
“True Empiricism”: The Stakes of the Cousin-Schelling Controversy

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Between 1833 and 1835, Victor Cousin and F.W.J. Schelling engaged in an “amical but serious critique” of each other’s philosophies. I argue that, despite perceptions to the contrary, key to this exchange is a common vision of an atypical, speculative empiricism. That is, against the grain of most commentaries, I contend that there are significant similarities between Cousin’s and Schelling’s philosophies of the early 1830s—similarities that converge on the possibility of a post-Kantian speculative empiricism, which they respectively dub metaphysical psychology or a priori empiricism.

Introduction

True empiricism does not necessarily deny everything supernatural... From Kant onwards, it has become customary to explain everything supersensible as super-empirical. After Kant, God has taken refuge in pure thinking, posited in a way that excludes *all* experience. However, such an empiricism that denies everything supersensible was not the empiricism of a Bacon, of a Pascal or of a Newton. (Schelling [1832/33] 1972, p. 271)¹

Between 1833 and 1835, Victor Cousin (1792–1867) and F.W.J. Schelling (1775–1854) engaged in an “amical but serious critique” of each other’s philosophies (Cousin and Schelling 1991, p. 229). The following essay argues that, despite perceptions to the contrary, key to this exchange is a shared vision of what Schelling above calls “true empiricism.” While there are many differences between their philosophies, endlessly recorded

1. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own. Many thanks to Delphine Antoine-Mahut, Silvia Manzo and Tyler Tritten for their extraordinarily helpful comments on an earlier draft.

by subsequent commentators, such scholarly focus on discrepancies has tended to obscure the similarities that motivated their interest in each other's work. Both Cousin and Schelling think through the possibility of a post-Kantian speculative empiricism—what they respectively dub, metaphysical psychology or a priori empiricism—namely, an empiricism that “does not necessarily deny” some kind of experience of the supersensible, that refuses to ultimately limit the empirical to data immediately perceived by the five senses, but that interrogates critical limits on experience experientially. Both attempt to revive the tradition of “true empiricism” that Schelling describes above.

To make the case for the above, in the first section of the essay I briefly sketch the intellectual context for this revival of “true empiricism”, before turning to the controversy itself, considering in turn Cousin's empiricist critique of Schelling and Schelling's empiricist critique of Cousin. In so doing, I gradually specify the visions of a “true empiricism” manifest in their writings.

1. Experience after Kant

Sophyle: Oh, philosophy is such a beautiful thing!

Euthyphron: Why?

Sop.: Why? Because it makes known the truth, it delivers us from prejudices, and it makes clear the precise limits of our knowledge.

Euth.: I avow it; but it is still more beautiful, because it makes the universe and ourselves richer: it allows us to see unknown lands from an immense distance.

Sop.: My friend, your unknown lands are imaginary spaces, believe me. Philosophy is beautiful and good precisely only because it destroys these fables. Its unshakeable basis is experience, and there is no truth beyond it.

Euth.: We are agreed. A philosophy founded on experience is evidently the only good one; but how many types of experience there are!

Sop.: I know of only one sole type; it is the experience of our five senses. Do you know of others?

Euth.: To tell you the truth, there was a time when I was of exactly the same opinion; but I have changed since. I am so changed that when I think of my former meanness, I am ashamed. (Hemsterhuis [1778] 2015, pp. 334–6)

So opens a 1778 dialogue, *Sophyle, ou de la philosophie* by François Hemsterhuis' (1721–1790)—“the ABC of all orthodox philosophy,” as he was later to call it (2012, 10: p. 15). Taking the part of Euthyphron, the Dutch writer argues

against what he considers the prevailing eighteenth-century reduction of experience to sensible properties of matter (represented by Sophyle). Hemsterhuis' point is a basic one: there is more to experience than is dreamt of in any sensualist philosophy. But to make his case, he does not pit some variant of rationalism, natural theology or fideism against empiricism; instead, the dialogue enacts a contest between two empiricisms. Both sides agree that philosophy's "unshakeable basis is experience, and there is no truth beyond it," that a "philosophy founded on experience is evidently the only good one;" rather, what distinguishes these empiricisms is their speculative intent. Sophyle, faithful to the Lockean tradition, insists that philosophy's primary purpose is critical: empiricism "delivers us from prejudices, and it makes clear the precise limits of our knowledge." However, Euthyphron (i.e., Hemsterhuis) refigures empiricism as ampliative, taking the philosopher beyond the present state of knowledge into "unknown lands." Hemsterhuis attempts to expand the range of possible knowledge through new experiences.

Hemsterhuis' avocation of a speculative form of empiricism—an empiricism that refuses merely to delimit the "precise limits of our knowledge," but instead progressively transcends them—found numerous adherents among Idealists and Romantics at the turn of the nineteenth century, and it is, I am going to implicitly suggest in what follows, no surprise that two of his most avid readers were Victor Cousin and F.W.J. Schelling.² For this Hemsterhuisian tradition centred on the possibility of an ampliative empiricism, of, crudely put, becoming sensible of the supersensible. It is a tradition that runs through Herder's revalorisation of *aesthesis*, Jacobi's early fascination with enthusiasm and Novalis' magic idealism into—I will contend—Schelling's late a priori empiricism and Cousin's metaphysical psychology.

Nonetheless, there are a number of ways in which later speculative empiricists could not merely imitate Hemsterhuis' example. For one, there was the problem of mysticism that manifested itself in the Hemsterhuis-inspired anti-philosophies of J.G. Schlosser, L. Stolberg and other members of the Münster Circle (see Brachin 1951; Vieillard-Baron 1988). Becoming sensible of the supersensible easily degenerates into a form of vision in which, according to Kant's polemics, "one does not have to *work* but need only hearken and attend to the oracle within, in order to gain complete possession of all the wisdom to which philosophy aspires" ([1796] 2002, pp. 431–2). In the 1830s, Schelling is similarly critical of mystics as "philosophers of not-knowing," who employ "ecstatic intuition and immediate

2. On Schelling's use of Hemsterhuis, see Schelling 1856–61, 4: pp. 490–1, and Franz 1996, pp. 81–2; on Cousin's familiarity with Hemsterhuis, see Cousin 1841, p. 274, Boulan 1924, pp. 58–9, and Schüppen 1995, p. 593.

revelation” as epistemic tools, such that, while they may possess the truth, “all communication of knowledge [becomes] impossible” ([1833] 1856–61, 10: pp. 193–5; 1994, pp. 179–81). In the face of the anti-philosophical use of mystic empiricisms, it became increasingly necessary to avoid any claim to immediate certainty of the beyond, prior to all concepts, all discourse and all rational scrutiny.

However, the biggest challenge facing later speculative empiricists was Kant’s critical philosophy. There are many ways in which the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, three years after Hemsterhuis’ *Sophyle*, problematised any simple adherence to empiricism: to name but three, there is Kant’s insistence on the activity of the understanding in the constitution of objects, his re-description of experience in general as always already saturated by categorial judgment,³ and his positing of limits to possible experience. The last obstacle is particularly pertinent to what follows: far more than the Lockean, Kant made clear “the precise limits of our knowledge,” in *Sophyle*’s words, by demarcating a specific set of experiences that were possible. That is, while it may well be possible to interpret Kant’s doctrine of the limit in a way that does make room for ampliative empiricisms (i.e., such that the set of experiences that are possible *could* include anything to which a non-mystic speculative empiricist would wish to lay claim),⁴ it was predominantly interpreted in the early nineteenth century as robustly restricting the domain of the empirical with his “startling” conclusion that “we can never transcend the limits of possible experience” ([1787] 1929, Bxix). And central to such an interpretation is the idea that “the formal conditions of experience” that circumscribe the possible ([1787] 1929, A218/B265; see [1790] 2002, p. 284) are defined, in part, by the present capacity of the senses: nothing that is beyond the capabilities of human sensibility *as it is currently constituted* can count as an empirical object. Hence, the reach of empiricism cannot be infinitely amplified. In other words, Kant seems to presuppose that the human faculty of sensibility is always going to be the same, that radical amelioration is impossible and that, consequently, the limits to what is experienceable remain static.⁵ Evidently, Kant does recognise a possible amplification of experience within limits “in accordance with the laws of the empirical

3. The meaning of ‘experience’ in Kant remains a highly contested topic. On its ambiguity in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, see, for example, Guyer 1987, pp. 79–81; Ginsborg 2006, pp. 59–65.

4. Even in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* itself, Kant hints that the range of possible experience could be very broad; see his remarks, for instance, on magnetic matter ([1787] 1929, A226/B273). In what follows, I am concerned merely with the way Kant was interpreted among his immediate successors.

5. See Whistler 2014 for a fuller version of this argument.

progression” ([1787] 1929, A493/B521); nevertheless, the set determining which experiences are possible and which are not does not appear to change. Kant’s static limits block the post-Hemsterhuisian ideal of an ever-expanding empirical domain.

Interpreted thus, Kant’s limits provoked much opposition, even among Kantians—opposition which often centred on re-theorizing experience so that it could become speculative. For instance, Friedrich Schiller and Salomon Maimon smuggle the resources of pre-Kantian traditions of normative epistemology into the critical framework, and with it a demand for the radical amelioration of the faculties and thus experience itself (see Whistler 2014). The job of the philosopher, on this alternative, is not to describe experience and its transcendental conditions as they are, but to improve the former in the name of the perfection of human knowledge. G.W.F. Hegel provides another famous example. There are numerous ways in which he contests Kantian limits, but what is of passing significance here is his return to a “Science of the *Experience* of Consciousness” (as an early subtitle for the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [1807] put it).⁶ Crudely articulated, Hegel rethinks experience by putting it in motion, such that its own dialectical dynamics take it beyond any limits posited in advance by a critical philosopher. Experience becomes a “series of configurations” through which consciousness passes, continually transcending limits—and, consequently, the philosopher’s job is not to insist on such limits but merely to watch “the necessary progression and interconnection of the forms” in their march towards “completed experience” (Hegel [1807] 1977, §77–9). This dynamic course of experience is one way in which Hegel rethinks Kant.

What is of interest in the rest of this essay is another set of responses to limits on experience—the responses given by Cousin and Schelling in their closely-related, if ultimately competing revivals of the tradition of speculative empiricism. Both responses are oriented around a common commitment to the idea that, in Schelling’s words, “empiricism [is the] philosophical principle, insofar as it claims that the highest object of philosophy is experiential... not to be determined through mere thinking nor posited in mere thinking” ([1832/33] 1972, p. 239). Both Schelling and Cousin renew the empiricist tradition in the face of what they see as problems in the very set-up of German Idealist philosophies from Kant to Hegel. And it is, I am going to argue, in the series of writings published between 1833 to 1835 in which they provide “serious but amical critique” of each other’s work that this shared heritage is, notwithstanding their

6. On the fate of this subtitle and its implications for Hegelian “experience,” see Heidegger [1950] 1970, pp. 139–45.

many differences, most explicit. To return to the epigraph that began this essay: what is here made manifest, among much else, is their common adherence to a “true empiricism” that refuses to hastily conflate the empirical with the sensible, that, consequently, makes use of experience to speculate on the supersensible and that, finally, finds its forebears in “the empiricism of a Bacon, of a Pascal or of a Newton.” Both Cousin and Schelling follow Hemsterhuis’ Euthyphron in exclaiming, “But how many types of experience there are!”

2. The Cousin-Schelling Controversy: Cousinian Perspectives

In Summer 1833, Schelling received Cousin’s new Preface for the second edition of his *Fragments philosophiques*, and replied as follows, “I received with great pleasure and read with great interest the second edition of your *Fragments philosophiques*, evident proof of the fact that your political career has not taken you from science.” (Cousin and Schelling 1991, p. 222) Schelling went on to provide a critical notice of Cousin’s piece in the *Bayer’schen Annalen*, subsequently reworked into a Preface to the 1834 German translation of Cousin’s second-edition Preface—“your preface to my preface”, as Cousin dubbed it (Cousin and Schelling 1991, p. 229). In 1835, it was itself translated into French, twice, and gave rise to a large number of responses from both French and German philosophers (I.G. Fichte, H.F. Hinrichs, F. Ravaisson, C.H. Weiss, A. Wendt, J. Willm, etc.). In 1838, Cousin himself responded to Schelling’s critique in the Preface to the third edition of *Fragments philosophiques*. Furthermore, these writings were merely the culmination of a correspondence that had begun the day Cousin met Schelling in Munich, 2 August 1818, and, amongst much else, this correspondence provides evidence of Schelling’s familiarity with many of Cousin’s other writings from the period, including the 1826 edition of the *Fragments philosophiques* and the 1828 lecture course on the history of philosophy.⁷

7. With the addition of the preface Cousin wrote to the 1834 publication of Biran’s *Nouvelles considérations sur les rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme*, this seems the extent of Schelling’s familiarity with Cousin’s works. It is much harder to gauge Cousin’s knowledge of any specific work by Schelling. As Cousin himself writes to Schelling, “I have studied Kant and I believe that I understand him. I scarcely dare say that about Fichte. As for you, I have studied you less, I understand you less; you are too far above me for me to be able to measure you. So, I have profited from what agreed with me here and there in your ideas, but without judging the whole, without either adopting or rejecting your system” (Cousin and Schelling 1991, p. 213). Indeed, as with the other German influences on Cousin, it is legitimate to wonder how much his knowledge of Schelling was second-hand (via Tennemann, etc). (In what follows, I limit my analysis, with one or two exceptions, to those works Cousin and Schelling knew of each other or that were written around the time of the controversy.)

Almost as soon as Schelling's Preface appeared, the controversy was cast into a battle between French and German philosophy: on the one side stood the leader of the "new German school" of speculative metaphysics who disdained the empirical world in the name of lofty abstractions and on the other side stood the leading light of "establishment" French spiritualism, fighting abstractions with trusty empirical observation. Joseph Willm (1790–1853), for example, observes in 1835:

What characterises [Schelling's Preface] and gives it a quite particular value is not Schelling judging Cousin, but French philosophy examined according to the views of German philosophy... Schelling judges Cousin's doctrine less from the point of view of his own system than from the German point of view; it is less Schelling's system opposed to Cousin's system as German method compared to French method; it is the state of thought in France faced with the thought of Germany... It is, finally, the successor of Kant and Fichte wishing to come to an understanding with the successor of Descartes and Condillac. (1835, pp. vi–vii)⁸

Willm goes on to specify that it is specifically Cousin's "psychological method, grounded in analysis of facts of consciousness"—the method "which has predominated in France for many years... the method of Descartes as of Condillac"—that is here "put on trial... by the most powerful organ of German method" (1835, p. x).

Significant is the extent to which this interpretation of the controversy continues to inform contemporary scholarship. Again and again, the stakes of the Cousin-Schelling controversy are held to consist in a sterile confrontation between two philosophical traditions that have little in common: analysis vs synthesis, psychology vs speculation, empiricism vs rationalism—France vs. Germany. Cousin's grounding of the philosophical enterprise in the data of psychological experience is, it is claimed, to be neatly opposed to the German Idealist flight from the empirical. One can list commentators on the controversy who, while often sympathetic to many German and particularly Hegelian influences on Cousin, still diametrically oppose Cousin and Schelling as representatives of rival traditions: Cotten (1994, p. 88), Janet (1887, pp. 370–6), Janicaud (1984, p. 460), Manns (1994, p. 76), Rey (2013, p. 147), Tilliette (1970, 2: 126–8; 1999, pp. 290–7), Vermeren (1991, p. 9).⁹

8. On Willm and his role in the controversy, see Rowe 2000.

9. Such a list also makes clear how little—Tilliette excepted—Schelling scholars have engaged with this controversy.

All these readings transform Cousin and Schelling into opponents. And bound up with this transformation is a refusal to take seriously the occasions on which the two philosophers admit to their similarities, instead relegating them to polite, yet ultimately insincere gestures by philosopher-politicians. In the face of Janicaud's puzzled exclamation that "it is certainly surprising that the great Schelling made the effort to write more than thirty pages on Victor Cousin's philosophy" (1984, p. 460), the obvious response is surely that Schelling saw in Cousin an ally in the struggle against the vices of the German Idealist tradition. Rather than a neat opposition, Cousin and Schelling enter into an uneasy alliance in the early 1830s, one defined by their shared commitment to atypical, speculative empiricisms.

The source of the problem is ultimately Cousin himself. He fails, as much as anyone, to discern some of the more significant similarities between his philosophy and the later Schelling's. Of course, Cousin does acknowledge some dependence on Schellingian philosophy; for instance, in the 1833 Preface, he is adamant that "the first years of the nineteenth century saw appear this great system. Europe owes it to Germany and Germany to Schelling. This system is the true one; for it is the most complete expression of the entirety of reality, of universal existence." And he continues, "Hegel borrowed from Schelling; and me, weaker than both, I borrowed from both of them" (1833, pp. xl–xli). Nevertheless, Rey is surely right to insist—in regard to Cousin's own view of the matter—that "it is more a general spirit than precise arguments that Cousin retained from Schelling" (2013, p. 145).¹⁰ For, when it comes to many of these precise arguments, Cousin contends that he differs radically from Schelling. Accordingly, he makes claims about the distance separating him from Schelling that are often hyperbolic and occasionally downright false with respect to the Schelling of the 1830s. This is most evident in the following—plainly inadequate—claim that is propagated in later commentaries from Willm onwards: Hegel and Schelling "place themselves straightaway at the pinnacle of speculation; me, I begin from experience" (1833, p. xlii). What follows aims at recovering the resemblances, complexities and ambivalences that such a binary covers over.

Cousin's antipathy towards some of Schellingian philosophy turns on method. Cousin favours psychological introspection over all other methodologies: "Here as elsewhere, as everywhere, as always, I pronounce myself for that method which places the point of departure of all healthy philosophy in the study of human nature and therefore in observation" (1833,

10. Elsewhere, I have argued that one major exception concerns the idea of systematicity that Cousin and Schelling share. See Whistler 2017.

pp. vi–vii). It is on this methodological ground that Cousin’s opposition to the “new German school” rests: “I must also in truth confess that some fundamental differences separate me from [Hegel and Schelling]... I blush to insist on them, but I cannot but recall the first and most fruitful of all—that of method.” He continues, “Here is manifest the general difference which separates me from the new German school—that is, the psychological character fully imprinted on all my views” (1833, pp. xlii–xliii).

The Preface to the third edition of *Fragments philosophiques* articulates this methodological critique of German philosophy most clearly. With reference to Schelling’s early concept of intellectual intuition, Cousin asks, “Either intellectual intuition falls under the eye of consciousness or it does not. If it does not, from where do you [i.e., Schelling] know of it? What reveals to us its marvellous existence? With what right, what justification do you speak of it? If it does fall under the eye of consciousness, we are thus reduced to psychology and I send you back to your own objections” (1838, pp. x–xi). According to Cousin, Schelling has a choice: either to posit the beginning of philosophy outside of consciousness or within it. The latter position is ultimately reducible to Cousin’s psychological introspection, whereas the former position is absurd, for a philosopher can only make knowledge claims about what appears to consciousness. Cousin assumes that the philosophical enterprise is a science of discovery, moving from the known to the unknown, and, since what does the knowing is consciousness, the starting point—the initial known from which philosophy begins—must fall under “the eye of consciousness.”

There are a number of problems with this argument, but I will only mention three. First, however one describes Schellingian intellectual intuition—and it has a convoluted history in Schelling’s early works—it always arises as the point of indifference between the subjective and the objective.¹¹ For the early Schelling, intellectual intuition is neither merely inside consciousness nor merely outside; it is meant to be both, at the point of identity between subject and object. Cousin’s alternative (either inside or outside consciousness) is a false dichotomy—what is more, it is a false dichotomy that Cousin himself repeatedly rejects: his own concept of reason is almost identical to that of the early Schelling’s in laying claim to both subjectivity and objectivity.¹² Even in the 1833 Preface, Cousin writes of reason as “a faculty that is both psychological and ontological

11. Evidence for the above can be found in many of Schelling’s works from 1794 through to 1804, but Schelling is clearest in the *Fernere Darstellungen* ([1802] 1856–61, 4: pp. 348–68).

12. On the similarity (although not dependence) between the two, see Cotten 1995, p. 43; Janet 1887, pp. 76–9.

together, subjective and objective at the same time, which appears in us without properly belonging to us... which from the heart of consciousness extends into the infinite and attains the being of beings" (1833, p. xxv). Cousin and the early Schelling share—in broad brushstrokes, at any rate—a conception of the starting point of philosophy as a rational act occurring at the point of indifference between the subjective and objective.

Secondly, Cousin's argument implies that any starting point for philosophy that "falls under the eye of consciousness" is ineluctably reducible to a Cousinian form of psychological introspection. This seems odd, and it stems from a particularly telling reduction of the field of empiricism at the heart of Cousin's project. For, one might object, consciousness is typically aware of more than its own psychological composition; the eye of consciousness ranges wider than introspection. But Cousin reduces the domain of empiricism from the empirical world as a whole to just one element of it: psychology. He is explicit on this point in the 1833 Preface:

[Philosophy] is distinguished from physics only by the nature of the phenomena it observes. The phenomena proper to physics are those of external nature, that vast world of which man is such a small part. The phenomena proper to philosophy are those of that other world that each man carries within himself, and that he perceives thanks to that internal light called consciousness, just as he perceives the other world through his senses. (1833, p. viii)

Consciousness observes something philosophically significant only when it observes itself. This is the huge restriction Cousin places on the capacities of empiricism. And it is, moreover, a restriction that Schelling pointedly derided as Cousin's "insistence on a sterile psychology that appears to us merely as a sad limitation on the vast domain of experience" ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 217).

Thirdly, Cousin's attempt to cast Schelling and himself as opponents ultimately fails for the basic reason that—intentionally or unintentionally¹³—his presentation of Schelling's position no longer bears any resemblance to the latter's philosophy of the time. In the 1830s, Schelling no

13. That is, in 1838, it is difficult to discern whether Cousin has just failed to understand developments in Schelling's philosophy (perhaps understandably, given Schelling's publication record after 1809) or "Schelling" has merely become a symbolic label for certain representative positions in German philosophy that it is expedient for Cousin to attack. In other words, by 1838, the politics of "Germanism," i.e., Cousin's attempts to increasingly distance himself from alleged German influences, raises the question of the extent to which Cousin *intended* to read Schelling accurately. For instance, the claim that Schelling's "system is the true one" is deleted from the 1838 edition of *Fragments philosophiques*, as well as from all subsequent ones.

longer explicitly subscribes to a concept of intellectual intuition. And even if Cousin's critique may well accidentally have some pertinence to Schelling's late notion of ecstatic reason (in which philosophy begins with "a being that is absolutely external to thought... beyond all experience as it is before all thought" ([1842/43] 1856–61, II/3: 127; 2007, p. 179)), the fact is that, in 1833, Schelling "advocates empiricism" ([1832/33] 1972, p. 272) and sets forth a methodology of philosophical empiricism in opposition to much of the speculative rationalism that Cousin still associates with him. Cousin ignores these developments and so, in the end, his critique—whether cogent or not—entirely misses the point: it attacks a philosophy that no longer exists.

3. The Cousin-Schelling Controversy: A Schellingian Perspective

Therefore, what most interpreters of the controversy—particularly Cousin himself—miss is Schelling's own recovery of a notion of experience during the 1830s. Only once this is sufficiently taken into account can one correctly discern that what is at stake in the controversy is less the opposition between empiricist and speculative forms of philosophy than an uneasy alliance between two similar, if distinct understandings of philosophy *as speculative empiricism*.¹⁴ Indeed, in his Preface to Cousin's Preface, Schelling is clear that—whatever differences do divide them—there is no question but that he is beginning from the same empiricist starting point as Cousin:

It is not that we [Germans] fail in any sense to presuppose experience, or that we refuse to admit that all philosophy rests individually on experience. The very first line of Kant's *Critique* declares that all knowledge proceeds from experience; and if one had asked this philosopher—or any other defender of a priori concepts independent of experience—how he had learnt of the existence of these concepts, he would have responded, without a doubt: only from experience... Thus the assertion that it is impossible to philosophise without experience is superfluous for German philosophy. It is not at all what is at issue. ([1834] 1856–61, 10: pp. 210–11)

Both Cousin and Schelling begin with experience—indeed, even observation, since Schelling goes on to avow a further specification of

14. It needs to be kept in mind throughout, however, that both Cousin and Schelling use the term "empiricism" in positive and negative registers. That is, while they do occasionally describe their projects as transformed or mutated empiricisms, they also critique traditional empiricisms, particularly Lockean variants. On Cousin's critique of past empiricisms, see Antoine-Mahut's contribution to this issue.

this principle: “All healthy philosophy must begin from observation and experience” ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 214).

Schelling draws attention so flagrantly to this shared empiricist point of departure, because, in part, he sees Cousin as an ally against the worst excesses of the German Idealist tradition he had been trying to escape. While this, as I will show at length in the next section, will ultimately be complicated by Schelling’s perception of a residue of Hegelianism in Cousin’s philosophy, nevertheless initially in the 1834 Preface, Schelling is “pleased to note on the side of the French and other no less gifted nations, who differentiate themselves completely from the Germans by means of the empirical standpoint of their philosophy, that this commitment to empiricism has for a long time been a stark, if sometimes blind protest—not against philosophy, but against one-sided rationalism... and it is precisely in this rejection of [rationalism] that we have seen, even if far off, a means of coming to some future agreement with them” ([1834] 1856–61, 10: pp. 216–7). Indeed, for Schelling, Cousin’s empiricism exhibits a refreshingly rebellious streak in its opposition to rationalist orthodoxies:

From time immemorial, noble and free spirits, peering out from under the compulsion of desert-like rationalism, have fled to the domain of empiricism... This opposition, this uprising of empiricism against the yoke of exclusive rationalism has been ever beneficial and breathed new life into science. After the restrictions of all-smothering rationalism, it is again beneficial to be able to view the world in general as a fact once more. ([1832/33] 1972, p. 248)

Moreover, Schelling also goes further than just approving of Cousin’s anti-rationalism. That is, he insists, in addition, on the dream they shared, in the early 1830s, for revived empiricisms built on non-standard foundations—mutated variants of empiricism that would be metaphysically ampliative. An early letter from Schelling to Cousin makes clear just how much Schelling saw their works as complementary. Having opposed both Cousin and himself to the “pitiably pusillanimity” of eighteenth-century sensualism, on the one hand, and ungrounded speculation, on the other, he continues,

It is for us, other Germans, who—since the advent of natural philosophy—have left behind that sad alternative between hollow ideas drawn from a metaphysics without basis, which everyone is right to mock, and narrow, arid observations from a fruitless psychology—it is for us, I say, and for those who understand us, to push towards the universal system, beginning from a first principle which, because of its absolute objectivity or positivity, can be known

only a posteriori, to the point that it ends up merging with empiricism, rightfully recognized, and uniting with it, until it is irresistible and unshakeable. I speak to you of Germans, but to tell the truth, in Germany most are far from understanding what, for example, you have divined in your wisdom. (Cousin and Schelling 1991, p. 204)

Schelling makes Cousin an ally not only in rejecting the above false dichotomy between heady rationalism, on the one hand, and mere psychologism, on the other; but also in the more constructive and specific project—which Schelling was beginning to dub “positive philosophy”—of postulating a first principle “known only a posteriori,” that is, empirically. Schelling sees them both as renegades from the philosophical mainstream in their refusal to conform to French and German intellectual stereotypes, instead seeking common ground in a revitalised empiricism. Schelling thus continues in the letter, “Keep going! You have followed entirely the idea of the true system” (Cousin and Schelling 1991, p. 204). What is more, when Schelling describes Cousin’s project in his 1834 critique, it is remarkable how close it sounds to his own: Cousin recognises “the necessity of raising up the empiricism he found before him, which remains his point of departure, into a rational philosophy grounded on universal principles” ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 205). In Cousin’s own words, he was using empiricism against itself “to reawaken among us the taste for high speculation” (Cousin and Schelling 1991, p. 202).

More specifically, what is most distinctively atypical about both Cousin’s and Schelling’s empiricisms is their assimilation of rationalist elements. Both rationalise their empiricism to the extent that Schelling can describe his project as “a priori empiricism” and Cousin can similarly exhort, “Reunite the two methods, like the great physician who, in his laboratory, conceives and experiments, experiments and conceives, and uses both his senses and his reason. Begin with the a priori method and as a counterweight add the a posteriori method” ([1828] 1991, p. 102). In the same vein, Schelling repeatedly praises Cousin for refusing empiricism “as it is now understood in France and a great part of Germany, as sensualism and a system denying to human knowledge all universality and necessity” ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 216). Cousin’s empiricism is simultaneously rational philosophy, just as Schelling’s own aim is to reconcile “empiricism and rationalism together in a much higher sense than possible until now” ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 216).

In the context of these avowed resemblances, it is evident that at least some of what is at stake in the Cousin-Schelling controversy is a testing of the closeness of their visions, an interrogation of each other’s philosophies

for the sake of a continued alliance of atypical empiricisms. Significant differences do emerge from this testing—and I will trace them in detail in the next section—but so too does a common core.

4. Schelling's Critique: Cousin as Rationalist

When it comes to overturning the critical consensus—originating from Cousin himself—that Schelling and Cousin represent rival traditions of German abstraction and French analysis, what is even more striking than Schelling's recognition of their similarities is the way he goes about criticising Cousin. For what emerges is *precisely* not the standard picture of Schelling as a priori metaphysician and Cousin as careful observer of empirical facts; instead, Schelling criticises Cousin for being *too much of a rationalist*. According to Schelling, despite the initial hope he had for a shared empiricist project (as described above), Cousin ultimately takes refuge in concepts and is not empiricist enough, such that Schelling can position himself as the genuine heir to the tradition of "true empiricism."

Much of the controversy centres on the question of "the transition from psychology to ontology"—that is, the legitimacy of Cousin's claim that the psychological facts he discovers through empirical introspection have implications that bear on the existence of the external world and God. Schelling describes Cousin's philosophy as two-step:

The first [part] remains completely within the sphere of psychology and therefore subjectivity, and finds in consciousness only the faculty of universal principles, thanks to which then a second part, a dogmatic and objective part, claims to prove the existence of the exterior world, that of our own personality and that of God. ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 209)

In other words, Cousin begins with "the complete enumeration of the essential elements or ideas of reason" (Cousin [1828] 1991, p. 105)—purporting to complete the task of tabulating the categories begun by Aristotle and Kant—and it is on this basis that he moves on to the second step and undertakes a "higher induction" ([1828] 1991, p. 133) that results in a "demonstration of the independence of truths perceived by reason" ([1828] 1991, p. 157). That is, through this transition from enumeration to demonstration, "the absolute principles obtained by observation can legitimately lead us where observation itself no longer has an immediate hold" (Cousin [1826] 1833, p. 23). Rational truths now have, according to Cousin, objective value (i.e. whenever claims about nature and God are rational, they are also mind-independently true). Cousin's philosophy "rests on observation; but has no limits other than reason itself, just as physics begins from observation, but does not stop there and with

the calculus raises itself to general laws of nature and to the system of the world" (1833, p. vii).

The difficulty in Cousin's account, of course, is precisely what justifies the transition between the two parts. Schelling focuses on Cousin's particular shift from the concept of cause that forms part of his inventory of the mind to the objective principle of a cause functioning in the external world, and notes an unjustified assertion of the existence of causality outside the mind to which Cousin seems committed: "It is thus through reason—in virtue of the law of causality imposed on my consciousness—that I am assured of the existence of an external cause and, by that, of an external world" (Schelling [1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 219). That is, Schelling implicitly asks: what legitimates the mind-independent existence of the principle of causality? What justifies Cousin's insistence that it is more than just an expedient fiction imposed on an indifferent world by the reasoning subject? Schelling implies that Cousin's inference from the subjective to the objective remains utterly unjustified—as Rey summarises it, "In the first as in the second preface to *Fragments philosophiques*, the question of the promised transition from psychology to ontology is left obscure. According to Schelling, this silence is explained by the impossibility that it covers up." (2013, p. 146)

As several commentators have noted in passing, behind Schelling's critique of Cousin's transition from psychology to ontology lies the spectre of Hegelianism. Tilliette writes, for example, "Schelling scented in Cousin's fragments the formidable presence of Hegel" (1970, 2: 128), and similarly Janicaud claims, "For Schelling, Cousin's abstract metaphysics is only an *Ersatz* of Hegelian rationalism" (1984, p. 459).¹⁵ That is, according to Schelling and despite all appearances, Cousin turns out to be the rationalist who stands firmly in the German philosophical tradition, rather than Schelling himself, and so Schelling—as a good empiricist—must offer a critique on behalf of the value of experience. Schelling's argument can be summarised as follows: by beginning with an enumeration of rational facts in consciousness, Cousin begins by *thinking concepts*, and he then attempts to show that those concepts correspond to reality. However, such a transition from existence *in intellectu* to existence *in re* is the very paradigm of rationalist argumentation, i.e. it mirrors the structure of Schelling's Hegel.¹⁶ Rationalists first analyse a concept in pure thinking and, only

15. Rey helpfully pinpoints Schelling's reading of the 1828 lecture course as the source of this critique of Cousin as Hegelian (2013, p. 146).

16. As Schelling writes more generally in his lectures of the period, "If we consider the termini around which everything revolves, i.e. the concept and existence of something, then philosophy is fundamentally a question of whether one goes from concept to being or from being to concept. Rationalism proves being a priori, immediately from the concept,

subsequently, fit reality into that conceptual template. Thus, Schelling reads Cousin's psychologism as disguised rationalism; there is nothing empiricist, Schelling is suggesting, about using reason to explain the world.¹⁷

This is precisely why Schelling spends so much of his 1834 Preface in a critique of Hegel without once naming him: he discerns the structure of Hegelian rationalism in Cousin's argumentation. Just as for Hegel, so too for Cousin: the "first presupposition of this philosophy, which apparently presupposes nothing, was to attribute to the purely logical concept as such the property or nature of transforming itself into its opposite [i.e., into objective reality]" (Schelling [1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 213). Both Hegel and Cousin—as rationalists—mould philosophy into a science of the transition from concept to reality. Moreover, as rationalistic, Cousin's philosophy falls prey to the very critique Schelling repeatedly makes of Hegelian philosophy during the 1830s and 1840s—and this critique, unsurprisingly enough, is focused on the necessary failure of any attempt to pass from thinking to reality or, in Cousin's terms, from psychology to ontology. Hence, what Schelling writes of Hegel also applies to Cousin: "The system develops within what is purely logical; but at the instant it must step outside this limit into reality, the thread of dialectical movement is snapped" ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 212). The transition fails; any purported progression from mind to world is only "an *apparent* progression" ([1832/33] 1972, p. 461); both systems are "still far from being a real philosophy" ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 209). Schelling concludes,

[Hegel attempted] to begin metaphysics with a purely rational concept exclusive of everything empirical—a vain attempt simply because the empirical element, rejected at the beginning, is subsequently reintroduced through the backdoor... Even if this episode in the history of modern philosophy has not served progress, it has at least shown once more that it is impossible to arrive at reality with what is purely rational. ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 213)

while empiricism, on the contrary, tries to prove the concept from experience a posteriori" ([1832/33] 1972, p. 402).

17. Note the implicit, idiosyncratic concept of "rationalism" to equally describe pre-Kantian dogmatism and post-Kantian speculation; as will become clear below, much of Schelling's critique of types of "negative philosophy," particularly Hegel's, rests on a retooling of the traditional dichotomy between empiricism and rationalism. For further analysis of the formation of traditional and not-so-traditional distinctions between empiricism and rationalism in the early nineteenth century, Manzo's contribution to this issue is an essential reference point.

Cousin's failure, according to Schelling, is to have learnt nothing from the recent example of Hegelianism, to have repeated its mistakes and held philosophy back from progress towards "true empiricism." On the contrary, Schelling remains faithful to "true empiricism," on his own account, by turning to "what is *opposed* to pure thinking" (experience), for "in experience, there is found that supplement which was lacking in the concept of the *pure* subject [of rationalism]" ([1832/33] 1972, p. 239). Thus, Schelling insists throughout the 1830s and 1840s: "There is an unbridgeable chasm between logical necessity and reality" ([1842/43] 1856–61, II/3: p. 101; 2007, p. 160).¹⁸ Thought is stuck on one side of this abyss; it can deal merely and exclusively with logically possible structures: "With pure reason, I cannot even realize the existence of some plant... Under given conditions, reason, *of itself*, can know quite well the *nature* of this plant, but not its actual, present existence" ([1842/43] 1856–61, II/3: p. 172; 2007, p. 210). On Schelling's interpretation, Hegel's and Cousin's negative philosophies fail to take this limitation seriously: they erroneously suppose reality can be reached from pure reason and consequently produce "negative [philosophy] driven beyond its limits" ([1842/43] 1856–61, II/3: p. 80; 2007, p. 145).

Instead, Schelling's positive philosophy delves directly into the empirical to identify those experiences that form the material of an abductive proof.¹⁹ The paradigm of this type of demonstration (and this is of course not an arbitrary example considering that positive philosophy is ultimately a philosophy of revelation) is that of knowing the character of a person from their actions. In this case, it is not that the actions of a person, as experienced, are to be derived from their character, as conceptually conceived (as on the rationalist model), nor is it merely that, given the actions, one is to infer the character of the freely-acting person behind them (as for traditional forms of empiricism); rather, in Schelling's positive philosophy, as Tritten summarises, "A person is only known by means of their consequent words and deeds; yet, that to be known, that toward which thinking strives, is the supersensible will precedent to these deeds, their *prius* or anterior" (2016, p. 62). Schelling applies this model to God:

If that which necessarily exists is *God*, then this and that consequence—we want to say, then *a*, *b*, *c*, and so on—become possible; but if

18. In what follows, I occasionally make use of Schelling's later 1842/43 Berlin lectures to clarify some aspects of his positive project. However, I hope thereby not to commit myself to any broader claims about the continuities and changes in Schelling's philosophy between the early 1830s and his return to Berlin.

19. On abduction in Schelling's positive philosophy, see Matthews in Schelling 2007, pp. 68–81; Tritten 2012, pp. 40–64.

according to our experience *a, b, c*, and so on, really exist, then the necessary conclusion is that that which necessarily exists is *really* God. ([1842/43] 1856–61, p. 169; 2007, p. 208)

The point, then, is to prove the essence (divinity) of that which exists by means of the consequences of this existence made manifest in experience, i.e., revelation—“to transform precisely that which is incomprehensible a priori into what is a posteriori comprehensible” ([1842/43] 1856–61, II/3: p. 165; 2007, p. 205). Positive philosophy consists of a proof of what is known a priori (the unprethinkable existence of God) through what is known a posteriori (experiences of revelation), and Schelling dubs this a proof “per posterius,” or “a priori empiricism,” for “the prius is grounded *empirically*,” and—as such—positive philosophy “has in it both elements of rationalism and empiricism, but stands at the same time above both” ([1832/33] 1972, p. 402). Schelling’s rationalist transfiguration of empiricism thus pinpoints those experiences indelibly marked by the non-empirical—that is, aspects of the empirical world “where thought and experience interpenetrate each other totally and together constitute one and the same indissoluble whole” ([1842/43] 1856–61, II/3: p. 111; 2007, p. 1669).²⁰ It follows that the task for the philosopher is to search out, and draw attention to, those marks of revelation, for “the true principle of empiricism, genuine empiricism, is what infers the existence of God... from *experiential* marks” ([1832/33] 1972, p. 271). This is what Schelling announces in his 1834 Preface on Cousin: “It is in this sense that philosophy will soon undergo a great reform which, in its essentials, will be its last. It will, on the one hand, impart the positive explanation of reality, without, on the other, taking away from reason the right to be in possession of the absolute *prius*, even *that of divinity*” ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 216).

A full exposition of Schelling’s positive philosophy goes far beyond the scope of this essay. My point here is merely to show how much more complicated the Cousin-Schelling controversy is than a mere opposition between German speculation and French empiricism. This is a debate between two empiricists over the best way to speculate with experience: Cousin accuses Schelling of not taking the materials of human consciousness seriously enough to undertake such a speculative empiricist project; Schelling blames Cousin for beginning with concepts and thus not sufficiently escaping the orbit of rationalism. Both consider themselves as heir to a “true empiricism” that makes use of experience to go beyond the sensible, that employs observation to transcend the observable.

20. Translation modified.

5. Cousin as Empiricist

Cousin emerges from Schelling's critique as a rationalist in empiricist's clothing, as far from the ideal of "true empiricism" as any traditional German Idealist. It is worth pausing, then, to assess the cogency of Schelling's criticisms and, in particular, to discern whether there might be a way to save Cousin from rationalism and thereby bring him back into the empiricist fold. The problem, however, is that many of the texts by Cousin that Schelling read do seem to operate in the manner Schelling is so critical of: beginning with facts of reason, which function as concepts, and inferring from them, without prior ground, ontological conclusions about the existence of the external world and God. The 1833 Preface to *Fragments philosophiques* and the 1828 lecture course on the history of philosophy both exhibit such a structure.²¹ As is often the case, it is Cousin's earlier work that provides a clearer picture of his empiricist commitments²² and, accordingly, I turn in what follows to scattered passages in the 1826 Preface to *Fragments philosophiques*, of which Schelling was also aware, that suggest a different way of transitioning from psychology to ontology.

Ultimately, everything revolves around the status of rational facts in Cousin's psychology, for Schelling is very quick to identify them with concepts. Throughout the late 1820s and early 1830s, Cousin repeats the same story about his discovery of these rational facts; here is the 1826 version:

Immediately when one delves into consciousness, without any systematic prejudice, one observes such varied phenomena manifest there that one is struck, first of all, by the presence of a crowd of phenomena impossible to confuse with those of sensibility. Sensation—as well as the notions that it gives rise to or with which it mixes—constitutes a real order of phenomena in consciousness; but one encounters there other equally incontestable facts which can be

21. In fact, in 1833, Cousin presents a mutilated form of Cartesian argumentation, based loosely on *Meditations* 3. Since reason possesses a concept of a finite cause (both as will and as nature), it must necessarily possess the concept of an infinite cause (since finitude is logically derivative of infinity): "It is a fact that once the notion of finite and limited causes is grasped, we cannot but conceive a superior, absolute and infinite cause, which is itself the first and last cause of all others" (1833, p. xxii). However, there is no real attempt to show why it follows that this idea of an infinite cause necessarily exists or why the idea must originate in an infinite substance.

22. In other words, what follows is implicitly consonant with a traditional reading of Cousin's development during the late 1820s from spiritualist empiricism to metaphysical speculation: while the 1826 Preface still retains traces of Cousin's early empiricist model, this is all but effaced in the 1830s. On Cousin's development between the two Prefaces, Antoine-Mahur's contribution to this issue is impeccable.

grouped into two large classes: volitional facts and rational facts. The will is not sensation, for the former often struggles against the latter, and it is in this very opposition that it manifests itself pre-eminently. Equally, reason is not identical to sensation, for, among the notions with which reason supplies us, there are some whose characteristics are irreconcilable with those of sensible phenomena, for example the notions of cause, substance, time, space, unity, etc. ([1826] 1833, pp. 13–14)

The contents of consciousness, Cousin attests, consist of three classes of facts: sensible facts, volitional facts and rational facts. According to Cousin, the Lockean empiricist tradition that culminated in eighteenth-century French sensualism recognised only the first class, sensible facts; Maine de Biran was, Cousin's story continues, the first to really take seriously the radical independence of volitional facts from sensible facts and, to this extent, Cousin acknowledges him as his teacher ("This admirable observer taught me to untangle in all our knowledge, and even in the most simple facts of consciousness, the part that pertains to voluntary activity" [1833, p. xxxv]). However, Cousin considers his own most innovative philosophical discovery to have been that of the irreducibility of rational facts to either sensible or volitional facts. Rational facts are radically different, and Cousin considers himself the first empiricist to have properly observed this.

Indeed, this is very much a matter of *observation* for Cousin: he considers the discovery of the third order of mental phenomena to have resulted from his highly-trained and nuanced powers of introspection. He *perceived* something no one else had—namely, he perceived the unique properties of rational facts that distinguish them from all other mental phenomena. His is "a psychology to which only profound reflection can attain" (1833, p. xx), and it is for this reason that he continues to exhort his readers to practice observing, for "a deepened analysis of reason is one of the most delicate enterprises of psychology" ([1826] 1833, p. 18). And through such delicate empiricism three unique properties of rational facts are to be ascertained: their necessity, universality and impersonality. The ascription of the first two properties is evidently dependent on Kant and suggest that Schelling is right in considering Cousin to be merely describing a priori concepts under another name (so too does his list of rational facts in the above as "notions" of substance and cause, etc).

It is with the third property of rational facts—impersonality—that Cousin lays claim to something new, and it is on this property that the transition from psychology to ontology depends. Indeed, it is precisely here that Cousin claims to have overcome what he considers to be Kantian

subjectivism, for the unexamined, but faulty principle at the heart of Kant's system, according to Cousin, is the "principle [of] the subjectivity and personality of reason" (1833, p. xvii). Cousin's argument against Kantian subjectivity goes something like this: if rational facts are observed by a sufficiently trained psychologist to pertain not merely to the I, but to reality in general, i.e. if they are impersonal, then psychological claims about rational facts are simultaneously ontological claims about mind-independent reality, i.e. they are objectively valid. What such an argument fails to establish, of course, is whether rational facts can be observed through psychological introspection to pertain to reality in general or even what it might look like for this to be the case.

It is at this point that a passage from the 1826 Preface to *Fragments philosophiques* becomes pertinent:

The first task of psychological method is to withdraw into the field of consciousness where there are only phenomena, all perceivable and appreciable by observation. Moreover, as no substantial existence falls under the eye of consciousness, it follows that the first effect of such a rigorous application of method is to adjourn ontology. It is adjourned, I say, not destroyed. Indeed, it is a fact attested by observation that in this same consciousness, where there are only phenomena, there are also notions whose regular development transcends the limits of consciousness and which thereby attain existence. Do you stop the development of these notions? If so, you arbitrarily limit the tendency of a fact, you attack this fact itself and thus you destroy the authority of all other facts. One must either revoke the authority of consciousness or admit this authority as a whole for all the facts it attests. Reason is neither more nor less real and certain than will and sensibility; its certainty, once admitted, must be followed everywhere it rigorously leads, even across to ontology. ([1826] 1833, pp. 14–15)

The central idea here is of "notions whose regular development transcends the limits of consciousness and attain existence"—that is, the dynamic "tendency" inherent in certain rational facts. Taking Cousin seriously on this point requires interpreting these rational facts as more than just traditional concepts, but as mental phenomena that possess their own entelechy, that are in motion, transcending themselves and the limits of the I. Rational facts move, and Cousin is clear that the philosopher, as observer, must follow this movement through to the end, and not arbitrarily stop at the limits of subjectivity. Rational facts pursue a dynamic path from consciousness to reality, and consequently—as a good empiricist—the vigilant philosopher must mark out the same path from

psychology to ontology. To do otherwise is to impose prejudices, unjustified limits and distorting restrictions on the phenomena themselves.²³ It is in this way that Cousin sees himself as the heir to “true empiricism”: in his rigorous fidelity to the phenomena, in his strict observation of mental facts in their dynamic, self-transcending process.²⁴ A certain set of experiences—rational facts—are already in motion, and the philosopher must describe this motion even as it exceeds consciousness.

The point is that Schelling’s description of Cousin’s philosophy as a two-step process—first, psychological description, then inference to ontology—is false on the present account. Cousin is undertaking one and the same task throughout: observing mental phenomena in their dynamic diversity. His only innovation is to have recognised through introspection a *sui generis* fact which is derived neither from the will nor from sensation and which turns out to move beyond consciousness, such that the philosopher too must move beyond psychology and begin to do ontology merely for the sake of doing justice to the full range of mental phenomena. This is no longer the rationalist inference from concepts to reality that Schelling criticises. In other words, rational facts are observed to have the property of impersonality, and so to describe them accurately requires a non-personal, non-subjective perspective—the perspective of ontology.²⁵ As Cousin writes in the 1826 Preface, “Here is [objective] existence, but existence revealed by a principle attested by consciousness. Here is a first step into ontology, but by the route of psychology—that is, by observation” ([1826] 1833, p. 16).

Once again, a full exposition of Cousin’s thesis on the dynamic tendency of rational facts—including a complete account of the how and why of their entelechy—far exceeds the scope of this essay, taking us, as it would, to texts much earlier than the period under discussion; nevertheless, it is evident from the above that, pace Schelling, Cousin’s philosophy can be interpreted as both empirical and metaphysical, as both introspective all the way down, but also “extending into the beyond” (1833, p. xix). The above reading provides one possible way to justify Cousin as an atypical,

23. To any objection that this is not the case or that rational facts lack such a tendency, Cousin’s response must therefore be that the objector’s powers of observation are less developed or less sensitive than his own, i.e., that any objection is ultimately a question of misperception, to be rectified through exercises in introspection.

24. From here one might develop a defence of Cousin against Schelling’s criticism that French philosophy does not think process ([1834] 1856–61, 10: p. 221).

25. Cousin writes, “Consciousness is a pure witness... Reason knows itself and knows everything else, and goes beyond the sphere of the I, because it does not belong to the I” (1833, pp. xxvi–xxvii).

speculative empiricist, for whom “psychology, by illuminating the nature of reason, itself leads us to ontology” (1833, p. xix). Just like other speculative empiricists, Cousin uses experience—in this case, the introspective experience of a certain class of mental phenomena—to go beyond the sensible and make metaphysical claims.

6. Mediated Experiences of the Impossible

On the above interpretation, Cousin’s and Schelling’s projects begin to resemble each other once again—two distinct forms of speculative empiricism that make use of experiences to go beyond the sensible. Both identify a kind of experience that does something seemingly impossible and takes the philosopher beyond the range of possible experiences. Theirs is self-transcending empiricism. Where they differ is in the specific experience they identify as making such transcendence possible, in, that is, the specific material they make use of to speculate.

Hence, Cousin specifies one class of mental phenomena as pertinent to his project. He is thus relatively uninterested in experiences of the external world (which he leaves to the natural sciences), introspective experiences of perceptual states (as already catalogued by eighteenth-century sensualists) and introspective experiences of volitional states (de Biran’s domain). What remains are rational facts, the philosophical pertinence of which consists in their inherent “tendency” to move outside the limits of consciousness. Cousin’s project ends up, indeed, broadly resembling Hegel’s “science of the experience of consciousness” and its contestation of the Kantian limits of possible experience: in both cases, the philosopher as pure observer watches experiences in motion, pursuing a path that continually transgresses any pre-established limits. One fundamental difference, however, is that Hegel makes experience *as such* dynamic, whereas Cousin restricts this dynamic tendency to the class of rational facts alone.

Schelling is interested in a certain type of experience which is marked by divine free activity and which therefore makes a *per posterius* proof of God possible—demonstrating what is a priori through a posteriori means. That is, he attempts to locate traces of divine revelation. And ultimately it turns out that *all* experience manifests such traces—that is, traces of either the process of creation or salvation. Schelling makes this abundantly clear in his 1842/43 lectures on the philosophy of revelation: “The experience towards which positive philosophy proceeds is not just of a *particular kind*, but is the entirety of all experience from beginning to end. What contributes to the proof is not a part of experience, but all of experience” ([1842/43] 1856–61, II/3: pp. 130–1; 2007, p. 181). In Schelling’s terminology of the early 1830s, it is not just any particular fact that should be employed for speculation, but “the fact of the world” ([1832/33] 1972,

p. 272): experience as a whole provides the *per posterius* proof of God.²⁶ And it is precisely this determination of the material of empiricism that motivates Schelling's critique of Cousin's restrictions on philosophically-pertinent experiences; he writes, "Should [philosophy] begin with the facts of consciousness? It would thereby, from the very beginning, exclude the whole external world from its consideration. It must not find its staging post in any old fact, but only in the fact of the world" ([1832/33] 1972, p. 272).

Cousin and Schelling choose very different materials, then, but their goal is the same: to identify properties in those experiences that "tend" towards a supersensible domain. As a result, when it comes to the dual challenge set out at the beginning of this essay facing any post-Hemsterhuisian speculative empiricism—namely, Kantian critique and mystic enthusiasm—Cousin's and Schelling's approach is as follows. In regard to Kant, Cousin and Schelling both attempt to theorise an experience that helps determine the supersensible, and yet such experience does so in a thoroughly *mediated* manner—that is, the experience itself remains fully within the limits of possible experience (experience of the workings of one's own mind for Cousin; the complete set of possible experiences for Schelling), but *tends* to something outside that limit, such that tracing the dynamics of such a possible experience reveals what is experientially impossible.²⁷ Similarly, in regard to mysticism, Cousin and Schelling both specify experiences that tell us something about God, about supersensible structures and metaphysical processes, and yet, once more, these experiences do so in a mediated way, from *within* the limits of possible experience. Such brief remarks evidently do justice to neither Cousin's nor Schelling's intricate relations with Kant and mysticism during the early 1830s; nevertheless, what is evident from the foregoing is the importance of the mediating movement that allows them to contest the critical empiricism of Hemsterhuis' *Sophyle* in the name of an ampliative empiricism of the sort advocated by Hemsterhuis' *Euthyphron*.

Such then, in conclusion, is the similar manner in which Cousin and Schelling represent themselves as heirs of "true empiricism"—through the description of possible experiences of the impossible. It is this resemblance that made the 1833–5 controversy possible, even if the writings from the controversy itself often focus on disagreements. I have argued that such differences are, for the most part, reducible to a disagreement *within*

26. For a full discussion of this point, see Martin 2013, pp. 6, 18–20.

27. I have spoken elsewhere of the "art of indirection" in Schelling's late "strategic" approach to the transcendent (see Whistler 2013). Of course, one might legitimately wonder how far we have actually progressed from sensible experiences acting as analogues of the supersensible in §59 of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790).

empiricism over what experiences best serve ampliative ends. On my interpretation, it is not the case, pace Schelling, that Cousin is some kind of rationalist in empiricist's clothing, nor is it the case, pace Cousin and most later commentators, that the two are to be opposed as leading representatives of the German tradition of speculative abstraction on the one hand and the French tradition of analytic introspection on the other. Rather, the stakes of this controversy are to be located in their shared aim of reviving "true empiricism."

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