each principle is nevertheless at a fundamental level as primordial as the other. The principles are fundamentally equiprimordial because at the level of simple opposition *both* of the principles are. And it is because both of the principles are that he considers *both* sides of the opposition. It is because both principles are and because he discusses the being of both principles that the two essences remain fundamentally and originally equal.

However, according to Schelling, when we investigate what it is for each of the two opposites to be, we discover not only that each principle has an intrinsic opposition within it, but also that each opposite has its own unifying essence. Each opposite has a unitary essence which permits the two opposing essences to co-exist and this unity is that which it is. Thus, the unity for the principle of restraint is *that which it is* which is more generally confining than emanating; the other unity is *that which it is* which is more generally emanating than it is confining. Only when we have considered what it is for both principles to be can we see that they both need the same unity. They both need the same unity in order to be that which it is which is more one essence than the other. They both need that which will permit the two opposites to co-exist. Yet this unity can be ascertained as the *same* unity only once the double opposition has been brought to light. But Schelling notes that if the being of both principles requires the same unity, and if this unity is in the one case that which it is which primarily emanates and in the other case that which it is which primarily restrains, then this unity is both that which it is which outstretches and that which it is which confines. That is, in formal terms, the unity is both A and $\sim A$. As Schelling says:

only if there is a contradiction, for only then will science know that current theory must be changed. The law of contradiction can be applied only if there is contradiction in the first place.

However, although this line of argument is superficially convincing, the necessity for contradiction is not placed at the correct point in science or in logic so as to correspond with Schelling's analyses of primal nature. In both science and formal logic a contradiction arises only if one has already posited something which is *false* prior to that contradiction. In logic, for example, one might assume B, but if from B one arrives at a contradiction, one has to conclude that $\sim B$ is the case. Thus, although it is the contradiction which enables us to make progress and to ascertain that B is false, the contradiction is essentially the *result* of a process of reasoning. We arrive at the contradiction having already assumed B. The contradiction *per se* is not that from which we begin. Indeed, if we did have a contradiction as our initial premiss and nothing else, we could make no progress at all, for the premiss itself is such that we cannot work with it or apply logic to it. The law of contradiction is helpful only if the contradiction is one at which we arrive, rather than one at which we start.

Likewise, in science we improve or change our hypotheses once we find a contradiction, but here too the contradiction must contradict something which is *prior* to the contradiction. If a contradiction appears in science and is to be helpful, then it must be one which either refutes an initial hypothesis or which at least calls for the hypothesis to be amended in some way. Science does not start with a contradiction; a contradiction is helpful only if something leads to it.

But perhaps this account is rather unsympathetic to Schelling. Indeed, Schelling only says that the law of contradiction cannot be established unless in a *certain sense* there is a contradiction. Why does Schelling say "in a certain sense?" Why is there a contradiction only in a qualified way? I have already explained above that for Schelling the law of contradiction merely forbids that "one and the same thing *as such* cannot be something and its opposite." That is, it only says that A cannot also be $\sim A$. Schelling claims that this leaves open the possibility for there to be something else — i.e., the unity — which can be both A and $\sim A$. If, then, one wanted to take a more sympathetic view of Schelling's account, one could say that he does indeed start with a contradiction, for his initial characterization of primal nature is such that it is both that which emanates and that which confines itself. From this contradictory state of affairs in which primal nature is both A and $\sim A$ and from recognizing that the law of contradiction will allow both A and $\sim A$ to be only if there is something else which is that which can exhibit both principles, Schelling concludes that there must also be a third, unitary principle. That is, briefly summarized, he starts from a contradiction, realizes this is impossible, looks at the situation more carefully and finds a third principle. It is because he starts with contradiction that in his initial exposition he claims that there are really three propositions — that there is a principle of restraint, that there is a

directly opposed principle of emanation "and only then" — thereby stressing the subsequent nature of what is to follow — there is that which unites the two. Thus, because his inquiry begins with a contradiction and only later finds the unitary principle, the contradiction is the starting point.

Nevertheless, if it is only under this interpretation in which the unitary principle is found *after* the two contraries that Schelling can truly start from a contradiction, then it may appear that the unity is no longer equiprimordial with the two opposites. The unity is found subsequent to the contraries and not *with* them. However, for Schelling, the unity is equiprimordial with the contradiction even though it is the last principle of the three to be discovered. Thus, although he does not find the unifying principle until he has first considered the two contraries, the unity is nevertheless to be understood as equiprimordial with the initial contradiction. And the unity has to be equiprimordial because logically the opposing principles can exist only if there is a unitary principle at the same time.

But if the unity is, in fact, equiprimordial with the two contraries, Schelling does not really start with a contradiction in the strict sense at all. It is not a contradiction in the strict sense because he does not commence with a true contradiction — with A and $\sim A$ — but begins in fact with the triad of principles. He begins not with the principle of emanation and the principle of restraint as such, but commences rather from that which it is which is emanating and restraining — with that which it is which is A and $\sim A$. The contradiction from which he begins is, therefore, only an apparent one. But if there is a contradiction "in a certain sense" because the contradiction is not a pure one but is, in fact, merely apparent, then it seems doubtful that Schelling can truly claim that an opposition as precluded by the law of contradiction lies at the heart of primal nature. If a contradiction is merely apparent, it is no contradiction at all.

Moreover, Schelling reasons from the apparently pure opposition to the unitary principle on the precise supposition that a contradiction cannot be. That is, he does not even start out from an apparently pure opposition, because his very argument already assumes that it cannot be a pure contradiction. That is, he never even himself truly believes that it is a pure opposition. Furthermore, he cannot say there is an opposition in a certain sense, because a contradiction as such is something there either is or is not. It does not allow for gradations. As soon as Schelling says that in one respect the unity is A and in another it is $\sim A$, he is no longer talking about a contradiction at all. He is in fact saying that a contradiction does not exist. Consequently, if Schelling truly wants to say that he starts with a contradiction, he cannot make the unitary principle equiprimordial with the two contraries. If, on the other hand, he wishes to retain the equiprimordiality of the unitary principle, he cannot really say in any sense that he begins with a contradiction.

Nevertheless, it seems from the above arguments that it is the status of the unity which causes problems for Schelling. If the unity is not equiprimordial with the two contraries, then there can be a contradiction. But if the Schellingian

says, the unity is equiprimordial with them, then there *cannot* be a contradiction. So, is the unity *really* equiprimordial or not? I shall argue that on Schelling's account there are, in fact, two different versions of the unity in play and I will maintain that the account which is the most advantageous to Schelling is one in which the unity is *more* primordial than the two contraries. A closer look at the role of the unity in Schelling's thought is now necessary.

I have already explained that Schelling distinguishes between the level of simple opposition and that of double opposition. At the level of simple opposition Schelling has before him the apparently contradictory finding that primal nature is necessarily both emanating and confining. At the same time he recognizes that the law of contradiction does not allow this simple opposition between A and $\sim A$ to hold. It is for this reason that he says that "it is not enough merely to discern the antithesis."¹⁶ A unitary principle must also be recognized, for, he says, the law of contradiction "does not preclude what is A from being able to be something else not A."¹⁷ That is, there *can* be a direct opposition if there is something else — which Schelling calls the unitary principle — to which A and $\sim A$ are predicated.¹⁸ Yet what is important here is that that which is A is that which is also *able* to be $\sim A$ — namely it is *possible* for it to be $\sim A$ as well. The unitary principle here is thus that which *can* be both A and $\sim A$, rather than that which *is* A and $\sim A$. It is possible for it to be both, but the unitary principle is itself neither. If, however, it is possible for the unity to be both A and $\sim A$ and if, as Schelling says, it is that to which the contraries are *predicated*, then it would seem that the unity is, in fact, *prior* to the contradiction — the unity is more primordial than the two contraries. And if the unity is more primordial than the two opposites, then there is no contradiction in *primal* nature at all. Primal nature now becomes that unity which is *prior* to contradiction coming about.

Yet Schelling himself seems to sense the danger of this interpretation, for he stresses that "the unity is on the same footing as the two opposites; it is assuredly not preferentially the essence, but only a principle of the essence."¹⁹ Similarly, he underlines further on that "the unity, again, is not more essential than each of the opposites is by itself."²⁰ This determination on Schelling's part to rule out any interpretation of the unity as more primordial than the two contraries, however, appears only once he has discussed the level of double opposition. Presumably, Schelling feels there will be no tendency to misinterpret the unity as more primordial at the level of simple opposition because at the level of simple opposition the unity is found *after* the two opposites. Thus, if anything, the unity will be mistaken as being less primordial than the initial contradiction, rather than more primordial.

Nevertheless, even though the unity is discovered last at the level of simple opposition, Schelling claims that the unity is still to be understood as equiprimordial with the two opposites. The level of double opposition goes some way to show why the unity is equiprimordial with the two opposites, for in considering the being of each opposite, the unity is shown to be necessary as well. If, then, Schelling asserts quite strongly that the unitary principle is not more

fundamental and if he does so only after he has expounded the level of double opposition, it may be that the argumentation at the level of double opposition will solve the problem as to why Schelling thinks the unitary principle is not "preferentially the essence." I will now investigate the unitary principle at the level of double opposition in more detail to see if this will show us why the unity cannot be that which is prior to the two contraries.

I have said that at the level of simple opposition Schelling is faced with a contradiction which he wishes to investigate further. There is the emanating principle and there is the restraining principle. In other words, there is A and there is $\sim A$. It is by commencing from the fact that these two opposing principles *are* that he is subsequently able to discern that there must also be a unitary principle in order for them to be able to co-exist. At the level of double opposition, though, his direction of inquiry changes. At the level of double opposition he no longer considers what else there must be if both of the contradictory principles are; rather, his aim is to show what is entailed by the very being of these two contraries themselves.

At the level of double opposition, then, Schelling considers each side of the contradiction in turn. In so doing he realizes that the being of each of the principles has the same unity pertaining to it, even though one is that which is more generally emanating than confining and the other is that which is more generally confining than emanating. Yet these unities can be ascertained as the *same* unity — that is, the unity of the two unities can be found — only once Schelling has considered what it is for both sides of the opposition to be. Only if both sides of the opposition *are* is it possible to see that each side requires the *same* unity. And, in comprehending that the two unities — that is, the unity pertaining to the principle of restraint and the unity pertaining to the principle of emanation — are both essentially the *same* unity, we come to posit a unity of the two unities. This unity of the two unities is that sameness which unites the two unities. Moreover, this latter unity can be only if the two opposing principles *are*. Only if both A and $\sim A$ are can the unity be the *same* unity on either side and only if both contraries are can the unity be precisely a *unity*. Schelling thus believes that the unity is not *preferentially* the essence, because the unity cannot truly *unite* unless A and $\sim A$ also *are*. And the unity is able to unite the principles only if both principles *are* and exhibit within them the *same* unity. This account of the unity is consistent with Schelling's exposition of the unity at the level of simple opposition in which he claims that there are three propositions — that there is that which emanates, that there is that which restrains "and only then" that there is that which is the same (i.e., the unity).

However, a problem now comes into view. Although this account of the unity explains why the unity is not "preferentially the essence," it now appears that the unity comes *after* the two opposing principles. The unity can unite only if there are already two things for it to unite. It can be the *same* unity only if both opposites, with their corresponding unitary essences, *are*. Furthermore, only if the two opposing principles *are* can the unity be as well, simply because the *being* of the unity is first dependent on there *being* two things

which it can unite. The unity can unite only those things which are distinct from itself.

But if the unity is subsequent to the two opposites, then it seems that this posteriority not only contradicts Schelling's claim that the unity is primordial with the opposites, but it also appears to be logically impossible for the unity to be subsequent to the opposites, for the same thing cannot follow directly both from A and from $\sim A$. If the unity necessarily follows from A, it cannot with equal necessity follow from $\sim A$. It can follow from both only if neither are purely emanating or purely restraining — if neither are *purely A* or *purely $\sim A$* . So, from this line of argument it may seem that somewhere Schelling must have gone wrong. Under this account Schelling can no longer claim that the unitary principle really is a constituent of primal nature and, moreover, if the unity is subsequent to the opposites, then the unity, as Schelling so describes it, is an impossibility.

Nevertheless, Schelling can be saved from the criticism that the unity as subsequent to the opposites is an impossibility. At the level of double opposition neither opposite is purely what it is. In considering how the principle of emanation comes into being, for example, there is also a need for the unity and the subdued essence of restraint. Thus, when the principle of emanation comes into being it is not that which is *purely* emanating, but also includes within it to a limited extent the essence of restraint and a unitary essence. The same, of course, holds when it is the principle of restraint which comes into being. When the principle of restraint comes into being, it can do so only by restraining the emanating essence and only if there is a unity underlying the two to permit them to co-exist. Thus the unity which is the same unity does not follow from that which is purely A or from that which is purely $\sim A$. Each contrary already requires the other to a limited extent. Consequently, since neither opposite is purely what it is, it is possible that both could lead to the same unity.

Nevertheless, the criticism that if the unity is *subsequent* to the contraries, then it can no longer be a constituent of *primal* nature, still seems to hold. Indeed, if we take a closer look at Schelling's methodology, there is yet further support for this criticism about the primordially of the unitary principle. At the level of double opposition, when Schelling considers how each side of the opposition can be, the structure of primal nature is already presupposed. When Schelling investigates either opposite he finds that each needs to overcome the other in order to be and each principle likewise requires a unitary essence to be present to allow the two opposites to co-exist. All three elements of primal nature, therefore, are already presupposed in Schelling's characterization of the being of each side of the opposition. Consequently, the subsequent unity of the two principles is not one of *primal* nature as such, because primal nature has been presupposed before we even arrive at the *being* of the unity which is both A and $\sim A$. But if primal nature is presupposed prior to the *being* of the unity, then, if primal nature itself has a unitary essence within it, this unitary essence can only be that which is *prior* to being. That is, there seem to be two

different accounts of the unity at play. There is the unity which is a necessary constituent of primal nature and there is that unity which is, but which nevertheless presupposes primal nature prior to its being.

If, then, we now make a distinction between that unity which is — the unity which finally comes into being at the end of the level of double opposition — and that unity which lies within primal nature and which is already presupposed within the double opposition, then it is irrelevant that the former unity is effectively subsequent to the being of the two contraries, for it is in any case not that unity which is a constituent of primal nature. It is that unity which is, whereas the unity which belongs to primal nature is one which could only *possibly* be.

Nevertheless, this move of distinguishing between two different unities still leaves us with our original problem, for now the unity pertaining to the level of double opposition is not the same as the unity at the level of simple opposition. Consequently, although the level of double opposition in no way tempts us to think of the unity as that which is "preferentially the essence" — as that which is *more* primordial than the two opposites — this in no way helps us to see why the unity at the level of simple opposition is not one which is more primordial than the two contraries, for the corresponding unities are quite distinct from each other.

Indeed, the problem we faced at the level of simple opposition seems to be as intractable as ever. I argued that at the level of simple opposition Schelling is faced with the apparent contradiction of there being both an emanating principle and a restraining principle. In order to overcome this contradiction he ascertains that there must be another principle — the unity — which is that which it is which is emanating or restraining. This unity, I argued, is that which *could* be both principles. It subsequently seemed that the unity had to be *prior* to the other two principles, for the latter were predicated to the unity and the unity was necessary before either of the opposites *could* be. And because the unity is that which *can* be both of the opposites, the unity seems to be a *possibility* of being.

But perhaps it is, in fact, advantageous to interpret the unity as being more primordial than the being of the two opposites. Indeed, if the unity at the level of simple opposition is merely a possibility of being, then this would be consistent with my previous arguments. I have contended above that Schelling presupposes primal nature in his attempt to bring out the *being* of the unity at the level of double opposition. I concluded from this that primal nature must, therefore, be *prior* to being. And that which is prior to being is surely the possibility of being — that is, the unity at the level of simple opposition.

Nevertheless, if we are to interpret the unity at the level of simple opposition as the more primordial principle, the following amendments to Schelling's thesis result. Firstly, if it is the unity which is the possibility of being, then it is not, strictly speaking, primal nature in Schelling's characterization of the term which is prior to being, but primarily the unity itself. It is the unity which is the possibility of being and not the opposites, for it is the

unity which permits the possibility of the contradiction. And, secondly, if the unity is prior to the two opposing principles, then primal nature is not really composed of *three*, principles at all. If the unity is that which is the most primordial and comes before the two contraries, then the two opposing principles cannot truly be said to be constitutive of *primal* nature. The two opposites are subsequent to the unity and thus cannot themselves be that which is first. That which is first is the unity. If the unity is more primordial than the contraries, then it is really the *unity* which is first, which constitutes *primal* nature.

I conclude, therefore, that in primal nature there is, strictly speaking, no opposition at all. There can be no opposition in primal nature, because neither A nor $\sim A$ are; their being is merely *possible*. And it is primal nature — the unity at the level of simple opposition — which makes their being possible. Moreover, I claim that the unitary principle which Schelling discovers at the level of simple opposition is that which is truly first and that, to be precise, it is not yet a *unitary* principle at all. The unitary principle at the level of simple opposition cannot yet be a *unitary* principle, because there is not anything yet for it to unite. If there is no opposition, then there cannot be anything to unite. Primal nature — the “unity” — is only a possibility of being. It is only at the level of double opposition — when we consider the *being* of Schelling’s principles — that we can truly say that there *are* two opposing principles and that there *is* a unity. But then at the level of double opposition we are not talking about that which is really first — about *primal* nature. The level of double opposition, as I have shown, already rests on the presupposition of primal nature prior to the being of the unity.

Nevertheless, although I am maintaining, contrary to Schelling, that there is, strictly speaking, no contradiction in primal nature and similarly no *unity* as such, I do not believe that this has any detrimental effect on Schelling’s philosophy. Indeed, I want to claim that if we distinguish between the initial possibility of being — the unity at the level of simple opposition — and the subsequent being of the truly unitary principle at the level of double opposition, then Schelling’s thought actually becomes more consistent thereby than before.

Indeed, I believe my amended interpretation has several advantages. The first advantage is that if we distinguish between the initial possibility of being and the actual being of the unity, we no longer need to worry about how Schelling can claim that the unity is that which *could* be A or $\sim A$ — thus suggesting it is *prior* to A and $\sim A$ — and that the unity is equiprimordial with them. We can now see, on the one hand, that the unity which *could* be A or $\sim A$ is not a *unity* at all, but a mere possibility of being. It is this unity which constitutes the true nature of primal reality. The unity which is equiprimordial with the two opposites, on the other hand, is that unity which *is* at the end of the level of double opposition. Here the unity and the opposites *are* equiprimordial (though not *truly* primordial), for as soon as this unity really *is*, it is a unity which unites both the unity which is that which it is which is primarily

emanating and the unity which is that which it is which is primarily restraining. When the unity so unites the two unities which are intrinsic to the two opposed principles, then all three principles come to be bound up with one another. Within that one unity which really *is*, no one principle has any precedence any more. As soon as we realize that there are two totally different concepts of unity in play, Schelling’s apparently irreconcilable claims gain greater credibility.

The second advantage is that we can now retain Schelling’s assertion that the law of contradiction cannot be established unless in a certain sense there is one. My initial reasons for denying this claim were as follows. Firstly, I have said that there cannot be a contradiction at all, because at the level of primal nature no opposition has yet come about. There is merely the possibility of being and no actual opposition. Secondly, I argued that there could be a contradiction in the strict sense only if the unitary principle were not equiprimordial with the opposites, for as soon as the unity is equiprimordial, the contradiction would not truly be a contradiction at all. Thirdly, I claimed that although Schelling says there is a contradiction only *in a certain sense*, it is meaningless to talk of something which is only a sort of contradiction. A contradiction, I said, does not permit of gradations. Now, however, we can start to understand what Schelling might mean when he talks of a contradiction *in a certain sense*. The above objections have focused on the fact that one cannot have a sort of *contradiction*. Now, however, that we have distinguished between a unity which is a possibility of being and a unity which really *is*, we can make the same sort of distinction between a contradiction which could possibly be and a contradiction which really *is*. Thus, although at the level of primal nature there is merely a possibility of being and thus there cannot be a contradiction, a contradiction could nevertheless still *possibly* be. Thus we could say that for Schelling there can be a contradiction only in a certain sense, because the contradiction is not one which *is*, but is one which only potentially *is*. The unity is not equiprimordial with the opposition, but *prior* to it and it is because of this that at the level of primal nature there is a contradiction only in a certain sense.

The third advantage, which follows on from the previous one, is that my previous critique is no longer applicable. In this critique I said that a contradiction as such cannot lie at the very basis of science and logic, because in science and logic a contradiction can occur and can be useful only if it arises from a line of prior reasoning. This critique is no longer applicable, because now we have a possibility of being prior to actual being. Consequently, as soon as a contradiction *does* arise, it will have done so from having developed from the possibility of being. Thus, since a contradiction as such does not lie at the beginning, but can only develop from out of that starting point, then this seems to be plausibly enough analogous to logic and science. Science and logic both develop out of their starting points and it is possible for both to so develop that their result ends in one of contradiction.

Moreover, the idea that primal nature

that even contradiction is possible is consistent with Schelling's claim that "propositions which are ... valid once for all, are antagonistic to the nature of true science, which consists in progress."²¹ If what primal nature were going to be were already determined, there would be no life, no progress. Because primal nature permits even contradiction to be possible, there is infinite scope for creation. Contradiction thus lies at the beginning of all science — i.e., in primal nature — in so far as the possibility of contradiction *must* be left open, if there is to be life, if there is to be progress at all. If a scientific theory — the beginning (primal nature) — did not already have within it the *possibility* of it turning into a contradiction, that theory — the starting point — would have no room to progress or to develop any further. Consequently, primal nature necessarily has within it the possibility of contradiction.

I conclude, therefore, that if we amend Schelling's thought so that we distinguish between the unity *qua* possibility of being — i.e., the unity *qua* primal nature — and the unity which really is and which is the fusion of unity and antithesis, then a lot of what Schelling has to say is very appealing. Many problems which may otherwise appear to be inherent in his initial characterizations of primal nature disappear when we take this differentiation into account. Moreover, once we have seen that there are, in fact, two distinct types of unity, we can more readily understand that Schelling's aim is really to show how the possibility of being develops into actual being. The strong logical progression of his ideas in tracing this development must surely make one think twice before dismissing it as purely a flight of fancy; the rigour and depth of thought is certainly worthy of study as a philosophical exercise alone.

Notes

¹F. W. J. Schelling *Ages of the World*, trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman Jnr. (New York: Columbian University Press, 1942). Page references in square brackets refer to the original German edition. p. 83 [199].

²See *Loc. Cit.*

³*Ibid.*, p. 84 [200].

⁴*Loc. Cit.*

⁵See *Ibid.*, p. 88 [202].

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 105 [219].

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 94 [208].

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 100 [214].

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 100 [214-5].

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99 [213].

¹¹See *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100 [214].

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 102 [216].

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 103 [217].

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 105 [219].

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 105

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 98 [212].

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 100 [214].

¹⁸For Schelling's reference to predication see *ibid.*, p. 100 [215].

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 103 [217].

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 103 [218].

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 94 [208].