



Psychoanalyzing Nature, Dark Ground of Spirit

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ABSTRACT

The ontological paradigms of Schelling and the late Merleau-Ponty bear striking resemblances to Spinoza's ontology. Both were developed in response to transcendental models of a Cartesian mold, resisting tendencies to exalt the human ego to the neglect or the detriment of the more-than-human world. As such, thinkers with environmental concerns have sought to derive favorable ethical prescriptions on their basis. We begin by discerning a deadlock between two such thinkers: Ted Toadvine and Sean McGrath. With ecological responsibility in mind, both actually resist Spinozist reduction of the human being to the status of a mere mode among modes. But despite having the same general aim, they end up endorsing contrary practical conclusions. Our objective is to pinpoint the reasons behind this deadlock, indicative of two strands of post-Spinozist environmental thought which stand in tension, and to begin to propose an integrative way forward. The ethical weight afforded by Toadvine to the notion of *resistance* in the work of the late Merleau-Ponty, namely nature's resistance to harmonizing, unifying pretensions, invites inquiry into two Merleau-Pontean notions he does not address: the barbarian principle, and the proposal to "Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature." We trace these to their origins in the works of Schelling's middle period, arguing that the Schellingian location of resistance in Spirit's dark ground—alternately conceived as primordial Dionysiac madness, bottled-up within the substratum of consciousness—leads to an understanding of the human, and human responsibility, that harbors favorable implications for environmental ethics.

KEYWORDS

Nature, Ontology,
Ethics, the
Dionysiac,
Schelling, Merleau-
Ponty

Human being: a mere mode among modes, or set apart from the rest of nature in a manner that entails specific ontological significance?¹ One's answer will have important implications for environmental ethics. Our point of departure is the relation between two continental philosophers whose respective ontologies bear striking resemblances to Spinoza's, itself a response to the Cartesian reduction of nature to the objectionable status of *extension*.²

The first is the late Merleau-Ponty, whose cryptic, ontological proposal to "Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature" is well-known (Merleau-Ponty 1968, p. 267). The second is Schelling, whose ontological reflections on pre-reflective being have proved to be of central importance for Merleau-Ponty's late proposal, and whose career-spanning meditations on the problem of ground led him to conceive of nature as the dark ground of Spirit. The likenesses to Spinoza's paradigm are not accidental; Spinoza held a place of primary influence in Schelling's thought, which in turn, through Schelling and others, influenced Merleau-Ponty.

Schelling's influence upon Merleau-Ponty's late ontology has received merited, recent emphasis.³ Our instigating question arises not so much from the literature on the relation between these thinkers, but rather from a seeming contradiction that has arisen in reading and comparing the work of two contemporary thinkers with environmental concerns, each of whom has been influenced by one of our two philosophers of nature. Having inherited Spinoza-inspired ontological paradigms through Merleau-Ponty and Schelling, Ted Toadvine and Sean McGrath both seek to transition from ontological reflection to ethical implementation.

The goal of the present inquiry is to suggest a path beyond a seeming contradiction that has arisen from reading and comparing their work, and our first section will begin by clarifying what that contradiction is (I). Responding to those who accentuate the "kinship" in Merleau-Ponty's "strange kinship," but who fail to heed the "strange," Toadvine's emphasis on resistance invites further inquiry into two Merleau-Pontean notions that Toadvine does not address. The first of these is Merleau-Ponty's proposal to "Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature," in conjunction with his late view that phenomenology and psychoanalysis converge in following their respective investigations into the substratum of consciousness (II). The second is his notion of the barbarian principle. To disambiguate this notion, and to draw out its ethical implications, we situate two of Merleau-Ponty's quotations of Schelling's *Ages of the World* against the backdrop of his middle works (III). Both notions are traced back to their inception in the dark ground of Spirit. Dionysiac desire, bottled up and repressed, can be released in one of two therapeutic ways,

¹ My gratitude is due to Paul Moyaert, Gadamer Chair at Boston College during the 2017-2018 academic year, whose zeal as a teacher and love as a learner have been influential for my development and the composition of this essay. I'd also like to thank Richard Atkins, whose careful criticisms and feedback on an earlier conference draft challenged me to transform a paper that was in otherwise poor shape. Additionally, I'd like to acknowledge and express my thanks to those present at the meeting of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy at SPEP in Pittsburgh (November 2019), at which I presented a draft: especially Bryan Bannon, for his kind disposition and engaging correspondence over the past few years, and thoughtful comments in response to this paper in particular; Rachel Jones, for her kindness and encouragement; and Josh Hayes, for much of the same. Finally, I express my thanks to two anonymous reviewers at the *Journal of the Pacific Association for the Continental Tradition*, along with its editor, Chris Lauer, whose comments, requests, and suggestions for further clarification have very much helped to improve the essay and to smooth out its rough edges.

² That is, the debates between anthropocentrists and biocentrists in the field of environmental philosophy fall beyond the scope of the present work.

³ See for example the volume edited by Jason Wirth and Patrick Burke, *The Barbarian Principle: Merleau-Ponty, Schelling, and the Question of Nature* (Wirth and Burke 2013), and Dylan Trigg, "'The Indestructible, the Barbaric Principle': The Role of Schelling in Merleau-Ponty's Psychoanalysis," which argues for necessity of returning to Schelling in order to make sense of Merleau-Ponty's cryptic proposal to "Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature" (Trigg 2016).

represented by Toadvine and McGrath: the Nietzschean and the Schellingian, respectively. But in the absence of further argumentation, it would appear that only one of these is both psychologically healthful and ethically mindful (IV).

Our thesis is as follows: Merleau-Ponty's intensifying focus on the common flesh of the body and of the world, along with the themes of resistance, the barbarian principle, and the late proposal to "Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature," ought to lead us into shadowlands from which we can discover anew the source of our very *need* for an ethics of ecological responsibility. Merleau-Ponty himself stands on the cusp of this insight, but his reading of Schelling in the *Nature* lectures does not attend to the development of Schelling's thought quite closely enough.

I. Environmental Groundwork

Considering the Spinozist lineage, one salient similarity between Ted Toadvine, who utilizes insights gleaned from Merleau-Ponty and the philosophy of nature in his environmental thought, and Sean McGrath, who does likewise with Schelling and psychoanalysis, is that Toadvine and McGrath alike resist the consequences of reducing the human to the ontological status of a mere mode among modes. And both do so with an eye to the problems that the elision of ontological difference, or homogenization of the human and the rest of nature, produces for environmental ethics.

McGrath takes the stronger stance when it comes to this point. In response to post-humanist tendencies in those inspired in particular by Deleuze and Guattari, his headline is clear: "Naturalism without humanism produces a flattened ontology in which nothing is particularly good or evil" (McGrath 2018, p. 102; henceforth *Difference*). His essay "In Defense of the Human Difference" begins boldly, with the following.

The common denial of the significance of human consciousness and freedom among eco-critics—the denial of the human difference—creates more problems for environmental philosophy than it solves. We will not break through to sustainable living by jettisoning the basic achievements of Western philosophy. Such a transcendence of our history is not even possible. And when it is tried, monsters are produced. It is not clear, for example, why the cockroaches shouldn't inherit the earth if there is nothing particularly distinct about us, as in Morton's "ecological thought." Nor is it clear on what moral grounds one could critique the self-maximizing capitalist for his ecological abuse if there is no such thing as moral grounds for anything. Naturalism without humanism produces a flattened ontology in which nothing is particularly good or evil. The proposed alternatives for ecology to some form of humanism are for the most part variations on Spinozism, either in a deep ecological or Deleuzian form, wherein we substitute the amoral good/bad dyad for real moral difference. For a thoroughgoing Spinozism there is nothing intrinsically wrong about the current destruction of the habitats of non-human animals for the sake of expanding human civilization. It is no doubt in our best interest to live more "sustainably," but that is a simple utilitarian calculus which does not challenge the ethics of the self-maximizer in any important way. We ought to recall that Spinoza's argument for why we should treat others well is that it is better to be surrounded by friends

rather than enemies—i.e., the utilitarian calculus. When we recall that utilitarian thinking is the very core of ecological degradation—everything reduced to exchange-value (in Marx’s language)—the conundrum facing political ecology becomes clear: naturalism without humanism leaves us with nothing but the ethics of capitalism. (*Difference*, pp. 101-102)

Such flattened ontologies, in other words, place the thinker beyond good and evil in such a way as to sweep away viable grounds for environmental responsibility. McGrath develops these arguments in detail in his recent book, *Thinking Nature: An Essay in Negative Ecology*.⁴

Toadvine’s resistance develops not so much out of an aversion to flattened ontology, *per se*. It arises in response to those who take the work of the late Merleau-Ponty as a point of departure, attempting to derive grounds for environmental ethics on the basis of an ontological kinship between the human and the rest of nature.⁵ Without going so far as to commend ecologically minded humanism, he poses the following challenge to those “on the rebound against earlier anthropocentric views of ‘man-apart-from-nature’”:

But perhaps this movement toward a continuity with nature, a homogeneity or kinship between the human and the natural, is wrongheaded. This problematic tendency is also apparent in recent phenomenologically oriented approaches to environmental philosophy, for example, in recent attempts to establish a kinship of the human and the natural on the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of corporeality and later ontology of flesh. Is environmental ethics best served by adopting this ‘humans-as-a-part-of-nature’ paradigm? (Toadvine 2005a, p. 139)

His answer is *no*, environmental ethics is not best served by adopting the ‘humans-as-a-part-of-nature’ paradigm. While he does not quite defend the necessity of postulating ontological difference in order to ground responsibility, Toadvine responds to such homogenization by highlighting a contrary tendency present in Merleau-Ponty’s work.

If we would hold out hope for an ethical summons arising from within this ontological paradigm, Toadvine argues, it would have to come from close attention to that which resists phenomenological investigation. As his reflections on Merleau-Ponty, that which resists thematization, and problems of ethical import unfold, Toadvine eventually turns to Deleuze and Guattari and their notion of *becoming animal* as an implied, quasi-ethical means of working out what it means to attend to such sites of resistance.⁶

While Husserl and other classical phenomenologists like Max Scheler surmounted the assumptions of Cartesian dualism by recognizing a layer of “animal sensibility” held in common with animals of other species, Merleau-Ponty alone “endorses something like an animal stratum of the human and finds in it the basis for what we will call a ‘strange kinship’” (Toadvine 2014, p. 111; henceforth *Voices*). Yet even Merleau-Ponty remains bound by Cartesian constraints, Toadvine suggests, when in his early work he refuses to recognize continuity, rather than a radical break, between animality and humanity. At least for the Merleau-Ponty of *The Structure*

⁴ For a more detailed description, see my forthcoming book review in *Continental Philosophy Review*.

⁵ Especially as in the work of ecophenomenologists like David Abram (See Toadvine 2005b).

⁶ “These sites of resistance are numerous and varied: the unconscious, dreams, madness, fatigue, the traumatic, the other, the ‘savage,’ the animal, the pre-reflective, birth, death, the back side of things. Each of these sites names a dilemma for phenomenology, an impossible dimension, an experience which cannot be thematized as such” (Toadvine 1999, p. 129).

of *Behavior*, “‘vital behavior as such disappears’ once our animality has been integrated into the higher and more encompassing gestalt of the human order.” With this claim, Toadvine maintains, Merleau-Ponty reproduces what Agamben has criticized as the “anthropological machine’s logic of inclusive exclusion,” whereby we humans construct ourselves with reference to the animals we are, and are not.

In response, Toadvine contends that “admission of the contingency of death into Merleau-Ponty’s hierarchy of Gestalts destabilizes it, toppling it over” (*Voices*, p. 112). He continues,

This is why Merleau-Ponty’s later work speaks of a lateral rather than a vertical transcendence, and why that transcendence can be understood as intertwining or chiasm. In the chiasmic relation, the animal becomes me and I become it, bringing this exchange very close to what Deleuze and Guattari call “blocks of becoming.” But this moment of exchange, the intersection of the chiasm, is a moment that exceeds the exchange itself. To understand this moment, we need to consider its strange temporality as a generative passivity. This generative moment is what Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, names the “anonymous,” the someone who perceives within me without coinciding with my personal self, my Ego. This anonymous someone is precisely my animal life, the life of my body as a natural self. But this means that my animal self lives a different temporality than my personal ego, a time of Aeon or of a past that has never been present. (*Voices*, p. 112)

“The Time of Animal Voices” seeks to tease out what exactly the presence of such an anonymous, animal self within would imply, doing so with reference to Deleuze and Guattari. Toadvine argues that the animal(s) which perceive from within me constitute “a virtual multiplicity” at the foundation of my being, and also that “my speech is the speaking through me of my own animal past.” Most importantly, “...when I gaze into the eyes of another, non-human animal, it is the animals within me, the animals of my own generative past, that look back.” All of these implications taken together proffer the promise of productive, or creative results in the moment of “mutual encounter.” Toadvine’s transition from the late Merleau-Ponty to the notion of *becoming animal* in Deleuze and Guattari works out what it would mean to attend to “sites of resistance” in Merleau-Ponty’s late writings, as a constructive resource for environmental ethics (Toadvine 1999, 2005a, 2005b, 2010).

It seems to me that at bottom, Toadvine and McGrath really want the same thing: firmer grounding for ethical responsibility arising from within an ontological paradigm generally inherited from Spinoza, and without recourse to talk of intrinsic value. It therefore strikes me as strange that while aiming at the same thing, they end up endorsing what appear to be mutually opposed viewpoints. On the one hand, Toadvine eventually turns to Deleuze and Guattari, supplementing his emphasis on the point that “an ethical response to nature becomes possible only when we are faced with the *impossibility* of reducing it to the homogenous, the continuous, the predictable, the perceivable, the thematizable” (Toadvine 2005a, p. 140). On the other hand, McGrath turns against Deleuze and Guattari, or against the Deleuze-inspired “flattened ontology in which nothing is particularly good or evil” (*Difference*, p. 102).

Further complicating our account, however, and lending credence to Toadvine’s Deleuzian turn, is the fact that in his earlier work on Schelling’s conception of the unconscious

McGrath discloses that Schelling endorses a notion of “the productive unconscious, which is widely associated with Jung, *and increasingly with Deleuze and Guattari*, but whose historical inception is Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*” (McGrath 2010, p. 85, emphasis mine). Indeed, McGrath argues quite winsomely in favor of the dissociative unconscious as an alternative to Freudian and Lacanian, tragic and repressive conceptions.⁷

Our ostensible contradiction arises. On the one hand, McGrath endorses a Schellingian conception of the unconscious which coincides with the work of Deleuze and Guattari. But on the other hand, McGrath argues that their flattened ontological paradigm—akin, we add, in conjunction with Toadvine, to that of the later Merleau-Ponty—threatens to undermine any particularly human call to ethics. If this is indeed a contradiction it would seem to call into question McGrath’s endorsement of the Schellingian, productive unconscious, which is increasingly associated with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and his opposition at the level of environmental ethics to the flattened ontology inspired by Deleuze and Guattari.

Have we stumbled upon a case in which what would be ethically mindful is shipwrecked against what would be psychologically and therapeutically healthful? Perhaps the will to life stands in opposition to the otherworldly demands of morals, and one must choose health and the this-worldly over morality and an unhappy consciousness. Or is there a way the Schellingian conception of the unconscious, and psychological health, might *coincide with*, or perhaps even evoke specifically human calls to ethical responsibility? Moreover, recalling Toadvine’s concerns about deriving implications for environmental ethics from within the ontological paradigm of the late Merleau-Ponty, are *Merleau-Ponty’s* phenomenological and ontological insights amenable to environmental responsibility, despite the flattened ontology?

II. Befriending the Philosopher’s Shadow

Again we take Toadvine’s ethical reflections as a point of departure. He follows Merleau-Ponty so far as the limits of phenomenological investigation allow, and no further: “But perhaps the possibility of an ethical response to nature lies with the impossibility of trimming its claws for adoption as our sibling or household pet. Perhaps, as I will suggest here, an ethical response to nature becomes possible only when we are faced with the *impossibility* of reducing it to the homogeneous, the continuous, the predictable, the perceivable, the thematizable” (Toadvine 2005a, p. 140). Emphasis on impossibility leads Toadvine to the surprising view that “What is

⁷ “The most serious problem with the Lacanian appropriation of Schelling is the imposition of a theory of repression onto the Schellingian unconscious. Nowhere does Schelling say that the unconscious is constituted by acts, contents, experiences, which are unconscious because subjectivity could not bear them. The Schellingian unconscious is not reactive but productive, not repressive but dissociative. Here we refer to a distinction between two broad classes of theories of the unconscious: the reactive unconscious, which is an effect of the loss and disowning of the individual’s past (of which Lacan’s is the most philosophically sophisticated account), and the productive unconscious, which is widely associated with Jung, and increasingly with Deleuze and Guattari, but whose historical inception is Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*. The productive unconscious is the future-oriented, creative ground of the polymorphous self, a collective layer of potencies and possibilities that are for the most part unrecognized by the ego but that make possible the development and transformations the psyche undergoes in its progressive individuation. Where the theoreticians of the reactive unconscious have broken with the theosophico-romantic lineage of dynamic psychology, the advocates of the productive unconscious have actively elaborated and developed it” (McGrath 2010, pp. 85-86).

called for is not a new philosophy of nature, but an ethics of the impossibility of any ‘philosophy of nature.’⁸

For the late Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, phenomenological investigation opens onto ontological speculation, clearing the space for a more robust philosophy of nature. We note that in using the language of “trimming nature’s claws,” Toadvine echoes Merleau-Ponty’s phrasing in his preface to Hesnard’s book on Freud. There he writes,

There is no longer any great risk that Freudian research will shock us by recalling what there is of the “barbarian” in us; the risk is rather that its findings will be too easily accepted in an “idealist” form. ...Today there is a race toward psychoanalysis, just as there was once a flight from it. Yesterday it was the spirit of evil; today one trims its claws and adopts it (Merleau-Ponty 1993, p. 70).

With this invocation we return to the beginnings of Merleau-Ponty’s cryptic ontological proposal: “Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature.”⁹ The great insight recovered in Freudian research, Merleau-Ponty maintains, is its recalling to consciousness “what there is of the ‘barbarian’ in us.” Investigations into the ground of conscious reflection lay bare a truth buried therein, a truth also brought to the fore in Schelling’s investigations of what he termed *the barbarian principle*. When Toadvine appropriates Merleau-Ponty’s language, arguing that the “possibility of an ethical response to nature” rests with “the impossibility of trimming its claws for adoption as our sibling or household pet,” he summons, unwittingly, the spirits of two key influences: Schelling and Freud.

When Merleau-Ponty speaks of *resistance*, he doesn’t impose a stricture that one must not attempt to theorize any further on this basis. Additionally, for the late Merleau-Ponty, by contrast with Toadvine and in consort with Schelling, resistance is more than simply that which cannot be thematized, is not simply the “other side” of the phenomenon or the Janus face which never directly appears.¹⁰ The philosopher’s shadow implies a darkness which is more than mere privation: “The philosopher must bear his shadow,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “which is not simply the factual absence of future light” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 178; henceforth *Shadow*). More than indiscernible deprivation or a nameless nullity, the barbarian principle which so thrilled the late Merleau-Ponty exceeds Toadvine’s seemingly passive conception of resistance. Merleau-Ponty continues, “What resists phenomenology within us—the natural being, the ‘barbarous’ source Schelling spoke of—cannot remain outside phenomenology and should have its place within it” (*Shadow*, p. 178). Direct attribution to Schelling, here in an essay on Husserl nearly contemporaneous with the preface to Hesnard, indicates acknowledgement of a drive or power which *actively* opposes the harmonizing, or totalizing tendencies of reason. This darker force is discovered when careful phenomenological description meets with an active resistance, opening the door to ontological speculation.

To descend further along the path of descent charted by the late Merleau-Ponty, the downward and inward path toward the “substratum of consciousness,” with which the investigations of phenomenology and psychoanalysis increasingly come to a head and converge,

⁸ This is surprising because he would go on, literally, to write the book on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of nature (Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, 2009).

⁹ Unfortunately, Toadvine does not address the Freudian and Lacanian lines of influence that begin to surface in the late Merleau-Ponty. Neither does he address this cryptic proposal.

¹⁰ Cf. Toadvine 2010.

we must be willing to discover anew “what there is of the barbarian in us.” The very same insight into the dark ground of consciousness just “yesterday” led Freudian psychoanalysis to be regarded as the “spirit of evil.” To do any less than to attend carefully to this positive principle would be to trim its claws for adoption. But to do so we must, as Dylan Trigg has argued, return with Merleau-Ponty to his source in thinking such forbidden thoughts: to Schelling (Trigg 2016). The injunction to “Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature” is, after all, prefaced by the following Schellingian clue: “The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize from within a passage from one into the other Existential eternity. The indestructible, the barbaric Principle” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, p. 267). Bringing to light what had remained hidden in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of this principle will disclose the path to an answer to our seeming contradiction.

III. The Barbarian Principle

Commenting on Schelling’s thought in the *Nature* lectures, Merleau-Ponty uses the term *barbarian principle* synonymously with the more generic *erste Natur*, where the latter was in fact employed more characteristically in Schelling’s earlier work. Beginning from this equation, in the following section we’ll uncover, then seek to recover the ethical connotations of *the barbarian principle*, explicating two key passages from a text cited at one remove by Merleau-Ponty: the 1815 draft of Schelling’s *Ages of the World*.¹¹ Both appear in the following selection from the *Nature* lectures, which we’ll comment upon at length in what follows:

We could speak, in Schelling, about a priority of existence over essence. This *erste Natur* is the most ancient element, “an abyss of the past,” which always remains present in us and in all things. *Erste Natur* is “the fundamental stuff of all life and of every existing being, something terrifying, a barbaric principle that one can overcome but never put aside.” It is an effort to explain this pre-being, which, as soon as we arrive on the scene, is always already there. This excess of Being over the consciousness of Being is what Schelling wants to think in all its rigor. Schelling tries to describe this “over-being” (*Übersein*, in the sense of the word “surrealism”), which cannot be thought ahead of time, which is not yet posited by God, but which is in God a preliminary condition. He tries to engage himself in the “desert of Being” (Jaspers), in this *erste Natur*, where he sees a principle of God just as important as goodwill: the “anger of God,” the “destructive fire.” There is nothing solid in the history of Nature, where this undoubtedly destructive

¹¹ Robert Vallier, translator of the *Nature* lectures into English, suggests that Merleau-Ponty may have remained unaware of this original source due to his reliance on secondary sources. In understanding and conveying Schelling’s philosophy, Merleau-Ponty draws liberally from the two works that were most readily available to him: Karl Jaspers’ *Schelling*, and Karl Löwith’s *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. Vallier writes of Jaspers’ work that at the time it was “one of the only widely available commentaries on Schelling,” which Merleau-Ponty used “extensively in the preparation of the materials on Schelling.” He writes of Löwith’s book that one of its primary aims is to “link [Nietzsche’s] thought to its precedents in German philosophy, notably Kant, Hegel and Schelling” (*Nature*, pp. 289-290n1, n4). Of the latter, Vallier continues, “Merleau-Ponty seems to have used this text extensively in the preparation of the materials on Schelling’s philosophy of nature, sometimes paraphrasing it in his lecture” (*ibid.*, p. 290n4). Löwith discusses Schelling for a total of five pages, but his analysis is very impressive. See Löwith 1997, pp. 145-149.

and savage but nevertheless necessary force is ignored. Thus the eighteenth century was the epoch when we lost sight of the principle of anger and selfishness. Schelling sees in his time “a world which is no longer but an image, and even an image of an image, nothing of nothing. Humans are only, in their turn, images, dreams. A people, in this laudable effort toward enlightenment...dissolves everything into thought and dissolves all forms with obscurity, this barbaric principle, the source of all grandeur and all beauty.” (Merleau-Ponty 2003, p. 38; henceforth *Nature*)

In the first quotations of Schelling in this passage we find Merleau-Ponty paraphrasing, in translation, citations of Schelling found in Löwith’s book on Nietzsche. Löwith mistakenly attributes them to an extremely early essay by Schelling, in fact one his very first publications.¹² Among other consequences, this inexactitude may have contributed to Merleau-Ponty’s failure to distinguish between *erste Natur* as theorized in Schelling’s earlier works, and the barbarian principle as theorized in the works of his middle period. Using them interchangeably, he glosses over deepened ontological and psychological connotations, and the ethical implications, which accrue to the latter.

Translator Robert Vallier underplays this confusion, also glossing the significance assumed by the latter term.¹³ By contrast, we argue that above and beyond the aesthetic considerations surrounding the notion of *erste Natur*, a term clearly less ethically charged, *the barbarian principle* denotes key developments which surfaced in Schelling’s *Freedom* essay and which he had developed further in *The Ages of the World*. The context from which these citations have been pulled—and indeed portions of the final passage cited from the *Ages of the World* which have been cut, in Merleau-Ponty’s quotations at secondhand—indicate as much. These together gesture in the direction of an ethical paradigm which implies an answer to our original problem. Thus a deeper, darker, and more contextualized understanding of the barbarian principle provides an untapped resource for those of us who, with Toadvine and McGrath, seek to salvage grounds for environmental responsibility according to ontological paradigm inherited from Spinoza, albeit at one or more removes.

The first of Merleau-Ponty’s quotations of *The Ages of the World* combines Merleau-Ponty’s paraphrase of Löwith’s paraphrase with Löwith’s quotation of a passage occurring a couple of pages later. The full text from Löwith’s book reads, “The basic material of all life and existence, according to Schelling and Nietzsche alike, is the terrible: a blind power and force, a barbaric principle that can be overcome but can never be eliminated, and that is ‘the foundation of all greatness of beauty’” (Löwith 1997, p. 149).¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty excludes Löwith’s

¹² Vallier recounts, “These last words are Schelling’s and are erroneously attributed by Löwith to *SW* 1:222, which is in the middle of “Of the I as a Principle of Philosophy” (1795); no such passage is to be found there, and the French editors did not correct the error” (*Nature*, p. 290n8). At the time of that essay’s publication Schelling was only 20 years old, still under the influence of Fichte’s transcendental idealism.

¹³ He writes elsewhere, “Now even though Schelling does not explicitly deploy ‘barbarian principle’ as a predicate for Nature until the sketches for *The Ages of the World*, it—and along with it, the problem of ground—[...] is present in his early works. During the ‘period’ of his *Naturphilosophie*, he names it *erste Natur*” (Vallier 2013, p. 131).

¹⁴ In Merleau-Ponty’s citation the reference to Nietzsche drops out. This reference will become significant later in our discussion.

constructive comparison of Schelling with Nietzsche, along with the subtle indication that the barbarian principle can be overcome but never eliminated.¹⁵

The initial portion of this text is Löwith's paraphrase of the end of a passage that appears almost at the end of Schelling's 1815 draft of *The Ages of the World*. Placed back into context, in that passage Schelling actually draws a distinction which brings further clarity to our larger concerns involving Deleuze, Spinoza, and environmental ethics.¹⁶ We find Schelling addressing two groups of thinkers that had claimed the name of *pantheism*, with each group succumbing in its own way to an ontological enticement still entertained by environmental thinkers today.¹⁷ Schelling's claim is that both have failed to glimpse the broader picture which the "real" pantheism of his middle period sought to paint:

Now, those who have recently talked so much about pantheism may now see what it really is. For most people who speak of the One and the Many only see the Many therein. They have not even once noticed that there is a One, a subject, therein. But by the many they understand that selfless totality that the initial nature is. This group also includes those who eternally reiterate the assurance of the harmony and wonderfully blessed unity of the cosmos, something that already long ago become a burden to any sensible person. Both groups would no doubt find real pantheism to be horrifying. But were they capable of penetrating the exterior surface of things, they would see that *the true prime matter of all life and existence is precisely what is horrifying*. (Schelling 2000, p. 104; emphasis mine; henceforth *Ages*)¹⁸

While the one group seeks to ignite the spark of desire to lose one's singularity in wholeheartedly embracing an animalistic multiplicity, the other fans the flame of longing to return to lost primal unity, to the continuous fabric of a harmonious universe in which reflective consciousness is no longer alienated from mother nature.

The first group consists of those who've become so enamored of multiplicity that they seek to eradicate the human subject, or self.¹⁹ The second is comprised of those who insist on cosmic harmony and universal unity to the exclusion of a contrary principle found also within

¹⁵ But this paraphrase is itself misleading, insofar as it implies that the ideal would be to eliminate it. As we'll see, Schelling's ideal is not elimination, but redirection.

¹⁶ This is especially the case when placed back into dialogue with Nietzsche, who, in addition to Spinoza, holds a place of principal influence in Deleuze's thought.

¹⁷ Steve Vogel captured at least one of these well when he classified conceptions of nature in environmental philosophy as falling under one of two categories: nature as origin or nature as difference (see Vogel 1998). Both groups criticized by Schelling in the passage cited next, it seems to me, can be classified as adhering to a regressive conception of nature as *origin*. The middle Schelling might perhaps be classified as seeking to counterbalance such emphasis, which corresponds to his early *Naturphilosophie*, by presenting a (qualified) view of "nature" as *difference*. We saw in our first section that in responding to those who attempt to derive an ethics of kinship on the basis of Merleau-Ponty's thought—a regressive conception of nature as origin, in other words—Toadvine relies upon a contrary tendency in the late Merleau-Ponty. This move echoes that of the middle Schelling. Toadvine's emphasis on an ethics of the "impossibility" of any philosophy of nature means that he refuses to entertain the full conclusion toward which we've been working. But as we've seen, the late Merleau-Ponty relies upon the very principle we're seeking to elucidate in context, about which Toadvine remains conspicuously silent: the barbarian principle.

¹⁸ Emphasis mine, highlighting the line from this passage paraphrased by Löwith and cited by Merleau-Ponty.

¹⁹ Read, for our larger purposes: Deleuze and the posthumanists. We'll attempt to justify the inclusion of "animalistic" before "multiplicity," on Schelling's own terms, in our next and final section.

nature, the principle of resistance emphasized by both Toadvine, *pace* Merleau-Ponty, and by the middle Schelling.²⁰ The problem is that *both* groups fail to acknowledge the “horrifying” nature of the chaos underlying natural order, the dark ground of Spirit. This means that both evade the conclusion that when fully actualized in the willed acts of a human individual, the barbarian principle unleashes into the world of nature the force of real, positive evil.

Connecting back to our larger environmental concerns, we note on the one hand that in his opposition to that “flattened ontology in which nothing is particularly good or evil,” Sean McGrath follows Schelling in waging a response to both of the groups here in question.²¹ On the other hand, in Toadvine’s move from the phenomenological ontology of the late Merleau-Ponty—which, we’ve maintained, smacks of implicit Spinozism—to his contention that “an ethical response to nature becomes possible only when we are faced with the *impossibility* of reducing it to the homogenous, the continuous, the predictable, the perceivable, the thematizable,” the resistance he seeks to foreground is waged in reaction to a Merleau-Pontean iteration of the second group.

Toadvine’s response to those who would attempt to derive an ethics of kinship on the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s late ontology mirrors a crucial concern of the middle Schelling, and McGrath: a phenomenon of crucial ethical import, a *real* phenomenon, has been ignored or repressed when the barbarian principle is jettisoned in attempts to satisfy regressive longings for a lost primal unity. Merleau-Ponty would appear to affirm this shared concern: “There is nothing solid in the history of Nature, where this undoubtedly destructive and savage but nevertheless necessary force is ignored” (*Nature*, p. 38). But by contrast with Schelling, and to a lesser extent also with Merleau-Ponty, Toadvine restricts his own project in such a way as to preclude reflection on the abuses of a specifically human freedom, and the abdication of a specifically human responsibility, in a manner that gives rise to real, positive evil.

Toadvine comes to side with Deleuze and Guattari, endorsing their notion of *becoming animal* as a quasi-ethical supplement to his earlier work on an ethics based in the notion of resistance. While he rightly criticizes those who would capitalize on the regressive tendency in the work of Merleau-Ponty in the name of an ethics of kinship, Toadvine’s embracing of Deleuze and Guattari’s *becoming animal* would appear to align him squarely with the first group pinpointed by Schelling, criticized by both Schelling and McGrath for its suspect ethical consequences. *Becoming animal* epitomizes abandonment of singularity in favor of animalistic multiplicity, an eschewal of the subject, or self, to be lost in the furor of group or mass psychology.

Löwith paraphrases the last line of the aforementioned passage—“But were they capable of penetrating the exterior surface of things, they would see that the true prime matter of all life and existence is precisely what is horrifying”—and combines it with a quotation from the last line of a passage occurring a few pages later. That latter line is in fact drawn from the end of the second passage quoted by Merleau-Ponty, at the end of our long citation from his *Nature* lectures. This second, much longer quotation of *The Ages of the World* concludes with a paraphrased and elided declaration that the barbarian principle simply *is* the source or foundation of all greatness of beauty. According to Schelling’s original, however, as the larger context of Löwith’s

²⁰ Read: deep ecology, and certain iterations of environmental Spinozism.

²¹ In *Thinking Nature*, McGrath addresses both of these even more explicitly. Consider the following passage, in response to the first group: “But every effort to forget ourselves, every descent into some pre-personal ersatz *unio mystica*—psychedelics, mosh pits, radical protests, war, sex, or just plain drunkenness—is followed by the painful return of distance we thought we had abolished and, with it, moral anxiety, either in the form of regret or, even more simply, sorrow that the *unio* was so temporary, and to that degree a lie” (McGrath 2019, p. 91).

discussion of Schelling makes clear, the barbarian principle does not by itself beget greatness and beauty. Quite the opposite: apart from human freedom used in service of the Good, this principle is the source of *the destruction* of greatness and beauty, lending to the implosion or self-destruction of life.²²

In a very Nietzschean vein, the second, more substantive quotation of Schelling offers a criticism of Enlightenment enthusiasts whose ratification of a cold, calculated, abstract rationalizing has led to the denial, as opposed to the affirmation of *life*. Much like both Nietzsche and Spinoza, two principal influences for Deleuze, Schelling strives to put his finger on the sources of fundamental vitality underlying the fecundity of the more-than-human world.²³ Just before this passage, in the *Ages of the World*, he writes, “No doubt, when German idealism emerged in its highest intensification with Fichte, the fundamental thought of the I, that is, of a living unity of that which has being and Being, aroused the hope of an elevated Spinozism that led to what is vital” (*Ages*, p. 106). The ultimate hope is for a position which would take Spinozist insights up into a higher standpoint, elevated above abstract formalism and the mechanistic conception of nature Spinoza had endorsed. Schelling stipulates elsewhere that such a viewpoint must refuse to abandon the “I” after the manner of those who, inspired by Spinozist yearnings, seek the loss of the “self” in multiplicity.²⁴

Yet we cannot deny Spinoza’s positive influence. Of all early moderns he stands out as having intimated from far off, and then suffused into his abstract system, elusive reverberations of Spirit’s dark ground: “Far be it from us to deny in Spinoza that for which he was our teacher and predecessor. Perhaps, of all the modern philosophers, there was in Spinoza a dark feeling of that primordial time of which we have attempted to conceptualize so precisely” (*Ages*, p. 104). These echoes reverberate down through Schelling’s work to the late Merleau-Ponty, providing a late supplement to his earlier, incisive phenomenological intimations of a “past that has never been present,” abiding in the substratum of consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p. 252). Indeed, the desire to wrestle with and bring to light “a dark feeling of that primordial time” characterizes well what Merleau-Ponty is after in his late lecture courses on *Nature*, which end by addressing

²² Schelling’s line is as follows: “But, along with the darkness, they lost all might and that (let the right word stand here) barbaric principle that, *when overcome but not annihilated*, is the foundation of all greatness and beauty” (*Ages*, p. 106, emphasis mine). Vallier concedes, “Löwith’s gloss conveniently summarizes the two passages, and Merleau-Ponty seems to rely on it more than on the original text itself” (Merleau-Ponty 2003, p. 291n8). But in the service of convenience, perhaps the most important element of this quotation has been cut out. To be sure, such omission does serve well Löwith’s affirmative comparison between Schelling and Nietzsche—a comparison which Merleau-Ponty has omitted from his own citation.

²³ Recall, in this context, McGrath’s characterization of “the productive unconscious” as “widely associated with Jung, and increasingly with Deleuze and Guattari, but whose historical inception is Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*” (McGrath 2010, p. 85).

²⁴ McGrath explains, “Despite the progressive turn away from transcendental philosophy, Schelling never abandons the transcendental method vouchsafed to consciousness by virtue of its capacity to self-reflect. Reflection may be ultimately inadequate to grasping the absolute but it remains the principal tool of philosophy. Philosophy must use it until it can no longer proceed and reflection itself begins to reveal its own limits. Spinoza’s lack of a transcendental method causes him intractable problems. He grasps the ideal only in contradistinction to the real; both are merely given for Spinoza without any clear sense of why they are given, that is, of why the ideal – real opposition exists in the first place. In Schelling’s view, Spinoza’s crucial insight into the correlativity of the ideal and the real should have led him into ‘the depths of his self-consciousness.’ Instead Spinoza literally loses himself in the object” (McGrath 2012, p. 86).

the concept of animality, discovered in the artifacts left behind by earlier humans and in an unconscious, never-present past.²⁵

By contrast with Spinoza's subtle intimations of Spirit's dark ground, Schelling's Enlightenment-influenced contemporaries have endorsed the cold calculations of abstract reason to the exclusion of all "darkness." Refusing to grapple with the philosopher's shadow, they've repressed that which, when rightly ordered by reason, has the potential to become the source of all greatness and beauty. Schelling speaks of the shadow-world created by these thinkers, and their diminished existence within it:

This is a world that is still just an image, nay, an image of an image, a nothing of nothing, a shadow of a shadow. These are people who are nothing but images, just dreams of shadows. This is a people that, in the good-natured endeavor toward so-called Enlightenment, really arrived at the dissolution of everything into thoughts. But, along with the darkness, they lost all might and that (let the right word stand here) barbaric principle that, when overcome but not annihilated, is the foundation of all greatness and beauty. (*Ages*, p. 106)

Abstract machinations devoid of darkness, Apollonian abstractions devoid of Dionysiac madness, beget a hollow shell of a world in which all that is really vital has been vitiated. With Merleau-Ponty, we declare in response: "The philosopher must bear his shadow" (*Shadow*, p. 178). But again, that shadow is "not simply the factual absence of future light."

Spinoza intimated echoes of the dark ground of existence. But mere intimations fail to capture the full situation at play here, both ontologically and ethically. The middle Schelling comes to argue that a positive principle lies beneath, the power of which exceeds merely passive conceptions of nature's resistance. Though he also fails to proceed very far beyond initial intimations, Merleau-Ponty follows Schelling partway: "What resists phenomenology within us—the natural being, the 'barbarous' source Schelling spoke of—cannot remain outside phenomenology and should have its place within it" (*Shadow*, p. 178). Repression of darkness begets a world that is the mere shadow of a shadow of reality, neutered and bereft of Dionysiac bark and bite. Darkness repressed merely forces the terrors underground, into the substratum of consciousness, twice removed from the light of so-called enlightenment. Having refused to befriend the philosopher's shadow, "enlightened" thought is rendered impotent: "nothing but images, just dreams of shadows."

²⁵ A key difference between Schelling and Merleau-Ponty is the one we've been explicating: Schelling's attempts to "conceptualize so precisely" this "dark feeling of that primordial time" lead to his ontological theorization of the barbarian principle as the natural ground of positive evil. To elaborate further, concerning rigorous conceptualization: whereas Merleau-Ponty refuses systematization in the service of phenomenological description, Schelling does not. Sebastian Gardner has argued quite forcefully, however: "...the problem facing Merleau-Ponty has the following form. If what is claimed in Schelling's *Real-Idealism* is incoherent, then it avails nothing to try the same (sort of) thing in a mode putatively free from systematic pretensions. Switching from *Wissenschaft* to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological-ontological idiom cannot salvage anything, for it is only by tacitly converting his claims back into systematic doctrines that they can be understood as candidates for truth. Ramsey's dictum, that what cannot be said cannot be whistled either, applies in the present case. If the ontology of *V&I* [*The Visible and the Invisible*] is not 'mere metaphor' but has philosophical truth, then the same must be said for *Real-Idealism*, in which case the question must be faced of how they relate to one another—to which the most convincing answer is provided, I have suggested, by the para-aesthetic reading of *V&I* and its subordination to *Real-Idealism*" (Gardner 2017, p. 23).

Greatness and beauty are elicited when the barbarian principle “*within us*” is acknowledged, then harnessed in pursuit of the Good. With this positive injunction we’ve gone well beyond Spinoza, and Schelling writes in the *Freedom* essay that what Spinoza’s skeleton of a system really needs is to be infused with the “warm breath of love” (Schelling 2006, p. 21).²⁶ Madness boiling beneath the surface of consciousness must be brought out into the light and *integrated* for the sake of a higher ethical ideal, the ideal of love.

IV. Dionysiac Madness

The “barbarian” in “barbarian principle” evokes ancient conceptions of unordered chaos preceding rationalized order, the uncivilized cruelty of non-Greek raiders contrasted with the cultivated civility—and “civilized” cruelty—of the Greeks. It also recalls primordial pleasure in acts of active destruction.²⁷ Vallier elaborates, “The destructive face of Nature is underscored in Schelling’s description of it as a barbarian principle; borrowing from the Greek βάρβαρος, signifying the strange, the foreign, the savage, the uncultivated non-Greeks who would invade and ravage the Greek Apolline civilization, what is barbaric and terrible is thus linked to a Dionysian irrationality” (Vallier 2013, p. 132). Three decades before Nietzsche’s birth, Schelling

²⁶ What Schelling means when he makes this claim can be explained by context: “Or does one doubt that the basic views of Spinozism must already be essentially changed by a dynamic notion of nature? If the doctrine that all things are contained in God is the ground of the whole system, then, at the very least, it must first be brought to life and torn from abstraction before it can become the principle of a system of reason” (Schelling 2006, p. 20). He goes on to describe that one must breathe *life* into Spinoza’s abstract system to make it dynamic, anticipating passages from the *Ages of the World* which we’ve discussed above: “How general are the expressions that finite beings are modifications or consequences of God; what a gulf there is to fill here, what questions there are to answer! One could look at the rigidity of Spinozism as at Pygmalion’s statue that had to be made animate through the warm breath of love; but this comparison is incomplete since Spinozism is more like a work sketched out only in barest outline in which many still missing or unfinished features would first become noticeable if it were made animate. It would be preferable to compare Spinozism to the most ancient images of divinities which appear that much more mysterious the less their features bespoke individuality and liveliness. In a word, it is a one-sidedly realist system, which expression indeed sounds less damning than pantheism, yet indicates what is characteristic of the system far more correctly and is also not employed here for the first time. It would be irksome to repeat the many explanations that have been made concerning this point in the author’s [own] early writings. A mutual saturation of realism and idealism in each other was the declared intent of his efforts. Spinoza’s basic concept, when infused by spirit (and, in one essential point, changed) by the principle of idealism, received a living basis in the higher forms of investigation of nature and the recognized unity of the dynamic with the emotional and spiritual; out of this grew the philosophy of nature, which as pure physics was indeed able to stand for itself, yet at any time in regard to the whole of philosophy was only considered as a part, namely the real part that would be capable of rising up into the genuine system of reason only through completion by the ideal part in which freedom rules. It was claimed that in this rising up (of freedom) the final empowering act was found through which all of nature transfigured itself in feeling, intelligence, and finally, in will. In the final and highest judgment, there is no other Being than will. Will is primal Being to which alone all predicates of Being apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence from time, self-affirmation. All of philosophy strives only to find this highest expression” (ibid., pp. 20-21). Since the early *Naturphilosophie*, in other words, Schelling’s entire philosophical development has been characterized by an attempt to breathe life into Spinoza’s abstract and lifeless system—and also, we add, to compensate nature for the mishandling it suffered in Fichte’s (to paraphrase Hegel, from the *Difference* essay).

²⁷ Recall Nietzsche’s desire to redirect a certain set of instincts—which have been repressed in the name of *morality*, but which nevertheless demand satisfaction—toward their proper mode of discharge. He refers to these under the banner of a drive (*Trieb*) toward “Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction” (Nietzsche 1989, pp. 84-85).

forges a positive connection between the barbarian principle and the notion of Dionysiac madness.

The passages from *The Ages of the World* which we've discussed come from the very last pages of Schelling's 1815 draft, in an appended section: "General Discussion of the Doctrine of Pantheism Developed Here."²⁸ Interestingly, just before this brief appendix we find an explicit discussion of madness:

The ancients did not speak in vain of a divine and holy madness. We even see nature, in the process of its free unfolding, becoming, in proportion to its approach to spirit, ever more, so to speak, frenzied. (...) Panthers or tigers do not pull the carriage of Dionysus in vain. For this wild frenzy of inspiration in which nature found itself when it was in view of the being was celebrated in the nature worship of prescient ancient peoples by the drunken festivals of Bacchic orgies. (*Ages*, pp. 102-103)

Ancient processions like these were accompanied by the "din of a coarse music that is partly deafening and partly lacerating." Anticipating the ruminations of the young Nietzsche, Schelling continues, "For nothing is more similar to that inner madness than music, which, through the incessant eccentric relinquishing and re-attracting of tones, most clearly imitates that primordial movement" (*Ages*, p. 103).²⁹

The statement that follows marks the point at which the paths of Nietzsche and Schelling would appear to part ways. Nietzsche—or, his more recent disciples in particular—seeks to cultivate health in the liberation of Dionysiac desire. Shattering the shackles of society and of morals, the ultimate aim on the Nietzschean account—at very least, in the positive account developed by Deleuze—must be to bring about new configurations of power and new possibilities of knowledge.³⁰ By contrast, for Schelling and for his pupils, the goal would have to be the liberation *and integration* of Dionysiac desire for the sake of higher psychological *and* ethical ends.³¹ Schelling himself is very clear: only when darkness is taken up and transfigured by the power of light, "Only when it is governed and, so to speak, verified, through the light of a higher intellect," can darkness be transformed into true might, and utilized in service of the Good (*Ages*, p. 103).

Charting a path for his criticism of those who endeavor toward a world of "so-called Enlightenment," Schelling delineates four possibilities for one's internal relation to Dionysiac madness. The first two are repressive. First, one might become the person in whom madness is

²⁸ The section is subtitled, "The Necessity of a Higher Realism: Spinoza," to which is added: "Fichte and the Philosophy of Nature" (*Ages*, p. 104).

²⁹ These lines are succeeded by a comment that must have piqued Löwith's comparative interest in writing about Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence: "Music itself is a turning wheel that, going out from a single point, always, through all excesses, spins back again to the beginning" (*Ages*, p. 103). True to the works of Schelling's middle period, the declarations in these quotations stand at a midpoint between the role played by *art* in the self-revelation of Being, in Schelling's earlier writings, and the role mythology plays in revealing the personality of God, in the late lectures. In the *Weltalter* context, he goes on to reference the self-flaying rage, and even auto-castration of the priests of the cult of the earth goddess, Cybele. Jason Wirth explains that the cult of Cybele was transformed into the cult of Demeter, giving rise to the Eleusinian mysteries (*Ages*, p. 148n118).

³⁰ The liberation of desire which characterizes Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *becoming animal* portends the overthrow of capitalist, and Freudian constraints.

³¹ For example, as McGrath has pointed out, in the underrecognized "Schelling school of romantic psychiatry" (McGrath 2012, p. 17).

simply absent: “These would be the uncreative people incapable of procreation, the ones they call sober spirits” (*Ages*, p. 103). Secondly, one might resort to imbecility, or the utter rejection and repression of a madness that is in fact present within.

By contrast, the last two are positive, or progressive, insofar as their aim is attainment of a holistic kind of health. In the third case one might become a person who governs madness rightly, and “in this overwhelming shows the highest force of the intellect” (*Ages*, pp. 103-104). This is the position endorsed by Schelling, in which the dark ground of Spirit is taken up and transformed by the light. Fourthly and finally, one might become a person who acknowledges the power of the Dionysiac and gives free reign to the madness within, allowing oneself to be governed by it. This would be the Nietzschean retrieval, expressed in the notion of *becoming animal* and its Deleuzian archetype: Melville’s Ahab.³²

Both of the latter options are therapeutically healthful, coinciding with the will to life. In the absence of an explicit ethical defense of the Nietzschean-Deleuzian position, however, it appears to us that only the third is *both* therapeutically healthful *and* ethically mindful. We end with a mere suggestion, which future work will need to corroborate: according to this schema, it would appear that the fourth relation—giving oneself over to be governed by Dionysiac madness—might very well be implicated at the roots of our ecologic crisis. If this is in fact the case, then by extension, taking up the notion of *becoming animal* as a quasi-ethical means of embracing animality would serve only to heighten the crisis, not to eradicate it. By contrast, the Schellingian path of integration would cut to the very roots of the crisis and offer up, for further evaluation, a psychologically sound and ethically oriented remedy.³³

Conclusion

It’s only in recognizing a tendency toward destruction within nature itself, a nature of which we are a/part, that we can begin to acknowledge particularly human calls to ethical responsibility.³⁴ Unfortunately, Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Schelling’s barbarian principle glosses over this insight and its implications. But the investigations of the middle Schelling, arising from deepened reflections on the problem of ground, acknowledge and indicate a need to come to terms with this tendency, at once wholly “natural” and all-too-human.

Holistic integration would require a Schellingian analog to Toadvine’s attentiveness to resistance, and Merleau-Ponty’s proposed descent into the depths of consciousness: “One must occasionally descend, awaken the ground, the madness beneath consciousness, and ensure that our ‘virtues’ do not become a thin disguise for our vices. Becoming a person for Schelling is a continual transmutation not only of the base into the sublime, but also of the sublime into the base” (McGrath 2012, p. 111). As Toadvine has pointed out, the thought of the late Merleau-

³² See Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 243ff.

³³ In returning to the Schellingian roots of the late Merleau-Ponty’s notion of resistance, and the barbarian principle which underlies it, the present paper has addressed both senses in which Merleau-Ponty’s injunction to “Do a Psychoanalysis of Nature” can be taken up, according to Laura McMahon: “First, it might be taken as the demand to give voice to the deep sense of a nature, conceived in terms of unconscious desire rather than scientific rationality, that precedes and exceeds human life. Second, we might do a psychoanalysis of our relationship *to* nature, of the ways in which modern thought tends to deny and repress the unconscious, organic desire at its heart” (McMahon 2014, p. 289).

³⁴ With this we’ve moved from ontological speculation to ethical implication, expressly with reference to the notions of resistance, the barbarian principle, and Dionysiac madness.

Ponty progressively belies an archeological orientation, where his focus has shifted increasingly toward the origins of perception in a common flesh. In this way the teleological, or forward-looking tendency of his thought is slowly eclipsed.³⁵

But with environmental implications in mind, for our purposes archeological orientation alone will not suffice. Lest we invite another generation given over to the egoistic self-interest epitomized by Melville's Ahab, we must take care that the path of descent is supplemented with a path of ascent, toward the Good—and what exactly we mean by *the Good* must be worked out in greater detail, perhaps with reference to the Platonic legacy in Schelling's thought. To do any less than to work out such a supplement would be to hasten the demise of the ship of the earth. And yet, the barbarian principle cannot continue to go ignored: "for in philosophy, as in Dante's poem, the path toward heaven leads through the abyss" (Schelling 2014, p. 31). To embrace the darkness, aiming at an integrative ideal of love: such would be the dual task of psychoanalyzing nature, dark ground of spirit.

³⁵ Toadvine 2009, p. 84.

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