

Schelling's Transition to Identity-Philosophy: The Philosophical Turn between 1800 and 1801

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Declaration

I, Yiran Yang, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Schelling's philosophy underwent significant changes between 1800 and 1801 when his system shifted from the parallelism completed by *System of Transcendental Idealism* to Identity Philosophy. This thesis aims to explore whether there are differences between the two systems, what the differences are, in what way the parallel system supports the 1801 system and what the causes of this systematic shift are.

By comparing the two systems, I will argue that Identity Philosophy prioritizes nature as the externalization of self-consciousness which serves as an empirical avenue for knowledge of absolute identity. However, reason's self-knowledge of Identity Philosophy is not dependent on the investigation into the speculative physics of natural science; rather it is epistemologically self-sufficient due to its assumption of total indifference between subjectivity and objectivity. My interpretation of Identity Philosophy contends with the prevalent interpretation of the current Schelling scholarship which attributes ontological primacy to nature and identifies totality with it. Instead, I argue that Schelling's definition of totality in 1801 must be understood as co-constituted by nature and consciousness.

Schelling's postulation of nature as the absolutely unconditioned was born out of his dissatisfaction with Fichte's subjective idealism, which falls short of solving the problem of immanent self-knowledge and fails to raise the absolute beyond the standpoint of finite oppositions. Schelling's positing of nature as the unconditioned in parallel with consciousness calls for an all-encompassing absolute identity between all oppositions, and it is the striving for this standpoint that motivated Schelling to dispense with all antitheses and occupy the original point of absolute identity, in a form of argument that recalls speculative philosophy.

This thesis aims to contribute to Schelling scholarship by giving insight into the birth of absolute idealism, a key moment in post-Kantian German idealism in which Schelling played the leading role.

Impact Statement

This thesis provides a new way of understanding the relation between Schelling's parallel system in 1800 and his System of Identity in 1801 which preserves its metaphysical agreement while demonstrating the methodological breakthrough. It aims to contribute to existing Schelling scholarship by providing an alternative understanding of the System of Identity that both explains the nature of the epistemological priority of Naturphilosophie and the self-sufficiency of the System of Identity. As a whole, this research provides insight to the course of development of post-Kantian German Idealism through the examination of a critical turning point.

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Chapter Outline

Introduction

Asking the research question: What is the nature of Schelling's systematic shift between his parallelism in 1800 and his Identity Philosophy in 1801?

Chapter 1 Historical Background

In this chapter I will position Schelling's philosophy within the context of post-Kantian German philosophy. I will present key philosophical influences on the development of Schelling's philosophy. Themes such as a monist cosmological view, a systematic construction of philosophy, and an animated understanding of nature present themselves as having long lasting influence on Schelling's philosophy.

Chapter 2 The Parallel System in 1800

This chapter discusses Schelling's parallelism, which is his philosophical system as it was presented in the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*. An understanding of how transcendental philosophy and Naturphilosophie constitute this system will prepare us for the understanding of his Identity-philosophy, and the nature of this systematic shift which the thesis is interested in as a whole.

Chapter 3 Identity Philosophy

This chapter is an exposition and analysis of Schelling's Identity Philosophy as it was presented in the 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, and the 1802 *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy*.

Chapter 4 The Relation between the Parallel System and Identity Philosophy

This chapter takes a detailed look at the relationship between the systems. I will first show the differences between them in order to answer the question of whether and how the epistemology and metaphysics have changed. Then I will make arguments about how the two systems should be understood in relation to each other by understanding their methods of justification.

Conclusion

Introduction

Jena in 1800 was a wonderful cultural and intellectual scene, where Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, the three cornerstone thinkers of German Idealism had inhabited the same city. Within the intellectual circle they participated in were also the great German poet and polymath Goethe, Schiller, and Hölderlin. This was a time in German intellectual history that was teeming with the genius of thoughts and arts. While the intellectual scene is at the peak of its activity to establish a systematic representation of reality, the brightest and most imaginative minds of the age were also maturing in their movement of Romanticism. This period of what is historically named as *Frühromantik* or Jena Romanticism, is defined by the intellectual tendency to value art and beauty as the envoy of truth, and a diminishing confidence in philosophy as offering the transparency of rational doctrines.¹

Among the thinkers at the forefront of these movements was the young prodigy Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. At the age of fifteen, Schelling received special permission to enter the Tübinger Stift despite being five years younger than his classmates, among whom were Hegel and Hölderlin. It was here that Schelling had acquired literary acquaintance with classic theological works and ancient Greek philosophies, and made connections with his intellectual peers who played formative roles in his career.

Recent years have seen a revival of Schelling's philosophy, and the growing tendency to see him as an independent thinker who isn't merely a transition between Fichte and Hegel. Schelling's breakthrough from his predecessors was a watershed moment in the history of German philosophy, as it was he who opened the gateway to Absolute Idealism which later achieved lasting influence through Hegel. However, the effort to understand Schelling's philosophy is hindered not only by its esoteric nature but also by its constant evolution. Schelling's philosophical development can be roughly divided into a few main stages. The early stage of Schelling's philosophy was marked by his general attraction to Fichte's subjective idealism. In mid-1790s Schelling published *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy* (1794) and *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (1795). Though underlying

¹ Grünter Zöllner, 'Introduction,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, ed. David James and Grünter Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 16.

differences between Schelling and Fichte regarding their conceptions of the “absolute I” were already noticeable, these essays remain largely in agreement with Fichtean subjective idealism. In 1797, however, Schelling published *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, after his attendance at courses of natural science in Leipzig University. Schelling’s fascination with nature led him to the conception of the phenomena of nature in terms of principles of dynamism. Though this work was considered as the mere application of transcendental principles to natural phenomena, his presentation of nature through forces that inhere in matter renders nature a reality that is independent of subjective sensing. The independence and self-sufficiency of nature is then explicitly stated and posited in *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), in which nature was postulated as the unconditioned, to which even consciousness was subordinated. Nevertheless, Schelling’s intention of publishing these works in Naturphilosophie (Philosophy of Nature) was not to reverse Fichte’s subjective idealism to an objective idealism but to complete it with its necessary counterpart. The intention to establish a parallel system was evident in his publication of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* in 1800 which completes the double science system between nature and consciousness. Then begins what scholars characterize as the “Identity Philosophy” period, marked by the publication of his *Darstellung meines System der Philosophie* in 1801, and the *Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie* in 1802. These demonstrations made clear Schelling’s ambition to subsume Naturphilosophie and subjective idealism under a global idealism which occupies the standpoint of totality, and this position ultimately led to a complete break with Fichte. A long period of public literary absence took place after 1809, perhaps due to a combined factors of the death of his wife Caroline Schlegel-Schelling and the sweeping influence of Hegel’s philosophy. Philosophical compositions in private continued in *Ages of the world*, but the work wasn’t published until more than a century later. After Schelling had taken on the position as the chair of philosophy in University of Berlin in 1841 (previously held by Hegel), he began to write and lecture on his “positive philosophy”, which is aimed at going beyond his “negative philosophy” by understanding the contingency of existence. During his time in Berlin, Schelling had influenced keystone thinkers of the late 19th century, such as Søren Kierkegaard, Mikhail Bakunin, and Engels. Through these figures, Schelling achieved long lasting influence in the intellectual history of the 20th century, especially in the tradition

of existentialism and Frankfurt School, through Heidegger, Habermas, Karl Jaspers, Walter Schulz, and others.²

During his long and fluctuating philosophical career, we see an interesting and significant shift between 1800 and 1801, when he transitioned from the parallelism of the two-science system to the System of Identity. Indeed, the comprehensiveness of absolute identity marked the maturation of his intellectual endeavours. In brief summary: Schelling's philosophical system in 1800 took the form of a parallel structure between the two sciences and reached the conclusion that there is a pre-established harmony between consciousness and nature. In 1801, however, we observe that Schelling's philosophy had dispensed with the opposition between nature and consciousness as a premise, and commenced with the original unity of all forms of distinction and opposition.

Some scholars argue that Schelling's system underwent an important shift with the publication of *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, because while the parallel system is predicated on the equal reality of Naturphilosophie and transcendental philosophy, the System of Identity appears to prioritize Naturphilosophie. It is also observed that Schelling's methodology has shifted from the reflection on the transcendental possibility of experience (whether such transcendental principles are in consciousness or not) to a form of speculative thinking which is independent of empirical experience. With the new starting point that assumes an original unity to all existence, Schelling explains how the absolute differentiates itself to the subjective and the objective, the mental and the physical, in finitude. The question then is, did Schelling rely on the conclusions from the parallel structure to support the new standpoint he occupies in Identity Philosophy, or does the latter stand on its own?

The aim of this thesis is to elucidate the nature of Schelling's philosophical shift between 1800 and 1801, through the exposition of the two systems, first individually, and then in comparison to each other. I will answer the questions of whether the two systems are different from each other, if so in what way, and why these changes had taken place. By explaining key concepts such as "pre-established harmony", "total indifference", and "absolute identity", I hope to retrace the outline of Schelling's philosophical development.

² Manfred Frank, 'Schelling, Marx, and the Philosophy of History,' in *The Habermas Handbook* ed. Hauke Brunkhorst, Regina Kreide and Cristina Lafont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 219

This research is a study of a critical turn in the trajectory of not only Schelling's philosophy, but also in the history of post-Kantian German philosophy. By examining the relations of these two systems which played significant roles in the course of Schelling's career, I hope to demonstrate underlying continuity and consistency in Schelling's intellectual evolution. Then by calling attention to the differences between the two systems, I aim to present the merit of Schelling's Identity Philosophy regarding its independence and speculative breakthrough. A solid understanding of "Identity Philosophy", which is the final version of his negative philosophy, will also contribute to a better understanding of the background of Schelling's positive philosophy which surfaced almost twenty years later. Understanding the historical motivations for the emergence of absolute idealism also clarifies how post-Kantian German philosophy broke free from the subjective standpoint and came to the standpoint of a global absolute. With this thesis I hope to provide insights to the integrity of Schelling's philosophy and the reasons that motivated absolute idealism. Though current studies of Schelling have turned their attention to important themes of consciousness, nature, art, symbols, myths, etc during specific stages of Schelling's philosophy, many more work can be done to look at Schelling's philosophy from a developmental point of view to understand the originality of this dynamic thinker.

Chapter 1 Historical Background

Amongst the late modern thinkers of the 19th century, Schelling is one of the most historically influenced thinkers. Among the sources of Schelling's intellectual inspirations, Plato has consequential influence. Schelling's acquaintance with Plato's philosophy dates back to his time in Tübingen Stift from 1790-1795. His commentary on *Timaeus* which also draws upon *Philebus* shows an early engagement with the Platonic cosmological themes such as the relation between the real and the ideal, as well as questions of whether the world is eternal and how it comes to be. Schelling's approximation of concepts such as the "world soul" [*die Weltseele*] and the original principle of motion establishes the foundation of his ontological standpoint of nature as a living thing that abides by its own principles of being.¹ A study comparing Schelling's commentary on *Timaeus* and his Naturphilosophie by Laura Follesa shows that the concept of the world soul is internalized in Schelling's definition of nature as a self-sufficient being in whom lawfulness and purposefulness coincide.² The world soul, Follesa summarizes, is both the medium in which "matter and form, body and reason" are united and the "primordial principle of movement".³ Both definitions underlie the foundations of Schelling's Naturphilosophie, in which he is committed to the ontology of nature as the original identity between the real and the ideal, as well as the investigation into speculative physics—the "inner clockwork" of nature that explains the principles of the productivity of nature and the first cause of motion.⁴ The influence of Plato's cosmology also reaches beyond Schelling's conception of nature into Identity Philosophy, as the idea of an original indeterminate being which pre-exists the determinate formation of finite forms corresponds to the principle of individuation from absolute identity. And the identity of the world soul as at once the *original indeterminate being* itself and the *principle* of its own being is again seen in the System of Identity, where the immanent existence is identical with its own essence.

Apart from Plato, scholarly studies on the reasons behind Schelling's break with Fichte

¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, trans. Adam Arola, Jena Jolissaint, and Peter Warnek, 'Timaeus,' *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12, no.2 (Spring 2008): 210. <https://doi.org/10.5840/epoche20081222>

² Laura Follesa, 'Schelling and Plato: The Idea of the World Soul in Schelling's *Timaeus*,' in *Platonism: Ficino to Foucault*, ed. Valery Rees, Anna Corrias, Francesca M Crasta, Laura Follesa, and Guido Giglioni (Leiden;Boston: Brill, 2020), 256-274.

³ *Ibid.*, 264

⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *First outline of a system of the philosophy of nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 196

show that Goethe also played an important influence to shaping the development of his thoughts. Regarding this critical turning point from subjective idealism to a perspective that would encapsulate an objective idealism in the form of Naturphilosophie, Nassar argues that Goethe's idea of metamorphosis played an important role.⁵ Metamorphosis presupposes an archetype of all plants, *die Urpflanze*, which furnishes the qualities and principles according to which all different forms of plants are identified.⁶ In the process of growth, each individual form of plant then manifests the grounding principle of the *Urpflanze*. Nassar characterized Goethe's metamorphosis as essentially a "characteristic of nature, an "archetype" that underlies and constitutes the relations of nature's parts and forms."⁷ In this sense, metamorphosis is the process in which the essence of nature unfolds itself through different stages of development. This is precisely what Schelling was concerned with in his Naturphilosophie, when he described different natural phenomena on a scale of advancement. The relation between an *Urform*, an original form of existence, and individual tokens of it also open up the question of individuation, which will replay itself not only in Naturphilosophie, but also in Identity Philosophy.⁸

The inspirations from his intellectual muses were adopted and integrated to Schelling's original solutions of revolving philosophical questions at his time. In Anthony Bruno's presentation of the nexus of problems that Schelling was responding to, the questions of grounding, freedom, and meaning, are identified as three main fronts that his philosophy battled on.⁹ Grounding, among the three, is the main problem that Schelling dealt with, though the other two themes are also implicit in the background.

With regards to the problem of grounding, Schelling addressed how knowledge is possible and refuted the undercurrent of scepticism from Kant. Schelling's answer to the problem of knowledge shall first be conceived in light of his reading of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where Kant attempts to bridge the schism between theoretical and practical

⁵ Dalia Nassar, 'From a Philosophy of Self to a Philosophy of Nature: Goethe and the Development of Schelling's Naturphilosophie', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92, no. 3 (November 2010): 307, <https://doi.org/10.1515/agph.2010.014>.

⁶ Gordon L. Miller, 'Introduction,' in *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), xv.

⁷ Nassar, 'From a Philosophy of Self to a Philosophy of Nature,' 316.

⁸ In the opening poem to *the Metamorphosis of Plants*, Goethe made the observation that "Like unto each the form/ yet none alike/ And so the choir hints a secret law/ A sacred mystery."

⁹ G. Anthony Bruno, 'The Appearance and Disappearance of Intellectual Intuition in Schelling's Philosophy', *Analecta Hermeneutica* 5 (2013): 1-14.

knowledge. Two main points of dissent are identified by Nassar as factors that drove Schelling away from Kant. First, Schelling criticized that Kant has limited himself to objective thinking, which results in his inability to account for the source of the object. According to Nassar, objective thinking is restricted to the representation of being as objects and fails to comprehend the ontological ground and self-sufficiency.¹⁰ In other words, objective thinking does not recognize the independence and subjecthood of objects. The cause of the peculiarities of the rational intellect therefore remains a mystery. Secondly, Schelling thinks that Kant has failed to unify teleology and mechanism in nature in the third *Critique* and he attributes the source of this failure to Kant's deduction of categories (of understanding).¹¹ In her essay tracing Schelling's influence by Kant, Nassar pointed out that the most important revelation of Kant's third *Critique* is that the unifying ground between teleology and mechanism of nature can only be grasped by intuitive understanding (intellectual intuition), the intellectual faculty that cognizes things-in-themselves. The human intellect, on the other hand, is only capable of discursive understanding, which does not determine the particular from the concept. That is, we cannot cognize the necessity of the individual in relation to the universal. Therefore, our experience of nature as an aggregate of particulars with the concept of purpose remains a matter of contingency. A teleological nature, however, requires a determinate relation between the particular and the concept such that each particular is perceived as necessary. The need for such a cognitive capacity in order to solve the metaphysical problem of unity contributed to Schelling's later endorsement of the faculty of intellectual intuition.

The *a priori* argument from the problem epistemology is a central motivation for Identity Philosophy. Beiser commented that while Schelling has not given explicit arguments for moving beyond the boundaries set up Kant, his motivation to do so is clear: to solve the epistemological problem and account for knowledge, as is illustrated above.¹² In order to reconcile the opposition between the subject and the object which co-constitute knowledge, Schelling needed to show that the principles of our productivity of knowledge is the same as

¹⁰ Dalia Nassar, 'Pure versus Empirical Forms of Thought: Schelling's Critique of Kant's Categories and the Beginnings of Naturphilosophie', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no.1:113-134 (January 2014). <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2014.0016>.

¹¹ Nassar, 'Pure Versus Empirical Forms of Thought,' 115.

¹² Frederick C Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 522.

nature's principle of productivity for its own phenomena. If this is true, then he will be able to say that the ideal representation in us and the real world of nature are identical, and we do not perceive the world other than how it is in-itself. Committing to the constitutive status of an intelligent nature is hence necessary to avoid reducing a purposeful nature to the intelligent representation of it in consciousness.

Schelling's method to address the problem of knowledge is situated within the Kant-Reinhold-Fichte dialogue, which seeks a fundamental principle of all knowledge. Reinhold suggests that philosophy needs to demonstrate a "real universal validity of found first principles and grounds of knowledge" whose reality and legitimacy must be investigated first.¹³ This first principle, is the *Grundstanz*, which makes knowledge true and possible. It is "a first principle from which the rest of philosophy can be deduced with certainty".¹⁴ Following from the suggestion of Reinhold, philosophy is led to a general direction of systematic construction, which deduces its legitimacy from a single ground. Kant has withheld from proposing such a first principle as this is beyond the limit of knowledge. However, Schelling thinks that Kant's text betrays his own limitation. He writes in *Of the I* that "it was an investigation which only presupposes the absolute I at every step and which, on the basis of presupposed higher principles, determines only the empirically conditioned I and the not-I in its synthesis with that I."¹⁵ Schelling observes that the presupposition of the self as the foundation is implicit in Kant's transcendental idealism which takes representation as the synthesis of subjective a priori principles of understanding and things-in-themselves. In his first *Critique*, Kant postulates transcendental apperception as the possibility of knowledge and experience, which furnishes the unity of the self with the manifold of representations and precedes all empirical occurrences of cognition. Transcendental apperception grasps the self independent from empirical cognition, and is a "pure, original, unchanging consciousness" which enables the unification of experience and a priori cognition.¹⁶ Because such an original act of self-consciousness is required to make

¹³ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Essay on a New Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation*, trans. T. Mehigan and B. Empson (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 64.

¹⁴ Michael N Forster, 'Schelling and Skepticism,' in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. Lara Ostaric (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 32–47.

¹⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, 'Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy or On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge' in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti (London: Associated University Press, 1979), 63-128.

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 232.

unified empirical experience possible, every assertion of “I think” presupposes “I am”. Hence experience is downstream from this more original ground which nonetheless cannot be made explicit within Kant’s framework. Schelling is certainly unsatisfied with the half-hearted grounding principle in Kant, though this was later supposedly resolved in Fichte’s “absolute I”.

Intended as a step forward from Kant, Fichte grounds transcendental idealism with the “absolute I” as the foundation of knowledge. The ultimate principle of “I am I” grounds reality by claiming that all experience is the result of the synthesis between I as subject and I as object. Although his advance gained Schelling’s initial adherence, it is not without its own problems. In his 1806 writing, *of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, Schelling’s attack on Fichtean philosophy demonstrated his dissatisfaction with the latter’s inability to account for the existence of God. Schelling writes that “if [philosophy] were not philosophy of nature, it would maintain that God exists alone in the world of thought, [and] therefore is not the positive in the real or the world of nature, that is, it would cancel out the idea of God itself.”¹⁷ For Schelling, whose philosophy aimed to preserve the actuality of the divine, subordinating God to subjective thinking could not be an acceptable outcome. To be sure, this is not the only point of disagreement between the two authors—more problems will be discussed over the course of this thesis as they are crucial to the systematic shift.

In 1800, Naturphilosophie and transcendental philosophy together explain the homogeneity between nature and mind by demonstrating “the parallels between dynamic features of inorganic matter and receptivity, sensitivity, and intuition in the ideal order.”¹⁸ It begins with opposition and the need to reconcile the antithesis, and ends with the identity between the two. This is Schelling’s first answer to the epistemological problem, but not the final answer. Schelling’s response to the problem of grounding is culminated in his Identity Philosophy, in which he moved away from explaining how cognition *corresponds* to the objects, to the demonstration of how subjectivity and objectivity are originally identical and undifferentiated, which renders the problem of correspondence empty. This standpoint, however, follows from the development of the parallel system, which we will now discuss in

¹⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine: An Elucidation of the Former*, trans. Dale E. Snow (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 29.

¹⁸ Michael Vater, ‘Bringing Nature to Light: Schelling’s Naturphilosophie in the Early System of Identity’, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 5 (2013): 6, <https://journals.library.mun.ca/ojs/index.php/analecta/article/view/1363>.

detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 The Parallel System in 1800

Schelling's philosophical system, as it stood in 1800, has been considered by scholars as a parallel system which demonstrates the identity of nature and consciousness. This system, completed by the publishing of his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), considers Naturphilosophie and transcendental philosophy as two sciences that work alongside each other to demonstrate that nature and consciousness have the same principles of productivity. The identity of the principles of productivity allows Schelling to show that consciousness cognizes nature in the same way nature produces itself, and the homogenous structure between consciousness and nature that is demonstrated by the two sciences is foundational to Schelling's whole philosophical system.

In this chapter my goal is to explain the structure and conclusion of the parallel system, so that we can compare it to Schelling's system in 1801. I will argue that the parallel system as it stood in 1800 admits two interpretations, which represents the system either as a parallel structure or a pyramidal structure. I will first present the two interpretations and then argue for the parallel reading, which highlights the epistemic importance of Naturphilosophie.

In the next two chapters, I will monitor the change in Schelling's system by looking at the key concepts that described the way in which subjectivity and objectivity correspond to each other—from “pre-established harmony”, “total indifference” to “absolute identity”. I will begin the exposition of Schelling's philosophical debt to and engagement with Leibniz, whose defence and qualms concerning the concept of pre-established harmony has shaped Schelling's overarching metaphysical structure of the parallel system and beyond.

2.1 Pre-established Harmony in Leibniz

The term “pre-established harmony” first appeared in Leibniz, who is an important influence on Schelling's parallel system and beyond. In the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, pre-established harmony (or sometimes referred to as predetermined harmony) figures itself as a mediating concept which captures the parallel structure between subjectivity and objectivity as they are experienced by consciousness. In Leibniz, pre-established harmony

was used to account for how substances correspond to each other while being causally isolated from other substances. In the introduction to *System*, Schelling writes that the way in which objective world and presentations correspond to each other without distortion is conceived by a predetermined harmony between the real and the ideal.¹⁹ In Schelling, pre-established harmony describes the concurrence between nature and consciousness in transcendental philosophy, and it is an intermediary concept which directs the search into the ground of the concurrence in the absolute identity of the primordial self. That is, by postulating that subjectivity and objectivity are in a pre-established harmony to each other, the inquiry is led to the true reason behind the correspondence—the original unity of the self which constitutes the totality of experience. The concept of “original unity” or “original identity”, does not refer to any temporal sense of precedence. Rather, “original unity” is “original” in the logical sense. It refers to a unified self whose conscious and unconscious activities are undivided and undistinguished from each other. Even after the two acts are separated in the act of self-positing, that is, in self-consciousness, the original identity of the self does not disappear, but persists as the self remains unitary and undivided. Therefore, in fact, the distinction of the self as conscious and unconscious is only *posited* by self-consciousness. To sum up, pre-established harmony is not an ontological ground, but a *relation* which signifies the reality of the original identity of the self.

Schelling’s direct borrowing of “pre-established harmony” from Leibniz makes the comparison between the two philosophers interesting. It is particularly intriguing that Schelling has closely associated himself with Leibnizian doctrines which were criticized by both Kant and Fichte. Understanding what the concept originally meant for Leibniz and how it is different from Schelling will inform us about how Leibniz had influenced Schelling’s views on the solution to the problem of knowledge and freedom.

In early modern philosophy, the problem of mind and body dualism had occupied the philosophers and stimulated various debates over how two distinct substances interact with each other and cause changes in each other.²⁰ In response to this problem, Leibniz proposed

¹⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath with an Introduction by Michael Vater (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 11-2.

²⁰ Stewart Duncan, ‘Mind and Body in Early Modern Philosophy,’ accessed April 28, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780415249126-V043-1>.

the doctrine of pre-established harmony which accounts for the *appearance* of inter-substantial causation through predetermined individual motions.²¹ Inter-substantial causation is the causal relation between different substances. However, under Leibniz's view, substances only have intra-substantial causation, which is an internal causal relation within a single substance between one state and another state of itself. According to his theory, mind and body (just like all substances) do not in fact *cause* changes in each other. Substances only *appear* to be responsive to changes in other substances because God has determined each substance so that the aggregated independent motions of each substance would conform to and manifest as pre-established harmony. Hence according to Leibniz, even though a prior state in one substance is able to cause a following state in the same substance, it cannot alter the state of any other substances. The perceptions and actions of each substance are in agreement with those of another as a result of being according to its own essence.

Leibniz's doctrine is speculative in nature, as there is no proof from experience that would support this claim on the nature of causation. His motivation for this speculative concept is manifold, but one important reason is the same problem that Schelling faced later—namely how a substance functions both according to its own principles while under the inescapable necessity imposed by other substances.²² Leibniz's answer eliminates the necessity imposed by other substances and asserts the individuality and subjecthood of each substance in-itself. This conception pertains to the solution of many philosophical problem ranging from cognition that renders knowledge to the reality of teleological nature. In both cases, philosophers are confronted by the challenge of how concepts and things-in-themselves can align with each other. In order to show how pre-established harmony can be conceived in all substances, Leibniz demonstrates the union of teleology and mechanism in nature, which exemplifies how substances are at once subordinated to God's will and perfectly obedient to their laws of necessity:

God could give to matter or to any other cause the faculty of becoming organic without communicating to it the idea and the knowledge of organic nature... For... the body is

²¹ Brandon C. Look, 'Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz,' accessed 29 April, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz/>.

²² For a discussion on Leibniz's influence on Schelling, see E. Booth, 'Leibniz and Schelling', *Studia Leibnitiana* 32, no. 1 (2000): 86–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40694358>.

prompted by its original constitution to carry out with the help of external things all that it does in accordance with the will of the soul. So the seeds by their original constitution carry out naturally the intentions of God, by an artifice greater still than that which causes our body to perform everything in conformity with our will.”²³

In this passage, Leibniz conceives of the possibility of how matter is the product of the unity between divine purpose and mechanical laws of nature. Products of nature actualize the divine purpose by blindly following the imminent laws of nature, which are the means through which teleology is realized. The duality of causes and the subordination of one to the other points to the mediation of God, who makes it possible for substances to correspond to the changes in others, for the purpose of realizing His Grace. (Correspondingly, nature also plays a privileged role conceptualizing and knowing absolute identity in Identity Philosophy for Schelling.) Metaphysically speaking, this harmony requires the union between mechanical laws of nature and teleology, which is also the union between final cause and efficient cause. The harmony in nature enables the correspondence between mind and body because it shows that substances can conform to each other as two self-sufficient beings. This harmony between final and efficient cause was taken up again in the essay *Principles of Nature and Grace based on Reason*. Under the influence of the Scholastic teachings, Leibniz defines two kinds of causes that are reconciled and unified through pre-established harmony:

- a) Law of appetites: the final causes which designate purposes such as good and evil.
- b) Law of efficient causes: the laws that govern the motions and changes of substances.²⁴

The harmony between final cause and efficient cause also provides the metaphysical ground for the harmony between qualities of the soul and movements of its body, which solves the mind body dualism that we mentioned in the beginning. The problem of the body corresponding to the concept of the mind, and the mind subject to the limitation of the body is solved by this account that final cause is actualized through efficient causes. In living beings, the soul provides final purposes, which are what Leibniz calls qualities of the monad. Qualities

²³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy*, trans. E.M. Huggard, 65-6, (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, November 24, 2005), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17147/17147-h/17147-h.htm>.

²⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason*, §3, in the version presented at <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/leibniz1714a.pdf>.

of the soul include perceptions and actions, which is respectively the mental representation and the tendency to change its state.²⁵²⁶ Since here Leibniz fundamentally conceives of pre-established harmony as the correspondence between purpose and mechanisms, it can thus be further understood as the relationship between the ideal and the real. This will be an important connection to Schelling because his parallel system between Naturphilosophie and transcendental philosophy also demonstrate that the real and the ideal are unified in nature and consciousness respectively: in nature embodied in the unity between mechanism and teleology, in consciousness between representation and objects.

Pre-established harmony between perception and substance or representations and things-in-themselves, provides an answer to the problem of epistemology. By saying that perceptions correspond to substances in the universe through pre-established harmony, Leibniz demonstrates that we can have knowledge where the ideal is identical with the real. Leibniz asserts that each soul “represents the universe from its own point of view”,²⁷ meaning that a correspondence sufficient for knowledge is valid despite the particularity and subjectivity of the representations of each soul. Though Schelling does not explicitly discuss the particularities and contingencies of subjective representations, he is on the same page with Leibniz regarding the possibility of knowledge.

Furthermore, Leibniz also posits pre-established harmony as the relation between nature and Grace. He claims that there is a harmony “that he [God] has pre-established from all time between the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace.”²⁸ As we will see later, the harmony between nature and the progression of history towards a determinate direction is also an important theme for Schelling, as he too conceives of a preestablished harmony where the progress of history ultimately leads to the revelation of Providence.

Leibniz is considered as an attributive monist in the sense that mind and body are of the same kind of substance, i.e. monads. His monadology also influences Schelling’s conception of the nature of subjectivity. The resemblance is: Schelling adopts Leibniz’s conception of the monad as a subject for itself, and integrated it with his characterization of both nature and

²⁵ Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason*, §2

²⁶ Bodies are also constituted by monads. All substances, including the body, are fundamentally monads, but those that are composite of material substances are of an inferior kind since they are incapable of feeling or reasoning.

²⁷ Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 357

²⁸ Leibniz, *Principle of Nature and Grace based on Reason*, §15

consciousness as selves who merely act according to their own principles.

There is no way of explaining how a Monad can be altered in quality or internally changed by any other created thing; since it is impossible to change the place of anything in it or to conceive in it any internal motion which could be produced, directed, increased or diminished therein.²⁹

In this respect, all beings are only objects for themselves, except in relation to God. The substances are completely independent from each other as they have “no windows” through which one substance can change its own course for another.³⁰

Following from the above exposition of Leibniz, and before entering into the exposition of Schelling, we can anticipate the following ways in which Schelling is influenced by Leibniz: First, the understanding of monad as a self-contained being sheds light on Schelling’s characterization of the absolute as a self. Schelling points out that Leibniz’s monadology spiritualizes all substances.³¹ Schelling agrees with Leibniz that mind and nature are fundamentally both intelligence, and they further agree with each other on the subject-hood of all being. Schelling understands the Leibnizian monad as “an absolute centre, a universe for itself, a self-contained world, a pure egoity (*Ichkeit*) into which nothing from outside could enter”.³² This coincides with the idealist nature of his Naturphilosophie, transcendental philosophy and Identity Philosophy, which respectively holds the absolute self as nature, consciousness, and reason. Seeing the universe as an integral selfhood helps to explain, in his Identity Philosophy, why the totality can be divided into subjectivity and objectivity of the *self qua reason*.

Secondly, Schelling’s appropriation of Leibniz’s doctrine of *pre-established harmony*, enlightens us concerning the way in which he seeks to bridge chasms between knower and the known, freedom and necessity, mechanisms and teleology. In his transcendental idealism, Schelling took the strategy undertaken by Leibniz in his proposal of pre-established harmony,

²⁹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology*, §7, in the version presented at <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/leibniz1714b.pdf>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §7.

³¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 75.

³² *Ibid.*, 79

and appeals to a third mediator (the original unity of the primordial self) who grounds the correspondence between the two realms that are considered as irreconcilable in Kantian dualism. Though he denounces Leibniz's doctrine as a "stunted" version of Spinozian philosophy,³³ because its substance pluralism fails to conclude that spirit and matter are one unitary and singular substance,³⁴ he certainly benefited from Leibniz's conception that each substance can stand in a necessary relation with the totality in the form of its particularity. Leibniz's principle has shown Schelling how individuals in nature can be joined up in a way such that the correspondence between substances does not rely on the compromise or submission of one to the other. We do not need to be a blank slate, a passive receiver, nor a solipsistic creator of reality, in order to have freedom or knowledge. By conceiving of a pre-established harmony, Schelling introduces a vertical relation between reality (divided into the subject and the object) and the principle of productivity, thereby introducing a metaphysical dimension to the grounding of experience that unifies the antithetical sides of reality.

Finally, Leibniz's original idea of gradation also influenced Schelling as he too conceived of substances on a continuous spectrum of ideality. In Leibniz's discussion on the qualities of monads, he writes that "there are infinite levels of life among monads, some of which are more or less dominant over others."³⁵ Leibniz differentiates lifeless being from animals and rational agents and rates them on an axis of increasing clarity of perception and levels of reason. Schelling admits that Leibniz's ideas "was the first beginning of looking at the One essence of nature in the necessary sequence of steps of its coming-to-itself."³⁶ This theme plays an important role in Schelling's philosophy throughout his Naturphilosophie period and his Identity philosophy when he introduced the idea of "potency".

Despite Leibniz's influence on Schelling, his philosophy was not appropriated without criticisms. In his introduction to the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling criticizes Leibniz's pre-established harmony as dogmatic. He points out that if all our representations of the world immediately follow from essence of the finite mind, then there will be no differences

³³ Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 79

³⁴ For a discussion on Leibniz's pluralism and monism, see

Blank, Andreas. "Substance Monism and Substance Pluralism in Leibniz's Metaphysical Papers 1675-1676." *Studia Leibnitiana* 33, no. 2 (2001): 216-23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40694393>.

³⁵ Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and Grace*, §4

³⁶ Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 80

in the ways in which we perceive the world.³⁷ He further points out that Leibniz does not explain why and how the agreements between perceptions and the universe occurs, except the implication that the agreement follows from the essence of each finite substance. Since the essence of each substance is grounded in God, which is a being external to each mind, the perceptions of each mind is subject to the power of God, and the mind in fact perceives nothing else but what God wants it to perceive. Representation of the world therefore remains an “illusion”, leaving us with the scepticism over whether other beings exist outside of us and how they are in-themselves. This leads Schelling to criticize that Leibniz’s theory contradicts itself on the intra-substantial causality of the mind as it seems that it is the essence rather than individual states of the mind that causes consequent representations and motions. If this is the case, then Leibniz is committed to the view that being and thoughts of the mind were already pre-determined along with its internal principle (essence) and that self-consciousness does not *come into being* freely, but rather is necessitated. Hence Schelling suggests that philosophy must give an account for the history of self-consciousness, as he does in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

2.2 Pre-established Harmony and Absolute Identity in *STI*

In Schelling’s early essay *Vom ich als Prinzip der Philosophie (Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy)*, he writes that “the ultimate to which philosophy leads is not an objective but an immanent principle of preestablished harmony, in which freedom and nature are identical, and this principle is nothing but the absolute I, from which all philosophy has emanated.”³⁸ What distinguishes an objective from an immanent principle of preestablished harmony is the source of this relation—whether it is grounded in objectivity, the “not-I” or the “I”. Leibniz’s doctrine of pre-established harmony grounds it in God, the not-I, but Schelling, following Fichte’s footsteps, takes the “I” to be the absolute ground.

Though Schelling’s early writing might differ from Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* on the nature of the absolute I, his transcendental philosophy *a la* Fichte stays true to the Fichtean

³⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature: As Introduction to the Study of That Science 1797, Second Edition 1803* Intro. Robert Stern, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 28-9.

³⁸ Schelling, *Of the I*, 126.

spirit. In *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling aims to solve the problem of knowledge, freedom, and teleology from the point of view of transcendental consciousness. In the preface of *System*, the system sets out transcendental philosophy with the task of explaining how knowledge is possible.³⁹ It aims to vindicate the following essential claims regarding monist epistemology:

- a) Our representations of objects outside of us coincide with objects as they are independent of our consciousness which perceives them. This means that objects are nothing but what we perceive them as.
- b) Our presentations, which are free and occurs without necessity, can obtain objective reality in the world external to us.

These two claims each represent the realist and the idealist solution regarding knowledge. a) denies that the mind distorts reality, and b) denies that reality has independence from the mind. Fallacies of these two proposals are criticized by early modern philosophers. Therefore Schelling needs to raise a way in which both stand true without falsifying each other. That is, he has to show how conscious representation of objectivity preserves the truth of objects. He writes:

How both the objective world accommodates to presentations in us, and presentations in us to the objective world, is unintelligible unless between the two worlds, the ideal and the real, there exists a *predetermined harmony*. But this latter is itself unthinkable unless the activity, whereby the objective world is produced, is at bottom identical with that which expresses itself in volition, and *vice versa*.⁴⁰

This passage indicates that the concurrence of presentation and objective world requires that the two are constituted in a similar way, so that the principle of this identity between representation and object lies in consciousness itself. That is, consciousness alone must be responsible for both subjective representations and objective things. This is the fundamental premise of transcendental philosophy. The identity between subjectivity and objectivity constituted by the unity of the self is called “absolute identity”. In transcendental philosophy,

³⁹ Schelling, *STI*, 10

⁴⁰ Schelling, *STI*, 11-2

absolute identity is the identity between unconscious activities of the intelligence and conscious acts of the willing, whose interplay produces the representation of subjectivity and objectivity.

In the following exposition of preestablished harmony in *System*, I will first explain how the relation of pre-established harmony (also referred to as “predetermined harmony”) manifests itself in *System of Transcendental Idealism*. I aim to show how pre-established harmony gestures at the necessity of absolute identity, which nonetheless cannot be directly represented. I further suggest that the structure of the self as an absolute identity separated into two opposite forces is transferred to Schelling’s overall systematic structure in 1800. That is, we should understand nature and consciousness as respectively the unconscious and conscious modes of productivity of the absolute, which is an intelligence in-itself.

Transcendental philosophy presents the self as constituted by two principles of productivity, the conscious and the unconscious. The identity of the principle of conscious and unconscious productivity, and the unity of the two in the self answers the problem of knowledge. This is why Schelling asserts that “the activity, whereby the objective world is produced, is at bottom identical with that which expresses itself in volition.”⁴¹ The self is the absolutely unconditioned. It is an infinite principle of activity which conditions the whole reality. Schelling thinks of the self as a Leibnizian monad:

The self is a completely enclosed world, a monad, which cannot issue forth from itself, though nor can anything enter it either, from without. So nothing counter posited (or objective) would ever come into it, unless this too were posited simultaneously through the original action of self-positing.⁴²

From this passage we can see that there is nothing outside the self. This means that what is experienced as posited against the self must also find grounding within it. In Fichte’s terms the not-I must be posited by the I and be subsumed under it, rather than external to it. Therefore the goal of philosophy is to see *how* the self constitutes totality. In order to do so, Schelling must provide an account of how different aspects of reality relates to a single source, in such a way that bring us to the consciousness of this absolute ground. This is where “preestablished

⁴¹ Schelling, *STI*, 12

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37

harmony” is postulated. It is the relation between the two opposing realms of reality (ideal and real) which are coordinated and identical with each other. Schelling dissents from the Leibnizian understanding of preestablished harmony, according to which the mind and the world are two clocks that have tacit agreement with each other, despite working separately and self-sufficiently.⁴³ An important premise of Leibniz’s understanding is that each substance is grounded in each substance itself. Schelling, however, thinks that the correspondence between the real and the ideal is grounded by a single being which produces all being. This means that each substance *is*, only insofar as they are produced by a self. Just as God designs everything so that it is in preestablished harmony, absolute identity enables identity of what the consciousness experience as subjective and objective. In this sense, the postulation of harmonious relation *signifies* absolute identity, as this relation must be grounded in something that makes it possible. It is therefore worthwhile to see how pre-established harmony performs this role of indication.

Most fundamentally, pre-established harmony is the relation of concurrence between the products of conscious and unconscious activities of the self. Hence, as it has been briefly mentioned above, pre-established harmony is the corresponding relation between subjectivity and objectivity. From the transcendental point of view, activities of the self are divided into two kinds: the conscious, free activity of production, and the unconscious production, through which the world becomes objective for the self. When consciousness is engaged in the free, intelligent production, it is aware of itself as a subject, freely generating concepts and actively involved in the presentation of the world. Conscious production therefore appears to the self as, springing from the will of the self. The products of unconscious production, in the contrary, appear to the self as objective, since the self is not aware of itself as producing. Hence, under the framework of transcendental philosophy, the problem of correspondence between subjective presentation and objective things-in-themselves translates itself into the problem of the correspondence between the conscious and unconscious activities of the self, which is resolved in the absolute identity of the self as a unity and identity of the two principles.

Pre-established harmony must be assumed because it is required to explain how self-

⁴³ Schelling, *STI*, 154

consciousness arises. To explain the original act of self-consciousness, in which the self determines itself, one must conceive of a prior act. However, the original act of the self must be the *first* act, which means that it does not follow from a prior act. Thus, the original act of self-consciousness must follow from an act that is not an act, i.e. a *nonaction*.⁴⁴ A nonaction cannot be an act which the self is the cause of, which means the self is not the positive condition of this act, but merely the negative condition for it. And since the self is not acting, this act must be independent of the self. No acts, however, can be intuited as outside of the self beyond which nothing exists. The contradiction must be resolved here—the act which is represented as in the self and external to the self presupposes a pre-established harmony between the two. I understand this to mean that the self and the other must be in agreement to allow this reciprocity to take place, a reciprocity in which both nonaction of the self and the action of the other coexist makes the original act of self-consciousness possible. Under this context, Schelling posits the pre-established harmony between multiple intelligences, where one is the negative condition of the other, and the other is the positive condition of the original act of self-consciousness in the I. Since Schelling has now conceived of the preestablished harmony between the self and other, he can now explain the original act of self-consciousness by explaining the circularity of how the self can wills before the act of willing. The answer to this is that another intelligence has provided the self with the concept of willing through a *demand*, an obligation, which is an object of possibility that has the possibility of obtaining reality through intelligence.⁴⁵ The concept of willing can then arise through the mediation of a demand, because it is through the free will of the self that the reality of the demand comes into being. A demand which appears in the ideal self but awaits realization through willing conditions the self to know itself as the vehicle through which a possibility translates into reality.

Now Schelling needs to answer the problem how an unconditioned I can be influenced by another one of equal reality and absoluteness. Another sense of pre-established harmony appears here. Schelling writes that there must be “a preestablished harmony in regard to the common world which they present.”⁴⁶ To intuit the world in the same way as I do is the basic

⁴⁴ Schelling, *STI*, 160

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 162-3

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 164

condition under which I can recognize another being as an intelligence. However, since the representation of the world is absolutely grounded in each “I”, there must be a pre-established harmony among the selves so that the representations of the world largely agrees, except for the idiosyncrasy of each world due to the uniqueness of each individual self. However, the individuality of each world is an important element, which provides a “pre-established harmony of the *negative* kind”.⁴⁷ By recognizing the lack of uniformity in how the intelligence present the world, the self comes to recognize others as distinct from itself. In this section, Schelling shows that pre-established harmony between the self and other intelligences is necessary for the original act of self-consciousness.

It’s worth pointing out that the kind of preestablished harmony mentioned here is different from the other usages I discussed in this chapter, for this usage is a relation which spans across multiple selves, whereas all the rest usages of the term is grounded in a singular indexical subject. Though Schelling explains that according to the principle of transcendental idealism, the act of positing passivity or nonaction is more primary than intuiting positive acts external to the “I”, transcendental philosophy cannot explain how there are multiple absolutes. By suggesting that there is a pre-established harmony across multiple intelligences, Schelling needs to answer the question of what the ground for this harmony is.

To answer this question, we shall turn to Fichte’s solution. For Fichte, the problem of how other rational beings are possible does not seem to present an epistemological problem in its own right: to the contrary, the Other enters as the solution to the practical problem of how there can be limits on the freedom of the self who is absolutely free. In *Foundations of Natural Right*, Fichte argues that positing another free subject of equal freedom serves to limit the self, thereby furnishing the self-consciousness of its own freedom. The limitation of one’s absolute freedom and the recognition of one’s freedom mutually condition each other because without the former the self cannot posit itself as limited, in which act it recognizes its freedom. Fichte writes, “the subject must distinguish itself, through opposition, from the rational being that...it has assumed to exist outside itself.”⁴⁸ Therefore, for Fichte, the necessity to assume another being is a

⁴⁷ Schelling, *STI*, 164-5

⁴⁸ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right: According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Frederick Neuhauser, trans. Michael Baur, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39.

practical one, because it accounts for the emergence of self-consciousness and recognition of freedom. By subjecting the other of an equal other to the absolute I, Fichte upholds the “I” as the highest grounding of reality.

In the discussion of history, preestablished harmony between freedom and necessity points to the necessity of absolute identity since there must be a ground for the unity between laws of necessity and the will of freedom. This preestablished harmony can only hold if there is a higher ground above both, in which the two were originally united. This ground is the absolute identity of the primordial self. Schelling writes that “history as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the absolute.”⁴⁹ This is the case because the absolute is the ground of both freedom and necessity, and in so far as history is predetermined in the absolute and played out in the free acts of the individuals, the absolute is revealed in history as a whole. He says:

A preestablished harmony of the objective (or law-governed) and the determinant (or free) is conceivable only through some higher thing, set *over* them both, and which is therefore neither intelligence nor free, but rather is the common source of the intelligent and likewise of the free.

Now if this higher thing be nothing else but the ground of identity between the absolutely subjective and the absolutely objective, this conscious and the unconscious...then this higher thing 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. This eternal unknown, [is] the eternal mediator between the self-determining subjective within us, and the objective or intuitant; at once the ground of lawfulness in freedom, and of freedom in lawfulness.⁵⁰

History can be viewed from two perspectives. According to one, it is determined by free acts, and according to the other, it follows a necessary sequence of events determined by natural laws. In this passage, Schelling clearly points out that there is something “higher” or more fundamental than either necessity or freedom, which grounds both. Therefore the very

⁴⁹ Schelling, *STI*, 221

⁵⁰ Schelling, *STI*, 209

conception of reconciling freedom and necessity requires a ground that mediates the otherwise irreconcilable antinomy by generating both sides of reality. In short, preestablished harmony holds between necessity and freedom such that what proceeds necessarily according to natural laws concurs with free willing. Schelling further explains:

*This absolutely identical principle, which is already divided in the first act of consciousness, and by this separation generates the entire system of finitude, cannot, in fact, have any predicates whatever; for it is the absolutely simple, and thus can have no predicates drawn either from intelligence or free agency, and hence, too, can never be an object of knowledge, being an object only that is eternally presupposed in action, that is, an object only that is eternally presupposed in action, that is, an object of belief.*⁵¹

This passage hints at how pre-established harmony between freedom and necessity points to absolute identity between the two—*belief*. The absolute identity which grounds the identity between conscious and unconscious activities of the self must be presupposed, or believed, as we have no direct awareness of it. The reality of absolute identity lacks certainty. We do not have direct knowledge of it but experience points to the necessity of asserting its truth. The absence of certainty is however necessary for the preservation of the appearance of freedom, for if we come to know that history is predetermined, then all free acts would become acts of necessity. For this reason Schelling argues that a full revelation of the absolute synthesis cannot be conceived at any given time in history.⁵² As we will see later in the sections on nature and works of art, absolute identity does manifest itself in something external to us, but an immediate access to the absolute remains elusive.

Preestablished harmony also explains how nature unifies teleology and mechanisms. In the section on teleology in nature, Schelling shows the harmony between nature as purposive and nature as a product of lawful mechanisms. Nature, viewed from the perspective of transcendental idealism is a product of the self, which is at once conscious and unconscious. The free, conscious production of nature renders it purposive, whereas the unconscious production brings about the objectivity of nature that illustrates its necessity. Viewed as a unity

⁵¹ Schelling, *STI*, 209

⁵² *Ibid.*, 210

between free production and necessity, nature is a mirror that reflects our own freedom, and is therefore a means for our intuition of the unity and identity of conscious and unconscious production in the self. According to Schelling, a theory that explains the possibility of the two aspects of nature must be grounded in transcendental consciousness. He writes:

This absolute identity of the purposive concept with the object itself is attributable only to a type of production in which conscious and unconscious activity are united; but this in turn is possible only within an intelligence.⁵³

This passage shows that in order for us to postulate the unity between teleology and mechanisms in nature, we must conceive of the ground as an intelligence, for only an intelligence is capable of production according to a concept.

So far, Schelling's strategy to argue from pre-established harmony to absolute identity of the primordial self is to posit the relation of harmony between the contradicting aspects of representations, and then demonstrating the logical necessity for a ground that constitutes and determines this harmonious relation. Finally, by showing how the absolute ground for this identity must be an intelligence, Schelling returns to the self as this absolute ground. This method is not necessary for art products, which are capable of offering direct access to absolute identity. The 1800 *System* culminates in its analysis of art-products, through which we become conscious of the original identity in the self.

2.3 Work of Art

Transcendental philosophy upholds art as the epistemic locus for *knowing* absolute identity. According to Schelling, "the work of art merely reflects to me what is otherwise not reflected by anything, namely that absolutely identical which has already divided itself even in the self."⁵⁴ We might recall nature plays a similar role of reflecting an objectified unity to the self in order for the it to understand itself as a whole. However, art products are different from products of organic nature in so far as art products commence with consciousness, where there is an infinite opposition between the conscious and unconscious activities of the self for the

⁵³ Schelling, *STI*, 217

⁵⁴ Schelling, *STI*, 230

sake of the appearance of absolute freedom. Products of organic nature, on the other hand, do not proceed from the infinite contradiction, which means that the unity between the conscious and unconscious activities of the self is unseparated from the beginning. As a result of this, art products are more privileged than organic products of nature in bringing the self to the consciousness of the original identity in itself, because though nature represents the original identity between the conscious and unconscious activities of the self, it merely does so for the transcendental philosopher who is aware of the initial separation of the two activities in the self. In art we can witness the process through which a conscious activity is joined up with an unconscious activity and reaches unity. This direct intuition of absolute identity must happen through art products.

Schelling argues that an act through which we know the absolute identity must satisfy two criteria. First, the production must be a unity and identity between conscious and unconscious activities. Secondly, the two activities must appear as separated so that the self can be conscious of the unity and the identity of them. These two requirements create a contradiction which Schelling discusses in the following passage:

Conscious and unconscious activities are to be absolutely one in the product, just as they also are in the organic product, but they are to be one in a different manner; the two are to be one *for the self itself*. This is impossible, however, unless the self is conscious of the production. But if it is so, the two activities must be separated, for this is a necessary condition for being conscious of the production. So the two activities must be one, since otherwise there is no identity, and yet must both be separated, since otherwise there is identity, but not for the self.⁵⁵

In order to resolve the contradiction, the production must begin with a conscious free act in which the self recognizes itself as freely productive. In this beginning, objectivity is abolished so that the act can appear as free, yet the appearance of the separation between freedom and objectivity must not be continued, but terminated in the final product, which is entirely objective. The *process* of production will then allow the self to become conscious of the identity between conscious and unconscious activity of the self, as the transition of the appearance from

⁵⁵ Schelling, *STI*, 220

freedom to objectivity unfolds before it, and as the product presents itself as a unified *freely* created *object*. By witnessing a production through which the freely productive self unifies with necessity, the self becomes conscious of the original identity between conscious and unconscious activities of the primordial self before the original act of self-consciousness, and indeed before the self separates the conscious and unconscious activities:

The intelligence will therefore end with a complete recognition of the identity expressed in the product as an identity whose principle lies in the intelligence itself; it will end, that is, in a complete intuiting of itself.⁵⁶

The product, as a unity of free act and objectivity, comes under the consciousness of the self as a totality where the objective conforms with the free and conscious productivity. This product then becomes a mirror which reflects that the original identity and unity lies in the intelligence. In other words, art products lead the self back to self-intuition. As a result, it becomes aware of itself as the original unity and absolute identity between subjectivity and objectivity, ideal and real, freedom and necessity. And in this sense, art is the odyssey of the spirit, where it is led back to the absolute start.

This unknown, however, whereby the objective and the conscious activities are here brought into unexpected harmony, is none other than that absolute which contains the common ground of the preestablished harmony between the conscious and unconscious.⁵⁷

In seeing the unity of conscious, free productivity and the final objectivity, the self experiences, Schelling claims, an “astonishment” of the union between freedom and the product, as if it is brought about through an external agency. The self experiences this astonishment because the act began with freedom, but ended up in pure objectivity, in which freedom ceases to be. The harmony between freedom and objectivity which now appears foreign to the self is none other than “the primordial self”.⁵⁸ Yet consciousness of the primordial self is inherently impossible, because the primordial self is the infinite activity, who must become finite to become an object

⁵⁶ Schelling, *STI*, 221

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 221

⁵⁸ Schelling, *STI*, 221, footnote.

for itself. Therefore the self seeks the ground for the union between freedom and objectivity in a “higher nature”, which is precisely the primordial self in which there was an original identity between freedom and necessity. This is why Schelling claims that original identity appears “above” the intelligence—the infinite primordial self is ungraspable by self-consciousness.

The reason why art takes a crucial place in the transcendental system is that through art, the self *knows* itself as the absolute. As Schelling said, the ultimate purpose of transcendental philosophy is to “[explain] how the ultimate ground of the harmony between subjective and objective becomes an object to the *self itself*.”⁵⁹ The only way in which this is possible is through intellectual intuition, through which the self cognizes itself without objectifying itself. Schelling asserts:

Intellectual intuition is the organ of all transcendental thinking. For the latter sets out to objectify to itself through freedom, what is otherwise not an object; it presupposes a capacity, simultaneously to produce certain acts of mind, and so to intuit that the producing of the object and the intuiting itself are absolutely one; but this very capacity is that of intellectual intuition.⁶⁰

Intellectual intuition in transcendental philosophy has two senses: it is at once self-knowing and the self in-itself. In this passage, we can see this double function: intellectual intuition is both the unity of production and intuition of the self *as well as* the consciousness of the unity itself. That is, the self is both a self and a self-knowing; or rather, it is a self in virtue of being a self-knowing. Now that we have understood the importance of intellectual intuition, Schelling declares that aesthetic intuition is objectified intellectual intuition, an externalization of intellectual intuition that exhibits the ground of all pre-established harmony we have discussed before. The work of art is the locus where the infinite primordial self is represented in an external object. Hence, despite being a limited object, art products must admit of unlimited explications or conceptual articulations. By becoming external, the absolute identity of the primordial self which was separated in the first act of self-positing, appears before the self outside of its own immanence. However, the insufficiency of work of art is also evident,

⁵⁹ Schelling, *STI*, 217

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 27

because the primordial self is infinite and unobjectifiable. Essentially Schelling's task is to represent the unrepresentable in art products, but to represent the infinite in an object, he needs an object that is not an object.⁶¹ The tension in the text here is embodied in Schelling's diction that the absolute identity merely "radiates back" from the art product, and is experienced by the self as a "dark unknown", which indicates that there remains inexplicability.⁶² If aesthetic intuition can successfully bring the self to knowledge of its infinite primordial self, then the infinitude shouldn't be merely indicated.

Schelling's adventure with aesthetic intuition following the course of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* demonstrates that he is not satisfied with an immanent knowledge of the absolute identity through intellectual intuition. The problem with immanent self-knowledge is a major problem of Fichte's system. In order to obtain self-knowledge, the self must distinguish itself as the subject from itself as the object. However, this would mean that knowledge of the self is no longer knowledge of the self in totality, or the self as it is in-itself. As Bowie says, Fichte's theoretical demand for immediate self-knowledge that protects the absolute unity of the self has never received a successful and adequate account.⁶³ This will be a problem that motivates the epistemological priority of Naturphilosophie in Schelling's Identity Philosophy (discussed in chapter 4).

2.4 Analysis of the System in 1800

So far we have only discussed one side of the parallel system, there remains the other important science, Naturphilosophie, which completes the parallel system as a whole, posits nature as the unconditioned, the *causa sui*, who is self-sufficient as a self-productive product, and demonstrates the metaphysical foundations that ground natural phenomena. According to Schelling, phenomena of nature are the manifestation of two dynamic forces, the force of infinite productivity and infinite inhibition, whose interplay and equilibrium with each other result in different organisms and natural phenomena. Furthermore, Naturphilosophie shows how consciousness is necessarily born out of nature as the highest manifestation of nature's

⁶¹ Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993), 52.

⁶² Schelling, *STI*, 222

⁶³ Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 77.

intelligence. Through the conscious presentation, nature becomes an object for itself. Since nature is understood as a subject-object that is both self-producing and self-produced, it bears the structure of a self whose highest goal is self-consciousness. With the deduction of how natural phenomena attain an increasing level of intelligence, Schelling provides a historical account for the occurrence of self-consciousness, where the development of nature culminates. He thus accounts for how self-consciousness is a necessary product of nature in which nature completes its highest goal by finding itself as an object in reflection. As a result, philosophy of nature shows how nature constitutes the total reality from the real to the ideal.

In *STI*, Schelling writes that his motivation for demonstrating a “graduate sequence of intuitions” through which the self becomes self-conscious is to show the “parallelism” between nature and consciousness. For this purposes, “neither transcendental philosophy nor the philosophy of nature is adequate by itself; both sciences together are alone able to do it, though on that very account the two must forever be opposed to one another, and can never merge into one.”⁶⁴ In other words, Schelling’s purpose of upholding the two systems together despite their contradiction is to show that nature and consciousness are fundamentally constituted in the same way, and produced with the same principle of productivity. With this Schelling would be able to conclude that what are taken to be two contrasting sides of reality are in fact identical. The contradiction that results from espousing two sciences, with one positing nature as the absolutely unconditioned and the other positing consciousness as the absolutely unconditioned, is that neither can be true. The two-science system thus ends up negating both sciences which it first postulated as true. In order to resolve this contradiction, the system can draw either of the following two conclusions: 1) nature is identical to consciousness, or 2) nature and consciousness are identical with each other with respect to a third being, in which the two are originally identical.

So which is the right conclusion to be drawn? In the following I will suggest that the two ways of understanding Schelling’s Naturphilosophie-Transcendental Philosophy system in 1800 can be geometrically described as either the “pyramidal” interpretation or the “parallel” interpretation. I will endorse the parallel system and further argue that the inadequacy of

⁶⁴ Schelling, *STI*, 2-3

transcendental idealism to know the absolute identity of the primordial self calls for Naturphilosophie as an important parallel science to solve the problem of immanent self-knowledge and reflexivity faced by Fichte.

The “pyramid interpretation” suggests that the contradiction between the two sciences points to an *unknown third* which is ontologically more fundamental than nature and consciousness. This third being, in virtue of being more fundamental than both, must be the true absolute, which is fully embodied in both nature and consciousness. That is, both nature and consciousness must be identical to the absolute, in virtue of being derived from it. The “parallel interpretation”, on the other hand, concludes the two-science system with the claim that nature and consciousness are identical with each other, without the mediation of a third being, or an absolute. This means that nature is objective consciousness, and consciousness is subjective nature. The two are in fact two attributes of the same being. If nature and consciousness are one and the same substance, then Naturphilosophie and transcendental philosophy are in fact one science explained from different directions. The difference between nature and consciousness will be merely postulated and then negated by the whole system, and both sciences explain how this single being is a self-productive product.

The two interpretations of the parallel system differ insofar as the pyramid interpretation requires a mediating third, while the parallel interpretation doesn't. Under the pyramid interpretation, nature and consciousness would be conditioned products, and are identical only insofar as they are products of the same unconditioned absolute. One might also question whether the two interpretations are indeed different from each other: it seems that according to the second interpretation which interprets nature and consciousness as the same substance viewed differently, this substance which is the unity of nature and consciousness must be neither one nor the other. Therefore, in virtue of being the identity and the totality between nature and consciousness, the substance is a third distinct being, and consciousness and nature are two possible attributes of it. However, this confusion between the two interpretations does not capture an important difference: under the pyramid interpretation, both nature and consciousness are *conditioned* because they are ontologically secondary to the absolutely unconditioned, whereas under the parallel interpretation, both nature and consciousness, which are in fact two sides of the same absolute, are *unconditioned* by dint of being the absolute itself.

Put differently, the pyramidal structure says that the absolute *grounds* the nature and consciousness, whereas in the parallel structure, the absolute is the immanence of nature and consciousness.

Under my view, Schelling's system as it stood in 1800 should be interpreted as a parallel structure. First, to interpret the absolute as the ground of nature and consciousness defies Schelling's assumption in both sciences that nature and consciousness are the absolutely unconditioned. More importantly, the parallel structure provides a holistic perspective where consciousness and nature are understood as the subjective and the objective side of the absolute as a self. This would formally align with the structure of nature and consciousness, both of which are subject-object unities that are self-producing and self-produced. Conceived from the perspective of the absolute, nature and consciousness are two ways in which the absolute produces itself, where one is conscious and subjective, and the other is nonconscious and objective. The parallel system, by identifying the subjective (consciousness) and the objective (nature), unites the two in the synthesis of the self, thereby structuring the absolute as a self-consciousness.

The major epistemological challenge presented in *STI* is that despite the goal to know absolute identity, the system falls short in every way. As we have previously demonstrated in history and art, no direct consciousness of the primordial self is possible. According to scholars such as Nassar and Snow,^{65 66} the problem of knowing the unknowable is one Schelling has attempted to avoid, though unsuccessfully. And for Nassar, reprimanding this failure would be an important motivation for the movement into Identity Philosophy (see discussion in chapter 4). Bowie, on the other hand sees Schelling's claims in *STI* as "apparently hyperbolic".⁶⁷ Their real purpose being to propose work of art as a kind of post-metaphysical method of revealing the truth which is superior to the conceptualization of metaphysics. By suggesting that truth is embodied in each work of art as an unfaltering revelation of the absolute, art products points to a new kind of epistemology enabled by metaphorical revelation rather than conceptual articulation (e.g. natural language). Bowie quotes Habermas' criticism of metaphysical

⁶⁵ Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795-1804* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 224.

⁶⁶ Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, SUNY Series in Hegelian Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 121.

⁶⁷ Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, 54

enquiries into the world, and argues that the inquiry into reality with reason in the form of metaphysics is “inherently reflexive”, and can reveal nothing but a reality that aligns with the rational structure.⁶⁸ A true inquiry that attempts to restore reality authentically must dispose of its rational assumption and use means which can be embodied in metaphors that seem according to Bowie, to escape rational self-reflection.

While I agree that the insufficiency of works of art is an important motivation for the philosophical transition from 1800 to 1801, I disagree with the first kind of interpretation that Schelling’s failure was unexpected. If Schelling has found out that the project of transcendental philosophy is inherently flawed, he could have abolished the project before fully revealing its failure. A philosopher has no incentive to publish a work solely to demonstrate its failure to reach their goal, unless the failure itself is significant in conveying the intended message. Secondly I disagree that art products are merely metaphors for absolute identity because the process of creating work of art allows the self to experience the ongoing development from a free act to a synthesis between freedom and necessity, which reveals the possibility of freedom and necessity being reconciled. The presupposition of a relation of pre-established harmony logically necessitates a ground which resolves it, which makes the reference to absolute identity a logical and conceptual one. Thirdly, there is no evidence that art products as metaphors can evade the problem of self-reflexivity of reason because at this stage Schelling doesn’t seem to be worried that reason fails to encapsulate reality. In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, Schelling is very close to saying that reason *is* the totality, and there can be nothing outside of it. Though Bowie’s understanding does provide ground for connecting Schelling’s early philosophy with his positive philosophy, there is not enough reason to think that going beyond reason is a motivation for Schelling’s writing as early as 1800.

Instead, I suggest that in *STI* Schelling aimed to show that Fichte cannot avoid the problem of immanent self-knowledge within the framework of transcendental philosophy. If a philosophical system has stopped here, where the absolute identity can only be known in mediation, then we would fall back into the fallacy of Kant’s supersensible, a theoretical postulate (albeit necessary) criticized by both Fichte and Schelling. The problem of immanent

⁶⁸ Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, 10

self-knowledge is that in order for the self to know itself as the absolute, it must first have a conception of what the self is. As Dieter Henrich has pointed out, “how can self-consciousness know that it knows itself if this knowledge is supposed to come about via an act of reflection? It is obvious that it cannot have this reflected knowledge without being able to lay claim to a preceding knowledge of itself.”⁶⁹ It is said here that in order to know what is known *is* the self who is knowing, one must already have a conception of what the self is for comparison. Therefore externalization of the self must represent the self as it is—as the unconditioned subject-object. Schelling’s concern with the problem of immanence and reflexivity is confirmed by his response to Eschenmayer, which we will discuss in chapter 4. At this stage we can conclude that by showing absolute self-knowledge is untenable for transcendental philosophy, Schelling reveals the significance of Naturphilosophie in the parallel system. That is, there must be an infinite being, external to the self that reflects the self in its absolute and primordial form. Systematically, transcendental philosophy requires Naturphilosophie as its complementary pair to solve both the problem of immanence and of reflexivity (see chapter 4). From here we can already see that the epistemic importance Schelling put on art calls for a greater responsibility assumed by Naturphilosophie, which will become an important part of Schelling’s Identity Philosophy.

⁶⁹ Dieter Henrich, *Selbstverhältnisse: Gedanken und Auslegungen zu den Grundlagen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 7852 (Stuttgart: P. Reclam, jun, 1982), 64. Bowie’s translation in *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 76.

Chapter 3 Identity Philosophy

“A system is completed when it is led back to its starting point.”¹

What marks Identity Philosophy as a distinct period of philosophical development from Schelling’s previous system is twofold. Metaphysically, the system asserts that absolute identity is the ground of all beings, and all beings are identical with each other as the manifestation of the absolute, which is *reason*. This metaphysical outlook unites all dualism once and for all. What the parallel system distinguishes as nature and consciousness, are identical from the perspective of reason. Methodologically, the system marks the full confidence and scope of intellectual intuition to cognize the absolute from the particular. Intellectual intuition thus becomes the organ that enables the philosophical method of construction, which is what Schelling considers as the proper method of philosophy, because it exhibits the particular in the universal and demonstrate the possibility of how the manifold of existence can ensue from the absolute. This immediate relationship between particular and universal explains the stylistic form of the 1801 *Darstellung Meines System der Philosophie* (hereafter referred to as *Presentation*) which recalls a geometrical demonstration with the same style that Spinoza has employed in *Ethics*.

In this chapter I will discuss Schelling’s Identity Philosophy which lasts roughly between 1801 and 1804 from the following aspects: 1) the relationship between total indifference and absolute identity 2) the method of construction in relation to the faculty of intellectual intuition and 3) Schelling’s answer to the problem of individuality.

Michael Vater criticized in his introduction to the translation of the 1802 *Further Presentation* that Schelling’s thick definition of identity in the first presentation made him appear as a “stalwart foundationalist”. The *Presentation*, without the justification of its methodology and logical proceedings, appeared “logically soft”.² Therefore, even though the 1801 *Presentation* is the centre piece for Identity Philosophy, the understanding of this dense

¹ Schelling, *STI*, 232

² F.W.J. Schelling, ‘Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy (1802),’ trans. Michael Vater, *The Philosophical Forum* 32, no. 4 (2001): 373. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0031-806x.00074>.

work must be aided by other writings that justify its methodology and expound upon the subtleties of the concepts.

3.1 Intellectual Intuition and Construction

The difficulty of understanding Schelling's Identity Philosophy not only lies in his unification of concepts that common sense takes to be opposed, but also in his employment of methods that are imbued with metaphysical assumptions. Schelling's method of geometrical demonstration and construction are different from the method of deductive reasoning that philosophy is familiar with, and the means themselves presume the metaphysical ends. In order to understand Schelling's Identity Philosophy, I will begin by expounding on the faculty of intellectual intuition and the method of construction, which are presupposed in his 1801 *Presentation*, but receives more detailed explication in the 1802 *Further Presentation* in Schelling's *Journal for Speculative Philosophy*.

Intellectual intuition is a faculty of the intellect that cannot be learned, but it is a necessary mode of intellectual cognition which allows the philosopher to see the universal in the particular. It is the organ that enables the practice of philosophy, which deals with the antithesis between ideal and real, concept and object. Schelling compares the certainty of intellectual intuition in philosophical construction to the certainty of pure intuition in geometrical demonstrations. The faculty of intellectual intuition is distinguished from reflection, which "relies on...the antithesis of thought and being".³ That is, the perspective of reflection presupposes that there is an opposition between thought and being, subjectivity and objectivity. On the other hand, intellectual intuition presumes that the thought and being are unified, which allows it to reveal the unity between the form of being and essence.

The possibility of intellectual intuition is grounded in absolute cognition.⁴ Absolute cognition is the immediate cognition of the absolute, which does not differentiate between the cognizing subject and the absolute that is cognized. In other words, absolute cognition is a kind of *being at one with* the absolute *in* cognition. Absolute cognition cannot be proven or shown, for it is self-evident for the mind which sees it. Its presence is its only proof. Formally defined,

³ Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 379

⁴ *Ibid.*, 379

absolute cognition is the identity between thought and being *in knowing*. Schelling highlights the important point in the footnotes that his assumption differs from a dogmatic one because he does not make claims about the objectivity of this identity, independent of cognition, but instead transitions from the *knowing* to the *being* of the absolute.⁵ The logical claim is: Since there is no difference between universality and particularity with the absolute (for it is *one*) it follows that there is no difference between essence and form, because form is that which distinguishes one particular from the other. Now it also established that the absolute has *being* in so far as it is cognized by absolute cognition, where thought and being is unified. Taking into consideration that absolute cognition is the *form* of being of the absolute (which aligns with the idealist tradition), we can know that thought and being must also be united with regards to the essence of the absolute. Therefore we can prove that the absolute must be the unity of being and thought in both essence and being. Schelling concludes that “the absolute unity of thought and being, of the ideal and the real, not differentiated from its essence, is the absolute’s eternal form, the absolute itself.”⁶

From this we can see that intellectual intuition is constituted by the immediate knowing of the absolute, which is made possible by the metaphysical principle that the *being* of the absolute is identical with the *cognition* of it. This is a mark of Schelling’s philosophy in this period—the legitimacy of epistemology is justified by the metaphysical end.⁷ At this stage, Schelling’s metaphysical aim is to illustrate the reality of the absolute, as well as to justify the immediate knowledge of it, for all mediation have been proved to fail in *STI*. The dialogue *Bruno* distinguishes identity philosophy by Schelling’s steadfast endorsement of intellectual intuition as the successful solution to a nexus of philosophical questions he had consistently engaged with.⁸ This view is in disagreement with Whistler, who thinks that intellectual intuition had subdued influence in Schelling’s Identity Philosophy.⁹ As Whistler views it, there is a priority of construction in the Identity System. Intellectual intuition is merely “a component part” of

⁵ Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 379

⁶ *Ibid.*, 381

⁷ Daniel Breazeale, “‘Exhibiting the Particular in the Universal’: Philosophical Construction and Intuition in Schelling’s Philosophy of Identity (1801–1804),” in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. Lara Ostaric (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 91–119, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139093569.007>, 117-8.

⁸ Bruno, ‘The Appearance and Disappearance of Intellectual Intuition,’ 7.

⁹ Daniel Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), 133.

construction, which is the “overarching methodology” during this period of Schelling’s writing. For him “intuition is the product of construction, while *Darstellung* names the process.”¹⁰ Whistler’s interpretation of the relationship between intellectual intuition and construction emphasizes the productive aspect of this faculty. I argue, however, that intellectual intuition and construction are a complementary pair that work in opposite ways. Intellectual intuition is the cognition of the universal through the particular, whereas construction is the exhibition of the particular in the universal. In Schelling’s own words, “construction is, first and in general, exhibition of the particular inside absolute form.”¹¹ Construction produces the particular from the point of view of the universal. It is not a discursive proof, but a way of showing how the particular can be born out of the universal, and how finitude embodies infinitude, thereby establishing an identity relation between the two. Schelling writes that since philosophy *is* the unconditioned of all science, it must “exhibit the totality in the principle which is its unity”, rather than “deduce the totality from the principle”.¹² The key difference here is that deduction only shows how determinate beings follow from a concept, but do not show how the unity of determinations is the expression of the absolute. For Schelling, construction demonstrates how the totality of finite particulars expresses the absolute. In his words, “in order to exhibit unity as real unity one must necessarily be acquainted with the totality and entire possibility of forms; they are not to be regarded...as if these had substances in themselves.”¹³ This is to say that we must not by means of deductions establish that individuals are being-in-themselves, which would be nothing more than an illusion of the independence of finite “substances” (finite beings do not qualify as a substance). Rather we must through construction show how the world of appearances “restore” the “divine harmony” of the universe, or in other words, manifest the absolute as a whole. The essence of the absolute itself only “fills us with images of an infinite enclosure, of an impenetrable stillness and concealment”.¹⁴ It is the finitude that articulates the infinitude, and construction that illustrates this articulation.

However, to construct finitude in accordance with infinitude presupposes the knowledge of the principle of unity, which is acquired through intellectual intuition. In this sense,

¹⁰ Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language*, 136

¹¹ Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 394

¹² *Ibid.*, 389

¹³ *Ibid.*, 389

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 392

construction presupposes intellectual intuition. Furthermore, it is through intellectual intuition that we establish the “identification of form with essence”, which “snatches the ultimate doubling {of the real and ideal} away from the dualism it inhabits and establishes *absolute idealism* for the partial idealism of the world of appearances.”¹⁵ This is to say that intellectual intuition is the primary faculty which gives us insight into the metaphysical unification between appearance and the absolute. It is intellectual intuition, grounded in absolute cognition, that first bridges the gap between particular and the universal. By positively intuiting¹⁶ the absolute, intellectual intuition establishes epistemic access to the absolute. The two are nevertheless a complementary pair in philosophy because while intellectual intuition intuits essence in form, construction displays form through essence. Intellectual intuition shows how absolute identity is an identity relation between the particular and the absolute, whereas construction shows how totality *is* the absolute. The two together completes the two senses of absolute identity: identity and totality.

3.2 Identity and Individuality

As we can see, individuality is an important question in Schelling’s Identity Philosophy. The problem that is presented for Identity Philosophy is: if all beings are identical to the absolute, then how can one individual be different from another?¹⁷ There are two important ways in which Schelling answers the problem. First, through a Platonist denial of status of sensuous appearance, Schelling argues that the particulars are *not* in the absolute. Second, by appealing to quantitative difference, Schelling argues that particularity is not *essentially* different from the absolute but only quantitatively so. In the following I will explain these two assertions that elucidate the position of individuality in Identity Philosophy.

The problem of particularity and universality is a problem that Schelling inherits from his Platonist influences. Schelling’s intellectual engagement with Plato has a long history. From his early writings on *Timaeus*, to his later writing titled *Bruno*, which paid homage to the

¹⁵ Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 392

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 385

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 387

Renaissance thinker Giordano Bruno who drew heavily on the Neo-Platonist tradition,¹⁸ Schelling evidently appropriated Platonic doctrines in the development of his philosophy.¹⁹ His Platonism can be seen in the claim that each object has existence by dint of the unification between form and matter. In his words, “everything we can know is a fragment of the absolute essence of the eternal principle, only cast in the form of appearance.”²⁰ By considering the finitude as imperfect and limited way of representing the absolute, Schelling’s absolute idealism resembles Plato’s theory of form. In Plato’s *Parmenides*, the problem arises regarding how there can be one form that every particular resembles, but in different ways, such that each particular can resemble the form, while being different from other particulars.²¹ To this problem, Schelling responds that we must devalue the appearance, as he says “sensible cognition is profound darkness”.²² It is the absolute that is manifested in the form which is the *being* in-itself, and “here is no individual being or individual thing in itself”.²³ Though finite particulars are the necessary forms through which absolute identity exists, the appearance of their ontological independence is ultimately subsumed under the totality which is the being-in-itself, absolute identity. As I understand it, there is a hierarchical structure between the appearance of the individual and the absolute as the totality of the existence, where the former is subsumed under the latter, as *being*. Each individual does not determine itself but is determined by another being because according to Schelling, the individual does not subsist in-itself. As he proclaims, “each individual being is as such a determined form of the being of absolute identity, but not its very being, which is only in totality.”²⁴ This indicates that each determinate individual is only part of the absolute as it is only part of totality, which means it does not have *being* independent from the whole. As Schelling says, “the endless dependence of things on one another through cause and effect is itself the expression and, as it were, the consciousness of

¹⁸ Alessandro G. Farinella and Carole Preston, ‘Giordano Bruno: Neoplatonism and the Wheel of Memory in the “De Umbris Idearum”’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2002): 596–624, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1262319>.

¹⁹ It is also worth mentioning that there is an interesting historical connection between Bruno and Leibniz. Although there are debates about the extent to which Bruno influenced Leibniz in the latter’s mature philosophy, it is at least evident that Leibniz was closely engaged with Bruno’s work for a period of time. On this topic, see Stuart Brown’s ‘Monadology and the Reception of Bruno in the Young Leibniz,’ in *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher of the Renaissance*, ed. Hilary Gatti, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 381-404.

²⁰ Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 38

²¹ Plato, *The Parmenides of Plato / with Introduction, Analysis, and Notes*, by Thomas Maguire, Dublin University Press Series (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co.; London: Longmans, Green&Co., 1882), 131a-c.

²² Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 391

²³ *Ibid.*, 357

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 361

the futility to which they are subjected, and a counterstriving toward the unity in which alone everything is real.”²⁵ Because each individual, as a *real* determined being, only partakes in the absolute, it seeks unity with other individuals in order to have *being* as the totality, which subsists as the absolute.²⁶ Conceived as a singular individual, separated from the totality, an individual *is not*. There is no ontological hierarchy, however, between the totality of experience and the absolute, as the two are one and the same. Schelling’s Platonism which helps him to explain the relationship between particular and universal needs to be carefully understood, as he is not saying that the universal is “transcendent”, and the particular is an imperfect translation of the perfect idea in immanent experience, thereby recreating dualism. Instead, the Platonic dualism between form and being is unified in a monism, where the infinite idea of the absolute and the totality of finite individuals are two ways of conceiving the one and only *being*.

Furthermore, Schelling conceives of individuality through the concept of “quantitative differentiation”. In the 1801 *Presentation*, Schelling writes that “quantitative difference between subjectivity and objectivity is conceivable only relative to individual being, but not in itself, or in light of the totality.”²⁷ In the following section I will answer the question of how individuality is conceived in terms of quantitative difference in light of Plato’s *Philebus*. In his 1794 commentary on *Timaeus*, Schelling used *Philebus* as an important aid to understanding the cosmology of the former work. As I will show here, Plato’s categorization of beings has reconfigured itself in Schelling’s concept of quantitative differentiation. Where in Plato, beings with the structure of subject-predicate come to be by combining determinant and indeterminate beings, in Schelling, individuals come about as a predication of the infinite determinant, the absolute.

In *Philebus*, Plato categorizes four kinds of being: 1) indeterminate being 2) determinate being 3) the mixture between determinate and indeterminate being 4) that which grounds the mixture in 3).²⁸ Indeterminate beings are qualities such as hot and cold, high and low pitch. Taking music as an example, high and low pitch which appear as opposing qualities can in fact

²⁵ Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 389

²⁶ Although Schelling rarely directly addresses political philosophy, this part of his metaphysics may have interesting political implications.

²⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, ‘Presentation of My System of Philosophy (1801),’ trans. Michael Vater. *The Philosophical Forum* 32, no.4 (2001): 357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0031-806X.00073>.

²⁸ Plato, *Philebus*, translated with notes and commentary by J.C.B. Gosling, Clarendon Plato Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 23c-d.

be translated onto a scale of quantitative difference of notes between the two, such that “high” and “low” are merely relative attributes measured among each other. When a quality can be measured according to different degrees, Plato categorizes such qualities as indeterminate beings, as they are on a scale of variance according to degree rather than kind. When something resists quantification on a scale, they are categorized as determinants. Determinants are unalterable and singular. Examples include a person, weather, etc. Then Socrates suggests that if one combines entities of the two categories, one would generate a third category—beings who are partially determinant and partially indeterminate. Socrates emphasizes that the third category “comes into being” through a quantified effect on a determinant being.²⁹ And the product is indeterminacy “bound” by a determinant.³⁰ Notice this third being has a subject predicate structure, which is the same structure of an individual. In Identity Philosophy, the only unalterable determinant is the absolute, and individuals are indeterminate beings that predicate the absolute in different ways. A relation between the absolute and the individual is a relation between subject and predicate, determinants and indeterminants. The quantitative difference between subjectivity and objectivity explains individuality because it measures the extent to which individuals, as object (or predicate) of the absolute, is identical to it. That is, an individual is distinguished by the quantity of difference between it and the absolute.

An individual being needs to be understood from two aspects following the Platonic structure. With respect to its essence, every individual is identical to each other, because the essence of everything is $A=A$, or absolute identity. With respect to its form, individuals can be distinct from each other because each is a form of being of the absolute identity, “an identity of identity”.³¹ This is where particularity comes to be—individuals differ in the extent to which its (finite) form *is* identical to absolute identity. That is, absolute identity manifest to a different degree in the form of individuals.

The following quote captures this two-fold thinking. Schelling writes, “each thing that is, considered absolutely and in-itself, is in essence absolute identity; but in its form of being, it is a cognizing of absolute identity.”³² As illustrated before, it is in the *form of being* that it is a

²⁹ Plato, *Philebus*, 26e

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27d

³¹ Schelling, *Presentation*, §16, 354

³² Schelling, *Presentation*, 354

matter of the quantity of absolute identity, and this form of being *is* the quantitative difference between subjectivity and objectivity in an individual. The relationship between essence and form in Identity Philosophy is that essence necessitates its form of being. We cannot think that either the essence or form of being is ontologically primary, because both are equally required to bring absolute identity to being. The essence of absolute identity is $A=A$, and the form of being of absolute identity is the absolute cognition of it in both subjectivity and objectivity, such that absolute identity is substantiated in the form of $(A=A)=(A=A)$, because both the subject and the object are posited in themselves. However, when there is a quantitative difference between subjectivity and objectivity, $A=A$ is posited as $A=B$ in which A designates the subject and B the object.

With regards to the nature of the quantitative difference between A and B, Schelling explains:

Since there is no possible difference between the two in terms of being itself (because they are equally unconditioned as subject and object, thus the same in essence), there remains only a quantitative difference, i.e., one that obtains with respect to the amount of being, such that the same identity is posited [as subject and object], but with a predominance of subjectivity [of cognizing] or objectivity [of being].³³

Since all beings are of the subject-object structure, the more a being is able to cognize its real being in the ideal, the more subjective it is, and the less it is able to grasp its objectivity in the ideal, the more objective it is. The subjectivity-objectivity distinction in this context roughly maps onto the ideal-real distinction, which is further elucidated by Spinoza's thought-extension distinction with regard to the essence of the infinite Substance. The closer the difference between a being's ideal and real existence, the more the being manifest absolute identity, which is the quantitative indifference between subject and object. Therefore, we can explicate the relation between the individual and the absolute identity in terms of the quantitative difference between the individual's own subjectivity and objectivity. In every being's own subjective-objective structure, it cognizes the absolute in its own form of being and becomes a particular.

³³ Schelling, *Presentation*, §23, 355

To answer the question posted at the beginning of this section, individuals are conceivable within Schelling's identity philosophy by measuring the quantified degree to which they are identical to absolute identity. In virtue of each particular being an "identity of an identity", it stands in relation to absolute identity in the form of a judgement. The more the subject-object structure manifests absolute identity, the more truth to the judgment. Schelling's Platonic view of individuality asserts that 1) each individual is in essence self-identical, and identical to absolute identity, and 2) each individual, in its form of being, is distinguished by its quantitative difference between its subjectivity and objectivity, which is also the quantitative difference between itself and absolute identity. This characterization both denies the in-itself of the *form* of individuality and affirms the being of individuals. Though in the above I make use of the concept of "essence", I do not mean that there is a transcendent being that is absolute identity which exists independent of individuals. Instead, I mean a formal structure of being, whose being depends on the individuals. On the positive affirmation of individuals, both Whistler and Bowie acknowledge that Schelling's definition of individuality is affirmative rather than negative. Different from Hegel, Schelling doesn't think that particularity is merely the result of negation, which is defined by Spinoza's "*omnis determinatio est negatio*", "every determination is negation". Whistler explains that for Schelling, "identity affirms itself and thereby "refracts" into individual expressions of identity, and this is how plurality arises in the Schellingian cosmos."³⁴ Similarly, Bowie argues that Schelling affirms the existence of the "prior ground" that makes the sight of difference and particularity possible, and this "prior ground" is the most all-encompassing absolute, in which everything exists. Therefore all comparisons between particularities in fact asserts a shared common ground—their *being*.

3.3 From "Total Indifference" to "Absolute Identity"

Schelling's Identity Philosophy got its name from the endorsement of absolute identity as ultimate truth. In the history of philosophy, Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles as the first analytic elucidation of identity.³⁵ The identity of indiscernibles says that for every

³⁴ Daniel Whistler, 'Schelling on Individuation', *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (2016): 340, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17570638.2016.1231884>.

³⁵ Manfred Frank, "'Identity of Identity and Non-Identity': Schelling's Path to the 'Absolute System of Identity'", trans. Ian

two objects who have the exact same qualities, they must be identical with each other,³⁶ which is formally expressed as: $\forall F(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy) \rightarrow x=y$. Different from Leibniz, Schelling does not attempt to establish the formal characterization of identity between two objects, but to show how the totality of existence as we experience is unified by absolute identity, which gives rise to finitude beings.

Fichte had criticized that Schelling's system has started with its conclusion, where by granting himself the definition of reason in the beginning, Schelling has already given himself the whole system. Fichte's criticism perhaps voices the confusion that many readers have with regard to the *Presentation*. He comments that:

Through an explanation or real definition of this kind the defined matter is presented and concluded as a finished object: hence, I don't see how the transition is supposed to be made from here to the following and the subsequent thoughts... The beginning can only be the most undetermined, the most unfinished, for otherwise we would have no reason to proceed further from it, and make it more defined through further reflection. Thus the following is only historical to the extent that it reports on a construction that is perhaps already executed, but not the executing philosophical construction itself.³⁷

Fichte's criticism is that in this first definition Schelling has already granted himself the conclusion of his presentation, and the following deduction cannot further develop from an already completed construction. Essentially, he points out that Schelling has not argued for his conclusion but assumed its truth from the very beginning. The system, according to Fichte, would be question-begging. What made Fichte think so? Here is the beginning of Schelling's demonstration:

Alexander Moore, in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. Lara Ostaric (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 120–44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139093569.008>.

³⁶ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §9, in the version presented at <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/leibniz1686d.pdf>.

³⁷ J.G.Fichte and F.W.J.Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800-1802)*, translated, edited, with an introduction by Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 122.

§1 *Definition*. I call *reason* absolute reason, or reason insofar as it is conceived as the total indifference of the subjective and objective.³⁸

Schelling's aim in the 1801 *Presentation* is to prove absolute identity as reality, in which subjectivity and objectivity, ideal and real are identical. Reading §1 with this end in mind, we may initially agree with Fichte that the system has begun where it should end. Though this might initially seem plausible, I will argue that by demonstrating how total indifference is absolute identity, the 1801 *Presentation* moves from the suppositum of total indifference, which does not obtain reality, to the ontological claim of totality as absolute identity. By deriving the existence of absolute identity from a postulated definition of indifference between subjectivity and objectivity, Schelling deters the criticism of circularity.

Though “total indifference” and “absolute identity” may seem analytic versions of each other, there are key differences between the two terms—whereas “total indifference” merely refers to the relation of identity, “absolute identity” both means the identity and refers to the totality of existence. In the following I will briefly rehearse the course of argumentation that Schelling followed in *Presentation* in order to show the key turning points where the system had moved from essence to existence, thereby advancing the system.

Schelling first defines reason as the total indifference between subjectivity and objectivity (§1), and then shows that if there were such a perspective whereby the two can be subsumed under it, then it must subsume everything there is (§2), which can either be subjective or objective. From here, it can be concluded that reason must be the *only* existence, for there can be nothing outside of it, and it must be self-identical for there is nothing besides itself to which it can be identical to (§3). This self-identity of reason can be expressed as $A=A$ (§4), which is the law of identity. In $A=A$, the first A is defined as the subject, and the second is defined as the predicate (§5). Note that up to this point Schelling has not yet made any ontological claims. He makes it clear that “the unique being posited through this proposition is that of identity itself, which accordingly is posited in complete independence from A as subject and from A as

³⁸ Schelling, *Presentation*, 349

predicate.”³⁹40 This means that what is posited here is a relation, rather than the substance within which the relation holds. In a shift of terms, $A=A$ which expresses the essence of reason defined by total indifference, is now called “absolute identity” (§6). Until now there is no distinction between total indifference and absolute identity, as the two both designate the same law $A=A$.

It is in §7 that the presentation begins to transition into the discussion of existence, though this is not properly done until §8. §7 is important, however, because it raises the concept of “cognition”, which is the thought of the proposition $A=A$. Essentially the claim made here is that $A=A$ cannot be posited independent from the form of the proposition “ $A=A$ ”, which is the cognition of absolute identity. No claim is made about whether this cognition exists, but merely that it is as unconditioned as $A=A$ itself. Crucially in §8, Schelling makes the transition from essence to existence. He asserts that because the very positing of $A=A$ requires that the form of a proposition “ $A=A$ ”, absolute identity “stands in being”. This is important because it shows that the being of absolute identity follows from the proposition stating its existence, and that “it belongs to the essence of absolute identity to be.”⁴¹ By asserting that the essence of absolute identity cannot be postulated unless through a thought, Schelling shows that the very essence of the understanding entails being, which moves the presentation from the initial stage of conceptualization to the positive affirmation of being. Now by establishing the connection between reason and $A=A$, Schelling shows that reason is $A=A$ in both essence and being (§9).

The next key step is the transition from the being of absolute identity to absolute totality, which takes place in §26, where he writes that “absolute identity is absolute totality—because it is itself everything that is, or it cannot be conceived as separated from everything that is (§12). It *is*, therefore, only as everything, i.e., it is absolute totality.”⁴² This is to say that *if* there is anything at all, everything that is must be identical to absolute identity. Combined with the conclusion from §9, Schelling is able to say that there must be *being*, and all *being* is absolute identity. In a detailed footnote, Schelling further rehearses the deduction from the being of

³⁹ Schelling, *Presentation*, §6, 351

⁴⁰ Hume has written that non-trivial assertions of identity presuppose the difference between the relata that are identified with each other. In this sense all non-trivial identity statements presumes non-identity. Schelling’s postulation of A (subject)= A (predicate) embodies the internalization of this principle in the history of metaphysics of identity.

⁴¹ Schelling, *Presentation*, §8, 351

⁴² *Ibid.*, §26, 357

absolute identity to absolute totality that shows the necessity of existence. This line of argument is as follows:

- 1) Since $A=A$ posits both the essence and the being of absolute identity (§9), then there must be cognition of $A=A$, which is the only form of being of $A=A$ (§7).
- 2) The form of being $A=A$ must also be under the form of subject=object. (§21)
- 3) To posit the form of being of $A=A$ as subject=object, one must posit subject and object as different from each other, and this difference can only be a quantitative difference. (§23) For the sake of distinction, we will designate a being which has quantitative difference between its subjectivity and objectivity as $A=B$.
- 4) Quantitative difference between subjectivity and objectivity gives rise to finite individuals. (§29)
- 5) *Therefore*, the form of being of $A=B$ is the form of finite individuals, and this being is necessary because being follows from $A=A$ as essence.

In the foregoing reconstruction, I hope to have shown that Schelling began with a definition of reason in terms of total indifference between subjectivity and objectivity which does not make any assertion regarding existence. Then by showing how reason under such definition is united with being, the presentation shifts to show that the law of reason, $A=A$, designated as absolute identity, is also ontologically positive as totality. On the whole, we can understand total indifference between subjectivity and objectivity as the description of absolute identity, but not vice versa.

Absolute identity thus derived obtains rich layers of meanings. As the essence of the totality, absolute identity is both the ground of all forms of being and the immanence of totality. Schelling writes that “absolute identity is not cause of the universe, but the universe itself.”⁴³ Though absolute identity is considered as the essence of existence, it is not removed from reality like Platonic forms. Absolute identity is the unity of subjectivity and objectivity. This unity is not a *synthesis* between the subjective and objective absolute but the original unity, which makes subjectivity and objectivity possible. Manfred Frank introduces Wolffian logic to understand the logical meaning of absolute identity. Wolff’s reduplicative logic asserts that

⁴³ Schelling, *Presentation*, §32, 359

there is a whole which can be *determined* in ways that are exclusive of each other. According to this model of reduplicative logic, absolute identity is the whole of identity and non-identity. Conceived in such manner, absolute identity can be determined in either way, such that one can describe absolute identity *qua* identity and *qua* non-identity.⁴⁴ This manner of understanding the absolute as containing the possibility of different modes of being sheds light on the way in which it admits of mutually exclusive predications, e.g. subjectivity/objectivity, nature/consciousness. The absolute can exist *under the description* of either nature or consciousness, and it is the unity of the two that has the possibility of being both. By becoming either one or the other, that which originally *is* in the absolute, as it were, “doubles” itself, and attains duplicated existence in a specified form of being. Absolute identity understood in this way, is the ontological unity of all beings that are later determined in one form or another. It is where the possibility of the totality is enfolded, and individual beings as we experience them are the articulations of what originally is in the absolute identity.

The task remains of evaluating whether Fichte assesses the definition in §1 as a “real definition”, in which Schelling had given himself the conclusion of the entire system. The previous analysis hopefully shows that Fichte’s criticism does not really undercut Schelling’s proof. §1 does not make claim to the reality or existence of reason and it is not until absolute identity is proved to be absolute totality that it has being. It is in the movement from essence to being that the system has progressed. Comparing Schelling’s demonstration with Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* shows that there are in fact parallels behind the two deductions. When Fichte sets out to assert the foundation of all knowledge that cannot be proved. The process of deduction is identical here: “What we are saying is: *If A exists, then A exists*. Hence there is simply no question here as to whether A actually exists or not....Thus in claiming that the above proposition is absolutely certain, what is established is that between that *if* and this *then* there is a necessary connection.” Fichte’s own suggestion of $A=A$ as the universal law similarly denies that it begins with making any assertion about A’s existence, but merely about the certainly of a relation.

⁴⁴ Frank, 'Identity of Identity and Non-Identity,' 131-3.

Chapter 4 The Relation Between the Parallel System and Identity Philosophy

As we can see in the last two chapters, Schelling presented his system in very different manners in 1800 and 1801, which leads one to wonder whether he has changed his philosophy during this time. In this chapter I will answer the question posted at the beginning: Has Schelling's system changed between 1800 and 1801? If so, how are they different from each other, how do they relate to each other, and what are some of the reasons that motivated the shift?

In the Preface of his 1801 *Presentation*, Schelling introduces his current project as the "foundation" of the presentations of Naturphilosophie and Transcendental Philosophy. He writes:

Working from wholly different sides, I sought to prepare for the integral reception of this philosophy...no one should think...that I have altered my system of philosophy. For the system that appears here for the first time in its fully characteristic shape is the same one that I always had in view in the different {earlier} presentations, which I constantly used as my personal guide-star in both transcendental and natural philosophy.¹

In this claim it seems that the breakthrough of absolute idealism has at least had its rough outline in Schelling's mind before he had even constructed Naturphilosophie and transcendental philosophy. This would mean that although the claims made in *Presentation* may seem to be the conclusions from the parallel system, it is in fact what made the construction of the two sciences possible. If this is true, then we would be mistaken to think that the metaphysics of Identity Philosophy relies on the parallel system. What is needed is an understanding of absolute idealism that is both compatible with the parallel system and independent from it.

In this chapter I will discuss the differences between the two systems and argue that although the parallel system supports absolute idealism, and there is alignment between the two systems, Identity Philosophy should stand in its own merit because the epistemology of the latter system is independent of empirical cognition. Admittedly, Identity Philosophy

¹ Schelling, *Presentation*, 344

prioritizes Naturphilosophie as the primary source of reason's self-knowledge, but it resists the strong nature-philosophy interpretation that is upheld by commentators such as Whistler and Beiser. At the end of this chapter, I hope to show that Fichte's subordination of reason to consciousness which fails to grasp its absoluteness motivated Schelling to move beyond all forms of opposition that result from reflective thinking and adopt the ground of absolute indifference as the starting ground of his Identity Philosophy.

4.1 Epistemological Difference

The problem of epistemology for Schelling is the question of how reason knows itself as the absolute identity between subjectivity and objectivity. In Identity Philosophy, Naturphilosophie is epistemologically privileged in so far as it provides a source of self-consciousness which resolves the problem of reflexivity that Fichte never overcame. The knowledge of absolute identity, however, stands independently from investigation into natural science which demonstrated the metaphysical grounding of nature, as it was done in Naturphilosophie. Instead, the *Presentation* in 1801 is self-sufficient for the apodictic knowledge of the absolute. On the other hand, Schelling has not provided a definitive answer regarding whether we have the knowledge of absolute identity between nature and consciousness in the parallel system. Although Naturphilosophie and transcendental philosophy respectively present nature and art as the ground of absolute identity, the parallel system as a whole lacks mediation between nature and consciousness that solidifies the knowledge of absolute identity between the two. The parallel system *points to*, and *strives for* the knowledge of the absolute, but does not fully obtain it.

In chapter 2, I have mentioned the problem of immanent self-knowledge as a problem that Schelling attempted to address with work of art, but merely to reveal that no solution to this problem (which Fichte was well aware of) is available within the framework of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Bowie formulated the problem as follows: "Fichte's epistemological problem is to find a way of describing an "eye", or a "look"—consciousness—that could "see" itself seeing, which, of course, threatens a regress."² Schelling's Naturphilosophie comes to the

² Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 78

rescue by representing the structure of self-consciousness outside of empirical self-consciousness. By identifying nature as a structure in which subjective purposiveness and objective laws of immanence are united, we first access the structure of an intelligence and conceive of the factuality of the unity between subjectivity and objectivity.

In 1801 Schelling openly claims that Naturphilosophie is epistemically privileged because it proves the identity between objectivity and subjectivity without circularity. His dialogue with Eschenmayer explains this epistemological privilege of Naturphilosophie regarding his new system. In *On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problem*, Schelling says:

Because philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy have been spoken of as opposed yet equally possible orientations of philosophy, many have asked which of the two is accorded priority?—Without doubt, philosophy of nature, because it lets the *standpoint* of idealism itself first come into being, and thereby provides for it a secure, *purely* theoretical foundation.³

This response to Eschenmayer marks a clear difference from the previous writings because the parallel system does not give priority to any science. In *STI*, Schelling was clear that his depiction of the “graduated sequence of intuitions” in consciousness is for the purpose of displaying “the parallelism between nature and intelligence”, as well as the “equal theoretical reality of the two sciences”.⁴ Here, however, Schelling makes the explicit claim that Naturphilosophie is not susceptible to the same “inescapable circle” that *Wissenschaftslehre* is subject to.⁵ Though the *Wissenschaftslehre* aims to construct self-consciousness, it *assumes* that the object of its reflection is identical with itself. As a result of this assumption, it cannot avoid constructing everything that comes to its consciousness according to its own potency, which is the highest potency of the ideal. In consequence, it inevitably idealizes everything that comes under its consciousness, because it already takes its object to be “I”. The identity between that which is intuited and that which is intuiting, is never annulled, and for that reason can never be established without circularity. In other words, *Wissenschaftslehre* seeks the conditions of the

³ F. W. J. Schelling, ‘On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving Its Problems’, in *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy, 1801, Nature and Identity*, trans. Judith Kahl and Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 47.

⁴ Schelling, *STI*, 2-3

⁵ Schelling, ‘On the True Concept,’ 49

ideal in the ideal itself, but fails to explain how the self recognizes itself as an ideal in the first place. By assuming “object=I” from the beginning, it fails to establish how self-consciousness, or self-identity comes into being.

Instead, we must “depotentiate” the self from its highest potency, namely, the ideal, to its lowest potency, the real. The concept of potency was introduced in detail in the 1801 *Presentation*, which discerns particular forms of being of absolute identity in the particular form of quantitative configuration between subjectivity and objectivity. A higher potency refers to the quantitative predomination of subjectivity over objectivity, that is cognition over being, and a lower potency designates the reverse. Depotentiating the self means attending to the real side of its being rather than its subjective cognition, which moves the self to the realm of pure-theoretical philosophy, where the self is not considered as willing but rather as being. In pure-theoretical philosophy, the assumption of the identity between object and “I” is annulled and through the elimination of this assumption the self can engage in the genuine, non-circular investigation of the identity between the object and itself, which leads to the proof of absolute identity. As it turns out, abstracting from the subjective effaces the pure subject-object, which is nature, and the theorizing of it as Naturphilosophie. In Schelling’s 1806 *Statement on the Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, he writes that “all these phenomena [of nature] are just so many symbolic signs of divine truths.”⁶

The epistemic privilege of Naturphilosophie presents itself as a clear difference from *System of Transcendental Idealism*, in which it was art rather than nature that provided a meaningful “proof” that freedom and objectivity are originally and in fact in every moment united. The circularity of subjectivity, or the vain attempt of the self to grasp itself within the imminence of itself has been consistently acknowledged in different stages of Schelling’s philosophy. To have understanding of the subject, one must seek aid from externalization, as we have seen in Schelling’s advocacy for the importance of work of art which we will discuss in the next section.⁷

⁶ Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship*, 37.

⁷ Dieter Sturma, ‘The Nature of Subjectivity: The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling’s Philosophy of Nature,’ in *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*. Ed. Sally Sedgwick. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 219-20.

4.2 The Relation between Philosophy and Art

From 1800 to 1801 we can see a demotion in the importance of art to philosophy. In *STI*, the work of art is considered as epistemically privileged in its ability to directly show the identity between the two forms of production of the self, the conscious and the unconscious, and was hailed as the organ which surpasses the perspective of philosophical reasoning. In *STI*, Schelling writes that “the universal organon of philosophy—and the keystone of its entire arch—is the *philosophy of art*.”⁸ In a more detailed characterization, he says:

If aesthetic intuition is merely transcendental intuition become objective, it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious.⁹

As it can be seen in this passage, work of art is a privileged organ that provides knowledge of the original identity in Schelling’s parallel system. In his *First Outline*, the identity between the conscious and unconscious mode of production of the intelligence is “*directly* proved in the case of an activity at once clearly conscious and unconscious, which manifests itself in the productions of *genius*; *indirectly, outside* of the consciousness, in the products of *Nature*.”¹⁰ Its epistemic advantage of offering direct knowledge of the identity between conscious and unconscious activities is not limited to transcendental philosophy but presides over Naturphilosophie. The reason why work of art provides direct proof of this identity is because it proceeds from a self-conscious act to a synthesis of consciousness and identity in a manner that allows the synthesis between the conscious and unconscious to unfold in front of the self. In the case of nature, consciousness does not have experience of the original identity, but must only infer it from the gradual revelation of natural science that brings out the ideality of nature. Schelling compares nature and art, saying “whereas in art the idea precedes the act or the execution, in Nature idea and act are rather contemporary and one; the idea passes immediately over into the product, and cannot be separated from it.”¹¹ We can see that art products are

⁸ Schelling, *STI*, 12

⁹ Schelling, *STI*, 231

¹⁰ Schelling, *First Outline*, 193

¹¹ Schelling, *First Outline*, 202

advantageous in demonstrating the original identity because we are conscious of the movement from the ideal to the synthesis of ideal and real, which becomes an objective reflection of the original identity that enables this synthesis. In nature, on the other hand, the ideal and real are already united, and the unity can only be illustrated through construction.

However, in *Philosophy of Art* which contains what Schelling delivered in lectures from 1802-1804,¹² he writes, “The full expression of absolute identity as such or of the divine to the extent that it is the principle of resolution of all potences is the absolute science of reason, or philosophy.”¹³ In the *System of Identity*, philosophy is the presentation of reason in its entirety, whereas art is the representative expression of this identity. On the relation between philosophy and art, Schelling seems to have reversed what he stated in 1800:

If we determine in a preliminary fashion the relationship of philosophy to art, it is the following: philosophy is the immediate or direct representation of the divine, whereas art is immediately or directly only the representation of indifference as such. (The fact that it is only indifference constitutes the reflective element of art; absolute identity=archetype.)¹⁴

Prior to Schelling’s announcement of immediate knowledge of the absolute, knowledge for the ground of reality has always remained elusive for consciousness. Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception postulates the self as that which grounds all empirical consciousness, but he is self-restricted from making direct claims about that which is not represented by consciousness. In Fichte, philosophical reasoning grasps the foundation of knowledge through practical reasoning but not immediate conceptualization. The value of philosophy proffering immediate knowledge of the absolute being thus marks a crucial moment that opens up knowledge of what used to be the inexplicable or merely a matter of belief. This above passage also points us back to our previous discussion on the differences between total indifference and absolute identity. It is more clearly stated here that absolute identity is the divine being in-itself while total indifference between subjectivity and objectivity is a neutral state of being. In this sense, total

¹² Jason M. Wirth, ‘Review: Freedom and Nature in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art’, review of *Freedom and Nature in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art*, by Devin Zane Shaw, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, October 10, 2011. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/freedom-and-nature-in-schelling-s-philosophy-of-art/>.

¹³ F.W.J Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, edited, translated, and introduced by Douglas W. Scott, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29

indifference between subjectivity and objectivity is a predication of absolute identity, which appears in the form of beauty.

Furthermore, Schelling later held a different view on beauty. In *STI*, beauty requires the genius who has the particular capacity to express the infinite in finitude, whose production subordinates both the conscious and unconscious activity of the self. Natural beauty was of particular interest because organic productions lack the very condition for aesthetic production, namely the infinite contradiction between the conscious and unconscious activity of the self. Natural beauty, under the framework of transcendental idealism, is thus contingent and not necessary. However, in *Identity Philosophy*, Schelling asserted the opposite claim. Because the essence of all finite beings is precisely this indifference, all existence must be beautiful, and the universe is a creation of God in the form of beauty.¹⁵ He further adds that “all things, viewed from the perspective of totality or as they are in themselves, are formed in absolute beauty, and that the archetypes of all things, just as they are absolutely true, are also absolutely beautiful.”¹⁶ Art represents the unity of the real and ideal world as a locus for the synthesis between object and form, and beauty is exhibited at the contact point between concept and nature. It is the unity between real and ideal that makes beauty possible. While in transcendental idealism art had already played the important role of revealing the absolute identity of the primordial self, Schelling expands his conception between absolute identity and beauty in *Identity Philosophy*, where art now displays the absolute identity that is not restricted to subjectivity, but is understood as a non-perspectival absolute. The definition of work of art is thus expanded from productions of genius to the creation of totality. Since beauty is the total indifference between real and ideal, an object of beauty must be an object as it is in the absolute. According to Schelling, beauty is the form of absolute identity, which rebukes the separation between consciousness and things-in-themselves:

The forms of art, since they are the forms of beautiful things, are also forms of things as they are within God or in themselves. And since all construction is a presentation of things within the absolute, the construction of art in particular is the presentation of its forms as forms

¹⁵ Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 31

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

of things as they are within the absolute, and accordingly also a presentation of the universe itself as an absolute work of art as it is formed within God in eternal beauty.¹⁷

In 1801, philosophy has usurped art as the primary epistemic organ due to the amplification of the function of intellectual intuition. However, although the confidence in art products as the organ through which we perceive the absolute identity between nature and consciousness is demoted in Identity philosophy, Schelling's theory of art has remained consistent in its conception of beauty as finite display of infinitude, and of art as the total indifference between subjectivity and objectivity.

On the issue of determining the epistemological difference between the parallel system and the System of Identity, we have so far demonstrated that art is privileged as the means to knowledge of absolute identity in the parallel system, whereas nature is privileged as the source of revelation of reason in Identity Philosophy. What remains to be answered is whether in 1800 the parallel system gives rise to the knowledge of the approximation between nature and consciousness so that reason comes to know itself as the absolute identity between nature and consciousness. The parallel system in 1800, despite its illustration of the analogous structures of nature and consciousness, lacks mediation between the two sciences. Though art represents the absolute identity in an object, this absolute identity is not claimed to be that which unites consciousness and nature, and the epistemic role of art is restricted to the science of transcendental idealism.

Although nature is the source of self-knowledge in 1801, Identity Philosophy acquires its metaphysical knowledge of reason independent from Naturphilosophie and its metaphysical construction of natural science. As we can see from Schelling's process of argumentation in the 1801 *Presentation*, the entire presentation does not invoke any positive conception of the structure of either nature or consciousness. The only place where Schelling may be appealing to his previous conclusions in the parallel system is in his explanation of §1, when he attempts to "generally awaken the idea that [he] shall connect with this word [reason]."¹⁸ He suggests that one would agree with this definition if one were to "[reflect] on what presents itself in

¹⁷ Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 32

¹⁸ Schelling, *Presentation*, §1, 349

philosophy [as occupying a position] between the subjective and the objective, which evidently must be an item standing indifferently over against both extremes.”¹⁹ Admittedly, this reflection on the status of reason in philosophy as what is indifferently shared by both subjectivity and objectivity presupposes previous conclusions in the two sciences. However, the conclusions drawn in this *Presentation* do not in fact appeal to any previous findings. Therefore with regards to epistemology, Identity Philosophy is independent from the system in 1800.

4.3 Nature-philosophy Interpretation of Absolute Idealism²⁰

With the important differences previously shown between the 1800 and the 1801 system. It is not unexpected that Schelling’s publication of *Presentation* and his subsequent works after 1801 has invited scholarly debates on how to interpret them in relation to the parallel system. Schelling scholarship is divided into two main stances on this. According to those who see absolute idealism as continuation of the parallel system, *Presentation* made explicit what was not said but implied in 1800, namely that there is an unconditioned absolute that can be considered as the absolute identity between nature and consciousness, and the claims in 1801 are vindicated by the prior system. This means that Identity philosophy adds on to the previous system without shifting the structure of Schelling’s philosophical system. The other interpretation commits to the nature-philosophy interpretation—though the parallel system supports and prepares for Identity Philosophy, Schelling’s system has undergone a fundamental shift which prioritizes Naturphilosophie over transcendental philosophy.

The strongest version of the nature-philosophy interpretation has two main tenets: a) Nature is epistemologically privileged as the mediation for our knowledge about absolute identity, and b) Nature is ontologically privileged as the origin of consciousness. Beiser, for example, argues that Naturphilosophie took over systematic primacy in Schelling’s philosophy after 1801. He presents two necessary conditions for this reading:

- i) The Universe, or Nature, is ontologically prior to the Ego.

¹⁹ Schelling, *Presentation*, §1, 349

²⁰ I borrow the term “nature-philosophy interpretation” Whistler and Berger’s Introduction to *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*.

ii) Reason, which is the essence of all Being, lies within the Universe.²¹

What ii) says is that Reason primarily lies in the totality of reality rather than in consciousness. The ontological primacy of Naturphilosophie is supported by Schelling's commitment to the view that nature is where the essence of absolute identity lies, and the essence of absolute identity has posited its own form of being, which is absolute cognition. Bowie is of the same view that Naturphilosophie attains systematic primacy in Identity Philosophy. As Bowie writes, "for Schelling reason itself is only the higher aspect of nature, which should not be there to enslave what it emerges from."²² He suggests that what is at stake in not recognizing nature as the metaphysical ground of consciousness is that we would fall into the Fichtean thought that nature exists for us, which led to ruthless domination of nature in modern capitalism. Whistler, for another example, also holds the same view. He thinks that "beginning in 1801, Schelling no longer shows an interest in elucidating the transcendental conditions which make knowledge of the natural world possible; he is now unabashedly concerned with *what nature is* and how the mind can be cut from the same cloth as it."²³

The argument for this interpretation is grounded on textual support in the 1801 *Presentation* in which Schelling designates totality as absolute identity. Later in the demonstration, Schelling also claims that

one can say of reality therefore, though not of objectivity, that it is the predominant element in the whole series {of potencies and of individuals within potencies}, since everything, even the subjective, strives toward it. —In the highest instance of reality one again finds absolute totality, absolute balance of subjectivity and objectivity.²⁴

This passage indicates that the form of being of absolute identity in different potencies has a tendency to strive towards reality, which is the quantitative predominance of the real over the ideal, or being over cognition. Due to Schelling's identification of absolute identity with totality, as well as the assertion on the primacy of matter as the first existent, Schelling's text can be easily misconstrued as being committed to the ontological primacy of nature. Because the

²¹ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 553-557

²² Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, 58

²³ Whistler, *Introduction to Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 8

²⁴ Schelling, *Presentation*, §50

existence of consciousness can be explained by its ontological dependence on matter, it may be wrongly understood that consciousness has lost the self-sufficiency it had in transcendental idealism.

I disagree with this strong reading of nature-philosophy interpretation which would effectively interpret Schelling's absolute identity as a mere "inversion of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*".²⁵ The identification between totality and absolute identity which renders nature the primary ontological ground of reality neglects Schelling's definition of totality as quantitative indifference between being and cognition. Nassar makes an insightful observation that in Identity Philosophy, instead of identifying nature and consciousness "as two aspects or sides of the one absolute, he speaks of them as two moments in the unfolding of the absolute."²⁶ This remark brings out an important difference in the two systems, which is the linearity to the structure of System of Identity that is absent in the previous system. This primacy given to the moment of matter, however, should not be mistaken for a self-sufficiency. In a footnote to the claim that "absolute identity is not cause of the universe, but the universe itself", the editor of the journal, H.K.A. Schelling adds that "the universe does not=material.—identity is to all eternity just identity, but *universe* means something entirely different."²⁷ A universe conceived as matter is clearly not rich enough for Schelling, because a universe in which there is no ideal activity cannot be called a universe *proper*. In order for totality to be quantitatively indifferent, the forms of being of absolute identity must reach a quantitative equilibrium, where the quantity of being is offset by the quantity of cognition in the sum of all potencies. This means that a world where there is only matter, and hence with a quantitative predominance of the real over the ideal, does not count as a totality. A self-sufficient totality which we can identify with absolute identity demands the ideal component. Thus Schelling's cosmological outlook cannot be understood as a totality which radiates from the original point of absolute identity, whose expansion into infinity is self-sufficient at every moment of development. Instead, his universe is a carefully balanced line whose two poles are already determined.²⁸ Although the universe develops from lowest to highest potency, the highest potency is a return to the point of origin.

²⁵ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 507

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 233

²⁷ Schelling, *Presentation*, 359

²⁸ This **should not be misunderstood to mean** that this line is hence finite. Because the two poles (not ends) of this line are both infinite, the line between them has to be infinite as well.

Beiser, who holds the strongest version of the nature-philosophy interpretation, identifies Naturphilosophie with objective idealism, which stands in direct opposition from Fichte's subjective idealism. Objective idealism is the view that "reason is *within* nature itself, that its rationality is not created by the transcendent ego alone but is inherent in the purposive activity of nature itself."²⁹ Nature is the subjective-objective being which has both mental and physical attributes, and is self-subsisting independent of consciousness. He further identifies absolute idealism with objective idealism and concludes that "objective Idealism is not a *synthesis* of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and *Naturphilosophie* after all. Rather, it is nothing than the standpoint of the *Naturphilosophie* itself, an absolute or transcendental realism and naturalism."³⁰

Beiser's interpretation of absolute idealism as objective idealism misses the spirit of Schelling's characterization of the absolute as both non-objective and non-subjective. While Beiser is right to claim that reason is immanent in nature and nature is both mental and physical, he is mistaken in thinking that reality can subsist in matter alone. Accepting this interpretation would directly counter the important tenet of Naturphilosophie which insists on the genesis of consciousness as necessary for nature's self-cognition. The importance of consciousness to totality is that it grasps the real in the ideal, which completes the system by returning full circle to self-cognition of absolute identity. We have said before that transcendental idealism requires Naturphilosophie, but the reverse is also true. Naturphilosophie requires transcendental idealism to grasp its own intelligibility, so that nature can become conscious of its own idealness. Granted, reason's self-cognition is both real and ideal, which makes every being, whether matter or consciousness, a self-revelation the absolute, and hence at once real and ideal.³¹ However, nature is the self-cognition of absolute identity in the real, whereas consciousness is the grasping in the ideal. The former lacks the conscious representation of its phenomenal character, which distinguishes itself from the ideal activity.

Instead of this strong nature-philosophy interpretation that Beiser advances, which has gained adherence from other commentators, in the above I have proposed a weaker reading. This reading acknowledges the epistemic privilege of nature as a revelation of reason in

²⁹ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 555

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 557. Original Emphasis

³¹ Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship*, 48

empirical experience, while recognizing the epistemic independence of Identity Philosophy through a priori reasoning, and it denies the ontological sufficiency of nature as that which alone is able to constitute totality. The metaphysics of the Identity System agrees with the parallel structure interpretation in chapter 2, according to which the Universe remains a single monistic being which admits both consciousness and nature as its attributes. What is made explicit however, is that this monist substance is the unity of its dual attributes, both ideal and real.

Now one might ask, what is the nature of this monist substance as the synthesis between the two attributes? The definitive answer to this question was left open by in 1800. According to our discussion, the parallel system metaphysically suggests a single substance with dual attributes but lack the epistemological means for knowledge of their identity. Beiser distinguishes three interpretations of subject-object identity. According to the “Dual-Aspect Doctrine”, the oppositions between subjective and objective, real and ideal, mental and physical are *ideal*. The above characterizations of the monistic substance are “incommensurable but equally valid ways of explaining the world”.³² The “hylozistic interpretation” argues that there is a *real* difference between the mental and physical, which is the result of the potentiated manifestation of absolute identity. The “Platonic interpretation” argues that reason as the archetype of all existence is neither subjective nor objective, neither mental nor physical. The ideal and real are identical on this interpretation because they homogeneously manifest the same rational structure. As Beiser says at the end of this section, these ways of conceiving of subject-object identity are not entirely exclusive of each other and the text supports all of these readings to a certain degree. I agree that in fact a synthesis of all three interpretations is the richest perhaps closest way of understanding subject-object identity in the Identity System. The mental-physical distinction presents itself for reflection (though not for intellectual intuition), but the quantitative predominance of subjectivity or objectivity which determines the form of being renders the distinction real at the same time. I do want to highlight the Platonic interpretation as the one which fits nicely with the demonstration in the parallel system, which shows that nature and consciousness are structurally analogous with each other

³² Beiser, *German Idealism*, 561

in terms of sharing the same principle of productivity, but the process of “instantiation” which suggests a metaphysical grounding subsisting independently from reality is merged with the immanence of existence in 1801. If in 1800 the system still begins with describing the reality in a subject-predicate form by introducing two manners of conceiving reality, the 1801 system has posited totality independent from the descriptions such as mental and physical, by identifying it with absolute identity. At this stage, any description of existence under a particular attribute is to comprehend the infinitude in finite ways.

4.4 Continuity between the Two Systems

How does the parallel system in 1800 relate to the System of Identity in 1801 and beyond? As we have seen, there are methodological changes between the two systems. Some scholars present the 1801 system as no less than a “break” from the previous system due to the manifest distinctions, while some others highlight crucial coherence between them.

Fundamentally, the two systems both show that nature and consciousness which were considered as complying with different laws of causality, are in fact constituted by the same principles of productivity. However, the two systems differ in so far as the parallel system begins with the empirical phenomena of nature and that of consciousness to illustrate the transcendental conditions of experience, whereas the System of Identity begins with the transcendental conditions of totality, to show how experience is possible. The interpretation that Identity Philosophy is equally dependent on nature and consciousness for the full display of the potency of the absolute further supports the metaphysical alignment of the two systems. Continuity is hence evident in the coherent insistence on the ontological necessity of both sides of reality.

One proponent for the continuation thesis is Dalia Nassar’s. According to her reading, the identity system argues for the same metaphysical position that absolute identity is the whole existence, but his epistemology for absolute shifted from deduction to direct, unmediated intellectual intuition of the absolute. Nassar argues that in *STI*, Schelling’s goal was to provide a proof of the “original identity” between nature and consciousness, but he soon realizes that “identity cannot be grasped deductively and thus turns away from the method of progress or

successive construction to a theory of knowledge that recalls his earliest conception of intellectual intuition.”³³ Despite her focus on this methodological shift, it does not seem to warrant a real break between the 1800 and 1801 system. In fact she argues that *STI* has important impact on Identity Philosophy,³⁴ because only Naturphilosophie combined with transcendental philosophy can prove that nature and consciousness are constructed with the same principles. While the absolute identity between nature and mind remains an assumption before the completion of the two-science system, the construction of nature and consciousness according to the same principle of productivity validates it. Secondly, and relatedly, Nassar argues that the 1800 *STI* solves the problem of knowledge which Naturphilosophie cannot solve alone, so the assertion of absolute identity in 1801 is supported by the parallel system. Nassar also points out that transcendental philosophy shows the need to go beyond it because philosophy has become irrelevant to the consciousness of absolute identity, as art becomes the organ to grasp the original identity. She says, “one is left to wonder whether the System, having thus announced the conclusion of philosophy in art, also announces the end of philosophy as such.”³⁵ According to Nassar, the fact that philosophy is losing its throne as the path to knowledge becomes an important motivating factor for Schelling to move on to Identity Philosophy.

It appears to me, however, that the secondary role of philosophy need not present itself as a problem whose consequence requires the modification of the system in order to put philosophy back to the primary place in epistemology. After all, the Romantic movement itself came out of the conviction of the insufficiency of philosophy for grounding the absolute truth, which was theological for the Romantic thinkers. Romanticism, as the reaction to the secularization of philosophical thought, aimed to establish new grounds for the certainty of theological beliefs.³⁶ As Schaeffer says, “at the moment of its birth, the speculative theory of Art is inseparable from the idea that Art must replace a defective philosophical recourse... In other words, it is because philosophical discourse is depreciated that the arts, and first of all

³³ Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 213

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 213

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 224

³⁶ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, trans. Steven Rendall, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 67.

poetry, will come to be invested as with an ontological function.”³⁷ In fact, a system of transcendental philosophy which upholds art as the answer to what is unanswerable by philosophy might perfectly reflect the Romantic forces of the time. Allen Wood has observed that “the romantics never renounced philosophy or philosophizing *tout court*, but championed an extension of it to include the cognitive potential of poetics.”³⁸ Schelling’s *STI* is a good reflection of such a system, which finds metaphysical grounding for art through philosophical reasoning that both champion art to reveal the absolute truth and grounds such legitimacy in philosophy.

A second difference between my and Nassar’s reading is: although the parallel system, read in light of the System of Identity, is supportive of the conclusion regarding absolute identity, it is not the case that System of Identity is legitimized by the previous conclusions in the parallel system. As we have reconstructed, the process of geometrical demonstration in *Presentation* is self-standing. Therefore the 1800 system does not elevate one to the 1801 standpoint of absolute reason, and Schelling’s conclusion on the identity between nature and consciousness is not dependent on the construction of experience in the two-science system. Whistler makes the same judgment regarding the self-sufficiency of the 1801 system: “While the earlier works may be helpful in understanding Schelling’s *Identitätssystem* they are *not necessary* for such comprehension (i.e. almost all the works written between 1801 and 1805 attempt to be self-sufficient presentation of the entirety of the Schellingian philosophy).³⁹

4.5 A Return to Speculative Metaphysics in 1801

In this section I would like to discuss Schelling’s methodology as a post-Kantian philosopher in relation to Kant’s critical project. Although Schelling’s Naturphilosophie is influenced by Kant in many ways, his philosophy adopts the opposite epistemological standpoint, which led to the full-fledged speculative metaphysics in 1801.

Schelling is influenced by Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and its characterisation of nature as a product conforming to a concept, for nature is a whole that makes its parts necessary, and

³⁷ Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 69

³⁸ David W. Wood, ‘From “Fichticizing” to “Romanticizing”’: Fichte and Novalis on the Activities of Philosophy and Art,’ *Fichte-Studien* 41 (2014): 261.

³⁹ Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language*, 68

the whole cannot come into being without its parts. Such a product cannot be brought about unless conforming to a concept. In order to understand the possibility of nature thus defined, Schelling thinks that there must be a way to explain the original cause of motion in nature, which is what he defines as speculative physics. Schelling's project of speculative physics grapples with the same issue Kant tackled in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Both philosophers aim to show how, or under what conditions, nature is conceived as necessary. For Kant, natural science does not show the necessity of nature unless it is established upon mathematics. Kant writes that "a rational doctrine of nature thus deserves the name of a natural science, only in case the fundamental natural laws therein are cognized *a priori*, and are not mere laws of experience."⁴⁰ Schelling, on the other hand, contends that the necessity is furnished by the absolute hypothesis which appear to be the involuntary conditions under which nature can be conceived. The difference between the two philosophers lies in the qualification of Kant's metaphysics by his critical project—that is, the metaphysical principles are provided by pure concepts of understanding and does not extend to things-in-themselves, but Schelling inquires into the metaphysical groundings of principles which inhere in nature itself.

The system in 1800 appears to remain, to a certain extent, mindful of Kant's critique, though this caution is completely lifted a year later. Kant's critique of what he calls speculative metaphysics which were prevalent in early modern predecessors is a result of his critique of the extension of formal concepts and principles of logic to objects beyond experience. According to Kant's conception of metaphysics as *synthetic a priori*, metaphysical knowledge is the application of a priori principles to intuitions given in experience, and knowledge beyond this scope is unattainable. Considering Kant's worry concerning how a priori concepts can be united with intuitions from experience, Schelling, in the two sciences, combines a priori concepts with experience through the method of construction. Schelling's dissatisfaction with Kant's philosophy is mainly due to the dualism which follows from Kant's limitation of metaphysics—he rejects the scepticism that has to be accepted as a result. Schelling's Identity Philosophy, on the other hand, applies the concept of reason and logic to the totality of existence, and makes claims about how things are in-themselves independent of cognitions of them.

⁴⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, edited and translated by Michael Friedman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4:468.

However, how does Schelling as a post-Kantian philosopher justify his application of principles of reason to nature and the later unreserved return to speculative metaphysics?

Schelling's rejection of Kant's concept of things-in-themselves begins with questioning Kant's inner consistency. He criticizes the legitimacy of Kant's that the supersensible is the ground of knowledge while also asserting that it is beyond the scope of our knowledge. Schelling points out that if the supersensible does not conform to the concepts of our understanding, then it cannot be thought at all. Although Kant sets out to show that the supersensible is unknowable, by characterizing (and thinking about) the unthinkable, he in fact ends up violating his own law. This criticism supports Schelling's beginning his philosophy with the opposite premise to that of Kant, which warrants his assumption that the object of knowledge can be known.

Beginning with the premise that concepts of our understanding can conform with objects, Schelling turns to the method of construction through which he constructs nature according to the structure of reason. This path would then lead Schelling to show that consciousness is born out of nature and conforms with productive principles of nature, which validates the claim that we can know nature in-itself. For Schelling, we cannot be said to have knowledge of an object unless we know the conditions under which it is possible.⁴¹ Hence, in the context of Naturphilosophie, the method of construction illustrates the truth of a claim, usually the principles according to which X comes into being, by first supposing a set of principles, and then testing its truth through the demonstration of how reality is possible according to these principles. In Naturphilosophie, it is first assumed that nature is constructed by dual dynamic forces of infinite productivity and infinite prohibition. Then Schelling shows how different phenomena of nature can be understood as results of the interplay between these two dynamic forces. And studies of natural science function as the verification tool which is capable of falsifying the assumed a priori principles. For Schelling, natural science holds within itself a priori principles of how the nature is possible, because natural science assumes inner consistency of nature.⁴² If natural science that proceeds according to a priori principles has successfully reproduced phenomena of nature, then we can be assured of the truth of the

⁴¹ Schelling, *First Outline*, 196.

⁴² Schelling, *First Outline*, 197

absolute hypothesis.

Jelscha Schmid argues that the method of “construction” allowed Schelling to respond to the epistemic problem that is posed by Kant, because it justifies the connection of intuition with a priori principles. By beginning with an a priori conception of nature and then subjecting it to falsification by experience, Schelling extends the method of mathematical demonstration that Kant has discussed in his *Critique of Pure Reason* to experience. In Kant’s *Transcendental Doctrine of Method*, he privileged mathematical deductions as the only place where concepts constructed a priori can be guaranteed their correspondence with intuitions because in mathematics concepts can provide themselves with pure intuitions that only come into existence with the concept. Kant argues that “only an apodictic proof, insofar as it is intuitive, can be called a demonstration.”⁴³ Such legitimacy is not accepted when concepts are provided by the understanding, and intuitions are given in experience. Schelling, on the other hand, extends the scope of demonstration and apodictic certainty that Kant bestows exclusively on mathematics. By constructing nature with a priori laws whose certainty is involuntary and necessary, Schelling argues that we are able to prove the agreement of the a priori laws with experience. Schmid puts it this way: “within the medium of presentation...the gulf between concepts and reality (or: nature) is overcome as in it concepts are always already expressed (or: presented) through the sensible, i.e. through intuitions or materiality itself.”⁴⁴ Construction therefore unifies the realm of experience and reality by showing how concepts are embodied in nature, a process verified by the successful replication of natural phenomena in natural science which are devised under the premise of the absolute hypothesis.

Arran Gare characterizes Schelling’s method of construction as synthesizing the influence of the Kant’s construction with the romanticism of a dynamic and vitalist nature. Schelling takes on Fichte’s notion of the constructive activity of the self and synthesizes it with Goethe’s concept of metamorphosis of the plants,⁴⁵ which leads him to his own conception of metaphysics that is neither dogmatic, in the sense criticized by Kant, nor immanent, as is the

⁴³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A734/B762

⁴⁴ Jelscha Schmid, ‘Schelling’s Method of Darstellung: Presenting Nature through Experiment,’ *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science. Part A* 69 (2018): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2018.01.009>.

⁴⁵ Arran Gare, ‘From Kant to Schelling to Process Metaphysics: On the Way to Ecological Civilization,’ *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (2011): 37-8, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A276808891/AONE?u=ucl_ttda&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=22875713.

one proposed by Kant and Fichte. This metaphysics which is undeniably speculative in nature, “generalize[s] features of experience” to the whole of reality.⁴⁶

The possibility of beginning with nature and consciousness as a subject that creates itself according to some knowable principles relies on Schelling’s confidence in the scope of intellectual intuition, for it is intellectual intuition that allows consciousness to abstract from itself as a thinking subject and gain non-objectified insight of how nature or consciousness produces itself as a subject. Naturphilosophie would not have been possible if Schelling did not allow for the actuality of intellectual intuition, which is the capacity to see the universal in the particular, the infinite in the finite, both united in a *living unity*. As Nassar observes, intellectual intuition has two significant roles in Schelling’s philosophy. The first is that it leads us to the standpoint of the absolute, and the second is that it enables the abstraction of the universal from the contingent particular, in order to reach the point of reason.⁴⁷ This second role of intellectual intuition is what enables the legitimate reasoning from empirical experience of nature to metaphysical concepts and principles such as those explored in Naturphilosophie.

Comparing the limitation of intellectual intuition to self-knowledge of transcendental consciousness in 1800, Schelling has significantly expanded the scope of intellectual intuition in 1801, which identifies it with the absolute cognition of reason in 1800. In 1800, intellectual intuition is the act through which self-consciousness comes into being, and through its reflective consciousness, intellectual intuition intuits itself as the single act in which production and intuition is unified. The essential structure of intellectual intuition in Identity Philosophy is already laid out here. Although later intellectual intuition also plays the role of intuiting the absolute in particularity, the faculty of a being who is identical to absolute identity intuiting absolute identity, is fundamentally the self-cognition of the absolute.

However, even though the methodological innovation of construction in Naturphilosophie responds to the Kantian critique in a way, it still falls short in some respects. For one, the concept of unconditioned nature that Schelling constructed lacks intuitions provided by experience because no scientific experiment is able to directly show that nature is productive in the duplicity of principles that Schelling has specified. What natural science can demonstrate

⁴⁶ Gare, ‘From Kant to Schelling to Process Metaphysics,’ 40

⁴⁷ Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 245

is merely the empirical conditions under which certain natural phenomena might be brought about, but the inference from empirical conditions to unobservable and non-sensible dynamical forces cannot be justified. It requires idealization of materiality by consciousness according to its own principles. Therefore it appears that Schelling is still in need of a more direct proof that the real and the ideal are productive in the same way, and are in fact originally identical with each other but merely separated in consciousness. Therefore, the method of construction requires the justification of its premise, which is the identity between the real and the ideal. This is what Schelling proves with his speculative metaphysics in 1801, in which he employs a method of thinking that requires “philosophizing hypothetically, with pure thought or the understanding’s [abstract] principle of identity.”⁴⁸ This explains why Schelling adopts the method of geometrical demonstration from Spinoza—this method captures the assumption that absolute cognition is absolute being. In his speculative metaphysics in 1801, Schelling comes closest to Spinoza in both the method of his geometrical demonstration and the nature of his monism.⁴⁹

4.6 The Nature and Cause of the Systematic Shift

In *STI*, Schelling remarked that knowledge of the self, which is non-objective, is different from all other kinds of knowledge, as the self cannot be grasped through inferences, proofs, and concepts.⁵⁰ The parallel structure between self and reason decides that reason, likewise, must become an object for itself without the aid of any subjective thinking, and must intuit itself through intellectual intuition. To be sure, Schelling’s assertion that knowledge of the self must be non-objective and must be distinguished from ordinary knowledge is a thesis he defended throughout 1800 and 1801. What has changed, however, is that in 1801 he has let go of all mediation, including that of art. As Nassar says, Schelling ceased to grasp absolute identity deductively in 1801, but what caused the shift in his method and the structure of his system as a whole?

Braeckman argues that the transition to absolute idealism results from “the transposition

⁴⁸ Schelling, *Further Presentation*, 379

⁴⁹ Yitzhak Melamed, “‘Deus Sive Vernunft: Schelling’s Transformation of Spinoza’s God’,” in *Schelling’s Philosophy: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity*, ed. G. Anthony Bruno (Oxford University Press, 2020), 93–115.

⁵⁰ Schelling, *STI*, 27

of the inner structure of the work of art” to absolute reason.⁵¹ He offers a wonderful critique of the irony of the work of art in Schelling’s transcendental philosophy. In the first sense, intuition of art products *symbolizes* the absolute but does not *represent* the absolute. The crucial fallout here lies in the problem that art products do not provide definitive knowledge, but only *gestures towards* absolute identity. Therefore, the objectified synthesis between subjectivity and objectivity in the work of art is only an infinite approximation to the direct consciousness of absolute identity in the primordial self, rather than the direct knowledge of it. Art products thus fail to provide immediate consciousness of the primordial self. Secondly, transcendental philosophy sets out to demonstrate how the totality is posited by the “I” by reflecting on its activities, but inevitably resorts to an object for its self-knowledge, and ends up in its own negation. Braeckman indicates that the failure of aesthetic intuition to make the primordial self an object for the self leads Schelling to shift the responsibility for knowledge of the absolute to intellectual intuition. The failure of aesthetic intuition to seal the knowledge of absolute identity ends up promoting intellectual intuition to the status of having the capacity of definite, immediate knowledge of the absolute. Whereas in transcendental philosophy, the primordial self “postulated” by intellectual intuition must be “verified by aesthetic intuition, in Identity Philosophy, intellectual intuition is no longer “postulatory”, but is capable of definitive knowledge.

The priority of aesthetic intuition in transcendental philosophy reflects the systematic necessity for the absolute to be grasped not only in the ideal, but also in the real. Aesthetic intuition is proposed as a complementary counterpart to intellectual intuition because it presents absolute identity to the self as an object. Schelling’s insistence on aesthetic intuition as the complementary pairing to intellectual intuition displays the epistemic importance of the real, which removes the self from the immanence of itself. What makes intellectual intuition’s self-consciousness merely “postulatory” is its indivisibility between the act of self-intuition and the self. This is why the problem of self-consciousness must be solved in external intuition. In the *First Outline*, Schelling writes, “the *empirically infinite* is only the external intuition of an *absolute (intellectual)* infinity whose intuition is originally in us, but which could never

⁵¹ Antoon Braeckman, ‘From the Work of Art to Absolute Reason: Schelling’s Journey toward Absolute Idealism,’ *The Review of Metaphysics* 57, no. 3 (2004): 551–69.

come to consciousness without external, empirical exhibition.”⁵² Through external intuition of nature, which obtains knowledge of the infinite through unending finitude, the structure of the absolute self emerges. Because it is known through intellectual intuition, the self is not objectified but intuited as a subject-object, which is identical to the self as consciousness, which strives to know itself as the absolute identity between freedom and necessity, but fails even through the works of art. This is a critical fallout of Fichte’s subjective idealism, which motivated Schelling to find externalization of the self in Nature. In his *Differenzschrift*, Hegel pointed out this problem that the intellect is explicated through “the chain of finite [acts and objects] of consciousness from which it never reconstructs itself again as identity and true infinity.”⁵³ Fichte’s grounding principle of I=I necessarily demands a not-I to explain the inhibition of the infinite productivity of the I; however, the finitude and objectivity which is the result of the interaction between the I and the not-I does not lead the system back to the unity of the I which it started from. Schelling’s philosophy, on the other hand, by positing nature as the objective subject-object which instantiates rational structure, has achieved the full circle of the return of the self to its own unity.

Braeckman’s analysis has merit in recognizing the ineptitude of the work of art as the epistemological organ in *System*. However, Braeckman’s interpretation does not convince me that there is an analogy between the inner structure of work of art and absolute reason. He presents *STI* and *Presentation* as sharing structurally parallel triads: In *System*, the self attains knowledge of the absolute through the mediation of the work of art, whereas in *Presentation*, the self attains knowledge of the absolute, i.e. reason, through reason itself, which led to Braeckman’s conclusion that reason and work of art share the same role, as the mediation of self- knowledge of the absolute. However, a disanalogy appears between the work of art and absolute reason precisely because in the identity system Schelling asserts reason’s capacity for unmediated self-knowledge. The work of art provides mediated knowledge of the absolute identity of the primordial self, but intellectual intuition of absolute reason through reason itself is immediate knowing, and Reason *mediates* the knowledge of itself only in a trivial sense. The

⁵² Schelling, *First Outline*, 15

⁵³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 81.

transposition of the epistemological structure of the work of art does not explain how Schelling commits himself to the possibility of reason's unmediated self-knowledge. The epistemological shift from transcendental philosophy to absolute idealism precisely lies in the elimination of externalization and objectification of the absolute identity for the purpose of complementing the subjective knowledge of intellectual intuition. Even though Schelling thinks that we can have mediated knowledge of the absolute identity of subject-object through art, it does not explain how he thinks this knowledge can be extricated from the mediation of the objective.

I argue instead that what brings Schelling to the speculative metaphysics of 1801 is the identification of intellectual intuition with the "intuition of reason", which bestows on reason the ability to know itself without the mediation and externalization that was required in the transcendental philosophy of 1800. Contrary to Braeckman, it is not the transposition of the inner structure of art-products, but the identification between intellectual intuition and absolute reason that justifies the possibility of reason knowing itself. Furthermore, there is a strong parallel between the structure of the self in transcendental philosophy and the absolute in Identity Philosophy in the sense that absolute is a *self*.

In the 1803 supplement to the Introduction of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling claimed the insufficiency of understanding Spinoza's monism as "a mere theory of objectivity", which conceals "the true absolute" as a subject-objectivity. Schelling's identification of the absolute with the structure of a self demonstrates his synthesis of the Spinozian substance with Fichte's promotion of the form of subject-objectivity to a universal standpoint that encompasses the totality. However, he is dissatisfied with the extent to which Fichte has carried out the project. As Schelling says, "the more it developed, the more it seemed to restrict that very identity, again as a special feature, to the subjective consciousness."⁵⁴ By arguing that the Ego constitutes both the subjectivity and objectivity, Fichte fails to raise Reason to the absolute standpoint which overarches both Ego and Nature, and ends up rendering nature as the lifeless product of consciousness. Hegel *Differenz* criticized Fichte on the same point: he had relativized the absolute by subjecting Reason to the intellect. Therefore, Schelling's move to absolute Reason and the speculative intellect is the result of his departure from the finite form

⁵⁴ Schelling, *Ideas*, 53-4

of thought, the reflection of the intellect which postulates the antithesis between nature and consciousness. This explains why the speculative philosophy of 1801 is self-sufficient and independent of the conclusions that we draw from the relative standpoint. As Hegel says, “the sole interest of Reason is to suspend such rigid antithesis”.⁵⁵ Therefore the standpoint of Reason must break free from the antithesis of the relative and assume the ground which gives rise to the opposition in the first place, and this is what Schelling did in his Identity Philosophy, by assuming the point of total indifference.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Difference*, 90

Conclusion

In the above, I have discussed the relation of (1) Schelling's two-science system of parallelism between Naturphilosophie and Transcendental Idealism in comparison to (2) the System of Identity. These two systems which were the landmark of Schelling's philosophy in 1800 and 1801 exhibited intriguing differences of epistemology and invited debates concerning their metaphysical differences. However, by looking at each system individually and comparing their epistemology and metaphysics, I suggested that Schelling's philosophy demonstrate continuity despite the turn in 1801 to explicitly unconditional speculative philosophy which is supported by the full-fledged confidence in intellectual intuition and the departure from the standpoint of reflection. Discarding the ultimacy of the oppositions between nature and consciousness, mental and physical, real and ideal, Schelling led the course of post-Kantian German philosophy to its high altitude of absolute reason, which adopts the assumption of the absolute identity between subjectivity and objectivity. Crucially, I have argued that Identity Philosophy, despite its philosophical continuity and harmony with the earlier parallel system, must be taken in its own merit, and that its vindication relies not on the two sciences, but on its conception of the absolute in terms of total indifference. I have also argued against the currently prevalent nature-philosophy interpretation in Schelling scholarship which endorses the privilege of Nature as the ontological ground, and which ultimately equates the absolute with nature. Schelling's absolute identity must instead preserve its ontological commitment to the independence and self-sufficiency of both nature and consciousness because both are identical in Reason and are thus equally absolute and unconditioned. Though empirical nature is epistemologically privileged as the externalization of the structure of self-consciousness, the knowledge of absolute identity lies in Reason's speculative thinking.

[Word Count: 29593]

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