# Nature's Visibility

## The metaphysical origin of living beings in F.W.J. Schelling's philosophy of nature

By

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## Declaration.

I, Barbara Nunez de Caceres Gonzalez, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract.

This thesis examines the philosophy of nature of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, with the aim of showing that the metaphysical framework of absolute identity makes possible a retrospective clarification of his early theory of living beings: in other words, that the 1790s *Naturphilosophie* is properly explained by Schelling's conception of living beings as individuations of absolute identity. I show that Schelling's early philosophical essays show him doctrinally independent from Fichte and projecting a path leading to the *Identitätssystem* of 1801. In order to support this continuity interpretation: (1) I show that the structural properties of organisation—identity, self-reference, metamorphosis, and purposiveness—presuppose the concept of absolute identity. (2) I suggest that the metaphysical origin of living beings is a function of absolute identity, which obtains according to a process of individuation in which the absolute's two identical modes of being—viz., the infinite and eternal activity of self-positing, and its real being—are differentiated by a contingent limit imposed on the absolute. (3) I propose a strategy based on the perceptual Gestalt in order to support Schelling's claim that a contingent limit can be introduced in the method of absolute construction. (4) I describe the metaphysical emergence of living beings as a contingent limit imposed by the finite factor, which captures and embodies a particular form differentiated from the eternal stream of absolute identity; this unleashes a dual process of metamorphosis [*Ineinsbildung*]—viz., progression to reach a unity and reversion to retain its form. (5) I explain the emergence of visibility as a universal mode of being that exists *in potentia* in nature, and which emerges when absolute identity becomes relative. Finally, I suggest that a stronger commitment to an ontological opposition is needed in order to give actuality to the subject-object structure that Schelling identifies in living beings.

## Impact statement.

That a metaphysical theory written in the nineteenth century could shed light on the riddle of the emergence of biological life, when recent scientific sophistication and technological progress are continuously reaching new heights, seems like a far-fetched idea. However, considering that the philosopher F. W. J. Schelling developed serious and influential theories that considerably impacted different spheres of intellectual activity such as science, philosophy, literature and the arts, this thesis seeks to unearth his metaphysical theories on the problem of biological organisation in order to offer, for researchers from other disciplines, resources that might provide useful methodological cues, conceptual inspiration, unorthodox points of view and the invitation to see in speculative conceptual thought a genuine means of scientific advance, especially when research hinges on a problem that requires significant interdisciplinary work. For example, the paradigm of identity that allows for the self-organisation of reality, can set the stage for introducing the notion of a primitive basis for "life" in non-organic systems. This is an idea that scientists and philosophers might ponder worthy of attention.

A second impactful benefit of this project lies within the academic domain. For it advances scholarly work, in the English language, of the historical and philosophical context in which the German philosopher developed his theories. Alongside the exegetical analysis of Schelling's original works in German, this thesis contributes to the historical and philosophical understanding of Schelling's philosophy in a critical purview, which uses an eclectic strategy to approach his work. In this respect, this work contributes with a methodological strategy that reads Schelling both as a thinker that can contribute to our contemporary concerns in philosophy and science, and as a historical figure, whose multidimensional character may still have an important impact in this age. Within academia, this may be portrayed as an advancement in historical and philosophical knowledge.

Public interest in the ways in which science and philosophy have explained biological phenomena is ongoing and this thesis has the potential of becoming a source for broadening the cultural interest in the historical and philosophical sources of early biological theories, particularly with respect to the problem of the emergence of living beings. The material this thesis is putting forward can be used for historical and cultural shows in mainstream media.

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## Note about the text.

Original spellings and italicisations have been retained in all quotations taken from the nineteenth-century printed editions of Schelling's works. This criteria also follows from the most up-to-date academic edition of Schelling's works, the *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe Werke*, Reihen I, II, II, (1976—). All quotations consisting of forty-five words begin on a new line and an increment of indent. Throughout the thesis, when references to the texts have been directly paraphrased, or when a term is emblematic of the referenced text, I use the idiosyncratic quotation marks (»«). For literal citations, I use single quotation marks (''), and for quotations inside the citations, I use double quotation marks (""). I maintain the scholarly tradition followed in the English translations of Schelling's works of capitalising (N)ature when it refers to the following philosophical connotations that Schelling used throughout his work: (1) when Nature is a metaphysical idea with a constitutive status in the transcendental mind; (2) when it refers to the real-ideal ground of all existence. By contrast, when the term nature is broadly referred to the character or essence of a thing, the same capitalisation does not follow. Depending on the context, other nouns that convey the sense of an ontological ground are also capitalised; more often: [A]bsolute, [B]eing, [G]od.

## Note about the translations of Schelling's works into English.

The translations of Schelling's works from German into English reflect many times the factual difficulty of finding the closest idiomatic translations to the original terms, either because the same German word cannot accept a single English equivalent or there is not a suitable equivalent for it. Even more striking, Schelling assigns different meanings to the same word throughout his philosophical career. One could choose to see this as a semantic quicksand that necessarily brings about unreconciling disagreement. Not denying that in the field of interpretation the margin of disagreement is unavoidable, I opted for the view, substantiated on careful reading and bibliographical evidence, that (1) changes in meaning manifest a sophistication in Schelling's language in order to convey a clearer idea of the system and its parts, hence denoting the strengthening of a more stable insight. And (2), that constraining the semantic domain of core terms to the period of my research offers a more stable basis for interpretation. In this respect, I offer the definitions of these core terms throughout the body of the thesis and in footnotes, all of them according to Schelling's texts.

Naturally, I follow the standard English translations of Schelling's works, but I add the original term in German when I consider that the translation of a term falls short in conveying the semantic scope within the particular context under discussion.

*--To my mother for her unconditional love and support.*
*--To the Royal Free Hospital for saving my life thrice.*
*--To UCL and the Department of Philosophy*
*for supporting my progress despite my health challenges.*

*„Während unser empirisches Zeitalter jene Idee ganz verloren zu haben schien, lebte sie doch noch in Spinozas und Cartes' Systemen und in Platons unsterblichen Werken als die heiligste Idee des Altertums (*τὸ ὄν*) fort; aber unmöglich wäre es nicht, dass unser Zeitalter, wenn es sich je wieder zu jener Idee erheben sollte, in seinem stolzen Wahne glaubte, dass vorher nie etwas dergleichen in eines Menschen Sinn gekommen sei."*

Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus and Kriticismus

## Preface.

The earliest motivation that trailed my postgraduate research at UCL, and eventually transmuted into the motivations of the present work seems now very distant in both form and content. At that time, my concern was more environmental in character. It aimed at explaining humankind's capacity to destroy their own world under the hypothesis that, on the basis of its being a natural creature, human species contains the seed of its own self-destructiveness. However, since among all living creatures, human species is not the only one which may be considered to be self-destructive, then seeking a more basic origin of self-destructiveness seemed to me to be a reasonable enquiry. Presupposing, on the one hand, that human beings are continuous with other natural beings, and, on the other hand, that natural beings are in turn expressions of the whole we call Nature, the guiding question that arose was: *why does Nature go against itself?* Put in these terms, this question invites us to see the problem of self-destructiveness as something more primitive, and perhaps ingrained in Nature. Hence, it would be appropriate to pose the question to Nature itself.

The notion that Nature can be questioned was in turn inspired by my reading of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. After addressing in my BA and MA dissertations some specific aspects of Merleau-Ponty's views about the phenomenological and ontological sources of experience, I was drawn by the latter's insightful explorations of what he called the pre-reflective dimension of Nature, which he explored through the sensorial experience of the living body. With the premise that 'Nature outside of us must be unveiled to us by the Nature that we are' (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 106), the promise of going beyond the idealistic transparency of the »pure ego« in order to delve into the »flesh of the world« from the flesh that outstrips consciousness no longer seemed so implausible. With his 'philosophy of vertical Being', Merleau-Ponty was indeed putting forward a view whereby our experience of Nature contains a more generic foundation that reaches beyond the realm of mere theoretical reflection about ego structures. Merleau-Ponty expresses this point by noting that, 'what we call the I and what we call a living being have a common root in pre-objective Being.' (Ibid pp. 106, 40). Agreeing with Merleau-Ponty that we share an original experience of Nature with all living beings, and therefore, that there is a 'wild being' of Nature that grounds all the possibilities of subject-objectivity, I focused on his teachings on the philosophical conception

of Nature, of which, the lesson on the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling stood out for me. I discovered that it was Schelling who put forward an original 'state of indivision' in which we are identical to Nature 'prior to reflection', and that Nature has a subjective dimension that bestows life on all natural things. And by retrieving this wild being that instils an original interior into things, Schelling ventured beyond the transcendental scope delimited by Kant long before Merleau-Ponty undertook the same kind of adventure into »Nature's flesh«. However, I also noticed that Schelling's metaphysics differs considerably from the idea of there being something such as a flesh in Nature, since he was sympathetic to uncovering Nature's universal structures. Yet, it was obvious to me that these structures revealed a *life* through the positing of a self-organising absolute, which develops in potencies, or as an internal development that explains the difference between physical things and living beings rather than promoting, like Kant or Husserl did, an inexplicable gap. In assessing the pros and cons of these two philosophical perspectives, my ambition soon turned into trying to merge both philosophers to map out the metaphysics of Nature with the 'phenomenology of pre-reflexive Being' in order to maybe merge flesh and potencies in a more contemporary discourse. Nonetheless, the task seemed too big for the scope and timing of a doctoral investigation. This became even more evident when, in trying to dominate Schelling's fluctuating thinking, it seemed to me that it was necessary to delve deeper into his intellectual context. This is how I decided to dedicate my doctoral research to Schelling's philosophy of nature.

On a slightly different note, yet again in reference to the influence Merleau-Ponty had on me, I would like to say something about another interesting parallel between the French philosopher and Schelling, i.e., the adjectival polarity *visible-invisible*. Unlike the classical connotation of *the visible*, which by and large refers to the lower ontological status of sensible things that exist in the world of becoming, Merleau-Ponty regards our visible experience of the world as the perfect example of the difference in identity that plays out between the flesh of the world, itself visible, and the 'visionaries', who attest to the reality of the *visible* with an unshakable perceptual faith, which Merleau-Ponty places in the flesh of their bodies. The connection to be drawn from this consideration is that Schelling's philosophy of Nature offers a philosophical idea of how this visible world could have come about. For Schelling's concept of living beings contains the same general principle of difference in identity. Briefly, I

imagined that it was possible to weave together the pieces of Schelling's nature-philosophical investigations of living beings in order to see a story of emergence of concentric processes from the flesh of Nature, whose last stage manifests *seers*, in other words, beings that posit their identity in difference with Nature, through the actualisation of their sensible dimension. Such an actualisation of the sensible dimension is one of the problems that I address in this thesis.

This was the path that led me to Schelling's metaphysics of nature and the thesis that living beings can be defined as the factors that realise the visible inasmuch as they are individuations of the absolute. In the present work, I do not answer the question that set this research in motion because in the idea that »Nature goes against itself« there is a presupposition of a primitive self-reference. This type of activity, which is most clearly expressed by living beings, is in Schelling's philosophy a natural process unleashed by the struggle of opposite tendencies that absolute identity makes possible, and this is the idea that I want to defend in this thesis.

# Introduction.

## [*a*. F. W. J. Schelling's philosophy of Nature as a metaphysical investigation of the nature and origin of living beings]

Schelling's philosophy of nature is characterised by its different versions and the contrasting methodological approaches it develops in order to address an extraordinary diversity of themes. This theoretical instability usually undermines historians' and philosophers' attempts to present an interpretation of his philosophy in terms of continuity. Moreover, it makes it hard for Schelling's interpreters and readers to believe one of his claims, included in the Preface of his 1801 presentation of the System of Identity, according to which: (1) the earlier versions of his philosophical treaties were only »preliminaries necessary to prepare« for »the fully characteristic shape« of the system of absolute identity, which was the subject of this 1801 text; and (2) he continually used this »shape« as »his personal guide-star« to write his versions of transcendental and natural philosophy, and also the »complete and certain exposition of this system« the *Darstellung meines System der Philosophie*. (Cf. AA I/10: 109-10; p. 141). The present thesis is an attempt to validate Schelling's claim by means of a historical and conceptual tracing of the nature and metaphysical origin of living beings in the philosophical investigations he developed under the umbrella of his nature-philosophy.

F.W.J. Schelling's philosophy of Nature extends roughly from 1794 to 1806, for if we accept a broad view of Schelling's interest in Nature, his school essay, the *Timaeus Kommentar*, would point to his early philosophical interest in Nature, while 1806 marks the end of Schelling's stay in Würzburg, during which he developed the most comprehensive version of his identity philosophy, known from the posthumous manuscript *System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere*. Moreover, 1806 is also the year of the publication of an appendix, for the reedition of his early *Von der Weltseele* of 1798, entirely concerned with the problem of nature, *Ueber das Verhältnis des Realen und Idealen in der Natur, oder, Entwickelung der ersten Grundsätze der Naturphilosophie an den Principien der Schwere und des Lichts*. After 1806, Schelling's focus diverts to metaphysical problems related more generally to time, freedom, and the idea of philosophy itself.

It is generally agreed that Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* period was one of intense work, rife with changes in terminology, methodologies, and shifts of perspective. The concept of Nature alone changed over from being the »the world of experience—a mere *Inbegriff*« to the co-ego of human self-consciousness, and then again, it changed over to being the absolute itself. Despite the sudden shifts, there are fairly stable topics in Schelling's philosophy which the interpreter may find helpful when she considers the interpretive connections of Schelling's investigations over this period. Two of these subjects are the basis of this thesis: the absolute as absolute identity and the relation of absolute identity with the concept of organisation in general, and with biological organisation in particular. Additionally, as it stands, the word 'visibility' in the title of this work is not just a mere catch phrase to spark the interest of the reader; it has a more important explanatory role in the reconstruction of the origin of living beings, for it is meant to account for their in-growth as instantiations of absolute identity, that is, when absolute identity goes through a moment of *differentiation* or *relativisation*. More specifically, this in-growth, as every process in Nature according to Schelling, is animated by a two-fold movement: One movement is characterised by an immanent striving leading to absolute identity. This movement is possible owing to the form that lies at the basis of their basic activity of self-reference. The other movement is characterised by an inverse drive to preserve their existence and avoid dissolution in the eternal homogeneity of absolute identity, which Schelling went on to develop in the System of Identity. For this reason, the general premise that I have taken up from Schelling's philosophy of nature is that all individuals beings partake in the absolute. However, in existing, as it were, stripped away from the absoluteness of absolute identity by the imposition of a contingent limit inherent to their position, they exist in a sort of lack that fuels their persistent development towards the ground-archetype, *das Grund die Urform*.

Thus, my thesis is an effort to reconstruct the relationship between Nature understood as absolute identity and living beings as individuations of it. This relationship can be established in the philosophy of nature in the period between the 1790s texts and the philosophy of identity. Furthermore, it is possible to show the parallelisms between these historically separate texts with respect to Schelling's conceptions of organisation in general and organisms in particular, but only to the extent that the concept of absolute identity is taken as an interpretive guideline, for it is from this grounding structure that the idea of

organisation derives. Similarly, the result of the process of the individuation of absolute identity is what I call nature's *visibility*, which accounts for the contingent limit that living beings introduce in Nature to take on a form through an active embodiment and conservation of their own individuated totality. Furthermore, according to Schelling's conception of organisation, the form of identity that has been individuated resolves itself into the opposite sides of the absolute's identity, subjectivity and objectivity, whose self-reference, even if *empty*, is essential to raise an *angle* or a partial positing of the whole in order to, as it were, water down the absolute homogeneity of the ground and turn it into a *visible* world, even if it is only a diffraction of the real-ideal. For if living beings were able to identify themselves with absolute Nature, they would posit themselves as equal to *allness*—in this instance they would dissolve into nothingness because the transparency of absolute identity amounts to pure *invisibility*, an unconscious self-reference, the non-objective, in a word, *blindness*. Contrarily, visibility entails difference, deficit, or preponderance of one of the poles in the identity over the other. Put differently, absolute identity must be distorted so that the invisible ground sheds a spectrum of visible nature and an objective correlate which demands a corresponding subjectivity. It is in this respect, that particular subject-objects of all kinds, i.e., all possible living beings, arise into existence.

Schelling's Nature-philosophy is in my view a metaphysical investigation of the different perspectives that Nature can take against the backdrop of absolute identity. Three perspectives are included in the present work: the perspective of organisation in general as metamorphosis, the perspective of organic beings in particular as functions of the absolute and the perspective of absolute identity. Now, the presentation of the three perspectives is the structure that this thesis will take to unfold the narrative of how Nature individuates itself into living beings. This attempt requires, however, a reconstruction that plays out a double strategy. One is a historical approach that accurately situates Schelling's *discoveries* in the philosophical context of his time. The second is a conceptual reconstruction that allows more *freedom* in the interpretation of the texts, which is necessary to see the connections and extract the narrative.

To be sure, Schelling was genuinely worried about the phenomenon of organisation in living beings, both as natural purposes and as organised beings. But his concerns were rather directed towards granting to organisation what he thought was *de jure* a primordial

ontological status. His interest was centred on emancipating the life of the flesh, to take Merleau-Ponty's term, from the fictional ideality where Kant and Fichte had left it. But Schelling never developed a philosophy of living beings as such, neither was he interested in accounting for their »emergence«, nor the correct way to characterise them, even less attribute consciousness to them. For this reason, my main claims about the life of living beings in Schelling's different systems stand in need of a concomitant claim that portrays a historical narrative that allows me to connect his early investigations, more invested in transcendental methodologies and deductions from the absolute in the human spirit, with his metaphysical investigations of Nature, which connect the absolute pure ego to the pure active real-ideality of Nature in his System of Identity.

The historical claim then proposes that the conjunction of Schelling's early theory of living beings and his conception of the absolute identity as articulated in his identity system, offers an explanatory account of his conception of living beings in the *Naturphilosophie* writings of the 1790s. So, despite the shifts of perspective from *Naturphilosophie* to the *Identitätsystem*, I show that Schelling's early conception of the absolute as absolute identity provides the means by which he arrived at the *Identitätsystem*, and conversely, that the latter affords the metaphysical elucidation of the emergence of living beings as the individuation of the absolute in the *Naturphilosophie*. This is clear when we see that the structural identity of the presupposed ground in the *Naturphilosophie* furnishes the substantial core of the Identity System. In showing the trail of absolute identity in his early metaphysical texts and his *Naturphilosophie*, it may turn out that there is no significant incompatibility when the nature of living beings is derived as a limitation of absolute identity. With this, I show three consequences: (1) that Schelling was never a Fichtean; (2) that his theory of organic beings is inherently connected with the absolute identity as ground of all subject-objectivity; (3) that Nature's visibility is explicated by the emergence of organisation in living beings. Let me elaborate the justification for this two-fold strategy in the following section.

## [b. Methodology]

An important methodological task follows from the outline of my goals in this research, which probes into the kind of approach am I taking in this dissertation. For the Schelling scholar it might appear that I am not offering an integral historical retracing of Schelling's philosophy since my approach, even if I consider it essentially hermeneutical, goes far beyond what Schelling actually said or intended to put forward without—and this must be stressed—claiming that the hermeneutical tools I use to reconstruct his philosophy should be considered his own. However, in choosing to go beyond Schelling's own words by establishing interpretive tools foreign to him, I am not undertaking the project of, to use Frederick Beiser's words, »putting my views in Schelling's mouth« or producing an anachronistic reading of Schelling that ends up deforming his own philosophy. Again, roughly reading into Beiser's suggestions about how to approach non-contemporaneous philosophers, in this work I tried to establish an approach that could be considered historical but with a philosophical reconstruction, that is, a hermeneutical reading with some reconstructive tones. The latter attempts to avoid treating Schelling as a museum piece, the former prevents smuggling my own views into what is, strictly speaking, Schelling's philosophy. (Cf. Beiser, 2005, p. 3-5). With this caveat in mind, I formulate an approach based on a leading question that forces Schelling's work into providing an answer. The question thus entails an inquiry into the nature and emergence of living beings into existence in his systems and it intends to provide a strictly philosophical answer based on the historical reconstruction of Schelling's views on this matter.

Now, the reason for not taking a purist approach is twofold: one reason is justified by relevance, the other by narrative. The first lies in the aspiration of making Schelling's philosophy of Nature visible to the contemporary discussions about living beings. For not only Schelling's philosophy deserves more attention, but also his metaphysical approach provides a meta-theoretical model that may induce us to think that metaphysics could be viable and shed some light on how to address some thorny concerns regarding »living« beings, for example, issues such as the abstruse problem of what criteria should be used to define them or the enigma of their emergence. With respect to the second reason, a non-purist approach helps me solve the problem of narrative in the midst of Schelling's constant shifts

of view and his often »only« preliminary conclusions and drafted ideas. Prima facie, the idea of a narrative might appear detached from the strict historical tracing, however, the narrative justification in this thesis tries not to deviate from textual evidence. Moreover, the narrative of the present work does not claim to offer a reading that privileges either a continuity or a *Protean* approach, rather, it is built upon a framework that considers *both aspects* as necessary ingredients of a lengthy investigation. In other words, I try to portray Schelling's far-reaching investigation, which produced a plethora of philosophical *discoveries*, against the background of a constancy of themes that inspired the former and enriched Schelling's *focus* on a variety of specific subjects. The strategy of reading Schelling's philosophy as periods of focus, rather than discrete blocks of reflection, could cogently lead us to assume that the topic of *Naturphilosophie* will not be abandoned in posterior developments.

Accordingly, instead of reading Schelling as a Protean thinker, who developed subjects on a whim and shifted his views with no concern for the bigger picture, I propose the idea that Schelling, despite how young and impressionable must he have been during his most prolific years of philosophical production, shows a constancy of themes that he held to be of the most philosophical importance. For the purposes of my research, and without denying there are other constants in his philosophy, these themes are: the absolute, identity and organisation. Similarly, I sustain the equally verifiable view, according to which he often shifted his views and experimented with different methods, traditions, theoretical frameworks, and disciplines, without ever reaching the presentation of the absolute, the principle of identity, and the concept of organisation, which he considered to be the definitive one. Likewise, it must be noted that even if he shifted his views, some of them are not necessarily incompatible with the previous views. On the contrary, it is precisely this aspect of compatibility that the narrative of the emergence of living beings in relation to the absolute can be told. To comply with this synthetic approach, I propose a reading in terms of focus and perspective.

Firstly, let us concentrate on the issue of Schelling's purported inconstancy. It is hard to deny the fact that Schelling changed his views not only during the period that concerns us here but also beyond the period of the metaphysics of identity, especially if we consider his late *Positive Philosophy*. If we focus more particularly on roughly the first decade of Schelling's philosophical production, we will find that he developed some of the most original and

ambitious accounts, which had the aim of achieving a philosophical system. These moves took the form of preliminary ideas, drafts, outlines, and some more polished expositions, all of which presented the opportunity for Schelling to turn his focus on a variety of problems that he worked out based on different philosophical methodologies. Likewise, Schelling produced different system versions that introduced adjustments and richer notions of the same ideas perhaps for clarification purposes or to reconcile with criticisms that his previous presentations did not deflect well. Certainly, these points of discontinuity provoked critics into considering Schelling an extravagant and chameleonic thinker that deserved the epithet of the *Proteus of Romanticism*.[1] Hence, Schelling was depicted, inter alia, as a *Proteus des deutschen Idealismus*, *Lucifer deutscher Wissenschaft*, *Muster der Zerstörung der Vernunft*. (See Loer, 1974, p. 5). Xavier Tilliette, in his influential masterwork 'Schelling', narrates the air of contempt that hovered over Schelling from the mid-nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth for taking various twists and turns causing 'the discontinuity of his shifts' and the 'inconsistency of his movements.' (Tilliette, 1992, pp. 12-13). In line with this idea, Schelling was reprimanded by those in tune with the spirit of systematicity, noting his 'unsatisfactory attempts to provide a system comparable in scope to the systems of Hegel or Schopenhauer.' (Snow, 1996, p. 2).

However, a more serene and attentive reading of Schelling's works may also present the opposite picture whereby he stands as a thinker continuously guided and deeply inspired by a handful of philosophical concerns, complex enough for demanding recurring reflections. This recurrence is the basis of a reading based on the compatibility of themes.

In 1801, Schelling himself, to some uncritically, supports the idea that his earlier pieces should be read as a work-in-progress that finally found its place in the one and only system, which was implicitly on the basis of all his reflections. Indeed, in the *Darstellung meines System der Philosophy*, Schelling claims that his new system is the one he 'always had in view in the different [earlier] presentations.' (AA I/10: 109; p. 344). So, instead of presupposing the perspective of either one of the two possible presentations of the object of philosophy, viz., on the one hand, the dimension of pure objectivity, which constructs Nature, and on the other hand, pure subjectivity or the construction of the pure ego, in the System of Identity Schelling

[1] B. Matthews claims that it was Hegel who awarded him 'the dubious title of Proteus of philosophy.' (Matthews, 2011, p. xi).

starts, as he did in 1795, from the standpoint of the absolute, where the philosopher, as it were, merges herself with the whole systematic form of philosophy in its 'fully characteristic shape'. This shape, seen in retrospective, implicitly contains the network of first principles which previously served as a tacit guide for developing Schelling's preliminary drafts and outlines. Notwithstanding Schelling's view, critics like F. Beiser see this statement as, 'a short-sighted attempt to see purpose and order in a career notable for its protean changes.' (2002, p. 552).

It is not my intention to prove or deny that there is a teleological character in Schelling's investigations. My purpose is to establish that his early descriptions of the absolute's structure played a role in his descriptions of living beings, and that these descriptions are not inconsistent with the metaphysics of identity. According to my research, this is because, firstly, Schelling presupposed absolute identity as a philosophical framework early in his investigations, and secondly, his early results were constrained to perspectives defined by his adoption of transcendental idealism, which is in turn an upshot of absolute identity—or »one of the two sides of philosophy.« Thus, the shift in views could be understood as whether the philosopher is inspecting original or subordinated regions.

Now, to develop this thesis, I pick up one invariant theme of research that, as I try to prove in the present work, plays an essential role in the emergence and nature of living beings, namely, the quest for the absolute. This is not hard to square when we keep in mind that, within the period comprised in my research, Schelling began sketching the absolute as a system-principle in his first publications and then found its consummation in his metaphysics of identity. As I. Hamilton Grant argues, each one of Schelling's presentations "is a philosophy of the Absolute", all of which were "complicated by the obligation to start from scratch, to rethink the All absolutely as a precondition of thinking the All repeatedly." (2006, p. 1). From this outlook, it is possible to consider Schelling less as a philosopher who catered to whims and more as a thinker driven by an ambitious project that necessitated a construction in different attempts.

In virtue of the view that Schelling's intellectual biography is dominated by the appraisal of the absolute, and the consequences of deriving organic systems from it, I propose a reading that comprises his views of the absolute in his major works on the philosophy of nature and some of his presentations of the system of identity.

My claim in this thesis is that the philosophical priority of the absolute persists at the backdrop of Schelling's nature-philosophical works of the 1790s. On a slightly different angle, the undeniable changes could be registered, inter alia, as Schelling's attempts to deliver the way in which 'philosophy rises itself to the Absolute Unconditioned.' (AA I/7: 77; p. 13). Accordingly, Schelling's approach to how philosophy realises the unconditioned changed the status of the *Naturphilosophie* in his philosophy of identity. On this point, I concur with Beiser's assessment of how these changes in the *Naturphilosophie*'s status could represent a significant disorientation when we are dealing with the kind of peculiar access that Schelling thinks *Naturphilosophie* is capable of. (2002, pp. 487-89). After all, as Beiser explains, *Naturphilosophie* in *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* of 1797 goes from rejecting a kind of naturalism to defend another kind of naturalism in the *Einleitung zu dem Entwurf* of 1800; similarly, *Naturphilosophie* goes from being posited as an ontological parallel to transcendental philosophy in the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* of 1800 to being prior to the latter in the short essay of the same year, *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Prozesses*. (Cf. Ibid.) But it is precisely this kind of peculiar access which makes *Natuphilosophie* the, as it were, organ of the different perspectives we could have of Nature. In this context, it thus makes sense to say that these perspectives give *Naturphilosophie* the right to stand first opposite to transcendental philosophy and then ontologically and metaphysically prior to it.

One might justifiably ask whether the present work is an attempt to shove Schelling down to a unitary vision that, as Tilliette notes, "actually risks succumbing to the excess of its counterpart." Indeed, the project of a unitary vision, Tilliette goes on, "in principle admits mutations because they are evident and impossible to eliminate" but the peril, he stresses out, comes down to a lessening of the complexity of Schelling's philosophy in virtue of "substitute[ing] the historical Schelling for a retouched project."(Tilliette, 1992, p. 14). My response to this challenge is simple: I maintained and highlighted Schelling's changes and shifts in virtue of his stable guidelines, which I take to be, absolute identity as the catalyst of the evolution of self-organisation.

My interpretive strategy is thus grounded on a hermeneutical principle that is essential to understand the nature and emergence of living beings in nature, i.e., absolute identity. The latter reading is not new. From the 1950s onwards, there has been a growing tendency to privilege the unity of Schelling's thinking and see it as evolving around key

principles.[2] There are a number of authors in the English language that used this methodological strategy. For example, Dale Snow, in her classic study *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, analysed Schelling's quest for the possibility of metaphysics through the tension of the opposites, as this is, she claims, 'the key hermeneutical principle for understanding's Schelling's philosophy.' (Snow, 1996, p. 3). Bruce Matthews's widespread study *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (2011) is another example. His approach unifies Schelling's thought from the early 1790s texts to the metaphysics of identity under the umbrella of Schelling's own model of organisation, which Matthews succinctly explains as, 'the positive capacity for self-organisation'. (Matthews, 2011, p. 178). Finally, Dalia Nassar with her recent book, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in German Romantic Philosophy* (1795-1804), traces a link between epistemological and metaphysical concerns expressed by some exponents of the romantic project with respect to their concept of the absolute. She shows that Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and Schelling understood the absolute as an interrelation of two senses: 'a cognitive ideal and an existential reality.' (Nassar, 2013, p. 2).

I hope this justification satisfies my reader. Let us turn now to the issue of the possible contributions of this work to the existing Schelling scholarship.

### [c. A contribution to Schelling's scholarship]

Beyond the methodological risks I have taken in this work, one of the main purposes that inspires it is the hope of producing an interesting research that can contribute to the long overdue scholarship work on Schelling in the English language. In recent times[3], the German scholarship on Schelling has flourished from the pen of scholars like Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, Christian Danz, Manfred Frank, Manfred Durner, Philipp Schwab, and many others who, with the in-progress monumental Historical-Critical Edition of Schelling's works by the Bavarian Academy and the Editorial House Frommann-Holzboog, is brightening the future for a starker involvement with Schelling's philosophy. And while the Anglophone counterpart is less abundant, Schelling's studies have taken interesting directions into the

[2] See Tilliette (1992, p. 13ff) for a detailed documentation of this interpretive tendency.
[3] I am narrowing the scope of the following statements about Schelling's scholarship to the work done over the twenty-first century.

complex issues raised by his philosophy as a whole, yet, laying an emphasis on the side of his so-called *Naturphilosophie* and the ways in which 'Nature' took centre stage as an object of reflection in the developments of the philosophy of the nineteenth century. Scholars like Michael Vater, Bruce Matthews, Nadia Nassar, Sebastian Gardner, Ian Hamilton Grant, and Daniel Whistler, among others, offer instances of such directions. Despite these academic endeavours, specialised studies on Schelling are not as robust as those dedicated, for example, to Hegel's philosophy. Hence, the main rationale for the development of the present thesis is the prospect of making a small contribution to Schelling's scholarship with a reading that confronts him as a natural philosopher with deep metaphysical concerns, and as a thinker that set his mind on the problem of *being as such* as the ground of most of his philosophical enquiries.

The present work is also moved by the conviction that Schelling's philosophy in general deserves a thoughtful consideration today for its central theses. After a long period of being largely ignored and dismissed as Hegel's shadow, Schelling's philosophy finally sparked the interest of contemporary philosophers. For example, in the twentieth century, Schelling was already in the minds of notable figures like Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida, all of whom delivered influential commentaries addressing several aspects of Schelling's philosophy. This first sweep of interest in Schelling's work attracted some further critical attention which, nonetheless, was not enough to stir up a more robust interest among academics. This reaction was perhaps motivated by his shifts of focus and change of methods within his vastly complex corpus, and, more obviously, the intricate constructions of the tiers of nature, which are comprised in the most notorious part of his published work, the philosophy of nature. If this was indeed the case, it was only due to a hard-line mindset of empirical positivism that dominated the scientific and philosophical circles from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Indeed, there was a consensus among positivists that Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* led to rampant speculations that were further fuelled by *the romantische Naturforschen*, a group of natural philosophers, mainly German, who in the context of late eighteen- and early nineteenth-century natural science focused their research on attempting to find an essential unity in natural phenomena and using transcendental principles to demonstrate the organic and dynamical nature of phenomena, while subordinating the value of experimentation to the former principles. (Cf. Heuser-

Keßler, 1986, p. 15).[4] This bad reputation followed Schelling and the *romantische Schule* along the nineteenth century and beyond. We read twentieth-century historians' worries revolving around the application of speculative thinking on subjects they believed deserved only empirical support. Erich Adickes, in his monumental work *Kant als Naturforscher*, warns us that Kant could have succumbed to the dangers of fantastic philosophising and become another "Schelling dem Phantasten", had he not maintained his characteristic "self-criticism, his sense of reality [*Wirklichkeitssinn*] and his 'right taste' in scientific matters.' Hence, Adickes does not consider Schelling to be one of the scientific geniuses. (1924, pp. 57-58). Robert J. Richards (2002, p. 3) cites the biologist and leading expert on myrmecology E. O. Wilson indicting the romantics as those responsible for advancing fantasy over scientific reason. Timothy Lenoir calls for the dismissal of the *romantische Naturphilosophie*, on the grounds that they are 'another school of zealots' that made the mistake of embracing a 'single all-embracing logical principle for which no direct empirical support could be provided.' (1983, p. 254).

Perhaps, what these latter critics failed to see was that Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, and some of the romantics' works that vouched for it, were not attempting to turn empirical investigation away from the domain of *Wissenschaftslehre*, but to present a global theory of science that admits metaphysics at its core. As Beiser notes, '*Naturphilosophie* was not a distinct discipline from the empirical sciences; it was rather the normal science of its day.' (2008, p. 11). A critical understanding of the scientific context in which Schelling lived helps us see how serious his speculative physics was in trying to make sense of Nature.

At a different angle, following from the growing concerns over environmental issues, Schelling's conception of Nature as an organic whole has sparked interest in academic circles, and has inspired some contemporary perspectives on philosophical ecologies that touch upon topics such as animal consciousness, the moral imperative to protect wildlife, and the independence of the natural world from human interests. These ideas can indeed find a kindred precedent in Schelling's philosophy, as much as he advanced the view that the principle of self-organisation is ingrained in Nature while demoting the idea that living beings are the incidental effects of a machine mechanism. Schelling argued that the latter is the analytic strategy of a programme that turns to the compartmentalisation of reality in order to

[4] Even Schelling himself complained against these natural philosophers, so far as they used to destroy "the diversity of natural causes […] by fictitious [*erdichtete*] identities." (AA I/6: 21).

advance knowledge in segments that fit certain criteria, which in turn are grounded on certain controversial assumptions. One of them more fundamentally claims that reality is a monolithic dimension which consists of geometrical topographies and interacting corpuscles whose motion is resolved through efficient causalities. Such a unidimensional description of reality essentially lacks any room to invoke an interiority aspect to natural things. Schelling did not dispute the viability of this kind of naturalistic approach to Nature, more precisely, he was poised to find a source of or a justification for the possibility of an interiority dimension in Nature. So, of the empirical perspective, he rather thought it was incomplete and partial on its outcomes.

In this context, my historical reconstruction of Schelling's philosophy has two aims. For one, I give an account of how his concept of living forms evolved as a function of his concept of absolute identity and its two fundamental forms, which in the more mature view developed in the System of Identity are cognition and extension, or ideality and reality. For another, I attempt to extract and put forward for further philosophical discussion a metaphysical model of what a living being is in general on the basis of the System of Identity; in other words, this model provides an idea of that which in a scholastic jargon would correspond to the essence or quiddity of that which is considered to be a living thing. As a reference, this present study aspires to a more out-reaching approach, such as the one made by Marie-Luise Heuser-Keßler's scholarly study *Die Productivität der Natur, Schellings Naturphilosophie und das neue Paradigma der Selbstorganisation in den Naturwissenschaften*, which seeks to identify Schelling as one of the pioneers of the concept of self-organisation, and apply his paradigm to different fields of scientific research in physics and biology.[5] The present work also intends to show that Schelling's speculative philosophy offers innovative insights and involves a fertile conceptual framework with a deep logical structure that allows for a variety of interesting interpretative possibilities for the philosophy of biology.

[5] This work has been criticised for attempting to apply Schelling's concept of self-organisation to the complex mechanisms of self-organisation in real systems, see the review by Kueppers, G. (1988, pp. 256-7).

[d. Organisation of this work]

The Part I of this work is a reconstruction of Schelling's early concept of the absolute. In the first chapter, I place him in the historical and conceptual context that yielded the conditions in which he developed his early account of the concept of absolute identity. Firstly, I show the influence that Kant's critical philosophy had on him; especially, I show how Kant's concept of systematicity was relevant for his serious commitment to ground philosophy on a first principle, which he thought would consummate philosophy's aspirations to become science, a *Wissenschaftslehre*. Then, in the second chapter, I present a brief intellectual narrative of Schelling's encounter with Fichte. As we shall see, Schelling was very excited about the prospects that Fichte raised for transcendental philosophy, through his pioneering foundationalist programme. However, I claim that Schelling's regard for Fichte was more a confirmation of his deep-seated points of view of what philosophy had to address than the modest desire to become a disciple and a spokesman of the trailblazing *Wissenschaftslehre*; in other words, Schelling was, since his teenage years, a fiercely ambitious thinker; and I suggest this in Chapter 3. To illustrate the idea that Schelling was more than Fichte's disciple, in Chapter 4, I look into his school essay the *Timaeus Kommentar* to find rudiments of an ideal-realism in his quasi-metaphysical account of the origin of the *visible* world, and, possibly, his first account of Nature as a whole, both organised and modelled according to *invisible*, intelligible forms. My intention in this fourth chapter is to depict Schelling's early metaphysical insights and his approach of Nature as an original power of movement.

Part II consists of four parts, which together present Schelling's transition to his nature-philosophical investigations. I hope to convince the reader that Schelling developed his *Naturphilosophie*, in tandem with his investigations about organisation and the nature of living beings, under the presupposed principle of absolute identity. Chapter 1 makes a case about Schelling's concept of the absolute I, which, I attempt to show, partakes of a metaphysical dimension that stands in opposition to Fichte's idealist approach to reality. Here I introduce the reader with the notion of the *Ich-Form*, which is an interpretive guideline that attempts to account for the relatedness under which, I believe, the necessary connection between the pure I and the absolute exists. In Chapter 2, I elaborate with more detail the idea that, during the years in which Schelling was focused on scientific studies and transcendental

deductions, he was presupposing his principle of absolute identity, and that instead of actively engaging with it, he located it in the region of the unconditioned, which allows no objectification. A brief section follows Chapter 2. This section 3 is meant to be a critical discussion about some of the difficulties that Schelling might have encountered, which prevented him to proceed with a system derived from a metaphysical principle. Section 4 is an invitation to understand, on the one hand, the context in which Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* was developed, and on the other hand, to assess the latter not against the background of contemporary cosmologies and concerns about science, but against its own historical cosmology. This part serves as a transition to move on to Schelling's nature-philosophical investigations *proper*.

In Part III, I provide an account of how the concept of absolute identity, even if presupposed, plays a role in the derivation of the concepts of organisation and organic beings in Schelling's three main works on the philosophy of nature before 1801. In Chapter 1, I account for Schelling's doctrine of Nature, understood as sum total of experience, is the product of opposite tendencies. In Chapter 2, I show that Schelling presupposes the concept of absolute identity to derive the structure of the living being conceived as an organic whole, where the individuated whole of living beings grows from within the absolute unity by means of a three-fold characterisation, i.e., self-reference, identity of form and matter, and organic whole. Similarly, I show how this three-fold characterisation plays a role in the concept of purposiveness which, I make the case, Schelling inherited from Kant. In Chapter 3, I find parallelisms between *Von der Weltseele* and the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* regarding the three-fold characterisation of living beings, which I extracted from the previous chapter. Furthermore, I explain that this three-fold characterisation can be ascribed to Nature as whole when conceived as process of metamorphosis. Here I lay out the suggestion that Schelling's nature-philosophical inquiries where motivated, among other issues, by the question of the immanent and invisible relation between body and mind in living beings. In Part IV, I move on to the Philosophy of Identity to show the way in which Schelling straightforwardly puts forward the principle of absolute identity as a metaphysically necessary condition for the emergence of living beings in his system. In Chapter 1, I place the reader in the indifferent space of absolute identity, just as Schelling defined it in the *Darstellung*, as a way to get us acquainted with the grounding structure of the

system. Then I look briefly into some of the objections his early critics raised against his bold metaphysical *Presentation*. In this First Chapter, I try to make the case that Schelling was realising his Spinozistic strand of thought, and that, after thinking thoroughly about the issue of emergence in Nature, he was ready to return to his earlier metaphysical aspirations and connect Nature with the unconditioned. With this return, he was fulfilling his early wish of reforming the foundations of Spinoza's system. In Chapter 2, I give an account of Schelling's methodology of abstraction and absolute construction, and I defend his view that relativity can be introduced into absolute identity without making the latter transcendent. I try to do this by introducing the concept of the perceptual Gestalt into the system. I argue that the absolute's form of cognition serves as the basis to establish a kind of figure/background structure, which, in turn, introduces limitation, perspective, and contingency into the system. Finally, in Chapter 3, I derive the same three-fold characterisation of organisation, which was the main subject of Part III, from the *Darstellung*. Additionally, I provide an interpretation of metamorphosis that involves the concept of forming-into-one and finalise the chapter with a speculation about the nature of visibility in the nature-philosophy.

# Part I. The theoretical context of Schelling's initial insights into the principle of absolute identity.

In the early 1790's Schelling played out the consequences of furnishing a principle of knowledge for the version of transcendental idealism that ensued with the reception of Kant's critical philosophy. Yet, the distinguishing mark in Schelling's early essays is, in my view, the preoccupation with a principle that not only warrants the epistemic transference of certainty to all the system of fundamental propositions of philosophy, but also warrants the reality of such a system. As a result, Schelling outlined a metaphysical principle that has ontological and epistemic implications; that is to say, without being a trait of existence, as a general pantheism would assume, Schelling's first principle holds all reality and truth together. On the basis of such a metaphysical unity, he postulates an absolute ground, neutral in that it is neither objective nor subjective nor any determination that limits its absoluteness.[6] Notwithstanding its lack of determination, Schelling claims that his first principle is not just simply an empty abstraction, but also that being itself issues from the absolute identity of all determinations in the absolute. Furthermore, this identity amounts to the absolute's capacity *to posit for itself* and within itself all being. With this notion, Schelling seems to begin with the Parmenidean identity, which equates being with itself in thinking, in order to fulfil the truth condition of absolute unconditionedness, which furnishes a veritable ultimate principle. In these essays, the young Schelling argues that from this concept of the absolute, a *form* [*Form*] derives that bears two fundamental aspects or forms that have a special relevance for the thesis I am defending in this work. The first one is the *form of self-positability*, whereby the absolute is conditioned by nothing other than itself; what we discover in enquiring about this form is a kind of unlimited self-reference or all-encompassing circularity. This form thus expresses the autonomous self-positing act that follows from the absolute, as such, self-

[6] There is room for the claim that Schelling's concept of the absolute may lead to a neutral monism. This is especially the case with Schelling's later system of identity. His principle complies with three conditions to be a neutral monism: (1) it postulates a neutral basis not considered as a determinate substance, i.e., as *das Unbedingte*. (SW I/2: 166); (2) spirit and matter are aspects of the real not reducible to its neutral basis, and (3) matter and spirit are not ontologically different or separable because they are just two aspects of the same reality. I have taken this threefold characterization of neutral monism from M. Silberstein's *Panentheism, Neutral Monism, and Advaita Vedanta* in *The Many Faces of Pantheism* (Atmanspacher & Sass, 2017, p. 1137). That Schelling's absolute could be construed as a version of neutral monism was pointed out by Markus Gabriel in his paper *Schelling* in *The Oxford Handbook of German Idealism*. (Forster & Gjesdal, 2015, p. 90), although Gabriel does not develop this idea in depth.

identical and unconditioned. The second aspect, fundamentally identical to the first, is the *form of unity*, or absolute identity, which follows from the absolute's ontological positing of all its reality for itself and immediately in itself. This latter form expresses the copulative binding of the absolute ground with all reality in a unity that conditions the content of all reality within the absolute. Roughly summarised, the absolute's self-positing of itself amounts to the positing of all reality in the all-encompassing unity that it affords without encountering any limits. In Schelling's writings between 1794 and 1795, these two forms are, to borrow Birgit Sandkaulen-Bock's expression, carried [*trug ein*] by the pure *Ich*, or the transcendental subject, and make the world of experience possible. It is not until 1797, when Schelling published his works on *Naturphilosophie*, that these two forms can be seen playing a constituting function in the quintessential natural systems: Nature as a whole and living beings.

This First Part of the thesis consists of four chapters. Here I introduce the reader to Schelling's theoretical context, and his early development of absolute identity as the first principle for a system of philosophy. Firstly, I turn to the philosophical context in which Schelling sought to build up his own philosophical concerns. With this context in mind, I look into Schelling's motivations for pursuing the first principle of the system of philosophy. I mainly focus on Schelling's essay *Vom ich als Princip der Philosophie oder das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (*Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy or the Unconditioned in Human Knowledge,* SW I/I: 150-244, also known as *Ichschrift* [the *I writing*]) to contend that his first principle is not merely a formal function that epistemically props and organises a system of propositions for a rational agent, but that Schelling thinks this principle is the absolute itself. In a word, not a merely heuristic idea, but a metaphysical ground. I show how, in pushing forward this metaphysical characterisation, he moves away from Fichte's subjectivism and, despite Schelling's adoption of Fichte's terminology, and to a certain extent his foundational programme, I argue that Schelling was closer to Spinoza in conceiving his *absolutes Ich* as the absolute itself, that is, not a hypostatisation of a representation, but the true and ultimate *das Unbedingte*. I argue that, in fact, Schelling begins with the absolute I knowing it is the only way in which it is possible to bestow reality to universal cognitions, for it breaks away from the circle of self-consciousness. Similarly, I reinforce the latter claim by looking back into Schelling's school essay known as the *Timaeus Kommentar*, composed circa 1794. I examine this text to trace Schelling's early cosmological interests while exposing a synthetic spirit in his

attempt to map Kant's transcendental ideas and pure concepts on Plato's ideal architecture of the cosmos. Borrowing from Plato, in this essay Schelling began applying, going forward, the heuristic notions of *the visible* (to determine the sensible-objective dimension), and *the invisible* (to refer to the subjective and ideal). This text reveals Schelling's concern with the metaphysical bond between the *visible* and the *invisible*, and although he only sketches the suggestion that the synthetic unity of the world in consciousness has a deeper metaphysical root in the divine intellect, I argue that he already pursues the systematic unification of the ideal and the real in a metaphysical ground.

## [Chapter 1. Schelling's early theoretical context]

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling was born January 27, 1775, in Leonberg, a town located to the west of Stuttgart, now the capital of the German federal state of Baden-Württenberg. He has been considered a sort of philosophical prodigy, exhibiting both exceptional native talents and a scholarly education at a very young age. Schelling's parents, both orphaned at an early age, were brough up by Protestant pastors in boarding schools and kept a strong Protestant tradition in which they would bring up their six children. About two years after Schelling's birth, his father, Joseph Friedrich Schelling, was appointed pastor at the higher seminary in Bebenhausen, and while he was promoted to the rank of prelate, he was a recognised theologian and considered one of the leading Orientalists of his time.[7] This academic background played a decisive role in shaping Schelling's precocious talents. Signs of his exceptional linguistic and intellectual skills were soon noticed by his father, who early on introduced him to classical languages and placed a special emphasis on Schelling's theological studies. In 1785, at the age of nine, his father sent him off to the Latin school in Nürtingen where he met Friedrich Hölderlin, five years Schelling's senior. After two years of Latin instruction, Schelling's father took his gifted son to the Bebenhausen seminary where he was a preacher and prepared him for university. As a result, in 1790 Schelling was already a young scholar all set for university: proficient in ancient Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic and

[7] My brief account of Schelling's early biography is based on that of Schmied-Kowarzik's, *Existenz denken Schellings Philosophie von ihren Anfängen bis zum Spätwerk*, (2015, pp. 17 ff.). I also follow X. Tilliette's *Schelling, une philosophie in devenir* (1992) and R. J. Richards's *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (2002, pp. 116-192) for my account of Schelling's intellectual biography.

other modern European languages, schooled in basic philosophical knowledge, most notably Plato's *Dialogues* and Leibniz's *Monadology*. But given Schelling's early age, his father had to obtain a special permission for him to attend the prestigious seminary that was attached to the University of Tübingen. Finally, in October of 1790, three years before the mandatory age of entry of eighteen, Schelling was a student at the *Tübinger Stift*. The seminary's curriculum required the future pastors and theologians to be instructed in philosophy for the first two years, followed by three of theology and biblical studies.

Decisively, the *Tübinger Stift* was an impactful experience for Schelling's subsequent philosophical development. Here he famously met and befriended Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and shared a room both with Hegel and Friedrich Hölderlin. During their seminar years and over a decade after, these three figures became intellectually entangled, in many respects exposed to the same influential characters, inspired and intellectually shaped by the same philosophers, enthusiastically stimulated by the French Revolution and, to some extent, allied against the strict orthodoxy of the instructors of the *Tübinger Sift*.[8] They went on to become some of the greatest figures of classical German philosophy and their influence on one another during these early years has been deemed far-reaching and it is hard to extricate. The partially lost manuscript, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* is a documentary testament of the joint intellectual development of the three philosophers.[9] The program not only pushed against the mainstream Christian view taught at Tübingen—the manuscript envisions the restoration of the idea of divinity and morality through 'the overthrow of all bogus faith, the prosecution, by reason itself, of the priesthood, which now apes reason'—but also conceived a system of ideas from which the author intended to 'arrive at the physics on a grand scale'. (Unknown, 1995, p. 199). From the realm of Nature, the author sought to elevate the idea of humanity to the spirit of a higher intellectuality and absolute freedom both in terms

[8] One example is the influence of Carl Immanuel Diez, an older student at the seminary responsible for assisting younger students. In his article, *Hegel's Life*, Terry Pinkard highlights Diez's radical ideas of autonomy and secular interpretation of the Kantian doctrines as influential in the development of Hegel, Hölderin and Schelling. (in Beiser, 2008, pp. 20-21).

[9] In *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus "Rezeptionsgeschichte und Interpretation"* (1989), Frank-Peter Hansen provides a comprehensive study of the *Systemprogramm*'s reception and the interpretive tendencies during the twentieth century that favoured each of the three philosophers. According to him, scholars that championed Hegel's authorship only started to appear in the 1940s, but the most convincing thesis was developed by Otto Pöggeler in 1965. (Cf. Ibid., 86, 175). However, since the appearance of the manuscript Schelling has been the most frequently chosen candidate. Some famous figures that favoured him were Franz Rosenzweig, Erns Cassirer, Niolai Hartmann, Manfred Schröter, Hinrich Knittermeyer, Georg Lukács, Karl Jaspers, Walter Schultz, Alexander Hollerbach, Horst Fuhrmans, Jürgen Habermas and Manfred Frank. (Ibid., 86, 174, 331).

of its history and social organisation; and on the basis of the Platonic idea of unity, integrate reason and goodness by means of an aesthetic sense; finally this organic unity that renders the ideas aesthetic will reveal that the ideas are mythological and mythology is rational. (Ibid, p. 200). The authorship of this fragment, which has been variously attributed to Hölderling, Hegel and Schelling, has been subjected to an extended hermeneutical dispute[10] precisely because the three students seemed to have formed an organic concord of growing philosophical, theological and political interests and a special fondness for ancient Greek philosophy. As the manuscript suggests, the three seminarians might have had similar thought-imbued sentiments and philosophical aspirations in mind, very likely guided by the spirit of the 'new philosophy' inaugurated by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Most notably, the seminarians became acquainted with the polemic started by the sharpest of Kant's critics, Carl Leonhard Reinhold, Salomon Maimon and Gottlob Ernst Schulze, whose *Aenesidemus*[11] (1792) prompted a fertile debate with Johann Gottfried Fichte, a figure that was essential for the birth of the one of the most spectacular periods of philosophical production known as German idealism.[12] Fichte visited the University of Tübingen for the second time in May 1794. Schelling became very enthusiastic with Fichte's radical systematization of Kant's transcendental idealism, and later that year, he plunged into the study of the latter's *Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*. Schelling quickly embraced the new extended facet of idealism by

[10] One page of this manuscript was found among Hegel's documents by Franz Rozenzweig in 1914, who attributed the authorship to Schelling, regardless of being written by Hegel's hand, and published it in 1917. However, since the outline points towards essential features that were consistently developed by Hegel's system, Schelling's philosophies and Hölderlin's writings, scholars have resorted also to the reconstruction of the philosophers' conversations, their correspondence, and even to the crafting of the margins and style of copying of the piece and their state of mind at the time of the manuscript's writing. (See for ex. Hansen, 1989, p. 22). This page has compelled many to think of Schelling as the author, for his intellectual production conforms to the program almost completely. Schmied-Kowarzik (2015, p. 53) and Horst Fuhrmans (in Schelling, 1962, pp. 55-59) give compelling reasons in favour of Schelling's authorship, which I strongly favour. For the sake of brevity, I can only highlight a few details. Beyond his clearly infused Platonic metaphysics, Schelling seems to conform to the program in a number of ways. One is his early Fichtean view that freedom was the absolute act of a practical and creative reason; another is his *Naturphilosophie* as speculative physics, which would follow the gradual progress of the unconscious activity of Nature to the arising of self-consciousness in spirit; one more is his lofty conception of art and the aesthetic genius in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*; finally, his late *Philosophy of Mythology*, which agrees with the manuscript's statement that 'mythology must become philosophical.' (Unknown, 1995, p. 200). However, it must be noted that Schelling never was an outright political thinker and this fact always comes to the fore when one wants to attribute his authorship to the manuscript. (See for example, Hansen, 1989, pp. 293-94). With respect to Schelling's itinerary, Fuhrmans (Ibid, p. 58) thinks the *Systemprogramm* was conceived during a meeting with Hölderlin around the end of Schelling's stay in Stuttgart in March of 1796, where he sketched the general guidelines of a new worldview projected in the manuscript.

[11] The complete title was *Aenesidemus, oder Ueber die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie, nebst einer Verteidigung des Skeptizismus gegen die Anmassungen der Vernunftkritik*. Published in 1793.

[12] For an accurate and detailed account of Kant's early critics and their impact on the German idealists, see D. Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures in German Idealism*. (2003), pp. 65-154. Aenesidemus polemic with Fichte, see debate see

publishing his Fichte-inspired *Über der Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt* in September of 1794, when he was only nineteen years old. By posting the *Formschrift* to Fichte, Schelling let him know of his adherence to the latter's foundational program, which Fichte gladly approved by sending him in return the opening fascicles of his *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschftslehre,* a more comprehensive exposition of his *Science of Knowledge*, which Schelling echoed in his next essays *Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie* and *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatism and Kriticismus* of 1795.[13] In a letter to Hegel dated January 1795, Schelling, at the outset of his final year in the seminary, stressed the idea that philosophy was not over with Kant's criticism. He wrote to Hegel:

> 'Currently, I live and move within philosophy! Philosophy is not over […] The last time *Fichte* was here, he said that one must have the genius of Socrates in order to penetrate Kant. I find this to be true every day. We must go further with philosophy! […] *Fichte* will raise philosophy to a level at which even the best of the earliest Kantians will feel dizzy!' (DB, 2: 24).

With these first essays, Schelling made clear he was aware of the problems unleashed with the reception of Kantianism and found himself similarly concerned by the urge to find systematic completeness as a requirement for heralding the scientific status of philosophy. (Cf. Gardner, 2019, p. 4, 5). For in his eyes, the *Critique of Pure Reason* did not provide a principle that would constitute the ultimate foundation of all the formal principles, e.g., the table of categories, on which derivative concepts and syntheses of experience, pure and a posteriori, depended. In a word, the possibility of philosophy, and therefore, of true knowledge was at stake. Unless, of course, the system's formal radical and its derivative a priori cognitions were secured. (Cf. SW I/1: 88, p. 39). In this respect, Schelling also felt drawn by Fichte's reformulation of transcendental idealism as much as Kant's criticism, Spinoza's metaphysics of the absolute and Plato's doctrine of ideas. These philosophers are not in the least the only thinkers that influenced Schelling, but they are the most visible in this work.

Thus, borrowing from Kant's idea of systematicity, Schelling set out to find the principle that could once and for all ground the system of scientific knowledge, or in Kantian

[13] The similarities between *Vom Ich* and Fichte's *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* have been analysed by, Gardner (2016), Schmied-Kowarzik (2015), Limnatis (2008), Horstman (2000).

terms, to exploit the formal predisposition of the mind which endeavours to complete the 'rational connection of cognitions into a whole.' (Ak 4:467; Cf. 4: 468). The merit of achieving systematicity for Schelling and some of his contemporaries was paramount, for they believed a systematic presentation meant that philosophy had found the path to finally achieve a scientific status. In this context, scientificity required that, in inspecting the space of rationality, the philosopher could discover *the* first, presuppositionless principle of all possible knowledge. Once this epistemic ground was secured, then she could proceed to derive a cohesive and organic scheme of basic a priori concepts that describe the unitary and essential structure of reality, something that, they thought, empirical science could not provide. Whether that unitary structure was fundamentally real or ideal remained to be seen, but the dispute to defend either—or both—not only fashioned a philosophical battleground, it was also one of the aspects that infused a distinctive character to each one of the so-called German idealists, in that they sought to justify, by means of this principle, the absolute unity of the world and what makes it knowable.

Schelling's philosophy may be placed generally within the Kantian tradition, not because it merely appropriates Kant's teachings, but because, at a very young age, Schelling took part in the extremely complex debate over how Kant's critical revolution could overcome its 'shortcomings'. (Cf. SW I/I: 87; p. 38). Of special concern for some critics of Kant were those limitations that prevented him from furnishing an adequate foundation for philosophy. Schelling took these critics up on that specific point and made of the discovery of the *ultimate* ground of philosophy one of his most fervent goals. In this respect, Schelling aligned himself with philosophers of the stature of Karl Leonard Reinhold and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who sought to develop a foundationalist programme that delivered the secure path towards the promise of turning philosophy into a true science. The various ways in which these philosophers positioned the starting principle left enough room for the development of considerably different philosophies.

Following from Kant's own prescription of what *philosophy as a science* should look like, these philosophers seemed firmly committed to a systematic conception of philosophy. This conception implies a connection between the Kantian concepts of 'system', 'science' in the sense of *Wissenschaft*, and the idea of the 'form of the whole'. One of the tenets that Schelling challenged, which is central for the development of the present work, was Kant's

core conception of philosophy as a systematic whole, where 'systematic' denotes a particular kind of organisation. The conception of Nature as a totality that is organised systematically refers to an ideal *internal* structure that allows the bridge between Nature and free human action, which in turn leads to the systematic unification of all human experience, that is, science and morality. But precisely on the basis of the form of the system as a hierarchical interconnectedness that resembles a living organism, the positing and determination of the sole aim of the system was possible.[14] In other words, the system was conceived as a living organism because it was purposive and had a final end: the realisation of the highest good. Let us not forget that underlying Kant's justification of the system there is the very crucial tenet that this systematic totality and its absolute purposiveness has only a logical form and is thus only a functional aid to human activity. For him the form of the whole of nature entails only "a logical purposiveness" which, he says, "does not allow us to infer that nature is capable [*tauglich*] of a real purposiveness within its products." (KU, 25: 217). Even if he admits that the purposive forms, i.e., living organisms, are shown primordially *in* experience, what we see is the logical form that experience constrains us to see. (KU 20: 218). But what if one challenges this formal view of the form of the system and posits Nature's production of particular systems as something not only logically possible but also as a reality? If the living form before me, the crow, the oak or the person next to me, can be thought of as a system not only because I infer from their shape and behaviour that such might be the case, but these forms are real systems of their own displaying purposes in Nature, then what would prevent us from positing the whole of Nature, which those particular systems are parts or products of, as a systematic totality, i.e. as an absolute purposive whole? This question and the corresponding answers are, in my view, Schelling's challenge to Kant's discussion of the form of the system and to Criticism's ramifications, which influenced the emerging life sciences of the late eighteenth century.

But even at that time, when the young Schelling was enthusiastically drawn to Kantian critical philosophy and Fichte's foundational programme, Spinoza rang something true in his mind. In a letter to Hegel dated February 4, 1795, Schelling confesses that he had 'become a Spinozist!', immediately adding a nuance to his announcement: 'Don't be surprised, you will

[14] Organised beings, Kant explains in part two of the Critique of Judgement, are "systems of purposes". (KU, 5: 420; 20: 217).

soon hear, how? For Spinoza, the world (the absolute object opposed to the subject) was everything; for me it is the *I*.' (quoted in Nassar, 2012, p. 136). Later on, in March 29 of the same year, Schelling further elaborates this idea:

> "It seems to me that the essential difference between critical and dogmatic philosophy lies in this, that the critical starts from the absolute I (not yet conditioned by any object) and the dogmatic from the absolute object or not-I. (In its highest consistency, the latter leads to the system of Spinoza, the former to that of Kant) Philosophy must take its start from the unconditional. The question is simply where this unconditional lies, in the I or in the not-I. If this question is answered, everything is decided. For me the highest principle of all philosophy is the pure, absolute I, that is, the I insofar as it is nothing but I, not yet conditioned by any objects, but posited by freedom." (Schelling, 1980, p. 133).

So far, the picture of the main philosophical figures that influenced Schelling's development as a philosopher who was going to be a protagonist in the reception of Kantianism is beginning to take a clearer shape. But some influences were more pervasive than others. A point in case is Schelling's rather intense relationship with Fichte between the years of 1794 to 1804, a period which has been rightly seen as nothing if not momentous for Schelling's early systematic aspirations, and the later aggressive way in which he moved away from transcendental idealism. Another figure who had a powerful influence on Schelling's work was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who influenced Schelling's view of Nature. From Goethe's influence Schelling started conceiving Nature as an entity that unfolds in a continuous process of metamorphosis.[15] Similarly, Baruch Spinoza is a philosopher who had a strong presence in Schelling's philosophy. He influenced Schelling in a different way because rather than inspiring his shifts, Spinoza represents his constancy. In fact, Schelling never stopped being a Spinozist, neither did he stop being critical of the Dutch philosopher. For one reason, Schelling sought to show that a principle that is One in an absolute sense was behind the invisible unity of the world and the subject that experiences it, a discovery that, in

[15] I will develop a brief analysis of this influence in Chapter 3.3. Dalia Nassar has shown that Goethe's influence over Schelling's idea of Nature is very significant. See, esp. 10.2 in *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy* (2013).

Schelling's view, no one else had achieved before Spinoza. For example, in the 1797 edition of *Ideas*, Schelling recognises that Spinoza was 'the first who, with complete clarity saw mind [*Geist*] and matter as one, thought and extension simply as modifications of the same principle.' (AA I/5: 76; p. 15). Indeed, only when the real and the ideal emanate from one and the same source, can we understand their union despite its apparent irreconcilable duality. For another reason, Schelling was also aware of the need to reshape the very foundation of Spinoza's system, a desideratum he had in mind since 1795 when, in virtue of his alliance to transcendental idealism, assessed the shortcomings of Spinoza's system, which he deemed 'more worthy of high-esteem, because of its bold consequences.' And he certainly wanted to restore Spinoza's system or present 'a counterpart to' it by 'annul[ing] the very foundations.' (SW I/2: 151, 159; pp. 64, 69). Immanuel Kant is another figure that takes precedence over other philosophers, at least in the period that our present discussions about Schelling will cover. In fact, Schelling was a careful reader of Kant, and contemporaneously with the main figures of German idealism, he was deeply committed to the unity of reason and Nature through a program of systematisation of Kantian extraction.[16] Of course, there are crucial nuances of interpretation regarding the different interpretive directions the main figures of German idealism, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, took to fulfil their projects in approaching Kant's transcendental idealism. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, I will assume two general aspects that make them fit in a common project. Firstly, that the German idealists were, post-Kantians, and therefore, took up the critical program from Kant's new views of transcendental philosophy in the *Prolegomena* and the B edition of the first *Critique* onwards. This point is decisive because, as E. Förster points out, the original edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was not available again until 1838 when the first edition of the Kant's works was published. Until then,

> 'neither Fichte nor Schelling nor Hegel were familiar with the first edition of the *Critique*, and we must remain open to the possibility that this fact might have consequences for the manner and extent to which they understood themselves to be engaged in a Kantian project.' (2012, p. 13).

[16] S. Sedgwick (ed.) (2000), P. Franks (2005), Förster (2012) are amongst the most insightful and careful studies available in the English language that address this complex and rich confluence of philosophical depth and innovation.

A second aspect is that they sought to find a new foundation for the unity of reason, so they could complete the revolution they thought was started by Kant, i.e., the ultimate a priori synthesis of all transcendental knowledge in a system.[17]

## [Chapter 2. Fichte's early influence on Schelling]

During his last years of theological studies at the *Tübinger Stift*, Schelling was in the middle of a very productive period with a strong hold on philosophy. After submitting his *Magister-Dissertation* in 1792, *Antiquissimi de prima Malorum Humanorum Origine* (*On the Oldest of the First Origin of Human Evil*), in order to complete his philosophical studies, he wrote three further essays, which proved his philosophical prowess: in 1794, he wrote a commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, a piece that was discovered and published for the first time 200 years after Schelling wrote it. Now known as the *Timaeus Kommentar*, this text has revolutionised the Schelling scholarship, especially with respect to the understanding and interpretation of Schelling's philosophical beginnings and the unity of his thought, which this text can prove to be interlaced by this early presentation of a synthesis of Plato's metaphysics and Kant's critical philosophy.[18]

The extent of Fichte's influence on Schelling has been largely discussed, but the more recent scholarly studies on Schelling lean towards the idea that Fichte was not as influential as was initially believed. Schelling's departure from Fichte's outlook has been shown in several studies, however, it is worth pointing out the aspects of Fichte's philosophy that Schelling adopted.[19] Firstly, during the years in which Fichte established his professional relationship with the young *Stifter*, he became interested, inter alia, in formulating a single root that could unify and sustain the functions and mechanisms of the knowing, practical and

[17] Most scholars would agree with these two general points.

[18] Some of the most important commentaries I will return to in this work are Hermann Krings's *Genesis und Materie--Zur Bedeutung der "Timaeus"-Handschrift für Schellings Naturphilosophie* (1994, pp. 117-155), Dieter Sturma's *The Nature of Subjectivity: The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature* (2000, pp. 216-231) and Chapter 4 of Bruce Matthews's *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (2011, pp. 103-135).

[19] It is not possible for me to expand on the deeply complex issues concerning the differences and similarities between Schelling and Fichte. For a comprehensive account of these connections, especially in Schelling's early philosophy, see S. Gardner, *Fichte and Schelling: The Limitations of the Wissenschaftslehre?* (2016, pp. 325-349). For a more detailed comparison between the philosophies of nature of both philosophers, see the very helpful *Das Problem der Natur: Erläuterungen zur Kontroverse zwischen Fichte und Schelling* (1997) by W. Schmied-Kowarzik. For my account of Fichte's philosophy, I will be drawing on these two papers and D. Henrich (Op. cit., 2003), J. Haag, *Fichte on the Consciousness of Spinoza's God* (2012, pp. 100-120), E. Ficara *»Transzendental« bei Kant und Fichte* (2009, pp. 81-95), Rolf-Peter Horstmann and F. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (2002, Part II).

reflective dimensions of the mind-concept delimited by Kant's critical philosophy, while showing, by way of the same principle, that the mind is above all a striving activity that realises itself more properly in the moral domain.

Fichte's project seemed to have grown from some of the worries of Kant's early critics.[20] For one reason, there was the problem of the unity of knowledge itself. Kant's transcendental basis of experience seemed loosely held between the intellectual and sensible spheres of the human mind, these in turn breaking down into understanding and reason, on one side, and space and time, on the other. These many parts were supposed to be united by the mind, which is the systematic whole *per se*. But Kant's critics considered that the mind was in turn insufficiently grounded. For although the parts of this whole where more or less explicated, its unifying principle, the *I*, appeared to be only a contentless, under-determined function. For another reason, there were the kinds of activity that this transcendental basis made possible but could not, in principle, bring together, namely, the practical and the theoretical. For even a further reason, the objectivity of knowledge seemed itself at stake if one could infer from Kant's system that, beyond the scope of experience, there was a metaphysical domain of *things-in themselves*, which could, at the same time, limit the finite transcendental subject and unexplainably feed our knowledge from a metaphysical above and below, that is, perhaps sourcing the metaphysical actuality of the transcendental ideas, on the one hand, and, on the other, serving as the indeterminate ground that the forms of space and time are supposed to give form to. These questions sprang because Kant never either discussed, in his critical opus, the origin and nature of these transcendental ideas and the forms of sensibility. In view of this, one has no way to know, as Schelling says, how these conceptual and sensible forms of reason that give a necessary logical assemblage to phenomena 'have become actual for us […], have found their way to our minds.' (AA I/5: 84; p. 23). In this respect, Schelling trailed Fichte's requirement of doing away with the notion of the *thing in itself*, which Fichte described as 'a non-thought' and Schelling as 'an idea that floats midway between something and nothing.' (AA I/5: 88; p. 25).

[20] There is a very comprehensive account of the philosophers that played an important role in the reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy in S. Sedgwick, *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy* (2000). For a thorough analysis of the prolific philosophical production of this period, the controversies that motivated it, and the philosophers that played a role in its emergence, see E. Förster's *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy* (2012). For a very thorough study of the reception of Kant's critical philosophy from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, see Gardner & Grist (eds.) *The Transcendental Turn* (2015).

The principle that was supposed to fill the gap and give cohesion to all these scattered parts and functions was *freedom*, but in Kant's system freedom amounted only to a transcendental idea, a merely formal guideline that aids human reasoning in its practical endeavours, therefore, nothing with the ontological grip necessary to give a real unity to the system of transcendental experience. Dieter Heinrich has noted, in this respect, that Kant's integration of freedom into the system is 'what makes Kant's program a *system* in the proper sense,' for freedom is a mediating function that bridges the intellectual and the sensible worlds but, as he explains further, freedom is reason's ultimate destination, a final step that helps the latter reach the form of an organic whole: 'It follows that one cannot deduce a philosophical system starting from freedom.' (Henrich, 2003, p. 66).[21] Some saw this this as a deliberate refusal to establish a *first* principle or a very first and unconditional start. Such a system appeared to them to be, at best 'incomplete' and at worst unsystematic.

To philosophers like Schelling and Fichte, it looked as though Kant's own project of founding a scientific philosophy was rooted in a frothy notion that did not have the power to anchor the system of all knowledge. This was G.E. Schulze's insight, when in 1793, under the alias of Aenesidemus published a paper called 'Humean skepticism,' to pose a sceptical challenge to Reinhold's 'principle of consciousness' in his *Elementary Philosophy*—a previous attempt to reformulate Kant's criticism into a systematic unity grounded in one presuppositionless basic proposition that could be related to a basic fact. In his critique, Schulze noticed that Reinhold's principle was not at all radical, for it presupposed other principles and so he felt confident to declare that 'in philosophy nothing can be decided on the basis of incontestably certain and universally valid first principles concerning the existence or nonexistence of things in themselves and their properties nor concerning the limits of man's capacity for knowledge.' (Fichte, 1988b, p. 54).

With his critique, Schulze was implying that a finite mind, with its limited cognitive capacity, could not unearth the foundations of unconditional first principles, those which could be truly presuppositionless. Prompted by Schulze's challenge, Fichte sought to stave off the sceptic's doubts about the existence of a sufficient and presuppositionless principle that could thoroughly ground the apodeictic truths presumed by the transcendental philosophy. In view of this, Fichte's philosophical project not only pursued a real unification of the mind

[21] For the role of freedom in Kant's system I am drawing mainly from Dieter Henrich's interpretation. (Op. cit).

through the unconditionality of the subjective act of freedom, but it also had a strong epistemic motivation. In the Prefatory Note to his *First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge*, Fichte says of Kant 'I soon came to the conclusion that the enterprise of this great man […] has been a complete failure.' Fichte explains that it was Kant's inability to integrate the unconditional act of freedom into the system what was lacking to sustain the whole building. He thought Kant only treated freedom on its practical side but never asked 'what type of consciousness is that?' And that is why, Fichte contends, Kant 'nowhere dealt with the foundation of all philosophy.' (Fichte, 1994, pp. 3, 46; GA I: 419, 472). Fichte came across his systematic foundation in the domain of self-consciousness. According to him, nothing presupposes the most abstract point, which is represented by the immediate consciousness of the self, and, at this point, the first principle that becomes systematic is the 'consciousness of what is thought without a consciousness' expressed in the proposition A = A. This, Fichte asserts, is 'where one cannot go beyond the immediate consciousness: the absolute.' (*New Version of the Wissenschaftslehre*, of 1800; in p. 99). What Fichte seems to mean by the comparison between immediate self-consciousness and the identity proposition is that the absolute thinking self, which is positing activity, never really becomes an object. Positing, in German *Setzung*, is a technical term of the highest relevance for our discussion. *Setzen* is a ubiquitous concept in the work of Schelling, and it is one of the many conceptual items he is indebted to Fichte and Kant. In the English translations of the works of these philosophers, the verb *setzen* and its derivative noun *Setzung* are generally seen as equivalents of *to posit* and *position* or *positing*. However, the meaning of *posit* in the works of these philosophers generally has more than the logical or discursive sense, common in English, of merely accepting or assuming something as true. Anglophone Scholarship on Fichte and Kant has made some progress on clarifying the sense of *setzen*. For example, Beatrice Longuenesse (1998) and Paul Franks (2016) trace its meaning to the German rationalist tradition that imports the Latin *ponere* in the logical sense of 'to affirm in judgement' but with a strong emphasis on reason's determinative role, that is, in the sense that 'to posit is to determine a thing for a reason [or ground]'. (2016, p. 378; Cf. 1998, p. 347). In Schelling, as I hope to show, *setzen* has an ontological ingredient that affirms the role of being [Sein] or Nature for philosophy. In the identity philosophy, positing something *in* the absolute or *in* Being itself, means that the former logically and ontologically follows from the latter, which warrants the ideal reality of

such an individual structure, so that, if *x* is *y* truly, then *x* is *y* really, and the logical and ontological senses of positing are intertwined again.

But returning to Fichte's search for the ultimate reason or ground of a system of knowledge, he established a theoretical framework that begins precisely with an act of self-positing, that is, "with a principle that expresses the self-positing act of the absolute I" (1988, p. 57). The absolute 'I' proved for him to be an *Unconditioned* or free activity that has itself as foundation while nothing pre-empts its striving and nothing pre-exists its own existence.

Fichte went on to develop a system he thought was immune to sceptical doubts. This is because he begins from a first principle, in other words, a ground that is presupposed by nothing, which gives a privileged point of view, for it allows the transcendental philosopher to see all knowledge arising *for him* in the imagination. (*BWL*, 1988a, p. 98). The privileged position of the transcendental philosopher necessarily leaves behind the common notion that regards our experience as dependent on empirical things. (CF. GA I/2: 160, 368). Now, the totality brought about in the transcendental imagination has the form of the system while the categories derived from the I completely determine all reality *for us*. Hence, the transcendental philosopher aims at ideal rather than empirical objects, for the epistemic weight completely falls on the side of the ideal. And from this perspective, even the notion of the *thing in itself*, or the *transcendent*, is a product of transcendental reflection, since whatever falls into the web of reflection is an *object*, therefore necessarily immanent to knowledge and never transcendent. From this point of view, the transcendent thing could be interpreted as a representation of knowledge's inherent dialectic when the *Ich* limits itself its own activity and becomes an object, or a non-active representation, a *nicht-Ich*. (Cf. Ficara, 2009, pp. 92-95).

From Kant's prescription that philosophy only becomes scientific when it furnishes 'a system of all philosophical cognition' (*KrV*, A838/B866), one could see why Fichte might have decided to call his theory *the Science of Knowledge*, or *Wissenschaftslehre*. Indeed, Kant thought that 'systematic unity is what first turns common cognition into science [*Wissenschaft*], [and] architectonic is the doctrine of what is scientific.' (Ibid, A832/B860). In fact, in the last chapter of the first *Critique*, the Architectonic of Pure Reason, Kant regards systematicity as the essence of true philosophical knowledge, and the ideal of an 'architectonic of all human knowledge', whereby all systems of human cognition are structurally united among one another 'as members of a whole', as something reaching completeness. (A835/B863). More importantly,

here Kant explains that the philosophical *science* cannot be brought about 'without having an underlying idea,' which Kant designates as 'reason's concept of the form of the whole.' (A832-34/B860-62). However, Kant reduced this bedrock idea to a mere logical function and placed it 'hidden in reason like a germ', beyond the reach of objective knowledge in the realm of the so-called *thing in itself*, where all transcendental ideas with *no actual content* lie. Fichte solved this problem and turned his philosophy into science with this first principle of the absolute I.

Schelling read Fichte's aims and terminology closely when he wrote his two essays, the *Formschrift* and the *Ichschrift*. But as Snow remarks, 'the widespread tendency to see Schelling's pre-1800 work as virtually indistinguishable from Fichte's is not merely mistaken, it blinds us to the essential continuity of Schelling's thought as a whole.' In the following, I will sketch briefly how Schelling departs from Fichte's aims. But before we move on to the next chapter, let us bear in mind that with his first published essay, *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy* (*Formschrift*), Schelling was already taking part in the debate about the shortcomings of Kant's revolution. Here he complained about Kant's failure in attempting to establish a first and original principle that could provide cogent coherence for all the a priori deductions, hence 'shaping a universally valid philosophy.' (SW I/I: 87, p. 58). In this early essay, the idea of system was already shaping Schelling's philosophy. In fact, the original form [*Urform*] of philosophy, he says, must be furnished by a first principle, which by virtue of its unconditionality, cannot but serve as 'the root of all particular forms' and give 'the reason for its necessary connection with the particular forms that depended on it.' (Ibid.) The system of all possible objects under one principle is a requirement for their immanent connection. In his following essay, *Vom ich als Princip der Philosophy*, Schelling, was going to adopt Fichte's strategy of grounding philosophy on a first principle, to which self-consciousness has an immanent relatedness. Furthermore, the principle «I am I» seemed to be, as Horstmann claims, 'something that is fundamentally immune to all sceptical objections.' (2015, p. 99).

## [Chapter 3. The metaphysical Gap between Schelling's and Fichte's *absolutes Ich*]

Looking back at Schelling's letters to Hegel, Schelling's promotion of the *Ich* as the absolute, over and against Spinoza's substance, is going to be the kind of critical position that he will develop more explicitly in two works published in 1795. One is *Vom ich als Princip der Philosophie oder das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (*Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy or the Unconditioned in Human Knowledge,* SW I/I: 150-244, also known as *Ichschrift* [the *I writing*]), and following shortly after, *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatism and Kriticismus* (*Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, SW I/I: 282-341).[22] But as it is apparent in his remarks to Hegel, he is enthusiastic about the philosophical prospect of becoming a Spinozist, which might have been signalling his intention to infuse his philosophy with Spinoza's unifying criterion—emphasised by Schelling in terms of the opposition of the world to the *Ich*.

The opposition makes sense for Schelling at this time because, echoing Fichte, he believes philosophy's systematic possibility is twofold and, on the condition that is consistently developed, can only be realised by means of two conflicting claims ending with two opposite systems, dogmatism and criticism. (Cf. Fichte, 1988a, p. 95; 1994, I: 101; also Schelling, 1980, p. 133). Moreover, these claims had to possess a prime status since, Schelling warns, 'speculation demands the unconditional', that is, a presuppositionless principle that could be either the object (the world) or the subject (the I), but 'both systems have to proceed in the same manner.' (SW I/I: 172; p. 79). Consequently, the philosopher could proceed by claiming, on the one hand, that *everything* is real or has the character of a thing, and thus postulate the object as principle, i.e., she has to posit 'the unconditional in an *absolute* object which is neither genus nor species nor individual' (SW I/2: 164; p. 73)—a case in point of this principle is Spinoza's absolute substance, though as Schelling reveals, by being unconditional, this substance is more than just a mere thing. (Cf. *Ethics*, I: D3:A1,2:P1,5,6).[23] On the opposite side, again one could claim that everything we can possibly know is ideal because it falls into the subject's sensible forms and it is further informed by consciousness' epistemic structure. If the system posits self-consciousness as its start, then, mutatis mutandis, the first principle

[22] In reality, the *Letters* appeared in two instalments in Immanuel Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft teutscher Gelehrte*, first anonymously in autumn of 1795 and then in the spring of 1796.
[23] For example, 'by substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.' (Cf. Spinoza, 1992, p. 31).

has to be an absolute subjectivity. According to Schelling, considering the absolute or God as an object is the concern of theoretical philosophy, also called dogmatism; whereas considering God as a subject leads to an 'unfinished criticism' like that of Kant, or a pure practical philosophy, ostensibly, like that of Fichte. (Cf. SW I/I: 169, 177, pp. 76, 82)

Yet, unhappy consequences might arise from these two alternatives, especially for a philosopher like Schelling that aims at the true *absolute* and therefore at systematic *completeness*. Note, however, that the empirical rendition of completeness is less than a concern for Schelling. It is not so much about applying the ideal of completeness to a coverable field of empirical things, neither is the purely ideal dimension of what could *fundamentally* be the case in isolation. For Schelling, there are two fundamental sorts of stuff: what is ideal or subjective and what is real or objective. But by positing one side as the *absolute* nullifies the possibility of being of the other and, as a consequence, we wind up with an incomplete account that cannot claim true systematicity. Let us examine, further, the consequences of choosing either principle.

Along the first path, claiming that the object is *absolute* amounts to presupposing or deliberately positing an infinite substance. One must note, though, that the concept of infinity here should not be associated to infinite quantities or specific infinite varieties of any mathematical kind. One way to think about this concept is by imagining an infinity that is not limited by any other item, be it either minimally infinite, such as that which is formed by finite things in an infinite progression—one example being the natural numbers; or maximally infinite—an instance of which could be one of the infinite particular attributes of the absolute substance.[24] Now, insofar as it is absolute, the infinite substance cannot be grounded in other than itself, be it something finite or particular, for if it is, then it is *in all* of them at once, which amounts to the absolute, therefore this absolute totality is a *thing in itself* and not *in another*. However, for the young Schelling, deriving the system of philosophy from a thing nullifies an essential part of the formula: the *Ich*, who in positing its own thinking, freely thinks the thing. Indeed, in this system everything is nature, or the object that the subject thinks, and nothing is mind; from this it follows that we end up with a dogmatic or naturalistic system. A

[24] One could argue that maximal and minimal infinities are co-determined by each other's boundaries and also by their sizes. Absolute infinity's unconditionedness precludes any determination by sizes. Now, if we follow Spinoza's doctrine, according to which the absolute's attributes are predicates that the intellect ascribes to it, in predication, the infinity of these attributes, can only reach maximal infinity, but not absolute infinity as such.

consistent dogmatism, Schelling declares in his *Briefe*, 'is bent not upon contest but upon surrender, not upon enforced but upon voluntary annihilation, upon quiet abandonment of oneself to the absolute object.' (SW I/I: 284; p. 157). For even if we imagine *minds* in this system, these are not really *Geiste*, or free agents. As the self-determining activity of thinking is subtracted from reality, individuals are depicted as machines within the causal series of natural things, effected and ruled by the system of interconnections and the natural laws. (Cf. *Ethics*, I; P7; Pr,Cor,Sch; II: P48; Pr; Sch). In Schelling's words: 'If the principle of all philosophy is to be […] a *thing in itself*, then every I is done away with, there is no longer any pure I, any freedom, and there is no reality in any I but instead only negation.' (SW I/I: 173; p. 79). It was not only a question of highlighting the necessity of freedom, but also salvaging what Jacobi denounced in *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, namely, faith and morality. (SW I/I: 303-309; p. 73). Given its principle of *deus sive natura*, it is not surprising that Schelling considers Spinoza's system the most accomplished instance of dogmatism. (Cf. SW I/I: §4, 170ff, 184; pp. 77-8, 87).

If we now turn to the opposite path, whereby everything is ideal or subjective, the consequences we get do not necessarily mirror the way of the thing in itself; for positing consciousness as a principle already implies freedom, or the self-referential act of thinking—therefore existing, and the objective correlate of consciousness, nature. But positing an absolute subject as the first principle of philosophy introduces the requirement of having to rise above the empirical subject and its necessary correlation to an object. According to Schelling, Kant proposed an idealism without stipulating an unconditioned principle and he stayed at a level of a conditioned generality. (SW I/I: 152ff; p. 65ff). Fichte's idealism, on the other hand, successfully dispensed with the thing-in-itself and found one hypothetical, albeit non-objective, pure principle in the agent's activity of self-reflection. However, Fichte does not seem to raise above the scope of universal subjectivity. This *scope* ultimately poses a problem for Schelling precisely because he regarded the overcoming of all oppositions as a decisive step towards the ascension to the domain of absoluteness. And it would become even more explicit in the philosophy of identity that this would remain a challenge that Fichte could have never met. Despite this charge of subjectivism, Fichte advanced his philosophy momentously by discovering the non-objective or '*pure*' principle of subjectivity, rightly claimed by transcendental philosophy. Schelling claimed this pure unity as well, but as we will discover, he developed a deeper insight into it.

But how, it will be asked, can we understand a non-objective principle? Fichte gives an exposition of his special kind of philosophical principle in his *Grundlage des gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (*Fundamental Principles of the entire Science of Knowledge*) of 1795. Here Fichte explains that the *I* that accompanies all our representations is a universal and pure *seeing* that never becomes an object, and therefore, 'does not appear among the empirical states of our consciousness.' (Cf. *Grundlage*, 1994, I: 91, 234). For even if the conscious subject contemplates himself, the object of contemplation is only a momentary representation subtended by the *pure* contemplative onlooker that never exhausts itself with any of its representations. Furthermore, according to Fichte, this pure activity seems to be behind the 'perfectly certain and accepted' identity A = A, particularly with regard to 'the necessary connection' revealed by the copula '*is*' but also by a hypothetical proposition like '*if* A *then* A.' Why? Because Fichte considers that both A as subject and A as predicate are posited *in* and *by* the *I*; therefore, the necessary connection that allows us to establish a logical unity in both propositions turns out to be this universal self. And to the extent that is posited *by* and *in* the self, the identity A = A, which was thought to be 'absolutely certain', in fact presupposes the universal onlooker 'that is permanently uniform, forever one and the same'. Correlatively, the positing of A in and by the *I*, presupposes the self-certainty of the *I* due to A being constrained by the territory of the *I*, which in turn is defined by the I's own self-certainty. This issue leads to the complete derivation of the concept of the *I* as an unconditional principle, mainly because Fichte's concern is not the mere pure *I* or a seeing without something seen. For him pure consciousness, that is, in abstraction of its correlative structure, is not an object of philosophy, and this would be especially thorny when it comes to his doctrinal differences with Schelling, because Fichte's doctrine is anchored in the possibility of experience, which is always mediated by the subject's formal structure, which delivers humanly tailored contents of experience. In this respect, the *I* amounts to the proposition *I am* [*I*] which expresses at once the self-positing and the self-certainty of the being of the *I*, which forms a unity that is self-grounded by and in the *I*. Even more so, the epistemological and ontological unity of the pure I delimits a scope of determination that turns out to be the source of the highest certainty but also the highest degree of reality. In light of this determinative scope, we can see how, if all knowledge starts with consciousness and ends in the domain of consciousness, the foundation that makes all acts and contents of consciousness possible is the self-conscious subject. (Cf.

Ibid, I: 92-96). It is precisely in this self-enclosed domain where Fichte locates the unconditional certainty that underlines all claims to knowledge because even if there is something grounded in a not-*I*, once it is predicated by the self, this not-I 'designates what the self, in reflecting upon itself, discovers to be present in itself.' (Ibid, I: 96, n. 3). This is an important point to bear in mind when we try to understand Schelling's own concerns about this purely subjective dimension, especially because it will become clear to him that Fichte's principle is unilateral. Indeed, since nothing escapes the overbearing determining power of the *I*, both in terms of its reality (at least semantic) and its certainty, the unity of the *I* [*am I*] as the absolute domain has been established without resorting to anything outside of the scope of the I. Fichte designates this special 'Act' of self-positing *Thathandlung* and it refers specifically to the transcendental certainty of our being conscious subjects, or of the *I* as *being an I*. The primordial self-positing *being* of the *I* naturally preconditions the positing of the existence of the world of ordinary experience, including the empirical self that we could say now emerges as »an I in the world as an I.« And in this way, reality is transferred from the *Thathandlung* to the whole world of its presentations. Fichte describes this special kind of act with the following words: 'whatever is posited in virtue of the simple positing of some thing (an item posited in the self) is the reality, or essence, of that thing.' (Ibid, I: 99). What is of particular relevance in this quote is that, for Fichte, the essence of things is what constitutes the crux of the reality of experience, which is necessarily for the knowing subject, and so it corresponds to a nexus of determinations of existence raging from thinking to perceiving and other modes of consciousness. (Cf. Ibid, I: 99-108).[25] Perception, as one of these determinations attaching to the objects of ordinary experience, could be exemplified in a very simple way:

> "the physical existence of «these written words» you are now reading presupposes the existence of your conscious self that is now positing them, at least, *in your perceptual horizon*. Perception determines a wide range of qualities that acquire their way of being by means of an a priori act of semantic generation that makes this object appear as some perceivable written words."

[25] For the interpretation of Fichte's concept of *Thathandlung*, I borrowed from R-P Horstman's *The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling.* (2000, esp. pp. 121-25).

That any empirical subject necessarily presupposes this unconditioned unity, in any of her thoughts and acts, is sufficient proof for Fichte to claim that the *I* has the capacity of providing a certainty that needs no further reference to other grounds and serves as an unconditional principle of the *system of all knowledge*.[26]

Let us now turn to Schelling's essay *Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie* (*Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy*), in order to consider the ways in which he formulated his first principle, and thus departed from Fichte. The *Ichschrift* is an essay that seems aligned with the transcendental project in that the domain of transcendental subjectivity was for him *the path* to find the unconditional foundation of philosophy: 'the concept of the subject must lead to the absolute I. For if there were no absolute I, then the concept of the subject, that is, the concept of the I which is conditioned by an object, would be the ultimate.' (SW I/I: 169; p. 76). Prima facie, Schelling appears to side with subjective idealism when he makes use of the term *absolute I* but, as the previous statement reveals, Schelling is not thinking about the transcendental subject in terms of an *I* and its immanent sphere of determination; instead, he jumps ahead to stand firmly on the grounding prerogative of the absolute: 'The perfect [*vollendente*] system of [philosophical] science proceeds from the absolute I […]. This, as the One Unconditionable, conditions the whole chain of knowledge. […] As the absolute all-comprehending reality, rules the whole system of our knowledge.' (SW I: 176; p. 81). In my reading, contrary to what Fichte deduced, Schelling is not thinking about the semantic reality that the *Ich* confers to her objects. Instead, Schelling is conveying the idea of an absolute intellectual activity that posits in itself and for itself all reality. For Schelling, then, the absolute I is a divine Ego or God that is neither an object, as in the proposition 'the only existing substance is physical', nor a transcendental self-conscious agent, such as Fichte's I, but a metaphysical priority that accepts no conditions and no determinations from finite or any other limited sources. (SW I/I: 169; p. 76, n. 1). And if the philosopher should see himself inclined to talk about substances, then Substance is God. Or as Schelling claims in the *Ichschrift*: 'If *substance* is the same as the unconditional, *then the* [absolute] *I is the only substance*.' (SW I/I: 192; p. 93).

[26] For more on Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, see the previous chapter, esp. pp. 13ff.

It is worth drawing a brief comparison with Fichte in order to clarify why I believe the latter's concept of 'absolute I' differs from Schelling's God—at least in Schelling's early essays. In my view, two aspects reveal the difference. As we saw previously, Fichte argues that the *Thathandlung* is an activity that posits itself as all reality—at least *formally*. This is enough for him to claim a free unconditional act that generates a network of a priori cognitions that give a universal form to all the intersubjective scope of cognitive experience. This form which is a priori will then be actualised by finite individuals with their practical actions. Seen in this light, Fichte's early philosophy[27] proposes an absolute *I* that represents the source of an idealistic system in which 'the world' is a product of the transcendental imagination and also a mirror of reason's own universal activity (i.e., the production of universal laws, general concepts, intersubjective relations, etc.). Indeed, as long as the *Thathandlung* is an absolute act, it is ontologically creative, or as Rolf-Peter Horstman lucidly puts it: the absolute I generates 'that structure of knowing "for" which something can exist in the mode of knowledge. […] To be conscious of reality, or to know about reality, is thus intrinsically bound to a complex act which conceptually generates [or *posits*] both self and world.' Most importantly, Horstman adds, the *Thathandlung* '*does not create reality*' (my emphasis), instead, it creates 'a form in which reality appears, namely, the form of knowing or cognition.' (2015, p. 130).

In Fichte's view, this should settle the matter of providing an unconditioned principle for all knowledge, the *I*, and the reality of that knowledge, that is to say, the a priori form, supplied by the I, that makes the reality of objects intelligible. However, the *Thathandlung* does not address, because Fichte thinks he needs not comply with this issue, the susceptibility that some possible undetermined reality might possess in order to be receptive of such a form or even remain beyond it. How could we? Fichte would ask, since overstepping the boundary of consciousness is, in his view, a dead end, for it essentially reflects us back to the governing acts of the I, and because the unintelligible cannot exist in the form of the *I* without receiving the form of the *I*. (Cf. Fichte, 1994, I: 103-104). Because the a priori form of cognition is necessarily *for a subject*, and this subject is meant to be *all reality*, Fichte feels the need to cancel everything that is *not for the form* of the *I* in order to keep the unity of the subjective activity and its experience together. So, when Fichte hypothetically considers a second self-positing act of the *I* as the counter-positing of an absolute *not-I* in order to derive the category of

[27] The so-called Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* was developed when Fichte taught in Jena between 1794 and 1799.

negation or limitation, he reduces the content of the opposition—purportedly the world *materialiter* or the thing in itself—to the fundamental form of the *I*, and the act of opposition to a possibility that the *I* just happens to have—as a part of its, so to speak, spectrum of acts. This could be the reason why Fichte admits that 'the act of counter-positing was admittedly improvable,' nonetheless, he asserts, it is 'achieved unconditionally and absolutely by a decree of reason.' (Ibid, I: 105-6).

After raising some perspectives that explain why one may consider that Fichte's systematic foundation brings about a formal ontology, we can move on to see why Fichte's early philosophy does not seem to agree with Schelling's project of the absolute, at least on two grounds. For one reason, Fichte's epistemological project of the *Wissenschaftslehre* does not seem able to ground reality in a way that, from its own being, corresponds to the form of knowledge. For another, the act of opposition that should warrant the unity of the absolute seems to be detached from the first self-positioning of the absolute I—since it is 'a second act' with no justification. This last issue will be later noticed by Hegel and then used by Schelling against Fichte to claim a superior standing for his philosophy of identity.

To have a better grasp of Schelling's disagreement with Fichte's position regarding the moment of opposition, let us break down the objection in two parts and call the first the ontological objection, and the second the unity objection. Both objections are dependent on each other because Schelling holds that, on the one hand, a superior unity is required for the obtention of any opposition, and on another hand, the reality of this unity, on which the reality that subjectivity thematizes depends, is a necessary presupposition too. In other words, there can be no unity and opposition between the subject and her reality if transsubjective reality is left unexplained. At least, this is how, in my view, Schelling's project of finding the absolute unconditioned distances from Fichte's subjectivism, for this is where Schelling's metaphysical interests lie.[28] In the following chapter, we will see that, even before his acquaintance with Fichte, Schelling was already preoccupied with the ontological basis of the unity of the world in itself and for the subject. I will explain why.

[28] For a similar interpretation, see Beiser's *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism* (2002), pp. 471-473.

## [Chapter 4. Schelling's early attempt at an Ideal-Realism: *Timaeus Kommentar*]

In my view, the fact that Fichte was focused on the cognitive form of reality makes a sharp contrast between him and Schelling, for the need to assert the right to the being of reality, to then claim the unity of the world, was an enduring preoccupation for the latter and the root of the ontological objection that he raised against Fichte. Even before his acquaintance with the latter, Schelling harboured a steady interest in *the pre-reflective or trans-subjective essence of reality*, which he described in terms of an absolute unity, unconditional with respect to the universality of both the external world of sensibility and the inner world of consciousness. One early instance of this concept is envisaged in Schelling's school essay, the *Timaeus Kommentar* (AA II/5: 143-196, pp. 205-239), composed during the first half of 1794, very likely before he read Fichte's works.[29] In this essay, the nineteen year-old reflects on the problem of the emergence (*Entstehung*) of the world as told by Plato in his dialogue *Timaeus*, while also introducing core concepts from another Plato's dialogue, the *Philebus*. Thus, fairly soon in the essay Schelling asks: 'What moved the maker [*Urheber*] of the world to bring it forth?' (AA II/5: 153; p. 209). Prima facie, Schelling seems to be simply posing a question to Plato. Surprisingly, though, as the essay progresses, Schelling appears to be fashioning a theory about the unity of all the principles that make the emergence of the world possible both in reality and for a knowing subject. As W. Schmied-Kowarzik asserts, Schelling's *Kommentar* is not just a term-work, but a 'testimony of Schelling's standalone philosophical thought.' (2015, p. 27). For the time being, let us look at the *Timaeus Kommentar* to focus on the problem of unity and the principle that makes it possible. In the following section, we will have the chance to take stock of some other fundamental problems that the *Kommentar* develops, which have served as an interpretive guide in Schelling's philosophical progression. We will be particularly concerned with the problems of the opposition in the absolute unity, the natural world as a living animal, and the epistemic access to the unconditioned. For now, my intention is to establish a metaphysical precedent that help us lead the narrative to an understanding of

[29] According to the editors of the Historisch-akademische Ausgabe, Schelling's school essays on Plato's philosophy were composed between the end of 1793 and the beginning of 1794. These dates suggest that the *Timaeus* manuscript as well as the *Form of Plato's Philosophy* were probably composed before Fichte's *Über den Begriff and Schelling's Über die Möglichkeit.* (130). W. Beirwaltes (2003, p. 268) suggests that Schelling wrote this piece when he was in his third year of theological studies at the Tübinger seminary, between January and February and May and June of 1794.

the *absolutes Ich* in *Vom Ich* as an unconditioned and absolute principle which, in so far as it brings the mayor opposites into unity, is neither subjective nor objective and neither ideal nor real. It is important to note that the *Timaeus Kommentar* presents several layers of opposition, but I will address only two. More specifically, there is a parallelism between four aspects of the world: ideal/real and subjective/objective-empirical. Ultimately, however, this parallelism is subordinate because what is primordial is the unity that the divine crafter brings about, and which keeps all oppositions together by means of formal/ideal principles to make up a whole.

> 'Plato thus establishes three things: (1) a substance, in which every form must inhere; (2) the forms themselves, which are in constant empirical change; and (3) originally pure forms through which the empirical forms are necessarily determined throughout their constant change.' (AA II/5: 177; p. 227).

> 'God composed the world according to its matter as such from out of the ἄπειρον and, according to its form, from out of the πέρας.' (AA II/5: 184; p. 232).

The bottom line of Schelling's thought in the *Kommentar* is that the problem of the emergence of the world, or of the coming into being (*das Werden zum Sein*), and its solution seem to imply that the *visible* world is the result of a metaphysical bond between two opposite but non-generated and invisible dimensions, both of which constitute ontological conditions: one pertaining to formless prime matter [*Urstoff*], and another to ideal forms in the divine understanding. These are necessary ingredients because, as Hermann Krings notes, 'in order to think the emergence of the world, that which is not generated (*das Unentstanden*) must be presupposed.' (Krings, 1994, p. 117; Cf. p. 120). Plato, says Schelling, could not find the cause of the connection that brought about the world of becoming 'neither in the one nor in the other alone, nor in both together' but had to invoke a third to bring them into unity. (AA II/5: 153; p. 209). Accordingly, it is by divine will that prime matter, albeit thoroughly alien, could be extracted out of its pure darkness and, so to speak, primed for unity, using a dynamic principle rooted in its own endemic chaotic motion. (Cf. AA II/5: 184; p. 232). Once the principle for the concept of matter in general has been found, it can be paired with the principle of form and organisation, so they will go on constantly *striving against each other* to

bring about the visible world. Borrowed from the *Philebus*, Schelling introduces the latter as πέρας. This concept is interpreted by him as the form of unity, perfect and bounded, that which is lawful, regular, and therefore modelled after the divine intellect. The former is ἄπειρον, a boundless fluctuation that attaches to imperfection and endless unruliness. (AA II/5: 181-3; p. 209, 230-2). However, Schelling regards the dimension of the intelligible, being eternal and unchangeable as it is in and of itself, as a dimension transcending the causal sequences of the world of existence. The divine maker is, in a word, wholly unconditioned and as such, unity has to find its way into its opposite by a mediation of those principles, which can bring the dynamic nature of matter, even that of the dark substrate of the 'pre-existing original matter of the world', into imperfect conformity with the principle of organised movement, ψυχή. (Ibid 5: 159; p. 209). For, as Schelling notes, 'to become visible in something this [understanding] can come to pass in no other way than when it is bound to some *principle of actuality*.' (Ibid, 5: 160; p. 210). In expressing the unity of the visible world according to Plato's concepts, Schelling variously assigns linking power to different forms, as if the bond was a layered construct. For example, Schelling quotes Plato's concept of τὸ τῆς αἰτίας γένος, a divine form of causality 'through which both πέρας and ἄπειρον are bound together in κοινόν [combination]' and also acts in the visible world as the form of generation and that which gives souls to the bodies. (AA II/5: 185; p. 232-33; II/5: 154; Cf. Plato, *Philebus*, 30a-b). Apart from causality, Schelling seems to assign a higher function to Plato's idea of τὸ κοινόν, for it is explained as the *category* of unity or totality, 'that which arises through the biding together of the previous too.' (AA II/5: 185; 232, Cf. II/5: 186; 234). In a last layer of unification, Schelling attempts to explain the unity of the world as something living in idea and in actuality. So, ψυχή together with ἄπειρον—as the 'category of reality' and principle that governs all matter—make up the visible world as a single living or ensouled animal, ζῷον ἔμψυχον, which encompasses all ζῷα as νόητα or all the individual genera and kinds of creatures as embodied ideas. (Ibid, II/5: 160-61, 184; pp: 210-11, 231; Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 30c-d, 31a, 36d, 37d). So, it seems that Schelling construes Plato's divine architect (δημιουργός) as mapping the unity of the world by projecting organising forms onto the uncanny matter, not before priming it with the modelling of the basic material elements—the four geometrical kinds. (Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 53a-c).

As noted previously, the *Timaeus Kommentar* is not attempting a scholarly interpretation of Plato's dialogues; it rather shows a preoccupation with the problem of unity of reality as a philosophical question raised in academic circles. At this point, however, the unity of the world is not complete, for it must include the experience of the world as a unity in idea and as a given. For this, Schelling draws from a contemporary source. This is especially noticeable in his focus on the Kantian concept of the idea of the form of the whole. For the sake of brevity, let us just define it as 'reason's scientific concept', which contains the kind of form that an organic form should display, i.e., an order that determines a priori the organisation and purpose of its possible parts, like in an animal body, whose growth consists in assimilation rather than mere addition. (Kant, *KrV* A832-3/B860-1; 1996, pp. 755-6). For Kant, this idea was a logical function with a deep and complex role that, inter alia, allows reason to mediately apply a systematic order to empirical cognitions—and, in a way, it aids in bridging the conceptual and the empirical orders. This 'form within the manifold' is the kind of form Schelling is thinking about when he talks of τὸ κοινόν or unity. (Cf. AA II/5: 161; p. 215).

Scholars agree that in this text Schelling construes Plato's dialogue through the framework of Kant's transcendental philosophy. Two aims seem to motivate this synthesis. One attempts to establish the participation of human reason from the divine intellect and another, following from the former, seeks to explain the emergence of the world as an empirical phenomenon. So, apart from the metaphysical unity, Schelling sets out to justify the world as something the subject experiences and as what the divine reason creates and human reason grasps. In this respect, Schelling seemed to have thought he was revealing the cognitive structure of the transcendental subject in Plato's account of the ideas by means of the Kantian framework. (Cf. AA II/5: 181; p.230). He, for example, affirms that Plato's philosophy 'is the carrying over of the subjective onto the objective', whereas it was evident for Schelling, thanks to his study of Kant, that 'the world is properly a unity of *representation in us*.' (AA II/5: 163; p. 216). Yet, as Bruce Matthews notes, the soul and organisation of the universe (ζῷον) 'is not the result of a naïve projection of the subjective forms of the understanding onto objective structures of the cosmos.' (2011, p. 127). Instead, Schelling sees a parallelism between the pure cognitive structure of the transcendental subject and the divine ideas originated in a higher intelligence (δημιουργός): 'Plato goes on to describe the efficacy of the rational world-soul

[the archetype that grounds the world] as entirely analogous with efficacy of human reason.' (AA II/5: 166; p. 219). Moreover, this efficacy or activity is 'the subjective form of reason [which] is everywhere ascending to absolute unity.' (Ibid, 5: 163; p. 216).

Perhaps Schelling saw in the synthesis of Plato and Kant an opportunity to bring *divine Being* and *Ideas* into unity with the fundamental epistemic dimension that makes empirical experience possible, i.e., the universal concepts of pure reason. More importantly, in quoting Plato, Schelling seems to be suggesting that *Being*, or what always is and never comes to be, has the form of understanding in that it is an intelligence that holds itself as whole of being [νοῦν ἔχον ὅλον]. (AA II/5: 154; p. 210). From this it follows, that the pure form of subjectivity is akin to the forms of the divine understanding. In other words, the form of the whole of being organically encroaches upon the whole structure of ideas by the higher form, whose universal concept rests in pure reason. In this regard, Schelling explains: 'The universal concepts had to be present in a higher intelligence, because they were the condition of the possibility of universal law, according to which humans establish their empirical research.' (Ibid, II/5: 160; p. 214). For just as the divine understanding makes possible the *real* emergence of the world of becoming by means of an idea: 'The visible world is thus grounded in a κόσμος νόητος', thus, the universal concepts of reason make possible our sensible experience of the existing world. (Ibid, 5: 156; p. 211; Cf. 160; p. 214). But the unifying intention of the *Kommentar* seems not to be enclosed in intelligence, it seeks the synthetic unity of fundamental opposites in a hierarchy of unconditionedness: being and becoming, nous and matter, original form [*Urbild*] and copy [*Abbild*], the invisible world and the visible, reason and sensibility. Therefore, what is generated by the non-generated, the copy, the world of becoming and sensibility have to be equally accounted for:

> '*the visible world is nothing but a copy* [*Nachbild*] *of the invisible world* […] But no philosophy could have come from this principle [*Satz*], if the philosophical ground for it weren't already in us. This means, namely, insofar as the whole of nature, as it appears to us, is not only a product of our *empirical receptivity*, but is rather actually the work of our power of representation [*Vorstellungsmögens*]—to the extent that this power contains within itself a pure and original foundational form (of nature)—and insofar as the world belongs in representation to a power that is higher than mere sensibility and nature is

exhibited as the stamp [*Tÿpus*] of a higher world which the pure laws of this world express.' (Ibid, II/5: 156; p. 212).

Accordingly, the world of becoming is just an afterimage of a higher intelligence stamping its form upon it. But this world is neither a mere copy and, as a sensible object, nor a meaningless epiphenomenon, it is instead an imperfect animal whole that strives, in every one of its parts, towards the unconditioned 'because every part of the world that can be considered as a *particular* world of reason ascending without hindrance to the unconditioned is likewise formed into a representation of the whole [*zur Vorstellung des ganzen geschlagen wird*].' (Ibid, II/5: 163; p. 216). In light of these ideas, one could even say that the material and the phenomenal wholes strive to conform to the original intelligible. From another angle, the sensible apparatus, being itself material, therefore changing, contingent and relative, is nonetheless a means to penetrate the flesh of the world in order to discover pieces that help confirm the invisible structure of organising concepts according to which matter was organised by divine reason's forms. Werner Beierwaltes (2003, p. 270) conveys a similar interpretation according to which Schelling takes up Kant in order to show the connection between the originative ideas and pure reason in human knowing; but also to establish 'the "communication" of being and consciousness from the idea.' For this goal, Beierwaltes goes on, Schelling refers to a passage from the *Philebus* which he renders as follows: 'this form is a gift from gods to men [θεῶν μὲν εἰς ἀνθρώπους δόσις].' (AA II/5: 160; p. 215; Plat. *Phil*. 16c5). Purportedly, for Schelling the gift consists in granting humankind a relation of kinship with the formal dimension of the divine. But the claim of kinship necessarily implies that the archetype of the world is independent of the subject as a generative but finite agent; for the archetype is above all an idea in God's intellect according to which nature is crafted and set off as an existing living whole, and the subject of knowledge participates in this form through human understanding, that is why 'the world is only properly a unity *as a representation in us*.' (AA II/5: 163; 216). As seen by Beierwaltes:

'it becomes clear that Schelling in no way reduces the Platonic Idea to a mere form of transcendental consciousness, so as to "Kantianize" Plato radically, but rather maintains a balance between the various moments in the meaning of Idea as metaphysical principle (in "the divine understanding"), ontological

> structure (with the implication of *Weltwesen*, "existent in the world," as essentially the image of the original, the Idea), and as a pure concept of the understanding that first makes accessible to us the "object of pure understanding'"—the ὄν νόητον ἄνευ αἰσθήσεως.' (Ibid, pp. 270-71).

Otherwise, if the archetypical forms were not ideal, the world as a lawfully organised whole would be available to us immediately in external perception. Respectively, all empirical forms are distant imitations of the original forms because matter 'has received a form outside of itself.' (AA II/5: 194; p. 238). In this regard, the flesh of the world and phenomenal experience only dimly afford the basis to grasp the ideal form of the whole in its fundamentality. However, the gift has been fathomed out, as Schelling reflects, for it 'is only available to God and those few humans whom Plato calls the beloved of the Gods [*Lieblinge der Götter*].' (AA II/5: 193; p. 237). Once Schelling establishes that the empirical research, insofar as it relies on what arises [γιγνόμενον] or comes to be, is not the path to grasp the 'form and harmony of the world,' he is able to justify philosophy as the only investigation that is able to embark into 'a discovery of a *supersensible principle*.' (My emphasis; Ibid, II/5: 154; p. 214).

In capturing Schelling's concern about the supersensible as a principle, we can return to the main point that brought us to the *Timaeus Kommentar*, namely, Schelling's robust interest in conceding reality or being to the noumenal dimension and an unconditioned causality to God. Thus, in his reading of Plato what unites together the visible and the invisible is a supersensible domain which intellectually pre-forms the world and its subjects without taking part in them. The unconditioned is thus here outlined as the will that *applies* an archetype of organisation by limiting or determining what is in itself disorganised; for this is 'the purest and most magnificent idea of God's intent [*Absicht*] in the creation of the world. (AA II/5: 153; p. 209; Cf. Krings, 1994, p. 118). To indulge in this speculation a bit further, one could even infer that the *Urstoff* (introduced by Plato in the *Timaeus* variously as the 'receptacle of all becoming' [πανδεχές], as a kind of absolute space or place [χώρα] and as a 'baffling and obscure form' [χαλεπὸν καὶ ἀμυδρὸν εἶδος])[30], although it is rather vaguely developed by Schelling in his essay, could be the dark or formless aspect of the divine insofar as it also

[30] Cf. Plat. Tim. esp. 51a-b, 52b, 57e, 58c.

depicted as an unconditioned ground. (Cf. Ibid, 5: 158; p. 213). To be sure, the unconditioned may be construed as a formless and dark principle especially from the framework of Schelling's later identity philosophy, which we will address when move on to the last part of this thesis. Nonetheless, at this stage of our discussion, the key to the meaning of the unconditioned for Schelling in the years of 1794 and 1795 may be rendered by way of its indeterminateness. To the extent that it is unconditionally related to existence, the unconditioned is neither subjective nor objective, and Schelling develops precisely this idea more thoroughly in the *Ichschrift* of 1795. Here Schelling writes: "we must not look for [the unconditioned] in the sphere of objects at all, not even within the sphere of that subject which is also determinable as an object." (AA I/2: 89; p. 74).

Indeed, in the *Ichschrift* Schelling seems again to justify the supersensible domain of reason as the ultimate ground of the correlation of knowledge and reality. Having more or less worked through the transcendental option offered by Fichte, Schelling adopts the latter's foundational programme and language to further his own endeavour to uncover the fact that philosophy can find the unconditioned *in* human reason—just as the subtitle of the *Ichschrift* reads: *das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen*. At first glance, this philosophical goal may lead us to wonder whether Schelling is arguing that the unconditioned is *in* the particular human subject, thus construing an approach similar to Fichte's. Far from constraining the investigation to pure subjectivity, Schelling seeks to prove that the unconditioned is the absolute understood neither as a subject nor as a substance separately because 'the principle of being and thinking is one and the same' (SW I/I: 163; p. 72). What unites them both is an *infinite ego or I* and, in this respect, the absolute I is God.

In the *Ichschrift*, Schelling is still, and will remain, a Spinozist in that he, like he thought of Spinoza, is ready to risk everything, 'either to achieve complete truth in all its greatness, or no truth at all.' (SW I/I: 151-2; p. 64). However, in Schelling's own outlook, to 'follow the truth to its fullest height' and uncover the real correspondence between knowledge and reality, form, and valid content, he would need to follow Spinoza's steps towards something that could give reality to itself, or in the language of the *Ethics*, a being that is truly *causa sui*. The finite I, even in its ideal domain of action and with the possibility of a semantic transference of reality, does not cause itself as a body—needless to say, consciousness cannot exist without a body. Moreover, the question of this hypothetical *universal onlooker* or the unconscious

activity of the pure I, absolutely identical with itself, is unanswered by Fichte. To overcome this impasse and find an all-inclusive explanatory principle, Schelling seems to implicitly adopt Spinoza's monism; while a few years later, his monism also appears to integrate Plato's organic cosmology as a way to develop a neutral monistic foundation that is a single unconditioned and organic totality.

# [Part II. The metaphysical dimension of absolute identity in Schelling's transcendental philosophy]

In this second part, I want to cement the idea that, even though Schelling turned away from the theoretical exhumation of absolute identity as the *in-itself*, he kept his commitment to absolute identity mainly in its relatedness in pure self-consciousness, but also as an autonomous dimension that could only be spoken of as a *secret bond*, a *common ground*, a *mythical notion*. While in the third part of the thesis we will discover how living beings originate in and develop their structure as a function of absolute identity, in this part I interpret the self-positing *structure* of the absolute as being embedded and carried in the pure I only as a formal function, which I call the *Ich-Form*, the subjective descendant of the absolute that turns the absolute's side of being into the objective, or a material horizon external to subjectivity. With this, I attempt to reveal that Schelling's principle of absolute identity still carries a metaphysical dimension, even if it is posited in self-consciousness. To this end, in the first chapter, I examine the *Ichschrift* again and find that Schelling pins down a double-sided aspect that stems from the concept of the absolute; one is *self-positability* and the other the *form of unity or absolute identity*. These two components break apart when the absolute is, as it were, individualised or limited by the finite being upon which the absolute has descended to make itself *visible*. In addition to shedding light on Schelling's early concept of the absolute, this characterisation serves as an interpretive strategy for the second chapter, which is to show that Schelling still operates with the notion of the absolute as a first principle when in 1797 he developed his own interpretation of transcendental idealism and embarked on the investigation of nature.

## [Chapter 1. The metaphysical dimension of absolute identity in the pure I]

This chapter aims at determining the metaphysical dimension of absolute identity in self-consciousness. This section unfolds in the following manner. At the outset, I show that the *Ichschrift* characterises the absolute as being endowed with two attributes: the form of self-positing that accounts for the self-referential occurrence of the absolute, and absolute identity, or the unity of Being with itself, which accounts for the proposition Being *is* Being. I suggest

that these 'properties' are *sides*, but even though the absolute is double-sided, its two sides are unconditionally identical: Thinking = Being or *Ich-Sein*. Later on, I show that these two aspects take on a different shape when the absolute I is carried by an empirical subject. In this scenario, the absolute is filtered down simply as an *Ich-Form* that posits itself in form but not in being.[31] However, in mirroring the activity of the absolute and according to its own nature, the *Ich-Form*, factually empty—an empty core, strives to impose itself in the confrontation with reality (*Sein*) by actualising its own form of unity, but the self-positing cannot close the perfect circle of the absolute because the *I-Form* splits itself in its own positing, and this is because the *Ich-Form* is unable to posit all reality within itself, so two different sides appear, one equivalent to identity (properly the I or the subject), and the other, the I in difference with all reality (or the object), this difference denotes and signals the limit it imposes on all reality.

In the *Ichschrift*, Schelling pushes backwards from 'the results of critical philosophy […] to the last principles of knowledge' in order to 'follow the truth to its fullest height', which Schelling finds in a principle that he identifies with the *Unconditioned* [*das Unbedingte*].[32] (SW I/I: 152; p. 64). Schelling's concept of the unconditioned has been picked up from Kant's characterisation of the nature of pure reason in his critical masterworks.

According to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, reason unfolds on the basis of its supreme principle of unlimited completeness, which aims at fulfilling the totality of conditions for every condition reason finds. It turns out, reason's overbearing principle usually bends the limits of objective experience by applying its completeness frenzy on the otherwise unfinished series of conditions in both the real and logical realms. (Cf. CPR A305-10/B362—67). Inasmuch as nothing in the sensible world dictates the kind of perfect totality that reason carries and strives for, reason's principle, also called by Kant «the idea of the form of the whole», is a formal or logical function that generates an unconditional necessity that builds the block of universal ideality, which, notwithstanding its apodicticity, has no objective content. (Cf. *Prolegomena*, Ak 4:363). Naturally, the unconditional character of this principle stems from its

[31] An interpretation of a descending form that contains the potential for existence is also shared by Emilio Carlo Carriero and Andrea Dezi in their introduction to *Nature and Realism in Schelling's Philosophy* (2015), where they write: 'In fact, already in the volume *Vom Ich* […] the absolute I as unconditional ultimate foundation of every reality is seen as 'absolute potency' of being, that is to say, pure 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*), *from which every possible 'form' of Being descends*.' (p. 28).

[32] There is a helpful comparison between Kant and Schelling on the nature of the unconditioned in Eric Watkins's *The early Schelling on the unconditioned* in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays* (Oštarić, 2014, pp. 10-31).

unlimited extension under the form of absolute totality which covers or contains, a priori, all possible conditions. As a result, no particular or general condition stands in a relation that conditions the absolute totality; hence this principle is the unconditioned.

Along similar lines, Schelling defines de unconditioned as something that 'must be the direct opposite of all that falls in the sphere of the conditional.' (SW I/I: 164; p. 72). But unlike Kant, Schelling thought of the unconditioned as a metaphysical principle on which all knowledge and its corresponding reality is grounded. So far as I can see, Schelling's position with respect to the principle of pure reason clearly goes beyond a mere logical function, for it is the resting place of all entities, either thinking or objectual beings. In fact, as regards the unconditioned, Schelling describes it as a kind of metaphysical dimension that cancels all types of conditions, from spatiotemporal existence to multiplicity, individuation, causality, and change, whose actuality presupposes a second order totality that is the unconditioned itself. Continuing with the metaphysical lines pursued by Parmenides, Plato and Spinoza, whom Schelling had studied quite seriously at a young age, he appears to be referring to Being itself, or τὸ ὄν, or the absolute substance, though with an important difference: the unconditioned has a self-identical form, such that, being is its very own thinking, and in an identical way, thought is its very own being. This is elaborated by Schelling in the following way:

> 'In the case of the unconditional [*Beim Unbedingtes*], the principle of its being [*seines Seyns*] and the principle of its being thought [*das Princip seines Denkens*] must coincide. […] The absolute can be given only by the absolute; indeed, if it is to be absolute, it must precede all thinking and imagining [*Vorstellen*]. Therefore, it must be *realized through itself* (§ 1), not through objective proofs, which go beyond the mere concept of the entity to be proved.' (Ibid. SW I/I: 167; p. 75).[33]

Notoriously, Schelling furthers an etymological analysis of the German term *das Unbedingte* to reinforce this point. In §3 of the same essay, he explains that the verb *Bedingen* designates the activity of conditioning by which anything becomes a *Ding* (a thing), which in

[33] It is worth noting that Schelling does not refer to an 'entity' in the original: „also nicht erst durch objektive Beweise, d. h. dadurch, daß man über seinen Begriff hinausgeht, sondern nur *durch sich selbst* realisirt werden." (Ibid.)

turn belongs to the sphere of the conditioned, *Bedingt*. Schelling tries to make the case that the word/root *Ding* carries lexically the scope of conditionality; while its opposite, *das Unbedingte*, represents 'what has not been turned into a thing, and cannot at all become a thing', but something unconditional and unconditioned, *Unbedingt*. (Ibid, 166; 74). Thus, by its very essence, the unconditioned can be made neither an object of experience—therefore limited—nor turned into a thing—thus fixated in its finiteness.

On these grounds, not even the subject is absolutely free of conditions, however, Schelling continuously refers to the unconditioned as an *I*. For example, in §15, Schelling defines 'the I' as that which is 'without any condition and without any restriction.' (Ibid, 202; 100). In this context, this *I* is more precisely *das absolute Ich*, or the I which 'is without any relation to objects,' an absolute that *is* 'not because it thinks at all, but because it thinks only itself [*es nur sich selbst denkt*].' (Ibid, 204n; 102n). Clearly, if the absolute I thinks, it does not think objects as such, unless its object is the absolute itself. But if the absolute I is not a simple subject that thinks objects—and in this respect, it should be noted that the empirical I is not unconditionable because she thinks objects—one must then ask why Schelling felt compelled to label the unconditioned also as an I. At first glance, Schelling's references to the I in the *Ichschrift* may seem confusing, for he often relies on the context to reveal whether he is speaking of either the absolute or the empirical I. Aside from these difficulties, I will argue that the *I* is a technical term, and a kind of denotation Schelling assigns to the specific self-referential unity that produces itself, and which Schelling finds both essentially bound up with the notion of the absolute, but also embedded in the empirical subject. Let us rebrand this technicism going forward as the *Ich-Form*. But first, let us explore the reasons Schelling gives for barring the empirical I from the scope of the unconditioned.

Schelling points out: 'the empirical I exists only with and through objects. But objects alone can never produce an *I*. The empirical I owes the fact that it is empirical to objects, but *it owes the fact that it is an I at all to a higher causality*.' (AA I/2: 168; p. 123; my emphasis). Here Schelling does not obliterate the conditional character of the relationship of consciousness with its object, but in a rather speculative move, and apart from maintaining the conditionality of the subject and the object as a common factor, Schelling also stresses the imbalance that makes the terms intrinsically different. For while, nonetheless, the objectual position stands

epistemically and ontologically as a necessary condition for the structure of self-consciousness to obtain, »objects alone can never produce an I.« (Ibid).

On this account, then, Schelling has two aspects of the subject-object dimension in mind that afford their conditionality. According to one aspect, the subject and the object are identical because the subject is burdened with the same level of conditionality as the object. The conditional burden of the subject is expressed in the subject's necessary engagement with objects, so that (1) she is a subject embedded in the mesh of natural bodies, and (2), she is a consciousness necessarily bound to something she is not. According to a second aspect, the subject and the object are different. The subject, in virtue of being an I, is not like an object because objects alone can never produce an I.

If we look at the identity aspect, Schelling seems to concede that a consciousness, as a *natural* agent, is not free from the nexus of conditions that could affect her and this makes her a thing and an objectifiable X, then something that 'could not be an ultimate one because it would have to be determined by an ulterior one.' (SW I/I: 155; p. 66; Cf. 165-6; 74). Analogously, the empirical I fails the test of the unconditioned if we, as Schelling does, frame the mutual conditioning implied in the structure of intentionality of consciousness: 'Since the subject is thinkable only in regard to an object, and the object only in regard to a subject, neither of them can contain the unconditional because both are conditioned reciprocally.' (Ibid). Indeed, so far as the subject is an *I* or a self-conscious individual, she has a special status due to its connection to a higher causality.

Nowhere is the difference between the subject and the object more evident than with regard to the context of intentionality. Here the object as an intentional correlate of consciousness is always *external* and different to the onlooker who bears the character of *inwardness*. The latter is an element that is based on a self-referential structure according to which the subject's point of view *is for herself*, so while the subject position is self-correlative, the objectual position is simply correlative; in other words, it does not share, literally, its point of view with the former position, and as a result, the object is never experienced as a first-person position as such. Consider the case of the purely subjective environment of a schizophrenic individual named Maude. (Glass, 2020). During a psychotic episode, Maude overlaps reality with a *phantasy* and splits her own personality into various characters, one of which is a sombre godly thing that communicates with her in her most intimate language.

Even though this character appears to her to be an independent agency dissociated from her internal environment, and therefore external and *real*, it is represented within her mind as an object and as an *outer* point of view that commands her to action. She perceives the thing as another agent.

Returning to the mundane context of objectual reality, the difference between the two positions still obtains, for when it comes down to the domain of the subject-object, Schelling holds their difference as much as their commonality to the same ontological foundation. Even more so if we remember that Schelling wants to avoid the view of a world purely sustained on subjective grounds. By the same token, Schelling does not think that «the world» as such can have any sense, form, or validity without a subject, since this scenario would simply run down the opposition to an untenable realism. In other words, world and consciousness *lack reality* if they are posited *each* on their own. (Cf. Ibid. SW I/I: 172; 79; also 95; 44). In Schelling's view, this is what happens when philosophy abolishes the subject-object identity and instead maintains the subject-object opposition. Philosophers' failure to embrace the former reproduce the opposition into contrary systems, idealism and realism, each further split into practical and theoretical branches to account for what they attempted to eliminate. Hence, theoretical philosophy seems to be content with resolving the opposition in the hypostatisation of the not-I, thus objectifying the absolute and becoming a system of dogmatism, whereas practical philosophy resolves it in the hypostatisation of the I, idealising the absolute through the personification of God and becoming an idealism. What they both do turns out to entail the hypostatisation of each of the terms of the opposition, I ≠ not-I, *forcing philosophy never to depart from the domain of the conditioned*. We can now understand why for Schelling remaining in the contrast I ≠ not-I always fails the test of the unconditioned either for the epistemological or the ontological grounding. The former makes the subject the ultimate source of the being of reality and the latter winds up running down consciousness to an epiphenomenon, leaving one asking how such a minimal by-product made it through the massive tsunami of physical events.

Thus far we can conclude with Schelling that the aspect of difference in the subject-object opposition is essential to determine the nature of the *I*, but only as far as we incorporate the identity aspect as an essential ingredient of the equation. Only in view of these two aspects, it makes sense to say that, while nonetheless the objectual position stands

epistemically and ontologically as a necessary condition for self-consciousness to obtain in the world, »objects alone can never produce an I.«

Now, the identity aspect is extremely relevant to the solution of our problem in this section because it reveals the link between the subject and the absolute by means of the form of the I, the *Ich-Form*. Furthermore, the architecture of this form in essence entails an unconditioned identity that cannot be found in the domain of the conditional in as much as 'the absolute can be given only by the absolute.' (SWI/I: 163; p. 72). Thus, either we *access* the I-form in its own realm of absolute identity or the absolute I supervenes on the conditional form of the I and we deduce the two sides implied in the latter. Matters are, the form of the conditional I is deduced only as far as the absolute I is presupposed, and if the absolute is presupposed, this leads us to the inevitable reality of absolute identity. This view is admittedly confirmed by, among other things, Schelling's statement in the *Ichschrift* about the role of the subject in our advance to the unconditioned and the discovery of the *Ich-Form*. In this respect Schelling argues:

> 'The concept of the subject must lead to the absolute I. For if there were no absolute I, then the concept of the subject, that is, the concept of the I which is conditioned by an object, would be the ultimate.' (SW I/I: 169; p. 76).

From this we can conclude that conditioned opposition cannot be the unconditioned. However, the immediate way in which one makes the absolute arise is by means of the contrast that the absolute casts upon the subject-object conditional identity:

> 'But since the concept of an object contains an antithesis, the basic determination of this concept […] is possible only in contrast to something that flatly excludes the concept of an object as such. Therefore, both the concept of an object and the concept of a subject which is conceivable only in contrast to some object must lead to an absolute which excludes every object and thus is in absolute contrast to any object.' (Ibid).

Decisively, Schelling steps back from the either/or limiting view of the subject-object opposition and sees the relationship in terms of complementarity, such that the subject and

the object, as a whole, amount to the domain of the conditional or that which »is conceivable only in relation to an object« (Op. cit.). In other words, we have a *not-I* representing the dimension of things by means of the antithesis subject-object. But is the dimension of things some sphere that opposes the absolute I absolutely, something like an «*absolute* not-I»? Schelling considers this case more carefully in §§5 & 10 to complement his negative determination of the absolute I as 'something which flatly excludes the concept of an object as such.' (SW I/I: 169; p. 76). Does this mean we are dealing again with an opposition and that the antithesis must thereupon be the first principle? If this be the case, then as Schelling notes, philosophy is destined to 'be an eternal round of propositions, each dissolving in its opposite.' However, he is certain that 'there must be an ultimate point of reality on which everything depends,' and the antithesis entailed in the dimension of things must be related to a principle that implies an absolute identity. (SW I/I: 162; p. 71). At some point Schelling insists that the antithesis 'must be posited just as absolutely as the I, and in opposition to it' even though he seems to admit that the absolute not-I, denoting an absolute lack of being, cancels the absolute I. (SW I/I: 188; p. 90). Prima facie, this idea leads to incongruity, unless we delve into the meaning of the not-I in its 'original' [or absolute] position. One way to advance this is by representing the relation in these terms:

[1] $(I = I) \parallel (I \neq \text{not-I})$,

where the first term represents the absolute I, and the second term the absolute opposition represented by the absolute not-I.

But how can we make sense of this parallelism?

Indeed, for Schelling what is first is the absolute I with its '*Urform der Identität*' in the sphere of pure, absolute, and eternal being (independent of all forms of time). (SW I/I: 199n; p. 200n; Cf. §15). So, naturally, its concept is not compatible with the idea of an *absolute not-I* on two grounds: (1) if the not-I denotes that which is a [conditioned] thing, then the absolutisation of the not-I is an arbitrary assumption (Ibid. §§4-5); (2) if one conceives the not-I as the unconditioned, then it must confront the absolute I, this would result in the annihilation of the absolute I, which contradicts its own concept (Cf. §10), for in order it to be »annihilated«, first the absolute I, which is absolute reality, has to be presupposed. (Cf. 187n; 90n). By the same token, an antithesis in this domain would introduce limitation in what is, by definition, an unlimited, 'absolute power which fills the entire infinity'; hence, the

absolute's sphere 'tolerates nothing that is in opposition, not even the not-I imagined as infinite.' (SW I/I: 201; p. 99). If, nonetheless, the not-I is raised to absoluteness, it confronts the absolute I as an 'absolutely counterposited not-I', simply in virtue of a 'mere antithesis to all reality' that amounts to absolute nothingness, which, 'as soon as we try to give it reality, we transfer it from the sphere of mere antithesis to the sphere of the conditional.' (Ibid 188; 90). Indeed, while the antithesis follows from the self-positing of the absolute I, the opposite's positing receives its content from the absolute I. Then, the not-I as a conditional thing is only possible in terms of an 'absolute contrast to *any object*' (Ibid 169; 76; my emphasis.) This means that the contrast that the absolute casts on the sphere of the objectual, which is already mediated by the necessary relation to the subject-object relation, is directed to *determinate*, particular objects (absolute I ≠ not-I), where the not-I is either subjective or objective, and not to the *totality* of all subject-objects, which presuppose the absolute identity of the subjective and the objective. Therefore, if one posits the not-I absolutely, it is only on account of the not-I representing the *whole opposition* of the subjective and the objective, which in the absolute I is an absolute identity, so there seems to be a contiguity between absolute identity and absolute opposition and the absolute not-I is not simply equal to nothingness. (Cf. 187n, 189; 90n, 91). Accordingly, the correct way to read the sphere of the absolute and its relation to the conditional is the quasi-notation:

[2] [(I = I) & (I ≠ not-I)],

> whereby the absolute seems to imply two aspects: identity and opposition, both original and therefore at the same level, which seems to defeat Schelling's claim that the absolute I is first. We will have to wait until the generation of the System of Identity, to see how Schelling solves this issue. Indeed, it is a higher neutral ground that imposes the unlimited identity over and above the identity to which opposition is counter posited. But at this point, Schelling is only focused on establishing a link between the absolute and the I.

The suggestion currently under consideration also would require that *absolute opposition* need be placed between the unconditional, understood as pure, eternal, and self-positing being, and the conditional, which has the form of existence in time and is posited and/or determined by something external to it. With opposition seen from this perspective,

Schelling appears to be introducing the unconditioned acting of the absolute I in the sphere of the conditioned. Perhaps in trying to connect his disquisitions with Kant's criticism and Fichte's primacy of the practical, Schelling tried to convey the idea that there is an unconditioned dimension on which consciousness is dependent. Clearly, for Schelling what makes an I is the unconditioned: 'But are you bearing in mind that all your consciousness is only possible only through this freedom [free self-positing activity of the I]?' (SW I/I: 180; p. 84). However, insofar as this unconditioned activity is limited by a not-I, we have no other alternative than to think that this I that sources consciousness is only formal so, what filters down from the *absolute I* in consciousness is the *Ich-Form* and not the absolute as *Ich-Sein*. And only in virtue of this merely formal activity of the I, it makes sense to agree with Schelling that 'the *phenomenon* is the not-I conditioned by the I.' (Ibid. 172; 79). For the absolute creates being [*Sein*] and form [*Ich*], when it thinks or posits itself, and the formal I, albeit free and self-positing, does not create being when it thinks itself. The Ich-Form is thinking mirroring its unconditioned source. Then again, the mirroring is only partial since the activity of the *Ich-Form* is not the absolute activity of being-bestowing of the absolute *Ich-Sein* because the *Ich-Form* cannot produce *all being* as such.

As I tried to convey in the last chapter, Schelling found a higher principle, necessarily metaphysical, that makes possible the merely formally ontological powers of the pure I, which is more or less implied in the development of Fichte's *Thathandlung*, on the one hand, and perhaps in Kant's idea of the transcendental unity of apperception, on the other hand. This *pure I*, because it is purely formal, can oppose a not-I whose being does not emanate from formal thinking. Indeed, being resists thinking. For the unconditional I in consciousness does not create being as such, but only imparts the semantic form of being to phenomena. In this respect, Schelling notes: 'The I posits the not-I as equal to the I. However, the form of the not-I forbids that. Therefore, the I can only *impart* reality to the not-I; *it can posit the not-I as reality only if combined with negation*. (189; 91; my emphasis. Cf. §15). In the footnote to §15, Schelling observes that conditional existence is merely derivative because the not-I 'receives its reality through the [absolute eternity of the] I' and as soon as the absolute identity of the subjective and the objective is disrupted with limitation [which can only happen in the sphere of the conditioned], the not-I, understood as the totality of being because it is 'originally posited

outside of all time', then 'loses its unconditionality, i.e., it becomes really connected with negation, conditional (limited) reality.' (SW I/I: 203n; p. 100n).

The *Ich-Form* is slowly gaining shape. Thus far, it has shown its two unconditionally identical sides in the domain of the absolute: absolute identity, where the subjective and the objective are welded together without any crack. Let us call this side the form of unity. The other identical side is the form of self-positing, or the simultaneity of the I as subject and the I as object. Evidently, if the I is the absolute, then identity and self-positing are one and exactly the same thing. On the other hand, when the I is embedded in an empirical subject, then limitation and difference rule both forms. The question now arises as to how these two sides express themselves in the empirical I. A further question should be lingering about as well, stinging perhaps the sceptical readers. Schelling expressed this concern in these terms: 'How is it possible for the absolute I to step out of itself [*aus sich selbst herauszugehen*] and oppose to itself a not-I?' (SW I/I: 175; p. 81). In this chapter, perhaps we could reframe the question in the following way: How is it possible that a physical body carries an unconditioned form? Schelling does not give a straightforward answer to his question but he states the idea that »as long as this question is not placed out of its proper domain, i.e., of 'higher abstraction', it will be misunderstood. « (Cf. Ibid). More simply put, there is no egress from the absolute because the absolute does not tolerate any limitation in its own sphere, which is the only one and true reality. On the contrary, it is always presupposed—even in the mere idea of an egress: 'Only through an absolute I, only through the fact that it is posited absolutely [*schlechthin gesetzt*] does it become possible that a not-I appears in contrast to it, indeed, that a philosophy itself becomes possible.' (Ibid. 176; 81). Yet, this does not disclose one of the most important of our concerns, namely, why, and how, does the empirical subject carry the I-form? As to this problem, which we may be inclined to call for now the »individuation of the absolute«, we must wait until the System of Identity is developed in 1801. For now, we must come to terms with the fact that in the *Ichschrift* and other early essays, Schelling is rather outlining ideas, testing new philosophical schemes and sketching the possible forms of a system based on an ultimate unconditioned principle.

Despite the theoretical shortcomings in Schelling's early approaches to absolute identity, he wants to put his name out in the centre of the propagation of Kantian philosophy, and perhaps he also found Kant's transcendental principles as the only coherent way to

determine »the unconditional in human knowledge«, for his answer to our questions up until this moment is clearly Kantian.

In the Third Section of the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes that the rational human being:

> 'Must necessarily assume that beyond his own subject's constitution as composed as nothing but appearances there must be something else as basis, namely, his ego as constituted in itself. Therefore, with regard to mere perception and the receptivity of sensations, he must count himself as belonging to the world of sense; but with regard to whatever there may be in him of pure activity […] he must count himself as belonging to the intellectual world.' (1993, Ak. 451; p. 53; Cf. *KpV*, Ak. 42).

Schelling seems to endorse Kant's speculative treatment of the absolute by maintaining that the latter rightly reveals the contradictions that arise from the concept of the supersensible [*das Übersinnliche*] when theoretical philosophy attempts to objectify the absolute '*alles Ich*', like Schelling thought Spinoza did with his concept of substance. And while this is the inevitable outcome of the theoretical aspect of philosophy, if it does not recognise its tendency to promote dualisms, practical philosophy can enter the supersensible domain through doing away with the theoretical and re-establishing 'what is intuited intellectually (the pure I).[34] Schelling then holds that once we recognise that the 'basis' Kant talks about is in fact metaphysical, then, 'what can we expect to find there other than the I? Therefore, no God as an object, no not-I at all, no empirical happiness, etcetera, but only pure, absolute I!' (SW I/I 202; p. 100).

With nothing more than an assumption, we must work with the idea that the empirical subject somehow »carries« the absolute I,[35] it carries specifically the *form* of being identical with itself through the form of the positing of itself. By the end of 1795 Schelling talks about

[34] Schelling clarifies in a footnote to §5 that he understands 'pure' [*rein*] as that which 'exists without any relation to objects' whereas objects are at the bottom of the pile of determinations thus being overdependent on multiple conditions for their possibility. (SW I/I: 176, 81).

[35] This is an idea that I borrow from Sandkaulen-Bock. He claims ‚Schelling aktiviert jetzt das Ich als inhaltliches und gelangt von der *Form der Unbedingtheit* zum *Unbedingten* selbst; im selben Moment wird die subjektive Dimension des Ichs preisgegeben, wieder wird es Träger einer Struktur. Schelling reflektiert weder explizit auf diese Verschiebung zwischen *Form-* und *Ichschrift*, noch auf die damit verbundene Entfernung von Fichtes Intention.' (Sandkaulen-Bock, 1990, p. 29).

this dimension as a 'profoundness of mind [*Tiefsinn*]' that does not imply a determinate awareness and it is 'produced by freedom alone'. (SW I/I: 318; p. 180). Earlier, in the *Formschrift*, Schelling was already concerned with the form of unconditionality. The idea he advances is connected with the attempt to find the ultimate basis of the system philosophy that imparts the essential structure of science to all knowledge—both theoretical and applied. The first axiom had to be presupposed because (1) the absolutely unconditioned axiom can only be given by itself, and by giving itself in unity or identity with itself, (2) it yields the form of an original I or that which self-posits unconditionally: '*Dieses ist nicht anders als das ursprünglich durch sich selbst gesetzte Ich.*' (SW I/I: 96; p. 45). This also means that, should the absolute axiom have a form and a content, it 'must receive its content through its form and its form through its content.' (Ibid 97; 45). This absolute axiom of two identical sides, one that is the form of absolute self-positing, or the I, and one that is the sheer giving of itself as an I, yields an »unavoidable circle« between the identity of matter and form of the I, and whose general proposition is A = A. And while in the *Ichschrift* this proposition will be maintained to represent the form of the absolute, Schelling boldly rises above the formalisms of critical philosophy to find the absolute itself, and in this way, warranting the absolute identity and simultaneity of thinking and being. Accordingly, Schelling asserts: 'The I contains all being [*Sein*], all reality [*Realität*].' And he adds: 'Yet, it is only through unconditionality that the I receives *all its* reality.' (SW I/I: 186; p. 89). Schelling even advances his further position in the philosophy of nature, according to which the I is an unconditioned principle *in* consciousness, 'whose function is to be the generic concept of all reality [*Inbegriff aller Realität*].' Then, this unconditioned I, this absolute, 'must contain the data, the absolute content that determines all being [*die absolute Materie der Bestimmung alles Seyns*], all possible reality.' (SW I/I: 186-87; p. 89). So, if there were a reality outside of, or more exactly, separate from the I, it should coincide with the latter in its very essential structure, therefore, the I and the structural reality, which the former thematises in its intentional acts of reason, are one and the same, which is what Schelling will try to prove from this time onwards and throughout his whole identity philosophy.

Another issue worth considering in the race to finally secure a systematic ground for all philosophical knowledge, was the problem of its epistemic access. In this respect, Schelling also felt compelled to justify the means for the intuition of absolute identity, which he did by

framing it as an unconditioned unity that has a place in consciousness. Schelling describes this access as a self-intuition that it is immanent to the I in consciousness. And regarding this he writes a year later in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*:

> 'a secret and wondrous capacity of withdrawing from temporal change into our innermost self, which we divest of every exterior accretion. There, in the form of immutability, we intuit the eternal in us. This intuition is the innermost and in the strictest sense our own experience, upon which depends everything we know and believe of a supersensible world.' (SW I/I: 318; p. 180).

From a slightly different angle, this self-intuition takes us back to the problem of the unavoidable circle brough about by the form of absolute identity. If I may suggest, even if this is not something that was explicitly put forward by Schelling, this circle is also the basis of the individuation of absolute identity. In mirroring the absolute's unavoidable circle, which is perfectly closed due to its absolute identity, the *Ich-Form* yields a formal circle that strives to unify and integrate the always-resisting and limiting not-I. Otherwise put, the *Ich-Form* yields a circle that strives to broadening itself by making the not-I become part of the I, but for the not-I to become a part in the infinite process of integration into experience, there must be an opposition *in the I*. Schelling says: 'If [the I] posits the not-I absolutely, it cancels itself; and if it posits itself absolutely, it cancels the not-I. Yet, both of them ought to be posited.' (SW I/I: 189; p. 91). He claims that this contradiction cannot be resolved from a theoretical point of view, that is, by assuming an absolute outside in opposition to the absolute; instead, the fact that absolute being *in itself* cannot be posited in the *Ich-Form*, makes it a not-I. The only way in which the not-I can leave its status of nothingness and a completely alien *thing in itself*, and become *real through the form* of the I is by means of a synthesis:

> 'As soon as reality is imparted to the not-I, it must be posited as contained in the very concept of all reality, that is, in the I; it must cease to be *pure* not-I […] Out of this transferred form of I, the original form of not-I, and the synthesis of the two originates the *categories* through which alone the original not-I receives reality (becomes imaginable) but for this very reason ceases to be absolute not-I.' (SW I/I: 189-90; p. 91)

This synthesis is possible because the I and the not-I are absolutely identical in the absolute, whose form is instantiated in the *Ich-Form* and realised by the limitation it embodies in consciousness and projects on absolute being. To be sure, the opposition does not follow from identity, but it is a fact of consciousness and thus it must be postulated accordingly. But the question we posed earlier in this chapter, which asks about the ways in which this absolute being is integrated gradually by the embodied *Ich-Form*, is going to be raised again in Part III of this thesis, and here I will attempt to argue that the *Ich-Form* could be located deeper, beyond pure self-consciousness, as a native a structure that defines all living organisms. For now, let us rest this issue and move on to the next chapter, which is dedicated to show that absolute identity is a principle that Schelling left presupposed in his own reinterpretation of transcendental philosophy.

## [Chapter 2. The Absolute as a presupposed bond]

When Schelling published anonymously the second instalment of his *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatism and Kriticismus* in 1796, he was still pretty much engaged with the goals of transcendental philosophy. He had paved the way for this in his previous essays, in which it is more or less clear that he was, on the one hand, determining the possibilities of theoretical knowledge, and on the other hand, asserting practical philosophy as the only possible way for philosophy to access the metaphysical dimension of freedom. For example, in the *Fourth Letter*, Schelling claims that 'theoretical reason, being unable to realise the unconditioned […] *demands* the *act* through which it *ought* to be realised […] then, philosophy proceeds […] to the domain of *practical* philosophy.' (SW I/2: 299; p. 167). Accordingly, this is inevitable because 'theoretical philosophy is based upon the very conflict between subject and object' and since this reasoning ends in contradictions, in order to proceed to the absolute, both must make of it an ideal, hence use it only immanently in practical philosophy, raising however further contradictions, most notably that of a purposive being making its experience possible in a deterministic world. (SW I/I: 333, p. 190; Cf. Ibid 177, 335, 338-9; pp. 82, 192, 194).

Similarly, he seemed to have left the issue of the meta-theoretical disclosure of the foundation of the system of philosophy undecided. So, in the first instalment of his *Philosophische Briefe*, a couple of years before his *Naturphilosophie* phase, Schelling seems to

align to the Kantian project of declaring intractable any theoretical elaborations about the absolute while making room for normative principles, by definition purely idealistic, to be able to come to terms with the fact that the absolute cannot be an object of knowledge.

Under this light and going forward, the dimension of the unconditioned and the absoluteness required by a first systematic principle is depicted as an idea and as the execution of a normative freedom, rather than a metaphysical start. This strategy is double-sided. Indeed, for one reason, freedom as a placeholder of the absolute is justified as a regulative ideal for the moral betterment of humanity, and, for another reason, it serves as pre-emptive defence against the 'objective power which threatens our freedom with annihilation' and does away with selfhood. (SW I/I: 336; p. 192; Cf. 317; p. 179). It is important to note this nuanced shift, which is most notably represented when, in the *Eighth Letter*, Schelling deflects endorsing intellectual intuition of the absolute itself. (Cf. 317; p. 180). Yet, he grants consciousness 'a profoundness of mind' (Ibid 318; p. 180) where infinity and eternity dwell and, although this dimension skews awareness, it is *experienced* by means of self-intuition:

> 'This intellectual intuition takes place whenever I cease to be an object for myself, when withdrawn into itself, the intuiting subject is identical with the intuited […] it is not *we* who are in time, but time is *in us*; in fact, it is not time but rather pure absolute eternity that is in ourselves.' (Ibid 319; p. 181).

The immediacy between the self and itself, the pure I, leaves no room for objectification by theoretical philosophy. And, even if Schelling admits that fundamental oppositions that prop up contrary systems, only cease by presupposing an absolute, (Ibid 329; p. 187), he now believes the latter is simply an idea, although necessary, and that the only 'absolute causality' that the philosopher could admit is the absolute causality of the will within consciousness in its practical endeavours, that is, the self insofar as she is the creator of the moral law that recognises the impossibility of cognising an absolutely objective God, but, still, '*desires* to know one.' (Ibid 288; p. 159; 291, p. 161).

Clearly, Schelling does not seem simply to discard the absolute as pseudo-problem. The problem is to try to theorise about it, to make it an object. Schelling clarifies in a footnote of same text that an empirical proof for the existence of God is an 'unphilosophical procedure [that] lies in the inability to abstract (from what is merely empirical)' and thus overlooks:

> 'the simple, intelligible truth that for the existence of God only an ontological proof can be given. If there is a God he can be only because he is. His existence and his essence [Wesen] must be identical. The proof for the being of God can be given only from this being.' (SW I/I:308n-309n; p. 174n).

Indeed, as seen by Michael Vater, in the early philosophical essays Schelling did not commit to the cosmological demonstration of God's reality, instead, he argues, for Schelling 'there is no ascent to the absolute from the finite.' (2012, p. 157). This is even clearer when Schelling notes that the correct approach in which the absolute must be understood is that of Spinoza's, who 'did not offer proof of an absolute being, but simply and absolutely asserted it,' without attempting 'to prove the very actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] of God.' (SW I/I: 309n; p. 174). In other words, with respect to the absolute, there is nothing left to prove and there should be no attempt at *discovering* anything in supernatural regions.

This made clear, Schelling, in the spirit of critical philosophy, restricts all philosophising to the demand of 'present[ing] the course of the human mind itself.' (Ibid 293; p. 163). Furthermore, Schelling leaves to art the task of approaching 'the highest' by means of an intuition he explains in terms of an 'abandonment to the world', a kind of unity that resembles the Platonic seeing of 'prototypes in the intellectual world.' (Ibid. 336, p. 192; 285, p. 157; 318, p. 180). It is as though Schelling was outlining in these *Philosophical Letters* the plan of his further philosophical work. Notwithstanding his leap into a transcendental justification of experience, Schelling admits that the idea of the absolute »still lives in past philosophical systems«. (Cf. SW I/I: 308n; p. 174n). Later, in the Nature-Philosophy texts, this idea revives, though as a necessary idea of reason, whose necessary origin must be sought after. For now, he seems to forsake it and move on to a new focus of interest: the constitution of Nature.

In my view, as Schelling is preparing to conduct his research with an emphasis on theoretical problems and, also, with the intention to make a name for himself in the philosophical scene of the early nineteenth century, he withdraws from all metaphysical concerns and proceeds to speak of the absolute, the *Ich-Sein*, in an enigmatic language, probably to convey the idea that it must be asserted, assumed, and, above all, unmixed with any instances of actuality. The latter case would invariably end in antinomies because

muddling up the absolute and the empirical necessarily entails introducing limitation in what is essentially unlimited; in other words, 'it seeks to represent something that can never be object of representation [*Object der Vorstellung*].' (AA I/4: 132; p. 105). It is not so much that Schelling disparages the empirical, but the empirical taken *on its own* as the source of definite knowledge; for what makes the latter knowable and intelligible is the ground given by »the immutable laws of nature and spirit«, whose identity Schelling was already overseeing in 1795.[36]

Between April of 1796 and July of 1798, Schelling was living in Leipzig. Historians note that during this period, Schelling's work was extremely intense. Not only was he tutoring the two sons of Baron Friedrich Adolphus Riedesel, but also took courses on natural sciences at the University of Leipzig and kept pushing his philosophical investigations with a strong accent into, as it were, letting »Nature speak its truth«.[37] At the same time, he accepted an offer to publish in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, a philosophical magazine edited by Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Between 1796 and 1797, Schelling delivered seven instalments of the *Allgemeine Uebersicht der neuesten philosophischen Litteratur* (*General survey of the newest philosophical literature*) for the *Journal*, most of them dedicated to clarifying Kant's transcendental idealism over against the most recent philosophical production that was picking up on Kantianism.

Along the way, these essays served their turn for Schelling's own interpretation of transcendental idealism.[38] Here, Schelling appears convinced that transcendental idealism was the authentic philosophy, particularly to the extent that it constrains the aspirations of reason to the territory of experience, where her concepts are tested by the degree of application they can possibly have on sensibility and its contents. (Cf. AA I/4: 60; p. 63). This is why now he claims that 'reason itself has solemnly foresworn all discoveries in supernatural regions.' (Ibid 4: 60; p. 63). In fact, when Schelling takes the theoretical position of philosophy

[36] This is a claim that follows from the postulation of absolute identity. As I said, Schelling was already aware of this in the *Ichschrift*. A footnote to §14 reveals this identity when Schelling writes: 'One could also say that the ultimate goal of the I is to turn the laws of freedom into laws of nature, and the laws of nature into laws of freedom, to bring about *nature* in the I, and *I* in nature.' (SW I/I: 198n; p. 98n).

[37] As Tilliette already noted in the 1970s, it is not so much that Schelling found in the study of Nature a personal vocation, rather Nature was a common subject of interest at the time, it was 'un phénomène d'époque' and a field of research of theoretical philosophy. (1992, p. 127).

[38] Referenced as AA I/4: 55-190; pp. 61-138. Thomas Pfau translates it as *Survey of the Most Recent Philosophical Literature*. This essay was originally published anonymously. The title changed in the 1809 edition of Schelling's collected writings to *Abhandlung zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre* (*Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*).

by means of the transcendental investigation, he is not attempting to ascend to the absolute but to deduce the possibility of the experience of nature through the unconditioned principle in self-consciousness. This principle looks very similar to the one he described in his earlier essays but now he calls it more often «the spirit» rather than «the pure I». To help maintain the continuity of my argument, I will refer to it as the *Ich-Form* that expresses two aspects or properties.

If the reader then grants me the assumption that the absolute is a presupposed principle in Schelling's further philosophising, then it does not appear as a coincidence that he speaks allegorically of it in the introductions to his nature-philosophical works. From this perspective, he would be echoing Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, a work that was deeply influential on him, not only with respect to the general strategies Kant uses to resolve the philosophical idea of Nature, at least in Schelling's early transcendental investigations, but also in the way in which Schelling understood the concept of organic beings in particular. Schelling himself stressed out what this work meant for him,[39] especially, he points to the §76 of that work, where Kant writes:

> 'reason forever demands that we assume something or other (the original basis) as existing with unconditioned necessity, something in which there is no longer to be any distinction between possibility and actuality; and for this idea our understanding has absolutely no concept, i.e. it cannot find a way to present such a thing as its way of existing […] the concept of an absolutely necessary being, though an indispensable idea of reason, if for human understanding an attainable problematic concept.' (Kant, 1987, Ak, 402; p. 285)

Further in the §81 of this same work, Kant concedes that the limited stock of constitutive principles available to human understanding, when confronted with the real in itself, and particularly in this case, living organisms, is insufficient to give us an insight[40] into the causes of their apparently purposive order. (KU Ak. 418; Cf. 411, 394). Having constitutive concepts to explain Nature in terms of efficient causes but, at the same time, being able to go

[39] 'Perhaps there have never been so many deep thoughts compressed into so few pages as in the critique of teleological judgement, §76.' (*Vom Ich*, SW I/I: 242; p. 127).
[40] Kant uses the term insight [*Einsicht*] to name a kind of theoretical cognition [*theoretisch erkennen*] that only gives us actualities or instances of knowledge within the boundaries of possible experience. See *KrV* Bxii, xiv, xxx; *KpV* Ak 4-5; *KU* Ak. 418.

beyond the causality of mechanism and conceive a causality in terms of purposes, in itself not compliant with empirical analysis, nonetheless, present as a principle in reason, calls for a unity of opposite principles, if not for the real, at least as a binder for the unity of reason. Hence, Kant calls for the wholly indeterminate concept of the supersensible basis of nature, which ultimately reconciles both principles when it concerns how we make sense of a world of appearances for ourselves; i.e., as a heuristic ground to claim a place in nature for ourselves, whereby human beings are not 'merely a natural purpose, which we may judge all organised beings to be, but also to be the *ultimate* purpose of Nature here on earth, the purpose by reference to which all other natural things constitute a system of purposes.' (KU Ak. 429). Yet, Kant continues to appeal to the metaphysical supersensible substrate of nature to account for the fact that we recognise the effects of a purposive causality in organic beings although we cannot explain its origin or how its possibility is constituted. (Cf. KU Ak. 414). In this case the limited and mediated nature of human cognition permits the *assumption* 'that nature is possible throughout in terms of both kinds of laws (physical laws and laws of final causes) operating in universal harmony, even though we have no insight whatever into how this happens.' (KU Ak. 415).

Similarly, when in the 1797 edition of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling asks 'What then is the secret bond [*jenes geheime Band*] which couples our mind [*unserm Geiste*] to Nature, or that hidden organ through which Nature speaks to our mind and our mind to Nature?' (AA I/5: 106; p. 41), he seems to be making an allegorical appeal to the metaphysical ground of both the I and Nature. However, the answer to the question is, of course, not available to theoretical philosophy as much as, according to the principles and methods of Fichtean transcendental idealism, it is irrelevant and meaningless to posit any reality that could stand independently of the mind. Thus, it makes sense to retreat to the original opposition subject-object as a start, but naturally, with the guarantee that in the *Ich-Form*, or the human spirit, both are united as one. Schelling seems to agree with this idea in the *Allgemeine Uebersicht* when he writes:

> 'a Kantian would have to claim, contrary to the letter yet in accordance with the spirit of the teacher, that we really know the things as they are in themselves, that is, that between the thing represented and the real object there does not

exist any difference,' without thereby confusing the real object with a mere empirical thing. (AA I/4: 130; p. 105).

Back in *Ideas*, Schelling offers as proof of this »secret dimension« of absolute unity the ideas of reason, which he says, 'are true in themselves' because, as he claims Spinoza argued, 'ideal and real (thought and object [*Gedanke und Gegenstand*]) are most intimately united *in our nature*' (AA I/5: 90; p. 27; my emphasis). What Spinoza could not realise, Schelling notes, is that there is no need to step out of the zone of self-consciousness to see 'the emergence of the two worlds in us—the ideal and the real […]; instead of explaining from our nature how finite and infinite, originally united in us, […] he lost himself forthwith in the idea of an infinite outside us.' (Ibid). But can the ideas be true *in themselves* and *in consciousness*? Arguably, yes, if we suppose that the absolute has, so to speak, descended and unfolded in consciousness by means of the *Ich-Form*. It would be perhaps more appropriate to say that consciousness, as much as the world—seen as the correlate of consciousness, is *in the absolute* by means of the *Ich-Form* that made to it possible, that is to say, to be in the absolute as subject-object. But this way of considering the relation would transport us to 1801, when Schelling developed the rest of the System of Identity and returned the absolute to its original position, previous to the unfolding of the finite mind, in a more classical but rekindled metaphysics. At this moment in time, Schelling thinks the internal problems of Kantian theory can be resolved with a more positive determination of the absolute principle seating *in consciousness*, the supersensible basis which explains the possibility of experience and so, in the *Allgemeine Uebersicht* he notes: 'Kant symbolized this supersensible ground of all sensibility with his expression of things in themselves—an expression that, like all symbolic expressions, contains a contradiction because it aims at presenting the unconditional [*das Unbedingte*] by means of something conditional [*ein Bedingtes*].' Yet, he adds, these contradictory expressions are in a way necessary, because they are 'the only ones by means of which we are able to present ideas at all.' (AA I/4: 133; p. 106).

Be it as it may, Schelling's critique tally with the conviction, already present in his 1795-96 *Philosophische Briefe*, that self-consciousness has an original position with respect to the absolute. Clearly, Schelling's preoccupation with preserving the former's epistemic

integrity[41] forsook his first attempt at granting access to the absolute *in itself* because he might have thought: we either become identical with the absolute, or else the absolute becomes identical with us, and in the latter case, which is 'what Spinoza preferred,' we become 'identical with the absolute object and lost in its non-finiteness.' (SW I/I: 319; 181). At this point and going forward, Schelling thinks this is a deception, for how can we account for the absolute identity of the real and the ideal if we banish the access via the unconditioned in self-consciousness? But this does not imply the absolute is in itself unreal, and although 'our intrinsic freedom' is 'the only supersensible thing of which we are certain' (AA I/4: 136; p. 108), *ideas* in us attest to its reality because they carry the absolute identity of the real and the ideal in self-consciousness, while 'the nature of our mind and of our whole existence rests on just this original union.' (AA I/5: 91; p. 28). Thus, ideas like that of »universal equilibrium«, »universe», »world-system», »Nature» or even »universal attraction«, and »opposite forces« are descendants of the absolute and therefore real—which means that ideas are not part of the temporal sequence of natural causes but that they are true in themselves; and we discover them aided by our progressive objective experience of the world when we project them onto it—because absolute being is something that we cannot posit absolutely and immediately but only mediately and progressively in time. In line with this point, Schelling argues, in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 'that ideas in us *follow* one another [because this] is the necessary consequence of our finitude, but that this series is *endless* proves that they proceed from a being [*Wesen*] in whose nature finitude and infinity are united.' (Ibid, 91; p. 29).

Contemporaneous with the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, the *Allgemeine Uebersicht* series, which is widely considered the most Fichtean work written by Schelling,[42] contains a few dim allegorical allusions to the absolute, for its aim is to cement Schelling's plea of following the critical task to constrain all philosophising to possible experience by appealing to transcendental principles because 'the principle of the sensible cannot once again lie in the sensible; it must lie in the supersensible.' (AA I/4: 133; p. 106). Schelling *comfortably* proceeds to the theoretical part of philosophy with the warrant that the deductions had been secured

[41] Schelling expressed this worry already in the *Eight* of his *Philosophical Letters* when, in discussing Spinoza's doctrine of the substance and the dangers of dogmatism, he wrote: ""The return to the deity, into the fountainhead of all existence, the unification with the absolute, the annihilation of self."' (SW I/I: 317; p. 179).

[42] For example, D. Nassar (2013) contends that in the *Allgemeine Uebersicht* Schelling 'turns to a conception of intellectual intuition closer to Fichte's'. (see p. 186).

on the basis of the absolute identity of the ideal and the real in our knowledge. In support of this idea, I quote this passage from the *Allgemeine Uebersicht*:

> 'It is a fundamental mistake to attempt a theoretical grounding of theoretical philosophy. As long as we are merely concerned with setting up a philosophical edifice (as was evidently Kant's purpose), we may content ourselves with such a foundation, just as we are satisfied when the house we are building stands on firm ground.' (AA I/4: 126; p. 101).

But since the locus of absolute identity is consciousness, then it follows that 'the principle of all philosophy is self-consciousness' (AA I/4: 109; p. 90). Thus, we can see that the supersensible that theoretical/practical philosophy is strictly restricted to is *in consciousness*; and from this starting point, this *General Survey*, says Schelling, 'promises genuine instruction and every possible guidance for the purpose of self-knowledge.' (AA I/4: 62; p. 64). The philosophical insight must be then directed towards the contents of consciousness whereby the real has descended in form, whereas our a posteriori experience of nature cooperates in the discovery of the universal contents, the material forms or predicates, that flow from the unconditioned *Reellform* of the absolute. The task that the deductions oversee is then epistemological and so the system's scope covers unconditioned regions where knowledge can advance successfully, namely, in 'nature and the human spirit, both equally immutable and eternal in their laws.' (Ibid 4: 60; p. 63).

Decidedly, the fact that Schelling halted his metaphysical investigation of the absolute and moved on to transcendental idealism could be attributed to his belief that absolute identity, in its real-ideal eternity, is present in self-consciousness as a foundational principle that can successfully further the epistemological enquiry of all philosophical representations because they contain, although formally, the basic ideal-real structure of the system of nature. In his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling seems happy to agree with Leibniz's understanding of the mind as that which *only is*, for 'no mind could have *come to be*', but also, Schelling adds, as 'a being to whose *nature* this particular system of ideas of external things also belongs'. (AA I/5: 92-93; p. 30). The question arises, however, as to how a being that never »comes to be« has to consider all the system of philosophy in »its becoming«. The answer, I believe, consists in understanding the intelligible or formal character of the self-positing I as

the simple self-identity which »always is« independently of time. Precisely, the 'ideating being [*vorstellende Wesen*]' is only a form, which as far as is unable to posit the ideality along with the reality of the absolute, only posits formalities in time to become conscious of them. The philosopher is aware of the infinity of the eternal forms as much as the finiteness of self-consciousness, thus she has to consider 'the system of our ideas, not in its *being* [*Seyn*], but in its *becoming* [*Werden*].' (AA I/5: 92-93; p. 30). This is why, Schelling asserts, 'philosophy becomes genetic', for it displays the system of ideas in the course of experience; while 'eine Naturlehre unsers Geistes' means that 'the system of nature is at the same time the system of our mind.' (Ibid.) Absolute identity is, as it were, reproduced in the mind in an ideal fashion.

But as we shall see, this same identity lies at the base of Schelling's attempts to maintain the unity of natural beings as a common ground, whereby opposite forces and processes find their way in an endless striving towards absolute unity. The chapters in Part III of this thesis approach the way in which Schelling explained the nature and emergence of living beings and organised wholes under the assumed unity of absolute identity. Here we will see Schelling finding the activity that was formerly localised in the mind now rooted in Nature as productivity. Moreover, Nature's demands for unconditionedness will take Schelling to finally bring the assumed principle down to its ontological integrity, first in his investigations of the philosophy of Nature and then in his philosophical systems. In sum, the journey of absolute identity that Schelling started in 1795 brought him to draft his systems of Nature and ultimately took him to its consummation in the Identity System, for this is when Schelling upgrades absolute identity from a merely presupposed principle in the mind to the absolute ground of all ideal-reality, none other than absolute indifference.

## [3. Excursus]

Schelling's philosophical presupposition of absolute identity at this point is metaphysical and perhaps, for the same reason, he struggles to make sense of the link between the absolute I and the antithetical structure of the theoretical subject as she must presuppose and start from the subject-object position in order to explain experience, broadly construed. It is very likely that, during the second half of the 1790s, Schelling was attempting to push an agenda following a transcendental vindication, according to which the absolute has no

philosophical relevance independently of the ancillary activity of the practical subject and the knowledge of the transcendental ideas in self-consciousness; hence the idealistic tone of his essays at this stage and in further presentations. In his transcendental works, Schelling seems to reassure us that the domain of the absolute is accessible by means of the I because between them there is some kind of essential kinship. So far as we stay in the scope of the abstract and pure I, which dwells in and makes consciousness possible, we have access to the unconditioned. The proof of this lies on: (1) our freedom as expressed in the self-positing act of practical self-determination, and (2) the necessity we find in the ontological categories presented by reason. Schelling is clear on his position in *Vom Ich*: 'the assertion of an absolute I would be transcendent if it were to go farther than the I' and he adds that such an assertion is 'as little transcendent as is the practical transition into the supersensible domain.' (SW I/I: 205; p. 102).

Notwithstanding the resolve of his assertions, Schelling is unable to justify some of his arguments at this stage. For example, it is still unclear how a pure I has descended or unfolded from the absolute in order to make self-consciousness possible. He deflects from the fact of the absolute's givenness in intuition and claims he is following Kant to the letter: 'Kant had already intimated that a deduction of the I from mere concepts is impossible when he said that the original proposition '*I* am' is antecedent to all concepts and merely accompanies them, as it were, as a vehicle [*als Vehikel*].' (Ibid, 204; p. 102). Along the same lines, he appears to rely on the transcendental power of the will to accommodate the unconditioned in the subject, but he often flirts with a theoretical justification of the absolute and the ways in which the »original opposition« implied in the theory of knowledge could lead back to the absolute—which nonetheless he told us cannot be given by any other than itself, that is, by absolute identity. By opening this line of inquiry, Schelling cut his transcendental teeth on the discussion of the synthetic powers ascribed by Kant to the transcendental imagination in order to account for the production of the schemata that should «reunite the conflict [*Widerstreit*]» between 'the pure *Urform* of eternity' and the form of existence of the not-I which is *in time*. (Cf. Ibid 202-3; 100). However, according to the logic of the absolute, an opposition simply does not follow from absolute identity. Schelling appears to be content with just a reassurance that for some inconspicuous reason, 'the concept of subject must lead to the

absolute I.' (SW I/I: 169; p. 76). This impasse also leaves the ontological requirement of the opposition between the I and the not-I unexplained. (Cf. 189; 91).

A further reason for puzzlement is Schelling's position with respect to the first principle in his nature-philosophical texts, especially in light of his constructions of the concepts of Nature, which are squarely aligned with the unconditioned principle in consciousness. In my view, he assumes the unconditioned by turning it into a postulate from which he can work out his way into the »applied part of theoretical philosophy«.[43] This seems to be the demand that follows from grounding all possible systems on an unconditional principle, not objectifiable, therefore unsuitable to follow from any proof. Schelling will only speak of it as a »hidden bond«. It is not the absolute itself because the absolute is known, we have seen, only by itself, but the form of the absolute that a *mind* or *Geist* carries along. If philosophers have created systems based on the absolute it is only because there is in the depths of the mind a form or 'an intellectual act' that allows us to see 'prototype[s] in the intellectual world.' (SW I/I: 318; p. 180). This is, in fact, the act or form that »breaths life« from *the absolute source of all life*. As we will see in Part III, these problems forced Schelling to put the discussion of the absolute and its philosophical consequences behind. But I believe that he will continue to hold the belief that the absolute unconditioned has its place in consciousness as a pure I, thus submitting its own constitutive pure identity to an equally original opposition.

Before we move on to Schelling's nature-philosophy of the second half of the 1790s, it is important to keep in mind that his work takes stock of some problems and terminology of Fichte's and Kant's idealisms, but his idealism is unlike them. This is because Schelling expressly derives his principles for a system of philosophy from the unconditioned and by means of the intellectual intuition, which means lifting consciousness to the supernatural dimension by the free act of self-positing of the I. More specifically, Schelling's idealism differs from Fichte's in that the latter establishes a principle that reclaims absolute unconditionality in the empirical I without endorsing any sort of access to the supersensible. In fact, in Fichte's *Introductions to the Science of Knowledge*, our acquaintance with the self-positing spontaneity of the I is always mediated because 'it is always conjoined with an intuition of sense.' (Fichte,

[43] Which in the 1797 edition of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* is, precisely, the philosophy of nature. (AA I/5: 65; p. 3).

1994, p. I: 464). And even in the case where we could proceed by abstracting empirical contents until arriving to the *Thathandlung*, setting out from the spontaneous act itself only lets us stand 'at the point joining the two worlds', the sensible and the supersensible, 'from whence they can be surveyed with a single glance.' (Ibid I: 468, Cf. I: 426). However, Fichte does not explain how the surveyed landscape looks like.[44] Similarly, when Schelling thinks of Kant's notion of the absolute I in the *Critique of Pure Reason* he seems to aim at, Schelling says, 'the destruction of the absolute I and the realisation of the not-I as an I, that is, as a thing in itself.'[45] (SW I/I: 206; p. 103).

In sum, the two transcendental perspectives, so it seems, contrast Schelling's own understanding of the pure I as I have described it so far. This is because he embeds the form of the absolute in the empirical I, which would make the latter a carrier of the supersensible dimension of the *Ich-Form*. Schelling at no time vacillated about the epistemic access to absolute identity, the contention was instead in the organ of this access. For it was never the task of theoretical reason to posit the freedom of the I as object, but to view the self-positing act in »I am I«, or freedom proper, as the intellectual intuition itself. Owing to this view of the I, we will not read Schelling invoking the absolute *Ich-Substanz*, instead he talks in a more sober tone about the human spirit or the human soul in the process of overcoming limits in order to reach the unconditioned. But such a gradual overcoming of the opposites in experience, i.e., theoretical or empirical, is not properly reaching absolute identity.[46] This is because a procedural synthesis depends on a higher identity and an original opposition, which Schelling knew from his first essays could only be posited if absolute identity is first resolved. The acknowledgement of this consequence could have led Schelling to returning back to his initial intuitions about the absolute as the principle of philosophy, the metaphysics of identity is a new attempt to take the original position of absolute identity once again.

[44] To be sure, Fichte's notion of intellectual intuition in the *Grundlage* of 1794, which is, most likely, the work that Schelling read, although partially, was defined only as method of reflection that separates and shows the structure of self-consciousness. (Cf. Ibid I: 92-93).

[45] More recently, Paul Guyer arrives at a similar conclusion in *The Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, (in Wuerth, 2010, see esp. pp. 210, )

[46] One example of a practical synthesis of the opposites is 'infinite harmony' in art, which is one of the conclusions of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800; but apart from some allusions to the 'First Epoch' of the formation of consciousness, I will not cover this work in my thesis.

## [Note about Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*]

A word should be said about Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. Schelling was a prolific and avid thinker, moved by a fascination with the natural world. Thus, it was reasonable to expect that he would be interested in the scientific discoveries of physics, chemistry, and physiology—soon to become biology—in the early nineteenth century.[47] In my view, Schelling tried to account for these discoveries as a way to show the explanatory profitability of his philosophically deduced natural principles. Due to the limited scope of the present work, I cannot deal with the plethora of particular processes and empirical principles that Schelling attempted to unify under his nature-philosophical theses—they comprise a range of problems like the formation of the Earth, the nature of water, the constitution of certain metallic substances, the chemical constitution of the animal body, the process of composition and decomposition of chemical elements, debunking atomistic physics and the theory of affinities, the chemical processes behind living beings, the separation of the sexes, to name a few. Schelling never considered the latter essential to philosophy neither philosophy essential to empirical knowledge in general.[48] But he believed that science could be organised into a system governed by philosophical first principles, and under this purview, perhaps one can understand his motivation to publish treatises that show the philosophical basis of the emergence of phenomena.

Now, the issue of the *origin* [*der Ursprung*] or emergence [*die Entstehung*] of general processes in nature, including those that have to do with biological organisation, plays a central role in his work, for it provides the explanatory sufficiency of the *Naturphilosophie*. For the existence of this philosophical science, either construed as a systematic collection of transcendental principles for the possibility of organic processes, or as a metaphysical mapping of their origin in the system of absolute identity, relies, by all means, on a reasoning that recognises the necessity behind higher-order theoretical cognitions that carry the basic

[47] Historians have pondered the extent to which certain scientific works weighed in Schelling's development of the idea of Nature. For example, Manfred Durner in *Zu den Quellen von Schellings Naturphilosophie* (1991) provides a survey of Schelling's early scientific and philosophical influences. In his paper, Durner shows that in his seminar years at the Tübinger Stift, Schelling was exposed to a fair variety of contemporary subjects on physics, chemistry, and biology, on the side of the sciences, and to Kant's works, on the side of philosophy.

[48] And he adds: 'I can think of no more pitiful, workaday occupation than such an application of abstract principles to an already existing empirical science.' (AA I/5: 66; p. 5).

ontological modes of being of things.[49] Therefore, it is an investigation that brackets the empirical domain, and rather than seeking the reason for things among physical causes, it seeks the reasons for being existences as such. The former approach requires assuming an open-ended paradigm typical of evolutionary approaches. As Joseph A. Bracken notes in *Emergence: A new approach to the perennial problem of the one and the many*, »emergence« has become popular in the natural science, especially biology, as an analogical concept, 'more generic philosophical than […] strictly scientific,' and it 'presupposes an underlying philosophical world view which puts more emphasis on Becoming than on Being.' (Bracken, 2013, p. 25). In contrast, the philosophical approach taken by Schelling is principally focused on Being as the ground of all Becoming:

> 'The existence [*Daseyn*] of finite things (hence also of finite representations [*Vorstellungen*]) can never be explained through concepts of cause and effect. Only when this has been understood as a fact can philosophy properly begin; indeed, without this realisation philosophy is not even perceived as a necessity, and our entire knowledge proves merely empirical, a progression from cause and effect.' (AA I/4: 86; p. 79).

With this, I want to suggest that his genetic approach is nothing other than a metaphysical investigation that progresses through orders of being and knowledge, arriving at a second-order philosophy with his Identity System, developed roughly between 1800 and 1806, in which he explores the ultimate philosophical domain that contains higher-order reasons that explain all modes of being in Nature.

From this perspective, a word of warning should be given about Schelling's scientific observations.

Schelling's scientific claims might seem outlandish for a contemporary reader with a basic knowledge of the natural sciences. But I strongly advise against the common practice of designating Schelling's investigations as 'pseudo-scientific', for there is considerable evidence that Schelling was not interested in prescribing principles for *natural science*. Instead, his

[49] To allude to Tilliette's words, Schelling's transcendental deductions of the experience of nature go beyond 'a philosophy of science and a critique of scientific theories—it is rather a cosmology (before it became a cosmogony), a representation of the universe.' (Tilliette, 1992, p. 382).

concerns were metaphysical in that they were motivated by the need to seek the ontological origin of the most general processes of existence, which for him had two sides: ideality and physicality. Despite this metaphysical framework, he was well instructed in the sciences of his time and he worked closely with, and studied scientific works by, physicists, chemists, medics, and physiologists—who were advancing the rudiments of the nascent biological sciences at the turn of the nineteenth century. Similarly, he was equally well acquainted with state-of-the-art techniques in experimental physics, chemistry, physiology, and botany.[50] Moreover, what was considered scientific at the time was intertwined with philosophy and metaphysics. Thus, Schelling's theories not only were well-fitted for legitimate scientific debate, but they were also, to the extent they were *philosophical*, considered authoritative for the integration of the sciences in a system. For example, Schelling often sought to demonstrate, against Kant, the philosophical principles that would validate chemistry and biology as legitimate lawful and scientific disciplines. In particular, he sought to promote the status of the concept of purposiveness in the study of biology and attempted to provide a systematisation of chemical affinities.[51] And although Schelling was less worried about the empirical confirmation of the results of his speculative physics—insofar as philosophy only targets the infinite in all dimensions—*Naturphilosophie* does not leave the particular out, for it posits the infinite productivity that is expressed within the limiting sphere of the dynamic relations in a phenomenal product. (Cf. SW I/4: 4; AA I/7: 77, 83; pp. 13, 18).

[50] The editors of the Historisch-akademische Ausgabe (AA, Op. cit.) have put together a remarkable compilation of philosophical and scientific references that contextualises Schelling's *Naturlehre* both historically and scientifically. With his doctrine of Nature, Schelling furthered his own theories based on the adoption and development of physical, chemical, and biological concepts and theories considerably advanced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
[51] Chem. affinities was based on the theory that there were degrees of combination of different substances with one another. It was widely spread during the eighteenth century and the systematisation of such relations was a precursor to the concept of the chemical compound. (Cf. Gaukroger, 2010, pp. 207-210).

# [Part III. Absolute identity through the shape of an absolute self-organising nature]

In the previous two parts I argued that Schelling's metaphysical leanings were present since his seminary years and were only perhaps shadowed by Schelling's personal commitments to transcendental idealism. Still, two aspects of his metaphysical undertakings stand out. One is Schelling's straightforward postulation of the unconditioned as that which *absolutely is* independently of and prior to any epistemic conditions of human cognition. (Cf. Gardner, 2019, p. 7). Indeed, in contrast to Fichte for whom the principle of all knowledge implies a hypothetical assumption, Schelling considers the sphere of human subjectivity only as a step towards elevating philosophy to actual unconditionality. Explained by Fichte in his famous letter to Schelling, dated November 15, 1800, the transcendental philosopher postulates a unity in the I in which everything is absolutely united. This merely formal unity sets the stage for a thought experiment whereby cognition can be abstracted from its correlative object. In this perspective, the philosopher is now free to play with a 'fiction' that consists in 'posit[ing] nature as something absolute (precisely because it abstracts from the intelligence).' Fichte thinks this reflective procedure allows reason to display the laws of nature and, mutatis mutandis, the '*equivalent fiction*' renders the laws of consciousness. (In Vater & Wood, 2012, p. 42). But this experiment does not explain how, as Schelling later puts it in the 1797 edition of *Ideas*: 'the whole system of finite things could have got into your consciousness [*in eure Vorstellung*].' (AA I/5: 98; pp. 34).

One must note here that when Schelling speaks of 'the real' or 'being', he is not referring to objects of the senses, but to the fundamental reality, or 'the whole system [of finite things]', underlying things themselves which the senses only give us perspectives and humanly preformed qualities of. Hence, Schelling's concern with the communication between Consciousness and Nature may lead us to consider another aspect of Schelling's enquiries that make them look metaphysical: namely, his insistence that there is a supersensible unity that is the ground of all being, and that justifies all truth claims about reality. Thus, for this unity to bring about not only epistemic forms, but also the being that corresponds and gives validity to these forms, Schelling had to consider the principle of being which, in order to be the ultimate ground, has to be one and the same with the principle of knowledge. For only one

and the same source could allow the conditions for a reality to be *receptible* for—or perhaps *active towards*—a universal cognitive form. Hence, this whole, this unity, as Schelling asserts in his first work on Nature-Philosophy, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, must be a 'secret bond' or 'a hidden organ through which Nature speaks to our mind [*Geiste*] or our mind [*Geist*] to Nature.' (AA I/5: 98, 106; pp. 34, 41). Such a bond seems to imply a solution that Schelling shaped after a synthesis between an idealism like Fichte's and a monism like Spinoza's.

In line with the idea of the 'secret bond', in this first chapter I argue that Schelling continued his investigations into Nature with the idea of the *bond* as a first principle that was presupposed everywhere, that is to say, an idea not only found among the *a priori* catalogue of necessary—though *empty*—ideas of reason, but also as the cohesive force that makes Nature one universe. To find this unity, I believe Schelling had to grapple with the difficulties of integrating the methods of transcendental philosophy and the latest discoveries of natural science into a project, metaphysical from the outset, that seeks to *explain* or deduce from first principles the whole edifice of nature.

## [Chapter 1. Nature as the *common ground* for the struggle of fundamental forces.]

During his Leipzig period, Schelling also composed and published two of the works that became his most celebrated expositions of *Naturphilosophie*, *Ideen einer Philosophie der Natur* of 1797, (*Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*; AA I/5: 45-371; pp. 1-273), and *Von der Weltseele: eine Hypothese der Höheren Physik zur Erklärung des allgemeinen Organismus* of 1798 (*On the World-Soul: A hypothesis of higher physics to explain the universal organism*; AA I/6: 67-270). Presumably, Schelling composed *Ideen* in only six months, from the autumn of 1796 to the spring of 1797. First published in seven instalments and then reedited with important annexes in 1802, *Ideas* invites us to ascend 'by degrees, from empirical experience and empirical laws towards pure principles that are prior to all experience.' (AA I/5: 183, p. 142). *Von der Weltseele*, on the other hand, was composed in 1798, and offers the inverse approach of deriving from nature-philosophical principles the most essential organic and inorganic processes of Nature. Furthermore, the fundamental principle that governs this work's deductions is that Nature

organises itself by the play of two mutually limiting principles: the positive and negative forces of Nature. Excluding its Introduction, *Ideas* is a work that clearly attaches to the methods of transcendental idealism to derive natural principles. *Weltseele*, meanwhile, develops a more nature-philosophical approach with language and concepts that bear testimony of structures belonging to Nature itself. But even if Schelling takes a more realistic tone in these books, he still believes that the principle governing the general organisation is the 'highest in the human spirit,' which is 'is not capable of any empirical, but only a transcendental deduction.' (AA I/6: 91).

That Schelling has developed his own interpretation of what transcendental principles represent for the constitution of experience is one of the theses I have been trying to show in this work, which regards Schelling as committing to the ontological dimension implied in the principle of absolute identity. In this respect, my thesis is an attempt to show the conceptual origins of the ontological bearings with which Schelling tinged and reinterpreted the transcendental methodology. A similar argument has been put forward by S. Gardner, who argues, in *Schelling's Substantive Reinterpretation of the Transcendental Turn*, that 'Schelling's redirection of Kantianism, viewed from one angle, involves the intrusion of an alien realist tangent into the idealist framework,' which ultimately led him off the transcendental path; and which Gardner sees as Schelling's achievement, for he showed, Garner adds, 'the possibility of an alternative construal of Kant's transcendental turn which is substantive rather than methodological.' (Gardner, 2019, pp. 3-4).[52]

Schelling's particular notion of absolute identity as the principle behind his transcendental deductions thus implies that Nature is a substantive dimension on its own right and this could also explain why Schelling develops a realist side in the nature-philosophical studies of *Ideas*, *Von der Weltseele*, and openly expresses a realist conception of living or biological organisation in the *Introduction* to the first edition of *Ideas*. This tendency is obviously accentuated in *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (*Outline for a System of the Philosophy of Nature*), and the *Einleitung zur Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (*Introduction to the Outline for a System of Philosophy*), the last two published in 1799.

[52] Other scholars who see Schelling's philosophy as departing from the transcendental approach are Limnatis & Munk in Chapter 2.2 of *German Idealism and the Problem of Knowledge: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.* (2009, esp. pp. 127, 131 ff.).

Perhaps this is the reason why, in 1797, Schelling starts placing his focus, no longer on justifying the keystone that unifies the system of philosophical knowledge, but on the mapping of the system itself. With this view in mind, he now moves on to explaining through natural principles the processual formation that makes possible the most general regularities exhibited by physical phenomena, and also seems to propose different outlines of the system of the world, which emanate from Nature's own natural principles.

Nothing is more essential for the understanding of the dynamical and productive character of Nature than the pervasive presence of the contrasting quasi-metaphysical principles that ultimately make up the edifice of Nature, the *Weltbau*. In the *Naturphilosophie* these two interwoven principles take different incarnations depending on the spheres of activity one seeks to address. More importantly for our argument `is the character that Schelling ascribes to this dynamism of Nature because he finds its root on the assumption of a *common ground* that serves as the stage for the struggle of opposite forces and, as it were, mobilises the inbuilding of the natural processes in the manner of striving. For example, in Book II of *Ideas* Schelling sets out to discover the necessity of the reciprocal universal laws of attraction and repulsion, not neglecting entirely an inference to the single principle by which they are united, and then examining how these constitutive principles of universal Nature instantiate themselves in the parts of the whole, i.e., the particularity of nature when, for example, we move on to constructing the first origin of matter. But again, it should be stressed that the necessity Schelling is seeking here is still constrained to what is necessary in the *system of our knowledge* as far as objective experience is concerned:

> 'Our purpose is now to discover how the laws of attraction and repulsion in the parts may be connected with those of universal attraction and repulsion [*Zurückstoßung*],[53] whether they are not both, perhaps, united by a single common principle, and both equally necessary in the system of our knowledge.' (AA I/5: 183, p. 141).

As this passage clearly describes, the first model of the opposition of principles that Schelling deduces consists in the explanation of the origin of matter in terms of the mutual

[53] More exactly, this sentence reads: „wie die Gesetze der partiellen – mit den Gesetzen der allgemeinen Anziehung und Zurückstoßung" (Ibid.)

limitation of the forces of attraction and repulsion. Kant's deduction of the concept of matter in the outer space is, of course, the precursor of Schelling's own. He, believing that was carrying the torch of philosophical progress, took up from Kant's metaphysical investigations in earnest.

To be sure, *Ideas* is replete with parallels to Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. This book, published in 1786, at the pinnacle of the Critical period, presents Kant's dynamical theory of matter within the framework of his radically modified version of metaphysics.[54] Like in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, *Ideas* addresses the philosophical subject of corporeal nature, but its scope and aims vary considerably. While in the former, Kant presents a metaphysical deduction of the general concept of matter according to the four categories of the understanding, in *Ideas*, Schelling presents a compendium of *ideas* or topics that are meant to constitute the program for a philosophy of nature. (Cf. *Vorrede zur ersten Auflage*, AA I/13: 46; p. 4). These ideas range from the critique of mechanism and the corresponding discipline it gives ground to, i.e., atomistic physics, to the sketch of the *idea of Nature* and the principles implied in its possibility. At some points, Schelling digresses into some contemporaneous discoveries and debates in physics and chemistry, purportedly, to throw light on the possible connection between the pure part of the metaphysics of Nature and the particular laws and empirical concepts of Nature that derive from it.[55] Notwithstanding the diversity of themes in this book, Schelling has one stable theme in mind: the ultimate conditions that make corporeal nature possible as a whole, and from this aim, he approaches the problem as 'a question of pursuing to its *first origins* the concept of matter itself.' (My emphasis. AA I/5: 208; p. 171).

However, unlike Kant, Schelling's deduction of the concept of matter does not start, as Kant did in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, with the postulation of the concept of forces in the outer sense. Kant argued that for the deduction of the concept of matter as an object of spatial experience, one has to infer a geometrical space, and in it, an infinite continuum of geometrical points whose existence could only be explained as the effect of the interaction of the two

[54] Metaphysics in general is, in the Critical corpus, a systematic presentation of all the pure a priori principles that conform to the division of the doctrines of nature and morals, so the systematic presentation of pure a priori principles or laws to which natural objects are subject is, according to Kant, metaphysics of nature.

[55] In *Kant's Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling's Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1979), G. Di Giovanni draws a comparison between the two philosophers' perspectives on the metaphysics of corporeal nature. He argues that in *Ideas*, Schelling proposes solutions for Kant's long-held issue of the transition from transcendental to particular principles of natural science, from metaphysics to physics.

opposite forces of attraction and repulsion, each of which fill each of the geometrical points through the exertion of influence on one another. (See figure $\varphi$ for the geometrical model). Framing his deductions first in a dynamical fashion, Kant defines forces within the dimension of possible experience of the outer sense, and understandably so, because dynamics demands that we abstract from all possible mathematical infinities and instead place the deductions in an existential space. (Cf. Ak 4: 502). With this geometrical landscape in mind, Kant starts by constructing matter as the movable in space, therefore conceiving the filling of space not as a substantial entity but as 'a particular moving force.' From this first dynamical condition, Kant then deduces the first of the forces as the 'expansive force', which extends all of its parts in the space towards infinity. (Cf. Ak 4: 498-99). If this force is not counteracted by an opposite force, then the former would expand with infinite velocity across the space and this infinite elasticity would be unfit to explain the relative densities we experience as filling the space. Therefore, the expansiveness demands an opposite force that 'would then decrease the space that the former strives to enlarge, in which case the latter would be called *compressing force*.' (Ak 4: 500, Cf. 4: 508-9). Furthermore, since the second force makes possible that the parts of the first force be pulled together into a smaller space, and also maintains the relative positions that bodies have with respect to one another, the second force is also conceived under the Newtonian characterisation of attractive force. From the interaction of these forces, Kant constructs the fundamental qualities of matter of elasticity (due to repulsion), weight (due to attraction), and density (due to both).

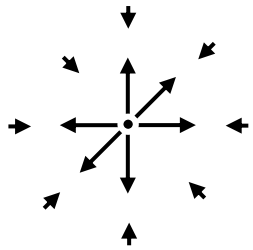

*Figure φ. The first force* 'streaming out in all directions from one central point'*—repulsion, would not be lingering in any point of empty space if an opposing force—attraction—did not limit and retard the former's expansion in order to give it* 'a finite velocity'. (AA I/7: 82; p. 17). *I rely on Schelling's interpretation in* Erster Entwurf *to draw attention to the parallelism with Kant. See also note 57 in this chapter.*

Schelling only in part agrees with Kant. In *Ideas* and *Von der Weltseele*, he by and large conceives matter as that which fills a 'particular space only through an interaction of opposing forces.' (AA I/6: 79, Cf. AA 5: 184; p. 143). But, at the same time, Schelling detected important presuppositions in a deduction that he thought should reach to ultimate principles, for in his view, Kant neither sought after the origin of these forces nor the metaphysical ground that makes them opposite. Indeed, for Kant forces were derivative concepts, only determinable by virtue of the experience of movement, which is a datum of experience. In other words, motive forces require the sense intuition of successive appearances in order to be able to infer their action: 'and such knowledge can be given only empirically.' (A207/B252; Cf. A220/B267ff.). For example, the thought that a body can resist forces is necessarily a posteriori because the representation of a body and a force impinging on it implies a contribution of perception and its possibility as a concept is determined by the pure concepts.[56]

In the strictest sense, the Schellingian programme demanded a different perspective from which a deduction could be achieved following from first principles, therefore, pointing towards something *higher*. This is most relevant because Schelling considers that 'matter insofar as it is thought of as merely filling space, is only the firm ground and basis [*Grund und Boden*] on which the edifice of Nature is first constructed [*aufgeführt*].' (AA I/5: 80; p. 19).

On the basis of these objections, in *Ideas* Schelling sets up the issue of the origin of matter from the intuiting pure subject of knowing, which put him closer to Fichte's transcendental derivation of the system of corporeal nature from a first and single principle in pure consciousness. Within the framework of the pure I, the deduction operated by the *Ich* starts from experience and ascends to the constituents of its phenomenon by discovering the conditions of its possibility. Although Schelling offers this purely ideal deduction of the opposition of forces in *Ideas*, (Cf. AA I/5: 214ff; p. 176ff), he presented a more sophisticated version in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, but this need not be relevant here.[57] Instead,

[56] In Newtonian mechanics, which Kant was attempting to defend by way of metaphysics, force is also real because it explains real motion.

[57] Schelling also offers a geometrical construction in the *System*. The transcendental deduction of forces is, he says, a procedure that relies on the concept of expansiveness as implying the concept of direction. (OA S. 172; p. 84). But since the operation remains in the dimension of a synthesis between the concepts of the understanding and sensibility, reflection represents force as indistinguishable from direction. (Cf. OA S. 172; p. 84). Direction, on the other hand, is an experiential determination [*Determination*] that by its own nature negates the absolute. (Cf. OA S. 171; p. 83). Outside of the limiting activity of the self, however, the forces are infinite and 'in infinity there are no directions'. In this sense, Schelling claims, not even in attempting to do away with all the possible moments of a trajectory in the construction of a material product, we leave reflection's fixation of the forces in terms of direction, for 'the negation of all direction is the absolute boundary, a mere *point*.' (OA S. 172; p. 84). Consequently, forces are fixed in the dimension of geometry,

what should be the focus of our attention is that Schelling, implicitly seeking a programme of ontological origins, is shifting from the opposition of mere forces to the mutual restriction of principles, a contrast that implies a quasi-metaphysical conception that will govern the entire notion of the whole of *visible* Nature. On this level, natural things are not just material substances that fill the space but finite products of the opposition of negative and positive *activities* [*entgegensetzte Thätigkeiten*], the former an infinite but limitable principle and the latter an illimitable but limiting one, both united necessarily in the product but presupposing the space of the transcendental mind. A further shift awaits us, though, one that has Nature as the *bond* where counteracting activities meet and animate the whole *Weltbau*.

Roughly a year after the publishing of *Ideas*, *Von der Weltseele* appeared with an ambitious programme, namely, the emergence of the edifice of Nature from the primordial opposition of activities, which was previously put forward in *Ideas*. But here is where the different incarnations of the opposite principles are developed. More specifically, in this work Schelling thinks that organisation, with its own pair of opposite universal principles, is the most immanent property of Nature and the reason why it should be considered as a *whole*.

Here again Schelling relies on the idea of a theoretically tacit common principle as the basis for the opposition. The title of the work itself is indicative that Schelling has this theoretically tacit principle in mind. In this respect, the editors of the Historisch-kritische Ausgabe have argued that, although Schelling's motivation for choosing the title *Of the World-Soul* is rather obscure, they see a plausible source of inspiration in Plato. In fact, the word World-Soul is used only one time in the whole work, and Schelling does not elaborate too much upon its meaning. The World-Soul was possibly, Schelling argues, how the ancients might have called this original principle that he construes as 'the idea of an organising principle, formative of the world as a system' which keeps the two opposite forces in unity and conflicting with each other. (AA I/6: 77).[58]

Thus, in *Of the World Soul* Schelling develops the emergence of Nature in processual layers of formation, all arising from this principle, which he claims, is inferred by the representation of two contending forces, one positive and one negative. Schelling endows

therefore undergoing a proper construction in Kant's sense. From the point of view of geometry, expansion, or the positive force of nature, is thus represented as a point, whereas the negative force 'will push back from all directions towards the one point.' (OA S. 172; p. 84).

[58] Already, in *Ideas*, Schelling had envisioned this principle as the world-soul or the living principle already thought of in bygone days, which the ancients believed permeated the entire world. (Cf. AA I/5: 99; p. 35).

these two forces with the mode of dynamism of the forces that fill the space and create matter for the senses, therefore, the *first* positive force of nature has the attribute of infinite expansiveness, as an impulse [*Impuls*] that, when disturbed by the negative second force, becomes productive of embodied forms. (AA I/6: 77). The positive force thus pushes forward as if it were attempting to draw a straight line, but the negative force's opposite tendency, which draws the positive into its magnetic influence [*als Anziehung*], coerces the linear movement of the first into *returning into itself* [*in sich selbst zurücklenkt*]. (Ibid).

With this original conflict transpiring from Nature's womb, an entire universal sphere of activity unfolds. The activity that results from the interaction is not merely motive because these are not mere pulling and pushing influences on existent objects, but the metaphysical principles that produce »finite quantities«, or more exactly, the processes that in the visible world we regard as discrete solid objects. (Ibid). Following the antithetical character of the deduction, Schelling determines the shapes and roles that the forces should take inside the world of Nature. So, if the positive force of nature is the common and immutable principle in all natural things, which keeps their permanence owing to the indestructibility of matter, then the negative principle is the changing factor that elicits the manifestation of things as sensible, the factor of their further multiplicity and divisibility, the source of disturbance. (Cf. Ibid 6: 206-8). The first principle is of course invisible but it lags behind the manifestations of its productivity, which is, as it were, crystalised by the negative force that is also invisible but manifested as a pulling force that can be *felt*. (Cf. Ibid 6: 78).

This primordial conflict, however, reproduces itself, and with this iteration, it branches within spheres of activity, which in turn create further spheres of activity that Schelling conceives as a hierarchy of physical complexity. The basic picture of this intricate compound represents the bottom of the edifice as made up by the polarity of forces, which in turn creates matter, the polarity of principles in matter, and the polarity in physical processes (and building upon the basic oppositions, we find a polarity of proxy principles in empirical layer, such as the atmosphere, electricity, magnetism, the air, organic and inorganic bodies, etc.) There are always positive and negative principles at work in all physical bodies, but the balance or disturbance of the equilibrium of the negative principles is what constitutes their properties. Matter itself is, on the one hand, a product of the opposite forces of attraction and repulsion, and on the other hand, the balance of negative principles at work in that finite

space, but the nature of these constitutive principles, for example, electricity, magnetism, air, water, oxygen, nitrogen, and others is not determined beyond their polarity and interaction. The inorganic and the organic are naturally opposed but, even though they are governed by the same principles and laws, the organic is determined by specific constitutive principles implied in the living processes, i.e., vital air, oxidation, intake of nitrogen, the balancing of negative principles and, as we shall see in the next chapter, in the immutable concept that lies at the basis of their sphere.

The universal lawfulness that may be derived from the doctrine of polarity in *Von der Weltseele* is one that sustains the perpetual becoming of phenomena through the hierarchies of polarities. But this becoming is established in terms of the disturbance and restoration of balance throughout different levels of formation. This clearly is a process that assumes a higher principle,[59] which we may assign hypothetically for now to Nature as an unconditioned whole. If we do, this principle is immanent to the totality, and lies in between the particular individual one and its limit, between absolute balance and yearned balance, and allows the emergence of natural products both organic and inorganic. In fact, Schelling says, the principle that maintains the opposition is 'absolutely one', and the opposition that follows is what *appears* within original limits, because without the limit, the phenomenal world would become for our sensible intuition [*unsre Anschauung*] an infinite abyss [*ein unendlich-leerer Raum*], a nothingness. (AA I/6: 102). In consonance with this argument, Schelling says that 'forces possess a striving to *equilibrate*, that is, to set themselves into a *minimal reci*procity,' but at the same time, if this equilibrium is not constantly destroyed, not only all planetary motion would vanish and the planetary system would collapse, also matter would not get a determinate form and qualities. (AA I/6: 86; p. 86; Cf. 6: 254).

In agreement with this interpretation, Schelling postulates a 'primitive movement', that is not simple motion, but a 'becoming' that arises in the process of *almost* attaining 'a dynamic balance [dynamisches Gleichgewicht]' of the material body. (6: 83). Under the light of the definition of dynamism established by Kant, Schelling's claim seems to be targeting the processual development that takes place outside the unconditioned, where mathematics may

[59] In discussing 'Schelling's natural philosophy is guided by the idea of an original natural principle.' (Krings, 1994, p. 143).

postulate their absolutes, and which Schelling seems to be deflecting from in this work.[60] This may be the reason why Schelling considers that the theory of nature has to presuppose as immediately true 'neither the principle of absolute homogeneity nor that of absolute heterogeneity', for in all matter, 'the truth lies in the union of the two.' (AA I/6: 86; p. 86).

A more sophisticated and organicist version of this conflict will be laid out in the *First Outline*, where the idea of metamorphosis animates an archetypal-themed organic nature, which, in the interpretation I have been carrying throughout this work, is a function of absolute identity. But this is the subject of the next chapter.

## [Chapter 2. Absolute identity as the condition of possibility of the living whole.]

In this chapter, we shall look at Schelling's concerns with the concept of organisation to isolate his conception of living organism and show that it is also relative to absolute identity. I propose that Schelling's concept of living organisation is formulated in similar terms as Kant did in his *Critique of Judgement*, even maintaining one of the requirements, which the latter set for something to be considered as an »organised being«, namely, to be a »whole«. Moreover, I argue that this concept of organisation is at work, although implicitly, in the *First Outline* and the *Introduction to the Outline*.

Schelling's reappraisal of the Kantian theory of biological organisation is essential to understand the directions in which he developed his philosophical approach to Nature, which put in a nutshell is a philosophy that makes the self-organisation of nature the origin of all existence. He unambiguously credits Kant with developing the leading theory of organisation but, at the same time, disparages him for confining the consideration of organisation to a mere thought, leaving undetermined the content of what makes organisation meaningful in Nature. (Cf. SW I/6: 5, 8). What Kant proposed was, from different angles, the inversion of what

[60] „Das Interesse der Naturwissenschaft ist, nichts Schrankenloses zuzulassen, keine Kraft als absolut, sondern jede derselben immer nur als die *negative ihrer Entgegengesetzten* anzusehen." (I/6: 80).

Schelling went on to submit as a philosophy of nature. The subject of our concerns though is organisation.

Let us begin by considering, although briefly, some of the distinctive theses that Schelling carefully picked up from the *Critique of Judgement*. Firstly, in §65 Kant talks about living beings as natural things whose form of being and behaviour seem to be organised according to purposes. These products of nature are like any other natural thing in that they are subject to mechanistic causality, which Kant explains as the kind of relation whereby some effect is immediately caused by an external factor, thus producing some modifications in motion or quantitative changes owing to mechanical properties of things. Yet, these other things seem to be endowed with an additional dimension, both untouched by mechanical causes and governed by some marginal causation that very much resembles the way a rational mind works, that is, acting in conformity with concepts. Following from this characterisation, Kant called these things 'natural purposes' [*Naturzwecke*].

And the question arises, why would Kant connect the concept of organisation with the concept of purpose? Kant thinks that having the »character« of a purpose implies a non-mediated self-referential relation: 'it must relate to itself in such a way that is both cause and effect of itself.' (KU, 5: 372). Furthermore, Kant appealed to this kind of causal connection to refer to a certain type of whole in which 'the possibility of its parts (as concerns both their existence and their form) must depend on their relation to the whole.' (Ak. 5: 373). This requirement was not enough, though, because artifacts and works of art can both meet this condition. Some other ingredient must make some natural products into natural purposes.

What artifacts, works of art, and organised beings have in common, then, is that they are wholes produced following a concept or a *form*, say, a qualitative variety of shape and colour that makes a purple leopard orchid that kind of flower. But the difference lies in that the former take their form from the mind of their designer, the latter have their form lying within themselves. More explicitly, the form that governs the connection of the parts of the organic whole must be ingrained in its own structure: 'the parts of the thing combine into the unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form.' (Ak. 5: 373). This second requirement is fundamental for Kant because he refused to see living beings as mere pieces of intelligent design, despite the fact that his critical philosophy made any philosophical discussion about their origin marginal and a 'stranger in science':

> 'No one has doubted the correctness of the principle which says that we must judge certain things in nature (organised beings) and their possibility in terms of the concept of final causes, even if we demand to use this principle only as a guide for observing these things so as to become acquainted with their character, without presuming to investigate their first origin.' (5:389).

In addition to the causality of purposes, which he called *nexus finalis* or *final causes*, Kant's third Critique narrowed the problem of causality to another type, which antagonizes the *nexus finalis*, namely, efficient causes or *nexus effectivus*. The latter, in making the cause and the effect external and *blind* to one another, is 'utterly contingent'. (5: 360; 381). This causality draws a linear series of countless members that, if it be possible to trace them regressively, there would be no chance of finding their *final origin or their unconditioned basis*. (5: 448). On the other hand, the causality based on purposes,[61] because it sets the parts of the whole in an unmediated relation to an end, sets the whole as an end, which again is its own form or concept as it is ingrained in the parts, and so the parts immediately express the form or concept of the whole. More importantly, since the existence of the parts is ruled by the form, and the form is the entire whole, in wholes that bear this type of causality 'nothing is gratuitous, purposeless, or to be attributed to a blind natural mechanism' (5: 376). Kant clarifies the notion of the [purposive] whole in these terms:

> "within itself thoroughly connected, that no part of it can be encroached upon without disturbing all the rest, nor adjusted without having previously determined for each part its place and influence on others; for, since there is nothing outside of it that could correct our judgement within it, the validity and use of each part depends on the relation in which it stands to the others within reason itself, and, as with the structure of an organized body, the purpose of any member can be derived only from the complete concept of the whole." (*Prolegomena*, 4: 263).

[61] For Kant purposiveness has two focal and connected senses, one is the condition of possibility for the construction of the order of ends [*die Ordnung der Zwecke*], which could be interpreted in terms of the form of a unity that requires mediation, and the other designates the relation of any being that acts in a way that is both cause and effect of itself. Only the latter is relevant for our present discussion.

In consonance with the transcendental programme of the previous two Critiques, Kant explains the use of teleological judgements—those concerned with the purposiveness of natural things—merely through the familiarity with the *form* of our rational mind, which sets off our practical actions on the basis of concepts. This also means that if non-human things appear to be purposive, we should find the reason for this in the form of the mind and abstain from predicating purposiveness objectively because we cannot prove it as really existing in things outside the human mind. (Cf. 5: 376). The principle of purposiveness, then, is useful for explaining things in a way that conform to our own purposive experience. Moreover, the sole possession of this concept does not give us any outreach insight into other things that might seem to act in the same way.

Seen under this light, Schelling only in part disagrees with the Kantian conception of organisation, and what he certainly takes issue with is Kant's one-sided approach that limits the objective reach of a science of organisation to the bounds of the human mind. Indeed, Schelling actually believes organisation should be a real property of biological life. At this point, we would want to pose the question about how one is to understand Schelling's conception of natural purposes.

To begin with, Schelling does not have a steady definition of biological organisms. While in the introduction of *Ideas* he made bold claims about the intrinsic purposiveness of biological organisms and challenged Kant's merely regulative function of the principles of organisation, in Book 2 of *Ideas*, and then in *Von der Weltseele*, he articulated their emergence in a strikingly naturalistic way, going as far as defining them as 'chemical processes' of a higher complexity, a claim that he maintained later on in the *First Outline* and then again in the *Universal Deduction of Physical Processes*. However, as we shall see, the characterisation of living organisms as chemical processes of higher order does not conflict with his concept of purposiveness. What is purposive is the structure of self-positing and unity of the organic whole, whereas the chemical process that constitutes its physical basis is an effect of an activity that allows contingency into organic formations.

Similarly, Schelling did not completely abandon Kant's concept of living organisation; instead, he developed a two-fold strategy that inverts the Kantian standpoint and rescues it from vacuous formalisms. One side of the strategy shifts the ontological status of organisation

by making it the essential property of Nature *in itself*, this, I claim, is done initially in the Introduction of the 1797 edition of *Ideas*. Once he established a *naturalistic* stance to read organisation into Nature, just as he defined it in *Ideas*, he then extrapolated it from the particularity and concreteness of the »natural product« to Nature as a universal whole, which consists of a scaffolding, or *Stufenfolge*, of spheres of activity that in turn reproduce the structure of the highest principle of organisation. (Cf. AA I/6: 172). The latter is the second aspect of the strategy, which is developed partly in *Von der Weltseele*, more cogently in *Erster Entwurf*, and with full force in the System of Identity. In my view, this seems to be his solution to the problem of the validity of the concept of organisation, for in this way Schelling could (1) promote the ontological import of the principle of organisation even above mechanical causality; and (2) he could construct a genuine organicist philosophy of nature. More importantly for my purposes, this naturalistic theory of organisation is compatible and hinges on the assumption of absolute identity.

It was in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* where Schelling first introduced his naturalistic interpretation of biological organisation. Generally shaped after Kant, he distinguishes organisation as a causal connection that reproduces itself in a kind of circular retrogression, hence, 'no organisation progresses *forward*, but is forever turning back always into *itself*.' (AA I/5: 93; p. 30; Cf. KU 5: 372). Additionally, this circularity is associated to the unity formed by self-reference, thus, being organised reproduces a self-referential unity that posits its own form of existence, so 'a product that exists *for itself* [*besteht* für sich selbst]' does not completely depend on external causes to reproduce its form of being. That 'its being [*Daseyn*] is dependent on no other being [*Daseyn*]', means then that, for example, the character of being a yellow butterfly does not depend *directly* on the physical conditions that affect the particular butterfly, so the reproduction of her shape, colour and type of reproduction are not the immediate effect of the temperature, atmospheric pressure, weather conditions, etc. This is why Schelling writes that, 'as soon as we enter the realm of *organic nature,* all mechanical linkage of cause and effect ceases for us.' (Ibid).

We can see now how entering into the domain of organic nature already assumes a realist stance, even though Schelling is still within the metaphysically modified framework of transcendental idealism. For example, in *Von der Weltseele*, he assures us that the original

opposition of forces is the germ from where the general organisation of the world springs, and this antithesis, Schelling explains, "is not capable of any empirical, but only a transcendental deduction." (AA I/6: 91). But we may want to argue now that his metaphysical approach to the grounding principle is why Schelling right away distances himself from the formal character that Kant ascribed to the kind of wholes produced by biological organisation: 'Every organic product carries the reason of its existence in *itself* for it is cause and effect of itself. No single part could *arise* except in this whole, and this whole itself consists only in the *interaction* of the parts.' (AA I/5: 94; p. 31). Schelling's insistence on this realistic stance gets a more straightforward tone when he tacitly objects Kant: 'the organism, however, is not mere appearance [*Erscheinung*], but is *itself* object […] subsisting through itself, in itself whole and indivisible.' (Ibid 5: 95; p. 31). In fact, this definition of organism reminds us of the concept of purposiveness that Kant established in the *Critique of Judgment*, and only regulatively ascribed to organic beings. We might want to ask at this point if Schelling is actually able to root purposiveness in organic beings themselves. In my view, he does.

Purposiveness is premised in Kant as the activity of an intelligence to act according to ends, but these ends, insofar as they are intelligible to the agent that, for this very reason, set them as causes of action, are also conceptual, therefore rational, in a word, *visible* both as causes and effects of the agent's action. To illustrate this notion, Kant memorably gave the example of someone that raises the intention of renting his property. (KU 5: 372). The representation of the possible income generated from renting the house is the effect, in this case also the end, of the intention of renting the house, which in turn is the cause of the intentional action. This is why it makes sense to talk about a circular causation: the concept is cause and effect of itself. (Cf. 5: 370). In the case of living beings, Kant cited the example of a tree that reproduces by means of seeds. (5: 371). The seed produces a tree, which in turn produces the seed that will further reproduce the tree. But an important notion is introduced in this example: the kernel of reproduction in living things is the species [*Gattung*], and this is what Schelling picks up and rearticulates as the purposiveness of Nature. In other words, if we take the species as a real concept embodying itself within a natural process, then we might discover that the parts, which are the real instantiations organised by the concept or species, are the matter of the concept whose form causes the parts to take in the form of the concept, while the effect is the form shaped into the parts. This is why Kant states that 'the parts of the

thing combine into a unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form.' (KU 5: 373). If the parts combine into a unity of reciprocity between form and matter, then Schelling, as we shall see below, is right in affirming the identity of both.

If transcendental idealism has succeeded in discovering a transcendental principle, i.e., purposiveness, which justifies our experience as a unity of functional relations organised onto an end, it has not explained satisfactorily, at least in Schelling's eyes, why this principle of purposiveness naturally attaches to Nature and living organisms beyond a mere predicate that informs natural things in a way amenable to our human mind. Similarly, this univocal determination does not explain why we ascribe this predicate to some things rather than others. And so, the question remains for Schelling:

> 'How the *representation* of purposive products outside me got *into me*, and how, *although it pertains to things only in relation to my understanding*, I am nevertheless compelled to think of this purposiveness as *actually outside me* and necessary. This question you have not answered.' (AA I/5: 98; p. 34).

As I have been arguing in this chapter, Schelling's answer to his own question is that purposiveness is really an attribute of Nature: 'Not only its form [*Form*] but its existence [*Daseyn*] is purposive. It could not organise itself without already being organised.' (AA I/5: 93-94; pp. 30-31). Schelling insists that Nature as a whole, and therefore, as *a system* and as an idea, is originally purposive and all its products inhere a purposiveness of their own. But how do we know this? Or put differently, how do we *enter into the realm of organic Nature*? The approach that I adopt to answer these questions is based on the principle that serves to reconstruct this research project. Accordingly, Schelling needs the assumption of absolute identity to bestow constitutive capacity to transcendental ideas, particularly, the ideas of purposiveness and of Nature as a whole. I explain.

Schelling does assign a kind of constitutive role to principles that in Kant's view were only regulative and logical.[62] But if these principles in the mind can be objective/constitutive of Nature, nothing impedes the ascription of such principles to Nature, and this is what Schelling does. Just as the mind—broadly construed, Nature has visible and invisible

[62] Something similar is argued by S. Gardner: '[Schelling's] *Naturphilosophie* is staked on the idea that the regulative construal of teleology provides no adequate basis for the thought about Nature.' (Gava 2016, p.23).

dimensions, or phenomenal and constitutive; this idea is what Schelling seems to argue further in *Von der Weltseele*. In other words, while phenomena are manifestations of the visible dimension elicited by the positive activity of Nature interacting with its opposite, the invisible, deeper ontological activities constitute its dynamic architectonic. As I explained in Part II, the two opposite dimensions of reality and ideality have the same common ground: absolute identity, which is the same common ground that lies in the pure I, the principle that rules Nature and philosophical knowledge the same. In a word, insight into the *transcendental* ideas amounts to having an insight into the *invisible* domain of Nature that constitutes its ontological physiology and is transpired into the phenomenal realm of visible Nature, which is compatible with biological sensibility. Because the idea of Nature is what comes from the absolute in the mind, whereby the ideal and the real are absolutely identical, it makes sense for Schelling to state the identity between the philosopher and Nature: 'So long as I myself am identical with nature, I understand what a living Nature is as well as I understand my own life.' (AA I/5: 100; p. 36).

This reconstruction of the consequences of assuming absolute identity in Schelling's own statements shall tally with Schelling's own methodological justification for why *ideas* belonging to Nature *enter* the human intellect, which is an epistemological approach that, like most Schellingian topics, he develops in the course of his work, and reaches perhaps the highest level of sophistication in the identity philosophy. Although borrowed from Kant as the method of construction, Schelling's realist commitments to the method of construction understandably led him to want to widen the scope of its possibilities to such an extent that, more than just a mathematical model of how pure intuition immediately posits the absolute compatibility of form and matter, or the universal and the particular, in one a priori exhibition as object, he seeks this kind of construction for all ideas that necessarily follow from absolute identity. This is why I think he is able to claim that:

> 'This absolute purposiveness of the whole of Nature is an Idea which we do not think arbitrarily but *necessarily*. We feel ourselves forced to relate every individual to such a purposiveness of the whole; where we find something in Nature that seems purposeless or quite contrary to purpose, we believe the whole scheme of things to be torn apart, or do not rest until the apparent refractoriness

to purpose is converted to purposiveness from another viewpoint.' (AA I/5: 106; p. 41)

We shall see Schelling's methodology of construction in Part IV, it should suffice to say for now that one aspect of Schelling's early conception of construction is maintained with respect to the philosophy of identity: the 'necessary union' of opposites that implies 'a primordial form' or 'primordial identity of the real and the ideal' that yields in turn a 'primordial duality'. (AA I/4: 135, 153-54; pp. 107, 120-21). Without downplaying the significative shift between the early account in which, according to my interpretation, absolute identity is tacit, duality is primordial, and unity is the result of synthesis, and the late account that inverts the scheme, the idea of a necessary unification in the acts of construction remains steady throughout. This unity is extremely relevant for Schelling because it traces the unconditioned, or the invisible, in visible nature.[63] With the method of tracing the unconditioned in essential unities, the *Naturphilosoph* is thus equipped to construct an archaeology of living beings. So, in *Of the Worldsoul*, the unification of opposite principles is the only way possible to construct the concept of animal life. (AA I/6: 187).

Life processes, however, presuppose the idea of an organising principle [*organisirenden Princips*] that, Schelling maintains, governs the primordial conflict of Nature. (AA I/6: 77). In this framework, Nature itself is a self-organising organisation and its visible manifestations can be traced in all natural phenomena by means of the processes that bring them about. (See diagram $\delta$ below for a schematic survey of the layers of construction of the animal process). This is why philosophy can show that all organic beings [*organischen Wesen*] are only a succession [*Stufenfolge*] formed through the progressive development of one and the same organisation. (Ibid, 6: 68). But life is a higher process that demands a level of organisation already in matter: 'there is a hierarchy [*Stufenfolge*] of life in Nature. Even in mere organised matter there is life, but a life of a more restricted kind.' (AA I/5: 99; p. 35).

[63] D. Nassar offers a different interpretation. In her book *The Romantic Absolute*, she considers that Schelling's method of construction in the philosophy of nature accounts for its most distinctive aspect, namely, that 'the construction of nature is not concerned with "inner sense" but with "outer sense," that is, with the construction of ideas that correspond to externally given natural phenomena.' My interpretation would render this separation of intuitions as a unity, which would align more closely to Schelling's argument about a higher unity between systems. (Nassar, 2013, p. 205).

What is then organisation in this context? Prima facie, the idea of a self-organising Nature implies a purposive structure. *Ideas* and *Von der Weltseele* contain several parallelisms regarding the idea of organisation—not surprisingly as Schelling wrote these works in the space of two years. But if in the Introduction to *Ideas* Schelling unabashedly ascribed purposiveness to Nature and to organic beings, closely reading Kant into his account (Vg., AA I/5: 95-97; p. 32-33), in *Weltseele* he seems to have changed his mind, stating that the purposiveness we see in organised beings is only a phenomenon that appears to our power of judgement [*der menschlichen Urtheilskraft*], rather than something in them, something resonating with Kant. (Cf. AA I/5: 95, p. 32; 6: 204). Why would Schelling change his view? What I would like to suggest is that although he demoted concrete biological organisms to random processes of formation, the organising process of nature whereby living things emerge retained the connotation of purposiveness.

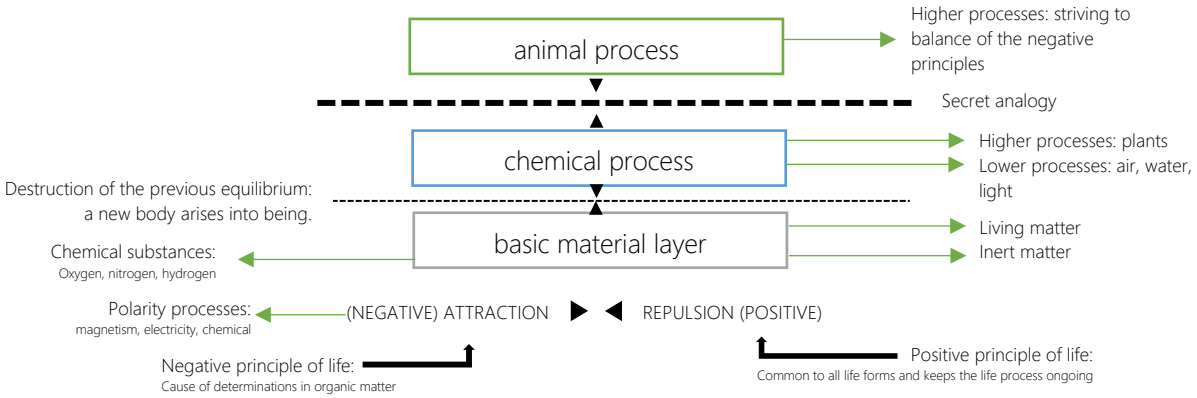


*Diagram 8. A very rough sketch of the hierarchy of material processes in* Von der Weltseele. *This diagram includes the basic structure of the emergence of animal matter within the »life process«. The structure can be reduced for illustrative reasons to forces, their balance and imbalance, corporeal basics, chemical substances, and higher order processes. Schelling thinks vegetation is nothing more than a higher-order chemical process, but also »the negative of the life process« due to their relationship with »vital air«. However, the plant is part of the most basic of the life processes. (Cf. AA I/6: 184-85).*

If we look at the parallelisms between the two works my suggestion seems to hold up. There are three of them that are especially relevant for my suggestion, plus they extend and complement Schelling's characterisation of organisation which accords well with the structure of identity.

*First*, Schelling conceives organisation as a self-referential process, so life consists in a kind of circulation [*Kreislauf*] that returns to itself; even more, this self-reference is *blind*. (AA I/5: 94; p. 30; 6: 69, 77, 204-5). This circulation is an organising process that makes up a whole [*ein Ganzes*] that branches out into spheres of activity. At the basis of this first primordial whole is a duality of principles in the opposite side of an identity that binds them together regardless of their conflicting activity—hence there is no life without struggle. Indeed, in the philosophy of nature the structure of opposition as a schema of all formation explains the process of individual production, precisely because they go against one another, i.e., the positive principle as impulse, and the negative principle breaking the impulse into multiple forms. As it stands, Nature is sketched as an encompassing system that comprehends subordinate systems that go from the greatest to the microscopic ones. (Cf. AA I/5: 117, p. 63). In *Weltseele*, Schelling construes this connection by means of the internal organisation of the general system that harbours 'the material principles' that 'already presuppose a world order [*Weltordnung*] within which they alone are possible.' (AA I/6: 172). Moreover, the system only makes sense when Nature is construed as 'a single Whole' that returns into itself as in a simultaneity of causes and effects, and this is why Schelling asserts that:

> 'if we unite these two extremes, the idea arises in us of a purposiveness of the whole; Nature becomes a circle which returns into itself, a self-enclosed system. The series of causes and effects ceases entirely, and there arises a reciprocal connection of *means* and *end;* neither could the individual become *real* without the whole, nor the whole without the individual.' (AA I/5: 105-6; pp. 40-41)[64]

*Second*, Schelling explains that organisation is the identity of form and matter, or in his own words: 'form and matter […] are originally and necessarily united.' (AA I/5: 95; p. 31). Schelling insists that in organised beings 'form and matter can never be separated,' moreover, that purposiveness arises when there is a reciprocal relation between form and matter, parts and whole, 'independence of mechanism, simultaneity of causes and effects;' (AA I/5: 105-6;

[64] Schelling makes this polarity statement in the context of his discussion about the compatibility between mechanism and purposiveness. Nonetheless, this is not inconsistent with my construal because in *Weltseele* the negative usually refers to the material principles that produce the multiplicity of effects in the spheres of activity, and these principles, seen in abstraction from the whole and the organising principle of life, which is the positive principle, are associated with the mechanism of nature. As we shall see, when we look at Nature from the point of view of the whole, then talking about mechanisms within the purposiveness of the whole makes sense.

pp. 40-41; Cf. 6: 188). This, however, can be reformulated as the simultaneity of form as a cause and of matter as its effect which is another way to say that form and matter are one and the same thing in organised things. However, if despite this identity, we are still differentiating the form as a cause and the matter as its effect, we might want to ask why they should be regarded as identical. The answer to this was stated above, the difference between matter and form is only nominal because no form or embodied concept can arise without its body. And thus, it is only in the analysis that we feel forced to make a difference. Moreover, the informing in the material process of the chemical level of higher order amounts to the process of individuation, whereby the indestructible form, as it were, instructs the process of the material into a figure and shape that is be incorporated in the material body:

> 'Daher folgt denn auch aus dem Begriff der Individualität, die doppelte Ansicht jeder Organisation, die als *idealisches* Ganzes die Ursache aller *Theile* (d. h. ihrer selbst als *realen* Ganzen), und als *reales* Ganzes (insofern sie *Theile* hat), die Ursache *ihrer selbst* als idealischen Ganzen ist, worin man dann ohne Mühe aufgestellte absolute Vereinigung des *Begriffs* und der *Erscheinung* (des Idealen und Realen) in jedem Naturproduct erkennt, und auf die endliche Bestimmung kommt, *daß jedes wahrhaft individuelle Wesen von sich selbst zugleich Wirkung und Ursache seye*.' (AA I/6: 208-9).

Now, from a higher point of view, that is, when the philosopher looks at the origin of the diversity of self-forming materials in the natural world, it arises the purposiveness of the whole: 'The ultimate goal of Nature in every organisation is the gradual individuation (what arises in this progressive individuation is incidental in relation to this general purpose of Nature.)' (AA I/6: 222; Cf. 6: 203). But this immediate purpose of Nature [*unmittelbare Zweck der Natur*] is an organising activity that spurs a gradual informing of matter towards infinity precisely because it is immediately one with Nature, which in this respect becomes the organising process whose absolute continuity is broken or crystalised, hence embodied forms obtain. Schelling frequently refers to the analogy with fluids to clarify this process because their essence is conceived phenomenally as not to consist in parts, from this it follows: 'in der absoluten Continuität, d.h. Nichtindividualität seiner Theile.' (Ibid 6: 207).

*Third*, we have the definition of organisation as a whole that arises after an intrinsic idea or *form*. It follows that if Nature is organisation, then Nature is an organised whole of this type; for example, in *Ideas*, Schelling derives from the inseparability of matter and form the organisation of the whole, hence, 'organisation […] is a *whole, its unity lies in itself*.' (AA I/5: 94; p. 31). Accordingly, the whole in organised beings becomes a process of integration or the synthesis enabled by the primordial unity or identity of the material substrate and the form of the whole in the parts. But the content of the integrating process is completely accidental.[65] The reason why, Schelling maintains, we see a unity of necessity and contingency in living beings is, actually, the unity of the necessary play of fundamental principles in the process and the content-specific integrations therein. (Cf. 6: 254). Just as the different gradient of colour in the human skin evolved from the effect of atmospheric conditions and other determinants of the specific geographical context, the necessity to perpetuate the life process gave rise to an organ like the skin. But if the integrating process unleashed by the chemical process is blind, there is a higher process in the animal body, Schelling contends, that is revealed 'by the structure according to an end' which can only be explained by a principle 'that lies outside the sphere of the chemical process and which is not part of this process itself.' (Ibid 6: 205).[66]

Schelling is, then, inviting us to lift above the chemical conditions and regard the whole from a second-order perspective. Here the ontological identity of the real and the ideal arises and explains the permanent and infinite process of material informing, whose basic dynamic infrastructure, Schelling maintains, reveals that »[informing-]matter is originally indestructible« and argues that 'in this *original indestructibility* [*ursprünglichen Unzestörbarkeit*] of matter hinges all *reality* [*Realität*] as much as it hinges on what is *insurmountable* [*Unüberwindliche*] in our *knowing* [*Erkenntniß*] (AA I/6: 206). But from a first-order perspective, this same unity between the positive principle of life, that impermanently fuels the informing-matter process, and the negative principles, that determine the content of the integrative

[65] Integration is none other than nutrition and growth which, Schelling writes, is achieved by the addition of dead matter—i.e., unorganised, to the process. „Es muß also in jedem Körper, in welchem die Natur einen organisirenden Proceß unterhält, ein *Ansatz* todter Masse geschehen können, *(Wachsthum, Enärhrung).* Dieser *Ansatz* aber ist nur *das begleitende Phänomen des Lebensprocesses,* nicht der *Lebensproceß selbst.*" (AA I/6: 203).

[66] Similarly, Kant states that when we judge some organisation by the beauty of its shape, form and qualities and attribute it to Nature's 'ability to structure itself with aesthetic purposiveness', our teleological judgement does not conflict with the fact that Nature did it 'freely, without following specific purposes but merely in accordance with chemical laws, by depositing the matter needed for this organisation.' (KU, 5: 350).

process, is in constant tension and this appears as the phenomena of decay and death. And the reason for this is only the *destruction*, or better said transformation, of the determinate side of the organised material. On this view, the *material basis of changeability* is the determining capacity of the negative principles to achieve or lose balance. But this is also to say that beings taking part in the process of life also are expressions of a concept that Schelling ascribes to them mediately as that which in them is the fixed, standstill *concept*, which is immediately one with the »sphere«.[67] (Cf. 6: 205). It is then because the *process* of unification of form (the positive or ideal principle) and matter (the negative or real principle) is never absolute that determinate beings arise—hence the idea of a 'Gleichegewicht hassenden, Natur'—and inversely, because the separation of matter and form is never absolute that the life process continues in ongoing individuation. (Cf. 6: 204). This is only possible also because *at the basis* of all particular spheres lies the principle of the 'absolute union of the changeable and the unchangeable.' (Ibid, 205)

With these characterisations in mind, we can see how Schelling adapts Kant's concept of purposiveness to his own theory of organisation. In his reformulation, ends are processual developments of the whole of nature branching out in the particular spheres of activity, or species [*Gattungen*], rather than goal-specific actions set by the particular organisms themselves. Indeed, for Schelling, the form of matter in an organic being is the concept of the species, that which in itself is whole and self-sufficient,[68] but since he, as we saw above, establishes an absolute identity of matter and form, then material substrates, at least in *living processes*, vegetation and animal bodies, are actually incarnated concepts: 'der erste Uebergang zur *Individualität* ist also *Formung* und *Gestaltung*.' (Ibid 6: 207). He is not inconsistent then when in *Ideas* he established that organised beings were purposive in themselves, for organised beings are the spheres which contain expressions of their own concepts.

Schelling generally agrees with Kant that there is an *appearance* (*Erscheinung*) of purposiveness in the expressions of the sphere, that is, in empirical organisms. However, he differs from Kant in that Schelling thinks the concepts that lie at their basis are purely subjective. Even though Kant did not deny that there is certain harmony in living beings, he attributed the seeming purposive basis of the form of the parts of an organised whole to the

[67] „das Unveränderliche wäre allein der *Begriff* (einer bestimmten Sphäre) den jene Erscheinungen continuirlich auszudrücken necessitirt sind." (6: 205).
[68] „*in sicht selbst Ganzes* und *Beschloßnes* (in seteres atque rotundum)" (6: 206).

understanding's need for rules that bring the contingent into a system of particular ends. (Cf. KU, 5: 365). For Schelling what is purposive is the invisible process behind the expression of particular beings but not that this butterfly outside my window is envisioning her own purposes. The only purpose set behind the existence of this butterfly outside my window is the individuation of the form «butterfly» in the physical processes of Nature. But this also means that the organisation we see in matter is not at all a random collision of atoms that inexplicably seems meaningful for our external and alien intelligence that perceives purposiveness where there is none. On the contrary, there is purposiveness in the whole of Nature because Nature is a continuous process of individuation; thus, one can say that even matter is a product of life of a primitive kind. (Cf. AA I/6: 190).

All the diversity of life in the entirety of creation lies in the unity of the positive principle that suffuses all beings and the negative principles that determine the individual. Under this light, the negative is the principle of individuation, for it determines particular spheres where concrete things of the same kind manifest, whereas the positive lies in the immeasurable absolute [*im Unermeßlichen, Absoluten*], therefore, outside the sphere of individuality [*der Sphäre der Individualität*]—because it is common to all spheres and all natural things the same. (Cf. AA I/6: 192).

In the next chapter we shall see how the metamorphosis of this life process leads Schelling to the ascension to absolute identity and 'this absolute purposiveness of the whole of Nature' is the process of becoming one with itself. (AA I/5: 106, p. 41).

## [Chapter 3. Absolute identity: the spur behind universal metamorphosis]

As I have been arguing so far, starting with *Ideas* of 1797, Schelling has employed a strategy that consists in expanding the scope of objective knowledge on the basis of a metaphysical principle that one has access to *in* the mind. This, I have been arguing, is because Schelling adopted a single unconditioned principle, absolute identity, as the ground of both self-consciousness and Nature; but even if the philosopher can access this principle in consciousness, and owing precisely to absolute identity, this ground transcends her. Proof of this is for Schelling the fact that ideas about nature, which are *true in themselves*, can be posited

in consciousness. From this it follows that, if they have »entered the mind of the philosopher« or she can »enter the realm of Nature«, then one can infer that the reason behind this »secret bond« is the unity that absolute identity issues between Nature and the mind, the real and the ideal, such that the unconditioned act of self-positing in consciousness is identical to the hypothetical self-positing of Nature. As Ian Hamilton Grant has put it, in *Von der Weltseele* 'the "positing" at issue is primitive, issuing *in* rather than *from* consciousness.' (Various, 2010, p. 64). To import this statement to the context of this dissertation, we may want to say that Schelling considered that human consciousness is not projecting its structure onto Nature but that there is an interior that both the I and Nature share. And despite the hypothetical status that Schelling attributed to this identity, as we shall see, by the end of the year 1800, the hypothetical aspect of Nature's self-positing will become real and autonomous with respect to the self-positing of consciousness.

Indeed, Schelling began to visualise more clearly the strategy of overcoming the standpoint of transcendental idealism in his course-book, *First Outline of a System of Nature-Philosophy* (*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*; AA I/7: 63-357; pp. 1-192), including the introduction to this outline, *Einleitung zur Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (*Introduction to the Outline for a System of Philosophy*; SW I/III: 269-326; pp. 193-232). This text, the *First Outline*, was printed for the winter semester of 1798/99. Schelling did not intend it to be a book for a larger audience, but only a manual for his lectures on *Naturphilosophie*, thus it contains ideas already suggested and/or developed in *Von der Weltseele* but often introduces new theses and adds more informed developments to refine and support Schelling's previous positions—which he further complements with the annotations to his manuscript.[69] But one clear goal seems to guide this text, namely, that Schelling wants to instil his students with the idea that there is an unconditional dimension in Nature from which a truly objective knowledge can profit.

[69] I will reference these annotations as HE (short for *Handexemplar*) immediately following the page of the AA edition. Since the Peterson translation adds them as footnotes, I will only add the letter 'n' after the page. The editors of the Historisch-kritische Ausgabe have found that Schelling started making annotations to his *First Outline* manuscript in the summer of 1799 and that he probably continued adding more of these after his lectures on *Naturphilosophie* in the course of a few semesters. (Cf. AA I/7: 37-40).

{3.1 Metamorphosis: the essential process behind organisation.}

After conjuring up in *Von der Weltseele* the idea of a purely active force that fuels Nature's potential for infinite forms, Schelling now feels in a position to invoke in Nature an unconditioned dimension, an aspect that *'cannot be sought in any individual "thing" nor in anything of which one can say that it "is." For what "is" only partakes of being and is only an individual form or kind of being* [*Form oder Art des Seyns*].' (AA I/7: 77; p. 13). From this statement, we can infer that Schelling is now focusing on that positive force which in *Weltseele* he described as *hiding* behind its manifestations. And in so doing, Schelling relocates the discussion from the framework of natural products and the conditions of their possibility to that activity whose limitation results in natural products, directly associating it with being itself [*Seyn selbst*]. That which is the principle of being of all natural things [*Naturdinge*] is, Schelling states, 'the unconditioned in Nature,' nothing that could be presented in finite products. (Ibid).

Probably, Schelling had arrived at this point owing to his insistence on keeping Nature's domain circumscribed as a field of research in its own right. That both the I and Nature share unconditioned dimensions follows from the absolute idealism that Schelling was aiming at early in 1800, which sees the unity of thinking and being in the ontological identity between these two aspects of one and the same absolute whole. From this it should be clear that reality must first be asserted for Nature but not merely as an inert substance but as the co-ego of the I; that is, really an activity with its own unconditional constitutional powers. This programme was reinforced when in 1800 Schelling published the *System of Transcendental Idealism* in which he established the transcendental dimension of Nature as concomitant with the idealism of the I. (Cf. OA I/2: 9; p. 5ff). Here Schelling regards both sciences, nature-philosophy and transcendental idealism, as opposites that are 'mutually necessary to each other' with respect to philosophy, whose focus is 'explaining the coincidence of these two.' (Ibid). What exactly does Schelling mean with the coincidence? One way to interpret Schelling's introductory passage in the 1800 *System* is to resort to the constant in Schelling's philosophy which amounts to the grounding dimension of the unconditioned, or absolute identity itself. Schelling himself seems to endorse this interpretation when he states that:

> 'the ground of identity between the absolutely subjective and the absolutely objective […] this higher thing itself can be neither subject nor object, nor both at once, but only the absolute identity, in which is no duality at all, and which, precisely because duality is the condition of all consciousness, can never attain thereto.' (OA I/2: 290; p. 208-209).

Thus, if one looks at the unconditioned from the standpoint of intelligence in the pure I, then Nature is an objectification of human intelligence and the former's lawful organisation will reflect the organisation of the I. Conversely, if one takes the standpoint of nature-philosophy in the opposite direction, then as much as these two sciences are opposite, one may conclude that Nature has an unconditioned dimension which makes it an intelligence in its own right, that is to say, when Nature 'become[s] wholly an object to herself […] it is what we call reason, whereby Nature first completely returns into herself.' (Ibid, p. 6). In this respect, the unconditioned in both Nature and humankind is identical, but beyond absolute identity as the keystone of the system, that is, in the deduced structure, the practical and content-specific results of the two sciences are different in terms of language and goals. From the standpoint of transcendental idealism, then, Nature would result in a teleological system whereby she would be rendered as intelligent and conscious, with a structural disposition to harbour the highest of human goals. (Cf. Ibid, pp. 12, 207). From the perspective of nature-philosophy, Nature should be treated by the nature-philosopher as the transcendental philosopher treats the I, in a word, as having an unconditioned dimension. This dimension is described here again as having a self-referential character because it goes through the cycle of returning to itself.

This return is key and is posited again and with more explanatory detail in Schelling's 1799 workbook, the *First Outline*. Treating Nature as the co-ego of the I requires that Nature too issues her own limiting activity, which constitutes an ongoing primordial duality from which an entire system of finitude arises. It is precisely this system what *Naturphilosoph* can target in order to map out the unconditioned in it. Moreover, since Nature is infinitely active, 'it must present itself by means of finite products,' which also means that 'Nature must return into itself through an endless circulation.' (AA I/7: 107; p. 42). Schelling returns to one of the main premises of *Von der Weltseele*, namely, that natural products ensue from pure positive

activity. Moreover, Schelling seems to retrace the argument back to the unconditioned, for if there is self-referential activity in Nature, then the unconditioned belongs to it. Hence, the *Erster Entwurf* showcases Nature as an autonomous productive being, its own creative agent, which in turn implies a conflict of opposite principles. Indeed, when Schelling thinks that Nature's unconditionedness can be warranted, he is attempting to prove that Nature's 'motive principles' are self-given and that her activity is a perpetual renovation of herself despite the moments of decay in her own system of products. Not surprisingly, when Schelling is able to ascribe unconditionedness to Nature, a self-referential activity or duplicity ensues and with it, the universal metamorphosis of the universal organism's original duplicity turns into the visible universe of multifarious natural forms. Further, in the handwritten notes that Schelling added to the *Entwurf*, he reinforces this idea by logging that 'Nature has its reality by virtue of itself—it is its own product—a whole, self-organising, and organised by itself.' (AA I/7: 276, p. 17n.).

The line of argument that follows from ascribing a self-referential activity to Nature invokes a foundational aspect. This aspect maintains the struggling duality of principles from which Nature and all its fundamental laws are something that emerges out of and within itself. Both the autonomy and autarchy of Nature are principles 'contained in the proposition: *Nature has unconditioned reality*.' (Ibid 7: 81; p. 17). More specifically, Schelling wants to show that Nature is autochthonously a self-positing activity that necessarily unfolds between the opposition of a first positive activity, or pure productivity, and a second negative, or inhibiting activity, whose limiting interaction resolves the imponderable productivity of Nature into the infinite diversification of its inhibited activity. Following the same logic behind the construction of matter from the opposition of forces, Schelling surmises that, if there is »real activity« in the visible world, then it must have been yielded by the limitation of pure activity; but for products to crystallise and, as it were, fall from the former, the limiting activity must be instead a tendency that limits by degrees, something »retarding« rather than cancelling or purely limiting, so that visible nature, or the absolute product, manifests 'particular stages of development.' (Cf. AA I/7: 67, 101; p. 5, 35). With the deduction of a play of *tendencies* that maintain a kind of tension, we now may turn to the idea of metamorphosis, for within it we shall find absolute identity as its keystone principle.

In line with the scheme of struggling activities, Schelling goes on to find that the abstract notion of force he developed in *Von der Weltseele* is not sufficient to account for the construction of evolving spheres of productive organisation in Nature. Instead, Schelling now postulates an »absolute product«, that is, a hypothetical envisioning of an 'infinity of individual products', all of them *visible*, that if it be possible to take them all together, *in experience*, they would amount to an absolute original model, but since, Schelling adds an 'absolute product nowhere exists (but always *becomes*, and so is nothing fixed),' one has to deduce the idea of »an approximation to the Absolute« to explain the becoming of visible Nature through all the diversity of organisms, and one must add, the layers of basic material construction that lays behind the approximation. More importantly, seen from the perspective of particularity, where organisms arise, each individual product 'departs infinitely from the ideal.' (AA I/7: 112-3; pp. 49-50). Schelling adds in an annotation that this departure could be explained by the original limitation of the original productivity at one point [*Hemmungspunkt*], but being infinite productivity as it is in herself, 'Nature fought against this point, raised it to product' thus cancelling it as inhibition-point to further arise as another point. (AA I/7: 112, HE: 296; p. 49n). This why, Schelling speculates, 'one product contain[s] the *ground* [*Grund*] of the subsequent one.' (Ibid.) And if this could be proven empirically, then one could view all organisms as 'various developments of one and the same [universal] organism.' (Ibid; p. 50n).

From this picture of an organic natural evolution, one cannot resist the thought that, in the *Entwurf*, Schelling has adopted the essence of Goethe's conception of organic developmental processes whose drive is propelled by their will to identify, through model-stages, with the universal archetype [*Urbild*]. Schelling himself offers some evidence for this claim. In a letter to Goethe from January 26, 1801, Schelling writes,

> 'Your presentation of the metamorphosis of plants has proven indispensable to me for understanding the emergence of all organic beings, and the inner identity of all organic forms amongst themselves and with the earth. . . . The organic was never *created* but has always *existed* [war immer *schon da*]' (AA III/2: 305).[70]

[70] Quoted in D. Nassar (2013, p. 193) and translated by her.

In several ways one can see that Goethe's influence on the *First Outline* is palpable. His early scientific theories are displayed throughout Schelling's text[71], most remarkably, the notion that Nature is a kind of self-creative agent that transforms herself endlessly in a process of metamorphosis. The idea that nature is an organism in metamorphosis was already shaped by Schelling in his *Von der Weltseele* of 1798, where he describes organic nature as a graduated series of production of beings progressively evolving from one and the same organised whole. (AA I/6: 68).[72] It is often remarked that *Von der Weltseele* impressed Goethe; so much so that he recommended Schelling to join the University of Jena, and later invited him to work on experiments together. D. Nassar has convincingly argued that it was Goethe, during this visit that Schelling paid him in his Weimer home in May of 1798, who pushed Schelling to go beyond the idealistic purview and turn to Nature's own fundamental principles. (Nassar, 2010b, pp. 310-11). While I agree with Nassar's reading, it would be important to mention that, according to my line of argumentation in this thesis, it was unproblematic for Schelling to transition to the point of view of Nature and grant it her own real sphere of activity. More specifically, because Schelling never conceived the domain of the in-itself, or the unconditioned, as a dead substance or as a fictitious transcendence, he could clearly see a purely active dimension in Nature. And also, because absolute identity was for him, at least in his transcendental years, a postulation, thus something that theoretical philosophy, with its reflective-dividing tendency, could treat only problematically, he could see that it was conceived as a principle with a foot in the mind, and, possibly, with another in Nature. Moreover, if absolute identity was to be postulated at the basis of Nature's productivity, as Schelling does in the *Erster Entwurf*, then, according to the structure of the first principle, a duplicity must follow.

It is true that the origin of this duplicity in *Von der Weltseele* is placed in the human spirit. Here Schelling recommends that the theory of Nature (*Naturlehre*), which only deals with natural phenomena, merely postulate the primitive antithesis since it is the task of

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[71] Schelling's considerations about organic beings with respect to their sexuality, growth and reproduction are based on Goethe's theories and he expressly cites Goethe's theory of optics, including the division of colours and the polarity of prismatic phenomena in the *First Division* (AA I/7: 95, EH: 283; p. 30), and his theory of the metamorphosis of plants in the *Third Division* (Ibid, 7: 191; p. 125). In an essay devoted to show the significant influence of Goethe on Schelling's idea of nature, Dalia Nassar notes that Schelling plainly appropriates Goethe's understanding of Nature as metamorphosis, which, she contends, 'enables Schelling to put forward a theory of nature as self-productive and independent of the mind.' (Nassar, 2010, pp. 307, 310).

[72] „Es wäre wenigstens *Ein* Schritt zu jener Erklärung gethan, wenn man zeigen konnte, daß die Stufenfolge aller organischen Wesen durch allmählige Entwicklung Einer und derselben Organisation sich gebildet habe." (Ibid).

transcendental philosophy to work out a deduction from the opposite activities of the transcendental mind: „Ihr Ursprung ist in der ursprünglichen Duplicität unsers Geistes zu suchen, der nur aus entgegengesetzten Thätigkeiten ein endliches Produkt construirt." (AA I/6: 91). However, according to the line of interpretation I have been suggesting, for Schelling Nature does not exist in function of the mind. Instead, it is because both Nature and spirit share the same structure that we can postulate principles for Nature that, due to methodological concerns, are first sought in the mind.

But now we may want to raise the question of how exactly Goethe influenced Schelling's idea of Nature. One could argue that Schelling's *Weltseele* was for Goethe a clear indication that the young philosopher was already overstepping the boundaries of the transcendental deduction. In a note in his personal notebook of the year 1798, Goethe wrote: „In der Naturwissenschaft fand ich manches zu denken, zu beschauen und zu thun. *Schellings Weltseele* beschäftige unser höchstes Geistesvermögen. Wir sahen sie nun in der ewigen Metamorphose der Außenwelt abermals verkörpert." (In Editorischer Bericht, AA I/6: 28.) Schelling would just need to find a new method to let Nature speak her truth.

This seems to be what Schelling intended to do. Soon after publishing the *Weltseele* and benefiting from meetings and letter exchanges with Goethe, Schelling went on to compose the *Erster Entwurf*. In this coursebook, he lays out a theory derived from Nature's own point of view, that is, one that is derived from absolute identity's ability to create an imbalance with itself in more primitive spheres of activity, these spheres being the strata of organic and inorganic formation. At least in the *First Outline*, the particular modes of organic and inorganic Nature are opposite from one of view and identical from another. According to the former, organic and inorganic are opposite owing to a *theoretical* determination; for example, when, from an empirical perspective, an agent divides herself from *reality* and opposes to it as *a self-evidently organic I* in order to determine it as a *not-I*, in order words, as something that cannot be organic due to x, y, z, which are present in the I (Cf. AA I/7: 171; p. 105). According to the latter view, organic and inorganic are only continuous stages in the processual development of the whole which can be possible if one sees this whole as an absolute union that keeps the two opposites together; Schelling argues this idea in a subsequent essay, where he notes that: 'organic Nature is nothing other than the inorganic that repeats itself in the higher power [*Potenz*].' (SW I/4: 4). Thus, the inorganic is a stage of formation that is described, in a similar

fashion to *Weltseele*, as interaction of forces, processual polarity (magnetic, electrical, chemical), and chemical intussusception, which lays out the dynamical infrastructure from which the organic builds up. Or in Schelling's words: 'all grounds of explanation of the organism must already lie in inorganic Nature.' (Ibid).

Let us now focus more specifically on the idea of organism that arises from the theory of metamorphosis. In this theory, Goethe's imprint is more evident as one finds that the principle that pumps the productivity of Nature is what Goethe first found to be behind the general growth and reproduction of plants, which he attributed to a general principle of metamorphosis. What was this principle in Goethe's first studies on plants?

In his journey to Italy (1786-88) Goethe first formulated the idea of a primeval unity underlying all plants, the *Urpflanze*. This *archetypal plant* would explain that we can group together all the vast diversity of plants under one recognisable kingdom, for how else, he asks, 'could I recognize that this or that form *was* a plant if all were not built upon the same basic model?' (quoted in Goethe & Miller, 2009, p. xvii). Interestingly, Goethe did not consider this model as a mere abstraction or as a transcending idea somehow governing the life of the plants; instead, he conceived it as a principle immanent to living plants, something like 'the secret of plant generation and structure' (quoted in Nassar, 2010b, p. 308). This principle governs from within, driving plants' growth and general development as in a progression of stages; yet it goes beyond the concrete individual as it drives reproduction continually and without gaps, thus securing the production of future plants. In fact, Goethe saw this progression in function of a general form represented by the particular leaf in its countless modifications, for it was in this organ that he saw 'the true Proteus who can hide or reveal himself in all vegetal forms. From first to last, the plant is nothing but leaf.' (In Goethe & Miller, 2009, p. xvii).

In his seminal scientific essay, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, Goethe went on to develop these insights and expound, again through the example of plant development, 'the laws of metamorphosis', which he raised as a universal process, 'by which Nature produces one part through another, creating a great variety of forms through the modification of a single organ.' (Ibid, pp. 5-6). In other words, metamorphosis is nature's own rule of self-generation, the real *Weltseele*.

How did Goethe come to realise that Nature is itself metamorphosis? The concept of metamorphosis was certainly not new. It was usually applied to describe extreme transformations in Nature like that of butterflies and frogs, but, as G. L. Miller notes, by extending this process to the formation of plants, Goethe was suggesting the existence of a universal process in organic nature. (Cf. Ibid, p. xix).

Goethe started by exemplifying this universal process in the general changes carried out by the plant. According to him, the plant expresses its vitality through two processes: growth and reproduction. Growth is a kind of reproduction that develops in a successive sequence of individual developments in the stem that go from node to node and from leaf to leaf, whereas reproduction often occurs rapidly and simultaneously in producing flowers and fruits. Goethe claimed that the two powers behind both processes are closely related because they were two manifestations of one and the same activity, i.e., expansion and contraction. Thus, successive reproduction is an expansive development that visibly occurs in the shooting of the stem through intervals between the nodes, and the sprouting of the leaves and branches; then during the blossoming of the plant, an opposite contractive development occurs in which growth concentrates around the production of cumulative organs in the form of flowers and fruits. (Cf. Ibid §§113-114). Hence, the vitality behind plant growth and reproduction is a principle which, by means of two opposite forces of expansion and contraction, guides one and the same organ, the *Urpflanze*, through a series of transformations until a goal is attained, namely, the perpetual dissemination and commencement of the organ. This is why, notwithstanding the exuberant richness of shapes and functions different plants present at different stages, Goethe presupposes one and the same organ, the *Urpflanze*, as that which develops while taking on different shapes and roles throughout reproduction. In Goethe's words:

> 'Whether the plant grows vegetatively, or flowers and bears fruit, the same organs fulfil nature's laws throughout, although with different functions and often under different guises. The organ that expanded on the stem as a leaf, assuming a variety of forms, is the same organ that now contracts in the calyx, expands again in the petal, contracts in the reproductive apparatus, only to expand finally as the fruit." (Ibid, §115)

In other words, for Goethe the whole developmental process of plants develops from one essential organ: the leaf (Cf. §119), but the leaf in its multifarious physical manifestations in turn obeys to a law, the archetypal principle, which possesses 'an inner necessity and truth' and is applicable to the invention of endless particular plants, whether the inventor is Nature or the human imagination. (Cf. §103). This means that the human understanding is able to grasp the 'inner essence' of the plant, the *Urpflanze*, which is identical and remains as a driving force throughout the manifoldness of form in outer appearance and the different stages of growth and reproduction, both in concrete plants as much as in possible plants, that is, in the kingdom of plants and in human imagination. (Cf. §60, 67). That this inner essence prompts apparent change is proven by the many forms and functions that reproduce the same model in multiple manifestations. But this is nothing more than the self-expression of Nature within the 'alternation of expansion and contraction' in the steps of growth and reproduction of plants. (Ibid, §73). With this, Goethe thinks he has managed to unite identity in difference in one and the same process, in one and the same plant, and ascending, in one and the same species, kingdom, and ultimately in all organic nature. More importantly, Goethe saw in this primal model a law of nature that should be 'applicable to all other living organisms' across organic nature. (In Goethe & Miller, 2009, p. 104).

From this it follows that Goethe's concept of metamorphosis does not merely describe change in an accidental series of steps; rather, it explains change in function of an essential unity that is the cause and the purpose of change. The steps of reproduction amount to this alternating power while the whole series of steps explains how 'nature steadfastly does its eternal work of propagating vegetation by two genders.' (§73). Thus, we can speak of this unity as purposive, for as much as it instantiates itself in a concrete organ that goes through changes—the seed, the leaf, the flower, the fruit, and again the seed, including various the intermediate steps—it also has an end, which is to instantiate itself again in the next generation of plants by means of the cycle of seed to seed through sexual propagation: 'Nature precludes the possibility of growth in endless stages, for it wants to hasten toward its goal by forming seeds.' (§106).

Goethe explained this circuitry of purpose in a series of manuscripts on morphology composed circa 1794: *Outline for a General Introduction of Comparative Anatomy, Commencing with Osteology, Observation on Morphology in General, and Studies for a Physiology of Plants*. In the

*Outline*, for example, Goethe declares that 'we conceive of the animal individual animal as a small world, existing for its own sake and its own means. Every creature is its own reason to be.' (Goethe, 1988, p. 121). Similarly, in these texts he promotes the idea that animals and insects are in a developmental process that makes reproduction possible when the individual is complete, so the faculties, activities and tasks develop in function of the final goal of reproduction through the sexes. With these investigations, Goethe not only coined the term »morphology«, he also founded this discipline as a scientific field. In these texts, Goethe extrapolates his findings from plants to the field of forms in the organic world. (Cite R. Richards). By looking into 'the anatomy of all living beings' and 'eliminating all that is arbitrary,' this new discipline expected to lay down the principles that underlie 'the structured form and the formation and transformation of organic bodies.' (Goethe, 1988, p. 57). With his morphological studies, Goethe advocated a unity between the great variety of forms and functions and the principles that guide them, or in his words, principles that secure, in the endless diversity of changes, 'a certain consistency which is partly universal and partly specific.' (Ibid). Accordingly, in morphology the researcher focuses on the structure of organic forms because what makes an organic being possible is precisely its structure. Inferred from this general and common structure, an archetype can be thought as the scope of organisation of fundamental parts in countless combinations; so, despite the great variety of forms, the structure is a 'unified whole' of singular variations. (Cf. Ibid, pp. 58-59, 120-21). More importantly, what keeps this structure together is the activity we call »life«. Hence, activity and physical structure are intertwined together and separable only in our imagination; and so, the researcher in morphology follows the form throughout development to detect the unchanging parts, after all: 'many varieties of form arise because one [fundamental] part or the other outweighs the rest in importance.' (Ibid. p. 120). There is an unchanging ground consistent in its parts, a kind of versatile archetype whose stability allows the researcher to follow 'this Proteus [that] never slips from our grasp.' (Ibid, p. 122).

It is possible that Schelling got a hold of any of these texts, and/or Goethe transmitted these ideas to him during his first visit of May 1798. Be it as it may, it is apparent that both philosophers shared some important theoretical points and that Schelling was already, as it were, primed for a more naturalistic approach, but not naturalistic in a Spinozist way, instead,

both Goethe and Schelling were invested in letting nature reveal the secrets of her own intelligent activity.

Thus, the Goethean principles that were picked up by Schelling and laid down in the *First Outline*—intelligent activity, the notion of archetype, the process of metamorphosis unleashed and patterned by the double action of expansion and contraction—were fundamental aspects of his explanation of »organic nature« in the lead-up to the point of view of Nature as a whole and then as absolute identity. Let us see how Schelling presents these principles to give shape to organic nature.

{3.2. Metamorphosis as a function of the archetype: absolute identity.}

Schelling's adoption of Goethe's theory of metamorphosis is fundamental in my interpretation, for it explains why, in nature-philosophy, it is viable to claim that living beings are metaphysical functions of absolute identity, that is, approximations to the archetype [*Urbild*], and incomplete or imperfect *copies* of the original organism [*Urorganismus*]. This interpretation is not far from Schelling's own theses, for he thought that 'individual products can only be seen as abortive attempts to represent the Absolute,' and as such, only *appearances* [*Scheinproducte*], finite phenomena. (AA I/7: 106, HE: 296, 80, 83; p. 41n, 16, 18). With this concept, Schelling seems to want to explain why products emerge in Nature and why Nature is succession or becoming; the answer seems to turn this idea of succession into a striving moved by something that is itself not part of the succession. This thesis had already been explored by Schelling. In *Von der Weltseele*, while alluding to Goethe's theory of metamorphosis, he conjectures about the prospect of finding a theory that could show that the succession of organic beings is but 'a progressive development of one and the same organisation.' (AA I/6: 68). A bit later, in the *First Outline*, taking stock from the Goethe's theories, Schelling finally seems to realise that processes, which kick off from basic material polarities, lead to formations in stages that are spurred by and towards the same *form*, thus, drawing the same circle he has been ascribing to organisation, that is, organic formations that depart from a model to approximate the same model in formative stages. And, as long as we

consider it *blind* or *unconscious*, this approximative striving could be then considered purposive.

Now all individual strivings or actions [*Actionen*][73] are explained in virtue of the universal striving, by virtue of which all of them are, Schelling states, 'presented collectively, *striv[ing] towards one and the same product*; for all natural activity [*Naturthätigkeit*] aims toward an absolute product.' (AA I/7: 88; p. 24). Thus, an idea of an unconditioned whole must be presupposed to serve as the background whereby a universal metamorphosis is posited. (Ibid 7: 81; p. 16). However, this absolute product is not yet absolute identity *in itself*, but only the hypothesis of the universal organism or the model towards which the striving aspires. And as I will argue below, absolute identity in itself must be presupposed as the ground and, as it were, the locus of deviation or departure of forms towards the archetype, for if there was not already a kernel of the model in each one of the stages of activity, then the deviation from it could not be explained. With this mediated identity one may thus argue something similar to what we deduced in the previous chapter, namely, that in between the one and its limiting opposite a process takes place. We could illustrate this idea by resorting to Schelling's early principle of absolute identity A = A, and add that in between the model as ground and the model as goal, the process of approximation drives a structural circle whereby A is cause and effect of A. Schelling has something similar in mind when in the *First Outline* he states that:

> 'The opposites fall in the *interior* of the universe, but all of these opposites are still only various forms into which the one primal opposition, extending itself in infinite branches through the whole of Nature, transforms itself—and so the universe is, in its absolute identity, only the product of *one* absolute duplicity. We have to think the most original state of Nature as a state of universal identity and homogeneity (as a universal sleep of Nature, so to speak). (AA I/7: 228-29; p. 157).

[73] Peterson translates this term as 'actants'. Schelling defined them as simple, ideal factors of matter that produce an 'original figure.' He resorts to this concept to explain the emergence of qualities in natural products. (AA I/7: 67, 68, 86, 94). This is a highly obscure concept that Schelling did not maintain going forward. It does not even explain the relation between the copy and the archetype in the stages of formation, therefore, I will not include it in my discussions.

Thus, the »absolute product« is a hypothetical system, or the backdrop that lurks behind the *visible* manifestations or individuations of the *Urbild*.[74] With this idea of hypothesis I mean that Schelling is not yet in the metaphysical space of absolute identity. Schelling thus posits the universal becoming as the locus where 'absolute activity exhausts itself', in other words, the space between A and A, where empirical production is set in motion. (AA I/7: 81; p. 16). Schelling shapes this same argument by resorting to the notion of dynamics that we discussed earlier regarding the Kantian construction of matter, that is, the constructing of an endless process without appealing to absolute notions. In this respect, Schelling notes: 'Since everything in Nature—or rather, here just that absolute product— is conceived continually *in becoming*, then it will neither be able to achieve absolute fluidity nor absolute non-fluidity.' (7: 92; p. 28). The same could be expressed in terms of any other pair of opposites. What is important to keep in mind at this moment is that this becoming 'will furnish the drama of the struggle between the form and the formless' or the coming into being of an organised body and the relative dissolution of the embodied form. (Ibid). This struggle is again the 'infinite process of *formation*' that is brought about by the fundamental opposition of activities, the purely productive and the inhibiting one. (Cf. 7: 112; p. 49). It is important to note, however, that neither of these forces is by itself productivity/expansiveness, or inhibiting force/contraction, but mutually determine each other as such. But beyond a mere interaction of forces, Schelling seems to give the idea that inhibition means that the original and 'unsurmountable' identity of the universal productivity is retarded, and this unreachability of the absolute identity is the requirement for it to be active in its own developmental reproduction. (Ibid, 7: 67; p. 5).

After laying out these ideas about absolute identity as an archetype, we are perhaps anticipating what Schelling saw subsequently when he wrote and published the *Introduction to the Outline*, where he confirms that 'Nature, insofar as it is *only* pure productivity, is pure identity, and there is absolutely nothing in it capable of being distinguished. In order for anything to be distinguished in it, its identity must be cancelled. (SW I/III: 287-88; p. 204). But this cancelation, or »diremption«, must originate from Nature itself. (Ibid, p. 205). Schelling's resolve in this introduction seems to come down to his conviction that the philosophy of

[74] In this respect, Schelling says: 'The original productivity of nature disappears behind the product. For us the product must disappear behind the productivity.' (AA I/7: 79; p. 15).

Nature should ascribe Nature with the self-referential structure that we have been observing throughout the present study, but with an important note, namely, this time Schelling is ready to raise Nature fully to the form of intelligence: 'Nature must originally be an object to itself.' Indeed, Nature is blind and unconscious productivity. (Ibid III: 271; p. 193).

Again, this new conquered quasi-metaphysical dimension is not in conflict with the idea that Nature as a whole is an organism, for being an organism is again a process of blind or unconscious self-reference that becomes fertile in its own conflict with itself. Indeed, in *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes oder der Kategorien der Physik* (1800),[75] Schelling declared that 'organic nature is nothing other than the inorganic that repeats itself in the higher potency [*Potenz*].' (SW I/4: 4). This statement transpires a formula of potentiation that he applies to resolve the problem of the emergence of individual organisms through the construction of matter without ever having to cross over to the idealism of the I for this quest, for the most essential task of Nature-Philosophy is the construction of matter from Nature itself. (SW I/4: 3). In fact, the proof itself will be maintained subsequently in the *Allgemeine Deduktion*, that matter is in itself a self-constructing continuum reproducing different stages of complexity that attempt to mimic the universal organism. The *First Outline* is not far from this view of Nature, for if it becomes, then it is metamorphosis, and only an organic whole has such a productive becoming. For example, Schelling admits that 'The *whole* of Nature, not just a *part* of it, should be equivalent to an ever-*becoming* product. Nature as a whole must be conceived in constant formation, and everything must engage in that universal process of formation.' (AA I/7: 93; p. 28).

Yet, *Naturphilosophie* undertakes this task of intuiting the whole but only limitedly because the finite perspective of the *Naturforscherin* constrains her to an angle, a section, and a fixation of that which is in a never-ending process of becoming. We would need to become the absolute itself to be able to extract, as in a dynamic snapshot, the infinite number of points that constitute the continuum of stages in which the absolute product resolves itself. Moreover, to see how the individual processes and the individuals themselves evolve in an innumerable series of stages towards the universal archetype of Nature is a task 'that exceeds all finite forces and which in Nature itself could only be resolved through unconscious

[75] This often-overlooked book is in fact most relevant in that, in it, Schelling lays the foundations for his own theory of dynamics, which later on will evolve into his *Potenzlehre*, the main subject of his so-called speculative physics.

production.' (SW I/4: 3). For even the lowest of formative stages of the absolute product, the so-called processes of the *first potency* or *dead matter*, are composites. This could be one of the reasons why Schelling made the final crossover to metaphysics. For in the metaphysics of identity the most basic structures of emergence of the fundamental modes of being, the organic and inorganic, the spiritual and the physical, are laid out without the need to resort to particular processes and empirical data.

Be it as it may, construed as an organic absolute, this unconditioned Nature may admit the characteristics of organisation we derived in the chapter above. We could even identify the same three characteristics of organisation that we derived from *Ideas* and *Weltseele*, i.e., organisation is: (1) a process that draws a circle because it implies an active principle that returns to itself, it is therefore, a self-referential process; in *Weltseele*, this self-reference is *blind*, and in the *Einleitung zum Entwurf*, which has raised Nature as an *Intelligenz*, it is explicitly described as *unconscious*. (2) Organisation arises from the identity of matter and form; this statement remains true in the *First Outline*, even if the form, previously considered in *Weltseele* as the concept, has, as it were, descended from the archetype, which implies the assumption of absolute identity as the form of all forms: the common ideal. (3) Organisation obtains where there is *a whole*—however, this idea now is extended by the suggestion that this whole yields an »interiority« [*ein Inneres zu bilden*]. (AA I/7: 69; p. 7). Let us expand these points further:

*Firstly*, the idea that organisation is a self-returning process is registered as a »universal and endless circulation [*allgemeiner, endloser Kreislauf*]«, for 'Nature constantly strives to cancel out duality and return into its original identity.' (AA I/7: 96, 105-107, HE: 287, 7: 126; pp. 31, 40n-42, 61). These statements reveal a more conscious intention on Schelling's part to highlight the role that absolute identity has in the process of becoming of Nature. As in Schelling's previous works, in the *Erster Entwurf* Nature is pictured as an infinitely active capacity that presents itself by means of products, thus as a self-referential process is assumed whereby Nature expands and contracts by the interaction of two fundamental forces, one expansive and the opposite retarding. Seen from the perspective of evolution, or metamorphosis, the former force is a universal or absolute productivity and the latter is a negative and obscure activity of inhibition. Since both forces are functions of Nature, a unity has to be presupposed to allow for the construction of the self-referential process that, as it were, fuels the constant struggle from which crystallisations of the absolutely productive

occur, and visible products fall from its informing potential. When Nature expands, it strives to cancel out duality, and when it contracts, attempts to return to its original identity; the former phase corresponds to a drive for productivity the latter to a certain degree of inhibition of the negative, retarding force. (Ibid 7: 107, HE: 287; p. 40n)

*Secondly*. One can positively extract from this book the assumption of identity of form and matter, but in a more general way, especially, because this identity refers to the unity that straddles across all oppositions—and as long as we establish this unity from the perspective of the absolute product. Indeed, if there is a fundamental duplicity in Nature, for example, the opposition form and formless, this also alludes to the relation between cause and effect. In this context, formless [*Gestaltlose*] is, according to Schelling, that which 'is receptive to every form', whereas the form [*Gestalt*] is the in-formed product. In a note added later, Schelling clarifies this idea in the following terms: 'In the pure productivity of Nature there is yet no determination, thus also no form [*Gestalt*].[76] The nearer Nature is to pure productivity the more formless, the nearer to the product, the more formed.' (AA I/7: 91, HE: 281; p. 27, n). In the same note, Schelling adds that for the dynamical philosopher—who has an insight into the unconditioned—the most original is the *Gestaltlose*, because it comes nearer to absolute productivity. (Ibid). This is because absolute productivity, as we saw above, is the bearer of all forms, but because it is absolute totality of forms, it lacks individual determination of forms. Under this light, it follows that form and formless are identical, while the union of them would justify that we see them as cause and effect of one another. Yet, according to the doctrine of metamorphosis, the simultaneity of cause, or productivity, and effect, or the product, cannot be identical, but only united in a tension that, going through expansion and contraction, makes possible the stages of formation of natural products. This is why we can experience formed and formless products in Nature, where the formless can be found in inorganic matter[77], whereas the formed abounds in the organic world. Indeed, if the formless is the nearest to the causal origin of formation, or the infinite productivity, this »whole [*das Ganze*]« is what 'mirrors itself in each individual being in Nature', where the mirroring is

[76] Goethe's characterisation of *form* comes to mind, which, very likely, must be in play in this passage: 'The Germans have a word for the complex of existence presented by a physical organism: *Gestalt* [structured form]. With this expression they exclude what is changeable and assume that an interrelated whole is identified, defined, and fixed in character.' (On Morphology, 1807; Goethe, 1988, p. 63.)

[77] A case in point is water whose fluidity makes it receptive to all shapes and whose homogeneity makes it closer to absolute productivity.

precisely the process of in-formation. Regarding this idea, Schelling asks and responds soon after: 'How opposed activities coincide in the intuition of the finite without reciprocally cancelling each other. It will have to be denied that they coincide in any product absolutely.' (7: 83; p. 18-19). This idea confirms our interpretation, for coincidence is only possible in absolute identity.

*Thirdly*. Organisation amounts to a whole that arises after an intrinsic idea. It may be helpful to remind oneself of the notion of »whole« that Schelling laid down in *Ideas* when he talked about an organism: 'this whole itself consists only in the *interaction* of the parts,' where the interaction is guided by the concept lying at the base of the whole in the parts. (AA I/5: 94; p. 31). This is in part a characterisation that follows from Kant's definition of organic whole, which reads: 'the possibility of [the whole's] parts (as concerns both their existence and their form) must depend on their relation to the whole.' (5: 373). If we try to apply these definitions to the idea of the absolute product, we may feel inclined to accept that this is a whole of that type, even more so if, with Schelling we postulate the view that 'the whole universe is contained in every individual.' For only in this way, one can assume the necessary continuity or unity of the opposites in one absolute process of becoming. (7: 83; p. 19). Further, since the *idea of the whole* governs the organisation of the parts and these in turn are functions of the whole, for Nature to be conceived as a universal becoming towards an archetype, or as a universal organism that all organisms long for, then 'the whole of Nature must suffuse each product.' (7: 93; p. 29). Nature, as an organic whole, is therefore pervasive and governs all parts in its domains, in the case of Nature as absolute identity, this domain is absolute and absolutely infinite.

If according to this approach, Nature as an absolute product is organised, and therefore a universal metamorphosis, it makes sense for Schelling to contend that 'nature is organic in its most original products.' (AA I/7: 67, 170; p. 5, 105). Does this mean that physical processes constituting the basic layers are also organic? To be sure, in the *First Outline*, organic and inorganic also represent opposite poles in the theatre of Nature, but regarding this particular opposition, as much as any other, the duality depends on a point of view. If the analysis is placed in one of the terms of the duality, one opposite limits the other, and in so far as it delimits it, it determines the sphere of action and possibilities of each term. Indeed, Schelling notes, 'organic and inorganic Nature must reciprocally explain and determine one

another.' (AA I/7: 171). However, we saw that Schelling also thinks, as he did in previous works, that the inorganic is presupposed in organic formation, so he asks, if the inorganic 'is opposed to the organic. So how could the grounds of the organic lie in it? —It cannot be explained except by a *preestablished harmony between both*.' (7: 171; p. 105). Schelling then is forced to move to a different point of view, that is, we must 'presuppose a higher order of things' whereby there must be '*a* third *which binds organic and inorganic* [*unorganisch/anorganisch*][78] *Nature together again, a medium that sustains the* continuity *between both.*' (Ibid). Indeed, this higher point of view is the view from the absolute in Nature, whereby the becoming in the absolute product is one endless process of formation. From this point of view, then, the same dynamical sequence of stages is the organisation that takes place in Nature throughout its universal movement insofar as such a sequence 'prevails in universal and anorganic Nature as in organic Nature.' (AA I/7: 72; p. 9).

Metamorphosis as organisation is then the law of the self-organisation of Nature, both the circle and unity that underlies all the diversity of its production and all its possible manifestations going forward. And like with the plant, which reproduces into a progression of leaves grown into one another, Nature also leaves a trace of progression that intensifies and simplifies intermittently. Yet, the question arises, how particular organised beings are functions of this becoming unleashed by absolute identity? If, on the one hand, we presuppose that absolute identity lies in the idea of the immanent archetype, which makes possible both the processes of departure, or expansion, and approximation, or contraction, in metamorphosis, and on the other hand, we construe the answer to this question using the three features that we used above to characterise organisation, we come to the following conclusions:

(1) There is a self-referential structure in a living being, first and foremost, because the original duplicity [*Duplicität*] filters from the general organisation of the universe down to the

[78] The adjective *anorganisch* is usually treated as the equivalent of *inorganic* in English, while *unorganisch* does not have a translation and its use in German is rather infrequent. Numerous times, Schelling uses *anorganisch* to refer to systems and processes of inanimate nature [*unbelebte Natur*], which was its common meaning during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in the chemical study of metals and salts and inanimate things in general. However, Schelling also uses, albeit infrequently, the less common *unorganisch* and he seems to make it virtually synonymous with *anorganisch*. Both are used interchangeably throughout Schelling's nature-philosophy and they refer to a world of beings that is intrinsically connected to the primal material processes of existence, magnetism, electricity, and chemical phenomena. In his translation of the *First Outline*, Bruce Matthews uses the term 'anorganic' to refer to *unorganisch*. Although I respect Matthews choice of words, I will indicate in square brackets whether it refers to either *anorganish* or *inorganisch* in the original.

organism. Since all oppositions in the system are 'determined by *one* original antithesis' then organisms contain this antithesis, which is a condition for their self-referential process. (Ibid 7: 265; p. 187). However, there is a distinctive type of antithesis that arises particularly in living beings: the organic process of excitability [*Erregbarkeit*], which is a necessary condition for a higher synthesis that yields sensibility [*Sensibilität*] as an activity of unification. We see, then, that unification is immanent to the organic being since it allows for the circularity of the self-reference, however, unification goes beyond the organic. For example, Schelling thinks that the essence of the inorganic is the formation of a universal system yielded by gravitation, whereas the essence of the organic is excitability [*Erregbarkeit*], defined as the property of being at once subject and object for oneself. (Cf. 7: 172). Both gravitation and excitability imply a process of unification. The former maintains the inorganic »spheres of affinity« organised together into a system, while the latter implies a unity or identity that makes possible for the organism to be 'its own object.' Schelling elucidates this further in a note:

> 'Organic nature differentiates itself from the dead precisely in that *it* takes *itself* as object. The dead is never object *for itself*, but for an *other*. […] The problem is that there should be duplicity in *one and the same undivided* individual, it should not be object for any other, but solely for itself.' (AA I/7: 172, HE 330; p. 106n)

Additionally, Schelling determines the organic being through its relationship with the inorganic, which is that, as much as productivity expands into a form or an exemplar for the formation of the organic being, (Cf. 7: 212, p. 143), a process of retardation of organic activity by the inorganic is also required for the productive-causing form to be retained in the product. It is because *inert matter within the organic body and outside* it limits the original productivity, that the organism can become an object for itself. Indeed, once the expansive force, which contains forms *in potentia*, is determined by the retarding force, the form that arises does this by referring to the archetype, and *mutatis mutandis*, the archetype is visible, if only partially, to itself.

If the reader allows me to apply the interpretive notion of *Ich-Form* to the problem of excitability in organic beings, what results is the following:

Suppose that absolute identity is the absolute archetype, which in one self-divisible act instigated by itself, has *descended*, and limited itself as a point of *original activity*. (a) The

most basic structure of activity is that of self-positing, whose form is A = A. (b) When A = A is limited by itself, a form, i.e., an exemplar or copy obtains, which is a relative form of A = A, i.e., A = A, iff A ≠ ¬A.

*Note*. This thought is not foreign to Schelling's philosophy of nature. We have seen above that one necessary condition of organisation is the activity of self-reference. Schelling continues to uphold this claim in the *First Outline*. For example, Schelling maintains that 'the law of all activity' rules the form of original activity, namely, 'that an activity which no longer has an *object* never reverts into itself, and likewise, that there is no longer an *object* for an *activity* that has ceased *to revert into itself*.' (7: 130; p. 66). In fact, according to Schelling, this activity, which is essential to organisation, is »*original*« in that the organism, like all organisation—as we determined in the chapter above—reverts to itself, thus, it follows that 'Only insofar as it is at once subject and object for itself can the organism be the most original thing in Nature, for we have determined Nature precisely as a causality that has itself for object.' (Ibid 7: 172; p. 106). Does this mean that Nature has the same self-referential structure? Schelling has answered this question affirmatively on two grounds. One hinges on the premise that Nature returns to itself when it opposes an activity (negative, attractive, retarding, limiting) that arises from itself, thus, forming a circle. The other hinges on the claim that Nature, insofar as it draws a circle, is a totality: 'If the universe is the absolute totality which comprehends everything within itself, then it is object *for itself*, since it has no object outside of itself, and turns toward itself.' (Ibid 7: 228; p. 157). This also means that the universe as a totality may be expressed through the proposition A = A. This takes us to the second characteristic of organisation, the identity of matter and form.

(2) Organic beings are possible because there is an original identity of form and matter. On this condition, organic beings are bearers of forms or embodied exemplars that strive to approximate to the archetype or »common ideal [*gemeinschaftliches Ideal*]«, whereas dead matter, insofar as does not reach the status of form, it is the formless. (Cf. AA I/7: 92, 134; pp. 29, 71). At this point, it is important to remember that we are in the dimension of dynamics, and in this respect, form and formless are approximations to the absolute but not the absolute itself. By applying the formula we used earlier, form and formless are the sides of a metamorphosis that happen between A and A, and when in absolute identity A is form and A is formless, then both are absolutely one and the same.

(a) Since self-reference is a property of organisation and both Nature as totality and organic beings as wholes have this structure, then self-reference has descended into particularity as a relative or finite totality individuated in organic beings, which unlike the inorganic, are the material bearers of forms.[79]

*Note*. The most basic form of self-reference may be denoted as A = A, thus, there is a basis for agency-identity in living forms. In an obscure passage, Schelling seems to infer a similar idea. Here he talks about a »*point of reflection*«, ostensibly the descent of the activity of divisibility that derives from A = A, namely, an activity of division that brings forth a limited version of the self-referential activity that aspires to posit itself in identity with the archetype. Hence, the closest figure that reproduces this activity is the self-positing and unifying activity of the individual that can be object for itself when, in asserting its own form of being, opposes an external reality, therefore, its form expresses $A = A$ as a condition for $A \neq \neg A$ in a primitive fashion. Schelling's argument conforms to this interpretation when he affirms that: 'Only that which struggles against organic activity can be turned into an object.' (7: 131, HE: 305; p. 66n). In this approach, the struggle implies that in being an object for itself, the organism has some minimal awareness of something exterior. Likewise, the struggle amounts to an imbalance, and when the organic, as it were, takes the upper hand in the struggle, achieves a gradual unity with the exterior when in its own self-positing activity, posits gradually the being outside in order to integrate it into its form, and this explains integration in the forms of nutrition and growth.[80] Similarly, this self-positing activity opposed to an exterior produces an interiority delimited by a unity, which takes us to the third characterisation of organisation: organisation as a whole.

(3) The constituting unity in organic beings is the result of a process of individuation that comes about when by drawing a circle it returns to itself. Originally pushed into a sphere by the attractive action of the inhibiting force, this creates an interiority that forms, as it were, the perimeter of the whole, and this in turn will delimit a kind of self that posits itself in

[79] The *forms* are expressions of the *Urbild*, which I propose is absolute identity. Most importantly, the forms (or species) are the impermanent and thus remain, while 'the individual passes away.' (AA I/7: 107; p. 42). These expressions diversify across the spheres of different species, meanwhile distinctive forms are designated as the genus of the sphere. Schelling resorts to the notion of actant to try to explain the difference at these particular levels of formation. See also 7: 108-10, pp. 43-45.

[80] Schelling illustrates this idea of the imbalance in the following terms: 'the inner *takes* the outer *into* itself only because its activity in relation to it becomes positive or negative.' But this relation, he adds is 'dynamic' so the opposition of the inner and the outer factors is an issue of relative equilibrium. (Cf. 7: 118-20; pp. 54-56).

opposition to a not-self. That the organism is excitable presupposes the mediation of an 'outer world' that winds it up to self-constructing activity under conditions of 'press' or 'crush' [*Andrang*].[81] On the one hand, 'the organism constitutes [*constituirt*][82] itself' because it is a being that 'produces itself from itself' or 'it takes itself as an object.' (7: 172, HE 326; p. 106, n. 1). Indeed, this pressure that forms an interiority opposes Nature's will to cancel all dualities and the tension that keeps them united, in other words, to return to pure homogeneity or absolute identity. Along similar lines, Schelling warns:

> 'While Nature does develop individuality, it is not really concerned with the individual—it is rather occupied with the annihilation of the individual. Nature constantly strives to cancel out duality and to return into its original identity. […] Nature did not intend the [original] separation.' (7: 105, HE: 286; p. 40).

In the particular case of organic beings, the tension lies in the subject-object opposition even if this duality is pre-theoretical and pre-discursive, perhaps better described as a feeling of the tangible, the visible, in a word, the sensible. In this regard, that which is exterior is a relative or perspectival feeling of a boundary, everything that cannot be posited absolutely but only gradually with the self-positing of the self of organic beings is the exterior. By contrast, mere matter does not have an inner world because it is not a self-positing activity that draws a circle of self-reference and thus:

> 'Dead matter [*todte Materie*] has no external world—it is absolutely identical with its world. The condition of an activity towards the outside is an influence from the outside. But conversely, the condition of an influence from the outside is the activity of the product *towards* the outside. The reciprocal determination is of the highest importance for the construction of all living phenomena.' (AA I/7: 118, HE: 298; p. 54n).

[81] The translation renders *Andrang* as 'duress', but the German term has the connotation of 'threat', which implies some awareness of the outer world, however, thus far, Schelling is keeping his analysis as a blind interaction between factors.

[82] For some unexplained reason, the translation of *constituirt* is rendered as 'construction'. The difference in meaning between 'self-construction' and 'self-constitution' in this context is not insignificant, even more so because Schelling largely speaks of 'self-construction' as the basic activity of matter in general.

In sum, 'nothing is an *inner* factor other than what this principle produces in itself.' Admittedly, inorganic matter may have a 'quasi inner' dimension, and more likely, if we infer that the inner factor in organic nature requires a native structure on which self-reference could build up. This could be the case in matter, more particularly, in its process of self-construction, which Schelling will develop as the subject of his speculative physics in the *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes oder der Kategorien der Physik* of 1800.[83] However, a differential could help make my case stronger if we add the further notion of a whole, which again implies that the form in organic beings instantiates in the embodied whole as much as in its parts. Schelling supports this interpretation when he defends the theory of epigenesis, or later on, when in the *Introduction to the Outline*, once he got a settled position with respect to his idea of organic Nature as an autonomous unconscious being, defines organic whole as something in which: 'all things mutually bear and support each other, then this organisation must have existed as a whole previous to its parts; the whole could not have arisen from the parts, but the parts must have arisen out of the whole.' (SW I/III: 279; p. 98). In any event, what pre-exists the parts is, as I have been arguing in Part III, the form that lies in the core of the whole.

In addition to these organisation descriptors, Schelling develops the concept of sensibility. On his account, sensibility is not merely *a property* of living organisms, neither their constitutive parts the cause of it. Instead, Schelling theorises that sensibility is not only 'the cause of every organism' but also more fundamentally the 'source and origin of life', nonetheless, excitability seems to be co-determinant for its arising, for even if excitability requires that duplicity pre-exists in the embodied form, identity is necessary as well for the activity of self-returning from the original division. Unfortunately, Schelling pushes the explanation of its origin outside the margins of his speculation. He just maintains that 'it has descended into everything organic.' But one may infer from Schelling's discussion that sensibility could be the relative form of absolute identity, especially, owing to the metaphysical import that sensibility brings in the recreation of an absolute interiority in the organism, hence the difficulty in elucidating its dynamic origin. (AA I/7: 180-82; p. 113-15). I may venture to speculate, in line with Schelling's insights, that if excitability realises the limit

[83] Speculative physics 'occupies itself solely and entirely with the original causes of motion in Nature, that is, solely with the dynamical phenomena' and also 'aims generally at the inner clockwork and what is *non-objective* in Nature.' (SW I/III: 75; p. 196).

between identity and non-identity, or self and not self, then sensibility is the unity of both. Yet, since this unity is not absolute—for otherwise the organised individual would be an absolute being itself—but relative, sensibility forms the open horizon that is able to unify in degrees the integration of external being to the particular form of the whole. Applying these conjectures to the structure of the Ich-Form. The schema is as follows:

Absolute identity, which is the 'highest' in Nature, contains all the ontological forms of reality. Owing to the absolute's structure of self-positing (A = A) and unity in identity (A = A), the absolute posits itself as its own concept A in unity with its own being A, therefore, A = A. By contrast, the *Selbst-Form* is the formal descendant of absolute identity when absolute identity breaks down and returns to itself by means of opposite forces, that is, when absolute identity becomes an absolute product, or Nature proper. The limitation might imply some degree or quantity of pressure on the positive, productive activity of the A = A and this determines the particularity, or the crystallisation of the form, of the organic whole. In any event, what is more relevant is that this *Selbst-Form* carries the form of identity, relative to the absolute. Thus, it reproduces (1) the activity of self-positing whereby self = self, but since this particular positing is limited, when the self-form posits itself, (2) it posits only part of its form in corporeal being rather than absolute being and the unity with being is only gradual and relative. We may want to assign (1) to sensibility, for it is the most primitive form of unity in the activity of self-reference, whereas excitability is the condition for the limit between self and other, thus, excitability might be the relating activity that keeps the opposition both separated and united; however (1) and (2) together are necessary to achieve a gradual unity of self with being that would transpire in the process of individuation—or the embodiment of a form through a dynamic process of material interactions.

It is important to note, however, that Schelling construes the position of the stages of excitability and sensibility in a different manner, which accords with the process of formation of material processes. Thus, my discussion about these two processes is only a speculative exercise to depict how a relative structure of identity could develop in Schelling's conception of organic Nature. Plus, in line with Goethe, Schelling links excitability and sensibility to a final stage of reproduction of the organism. This last stage corresponds to the differentiation of the sexes, whose union has the role of reproducing a new generation of individual *organic forms*. With this, the potentiation of the organic comes to a full circle, as Schelling thinks that

the development of the sexes 'is the highest zenith of the process of formation.' (AA I/7: 103; p. 37). To be sure, these three stages of organic formation have a one-to-one correspondence with processes of formation in the inorganic potency. But they seem to furnish the same structural functions in a more primitive manner. Accordingly, magnetism plays the role of unity in duplicity in one body, electricity represents two opposite poles separated in two bodies, and the chemical process achieves a synthesis of poles in one new individual body. (See table τ for these parallelisms). In Schelling's future approach to the doctrine of potencies, these conditions are the real aspect that serves as the building blocks for the ideal aspect to emerge in the Nature.

With respect to the material processes, the *First Outline* posits the living organism as a higher potentiation of Nature. Since it is a material body, it presupposes the dynamic process of filling of space, but the filling of space cannot explain the living organism because the latter is more than just a material body. The dynamical processes that govern the living organism are therefore of a more complex nature. Therefore, the process of formation that takes place at this level, clearly implies a tendency to organisation and an affinity that is not just a mechanical aggregate of elementary parts, but more like a primitive syntax that arouses 'the first stirrings of universal organisation' and compiles the 'universal medium of life.' As Schelling puts it, 'Nature and chemistry are related to one another like language and grammar.' (AA I/7: 122; p. 58). In this context, the inorganic is nothing other than *mass*, but masses are not the most primitive aspects of nature, the dynamic processes are, and they express the basic layer of natural activity. In this way, Schelling challenges Kant's view that, on the one hand, the origin of organic nature is beyond the limits of objective explanation and, on the other, any treatment of organic Nature can only be dealt with by means of contentless subjective principles and empirical analogies. (Cf. Ak. 5: 409, 20: 218; p. 294, p. 406).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Higher potency | Sensibility | Excitability | Reproductive drive |
| | (*identity*) | (*duality*) | (*synthetic unity*) |
| Lower potency | Magnetism | Electrical process | Chemical process |

Table τ. *The structure of potentiation of identity, duality, and synthetic unity in Nature; here expressed through the basic natural processes. The first layer comprises inorganic processes whereas the second expresses the organic.*

More importantly, Schelling again and again turns to the necessary presupposition of absolute identity for the reproduction of the original duplicity across all spheres of dynamic formation. This presupposition is alluded in the continuity represented by the becoming of the absolute product, which is held up by absolute identity, without the need to appeal to ontological dualisms. We have seen that a unity is a necessary condition in the organism as much as in the opposition between the organic and the inorganic. Elsewhere, Schelling appeals to a necessary common ground to the general forms of Nature: 'The reciprocal coming together of organic and anorganic nature can only be explained, therefore, from the *common physical origin* of both, that both are originally only *one* product.' (AA I/7: 133, p. 69). To reinforce this idea, Schelling also appeals to a 'higher factor' in order to justify the unity of the world of Nature that he had aways had in mind. Indeed, nothing can be diametrically and absolutely opposite to absolute identity, if there are opposites, they have to be united in essence by a third factor, which is the common root that makes them 'one product'. (Cf. AA I/7: 132-33; p. 69-70).

At a higher-order conception of Nature, we find that the dynamical organisation of the universe as metamorphosis also presupposes »a theatre« or the *locus* where the organisation evolved 'from one original point'. As we saw above, a point was originally raised to a product by the activity of Nature dividing itself into pure productivity, or *natura naturans*, and a self-returning activity that inhibited the first; this point is »the original product« and the evolution that ensued is nothing but 'a dissociation of this product into ever new products.' (AA I/7: 265; p. 187). Naturing nature, in its infinite activity, Schelling says, 'longs for the Absolute and continually endeavours to represent it [es *darzustellen*].' (AA I/7: 102; p. 35).

Not only in the dimension of organic nature the assumption of absolute identity takes place. The system of gravity is also an important conceptual guideline that led Schelling to taking a decisive step towards absolute identity. It is often noted that Schelling moved away from Kant's metaphysical foundations of the origin of matter by influence of Franz von Baader. In fact, Baader had challenged Schelling's Kantian conception of forces developed in *Ideas* and in *Von der Weltseele*, in the preface of his book, *On the Pythagorean Square in Nature, or The Four Regions of the World*. (Förster, 2012, p. 241). Schelling not only welcomed the latter's criticism, but also adopted the view that Kant missed an essential ingredient in his

transcendental deduction of matter. (Cf. AA I/7: 268; p. 190). The basic claim, which Schelling reproduces in the *First Outline*, following Baader, is that the two opposite forces of attraction and repulsion must rely on a third principle to come together in degrees leading to a single point. The third would solve the problem of how to justify their opposite nature without arriving at the logical consequence of exerting equal force, which would turn their quantities into zero when they confront each other in space.[84] Moreover, for them *to fill a space*, some form of absolute void should be also presupposed, so the construction must start from something more original and permanent that brings the two tendencies together. Indeed, Baader conceived universal gravity as that which expresses a whole or a totality that cannot simply be the force of attraction, as Kant thought, for 'the force of attraction is already expended in its mere construction.' (Förster, 2012, p. 241).

Schelling also agreed with Baader on this matter and expounded further on the possible metaphysical origin of universal gravity. This discussion basically conceives this third principle as synthetic and pervasive in all Nature, in a word, something keeping the parts of all material wholes together and all of the wholes gravitating towards this 'higher term' in one tendency. Following from this general idea, one can argue that the metaphysical ascension to absolute identity was possible by positing a higher third principle in Nature itself, which Schelling refers to as 'the ultimate factor [that] holds Nature together' and is 'its most interior principle.' (AA I/7: 144; p. 78).[85] In relation to this, Schelling asks in the general summary of the *First Outline* the following question: '*Supreme problem of the philosophy of nature:*

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[84] The necessity of an ontological antecedent for the principle of opposition has a long philosophical tradition. Indeed, this basic cosmological structure was in the mind of natural philosophers since the middle of the sixth century. As B.C. R. G. Collinwood notes, among Greek philosophers it was Anaximander who first visualised the necessary link that sustains the structure of opposition in natural phenomena. Anaximander readily departed from Thales' cosmology due to its being shored up by an abstract contradiction. While water was nominated by Thales as the single, most original, and unchanging substance that is common to all natural things, its inherent opposite, the dry, was left out of the explanatory model. And ultimately, since the dry was implied by the wet, the wet, and therefore water, could not be the most basic element out of which everything is made. "Of a pair of opposites each implies the other, and both must have arisen by differentiation out of something originally undifferentiated. The thing out of which everything is made must be, therefore, the undifferentiated." (Collingwood, 2014, p. 34). According to Collingwood, Anaximander, in attempting to discover the basic stuff that served as the medium of our world and innumerable others, arrived at the conclusion that only a uniformly indeterminate medium could serve as the underlying primary material that glues together all different natural phenomena in one continuous world-making process. Anaximander designated this creative process as the Boundless [τὸ ἄπειρον], a stuff infinite both in time and space, which extends indefinitely in every direction, is indeterminate in quality (neither solid nor liquid nor gaseous) and is deathless and imperishable. (Ibid., p. 33).

[85] In *Schelling et la réalité finie,* Judith E. Schlanger dedicates a brief section XVIII of Part II of her book to describe this transition from the third force to the system of identity. (1966, pp. 97-101). Similarly, E. Förster, in *Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, makes a very lucid but smoother transition from gravity to the system of the world. (Cf. 2012, p. 241-246). I draw on their general idea of how the transition comes about.

*What cause brought forth the first duplicity* (of which all other opposites are mere progeny) *out of the universal identity of Nature?* (AA I/7: 73; p. 10). To be sure, this is a challenge that remained unanswered by Schelling until his complete system of 1804. Whether Schelling thought that absolute identity is the absolute ontological ground of all reality or if he admitted duality as having an equal footing vis-à-vis absolute identity, is a hotly debated issue, which is not possible for me to discuss here. The view that I will take in the following part is that primordial duality has always belonged to the sphere of the particular and that shifting philosophical positions puts us in either the standpoint of absolute identity, and so we have the view from the absolute identity, or we take the perspective of particularity, where duality is coexistent with it. As Schelling argues in the second edition of *Ideas*: 'antithesis must be assumed to have sprung from a universal identity.' (AA I/5: 256; p. 179). As I have been discussing thus far, visible Nature is the locus of the dynamical becoming and the metamorphosis of the system, what Schelling conceived as the absolute product. This existential space is located between the absolute and its limit. If emergence is what happens in the scope of particularity, then antithesis, which is a condition of metamorphosis, certainly springs from absolute identity. In this respect, Philipp Schwab rightly notes, that the dispute with Schelling's contemporaries regarding the priority of duality was not about absolute identity as the principle of the system, instead, it centred around the status of difference within a system grounded on absolute identity, thus the problem was that: ‚wird die Differenz in der absoluten Identität gesetzt, so droht die innere Einheit des Prinzips auf- gehoben zu werden; findet aber die Differenz schlechthin jenseits der prinzipiierenden Identität ihren Ort, so ist deren Letzt- und Alleinbegründungs-anspruch gefährdet.' (Schwab, 2017, p. 264).

Thus, in my reading, which is consistent with the thesis I am developing here, absolute identity will continue to be ontologically and metaphysically primordial, as it appeared to be for Schelling by the end of 1800, when he seems to be more committed to stripping away presuppositions coming from the »idealism of the I« to account for the principles expressed by Nature itself. Assumptions such as the view that Nature, as a mere object of experience, is 'the sum-total of all existence [*Inbegriff alles Seyns*]' or that Nature as »a being *in itself*« is devoid of activity, are put aside in the *First Outline* and in the *Introduction to the Outline* where Schelling more decidedly crowns Nature's pure productivity as completely autonomous and seeks for an ultimate substrate from which he develops the stages of Nature's productivity as

functions of difference and *indifference*—the identity produced by the synthesis of opposites. (AA I/7: 78, HE: 275; pp. 13-14n; SW IIII: 304, 308; p. 216, 218).[86]

There are many passages that confirm the originality of absolute identity over the original opposition. For example, in different passages of the *First Outline* and the handwritten notes, Schelling states that Nature itself 'is originally pure identity' and for this reason 'nothing [is] to be distinguished in it', here we see Schelling moving straight into the domain of the hidden and assumed first principle, i.e., the concept of the absolute. Accordingly, by the end of the third part of the *First Outline*, Schelling stresses that 'an identity of the final cause must be accepted' and that by means of this highest or unconditioned cause, the universal visible nature 'is ensouled [*beseelt*]'. (AA I/7: 229; p. 158). This is the same epistemically transcendent principle that Schelling talked about more allegorically in *Von der Weltseele* as a 'common principle' in which the antithetical forces fluctuate, but it is 'everywhere present, it is nowhere, and because it is everything, it cannot be anything determinate or particular, language has no appropriate term for it, and the earlies philosophies […] have handed down to us an idea of it only in a figurative sense.' (AA I/6: 67; p. 67). However, absolute identity in these texts is still something deduced from a transcendental dimension *within* the subjectivity of the philosopher when she refers to the ideal structures of the world, but the philosopher's position is still not the standpoint of absolute indifference, whereby all oppositions simply dissolve in absolute identity. Therefore, to deal with the very first principle that so far has only been presupposed, Schelling will develop an appropriate presentation. That is, one that lifts above all relativity to find the absolute in its proper domain, which is that of the absolute and eternal identity. Other scholars agree with this perspective, for example, Berger and Whistler state that:

> 'this shift from dualism to monism is a long standing tendency in Schelling's philosophy of nature: the First Outline postulates an identity of productivity with itself underlying all of the various dualities in nature; the Universal Deduction claims that all antithetical activities are unified in a more fundamental identity.' (Berger & Whistler, 2020).

[86] Schelling acknowledges the autonomy of Nature in these terms. Even though, the regularity and organisation of Nature is "visible to the understanding", the forces that are immanent to the natural whole are independent of knowledge and real, therefore, equally as these ideas arose in the understanding, conversely 'the ideal must arise out of the real and admit of explanation from it.' (SW I/3: 272; p. 194).

As I tried to show thus far, there is enough evidence to claim that throughout his transcendental developments, Schelling maintained his early view that the absolute is also real in its own right, even if the philosopher can only have access to it from self-consciousness. Scholars usually overlook the seeming disparities between Schelling's adherence to the transcendental deductions of the basic concepts of Nature and his realist allusions to the autonomy of Nature in his works on nature-philosophy. D. Nassar (2013), for example, rightly notes that while Schelling does seem to grant autonomous reality to Nature, he nonetheless 'continues to maintain that natural organization can be understood only in relation to a self-intuiting mind and not on its own terms.' (p. 192). Other scholars, like Tilliette (1992, pp.) and Beiser (2002, Cf. 483-487) simply leave this oscillation unnoticed.[87] The present dissertation is an effort to explain this apparent paradox. Yet, I am not implying that all these thorny considerations were not unambiguous for Schelling when he wrote his treaties of the 1790s, after all Schelling was in a process of discovery, and as Hegel famously noted, he underwent his philosophical education in public.[88] Before the System of Identity, Schelling is still struggling to understand the relationship of the finite and the infinite in the absolute, and he thinks that the idea of a finite entity limiting the infinite—the human agent in *Ideas* and *the organic product* in the *Introduction*—does not explain how the finite could modify the absolute because he is equating the absolutely unlimited with the infinite that is determined only by its opposition to the finite. The solution to this riddle must await an adequate development in his System of Identity. For the time being, Schelling can only explain the unity of the infinite and the finite in the mind: 'that ideas in us *follow* one another is the necessary consequence of our finitude, but that this series is *endless* proves that they proceed from a being in whose nature finitude and infinity are united.' (AA I/5: 91; p. 29). And the duplicity of nature, nature as productive and nature as product, in the hypothesis of nature as a whole. Hence, what

[87] In the case of Tilliette, it would be more precise to say that Schelling's references to the autonomy of nature are incorporated as instances of one of the two thematic sides into which knowledge [le savoir] is divided; hence, 'le monde objectif n'es rien *en soi* de *reel*, et on ne comprend pas pourquoi il dure sinon par le constant vouloir de l'esprit.' (Op. cit. 133). This view, however, does not conflict with the view here exposed, which simply states that the ideal-reality of the absolute is not denied, but found to be immediately accessible in its real form, the system of ideas, through self-consciousness by means of the Ich-Form.

[88] In alluding to Hegel's famous remark, I acknowledge with him that perhaps Schelling's early reflections could have gained more stability if he had let his arguments mature. Yet, this hypothetical case is completely at odds with the kind of philosopher Schelling was and the corresponding philosophy that he developed, namely, one that materialises the productive spontaneity of a creative mind. Furthermore, the tone of my work conveys the idea that despite Schelling's shift of perspectives, a common theme, the absolute and its relation to a particular kind of existence, is the one preoccupation that persist throughout his work at least until 1809.

Nassar thinks is an ambiguous move between metaphysics and transcendental philosophy, I see as an enhanced focus towards a transcendental investigation that leaves the problem of the reality of the supernatural ground of nature untouched, and for all the right reasons, as far as the philosopher has gained access to the absolute, therefore, to the system of all ideas, through the methodology provided by transcendental philosophy.

However, one important idea that advances the System of Identity is already in the development of his first *Naturphilosophie* writings, because Schelling did not appear completely confident about enclosing the absolute in the sphere of subjectivity. Hence, Schelling's notion of the transcendental defies that of Kant and Fichte, for it has been modified to meet the metaphysical demands of Schelling's idea of the unconditioned. This modification implies that the transcendental domain need be upraised from the absolute subjectivity proposed by Fichte to the neutral realm of absolute indifference, whose unconditionality demands that the philosopher limits its absoluteness to neither the subjective nor the objective but take both of them in their unconditional identity. It is true that Schelling, until the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, considered that the unconditioned was reached only within self-consciousness. But even in this work, Schelling points towards the metaphysical sovereignty of the unconditioned over its own higher domain:

> 'the ground of identity between the absolutely subjective and the absolutely objective […] this higher thing itself can be neither subject nor object, nor both at once, but only the absolute identity, in which is no duality at all, and which, precisely because duality is the condition of all consciousness, can never attain thereto.' (OA p. 208-209). (check)

## Part IV. Absolute Identity and the Metaphysical Origin of Living Organisation.

In Part I, we were able to survey essays that Schelling composed between 1795 and 1801. This period is characterised by a diversity of treaties that outlined what he thought could be a satisfactory systematisation of philosophical knowledge on the assumption that philosophy can be developed in two equally valid but opposite sides: the transcendental dimension of the transcendental ego and the metaphysically laden transcendental dimension of Nature. What I tried to show in Parts I-III was that the pervasive principle that makes possible these two sides of knowledge and objective construction is absolute identity. Since our main concern here is nature-philosophy, we traced absolute identity as a fundamental assumption in Nature, but we also analysed it as a relational form in the transcendental I—the *Ich-Form*. In sum, I claimed that, firstly, by analysing and postulating a metaphysical dimension for the absolute I, Schelling was putting forward an unconditioned ground that is resolved as an absolute identity of the real and the ideal, by means of which he tried to salvage the mechanistic reification implied by Spinoza's substance. Secondly, by assuming that absolute identity has an immanent relatedness to the pure I, I contended that Schelling could argue that the ideal aspect of knowledge was in fact real, and from there, he felt philosophically entitled to derive the two opposite sides of the entire system of philosophy. Thirdly, by assuming absolute identity as the ground of both subjectivity and objectivity, he showed the isomorphic structure that unfolds in both the system of Nature and the transcendental system of self-consciousness. Fourthly, Schelling presupposes absolute identity as the immanent basis in all forms of organisation, from visible Nature as an absolute product, to particular organisms that in turn make the world visible for themselves on the basis of the same structure of organisation. This is consistent with the idea that an organic whole posits itself *for* itself equally in all its parts, for self-positing presupposes identity. In the dimension of finiteness, though, this identity integrates inorganic material in a contingent manner, from which results the diversity of the countless modifications in the organic world.

Finally, in this Part IV, we will see Schelling doubling down on asserting the autonomy of Nature beyond the idealism of the I. And in virtue of the latter's transcendental sphere and the possibility of the experience of the I as the unity of the a priori and the a posteriori,

Schelling launches with more conviction than ever, a philosophy that intends to lift itself above the *unavoidable circle of the I* to reach the standpoint of Nature. In this part we move on to Schelling's next consolidating step: he has crown Nature as absolute being and set it as the true and real dimension of absolute identity.

Below I offer a brief exposition of the system of identity and how living beings are functions of absolute identity. We will see the same presupposition of identity as the grounding principle of the organic structure, and with this development, I will try to settle my hypothesis, namely, that absolute identity was assumed in Schelling's philosophy of Nature from 1797 to 1801, and that the emergence of organisation and living beings is a particularly important instance of this assumption. The general goal of Part IV is, then, to elucidate how the living being is a metaphysical function, or a relational form, of absolute identity; in other words, I will explain the metaphysical origin and structure of the living being as a necessary mode of being of absolute identity. To achieve this goal, I will break the exposition into the following chapters.

Chapter (1) addresses the concept of absolute identity as the ground of the system in the philosophy of identity; I incorporate a brief overview of the critical reception of the system, particularly regarding the first presentation of 1801.

Chapter (2) moves on to the methodological approach of the system of identity; here, I elucidate two key concepts: abstraction and construction as the exhibiting coincidence of the absolute and the particular, and the *In-building* or *Ineinsbiuldung* that grounds and describes the inner life of the absolute; we shall survey some of the most relevant challenges critics posed to Schelling's approach. Once we understand how the absolute and the particular are necessarily related, in this chapter we trace the particular and necessary forms that follow from absolute identity. In this portion of the work, we shall derive the basic schema of the *In-building* of the absolute.

Chapter (3) gets to the nub of the second part by identifying the schema obtained in the previous chapter in the third potency, which belongs to the living being. I explain in what sense the system of identity makes the living being a relative function of the absolute and derive the same properties that we derived in the last chapter of Part III, that is, under Schelling's conception of living being in the 1790s *Naturphilosophie*. Nature's visibility, as we shall see, is the essence of relative identity under the predominance of subjectivity; it starts

with plants, the first stage of excitability, and moves on to sensibility, the more complex form of subject-objectivity in animals. Here I reconstruct the results of the previous Parts of this work to show that the Ich-Form may be a synonym of the third potency in the System of Identity.

## [Chapter 1. Absolute Identity: the suspension of existence in the locus of Reason]

This chapter consists of two sections. In section 1.1, I discuss Schelling's new metaphysical conception of absolute identity according to his first published presentation of the philosophy of identity. Schelling's fundamental claim is that from the standpoint of absolute identity, not only the ideal is absolutely identical to the real but also that there is no place for antithetical assumptions or opposing principles, for the space of absolute reason tolerates nothing but indifference. Section 1.2 surveys some of the critical reception of this first presentation of absolute identity—prima facie, critics seemed to have a bona fide notion of Schelling: he was always a Spinozist, however, a careful reading reveals that he was intending to act on his earliest insight into the unconditioned and what he thought was correct about Spinoza's substance, for Schelling was finally able take Spinoza's system and 'annul [its] very foundations' (SW I/2: 151, 159; pp. 64, 69), by making the modes that Spinoza thought were external to the absolute substance internal to it. (Cf. AA I/10: §44, *Anm, I*).

### {1.1. The Absolute in the *Presentation of my system of philosophy*}

What I have been arguing so far is that Schelling's early conception of absolute identity as a metaphysical principle remains implicit in his philosophy until he had the appropriate method to elaborate it in full force over a period in which his philosophy of identity came to light, roughly from 1801 to 1806. This was a time when Schelling occupied his mind, both publicly and privately, with the problem of the absolute as an ontological ground.

No doubt Schelling produced metaphysical investigations more or less following the 'standard' Kant recommended in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, that is, determining what the regions of the system of the absolute may be *for* our spirit, and *within* the bounds of our subjectivity. But there is textual evidence that points to the possibility that

between 1797 and 1800, Schelling committed to the method of idealistic deductions without fully adopting Fichte's pure I as the principle behind his own nature-philosophical deductions; for he began with the problem of supplying an absolutely true principle for a philosophical system and ended beginning with one in his metaphysics of identity of 1801. Even during his idealistic deductions, he clearly presupposed it when he raised his main transcendental question: 'How a world outside us, how a Nature and with it experience, is possible?' (AA I/5: 70; p. 10). For this question requires to assume an absolute unity that presupposes the correlation between Nature in itself and experience. Eventually, Schelling returned to the problem of the absolute to solve this pressing question. He seemed to have concluded that transcendental idealism, taken to its highest bid by Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* [*Wissenschaftslehere*], is none other than a philosophy of mind, or a phenomenology that, as Schelling lets Fichte know by the end of 1800, 'proceeds entirely in pure logic and has nothing to do with reality.' (Letter of November 19; in M. G. Vater & Wood, 2012, p. 44). Ultimately, Schelling's return to the problem of the ontological ground that gives reality to our knowledge forced him to take a step back from the self-construction of the mind and contemplate the self-construction of the reality that makes the mind possible. Along the same lines, Schelling writes in a passage of his *Ueber den wharen Begriff der Naturphilosophie und die richtige Art, ihre Probleme aufzulösen* (*On the true concept of nature-philosophy and the correct way to solve its problems*; AA I/10: 77-106):[89]

> 'To be able to philosophise, I must already have philosophised, for how else would I know what philosophising is? If I now emerge from this to find out what philosophising itself is, then I see myself merely as something known in myself [*an mich selbst gewiesen*]—and during this entire investigation I never get out of myself.' (AA I/10: 89; p. 48).

This shift is none other than a change in focus back to Schelling's steady interest in finding the ground of the reality of knowledge beyond mere ideas without content. The only candidate that could hold such a reality is Nature *in itself*. Such an interest requires a

[89] From now on *Begriff der Naturphilosophie*. The original title of this essay is *Anhang zu dem Aufsatz des Herr Eschenmayer betreffend den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie, un die richtige Art ihre Probleme aufzulösen.* (AA I/10: 77-106; pp. 46-62). This essay was included as an annex to the *Zeitschrift für Spekulative Physik* (Bd. 2. H. 1. Jena und Lepizig), edited by Schelling himself in 1801.

metaphysical interpretation, which is the line I attempt to establish with two aims in mind. One aim is to introduce the reader to the metaphysical dimension of Schelling's philosophy; another is to weave the metaphysical issues that appeared scattered over his essays between 1794 and 1800. To meet this aim, I will draw our focus to the concept of the absolute as a grounding principle, which certain subsystems in Nature are capable of mirroring, more particularly organic beings, both from a universal and particular points of view. I believe that Schelling's insistence on finding the absolute ground of the whole of organisation of Nature as a system led him to this point, when he had enough theoretical grounds to reinstate the metaphysics that he initiated in his early essay, the *Ichschrift*.

The *Darstellung meines System der Philosophie* (*Presentation of my system of philosophy*; AA/10: 107-211) is Schelling's first formal presentation of the highest foundation of true philosophical knowledge. The deductive structure, standing on a presuppositionless therefore epistemically unshakeable ground, is supposed to be the true account of all knowable reality because, according to Schelling, from the standing of absolute identity, reality explains itself. Published in May of 1801 in the second volume of the *Journal for Speculative Physics*, a magazine founded and edited by Schelling himself in Jena, the *Darstellung* appears to have been for Schelling the inaugural exposition of what has come to be known as the philosophy of identity, which he attempted to clarify, extend and, to certain extent, *Platonize*, in a further series of texts published between 1801 and 1806.[90] A further text published anonymously as *System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere* is regarded as Schelling's most comprehensive version of the System of Identity; it was composed between 1803 and 1804 on the basis of Schelling's lectures in the katholische Universität Würzburg, where he got a professorship appointment from November of 1803 to April of 1806.

In a way, the *Darstellung* concerns not only Schelling's positive unearthing of the unconditioned as absolute identity but also the system of philosophy that logically follows from his presuppositionless principle. The *Darstellung* is perhaps Schelling's finest attempt to derive a system from a principle that assumes that all being is absolutely one and identical to

[90] The most strikingly Platonic of them is *Bruno oder über das göttliche und natürliche Princip der Ding. En Gespräch* (*Bruno or on the divine and natural principle of things. A dialogue* [SW I/IV: 213-230]) of 1802; but Schelling uses a similar framework in the annexations of the 1802 edition (second) of *Ideen einer Philosophie der Natur*, (*Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* [AA I/13: 45-371]), and the short essay, *Über das Verhältnis des Realen und Idealen in der Natur* (*On the Relationship between the Real and Ideal in Nature* [SW I/II: 357-380]) appeared in the 1806 re-edition of *Von der Weltseele*.

itself. For this reason, it is not surprising that this work also seems to consummate Schelling's long-held intellectual admiration for Spinoza's substance monism.[91] Hence the work is shaped after Spinoza's *Ethics*. This is particularly evident in that the *Darstellung* is a logical deduction structured into propositions, proofs, explications and corollaries; and similarly, it endeavours to offer a comprehensive insight into the oneness of all things. Indeed, this work seems to bring Schelling closer to Spinoza and farther from the »idealism of the I« that the former nurtured since his days at the *Tübinger Stift*. But even if in a way Schelling is a Spinozist, he is also not close to Spinoza in important ways. This is because, in the System of Identity, Schelling turns the foundations of the reified substance to make it »an idealism of Nature«. This idealism, Schelling explains in his essay *On the True Concept of Nature-Philosophy*, is original, whereas the idealism of the »I« is derived. (Cf. AA I/10: 88; p. 48).

It is in the *Darstellung*, a relatively short but rigorously axiomatic work, where he claims to have developed, in earnest, his first system of philosophy 'in its full characteristic shape'. (AA I/10: 109; p. 344). For Schelling this meant that his past published treatises, albeit striving for the form of systematicity in one way or another, could not be more than outlines or partial systems as far as they failed to reveal the highest grounding from which a system evolves and constructs itself. Hence, none of these past treatises made the 'complete form' explicit but were rather thought of and planned as one-sided presentations of philosophy with equally original status and standing. (Ibid, 110; p. 344). As a result, Schelling often speaks about opposite but equal *sides* of philosophy, each abiding by their corresponding unconditioned principles, either Nature or self-consciousness. But as the spatial analogy might help us realise, two *sides* are not independent from each other or self-sustaining apart from the imaginary line that contains them; instead, they are mutually limiting portions of a unifying but *side*-transcending structure. Schelling is explicit that the highest foundation that his new philosophy has reached is the highest expression of reality *in itself*. Thus, absolute indifference is the first and only presupposition from which these sides can be seen to become 'opposite poles of philosophical activity.' (AA I/10: 110; p. 344). These poles are, on the one hand, the science that aims at the unconditioned in Nature and the laws deriving therefrom,

[91] It is important to note that Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's book *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (1785) and the so-called pantheism controversy played a major part in the reception of Spinoza for Schelling in particular and other figures of German idealism. For a rich and sophisticated overview of Spinoza's influence on German idealism, see *Spinoza and German Idealism* (2012), Förster & Melamed (eds.).

namely, the philosophy of nature; on the other hand, transcendental philosophy, which he defines in 1800 after Fichte as *Wissenschaftslehre*, or 'the science of all knowledge […] a science which puts the subjective first and foremost.' [92]

However, Schelling was convinced that his previous writings already contained or presupposed the undisclosed basis of absolute identity, but now that he has, as it were, found enough philosophical bases to justify the unfolding from absolute identity, we will see the inverse path, that is, the unfolding from absolute identity to relative identity, instead of the other way around, which is a path that Schelling seemed to have explored in the Nature-Philosophy of the 1790s. Indeed, if we climbed to absolute identity from the structure of organisation, now we will descend to the organism from it.

Early in the first paragraph of the *Darstellung*, Schelling indicates that we should understand absolute reason, (Reason)[93], as that which 'presents itself in philosophy between the subjective and the objective […] standing indifferently over against both extremes.' (§1).[94] In order to think of Reason in this way, Schelling compels us to 'abstract from what does the thinking' so, in performing such an abstraction, 'reason immediately ceases to be something subjective.' (Ibid.) Since the objective is necessarily conditioned by the subjective and vice versa, once the subjective is done away with, the objective also immediately ceases to exist. What remains after this extreme abstraction is not simply a fictional suspension of two opposite concepts, but something Schelling calls *absolute indifference*. When Schelling talks about philosophy standing indifferently between the two most fundamental poles of identity we can think of, namely, the subjective or ideal and the objective or real, it means philosophy is no longer concerned with anything within the scope of empirical or transcendental *experience*; for in his view, in achieving the extreme suspension of all conditions, both real and

[92] For an excellent source of the falling-out between Fichte and Schelling see *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling*, (Vater, & Wood, 2012). This edition contains selected texts by both philosophers and their correspondence.
[93] For the economy of the narrative, from now on I will refer to nature and reason as *absolute* by capitalising the first letter. Thus, *R*eason and *N*ature are infinite and eternal whereas *r*eason and *n*ature are finite, that is, they are not considered *in* themselves and *by* themselves but *in* and *relative* to the absolute. The latter include both subjects and objects, which are mutually conditioned and exist only in virtue of their connection to the absolute. The same economy will be applied to Identity, Indifference, Freedom, Infinity, etc., under which relative identity, relative indifference, and so on, are.
[94] In order to avoid unnecessary cluttering of the pages, I will use the §§ numbers to quote the definitions, explications, corollaries, and theorems of the *Darstellung* instead of the whole AA reference coding. Just the same, I remind the reader that all these §§ are contained in AA/10: 116-211 of the academy edition, and in pp. 145-205 of M. Vater's translation.

ideal, philosophy can finally *descend* from Absolute Identity, a metaphysical space in which Reason is Reason, Being is Being, and Being is Reason. In here, Schelling believes he has found a metaphysical opening that is grasped when human reason meets Reason and the whole of reality presents itself in its form of being which, he says, is the identity of the ideal and the real: a pure and absolute unity that reason expresses with the proposition A = A. Schelling thinks that, irrespective of what A is in either position of the equation, this proposition amounts to 'the sole unconditioned cognition [*Erkentniss*]' (§7) that conveys the eternal truth of this absolute unity that necessarily has the form of subject-objectivity and, therefore, is the absolute identity of the ideal and the real. The fact that human reason grasps the truth of A = A with absolute necessity follows precisely from the verity that the law of identity is the law of Reason, which in turn expresses the necessity of the statement that Reason is 'one and simply self-identical.' (§3). Only if we start from the absolute unity and remain within the absolute unity, Schelling thinks, we stay in the true dimension of science, which is the System of Identity. As Schelling asserts in his Platonic dialogue *Bruno oder über das göttliche und natürliche Princip der Dinge. Ein Gespräch* (*Bruno or on the divine and natural principle of things. A dialogue.*), published in 1802: the 'only truth' is eternal and only supreme identity can afford it. (SW I/IV: 219; p. 121).

The commitment to the philosophy of identity as the ground of the system of the universe requires the 'contemplation' of the absolute as it unfolds by its own logical and necessary demands: for 'in philosophy the idea of the absolute comes first.' (SW I/6: 155; p. 152). However, to move further into the system, one often has to pop around to see what comes second—without leaving the position of philosophy. Indeed, Schelling thinks that philosophy moves into its pure element when it takes the position of the absolute, which requires of the philosopher nothing but her personal dissolution along with all her objects of reflection. Then the absolute, as it were, speaks for itself and nothing else stems from it except the necessary fact that it is unconditionally one, simple, and infinitely self-identical. Schelling provides us with a succinct illustration of this principle, only introducing certain nuances of expression in other presentations of the philosophy of identity: '*Alles ist Eins*' or 'everything is simply One' (SW I/6: 176; p. 166). Depending on the focus of his concerns—possibly anticipating the attacks of his detractors or in an attempt to strip away presuppositions, Schelling either underscores the absolute, inter alia, as Reason (die *Vernunft*), as a divine Unity

(*die höchste Einheit*), as the One (*die Eins*), as God (*Gott*), as Substance (*die Substanz*); and while the early figure of the unconditioned as *absolutes Ich* as a placeholder for the absolute has long gone, Schelling maintains a continuity with respect to the absolute as identity or indifference. Schelling himself confirms this in the preface[95] to the first publication of his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (also widely known as *Freiheitschrift*) in 1809. Here he notes, that in the *Ichschrift*, 'at least, the I is still taken everywhere as absolute or as identity of the subjective and the objective and not as subjective' and of the *Briefe*, especially in the *Ninth Letter*, he points to 'the disappearance of all oppositions of conflicting principles in the absolute, [which] are the clear seeds [*Keime*] of later and more positive views." (SW I/7: 332; p. 3). These views premise on the idea that the »positive« is the self-affirmation of the »thing in-itself«, the unconditioned and divine Substance whose being is Being itself. That the absolute comprehends all reality means as well that the former is immediately equal to the latter's Being; and this relation of the whole with its unlimited self, affords for an absolute identity that cannot be mistaken for a mere empirical emptiness, for everything actually is *in* the absolute. Instead, the One of absolute identity is more like a disintegration of determinateness, an infinite bounty of being that is only replenished by the eternal dimension of God—the absolute itself. In his Platonic dialogue *Bruno or on the divine and natural principle of things*, Schelling reformulates the idea of the absolute in the following way:

> 'we have defined the absolute as that which in essence is neither ideal nor real, in essence neither thought [*Denken*] nor being. But in relation to things, the absolute will necessarily be [*es ist notwendig*] both one and the other with equal infinitude. For we have said that everything in the absolute ['s domain] is ideal as much as it is real, and is real as much as it is ideal.' (SW I/4: 246; p. 145].

Continuing with the Platonic tone, in his entire presentation of the system, which is displayed in two series, the real and the ideal, *System der gesammten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere* (*System of the entire Philosophy and the nature-philosophy in particular*),[96] also known as the *Würzburg System* or the *Würzburger Vorlesungen*, Schelling alludes to the position of the thing in itself as 'the true idea', immediately expressing the

[95] This preface was written in connection with what was meant to be a collected edition of Schelling works published in 1809 by Philipp Krüll in Landshut. The *Freiheitschrift* appeared in the first volume, along with the *Treatise*.
[96] This text was posthumously published and based on the lectures he gave at the university of Würzburg.

primordial whole that Schelling identifies with the '*Universum*'. This idea echoes the archetype of the world he talked about when, as a schoolboy, speculated about the generation of the animal world from the divine understanding.

In the doctrine of the absolute, Schelling justifies the indeterminateness of the absolute by means of the identity with itself, that is, by providing analytic definitions of it. Accordingly, the absolute comprises everything and confronts no limits, so in its allness [*Allheit*] nothing stands out except the unlimited totality or an infinite One. Schelling's proofs of the absolute run the same kind of analytical claims, all stating the absolute's autocratic integrity and its overwhelming ubiquity. Thus, the definitions seem to go in circles affirming its identity and, therefore, the self-referential logic that emanates from it. For example, since everything is in the absolute, Schelling observes, the absolute is only equalled by itself, from which it follows the absolute's self-identity. When contrasted, the concrete thing, Schelling notes, the absolute 'has a form,' yet, since the real and the ideal are identical and not mutually delimited, the form of the absolute is indifference of subjectivity and objectivity or identity of real and the ideal, 'and in this respect, it is once again devoid of form [*formlos*], namely, to the extent that the formless is posited as identical with the infinite.' (SW I/VI: 162; p. 157). —because when particular beings are posited, the absolute posits them 'as dissolved within itself, that is, disregarding their particular reality,' as only totality is. (Ibid, 180; 170)

Furthermore, by believing he had subtracted the ego factor from absolute identity, Schelling thinks he had arrived at a more sophisticated theory of absolute identity. It is no longer an absolute I, but absolute reason. Not surprisingly he conceived the absolute as a thinking substance, given Schelling's sympathies for ancient metaphysics.[97] Strongly influenced by, among other, the German mystics, Plato and Spinoza, Schelling seemed to have evolved a view, according to which the absolute is an unconscious Nature which, bearing on its own absolute self-given freedom, develops itself as a will craving for its own self-knowledge.[98] Glenn Alexander Magee, for example, claims that 'Schelling's identity philosophy can be understood as a sophisticated, post-Kantian attempt to express the meaning of 'Εν καὶ πᾶν.' (2008, p. 277). Magee thinks this pantheistic slogan in fact could be

[97] I talked a little about Schelling's prowess in Part I.

[98] This more mystical development of absolute identity is more palpable in the second edition of *Ideas, Bruno* and in the *Würzburger System*. The *Darstellung*, by contrast, is a more schematic, analytic deduction; its presentation is austere and as Richards points out in his analysis of the work, at the time 'left many readers nonplused, as it still does today.' (Richards, 2002, p. 181).

seen as a placeholder of the rich philosophical tradition that infused Schelling. In fact, the »one and all« adage was first used in 1780 by G. E. Lessing in his conversations with F. H. Jacobi to defend the rationalism of the Aufklärung by way of the spirit of Spinozism. For Lessing it basically meant that Spinoza's system could be seen as the highest expression of the authority of reason, which was finally embodying a perfect naturalist and mechanical substance. However, Jacobi reacted to this view by charging Spinozism as a nihilism because it led to atheism and fatalism.[99] Later on, when the 'one and all' took on a richer meaning, it was taken as a motto by Hölderlin to express, on the one hand, the pantheism represented by Spinoza, and on the other, the mystic tradition that both Schelling and Hölderlin absorbed through the works of the Swabian pietist F. C. Oetinger, who was in turn a follower of the mystics Meister Eckhart (1260–ca. 1327) and Jakob Boehme (1575–1624). Schelling and Hegel apparently followed this pantheistic enthusiasm and the influence to convey the idea that 'all *is* one'. (Op. cit. p. 254, 277). It is very likely that the absolute in the System of Identity borrowed from this attempt at a philosophical synthesis of mysticism and philosophies of the Enlightenment, through the ideal of 'Εν καὶ πᾶν', but there is another aspect that enriches Schelling's notion in his metaphysical system, which is the fact that apart from holding the reality of Being, it is also, and to the same extent, Intelligence.

Indeed, on one side, Being or *Sein* is closer to classical metaphysics in that he renders it as *the* essentially true, eternal, grounding reality, in other words, what simply is and never becomes or ceases to be. To clarify this point, if we contrast the *issness* of Being with empirical reality, we find that the latter is only an inessential aspect of the former, a watered-down existence determined, and thus relativised, in virtue of its necessary relation to the particular in existence and a concomitant finite cognition. Seen from this perspective, Being as absolute cognition of itself testifies for the reality of the absolute as its own essence, while existence as such—our empirical reality—testifies for particular cognition, relativity and perspectivism. On a different side, the reference of *Being* to a kind of self-reflexivity separates Schelling from the abovementioned traditions in one specific respect: if Being is that which is in virtue of its own being, then Being is *for itself* because if «Being is [Being]», then, the identity it affords is given by itself and only *for* itself. Indeed, Schelling and some of his contemporaries seemed to

[99] The most celebrated discussion of the Pantheism Controversy is in Beiser (Op. cit., 1987, pp. 56-60).

have drawn on an interpretation of Platonic metaphysics[100] according to which Being or τὸ ὄν is connected with ιδέα, the intelligible forms necessarily involving a divine understanding [εἰδός αἰτίας] that grasps what it is, or ὄντος ὄν—the being whose existence really is and unfolds as an eidetic repository of ιδέα.[101] And since the only being that *is really* is Being, then the divine understanding thinks itself. Furthermore, in so far as this Being is not a mere thing but a living understanding, it has a self-referential quality, which expressed by absolute Being cannot but result in the manifestation of its own absolute identity. Thus, the fact that Being implies reflexivity, means that Being is Thinking, hence the interpretation of the absolute as νοῦς to which forms [ιδέα] inhere. In more contemporary terms, and as long as it holds its self-identical quality, we may think of the absolute as the ground [νοῦς] of all abstracta [ιδέα] which, by virtue of being logico-ontological types unrolling from the eternal ground, do not obtain through spatio-temporal conditions. And just as types have single physical instantiations in their tokens, Schelling's account of the »forms that inhere in the absolute« have their concrete, spatiotemporally located examples. (Cf. SW I/VI: 182-85; pp. 171-173).

### {1.2. Schelling's first critics}

Some critics in Schelling's intellectual circle saw his philosophy of identity as a return to the kind of metaphysics against which Kant edified a critical project. Kant called it *dogmatism*, a kind of zealous use of the dogmatic method of reasoning in metaphysics that allowed thinkers to go astray in positing what reason could or could not objectively know. According to Kant, the failure of this metaphysics lies in attempting to go beyond the scope of pure subjective reason and her possible experience by luring philosophers into thinking they can put forward truth claims about metaphysical principles or claim any insights into the reality of the supernatural—or what lies beyond the bounds of experience. (Cf. *Prolegomena*, AA 4:372). Dogmatism in metaphysics—says Kant in the B edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*—'encourages them quite early and strongly to reason with ease about things of

[100] Regarding this influence, W. Beierwaltes (2003), notes: 'Plato's ideas are conceptualized as existing reasons and origins that ground and determine each individual existent, themselves being unchanging existents and at the same time thinking structures of a timeless, absolute Mind, and thus the point of reference between this Mind and the thinking that is identified with being.' (p. 269).

[101] See for example this excerpt from Schelling's Timaeus Kommentar: 'Plato explains the ὄν at this point as something that is the object of pure intellect ἄνευ αἰσθήσεως, that which is "perfectly discernible."' (AA II/5: 149; p. 207). Schelling quotes Plat. Tim. 27d-28a. Note esp. 'the one is grasped by the intellect by way of its being always the same [τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν.]'

which they understand nothing and into which, moreover, neither they nor anyone else in the world will ever have any insight.' (*KrV*, Bxxx). As a procedure that only satisfies the empty aspirations of speculative reason, Kant admonished the 'real use' of metaphysical principles to go beyond the standards imposed by his *Critique*. After all, for Kant such a 'real use' was a mere deception indulging the 'natural predisposition of the mind' which, going unchecked and unbridled in its dialectical art, seeks 'to derive principles from it[self] and to follow the natural but nonetheless false illusion in their use.' (*Prolegomena*, AA 4: 365). And even after his reconsideration of the role of metaphysics in science, as specified in his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* of 1783, Kant's worry lies in that metaphysics, as an expression of 'the preoccupation of reason simply with itself' (Ak 4: 327), would only furnish principles of mere logic that cannot lead to any material knowledge, in other words, 'the attempt to cull a real object out of logic is a vain effort'—as Kant once declared in the context of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*.[102] (Ak 12: 369-71). Schelling, his critics thought, seemed to have returned to this kind of speculation that flees into exile from the anchors of possible experience. To the extent that he grants absolute Being to pure Reason—formerly pure human reason—thus demoting the subjective domain from its status of ground to a mere consequent, he seemed to take a more classical path leading to a system. But should we consider this *shift* to be something completely unexpected in Schelling's philosophy?

In a way, the answer may be affirmative, since Schelling embraced transcendental idealism during the second half of the 1790s; but in another the answer may be negative because in taking up Kant's criticism and Fichte's foundational programme, Schelling came up with a version that he did not leave untouched. The foundations for the Schellingian strand of transcendental philosophy were, as we saw in Parts I, II, established on the foothold of his idea of the absolute, a metaphysical principle that is 'the basis for all existence, a pure, immutable arch-being [*Ursein*], a basis for everything that comes about and passes away, something that had to exist by itself, in which and through which everything in existence had to attain the unity of existence." (AA I/2: 121; p. 94). Thus, in contrast to Kant's critical revision of this concept, Schelling understood the absolute as 'neither a merely formal principle, nor

[102] Scholars think it is highly improbable that Kant actually read Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*—which Fichte posted to Kant in 1794. Kant's review of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* was instead prompted by another review by Johann Gottlieb Buhle, who declared Fichte as 'undeniably […] the first true Transcendental Philosopher.' (Ak 12: 371; p. 560).

an idea (*Idee*), nor an object (*Object*), but a pure I determined by intellectual intuition as absolute reality.' (AA I/2:136, p. 104).

So, Schelling was not foreign to reasoning about that which stands in itself logically and ontologically prior to the standpoint of transcendental subjectivity and the empirical experience that complements it. Unsurprisingly, time and time again Schelling appealed to Spinoza's metaphysics, epitome of dogmatism, not to shelve him but to recover what Schelling thought his system unintentionally had obscured, namely, that the unconditioned substance was no object. After all, in 1795 Schelling thought Spinoza was the first to discover the *Ursein*, only mistaking it with the absolute not-I, in other words, turning that which originally must be *Intelligenz* into an absolute thing, thus concealing its original unconditionality which, Schelling writes, 'can lie neither in a thing as such, nor in anything that can become a thing.' (SW I/I: 166; p. 74).

It turns out, Schelling's presentation of his system of identity, the *Darstellung*, is very much a celebration of Spinoza's system, and if not a restoration, an original reformulation of the latter's system of the absolute. In a way, Schelling takes up the challenge of starting his system with the unity implied in Spinoza's deeply puzzling and provocative principle *deus sive natura*, by crowning Nature as the true absolute in his system. But in another way, Schelling also modified the foundations of Spinoza's system by unfolding a principle that was not only realistic to the extent that Nature presents itself as absolute reality, but also to the extent that all reality is also ideal. This was clear for Schelling as he was shifting away from his previous notions about the standpoint of theoretical philosophy in *Begriff der Naturphilosophie*. Here responding to Eschenmayer's criticism of the unification shortcomings in the *First Outline*, Schelling writes: 'There is an idealism of nature and an idealism of the I. For me, the former is original, the *latter* is derived.' (AA I/10: 88; p. 48).[103] Thus, Schelling, in a bold attempt to make sense of it as the principle of philosophy, not only makes Nature speak *for herself*, but also, makes her the prime *Intelligenz*, for Nature as an unconditioned substance is also and to the same extent absolute reason. This was already forecast in 1795, as his *Ichschrift* points: 'If *substance* is the same as the unconditional, *then the* [absolute] *I is the only*

[103] Michael G. Vater notes in *Reconfiguring Identity in Schelling's Würzburg System*, (in Schelling Studien, 2014, pp. 129-28) that, in responding to A. C. A. Eschenmayer's challenges about what appeared to the latter to be Schelling's one-sided foundation of natural phenomena with his 'unconditioned empiricism', Schelling polished up his view that *Naturphilosophie* had to move up and become the true and objective speaker of theoretical philosophy. (Cf. AA I/10:

*substance*.' (SW I/I: 192; p. 93). Moreover, in line with Spinoza's *Ethics*, Schelling deliberately designed the first presentation of his system, the *Darstellung* of 1801, after Spinoza's famous *ordine geometrico demonstrate*. The consequence was that the association with Spinoza was hardly difficult to bring to mind.[104] (Cf. AA I/10: 115; p. 145).

For example, Friedrich Schlegel, in a letter to F. D. E. Schleiermacher, dated 12 April 1802, writes:

> 'Das neue System von Schelling habe ich dieser Tage gelesen und bin ordentlich erschrocken es zu finden. Noch nie ist die absolute Unwahrheit so rein und deutlich ausgesprochen es ist wirklich Spinosismus, aber nur *ohne die Liebe*, d.h. ohne das Einzige was ich im Spinosa werth halte.' (Durner, 2009, pp. 50-51).

For some of these figures, the most worrying aspect of Schelling's system seems not to be only his adoption of Spinoza's monism, but also the boldness that Schelling adopts in elevating philosophy to an absolute truth, the encounter of which is possible, according to him, only in the dimension of absolute reason. The question then arises as to why Schelling feels the need to locate truth in this dimension and how, in his view, this indifferent Reason can be, as it were, the metaphysical locus of truth.

Critics immediately saw this apparent weakness, which may be the reason why they felt entitled to attack the foundational principle of the *Darstellung*—precisely Schelling's notion of an absolute identity of Reason and Being as the first and unconditioned principle of philosophy. For if they could bring down this ground, the whole system would suffer the same fate. They may have been hooked around the dogmatic element implying the grand epistemological claim of thought's access to the *ens realissimum*. (Cf. *KrV*, A578f/B606). This could have likely been the case because, for one reason, placing truth and lawful necessity only in the noumenal region, as Schelling's system does, has the ontological consequence of downgrading the validity of the individual's cognitive experiences. For another, establishing

[104] However, as M. Vater indicates in *Schelling's philosophy of identity and Spinoza's Ethica more geometrico*, Schelling's procedure in the *Darstellung* is not strictly Euclidean, that is, aiming at demonstrating new propositions with strict geometrical necessity—at least, Euclidean necessity—but rather, Schelling's procedure is 'Cartesian […] and depends on theorems attaining plausibility as the upshot of an extensive meditation on fundamental principles.' (M. Vater, 2012, pp. 158-9).

an ontological top-down approach, ascribes sensible existence with a lower degree of reality, almost as an illusion. This was emphasised by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who described Schelling's system as a natural consequence of a thoroughly rationalistic philosophy that, to be consistently carried out, must begin with the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which Jacobi reformulates using the ancient cosmological dictum *nihili nihil fit*. Others followed Jacobi along similar lines. For example, K. L. Reinhold also complained about the System of Identity in a letter of January 1802, stating to F. I. Niethammer that 'Schelling's system of absolute identity contributes to open one's eyes about the true nature of transcendentalism.' (Durner, 2009, p. 53). Indeed, in Reinhold's view, once pushed to its ultimate consequences, transcendentalism would come down to a point where it becomes 'a new pure rationalism' and a representation of nothingness; or as Schelling's cousin, Christoph Bardili, also critical of him, put it: 'a creation ex- nihilo; --Schelling's reason is nothing.' (Ibid, pp. 53, 55, 62, 63). However, Jacobi was the most notorious and insistent of the attackers of the *Identitäts-System*, for he saw in Schelling's system a new 'rationalistic' attempt that once again stirred up his worries over fatalism, nihilism and atheism. (Cf. Durner, 2009, p. 52).[105]

Jacobi had previously shared his concerns about the nihilistic consequences of transcendental philosophy in a letter to Fichte, published in 1799. Here he complains about those who, like Fichte himself, push the boundaries of consciousness to a place that is '*the true* inaccessible to science.' Jacobi declares himself bound to Kant's decision 'to sin against the system' rather than sinning against 'the majesty of this place' where 'the consciousness of *not knowing*' lies. (1994, p. 499).[106] Besides, by putting the domain of science into the place of not-knowing, Fichte—and later Schelling, incur the terrain of a thoroughly empty consciousness, which in Jacobi's view, only recreates a mere speculative exercise of creating real things out of nothingness. (Cf. Ibid., 500 ff.). With respect to this caveat, Jacobi thinks Schelling sins against the mystery that only befits faith. If divine truth is accessible, Jacobi thinks, it does away with faith. Moreover, in Jacobi's view, Schelling takes philosophy to a place of pure indeterminacy, a non-ground, thus justifying that *nothing comes from nothingness*.

[105] In *All or nothing: systematicity and nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon* (in Ameriks, 2006, pp. 95-116), Paul Franks offers a very clear analysis of Jacobi's concerns against rationalistic philosophies that take on the shape of Spinozism. Jacobi, Franks argues, thought that these systems would end up developing 'a maximally *consistent* version of the rationalistic conception of reasons as explanatory grounds [which] would be led inexorably to a system that [is] (A) monistic, (B) atheistic, (C) fatalistic, and (D) nihilistic.' (p. 97).

[106] Jacobi's condemnation of Fichte's idealism is known in the literature as the *Atheismus-Streit*.

Clearly, in a world where reality is absolute identity, nothing determinate stands out. From this an obvious challenge arises. Is it possible to derive reality, the being of Reason, from its concept? This question was seriously raised by Jacobi numerous times. One of his last campaigns against philosophy is the preface of the 1815 re-edition of his dialogue *David Hume on Faith*,[107] which although does not mention Schelling openly, has obvious references to the latter's System of Identity. Here, Jacobi seems to refer to Schelling's system when he writes that Reason 'finally achieves the infinitely wide concept of One and All, which is the non-thought of a thoroughly indeterminate.' Jacobi's concern is to put forward his belief that the philosophical pretension of founding truth and reality on a truism like Being is Being is no more than an illusory abstraction that intends helplessly to free us from all conditions. For Jacobi, even if we were to insist that we can reconcile all oppositions in an absolutely unlimited ground, it does not avoid falling into the trap of founding everything on nothing which, beyond whether it can be epistemically justified, it has ethical ramifications. As Jacobi writes in the preface of the 1815 re-edition of his dialogue *David Hume on Faith*, which he wrote, among other things, apropos of his dispute with Schelling:

> 'this highest concept to which the understanding can advance through abstraction is the concept of pure negation, of pure nothingness. If we take it as the unconditional ground from which every conditioned thing comes forth, then it actually is the absolute non-ground, a perfectly indeterminate becoming, out of which a determinate result is supposed to have emerged—a totality without any characteristic whatever, yet the ground of a real world with an infinite manifold of determinate characteristics.' (Jacobi et al., 1994, p. 571).

Jacobi's concerns may have been justified, because Schelling in fact makes Reason the sole self-explanatory principle, relative to which everything else has being and could be known. Indeed, 'outside Reason is nothing, and in it is everything,' Schelling states. (§2). And when Schelling raises Reason to divinity, or the highest point of reality and truth, and makes

[107] Jacobi's attack on Schelling's System of Identity eventually precipitated a controversy known as the *Pantheismus-Streit*. This Preface is part of this controversy. Historians trace its origin back to 1807 in Munich when Schelling gave the lecture *Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zur Natur* (SW I/VII) before the members of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences.

everything else mediately dependent on it, he draws the consequence that, *realiter*, everything that is not Reason has only relative truth, relative identity, and relative existence. As a result, finite things, interwoven into the fabric of time as they come into being and pass away, never really are. But this is mainly because existing things cannot be considered in themselves but only determined as themes against the backdrop of the absolute. (§§8, 28). Again, insofar as the absolute must be conceived as absolutely unlimited, therefore transcending space and time, it must be predicated as eternal. (§§8, 10, 44). Similarly, Schelling posits Reason using the universal quantifiers All [*Alles*] and Nothing(ness) [*Nichts*], assigning to them the widest possible scope; so, when he proceeds to determine the dimension of relative existence, he contrasts it with the totality of Being, which is now limited by the perspective of the individual. In this regard, Reason, not considered in and by itself but in relation to the finite, mirrors onto the whole of existence its totality as the negative of itself, which is Being itself mediated by all the extension of the finite, namely, Nothingness. From this it follows that Schelling articulates some definitions negatively: '*Nichts ist dem Seyn an sich nach entstanden*.'[108] (§13) or '*Nichts ist an sich betrachtet endlich*.' (§14). Thus, Reason, not as a mere addition of finite things but as a mereological unity of all of them, cannot be a thing but only an absolute totality that is hard to conceive in its own outside of the absolute identity, which, Schelling claims, emanates from the law expressed by A = A.

Other criticisms levelled against him could be brought back to one, principally those elaborated by Fichte, who was one of the first to point out this weakness among others. Fichte himself writes in a personal manuscript:

> '[Schelling] can never get out the indifference through mere thinking. Every other word that he employs [i.e., everything that is not A = A] is surreptitiously obtained […] *Polyphemous without an eye*. It is clear to me that he does not know the original meaning of "subjective," as it is in A, but that he can only grasp it in relation to an already presupposed subject (a thinking agent in thinking). Thus, he cannot actually escape from this I as a presupposed substance, and this holds for the entire system'. (Fichte, 2012, p. 121).[109]

[108] The translation reads 'With respect to being in itself, nothing has come into being.' (§13). And 'Nothing, considered intrinsically, is finite.' (§14). In quoting the original in German, I am only directing the reader to grasp the position of 'Nothing' and 'is' in these two theorems.

[109] Fichte wrote these lines in two manuscripts *contra* Schelling; one was composed in 1800 and was his response to the latter's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, against which he had important objections, the other was composed soon

Three main objections can be extracted from this passage. According to the first, Fichte is sceptical against the possibility of annulling the intuiting agent and reaching a so-called point of indifference. The second raises doubts about the possibility that the whole system is a product of intellectual intuition; instead, Fichte thinks Schelling's system is a result of just mere conceptual thinking. The third recasts the problem by assuming that one has taken the standpoint of the absolute; so, once in this purview, Fichte thinks, it is impossible to get out of it and attest, and without cancelling it through theoretical reason, the display of the necessary forms of finite existence, that is, the whole range of universal or philosophical knowledge. A reformulation of this third objection is included in the famous §16 of the Preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel, tacitly speaking to Schelling, referred to his philosophy of identity as a »formalism« that asserts that:

> 'what counts as the speculative way of considering things turns out to be the dissolution of the distinct and the determinate, or, instead turns out to be simply the casting of what is distinct and determinate into the abyss of the void, an act lacking all development to examine any existence in the way in which it is in the *absolute* consists in nothing more than saying it is in fact being spoken of as, say, a "something," whereas in the absolute, in the A = A, there is no such "something," for in the absolute, everything is one. To oppose this *one* bit of knowledge, namely, that in the absolute everything is the same, to the knowing that makes distinctions […]—that is, to pass off its *absolute* as the night in which, as one says, all cows are black—is an utterly vacuous naiveté in cognition.' (Hegel, 2018, pp. 11-12).

These challenges are interconnected, for their root lies in solving the problem of how to account for the philosophical evidence of what we experience as truthful without the factor of experience that relativizes what is true. One may want to say that Hegel's philosophy is an alternative to Schelling's attempt at a philosophy of the absolute, but Schelling himself

after the publication of the 1801 *Darstellung*. There is no record that Schelling read this manuscripts. However, Fichte had already expressed his concerns directly to Schelling in a series of letters. Especially significant is a letter penned in August 1807.

thought he could provide an ontological and epistemological justification of both true and relative knowledge and true and relative being.

Schelling's essays on construction as a method that precisely brings together absolute and relative knowledge and existence seems to be a response to these challenges, even in anticipation of Hegel's criticism. And while we will delve into the method of construction in the following chapter, what is important to keep in mind for now is that Schelling's new outlook of the absolute demotes the method of idealistic deductions, for they rely on epistemic conduits not suitable for grasping absolute reason's own nature. This is because, idealistic deductions are akin to reflective understanding, which in Schelling's view, is a faculty designed to divide and hypothetically isolate what is originally one. The result of reflection's operations is an abstract limitation between opposites and a presupposed identity that makes them appear as discrete principles in order to arrive at a formula of the identity, but this identity is synthetic and relative to the temporal priority of the positing of theses and antitheses, which in turn pertains to the relative analysis of reflective philosophy. In other words, Fichte's hesitation to reach a point that transcends subjectivity abides by his own method of reflection in following the rules of logic, whereby a uniform principle like the proposition A = A cannot be conceived without postulating at the same time the opposition between subject and predicate which is a synthetic operation of the subject that thinks it. Apart from his methodological essays, Schelling also addresses Fichte's criticism in his dialogue *Bruno*. In this book, the character Lucian represents the dialectical thinker that resolves identity into simple oppositions, such as infinite and finite, soul and body, archetypal Nature, and productive Nature. But, at least in the System of Identity, Schelling is not ready to give up absolute identity and the source of truth that it promises. In fact, it is more important for him to conquer the absolute dimension and not capitulate, for 'an absolute knowing is not one in which subjective and objective are united as opposites, but one in which the entire subjective is the entire objective.' (AA I/10: p. 46). So, despite these sceptical challenges, Schelling remained on this path. This intention is laid down in Schelling's letter to Fichte penned on 3 October 1801. In providing a clarification of the first principle put forward in his *Darstellung*, Schelling harangues Fichte for not being able to see that absolute subjectivity as ground is only a preliminary exercise 'prior to finding the true principle', which being the true absolute must demand absolute indifference of subjectivity and objectivity. According to him,

the idealist is subject to an illusion performed by an analytical faculty that is prone to divide and oppose what is united and that Schelling identifies with reflection.

Of the so-called *Grundsatzkritik* which points out the insufficiency and triviality of systems derived from a first principle, only one will be indirectly tested.[110] This criticism claims that, even if we grant that an entire system can be derived from one principle, it does not follow that it is true since it is not possible for experience to test the highest foundation of the system, for we can 'conceptualize, systematise or interpret the same facts in incompatible ways.' (Beiser, 2005, p. 25). Schelling's first principle is the absolute unity of subjectivity and objectivity. As such, it presupposes the unity of intuition and finite being. In this context, the 'incompatible ways' that would challenge the unity approach have to be either dualistic or one-sided views. Dualistic views posit a gap that can be either closed or not closed. If closed then they have to explain the factor that *in experience* living beings seem to instantiate such a unity. On the other hand, if dualists posit two mutually exclusive worlds, they give up any explanation for the apparent difference in Nature between mind and the physical substrate. One-sided views, under different names, have attempted to explain the subject-object relation as a false adequacy by removing one side of the opposition but this does not explain the opposition *in experience*. In any event, if Schelling's absolute identity and the speculative system that derives thereof can explain the continuity of mind and matter by describing one process of interrelation of two opposite factors even if they are opposed, one can argue that, at least in this case, 'consulting experience' of exemplary cases in which it is evident that animals and plants have an unconscious knowledge of their surroundings, then it is plausible that Schelling's system might be true. (Di Giovanni, 1979, p. 70).

At any rate, Schelling's own response to these criticisms is articulated in his essays on the method of construction and abstraction, to which I suggest in the following chapter a possible avenue of defence.

[110] For a helpful summary of these criticisms levelled by some intellectuals in the 1790s, see (Beiser, 2005, p. 24ff.)

## [Chapter 2. Abstraction and construction: a gateway to the necessary forms of being of absolute identity]

Before we move out of the standpoint of absolute identity to, as it were, descend upon the spheres of particularity and look into the *movement* that brings about the living organism, it is crucial that we say a word about the method of construction Schelling relies on to unfold absolute identity into a system of the general modes of existence. Constructing the system is, in Schelling's view, the same as intuiting the whole *out* and *in* its necessary parts. This means that the absolute, even if transcends the particular, it is also, and to the same extent, immanent to its modes of being, the ideal and the real, which are grounded in the law of reason, A = A, and therefore are identical to each other. It is in the particular spheres of being where we will find the grounding process that in-builds the metaphysical structure of the living being—one that, as I will show, fits the structure that we deduced in the previous parts of this work. Thus, to be able to move into the system in its particularity and understand how the infinite and the finite can subsist in absolute unity, an exposition of Schelling's method of constructing may be illuminating.

Here I argue that what Schelling wants with his revamped methodology is to show a kind of cognitive merging with absolute reason that allows the philosopher to see the absolute's inner dimension, or the necessary modes of finite being, without *losing* the whole. This inner life, or the *Ineinsbildung*, is the topic of Chapter 3, where I argue that although eternal and always the same, this in-building makes the absolute's potentiation possible within the modes necessarily linked to it. To complement Schelling's concept of construction, we revise some of the most relevant criticisms levelled against Schelling's method and system.

To develop my interpretation of the concepts of construction and In-building, I draw principally on the series of eight essays Schelling published in the in the April and October 1802 issues of the *Neue Zeitschrift fuïr spekulative Physik* with the title *Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie* (*Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy*) where he outlined his vision of the whole system and expounded on key topics such as philosophical cognition, intellectual intuition, the idea of the absolute, the folding and unfolding of the absolute through the three potencies in each of the two series from the objective side to the ideal side,

plus the construction of matter, the laws of planetary motion, and the organisation of the planetary system around the sun.

Schelling must have certainly expected that his revival of metaphysics would come as a great shock to the philosophical circles. So, perhaps inspired by the challenges his critics posed to it, he focused on extending the initial scope of the *Darstellung* as to offer more explanatory baggage to his very schematic initial presentation. Thus far, in 1801 Schelling has turned away from the distinct methods and concepts established by the Fichtean reception of transcendental idealism. He now has developed a constructive methodology that aligns with the self-reproduction of the absolute itself; therefore, it no longer refers to a priori synthetic judging or the exhibition of objects in pure sensibility, á la Kant, neither to the exhibition of objects in the inner sense of the pure I, as he fashioned in his idealistic *System* of 1800. (Cf. SW I/III: 349; p. 13). Instead, Schelling subscribed to the controversial belief that the self-positing of the absolute is accessible by widening the epistemic act of intellectual intuition to match *Reason's own intuition*. The result of this, he thinks, is that the transcendental agent and her a priori object have to be *a fortiori* bracketed. It is, indeed, not until the epiphany of 1801 that Schelling realised that the radical of this identity, its absoluteness, can be displayed in its own element and ramifying beyond the scope of consciousness and the subject-object relations that make the absolute accessible. Indeed, in a letter to Eschenmayer, penned on the 30th of July 1805, Schelling declared that in 1800, after finishing the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, a light downed on him, according to which, not only absolute identity must be preserved in its own non-objectification, but also, that it could be posited in itself as absolute reason. Put in his own words:

> „Daß die Philosophie keineswegs in einem Objectiviren des Urbildes, d. h. in einem (insofern subjectiven) Setzen des Urbildes oder Absoluten als eines Objectiven bestehe; daß vielmehr das Setzen in der Vernunft kein Setzen des Menschen (des Subjects), und wie dasjenige, wovon die Vernunft das Setzen ist, weder ein subjectives, noch ein objectives, sondern eben ein absolutes sei." (Plitt, 1870, II: 60)

Thus, Schelling went on to construct his System of Identity, confident that he, as a philosopher, had left the one-sided point of view of the I and, as *Reason*, become one with the absolute and the essential ways in which it expresses its inner life. It is not clear, however, by which means this epistemic widening occurs or how it is possible to supress or abstract from the epistemic agent and its correlate to attain an absolute point of indifference.[111] One possible way to unpick this obstacle, and perhaps grant some persuasiveness to Schelling's method, is to understand construction as a way to always preserve identity, even if it is the highest and most unconditioned of all identities, and couple it with a concomitant act that, despite surpassing reflective thinking, has a seat in human reason.

In his essay of 1801, *Ueber den wharen Begriff der Naturphilosophie und die richtige Art, ihre Probleme aufzulösen* (*On the true concept of nature-philosophy and the correct way to solve its problems*; AA I/10: 77-106), in anticipating his new »idealism of Nature«, Schelling suggests an exercise of extreme abstraction [*bestimmende Abstraction*] of all reality at once. This exercise hangs on a kind of reduction that disbands 'all the metamorphoses that are necessary for [absolute identity] to rise up into consciousness.' (AA I/10: 89; p. 49). On this approach, Schelling contends that absolute identity is the most basic potency, one in which the 'original coming-into-being [*ursprünglichen* Entstehen]' presents itself in 'its first emergence [*ersten* Hervortretens]', at the very primitive moment in which it still is 'non-conscious activity [*bewußtlosen* Thätigkeit].' (Ibid). By comparison, in the »idealism of the I« absolute identity enters into pure-consciousness once the 'original coming-into-being' is in its 'highest potency' (Ibid, 10: 88), that is, when absolute identity has risen to its highest self-construction, or in Schelling's words, when 'it has already run through all the metamorphoses which are necessary for it to rise up to consciousness.' (Ibid 10: 88; p. 49). This reduction is meant to elevate philosophy to the »idealism of Nature« which, owing to its originality, takes philosophical precedence over idealism. Thus, what the philosopher achieves with this kind of method is to see absolute being in its first coming-into-being 'by depotentiating the object of all philosophising.' (Ibid 10: 88; p. 49).

To be sure, while *depotentiation* can be regarded as a methodological procedure, what Schelling is suggesting in this essay, and further in the *Darstellung*, is an abstraction that is

[111] Fichte levelled some of the most powerful objections to this kind of epistemic access and evidence in letters he posted to Schelling soon after the publishing of the System of 180. We will examine Fichte's criticisms and Schelling's responses shortly after we get acquainted with the method of construction and the life of the absolute.

paired with the free act of intellectual intuition. Because the doctrine of potency[112] refers to the graduated series in which reality unfolds and folds back by means of stages of self-construction, potency is the essential natural process that the philosopher *sees* when she performs the free act of abstraction. Berger and Whistler[113] have proposed an interesting term to explain abstraction; they think it is 'a method of immersion' that opposes 'transcendence'. (2020, p. 171) The latter, they explain, is the kind of Kantian conception of the absolute that presupposes the normative acknowledgement of the limits of human knowledge and the narrow stock of cognitions that make up the transcendental structures we use to experience possible objective contents.[114] (Ibid, p. 165). In any case, what Schelling expects to show with this kind of *epokhē* is that, since transcendental idealism remains bound to the subjective structures of the *I*, it is necessary to 'alter reality so that it becomes identical to (and can therefore intuit) non-conscious reality.' (Ibid, p. 173). Is there a conceptual path that led Schelling to this new position?

In my view, Schelling had already glimpsed in the *First Outline* that he could access absolute identity without the need of the subjective point of view. But first, Schelling had to grapple with the difficulty of writing off transcendental philosophy. Two strategies gave Schelling a window of opportunity for, finally and without hesitancy, unpicking the obstacles towards the unconditioned region of absolute identity *in itself*. One consisted in ascending to the unconditioned in Nature, the other in extrapolating the method of construction from the pure synthesis Kant granted to mathematics and geometry to the pure unity from which Nature realises itself. We could trace back these two strategies inthe *First Outline*. Let us first remember that, at this time, Schelling was still working under the umbrella of transcendental philosophy—even if he tried to convince Eschenmayer of otherwise. Nonetheless, when he designated the intellectual activity that strips away the empirical from natural phenomena and puts forward the unconditionedness of Nature above the merely empirical, he was setting

[112] We saw some of these stages in Part II, however, the notion of potency in the system of identity narrows the constructing processes to match the theory of identity and thus Schelling works them in the framework of »quantitative difference«.

[113] This paper contains a prolific study of how Schelling developed his notion of abstraction from and *pace* his complex theoretical interactions with Kant and Fichte; it also contains a fertile comparison with Hegel's own methodological access to the absolute and important criticisms objecting the possibility of this kind of abstraction. (*See the entry in the bibliography*).

[114] Not even absolute identity can be problematic in a Kantian sense, since there is no contradiction when absolute identity is thought solely through pure understanding as a thing in itself, the problem lies instead in that its objective reality cannot be cognized in any way. [A254/B310].

the path for the approach that seeks the unconditioned in Nature through a change of standpoint and rather than displaying Nature as the customary 'sum total *of existence* [*Inbegriff* alles Seyns]' or the object of a reflecting agent, he crowns Nature as the co-ego of the transcendental I, for he had realised there is epistemic access to the free productivity of Nature. After all, if it is possible for the transcendental philosopher to intuit the self-constructing activity of the spirit [*Construction des Geistes*], and 'construction is thinkable [*vorstellbar*] at all only as activity,' it follows that the philosopher can intuit 'being itself', which is 'nothing other than *the highest constructing activity* [die *höchste construirende Thätigkeit*].' (AA I/7: 78; pp. 13-14). Of course, we should not downplay the significative shift that Schelling took when he realised that the activity of the very first and grounding potency, absolute identity, requires a deconstruction of what the activity of the *I* has put in it. Under this reading, the 'highest activity' was certainly a dimension still posited by the I and tinged with its own positing activity. Alternatively, we could read the superlative 'highest' in the above quotation as that which has the greatest ontological import. Schelling seems to point this out in an introductory section in the same book, where he clarifies that while a particular thing *is* and thus participates from the predicate of being, the unconditioned in Nature cannot be a mere predicate under a determining qualification of being something. It is rather the principle of all being that cannot participate from a higher being, 'like light that requires no higher light in order to be visible.' (AA I/7: 77; p. 13). In any event, the point I want to make with this parallel is that in conceiving Nature as an unconditioned activity, Schelling took one step forward towards finding the key to approach Nature in itself. As he remarks in the *First Outline*, if »Nature must be viewed as the unconditioned«, then 'the concept of being as an originary [substratum][115] should be absolutely eliminated from the philosophy of nature.' (AA I/7: 77; p. 13). This falls in line with Schelling's intention of reporting the pure productivity of Nature: 'Our philosophy follows precisely the opposite course. It knows nothing of the *product*, it does not even exist for it. First and foremost, it knows only of the purely *productive* in Nature.' (AA I/7: 142; p. 76).

To continue with the parallelisms, in *Begriff der Naturphilosophie* Schelling claims to be relying on the free act of intellectual intuition, which he had long ago established as the proper

[115] Keith R. Peterson's translation adds 'substratum' to ‚der Begriff des Seyns als eines Ursprünglichen soll aus del Naturphilosophie […] schechthin eliminirt werden', perhaps to clarify that Schelling refers specifically to the derived concept of being as substance that has been hypostasised by reflective understanding.

epistemic act to reach the unconditioned.[116] Thus, in order to access this *immersive* standpoint, he remained in the same epistemic gap, but after his epiphany of 1801, his task was to show that the difficulty of »detaching oneself« from the subjective element, or the *intuiting*, could actually be overcome.[117] Schelling's strategy to meet this challenge consisted in reducing the subject-object dimensions of the I in the following manner. Firstly, Schelling thinks the philosophising is in fact able to see the arising of 'the purely-objective [element] of intellectual intuition' that is expressed by absolute being. Secondly, once this dimension of absoluteness becomes available, it only remains to undo the transcendental philosopher's step when she posited the absolute as an *I* through its pervasive subjective mode. This second step uncovers Nature as it is in itself, which in virtue of its own essence of absolute identity is 'the pure subject-object.' (AA I/10: 95; p. 53; Cf. 100; 57). It becomes clear that, for Schelling, abstraction has the role of laying out a blank canvas, free of presuppositions, for the coming-into-being to exhibit itself, within its own domain, in its own process of self-construction, which is in a way the heart of the system of identity. It is reasonable to think that if the philosopher has been eliminated from philosophical knowledge, construction is no longer a deductive tool but a self-reporting of Nature's own particular processes. Would Schelling agree with this view? Does Nature report its own particularity without losing itself in the process?

The answer to these questions also lies on the method of construction. For the way in which Schelling regarded the connection between the particular and the absolute has its origin again in his appropriation of the method of transcendental construction. Let us see in which ways this can be the case.

In the beginning construction was Schelling's strategy to claim possession of genuine knowledge from the ideas. He first sketched this method in *Ideas*, then worked his way through it a bit later in the *Introduction to the Outline*. But in these works, Schelling was still relying on his first principle to deduce necessary ideas with the help of experience. As Peterson as observed, transcendental construction was for Schelling 'an extraction of the necessary from the contingent […] a determination of the necessary conditions of possibility of the experience of an objective world.' (2004, 22). In view of the unity of opposites that this

[116] See above, mainly pp. 67-68, 150ff.

[117] Of course, this is a highly controversial issue that is still debated today. For an interesting defence of Schelling's position against Förster's challenge to him, which can be summarised in the question 'how can we know nature without consciousness?' see Berger & Whistler (2020), esp. pp. 175ff.

method implied, i.e., the necessary and the contingent, the universal and the particular, at that time Schelling just needed to justify the necessity of these constitutive principles. In *Ideas,* Schelling presents 'universal equilibrium', 'world system', 'purposiveness', 'Nature', as constitutive ideas. Their evidential weight comes from the fact that they *are immediately* in the transcendental subject. Hence, ideas are reliable on account of their analyticity and their transcendentality; and despite their purely intensional, or in Kantian terms, analytical, structure, they serve as the principles for the possibility of objects. In the *Introduction to the Outline*, these ideas are described, in conformity with their structure, as the absolute 'self-produced' [*absolutes Selbsthervorgebrachte*] and what provides us with 'a *pure* knowing *a priori*' (SW I/3: 276; p. 197). Hence, ideas are the epistemic foundation for philosophical knowledge [*Wissen*], but they alone do not furnish us with the sufficient evidence of their necessity vis-à-vis natural phenomena. They require a procedure to, as it were, make them discursive: 'it would certainly be impossible to get a glimpse of the construction of Nature if an invasion of Nature were not possible through freedom.' (SW I/III: 276; p. 196). Thus, this procedure involves establishing a hypothesis, then bring it to 'an empirical test'. Drawing on the generality of an experience to determine the unconditioned in Nature exhibits the necessity of the principle, for 'these judgements become *a priori* principles when we become conscious of them as necessary.' (Ibid 277-78; p. 197-98). Consequently, when the philosopher brings an extensional given to determine the intensionality of the unconditioned idea, such that it lends a discursive form to it, the scientific synthesis is achieved, and true knowledge put forth. In this context, Schelling seems to unpick the thorny issue of the epistemic access to the absolute ideas by appealing to the experience of general objects, and by committing to the scope of possible experience, he subscribes to transcendental philosophy: '*we originally know nothing at all except through experience, and by means of experience*.' (Ibid 278; 98).

Yet, in 1801 Schelling is telling us that we need not look into experience to derive the fundamental structures of Nature. He thus develops a new idea of construction that is also based on a unity of opposites: the absolute and its particular modes of being, but this time, since the subjective position has been reduced to a purely active subject-object, the object of the subject in experience need not be an ingredient anymore. As Schelling writes in 1802, 'philosophy subsists entirely and completely in the absolute,' leaving behind that which, as it were, feeds 'finite understanding', thus precluding 'the return to the realm of the conditioned

[*Bedingtheit*]' by this declaration. (SW I/IV: 392; p. 212). Construction as a method is not new in Schelling's treatises, but there it was seen precisely as a methodological tool. Conversely, in the System of Identity construction is Nature's own metamorphosis within its particular forms. So, more than a method, one can construe it as the exhibition of the absolute's inner life. Potentiation is thus the arising of particularity inside the, so to speak, unconditional perimeter of absolute identity. But to preserve the identity despite things' particular form of being Schelling had to modify his conception of potency as a general dynamics that govern material processes to a second-order dynamics that matches the absolute's inner self-construction. Before we delve into the absolute's self-construction of its particular modes, let us first attend to Schelling's notion of potency in 1801 and then consider in which ways construction and potentiation coincide.

The concept of potency (Potenz), as much as the notation he uses to represent it, is central in Schelling's design and construction of the metaphysical system of Nature's absolute identity. Scholars are not divided over the claim that Schelling seized the concept of potency, the use of the algebraic notation, and key formal terminology from the work of the physician and philosopher Adolph Carl August Eschenmayer. The latter's influence on Schelling's intellectual evolution is recognised by Schelling himself throughout his works and in letters to Eschenmayer.[118] The relationship between the two was one of cordiality, respect, and admiration, and their controversies, rather than erupting in an acrimonious, pamphleteering disputes, prompted penetrating and original theories from both philosophers. B. Berger and D. Whistler, in *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy, 1801*, have laid out a careful study of the intellectual interactions between the two philosophers that led to their disagreement in 1801. This study offers substantial evidence of the extent in which Eschenmayer's theories influenced Schelling's philosophy of identity.[119] In the following, however, I will only focus on Schelling's own definitions of potency in the system.

In the *Darstellung*, inasmuch as the philosophising never leaves the standpoint of the in-itself, what generates diversity is not an antithetical conflict of forces but the more general

[118] See for example, *Ideas*, *Von der Weltseele*, *Begriff der Naturphilosophie*, esp., *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (AA I/10: 110; p. 142).

[119] This study contains not only informative and helpful analyses of central concepts that play an essential role in Schelling's gestation of the identity philosophy and Eschenmayer's philosophy of Nature, but it also contains excellent translations that were fundamental for the development of my research. I borrow some of the elucidations of the concepts of potency and identity from this volume, which appear, respectively, in chapters two and three. (Berger & Whistler, 2020, pp. 94-116 and 117-138).

movement of absolute identity (A = A) that expresses itself *in appearance* with various levels of intensity of the modes of being of the absolute, the real in one position and the ideal in the other irrespective of the side. The surging of a potency denotes such intensity or preponderance of the mode of being (positive) or the mode of cognition (negative); the notation Schelling uses to refer to this identity in difference is A = B, where »A« is cognition and »B« being, the latter is 'posited as that which originally is (hence the real principle)', meanwhile the former is that which 'cognizes the B' and on this account is 'the ideal principle.' (§44, *Anm I*). Drawing on the characterisation from previous treatises, the real principle is 'in itself unlimited', while the ideal 'is the limiting one.' (§44, *Anm* II). Meeting Spinoza's definition of the absolute substance as having attributes, (Ibid) Schelling overtakes the task of showing how these modes issue from identity because,

> 'We do not merely think these attributes are identical *idealiter*, as people commonly understand Spinoza, we think them completely *realiter*. Accordingly, nothing can be posited under the form of A that is not as such and *eo ipso* also posited under the form of B.' (Ibid).

The movements or potencies of identity then designate more generally whether the particular at any moment has a preponderance of objectivity/reality or subjectivity/ideality, which is also registered in terms of quantitative difference. Whenever difference is posited in the system, a potency arises that designates a 'relative totality'. This definition is abstruse and obscure owing to the fact that it is not obvious how a totality can arise from difference. Schelling's justification for this lies in that all potencies occur under the form of absolute identity which is at the same time absolute totality (§§26, 43, 44). But being under its form describes a kind of relativity that implies a distortion elicited by difference. This distortion demarcates an individual that, as much as it is posited under absolute totality in a relative way, is as well a relative totality. This individual, in turn, has a character shaped by the particular preponderance that constitutes its form; this form or quantitative difference dominates the entire circumscribed totality so that 'the predominance of one factor over the other […] occurs in the whole and in the part.' (§§39, 45 *Bew*). Thus, relative totality with a preponderance of one factor is the character of a potency, and this A = B, Schelling says, 'is generally the expression of finitude', (§44, *Anm II*), so we may conclude that potency is a

particular way or mode in which finitude is an expression of absolute identity. To this we must add that there are two very basic modes, reality and ideality, each of which vary within their own totalities in terms of quantity or degree.

In this respect, Schelling comments that 'in the perspective of the individual a preponderance might occur on one side or the other, that therefore we would perceive that precisely this quantitative difference is in no way posited *in itself*, but only in appearance.' (§30). Considering then that identity is constructing itself for philosophy, and identity reigns supreme, more preponderance of one term in one side of the system amounts to less preponderance of the same term elsewhere. Yet, this momentary—therefore unreal—imbalance, pertains to a perspective that has not the view of the absolute whole because from the point of view of the absolute equality is always maintained. In the following paragraphs, I suggest a way to understand this problem in terms of constructing the inner life of the absolute. More importantly for our general aim, this interpretation of construction is also the narrative behind the idea according to which living beings are metaphysical functions of the absolute. Let us proceed.

There is one basic assumption that Schelling wants us to recognise in the construction of Nature as a process of potentiation, which is that an immanent unity lies in the different and finite taken as a whole; additionally, that this unity *must be* presupposed in order to make sense of the finite and different for us in experience. In other words, the possibility of the finite and different, as such and in experience, is grounded in absolute identity which, in itself, is present everywhere and eternally as one. The detractors of this method of absolute construction would want to say that even if there is a unity lying at the base of the multiple, 'no science is possible of something that is simply one and ever the same,' and thus, that the opposite is required, namely, that 'which is not identical, but multiple and differentiated' so that what needs to be demonstrated 'is not necessarily one but many.' (SW I/IV: 392; pp. 213-14). However, Schelling insists that the properly philosophical is not the many but the absolute unity that sustains the determination of the many in relation to the identical: 'demonstration is absolute identification of the universal and the particular, that [universal] which is proved and that [particular] in which it is so. These are necessarily and simply one in every construction.' Hence, Schelling dubs this construction 'absolute'. (Ibid, IV: 393).

Nature's innermost activity, as we have seen, expends itself in a mutual determining through 'the [apparent] contradiction which lies within it,' i.e., the pure subject-object, and 'only from its own intuition' which is non-conscious. The result of this intuition is the identity of the ideal and the real, or *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* as originally identical but 'regarded from different points of view.' (AA 10: 95; p. 53). And so, shifting from the standpoint of absolute identity to that of their »relative opposition« amounts to the absolute's own giving rise and passing through all its potencies in which 'a series of determinate products result from Nature's own unlimited potentiation.' (Ibid). Now, since construction now has moved from a mere method of deduction of determinate activity, as conceived by transcendental philosophy, to Nature's own inner life, the methodological challenge lies in, not so much deducing Nature's determining activity, but in how the philosophising is able to *see* the unfolding unleashed by the relative opposition without cancelling absolute identity itself. On a different perspective, this aspect is also the justification that Schelling puts forward for, as it were, delimiting particularity and difference from absolute identity.

Moreover, Schelling does not really justify particularity in the absolute as transition from absolute identity to finiteness, because we never really leave the domain of the absolute. (Cf. AA I/13: 102; p. 47). Schelling gives two claims to explain how things in the philosophising can arise out of indifference without effecting any real cessation in the essence of absolute identity. Let us call one of them the *angle* claim, and the other the *infinity* claim. We shall see that the infinity claim seeks to overcome Fichte's criticism that there is no consistent way to get out of absolute indifference as A = A once *posited*.[120] For Fichte simply did not believe that the absolute could even be 'penetrated', for all philosophising always amounts to departing from a hypothetical unconditioned self-positing and then describe a determinate object according to the set of conditions that make the latter intelligible.[121]

*Angle*. This claim intends to affirm absolute identity as the supreme ontological basis of existence, and as the domain where everything at once stands in being; by contrast, the

[120] In a letter penned on the 31st of May 1801, Fichte emphatically expresses to Schelling that he is sceptical about the claim that the absolute can 'be reflected or penetrated by any consciousness.' And he stresses further: 'one cannot proceed from *being* […] but one has to proceed from a *seeing* […] Being […] is the eternally impenetrable.' (Wood, 2012, p. 56). It is not unlikely that Schelling wrote *Bruno—or on the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things* (1802), as a response to Fichte's challenges, for he even resorted to the dialogue genre to portray Fichte as one of the interlocutors, *Lucian*, while Schelling, plays the didactic character of *Bruno* who elaborates this *infinity* claim.

[121] These objections, of course, merit much more research, development, and space, but I hope that my *angle* defence is at least of interest to my reader.

state of being *separated* from this whole is a particular reality, which only owes its state of separation to not being in the *in itself*. But standing in being with absolute identity is the same as affirming the whole over the part, for every part is never something in itself but always and everywhere in the whole, therefore, the standpoint of the whole has, as it were, ontological priority. Now, there is a way in which the part takes precedence over the whole, which could be explained as a ratio contingently imposed, even if anodyne, on absolute being: the perspective derived from this part is the angle of a relative totality with a preponderance of subjectivity.

To use an analogy, think of the figure-ground dyad used by the *Gestaltpsychologie* theorists to describe the inner workings of the visual field. Accordingly, when an organism endowed with vision has access to visual experiences, it 'responds to the *pattern* of stimuli to which it is exposed', where the pattern is a 'unitary process' or a 'whole' that makes up 'a sensory scene' rather than a 'mosaic of local sensations.' (Köhler, 1992, p. 103). Once the visual field is established as this particular kind of »functional whole«, two factors arise that seem to have a common life, namely, figure and ground, which, nonetheless, 'behave quite differently in the visual field.' (Ibid, 203). To summarise, while the ground appears as a well-ordered unitary visual whole whereby particular things have spatial relations to all others, the observer can focus on local events or objects that occur within the whole distribution of the whole, and the relations of these localised objects are always dynamic and its position is relative to the rest of spatial positions in the ground. (Cf. p. 206ff.) The fact that we can focus on one object after another and can make it the *figure* of our attention is a possibility that the ground lays down for the observer, but in this dynamical whole, there is no figure without a ground as much as there is no ground without a figure. As Merleau-Ponty notes in his seminal work the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in order to see the object better, a dynamic but unbreakable relation is required 'to lose in the background what is gained in the figure,' and this is because:

> 'to see the object is to plunge into it and because objects form a system in which one cannot appear without concealing others. More precisely, the inner horizon of an object cannot become an object without the surrounding objects becoming a horizon, and so vision is a two-sided act.' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 70)

Merleau-Ponty went on to extrapolate this structure to perceptual phenomena, linguistic articulations, the language of the body, the thinking process, the temporal constitution of time, in a word, to the entire life of consciousness. In his posthumously published glosses on his last major manuscript, *The Visible and the Invisible*, he states: 'the figure on a ground, the simplest '*Etwas*'—the *Gestalt* contains the key to the problem of the mind.' (Merleau-Ponty, 2016, p. 192).

If, with Merleau-Ponty, we find the figure-ground dynamism as the most basic structure in the mind and if, as I propose, we extrapolate it from the mind to the relationship between the finite, particular thing, and the absolute, a salient ingredient will seem to be missing: the agent that posits the angle, the theme, the determined shape, *the seer herself*. However, this ingredient is not missing in Schelling's system. In fact, the cognitive act that, as it were, cuts out the particular thing from the in-itself is inherently united to the existence of the particular thing as such, and even above particularity, it is inherent to the absolute itself—remember that the absolute amounts to the absolute identity of cognition and being, so particularity in its mode of being is both relative cognition and relative being, for absolute identity straddles across all potencies of the absolute. Notwithstanding their joint existence, both the particular thing and the activity that posits it are not real in themselves, that is, their being does not follow from their essence, for their existence has its ground, on the one hand, on each other, and ultimately on the absolute itself. (Cf. §§35, 36). In a word, their reality hinges on their being *in* absolute identity, the background that justifies their existence; from this it follows that the essence of each thing taken together with the whole of things is absolute identity, consequently: 'The entire universe subsists in [*ist im*] the absolute as plant, as animal, as human being, but since the whole is in every part, it subsists therein not as plant, not as animal, not as human being or as the particular unity, but as absolute unity.' (SW I/IV: 394; 214).

Let us elaborate the previous claims with more detail. This *angle* or point of view interpretation hinges on two basic premises:

(1) A particular thing, insofar as implies a 'negation' or separation from the whole, is not in itself real; it exists only to the extent that is a construction in and by the in itself but does not have the ontological status of the ground. This is why in several

places of the *Darstellung* Schelling defines the particular thing as that which 'exists outside totality' (§27), now, since nothing in itself is outside the totality of absolute identity, when 'something is *viewed* [*erblickt wird*] outside the totality'(§28; my emphasis), then 'this happens only by an arbitrary separation of the individual from the whole,' and Schelling immediately adds that this severance 'is effected by reflection.' (§28, *Anm*).

(2) From this it follows that existing outside totality is only a point of view that is taken when one abandons the standpoint of reason, where subjectivity and objectivity stand indifferently (§1). But to be outside absolute reason does not cancel absolute identity, for its essence is to be and its being follows from its essence. On the contrary and despite the contingency effected by separation, the absolute has to be postulated as necessary, for everything that has existence, or a mode of being, to the extent that stands in being through its mode, presupposes the absolute reality of being.

The way of being of the individual thing in a state of *separation* and *difference* is thus not real in itself, but a perspective that can be described as the framework of becoming, for things *appear*, initially *in other*—i.e., the absolute—and, at a higher preponderance of subjectivity, *for other*, or as Schelling states: 'the things or appearances that appear to us as different are not truly different but are *realiter* one, so that all things together [in the standpoint of reason], though none for itself, display clear unclouded identity itself inside the totality.' (§30, *Anm*).

With this we can conclude with Schelling that the reality of the grounding being has to serve as the permanent and original foundation where individual things come into being, so the standpoint of absolute identity has the upmost ontological integrity when compared to the part, the finite, individual whole, the determinate thing. But again, from the point of view of the absolute whole, the particular has not come into being, but it is always identical with the absolute. '*With respect to being in itself, nothing has come into being*. For everything that subsists in itself is absolute identity itself.' (§ 13). Drawing from the analogy of the perceptual *Gestalt*, we may conjecture that moving from the ground to the individual thing would not annihilate the ground, for it is where the thing subsists and the background over which the thing gains its own shape or mode of being by contrast, and if it gains shape, as I will argue

below, it is because the ideal is always a limiting factor in any potency. This interpretation makes sense when seen in the light of Schelling's own words:

> 'It is first within appearance [*Erscheinung*], where [the absolute] ceases to be *the whole* [*das Ganze*], where the form [*die Form*] pretends to be something for itself and steps out of indifference with essence, that each becomes the particular and the determinate unity.' (SW I/IV: 394; p. 214).

Yet again, drawing on the analogy of the perceptual *Gestalt* has not justified that which generates the point of view, and literally the first-unconscious-later-conscious *seer.* So, it is right to ask, whether this is a necessary ingredient to the point of view of the finite? And where does it come from? Since the particular is a potentiation of absolute identity and, therefore, is a reproduction of the lowest and very basic fundamental structure of absolute identity, then particularity in a higher potency is also identity of being and cognition but relative to the absolute. This is why talking about an 'angle' is justified. Indeed, this relativity is what brings about the angle and with it a *perspectival seeing*. This is because, in any potency, things are not if they are not linked to their cognition, for every potency is A = B, and so, 'thought and extension are never separated in anything.' (§44, *Anm I*). It is not hard to see then that cognition always accompanies the reality of the thing. For example, galaxies as such are not galaxies if a cognising does not determine them as such; of course, they are galaxies *for us* but probably nothing for, say, snails. But if we think there is no cognising without a conscious human intellect positing it, then we would not be understanding Schelling's systematic identity in the domain of the particular. After all, cognition need not be equal to human intellection or to snail cognition. Cognition in the system of identity is, as much as everything that exists, susceptible to potentiation; thus, reflective thinking should be seen as a cognitive act in the higher potency, to which being, i.e., the brain in a corresponding level of development or potentiation of the objective, corresponds. If conversely, human intellect is still not developed and thus galaxies have no corresponding cognitive positing, then galaxies correspond to the lowest potency of identity in which human cognitive potency is only a potential existence. However, the fact that galaxies are not posited by a human or any other higher intellectual act, does not rule either that primitive cognition in the lowest potency exists in the universe. In Schelling's view, 'the subjective cognizing principle is conjoined to matter

itself, or is first realized within it.' (§§55, 58, 59). Indeed, the mode of cognition subsists in matter to the extent that the particular »matter« is an expression of absolute identity but with predominance of being (§56). For example, in Schelling's system of identity, the most objectively predominant manifestation of cognition is at one level the attractive force or specific gravity, at another *light*, for 'light is an intuiting of nature [but] gravity an external one' (§62 *Cor*), and so on and so forth. But since in this potency the real factor is predominant ($A = B^{(+)}$), then the ideal factor is in a way dormant but in another also limiting and expressed in its most objective form of being *ideal*. (Cf. §62). It is only in higher potencies that cognition becomes illimitable and most divisible and determining. A case in point is primitive reflection, first reproduced by light as an optic phenomenon, then by excitability, then a higher moment could be suggested in common human reflection, and then one still higher by theoretical reflection. (Cf. §104-106).

In sum, if there are different ways in which a thing can be, these particular modes of being depend on the subjective side that delimits and contrasts them with the whole. The subjective point of view, in reflecting on itself (as in A on B, which in reality is A), and circumscribing a relative totality, departs from the primal condition of absolute identity whereby something, as part of totality, stands in being equally with everything else. Separation or departure from being is, as we saw above, a derivative state, not something in itself, therefore, something whose being depends on and lies in »other«, and this other is at all times and for everything absolute identity itself.

One more strand of thinking may be added to this interpretation, which I dubbed the *infinity claim*. In §38 of the *Darstellung*, Schelling notes that 'a first point can never be specified where absolute identity has passed over into an individual thing because it is not the individual but totality that is primordial.' (AA I/10: 133; p. 156). With this argument, Schelling is still seeing things from the dimension of absolute identity. When in intellectual intuition the philosopher merges with absolute reason, and the evidence that results is the self-realisation of the absolute as identical with itself, the form of its being is in essence absolute totality; this is conceived by Schelling as nothing but an eternal, infinite and indivisible identity, in a word, an absolute loop. (Cf. Ibid, §§18, 20, 21). Since absolute identity is eternal and has never come into being, it is therefore everywhere and always. Thus, in eternity, as much as in the absolute pervasiveness of being, the idea of transition is unthinkable. As

Schelling states a bit earlier in §34: 'absolute identity is in essence the same in every part of the universe,' completely independent of any difference, either quantitative or qualitative, and there is not a transition as such from the infinite into the finite, as if the infinite had been *really* suspended and replaced with finiteness—or Being without its essence. The latter is possible for an observer that, in a higher potency, separates in her imagination what is essentially united. (Cf. §14, *Zus*).[122]

In this respect, if there is a transition, this is related to the point of view of the observer when she severs being from form and makes finiteness and the infinite transcendent to one another, but forms or modes, by their nature and in virtue of being identical to one another in the absolute, are infinite as well. Other than this, finiteness must be considered as such infinite in the absolute. If we express this in terms of individuation, we may conceive that absolute identity has posited its own form in one of the modes of its being, then, although the '*individual is certainly not absolute, it is infinite in its kind*.' (§40). A question naturally arises, for why would the potency be infinite but not absolute? Schelling explains this out by constraining the individual to a limited infinity, for it cannot be 'absolutely infinite', for to be a potency it has to meet the condition of limitation. Let us remember at this point that the schema of potency is A = B, where A is cognition and B is being. In each potency one term A is limited by the opposite term B, which always is as much as A. However, the limitation is different whether it refers to A or B. This is because in particularity, Schelling conceives cognition (A) as outside being (B), or cognition positing being as object, the latter case makes B limited while A meets a restriction with B. What is important to note in this limiting/restricting unity is that they both are because they are in the absolute, but their mode of being is limited. This is how, in my view, Schelling justifies the infinity of the modes of being and the finiteness of the figure over the ground.

From the infinity claim, we may conclude that the particular, even though is not absolutely real, in its own sphere is real—in virtue of A = B. Schelling's gateway to climbing to the standpoint of absolute indifference and moving down to the finite from it is placing the finite, and its different forms of being along with the absolutely infinite. By means of an analogy with the phenomenon of light already envisioned in his annotations on the *First*

[122] Schelling is here clearly following Spinoza; 'Deus est omnium rerum causa immanens; non vero transiens.' (Ethica P18S19f.)

*Outline*, we shall understand why, according to Schelling, even though the finite does *appear* it can also be a necessary fact grounded in the absolute and, therefore, that appearance and development are the same and, finally, that it is also possible to get out of absolute indifference if absolute identity filters down, or repeats itself, into the finite. Schelling endorsed Goethe's theory of colours over Newton's mainly because for him light was more than just a decomposable quantity; instead, Schelling saw a metaphysical dimension in light,[123] a kind of boundary between the ideal and the real due to its immateriality (Cf. AA I/7: 220; p. 150), and its homogeneity as a the positively *real* instantiation of absolute indifference. Not surprisingly, Schelling thought, in accord with Goethe, that light was 'originally simple' and that 'the true structure of colour formation' has to do with an 'indifferent point' in the middle and a polarity where colours appear that the eye distinguishes as opposites, thus he believed that there was 'a manifest duality and polarity in the prismatic *phenomena*.' (Ibid 7: 95n; pp. 30-31n—my emphasis). Now, in the same annotation Schelling cites the prism as »a particular circumstance« that makes us see the colours as apparently continuous, however, they are truly opposite but only *for* the eye. Something similar happens in construction: every time that there is an eye, or a particular condition of this sort, colours in opposition will appear, but for this particular condition to have this effect, light must be posited first. In this analogy, it is light that has the potential to exhibit colours in polarity, even though, *pace* Newton, it is originally simple.

## [Chapter 3. The inner life of absolute identity and living beings].

The *Darstellung* starts with the metaphysical presentation of absolute identity within the standpoint of Reason; then it moves on to the standpoint of relative identity, which describes the positive in-forming of the potencies in the real series. The second-series construction, not included in this piece, is meant to portray the three potencies that are positive on the ideal series, that is, 'from the stage of organic nature' up to the point where absolute identity is again established 'under perfectly equal potencies,' and the philosopher-

[123] It is sensible to mention that before the *First Outline*, Schelling was indecisive as to whether the phenomenon of light was material or immaterial and his judgement was rather informed by the science of the day. See, for example, AA I/6: 78; AA I/5: 127; p. 75).

system, in the highest ideal potency, »arrives at the absolute centre of gravity« where the real is fully absorbed into the ideal, and '*truth* and *beauty* coincide as the two highest expressions of indifference.' (AA I/10: 211; p. 205). The general scheme has a basic dynamic formula and it works the same in the real series as in the ideal series. It is this formula which organises itself through increasingly complex stages of formation of the absolute's inner life, a process that I identify with Schelling's concept of in-building. So, the schema of the formation is the same from the most original indifference to the different stages in which the two forms or modes of being of absolute identity unfold. In this final chapter, we shall first derive a schema from the inner life of the system, and second, we will see how this schema applies to the structure of living beings. I hope to convince the reader that the same schema was implied in Schelling's earlier derivations of living organisation and that absolute identity was the principle that he had presupposed in every instance.

{3.1. Ineinsbildung: the absolute's inner life.}

Schelling's exercise of *epokhē* showed us the overwhelming indeterminacy of the concept of absolute reason. This is more obvious when Schelling talks about the absolute identity of essence [*Wesen*], being [*Seyn*], and form [*Form*] in his clarificatory essays of 1802, a formula that exhibits the indifferent space of Reason. However, in the surge of the potencies, this triad gains in determination by degrees. By and large, Schelling tried to keep the same symmetric schema of the potentiation of Nature through the multiple presentations of the System of Identity. The schema thus may be formulated in the following way: *a simple unity that unfurls along triads*. Furthermore, there is one fundamental triad that is recursive along different potencies; in fact, the start of a higher-level potency is marked by the end of the third moment of the triad that constitutes the previous potency. Additionally, as I suggested in the previous chapter, one may also draw two standpoints from which, philosophically, the absolute makes sense: one is the absolute itself, now the background, and the other is the inessential negation of or diremption from the absolute, which becomes the philosophy's focus when the task is to describe the absolute's in-building (*Ineinsbildung*). The latter could be interpreted as the inner life of the absolute, the particular region of potentiation where things *appear*.

Schelling coined the German term *Ineinsbildung*—also spelled *in-eins-Bildung* elsewhere—to refer to this inner life of the absolute. The term first appeared in 1802 in his essay on the method of construction, a year after the apparition of the first presentation of the system, where he associates it with 'the innermost mystery of creation' and the 'equal absoluteness of the unities' that in a discrete form of cognition appear distinguished as particular and universal. Then he adds that this is the source of a 'two-fold striving [*doppelter Trieb*]' whereby 'everything moves [*webt*] and lives.' (SW I/IV: 394; p. 213; Cf. AA I/13: 106-7; p. 51). It is impossible to find a match in the English language that reflects, in one word, the meaning Schelling intended to convey. Michael V. Vater has translated this term elsewhere as *In-building*, *forming-into-one*, *identification* and has noted the morphological parallelisms with the German words *Einbildung* (*imagination*) and *Einbildung* (*making uniform*).[124] An etymological glance at its components, *in-eins* and *Bildung*, may suggest the idea of an inward building within and onto unity, or an imaginative creativity of a metaphysical sort. Schelling himself, in the quoted paragraph appeals to an invocation of a metaphysical imagination when he first drops the term in reference to the absolute identity of finite and infinite: ‚der göttlichen Ineinsbildung (Einbildung) des Vorbildlichen und Gegenbildlichen, in welcher jedes Wesen seine wahre Wurzel hat.'[125] (Ibid.) By introducing this neologism, Schelling seems to be alluding to a quasi-Platonic approach when he drops the suggestion that what the absolute exhibits in its innermost unity is the joint subsistence of the exemplar [*das Vorbildliche*] and its opposite [*das Gegenbildliche*], namely, the original. Schelling's reference to Platonic jargon is the first attempt of a more serious synthesis between his own *Identitätssystem* and his interpretation of Platonic and neo-Platonic themes in later works.[126] This is significative, though, on two grounds: one hinges on his belief that he, as an heir of a long tradition of great philosophers, is contributing towards the unearthing of philosophical principles that genuinely describe the ontological atlas of that primordial reality—or ὄντος ὄν—that makes

[124] See for example, *The Philosophical Rupture* in Notes, p. 263. (Vater & Wood, 2012); *Bruno* in Notes, p. 237 (M. G. Vater, 1984).

[125] Vater's translation reads: 'the innermost mystery of creation, the divine identification (imaging) of original and copy that is the true root of every being.' (Ibid.)

[126] *Bruno*, *or of on the natural and the divine principle of things* of 1802, is the most distinctive example of Schelling's attempt to assimilate his identity philosophy to Platonic themes. The critical reception was generally tainted with scorn, not only because Schelling returned to the literary form of dialogue but also because it was deemed obscure, profoundly abstract, and bordering in sectarian mysticism. For an overview of Bruno's reception, see Vater (1984, pp. 9-15). Two further works map out the absolute's in-forming processes, the Stuttgart lectures of 1802-1803, published as *Methode des akademisches Studiums* and the 1803 re-edition of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature.*

becoming possible; the other, hinging on the first, seeks to incorporate his earlier insights concerned with the Platonic εἰδός αἰτίας back into a system that justifies access to the absolute itself with his new conception of construction. Now, with the two methodological keys we have derived, on the one hand abstraction as, not just Schelling's epistemic justification of his system, but *the seeing* of the standpoint of absolute identity, and on another hand, the content of forming-into-one as *what is seen*, which describes the construction of the inner life of absolute identity, Schelling thinks the absolute's inner life can be traced as a necessary consequence when an »angle« is derived from it. With respect to the necessary link between the absolute and its forms of being, something must be noted.

For Schelling »absolute construction« does not separate anymore the forming-into-one and its structure because, according to him, both, the absolute unity of the ideal and the real, and the particular that arises from it, are necessarily one, a real organic whole because the essence of the absolute, which is to be, is in every part of the necessary process of its in-building. And he even thought that the knowledge of the particular, when seen over the backdrop of universality, is perfect. For example, in the very last paragraphs of the second edition of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling appeals to 'the root and essence of Nature' as 'the primal ground [*Urgrund*] of all creation', which he claims we have contemplated by means of the 'separated sides into which it resolves itself for appearance.' Therefore, the *Urgrund* of Nature as appearance was not the object of the first edition of *Ideas*, but only its mediated manifestation in the generality of its appearance. Thus, as far as the philosophising does not miss the whole, then it has 'the most perfect knowledge of the divine Nature, in reason.' (Ibid., 13: 370; p. 273).

With these arguments, Schelling managed to retain the notion of organic whole for the absolute itself because the particular within it is at every moment not only a function of but also expresses the entire whole. In his own words, this kind of unity exhibits the particular 'within the absolute' and only 'insofar as it contains the *entire absolute* exhibited within itself.' (SW I/IV: 393-94; p. 213). The particular of course comes to the fore when the philosophising focuses on it and becomes formal—or if we pick up from the form of the potencies, we could equally say that it becomes relative. That this relativity is formal means that the acknowledged difference, at any degree, is not real, in other words, 'it is a difference that is not posited with respect to essence […] a difference, therefore, based merely on the diversity [of factors] within

form […] a *differentia formalis*.' (§30, AA I/10: 127-28, n61). Precisely regarding this latter point, the objection that Schelling had against his forerunners, and earlier versions of his work, is precisely the antithetical mode of philosophising that severs and ditches one term of the identity as that which is absolutely different. For example, in the 1803 edition of *Ideas*, Schelling, in trying to correct his past formalistic views, added a series of explanatory supplements to reintegrate the transcendental investigations he laid out in the 1797 by rebranding them as the formal or subjectivist side of philosophy that absorbs the real into the ideal, so that idealism, seen from the standpoint of the system, 'entirely reduces [*weist zurück*] philosophy to form, to knowledge, to cognition,' and conversely, does away with being by making it antithetical.[127] (SW I/IV: 370; p. 211). In *Bruno*, Schelling remarks that finite cognition 'keeps object and concept, particular and universal distinct from one another.' And he tacitly refers to Fichte as one of those 'self-proclaimed philosophers who first posit unity, then multiplicity, and leave them simply opposed.' (SW 4: 241; p. 141).

The metaphysics of identity, by contrast, is not univocal in that it does not make the absolute antithetical or transcendent but recovers the formal aspect that arises with the particular and integrates it into the unity of the absolute whole, and only in this way it makes sense to say that particularity is different from the absolute 'only ideally […] viz., as a copy is different from the original, while intrinsically or really it is entirely identical to it.' (SW I/IV: 393-94; p. 213). As for the process as a whole, it will be marked by a formative activity that in fact *moves* on the basis of this forming-into-one which the philosophy of identity intends to justify as the truth and the true particular instances that follow from the one truth.

With these ideas in mind, we might want to ask: if the particular is a striving onto one, how does it obtain in the system? In the previous parts of this work, I tried to make the case that the process of formation of organic beings follows the general outline of the organisation of the whole of Nature. On this account, organisation consisted in a struggle of opposite tendencies subtended by an assumed identity that drives the activity to meet one blind goal,

[127] Schelling himself expresses this view in one of the essays of the *Fernere Darstellungen*. With respect to the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, he says that its purpose was to 'present one side of philosophy, namely the subjective and the ideal.' (SW I/4: 410; p. 224). In *Ideas* of 1802, Schelling regards the concepts constructed by Kant, such as the forces that make matter possible, as »purely formal concepts engendered by reflection« from which it follows a separation into an ideal and a real side, the ideal side which omits the real being the relative idealism delivered by Kant's transcendental idealism, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and Schelling's own reflections in the first edition of *Ideas*. (Cf. AA I/13: 105, 234, 274, 106; pp. 50, 158, 191, 51).

namely, to re-establish the unity. And it is only because this assumed identity is transcendent or, better said, relative to the process that the process is ongoing.

In the System of Identity there is a similar set of ideas with respect to the organisation of the general process and organised beings, but now, the stages of formation have been clearly designed to meet the now-blunt-previously-presupposed principle of absolute identity. Namely, there are potencies that serve as the building processes of the organic being and these potencies go through three moments of development that organised beings will reproduce. In the following paragraphs, I will summarise the process that the philosophising traces along the unfolding of the particular through triadic potencies in the real series; in other words, we will isolate the schema in which embodied forms, the *visible*, come into being.

The first—and only true and real— standpoint [*Standpunct*] is that of absolute identity, or the in itself, which Schelling explains as a unitary triad or *Drei-Einheit*[128] of Essence, Being and Form. In the absolute, however, this triad is really one because in itself, Essence, Being and Form are absolutely identical. In other words: 'the interior [das innere] of the absolute or its own essence can only be thought of as an absolute, thoroughly pure, and unclouded identity' (SW I/IV: 374), which is expressed through the law of identity and posited under the form of the unconditionally certain proposition A = A. Now, posited through its law and under the proposition of identity, one may identify three aspects of this form, namely, 'A' in the subject position, 'A' in the predicate position and '=' of identity or indifference.[129] However, since in this standpoint A is nothing on its own and the positions of A are indifferent (AA I/10: §6), this proposition only means the identity of the identity (Ibid, §16, Cor1), in other words, since essence is identical to being, and being identical to essence, then

(1) A is both essence and being, or being and essence

(2) Thus, A: A = A

(3) But since A expresses the identity of essence and being,

(4) A = A then means, (A = A) = (A = A), or the absolute form of identity of identity.

[128] Similarly: *das drei-einige Wesen*. Schelling used these terms repeatedly in the *Fernere Darstellungen*. (Cf. SW I/IV: 423, ff.)

[129] Berger and Whistler identify these three elements in the formula for potency or relative totality, A = B; I use this analysis both for the law of identity and the latter formula. (Cf 2020, pp. 99, 137)

Yet, the above characterisation presents a challenge against the idea of finding a »structure« in the absolute; given that the main qualifiers Schelling uses, Essence, Being, and Form, are all perfectly and immediately identical to each other as they follow from the absolute itself. This dominance, proper to something that is absolute, may be better illustrated as a pure and perfect homogeneous distribution of white light diffusing everywhere with equal proportion in a closed room, to the point of blinding the eye to objects' qualities. Schelling often talks about »dissolution into totality« when what is posited is not the absolute itself but that which carries difference, divisibility, succession, limitation, or particularity, all of which are simply unconceivable in the homogeneous domain of the *in itself*; in other words, the absolute posits particularity only as something dissolved in its totality [*setzt es sie nur als aufgelöst in sich*]. (Cf. SW I/6: 178f., 181ff; pp. 168ff). But the philosophising is now positing itself in relativity which, we have seen, pertains to a point of view that already limits the absolute but only formally, and because the relative is derivative with respect to absolute identity, then the relative is key to understand the unfolding of the potency. Thus, this point of view is, on the one hand inessential with respect to absolute identity, and on another hand, meaningful with respect to the potency in which philosophy posits a form of being, either the real series or the ideal series. It becomes meaningful precisely when it takes shape in becoming a figure over the ground.

In essence all things are in absolute identity (§2), but the particular thing is that which is considered outside of absolute identity (§27), in our language, the shape that comes to the fore. While essence is a factor that for particular things does not change because 'everything is identical in essence' (§§35, 12, *Cor 1*), form and being become variously determined in every potency. How can we explain this? A thing that comes *into being* is one with the essence of absolute identity which is *to be*; besides, the ground of the individual thing is always in another and everything ultimately is grounded in absolute identity. (§§35-36, 28). But as we noted before, the *form* of *being* is distinguished in the potency when there is a difference in degree. This only means that a particular thing has a form or way of being that is relative and not original; the particular is then relative to the absolute and this relativity has a certain *intensity* that can be determined by means of their quantitative difference. (§37) As we saw above, Schelling expresses this capacity for difference with the proposition A = B, which has an equality of two differentiated factors, A that represents the negative or ideal, and B that

represents the real or the positive. There could be preponderance of reality, for example, in the three fundamental layers of formation of Nature (or being or, in Spinoza's language, extension): matter, dynamic processes, and the organism, each of which circumscribe a potency that unfolds as a relative identity, a relative duplicity, and a relative totality.

A = B also means that, in mimicking or individuating absolute totality, every potency refers to itself in virtue of the identity that a potency bears, even if this identity expresses a degree of difference; thus, it has a self-referential constitution, which Schelling represents through the concept of »relative totality«. In §41 he explains 'each individual relative to itself is a totality.' This statement leads Schelling to the conclusion that when A = B is not considered in essence (in itself A = A), then it is a sphere whose boundaries are denoted by the degree of limitation that A imposes on B. As we saw in Chapter 4.2 when we discussed the method of construction, Schelling appears to have realised that an account of the doctrine of potency would not be possible without introducing a primal limiting that prioritises a preponderance of subjectivity in every potency: 'if A = B is generally the expression of finitude, then A is to be conceived as its principle.' (§44, II).[130] It is in fact necessary to posit $A^{P+1}$, i.e., in a higher potency, to circumscribe the potency starting from matter: 'within matter is comprehended the ideal principle, which as intrinsically illimitable, contains the ground of all potencies.' (§§59, 58, Cf. §137).[131] In our interpretation, this is the capacity that the absolute concedes for it to be possible that figures stick out. So, while the divine creativity displays its life in absolute unity, the philosophical construction posits the particular by, as it were, levelling up one of the necessary modes of the absolute and exhibits this life as that which grounds, or is the source of, the surging powers of Nature that make the *visible universe* the way it is, i.e., a unity of ideal and real factors in different proportions.

If we use nature-philosophical terms to show the moments of the first potency in which matter comes about, then A and B, in immediately grounding the reality of matter (§53, *Cor* 2), or the prime existent [*primum Existens*]—that in which the material form of an individual being is always potential (Cf. §51, *Bew* c), are equally forces, (§52) but A, due to its attractive

[130] This also could be verified in AA I/10: §50, *Erl.* 3: 'Since the schema noted above is derived from the universal concept of potency (A = B), it is necessarily the schema of all potencies, and since, further, absolute totality is constructed only through a realization of the subjective in all potencies, just as the relative totality is constructed through a realization [of subjectivity] in the determinate potency, so must the succession of potencies follow according to this schema.'

[131] This is also the reason why Schelling includes Corollaries 4ff in §58.

power, draws B to return to itself and the result of the conflict of tendencies is a totality relative to absolute totality. In this construction of matter, we may also distinguish the three moments of the general construction of potency. The first is relative identity, which arises when A and B are posited as constructing tendencies, even though *idealiter* they are different. Philosophy thus describes them as tendencies: B, which expands endlessly through a line, and A, which diverts the course of the line to draw an angle. A relative duplicity [*Duplicität*] is then formed whereby the reality of the ideal factor, along with the reality of the real factor, is affirmed—both are equally real in the potency even if they are different.[132] The fact that both tendencies are interacting is what creates a third dimension, or depth, that determines this totality of the prime existent as extension. However, Schelling warns, in the first potency, these moments are, as it were, rather undifferentiated because there is still not a sound limiting factor that determines the relativity of the potency. Indeed, Schelling asserts that in the prime existent 'A and B are posited as being or as real' and 'immediately through absolute identity', thus, the 'prime existent (consequently A and B) has being directly from absolute identity itself.' (Cf. §53). This kind of metaphysical kinship with absolute identity with respect to the material ground is in part due to the fundamental principles constituting this potency, which reveal a similar nature. Indeed, gravity and light, both of which have a homogeneous character, are the ground of all reality in that gravity is the objective form of being of absolute identity, or its real being [*Reellseyns*], whereas light is the ideal form of being of absolute identity and the metaphysical opposite of gravity; for when light appears 'gravity flees into the eternal night.'[133] (§§93, 97-99, 137). On the one hand, gravity is the 'constructive force and absolute identity insofar as it contains the ground of its being' (§54 *Erk*, §97), this is so because gravity pulls everything towards the metaphysical centre that imparts being to all particular things. (Cf. §§30, 159n). On the other hand, light is all reality and expansive activity, the closest expression of absolute identity in the first potency. (Cf. §100). (See Table τ2, *1st Potency*). Thus, the principles that ground the real series, insofar as they are closer to the source, both sink multiplicity into a homogeneous not-yet-immaterial substrate. (Cf. §140). Difference, thus, has to be introduced and, once more, in §58 Schelling establishes the preponderance of subjectivity by elevating it to the second potency in order to, as it were, sully the homogeneity

[132] This is perhaps why Michael Vater translates »Duplicität« as 'doubling'.
[133] Far from mistaken, this metaphor describes in part the contemporary understanding of gravity in the constitution of black holes which are the regions of the universe where gravity is the strongest.

of the first opposite principles of gravity and light. Here Schelling explains that for the real to be limited by the ideal, the ideal has to be posited in a higher potency ($A^2$) so as to be illimitable and limiting to a certain degree with respect to the real, which in view of the limitation has become a relative totality (A = B). It is as though, to have a vision of the whole, the observer has to elevate from a merely flat surface to construct an angle for herself with respect to the vertex.[134] Owing to its interiority, light is designated in a higher potency, $A^2$, as 'the internal intuiting of nature' (§62 *Zus*) that opposes gravity, the outer intuiting. With this arguments, Schelling has posited matter as a relative totality A = B and gravity as the real attribute—or extension, for it has been limited by the ideal factor of light in the second potency—but we are still in the working framework of the first potency. (Cf. §138). The fact that a relative totality has been posited by $A^2$ allows for 'all ideal forms of being' to be posited 'in A = B as their substance', that is, the formal or relative aspect that is necessary for the shift from absolute identity to particularity has been warranted, and so 'relative identity, relative duplicity, and relative totality' may now be posited in the real series. (Cf. §64). This means that relative identity and relative duplicity were only potential in the construction of the material basis. (Cf. §64 *Erl* 2). This material basis though is necessary for the emergence of dynamic processes, the third order of organic beings, and the ideal series, all of which are built upon the relative totality of the material in-building. This struggle between the limiting ideal factor in a higher potency and the real being of Nature is significant when we see the schema of the living being, for it is in virtue of this principle of limitation of the real factor that the organic being posits reality only partially because the preponderance of subjectivity that is constitutive of its form of being is the basis of its difference with the *inorganic*.

It is not within the scope of the present research to explain in detail all the potencies that unfold in the real series, but it is important to summarise the schema. If matter contains the possibility of all potencies (§59), the second potency is the ground-laying of the organic being. In the second potency (see Table τ2, 2nd *Potency*), there is already a predominance of the positive or objective principle.[135] Schelling represents the opposition of factors in the second

[134] Or as Schelling remarks in the fifth essay of the *Fernere Darstellungen*, 'all quantitative difference only arises because the ideal determination as such separates itself from the essence [of the in-itself, which is its own concept of absolute identity]' (SW I/IV: 414).

[135] To be sure, there are many intermediate steps that explain the construction of matter, but the scope and space demands of this work preclude a critical and detailed expounding of Schelling's obscure doctrine of the potencies in the *Darstellung*. Instead, I am leaving this subject for a further paper. There is a very good study about the construction of matter in the System of Würzburg, (*Der allgemeine Leib der Dinge*, Barbarić, 2014, in *Schelling Studien*) Here Schelling

potency by means of a geometrically constructed line that expresses first the moment of *magnetism* in which the negative determining factor A and the positive determined factor B are united as in a cohesion. Magnetism, insofar as is 'being posited in reference to itself' is a totality—with this, Schelling establishes the magnetic field as an inherent property of matter. (§70, Cf. §69). Magnetism falls under the schema of relative identity (§83, *Zus* 4n) because the opposed factors are encountered both at once, either in matter as the universal magnet or, at any rate, in individual bodies. (Cf. §§79-80). In contrast, electricity 'falls under the schema of relative duplicity' while presupposing the universal magnet, due to the fact that it determines the interaction of two different magnetic bodies with difference in charge. (§83). All the phenomena that arise in the electro-magnetic field are functions of the interactions between the first and second moments of the first potency. Finally, in the third moment of the second potency Schelling posits the series of chemical elements which are determined with respect to their position in the line of the magnet, either closer to pole (+) or to pole (-). Their quantitative difference establishes the possibility of their combinations but also the level of cohesion that ultimately separates or combines them in a unity because some metals tend towards a positive charge and others towards the opposite. (Cf. §95). Given that they are determined by magnetism and electricity, the former third moment expressed by the chemical synthesis in matter is also the unity of the two previous moments of the potency. This moment also expresses, through the chemical process, 'the universal endeavour of gravity' to suspend all potencies by means of 'mutual interaction' of the factors and the processes taken all together, thus, 'the totality of dynamic processes is displayed through the chemical process.' (§112).

In its metaphysical dimension, this moment forms a 'dynamic sphere' in which 'dynamic activity' occurs. (§§108-09). Gravity, as the real expression of absolute identity, drives this activity towards indifference, but precisely because there are two opposed factors laying at the basis of each potency, in the first light and cohesion, in the second magnetism and electricity, that a gap of activity produced by the tension arises instead of a pure undifferentiated unity. As Schelling puts it, 'in the dynamic sphere nature necessarily tends towards absolute indifference.' (§109). Correlatively, this striving for absolute indifference is

has elaborated this problem in depth and introduced a Platonic language. Gravity is the bond that connects the totality of things, it is the real principle that fights multiplicity and the ground of the conflict of opposite forces; conversely, light is the ideal principle which draws the particular thing out of the obscurity in which gravity sinks it. Light also makes the whole present in the particular. In sum, the interaction of gravity and light lays down the constructive power of the following potencies.

the basis for a concept of metamorphosis. An idea that we shall identify again with the *Ineinsbildung* in the next section.

| Mode of being | *real series* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Negative (subjectivity) | Sensibility (-) | Excitability (-) | Reproductive drive (-) | *3rd Potency* |
| ≠ | (relative *identity*) | (relative *duplicity*) | (relative *totality*) | |
| Positive (objectivity) | Magnetism (+) | Electricity (+) | Chemical process (+) | *2nd Potency* |
| Δ | | | | |
| A = B<br>Relative totality | A (*attractive force*) vs B (*repulsive force*)<br>Matter (the prime existent) (+)<br>Δ<br>Light ($A^2$) (-) Gravity (+)<br>(-) Gravity (+) | | | *1st Potency* |
| A = A | Δ<br>Absolute identity | | | *0 Potency* |

*Table* τ2. This table displays an outline of the structure of potentiation in the system of identity according to the modes of being of absolute identity. All particularity is relative to absolute identity. The relativity of the particular is denoted by a quantitative difference that marks either a predominance of ideality (-) or a predominance of reality (+). In the zero potency, gravity is 'incapable of any quantitative difference' therefore 'arises from pure absolute being.' Since absolute identity cannot be immediately one with the first relative totality that is objective-predominant, i.e., matter or the *prime existent* (§54), gravity works as the latter's immediate ground; and in virtue of this, 'gravity is the constructing power' together with light as its ideal counterpart. (Cf. §§61-63). The zero potency enables difference to be posited within matter. (Cf. §§66-67). I use Δ in Schelling's sense in §114, *Zus b.*

{3.2. Absolute identity: the basic schema of living beings}

This concluding section has only one purpose, which is to show that in the System of Identity Schelling now openly and unabashedly admits absolute identity as the immediate ground of the organic being. First, I will summarise the moments of the third potency that give rise to the life of the organism. Then I will draw a parallel between the characterisation of organisation that we observed in Part III of this work, we shall conclude that metamorphosis in Nature and in the individual organism can be identified as In-building. Finally, I will adapt Schelling's general characterisation of the organic being in the *Darstellung* to the structure of the *Ich-Form* to show how the visibility of the natural environment is grounded in the structure of absolute identity.

In considering the problem of the metaphysical origin of organic beings in Nature in the identity system, I draw mainly on the language and definitions of the *Darstellung meines System der Philosophie* (*Presentation of my System of Philosophy*) for my interpretation. However, I look into some other works of these period to try to clarify the deeply abstruse language used by Schelling in this work. Another reason to seek clarifications in other expositions of the philosophy of identity is that the *Darstellung*, apart from being a cumbersome and dense work, it is also incomplete. Schelling stopped the development of the system at the beginning of the construction of the organism, with which Schelling almost completely described the real series of absolute identity, but left the construction of the ideal series, which is meant to complete the spiritual side, on hold. This should not be an obstacle. Indeed, we need not go over the ideal series and describe the first potency in detail because the organism represents the boundary between the real and the ideal and the determination of the living being on the boundary should suffice to have a clear idea of how reality and ideality play a level of indifference in the organism's structure. Moreover, the use of the other works of this period here is justified by the view that they are parcels of the investigative project dedicated to absolute identity, so a comparison only seeks to shed light on the raw architecture of the *Darstellung*. And this is not an overstatement. Even though Schelling's *Presentation* contains the basic model that allows for the construction in the first potency of the individual being and the organism in the third, one may also argue, exhibits the most elementary version of the system of identity which, under Eschenmayer's and Fichte's pressing criticisms, Schelling saw himself encouraged to publish.

A good way to summarise the previous account of the two first potencies is Schelling's own metaphysical synopsis of the real series in the second edition of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. With the introduction of this Platonic approach, I hope to shed some light on the tight and complicated naturalistic schema of the *Darstellung* as the new language will help us extract the metaphysical schema of each potency and make sense of the moments that constitute them. In the Supplement to the original Introduction, Schelling writes about the potencies:

> 'These unities, each of which signifies a definite degree of embodiment [*Einbildung*] of the infinite into the finite, are represented in three potencies of Nature-Philosophy. The first unity, which in embodying the infinite into the

> finite is itself again this embodiment, presents itself as a whole through the *universal structure of the world* [*allgemeinen Weltbau*], individually through the series of bodies. The other unity, of the reverse embodiment of the particular into the universal or essence, expresses itself, though always in subordination to the real unity which is predominant in Nature, in *universal mechanism,* where the universal or essence issues as *light,* the particular as *bodies,* in accordance with all dynamical determinations. Finally, the absolute integration into one, or indifferencing, of both unities, yet still in the real, is expressed by *organism,* which is therefore once more the *in-itself* of the first two unities (though considered, not as synthesis, but as primary), and the perfect mirror-image of the absolute in Nature and for Nature.' (AA I/13: 106-07; p. 51).

Accordingly, the first potency that contains the moments of the construction of matter is in this passage reformulated as the infinite absorbing itself into the finite.[136] In the *Darstellung*, gravity and light, both bordering absolute identity, give rise to matter through a process of differentiation that involved elevating light as the cognising principle that could determine the scope of the first relative totality, i.e., matter. The dynamic process, established within the sphere of activity, which is circumscribed in virtue of the unified polarity of magnetism and the divided charge of electricity, is in this passage the particular which in its embodied finiteness reaches out to universality by means of a lawful order of causality, i.e., universal mechanism. The third unity is, Schelling states, the »Indifferenziirung«, that is, the *in itself*, of the two previous potencies. This is because, according to him, the organism perfectly mirrors absolute identity, or the absolute in Nature and for Nature. Further in this passage, he also alludes to the archetype as that which the absolute cognition, that is, the intellectual intuition that allows the philosophising to apprehend the unfolding of the absolute, sees when in looking at the copy—the real instantiation of the *Vorbild*—makes sense of the unity of the concrete organism and the universal organism. This path can be also inscribed in the construction of the organism, the third potency, or unity, of the *Darstellung*. Why is this so? Because every moment in the potency is ruled by the same principle of

[136] Schelling uses the term *Aufnahme* that could be translated as *absorption*, to refer to this interaction between the finite and the infinite in which there is an in-forming of the essence in the form. (SW I/IV: 415).

absolute identity. Moreover, the arising of the concrete individual in the potency is explained also by a process of metamorphosis, although with more naturalistic tones, that has absolute identity as the archetype to which processes in nature strive.

Schelling, however, establishes the potency first for organisation in general. Schelling puts forward the identity of $A^2 = (A = B)$, where $A^2$ is the cognising principle elevated to a higher potency and (A = B) is the relative totality delimited as such by the former term of the equation. The chemical process was the last moment of the second potency that delimited a dynamic sphere, thus, the organism starts by circumscribing its own dynamic sphere. Similarly, the organism entails a heightened form of cognising, $A^2$. Indeed, Schelling thinks A is the ideal factor and that $A^2$ is light, moreover, he asserts that 'absolute identity is itself in light' (§93) which is also actually 'activity' (§96), so the activity that comes from absolute identity, i.e., that of self-positing, not just mere natural activity, is in the organism, and thus, as Schelling writes, 'it can exist not in account of any external thing of purpose but only for its own sake, i.e. hence that absolute identity exists under its form.' (§147, *Zus*).

Moreover, the schema of the potency is, according to him, that of relative duplicity because there is absolute identity within in the ideal form of $A^2$ and absolute identity without, in the real form (A = B). But because the organism is dominated by the capacity for indifference (§145, *Erl*), then $A^2$ which represents the cognising or subjective factor highly potentiated, and (A = B) that is the organism's body (its 'substance'), which is a dynamic sphere of activity where chemical processes are in effect, are one and the same, even though they are in a relation of quantitative difference. Now, since the organism determines its own sphere of activity, both its body and the immediate surrounding environment, or relative totality in relation to itself as absolute identity, Schelling grants it originality with respect to absolute identity. Hence,

> 'The organism is therefore the *secundum Existens;* and since absolute identity as the immediate cause of the organism is again the ground of its existence, so it presents itself anew as the "gravity" of the higher potency.' (§145, *Zus* 3).

One may say, following from this, that there is a moment of relative identity in the organism insofar as it refers to itself as a totality that comprehends two poles, the subject and the object, a relation founded in the absolute identity that grounds its existence, which nonetheless, is resisted by the reality of the dynamical sphere of its own corporeality. In the

next moment of relative duplicity, we have the agent of the self-positing activity, or mind, and which it posits when it posits itself, i.e., its body—this schema of duplicity adapts to Schelling's notion of causality, but since the animal principle and its body are in an absolute identity, for their potency, the causality is circular. (§146, *Zus*). The third moment of the third potency, the organism, insofar as it is constituted as $A^2 = (A = B)$, amounts to the organism and its sphere of activity expressed as *sensibility*, which Schelling determines as a capacity for indifference in virtue of its tendency to unify the agent with the surrounding environment, are posited, thus limited, by the philosophising.

Far from attempting to establish the order of the moments of the potencies in the *Darstellung*—in fact, the moments are collapsed in the first potency and there seems to be more moments in the third potency, i.e., relative opposition, relative indifference, relative difference—what I tried to bring up with the following schematic summary is the three characterisations we derived from Schelling's earlier nature-philosophical texts that assume the principle of absolute identity. This comparison, however, need not be necessary, for Schelling insists that 'absolute identity is just as much the direct cause of organism (or the ground of the common reality of $A^2$ and (A = B) as it is the ground of A and B in the *Primum Existens* (§ 53). The organism is therefore the *secundum Existens*.' (§145, *Zus* 3). Nonetheless, the parallelisms might help in the consolidation of the thesis that absolute identity lies at the basis of the concept of organisation in the earlier works. Accordingly, in Part III we identified three inherent properties in every organisation:

*Self-reference and identity of form and matter (pages 100-101 in Part III, Ch. 2, and pages 119-125 of Ch. 3*). Schelling's claims in §70 and §146, *Zus*, conform to this characterisation: 'the organism […] immediately subsists [*ist*] only in reciprocal interaction with itself.' Schelling's explanation for this is based also on his claims on §70. Considering that $A^2 = (A = B)$ is the organism, (A = B) designates its substance, or biological body, and the terms of the equation A and B are its properties, which means that properties and substance are relatively identical in virtue of their quantitative difference—in this context, A is form or concept and B is matter that incorporates the former. And under the identity of $A^2$ and (A = B), since together these two terms form a relative duplicity, i.e., both agent and body are real, different *idealiter*, while the opposition yielded by $A^2$ creates the returning or interactive activity. (§83 *Zus* 4). With

respect to this definition, the causality is not simply efficient, because the causa sui behind self-reference associated with the enhanced form of subjectivity made the combination of force (*Kraft*) and activity (*Thätigkeit*). (Cf. §143).

*Totality or a whole (pages 102-104 in Part III, Ch. 2, and pages 125-127, Ch. 3).* Since absolute identity is immediately under the form of the two parts of the organism, i.e., self-positing activity and biological body, then the unity of the whole that lies in the parts are expression of the whole as a totality which is the form of absolute identity that animates the organism. In this regard, Schelling writes, 'the organism as such is a totality, not just with respect to itself but absolutely.' (§146) In the *Fernere Darstellungen*, Schelling expresses this kind of whole in these terms:

> 'The entire universe subsists in the absolute as plant, as animal, as human being, but since the whole is in every part, it subsists therein not as plant, not as animal, not as human being or as the particular unity, but as absolute unity; it is first within appearance, where it ceases to be the *whole*.' (SW I/IV: 394; p. 213).

These three properties of self-reference, identity and totality bring us to the self-positing activities in the organic being, sensitivity [*Reizbarkeit*] and excitation [*Erregung*]. In fact, Schelling no longer talks about sensibility and excitability in this exposition, probably because he considered that they are moments that pertain to the ideal series. But both are very similar, Schelling characterises them as displaying the 'capacity for indifference' owing to the formula $A^2 = (A = B)$ that grounds the form of the organism. (§145, *Zus* 4, 5). These two forms of self-reference serve also as the catalyst of integration of material substrates to its biological body (nourishment, growth, potentially the transformation of the environment into their image, or conversely, the transformation of their bodies to reflect the immediate environment). In line with this Schelling, adds, '*The efficacy whereby the organism exists arises not from the conservation of substance as such, but from substance as the form of existence of absolute identity*.' (§144). Put differently, the activity that tends to reach the indifference of $A^2$ and $(A = B)$ is motivated by the form of absolute identity, the archetype; thus, efficacy has the role of conservating the form of the substance, its biological body, by striving to meet the form that lies at the basis of such and such particular organism. To be able to maintain the form of the body, the organism integrates nutrients from the environment; and keeping an equilibrium

between the form and the body, is driven by the capacity of indifference, which means that the organism is healthy. (Cf. §145 *Zus* 5). We may also add that the dynamic sphere, represented by (A = B), which is invigorated by the chemical process, also tends 'to the continuous addition of the totality to itself, which proceeds indefinitely.' (§119 *Anm* 2). Moreover, 'each individual body […] tends to be a totality itself' or 'preserve its being', (§80)

*Finally, the organism is a function of metamorphosis, which presuppose the identity of form and matter in a processual dialectics*. Schelling uses a narrow and a broad definitions of metamorphosis in the *Darstellung*. The first denotes the mere preponderance of a form of being, or to conserve the degree of preponderance that constitutes its form of being; the second designates a general law that every individual body 'must be conceived as tending towards totality'. (§§78, 80, 95). This fixation of preponderance should prime the term (A = B) of the organic formula to receive a form. In a note in this text, Schelling resorts to the concept of individuation in bodily things as the form they acquire and they want to preserve, something 'expressed *in* the absolute itself in order to separate them, not in the perspective of the absolute, but rather in their own perspective.' (AA I/10: 174n, p. 257). Form in the *Darstellung* is defined as quantitative difference (i.e., finitude in the individual) and indifference (i.e., infinitude in the whole), so finite beings, even the entire series of them, are equally eternal and simply present in the absolute, just not *as* finite.' (Ibid). It is as though the finite individual strives to preserve its form to preclude the imminent likeliness of dissolving into absolute indifference. Thus, in distancing itself from absolute identity, each totality enacts an inverse metamorphosis.

The progressive metamorphosis echoes, we might say, the process fuelled by the aspiration to reach the archetype that Schelling ascribed to Nature in the 1790s nature-philosophical texts. With the Platonic language that Schelling uses from 1802 going forward, this becomes even more evident. A case in point is the 1803 edition of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. Here Schelling describes Nature as the tool (*Werkzeug*), whereby 'the absolute understanding' brings to execution and reality what is prefigured in its mind in an eternal way. (Cf. AA I/13: 370; p. 272). One may say that this execution is the absolute's individuation expressing its idea of absolute identity in the particular. Again, in this edition of *Ideas* Schelling registers this process of individuation as '[absolute] reason symbolising itself in the organism.' (AA I/13: 107; p. 51). Here he also explains that the domain of the particular in Nature is a

unity of unities because it comprehends each one of the relative totalities that are expressed in the three potencies of the real series. We saw that these unities are also expressions of absolute identity, which is the ground that makes them totalities or unities of the different, and with this, the unity of the particular and the universal—absolute identity—is established. Hence Schelling remarks: 'These unities, each of which signifies a definite degree of embodiment [*Einbildung*] of the infinite into the finite, are represented in three potencies of Nature-philosophy.'[137] (AA I/13: 106; p. 51). These degrees of divine imagination that delimit the unity of the potency in question are such only as far as the philosophising places itself in the domain of the particular that, in a way, *negates* the view of absolute and *sees* what necessarily follows from this »angle« or field we have come to refer as the particular, but without severing it from the absolute as if the particular was the *in-itself*. The particular unity, with its two sides, the real (for example, the concrete plant) and the ideal (the concept that lies at the basis of the forming matter that shapes into the plant), or—if we want to use Schelling's Platonic strand of thought—the copy, is not false but something like a snapshot of the whole. But this particular unity is only relative, with preponderance of reality or the positive factor in the real series that correspond to the fundamental processes of Nature. Thus, the real that has a degree of limitation from the ideal, and this limitation yields a striving of the bodily expression of identity towards absolute identity, especially in the organism, as Schelling straightforwardly admits, 'the absolute integration [*Ineinsbildung*] or indifferencing [*Indifferenziirung*]' in the real series, which unifies the two previous potencies, 'is expressed by the organism [*Organismus*], which is 'the perfect mirror-image [*Gegenbild*] of the absolute in Nature and for Nature.' (AA I/13: 107; p. 51). From this we may establish that the *Ineinsbildung* is a kind of organic identity of the universal which denotes the absolute identity of the real and the ideal, and the particular, which always forms a relative totality within the whole and in virtue of this whole. More specifically, the *Ineinsbildung* is the process of identification with the form that organic bodies strive to meet because this identification, understood as striving, is what establishes the relationship between the model and the real instantiation of the thing. (AA I/13: 106-07; p. 51). When a difference in preponderance is, to use Schelling's term, fixed, the organism, by attempting to preserve the form, strives to reach it, and by approximating to

[137] Schelling does not exactly use the term »embodiment« in the edition of *Ideas* of 1803 but »*Einbildung*« to convey with the term that the divine imagination is a forming process in the real series and perhaps the translator wanted to stress the fact that the *Einbildung* is obtaining in the corporeality of Nature.

it as much as it can, preserves also the totality towards it tends. In this perspective, the evolution of natural things proceeds indirectly towards absolute identity, i.e., through the preservation of the form that the process of individuation has fixated, while at the same time this totality flees away from absolute identity directly, i.e., by »tending towards the particular or relative totality«.

For the whole process of organisation of the universe, this only means that Nature, which is the *One*, comes out of itself as *Two*, which is the simplest multiplicity, to diversify itself in multiple dichotomies that return, gradually and with more perfection in each stage, to the *One*. The absolute is the 'true universe [*Universum*]' in which 'nothing is divorced or excluded from anything else, where everything is absolutely integrated into one' and for this reason it is an infinite fulness together with the infinitely finite. In contrast, Schelling observes, the world replica [*Abbild*] is 'forced to spread itself out over a boundless [expanse] of time.' (SW I/4: 251; p. 151).[138] Thus, Schelling adds:

> 'The organism [*organischer Leib*] is merely an image [*Abbild*] of an archetype [*Urbilds*] within the absolute, wherein every possibility is united with its actualisation, and every actuality with its possibility.' (SW I/4: 251; p. 151).

In the language of *Ideas*, Nature presents physicality, in all its manifoldness, as the clothing of the absolute, for its essence is presented in the mode of 'bodiliness or corporeality'. (AA I/13: 224; p. 150). Ideas are thus instantiated in Nature by way of the modality of embodied existence. Indeed, 'ideas are simultaneously worlds' or 'world-bodies' in the system of the universe. 'The system of the world bodies is therefore nothing else but the realms of ideas, visibly knowable in finitude.' (Ibid, 13: 225; p. 151). Undoubtedly, Schelling's metaphysical turn towards Platonism went on to exploit the idea of metamorphosis to develop rich and interesting avenues, but I will leave Schelling's developments of the concept of organisation in this Platonic phase for my future research. For now, I want to explore in a brief account the idea of the emergence of the visibility of Nature with the categories of organisation in the system of identity are able to explain.

[138] The original reads: 'dehnt es sich in dem Abbild notwendig in eine grenzenlose Zeit aus.' (Ibid.)

With the deductions of the *Darstellung*, we came to realise that the form of unity in finite organic wholes develops as a self-contained or internal sphere of activity (A = B) which circumscribes a totality that *in* and *for itself* arranges the organisation of heterogeneous parts according to its unifying principles, which are all relative to absolute identity in virtue of the difference in their form of being. This relativity in the moments of formation of the organism is marked by the preponderance of subjectivity and objectivity at different levels. However, it is the ideal factor the one that furnishes the limit on the positive factor and make it a relative totality that will embody the degree of subjective preponderance that the individual body, in its tendency towards totality, will continue to fixate.

Suppose that, like Schelling believed, the degree of ideality crops a section of the absolute, which, then, descends as an embedded concept or *form*. The organic body is now ready to form itself as substance into one with this form. It is not relevant whether this process actually happens in Nature or not—more research is required to even pose such a hypothesis. What interests us is the principle of absolute identity that animates the inner world of the organic individual, in the framework laid out by the system, in order to understand why living beings make their surrounding environment *visible*, in a word, sensible. Following Schelling's account, it is possible to argue that absolute identity has descended into the forming-into-one process of the organic being. But this identity, insofar as it is only relative in form, will carry the form of self-positing, A = A, only for the embodied concept that has been individuated. Hence, the form of the, say, *Fritillaria delavayi* will posit itself along with its embodied form, thus, *Fd = Fd*. This form of self-positing could be identified with the process of individuation Schelling described in *Von der Weltseele* and the *First Outline*, but it does not have to imply any awareness or sensibility on its own, for the identity that is under the self-positing activity commands, as it were, the activity of plant to take ingredients from the environment to persist in the identity of its individuated form. But the question arises, what does happen when a formerly colourful plant [*Fritillaria delavayi*] suddenly displays the ability of abruptly camouflaging the grey scree of its environment in order to hide from its predator? Schelling's constructing line of preponderance may explain that the plant, owing to its metaphysical closeness to the real factor, easily takes the form of matter in the surrounding environment. But this does not explain why the plant seems to be in need to hide itself. The only factor that explains the visibility of an external environment is $A^2$ in its delimitation of

(A = B). But when Schelling posits $A^2$, he is already establishing the opposition of the subject and the object, in the unity of its form. In other words, the potential for visibility is in Nature, and therefore in matter, for subject-objectivity is the essence of absolute being. Taking this fact into account, we could establish that, because the unconscious or blind self-reference of A = A is not limited from within, A = A does not see itself, but due to the difference introduced with the unity of A and B, this potential vision that makes the subject an object for itself, then visibility is warranted. However, for this visibility to be actual, there must be a limitation from within, that is, an opposition with an ontological leverage has to be weighted in in order to account for the agency of organic beings. With respect to this moment, Schelling himself says, 'in intuition we are not conscious of any activity, any going beyond ourselves, any opposing and relating.' (AA I/4: 104; p. 86). Therefore, this activity is never conscious of itself; it can only grasp itself via the product of its creative flow, through its products, which are finite. Like Fichte, Schelling assumes the *Ich-Form* and the opposition between subject and object as inferred principles because they are necessary for the fact of consciousness to obtain, so both identity and opposition are posited as original at least in the *Ich-Form*.[139] In terms of experience, it would not be incorrect to say that I *live the I* through its products, be it conceptual, sensible, aesthetic, or ideal. But at the moment of experiencing the products, the I is only a reflection of itself in the other.

Opposition has to be posited as an ontological feature so, using Schelling's terms, Nature shows how her blind or unconscious drive to produce necessary mechanisms, prompts the emergence of living organisms: the first manifestation of a free activity that relates to itself by means of an external world, even if narrow and singularised. (Cf. AA I/7: 171-73, 112, HA 294; pp. 105-7, 112, n. 2).

On the other hand, the form of self-positability develops as the unconscious active relation of the living body with itself at once as subject and object by way of its immediate external environment—(*Erregbarkeit*). In this context and by means of two properties derived from the relative connection to the absolute, i.e., self-positing and unity with being, living beings emerge as individual, organic wholes, or mereological beings that strive for a higher unity by means of sensibility, and, in doing so, they develop the ability to overcome the

[139] In the *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794, Fichte says, 'as the proposition "-A ≠ A" occurs among the facts of empirical consciousness, there is thus an opposition included among the acts of the I; and this opposition is, as to its mere form, an absolutely possible and unconditional act based on no higher ground.' (Fichte, 1982, p. 103).

resistance imposed by the surrounding world. I have been using the heuristic term visibility to refer to the domain of the particular, the absolute product that arises from the self-returning or inhibition of Nature's own positive force, which requires the predominance of the cognising factor through $A^2$ to arise. However, in this context, visibility is reproduced by the individuation of the absolute in the sphere of particularity, more specifically in living beings, for they have been able to recreate the limited interiority of the absolutely immanent form of absolute identity. So, from a unifying process whereby the visible, or the living beings' objective environment, and the invisible, the two-property unconscious activity, elaborate a mereological whole with their surrounding environment only impaired by their finite nature or the relative identity that stems from their inability to be purely productive and posit the entirety of being when they posit themselves in form.

This plays out in the following way. The third potency is constructed with preponderance of subjectivity, thus the subjective form of this totality $A^2$, which is immediately brought up by absolute identity, establishes an activity that is more than mere mechanical activity. Indeed, in mimicking the absolute, this activity is a self-positing of the subject, *Wirksamkeit*, as object for itself, i.e., as a substance or body. (§145, *Erl*). Excitability [*Erregbarkeit*] is precisely a self-reference of this type in the organism. (See p. 123 of this work).

{3.3 The emergence of the visibility of Nature}

From the point of view of existence, it is impossible to determine the absolute origin of any temporal being. (Cf. SW I/4: 222). Schelling agrees with Kant that experience is the product of a synthesis of schematized concepts and contents of intuition, where causality, and therefore the series of chained objects of experience run infinitely. Whereas the particularisation of eternity according to the first potency reproduces infinitely individual beings in a continuous present. Thus, from the point of view of Nature as a product and the subject that experiences it, the series of events never gives us any evidence as to completely determine the origin of a caused thing. The concept of origin in this respect, only finds a meaningful determination in metaphysics. Emergence, on the other hand, refers to the coming into being of certain pre-existing conditions whose organisation has undergone a new

arrangement of limiting conditions. As to whether Schelling was able to produce a satisfactory philosophical account of the metaphysical origin of organisation and living beings, this will depend on whether we want to subscribe his method of access to the absolute for not only organic beings but the whole dimension of existence hinges on this principle. But even if we do not subscribe to his epistemological doctrines, we could assess the philosophical integrity of the derivation of existence from absolute identity; his system does seem coherent by and large, but many gaps are left open. Further, if we constrain the derivation of the system to two fundamental forms of being that we opposed in our experience and generalise the opposition to all living beings, this derived existence only circumscribes the modes of being that attain to cognising things, and perhaps in this respect of the derivation, Spinoza's infinity of attributes has a better chance as a metaphysical system that derives the only two attributes known to us.

By the same token, the pair visible-invisible, like the rest of terms Schelling used between 1794 and 1804, is an analogy that went through considerable changes in meaning. Initially, Schelling borrowed it from Plato to stress the divide between the visible world of experience, which seems to be double-sided—the side that we experience with the senses, and the side that is the sensible copy modelled after the ideas. Under this Platonic framework, Schelling more or less established that the absolute's will to make itself visible produces the endless causal chain of phenomena we know as Nature or the universe. By indulging itself with an endless productivity (*natura naturans*), the absolute expreses itself through an *external, visible* form (*natura naturata*) that breaks down into a countless multiplicity of empirical entities, among which living beings are the absolute's closer analogues. To depict such an affinity, I purposedly draw on Schelling's own play of words in the opposition invisible-visible [*unsichtbar-sichtbar*] and pair them together with his adoption of Spinoza's scholastic division *natura-naturans* and *natura naturata*. We are able to see that in the development of Schelling's philosophy of Nature, the affinity is a complex issue, for it expresses a unity of opposition that runs through all the three levels of formation of the productive absolute, visible nature and living beings. Early traces of the first opposition are in Schelling's early essay, the *Timaeus Kommentar*, where he takes up Plato's doctrine of the ideas to reflect on the origin of a timely existence from an immutable source. In this essay, going forward, Schelling conceives *the visible* as the form that matter takes on when the eternal essences are projected onto its immanent heterogeneity, so that, to the extent that materiality has received a form

external to its nature, the created world becomes sensible and it is endowed with visibility. On the other side of the opposition, *the invisible* denotes the eternal model, unconditional through and through and therefore purely ideal and devoid of any sensible dependencies. In Schelling's interpretation of Platonic cosmology, it is the demiurge who grasps the essences and applies the model [*Urbild*] upon the material substrate, thus generating the visible cosmos. A few years later, Schelling develops a more sophisticated version of this argument in his philosophy of Nature. Firstly, Schelling understands the unity as absolute with two sides, the self-positing infinite and the eternal process of self-construction. That is why the proposition that best depicts the absolute's nature is A = A. Secondly, the absolute wills to make itself visible; to do so, the identity takes on a transitioning quality whereby the subjective-objective identity unfolds as a self-positing productive agent (*natura naturans*) that mirrors itself on the whole of its visible reproducing universe (*natura naturata*).

Basically, »Nature's visibility« denotes Schelling's account of the progressive, temporal becoming of existing things as a consequence of the immanent procedural nature of the absolute and its will to intuit itself as relative forms of A = A. Now, Schelling's ontological justification for extracting finitude, difference, multiplicity, limitation, and temporality from what is unconditionally eternal and immutable does not always satisfy his critics. However, he consistently offers a solid response to the question, as he puts it echoing Leibniz, 'warum ist nicht nichts, warum ist etwas überhaupt?' (SW I/VI: 155), which is that the absolute, in the form of productive Nature brings about the visible universe by mirroring itself onto the *external* forms of individuated, finite things. So, we can agree there is a sense of deficit when he addresses the problem of the genesis of temporal multiplicity of finite existences from what at face value, we take to be the hollow formalism of the Schellingian absolute: »the absolute identity of being with itself. « But let us not be misled. The Schellingian absolute is not an inert and vacuous proposition. As this thesis attempted to prove, this absolute is an ontological embodying of being into itself, and even if this sounds like a process in time, the enfolding of being is timeless; on the other side of the spectrum, living beings, responding to the projected structure of the absolute onto themselves, reproduce the enfolding, with the archetype of their forms and that of totality as an operative but unconscious function, as a process in time of gradual integration of the real into their *world*.

My investigation shows that over the historical period I covered, Schelling argued that living beings are individual projections of the absolute that, in virtue of their finiteness and inherent limiting nature, mirror the absolute imperfectly. Precisely, to mirror the absolute imperfectly is the crux of the problem, for according to my account, in mirroring the absolute, living beings partially reproduce the absolute's self-positing productive structure thus making the world *visible* for themselves. Notwithstanding the difficulty of this seemingly epistemological problem, in this work I pushed this concern further and asked Schelling's texts a more basic question: how the world of living beings becomes *visible* for themselves not as cognitive agents but as bodily individuals, that is, how their surrounding world *becomes them*. The answer comes down to the same premise, i.e., that by merely mirroring the absolute, finite agents reproduce the formal aspect of the absolute's structure, the self-positing productivity, while having to rely on the opposition of a resisting reality to affirm their own relative identity. For it is only because living beings are copies or projections of the absolute's own active structure that they come into existence and in turn reproduce, although partially, the absolute's logico-ontological structure. Put in different words, the self-positing activity of a living being is a longing for a unity with reality that is never complete, a striving that progressively gains visibility of the real, while totality, Being, is only an archetype, a formal function. Such a progress is the manifestation of the striving of the entire kingdom of living beings, whereby the human species is only its highest approximation to the archetype.

As a further speculative exercise, if we apply the structure of the *Ich-Form* to the organic being, more specifically, at the level of sensibility, then the self-referential activity of Nature as an absolute whole is replicated, mirrored or copied by the unity in the organic being. Let us remember that in the scheme of the absolute identity in the I, the self-referential activity of that is equal to sheer being, thus setting himself apart from Spinoza's infinite substance. Accordingly, I have suggested the label of *Ich-Sein* in Part II to account for the absolute's two identical sides, self-positing of being that amounts to the absolute identity of being with itself. This means that the self-referential positing of the absolute cannot be reduced to a mere formal aspect because its standing is being itself; inversely, when the absolute refers to itself in the positing, what it confronts is its own being, which is identical with itself. The absolute is all reality and the reality of the absolute is all. From this it follows that the form of being of the absolute is identical with its being, it is the *Ich-Substanz* or *Ich-*

*Sein* inasmuch as this 'unconditioned substance' is the reality (*Realität*) that «realises itself» unconditionally. (Cf. SW I/I: 192; p. 93). In fact, the self-realisation of the I is the absolute form that coincides with its absolute content or *matter*. (Cf. SW I/I: 187; p. 89). Accordingly, while form and matter, I and Being, are identical in the absolute, in the dimension of the conditioned they are split and different, they are properly form and matter and their constitution is accounted for by the *Ich-Form*, which restores the incomplete unity of subjectivity and objectivity through the progressive integration of Being into the world unified by the *Ich-Form*—the form of unity and the identity of the self in the self-referential activity of agency.

In the case of the absolute, things look different because its internal logic demands that we remove all predicates of finiteness. The outcome of this is that there is no difference in its self-reference. This means that when Being posits its own absolute self, it posits Being, which is equal to itself. Therefore, the kind of reference that Being establishes is that of immediacy. In comparison, if human beings were the absolute, in referring or thinking about the galaxy Andromeda (M31), then immediately, Andromeda would be brough about into existence. In a word, finiteness precludes us from positing being as such and our ontological function is merely formal and limited to giving form to what already is there in existence, we are limited to *Da-Sein*. But the absolute is pure dynamic and eternal activity, and since everything is the absolute, all its projections are products that embody the absolute's activity; but rather than creations, the products perform recreations or reproductions, all of which strive to and aim at the totality of the absolute.[140]

Again, let us dissect the absolute into two essential features which mirror one another in the identity of the *Ich-Sein or absolute identity of being and form*:

- (i) It is a self (*Selbst*) on account of its self-referentiality because ´the absolute can be given only by the absolute.´ (SW I/I: 163; 72; AA I/10: §3). This yields a circle of identity that leaves nothing out of itself capable of limiting it; simply put, it is the unconditioned identity of being and cognising. (Cf. SW I/I: 202; 100; AAI/10: §2).
- (ii) It is pure being (*Sein*) on account of its unconditionedness because nothing else presupposes its form or its being which are absolutely identical, thus, it is truly the *ne plus ultra*. (AA I/10: §3). When the absolute posits itself in identity, the being that

[140] Cf. 'Oikeiosis in this way begins as a self-relation but immediately broadens to inform structure and the animal's experience of objects around it.' Wayne M. Martin, The Transcendental Turn, p. 346.

follows is absolute identity, in a word, a totality of an absolutely identical form and identical being. (SW I/I: 177; 82; 10: §§6, 7, 26).

- These two essential features are the core of the absolute, which Schelling renders as the identity of thinking and being: 'The last ground of reality is something that is thinkable only through its being [*Sein*]; it is thought only inasmuch as it is. In short, the principle of being and thinking is one and the same.' (SW I/I: 163; 72; SW I/IV: 367; p. 210).

Now, if we take sensibility as a kind of reflection, it turns out that sensibility can also be a mirroring capacity that absorbs the finite into its own formal identity and projects back its own mode of relative identity onto the finite existence. To be sure, Schelling only ascribes this activity of reflection to the native capacity of knowledge of human consciousness. In the second essay of the *Further Presentations*, he states that our knowledge 'is established [gesetzt] in necessary connection to some merely finite existence [*Daseyn*] and is a knowledge reflecting this finite [item].' (SW I/IV: 362-63; p. 207). And he adds that this necessary connection, insofar as absolute identity is a living thing animating all potencies, all Gestalten and individual beings, assumes a complementary counterpart, namely, that 'this finite existence only for us [but] in connection to and in contrast with an infinite factor.' (Ibid). Just as this finite existence is for us, it is also for every being that is capable of positing itself in opposition and integration with all being. If the organism has only a finite capacity of reflection/integration, the reason is that when it posits itself as a relative identity, it does not posit the All, but only the finiteness that has in view, the narrow finiteness that has become visible is for the living being as much as the wider finiteness that is visible to human consciousness.

In the visible, or phenomenal, Schelling says, 'the absolute veils itself here in what is other [the particular known as particular], in a finite, a being, which is its symbol, and as such, like every symbol, takes on a life independent of that which it means.' (AA I/13: 106; p. 50). Due to the individual mind's capacity to connect outer and inner actual experiences with what is universal, either unconscious or consciously, the production of the natural world as a phenomenon anchors our perspective in an external actuality, or the *hic et nunc* of things, while, at the same time, combines our experiencing of things with a horizon of possibility that, insofar as it is the temporalisation of the absolute, presents itself as an uncoverable sea of

succession. Or, in Schelling's words, the transition between the universal and the particular is immanent to experience since 'the root and essence [*die Wurzel und das Wessen*] of Nature is that which combines the infinite possibility of all things with the reality [*Wirklichkeit*] of the particular, and hence is the eternal urge and primal ground [*der ewige Trieb und Urgrund*] of creation.' (SW I/IV: 342; p. 273). Human self-consciousness actualises the unity of possibility and actuality in an unconscious way and that puts it closer to the absolute, and for this reason, makes it a wholesome organic being. But there is a basis in which this statement is true for all organic beings. This structure could explain the riddle of how living beings make the world *visible* for themselves in their own sphere. Some may put the idea of *visibility* in terms of living beings becoming aware of and active towards their surrounding world, but this development requires further research.

## Conclusions.

What I tried to show in this thesis was that Schelling's philosophy of nature often describes a genetic path that, as it were, hatches up the organic being from Nature by progressively taking two different onto-epistemological directions in the orders of existence. He took the direction that goes from relative existence to absolute indifference without ever totally reaching it because, before 1801, and further from absolute to the relative existence—marked by the philosophy of identity. This to-and-fro movement rendered different results, but at the same time tested Schelling's certainty about a handful of his theses. In the present work, I tested the thesis of the concept of absolute identity as a foundational principle in the context of the concepts of organisation in general and of organisms in particular. According to my results, these concepts turned out to be more or less steady irrespective of Schelling's constant shifts. Moreover, the stability of the concept of absolute identity as principle of derivation of knowledge and reality proved to be complementary in understanding the problem of organic beings in Schelling's philosophy of nature.

Similarly, I tried to suggest that it is plausible to arrive at the conclusion that Schelling was, at every step and in spite of the different standpoints of his investigations, committed to absolute identity as a grounding principle, first for the possibility of true knowledge, and at a second moment, for the possibility of the knowledge of the in-itself. As this work tried to show, one philosophical line of development that can give testimony of this commitment is Schelling's constant concern with the concept of organisation and of living beings.

In my view, Schelling focused on organisation because it is the most palpable expression of absolute identity in the visible world, thus, by digging into the »unconditioned« or the universal real-ideality that sustains the general structures of organic nature, he attempted to prove that the postulation of an absolute unity of factors, which only from the perspective of a natural attitude appear as opposites, was philosophically correct and logically warranted. Indeed, it is only in these beings that the inextricable unity of subjectivity and objectivity could obtain, and not only »in representation« or according to the architecture of reason, but in beings that are closer to Nature and farther from our theoretical reasoning. What better proof of this unity that transcends our philosophical mind than the unity of nature *itself*. Then the living being appeared to him as a delectable source of his quest for the source of this »mythical« unity. In my interpretation, once in the terrain of natural organisation,

Schelling felt drawn to the idea of positing this unity as absolute identity not only in the transcendental mind, but in the embodiment of the living beings; for they were the instantiations of the higher unity.

To prove this thesis, I showed in the first part of this work that Schelling had an early interest in a knowledge that could be based on a first principle that warranted the epistemic demands of the sceptic. Moreover, this principle was not meant to be merely formal, for the reality that would justify its objectivity had to be proved as well, but for this to be possible, the deduction had to be metaphysical in kind, that is, necessarily transcending the conditioned scope of self-consciousness. I showed that at the beginning of his quest, roughly localised in his foundationalist texts, Schelling realised that pure unconditionality was the only predicate that could properly describe the scope of the absolute. On the other hand, unconditionality can only be predicated upon a self-causing activity that refers back to unconditionality. The closest figure that reproduces this activity is the self-positing and unifying activity of the self-conscious individual when, in asserting her own identity, even in opposition to an external reality, she says «*I am I*». The obvious answer was not that self-consciousness was the absolute but that consciousness carried the form of the absolute. But again, to be able to access it, one has to be able to move out of the scope of self-consciousness. Access is then at stake.

With this in view, my suggestion was that, in the second half of the 1790s, Schelling left the metaphysical implications of his *Ichschrift* aside and started to refer to the absolute as »the secret bond between mind and nature«. In sum, Schelling's failure to justify this access is what, in my view, held him back during the second half of the 1790s and forced him to rely on a conceptual figure centred on the subject, very much in the way Fichte modelled his grounding principle. Yet, he was not entirely convinced that the absolute had to be shied away from. And, although he seemed to be grappling with the problem of how to conciliate the metaphysical priority of the absolute and the main premises of transcendental philosophy, to which he had in a way committed to, not only to stand at the vanguard of philosophy and the sciences, but also because, as I argued, in his view Kant's critical project had already made actual progress in philosophical matters and it was the task of new thinkers to complete his project. (Cf. SW I/I: 87; p. 38). Thus, when in the second half of the 1790s Schelling referred to the absolute allegorically, in terms of a mythical past, or commissioned art the task of bringing forth objective manifestations of the original identity in consciousness, he was complying with

this requirement. (Cf. OA I/2: 476-77; p. 232). The problem of how absolute identity exhibits in-itself and from itself and not from a subjective perspective was, in my view, a path of research and discovery through which Schelling matured his ideas and gathered sufficient scientific instruction and theoretical evidence to launch a system that, as he promised he was going to do in the *Ichschrift*, would subvert the foundations of Spinoza's system.

Once Schelling believed he had secured the access to the absolute, he was able to put aside the subjectivistic outlook of the constitution of the world and crown Nature as the real and objective source of our ideas about the legislative character of reality. What made him believe this? Once can certainly trace multiple factors, from theoretical to social to historical, but one line of motivation that I wanted to explore in this work is that a decisive factor could be traced in Schelling's interest and elaboration of the nature and origin of organic beings and its correlative concept of organisation.

On account of Schelling's notions about organisation, I claimed that the inherent connection between living beings and the absolute was being already sketched in 1794 in the *Timaeus Kommentar*, but the problem of the ground had to be solved first before trying to explain the source of the binomial character of the individual that makes her experience possible from both the source of an a priori dimension and from that which is affected by an a posteriori world of nature. When Schelling developed his first attempt at a metaphysical characterisation of the absolute with an anchor in the transcendental subject, the pure I, he did not simply forget Plato's regard of nature as a »living animal« and neither did he forget the architectonic of species and genera striving to reach the »ideal model« that embraces them. Similarly, when Schelling went on to display the *ideas* that were necessary conditions for a philosophy of nature, and then the main developmental parts that should make up the philosophical system of nature, he did not simply forget about his commitment to absolute identity as an unconditioned ground, after all, he was factually »a Spniozist!« from the very beginning. Instead of forgetting about it, in my view, Schelling resolved to make the bedrock of the system accessible to the ideal dimension in human experience. Moreover, by granting unconditionedness to Nature over against the unconditionedness of the thinking ego, Schelling was opening the possibility of placing the absolute above all determinations. Even in these texts, which are closer to the methods and language of transcendental idealism, Schelling struggles with the idealistic tenet that Nature is a fictional construction that only has

the function of revealing its laws as laws of the thinking subject. On the other hand, and without denying that there was a significative shift between the *System* of 1800 and the *Darstellung*,[141] Schelling still presents the *System of Transcendental Idealism* as the mirror of a double-sided science that deals systematically with the opposite side of nature, i.e., self-consciousness, by deriving its necessary contents from its first principle, the absolute identity of the I. Globally, once Schelling launched the *Identitätphilosophie*, he could retrace the principles back to these books as much as he believed the idea of Nature, already outlined in 1797, presupposed the highest principle of absolute identity, spelled out in 1802 as 'the absolute unity which embraces the whole.' (AA I/13: 370; p. 272). In the 1797 edition of *Ideas*, the principle was distantly present, appearing as an analogue of the transcendental subject with a potential to reveal its own reality: 'in the absolute identity of Mind in us and Nature outside us, the problem of the possibility of a Nature external to us must be resolved.' (AA I/5: 107, p. 42). And while in the following years of 1798 and 1799, Schelling directly tackled the internal dynamics of an already presupposed *external Nature*, it was only in the System of 1801 when he *resolved it* by grounding her in the principle of the *Unconditioned*, which in turn made the idea gain full hypostasis.

A critic could object that rather than establishing line of interpretation that establishes a continuity argument, I took advantage of the protean character of Schelling's philosophy to arrange conceptual adaptations that are far from Schelling's own motives and goals and more fitted to make his claims charitable for my views. But in response to this, I believe I was able to illustrate Schelling's unstable intellectual endeavours, and his hesitancy in surveying competing positions as he went along, as if he was discovering different degrees of evidence, not always compatible, in support of his claims. Furthermore, in this work, I did not hide from the fact that Schelling's chronological development does not correspond to a linear continuity of themes. To be sure, Schelling was constantly introducing new approaches, ideas, and conceptual relations into his philosophy; however, one may be able to say that, from a retrospective standpoint, it is not difficult to assess that these shifts can also be seen as expressions of Schelling's progressive understanding of the increasingly complex relation between the absolute, nature and living beings. Although in Schelling's early writings he does

[141] See Section A above for a discussion about Schelling's devising of the nature of the first principle before the *Einleitung zur dem Entwurf* of 1799.

not directly engage with a philosophy of nature, his critical treatment of Spinoza's substance, his preoccupation with Being [*Sein*] as the true ground of the «reality of knowledge», and his disquisitions about Plato's cosmology in the dialogue *Timaeus*, are themes that advance Schelling's philosophy of nature. And as I tried to prove, there is certainly a strong organic connection between his early and later notions of the absolute, nature and living beings through the concept of absolute identity.

Similarly, I do not constrain from confessing that mastering Schelling's employment of the concept of the absolute and the ways in which he thinks its unconditional form transmutes into nature and living beings was an extremely complex undertaking. But from this research, I have come to the conclusion that it is simply not possible to address Schelling's understanding of living beings without appealing to his idea of nature, which is meaningless if the reader of Schelling is not aware that invisible Nature is the absolute whereas visible nature comprises its unlimited manifestations. Thus, in consonance with this concern, in the present investigation I undertook the task of tracing an evolution of Schelling's notion of absolute from its early emphasis as a self-positing totality that has the quality of a mind, which I called the *Ich-Form*, the subjective descendant of the absolute, to its more mature conception of the absolute as the ground of all reality, a Being that is also a νοῦς, something I advanced with the notion of the *Ich-Sein* and in the later versions of the system of identity, Schelling refers to as the One, Reason, God, and absolute Indifference.

As I have been suggesting thus far, absolute identity was only a necessary assumption, neither dispensable as a founding principle nor available for theoretical discussion. Interrogations about the source of the activity of nature were signs that Schelling was again getting closer to absolute identity to try to pull definite answers out of it. Scholars usually contribute with explanations about the transition from the transcendental deductions to the metaphysics of identity based on analyses of the historical-intellectual context that influenced Schelling more directly. These studies are extremely illuminating and helpful and I referenced them when it was appropriate. However, this transition can also be explained by Schelling's conceptual development within *Naturphilosophie*; which is roughly the route I have taken.

Finally, taking absolute identity as an interpretive principle allowed me to provide a continuity narrative for Schelling's concept of organisation and organic beings, for their structure, I claim, presuppose it. Seeing the parallelisms between these two historically

separate conceptions of living being led us to conclude that (1) Schelling's notion of living being requires the principle of absolute identity to explain the living being's origin and structure; (2) Schelling's conception of living being, insofar as it is based on the metaphysical assumption of absolute identity, was all along metaphysical—rather than transcendental, much less empirical; and finally, (3) that, seen from the perspective of the speculative origin of living organisation, Schelling's early discussions of absolute identity are consistent with his nature-philosophy of the 1790s, and later with the system of identity, therefore, that he had enough merits to maintain that, while the full shape of the System of Identity was presented only in 1801, the 'characteristic shape' of it, i.e., absolute identity, was »continually used as his personal guide-star in both transcendental and natural philosophy.« (AA I/10: ; p. 141).

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