

*Discussione*

## **G. Anthony Bruno, *Schelling's Philosophy. Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity***

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After longstanding neglect, towards the end of the twentieth century the issues tackled during the time stretching 'von Kant bis Hegel' have become relevant in the Anglophone reception. Several are the attempts to explore the philosophical project of those who escape from this teleology and can be traced back to the period known as 'German idealism' or, in a less distorting way<sup>1</sup>, as 'classical German philosophy'. Although it did not represent one of the first philosophies to experience a *renaissance* in English-speaking studies, there is no doubt that in recent decades the interest of interpreters is moving significantly towards F.W.J. Schelling's thought.

The volume *Schelling's philosophy: Freedom, Nature and Systematicity* edited by G. Anthony Bruno undoubtedly represents a turning point in this process of appropriation<sup>2</sup>. The book collects twelve essays. Following a canonical periodization of Schelling's thought, they are divided into four parts that trace the major phases of Schelling's project. To his «early philosophy» are dedicated Essay 1 (on the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*) and Essay 2 (on *On University Studies* and his *Würzburg Lectures*). Essay 3 (on *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, the *On the World-Soul*, and his *First Outline for a System of the Philosophy of Nature*), Essay 4 (on *On the World-Soul*), Essay 5 (on *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*), and Essay 6 (on *Philosophy and Religion* and *Freedom Essay*) address Schelling's «philosophy of nature». Essay 7 (on *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and the *First Outline*), Essay 8 (on *Freedom*

<sup>1</sup> For the limits and bias of the label "German Idealism" see W. Jaeschke, *Zur Genealogie des Deutschen Idealismus. Konstitutionsgeschichtliche Bemerkungen in methodologischer Absicht*, in Id., *Hegels Philosophie*, Hamburg 2020.

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned in the *Introduction* (p.1), the last English volume devoted to Schelling's philosophy is L. Ostaric (ed.), *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, Cambridge 2014.

*Essay*), Essay 9 (on *First Outline and Freedom Essay*), Essay 10 (on *Ages of the World*) are gathered under the label of «philosophy of freedom». Finally, his «late philosophy» is assessed in Essay 11 (on the *On the Source of the Eternal Truths*) and Essay 12 (on the 1833 *Munich Lectures*).

As the partial ‘overlapping’ of the commented texts reveals, the labels specifying multiple «phases» of Schelling’s philosophy, although legitimate, are far from univocal. They rather oversimplify a style of thinking which insists on some issues, changing with every opportunity to address them. For this reason, in discussing the contributes, we will follow the set of the arguments and questions rather than their chronological order of exposition.

In the first essay, *Nature as the World of Action, Not of Speculation: Schelling’s Critique of Kant’s Postulates in His Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, Lara Ostaric explores Schelling’s *Letters* by focusing on his critique of the religious appropriation of Kant’s practical postulate for God’s existence by the «dogmaticism» of the Tübingen theologians. How should the absolute, i.e., the Unconditioned that grounds the unity of the realm of freedom and the realm of nature, be realized? To this question, two alternatives appear: (i) either Kant’s postulates should offer a form of cognition (what he calls «practical cognition» achieved by giving objective reality to the Ideas of freedom, God and immortality) which cannot but be freed «from the limits Kant imposed on it in his first *Critique*» (p. 17), thereby exposing the postulates to their reversal in terms of objects of revelation; (ii) or the Idea of God should be transformed from «an object of holding-to-be-true» (*Object eines Fürwahrhaltens*) to «an object of action» (*Object des Handelns*) (*AA I/3*: 54n.)<sup>3</sup>. The latter is said to constitute Schelling’s solution. As Ostaric suggests, by giving objective reality to the Unconditioned, not theoretically, but «practically, that is, through freedom» (*AA I/3*: 75.13), Schelling’s reading brings Kant’s project to a completion without being susceptible to the misinterpretations and manipulations of the theological orthodoxy. Secondly, by defining the type of action he has in mind as the one of «creative reason» (*schöpferische Vernunft*), Schelling’s alternative gains a greater proximity to Kant’s third Critique than to Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. In particular, since by intellectual intuition Schelling considers the understanding that proceeds from a synthetic universal (the idea of the whole as such) to the particular (the parts), albeit the assonance his notion is closer to Kant’s intuitive understanding than to Fichte’s notion of intellectual intuition.

Schelling’s attempt at overcoming the subjectivity of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* is taken up in the next essay *Schelling’s Romanticism: Traces*

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<sup>3</sup> We follow the quotation-style used in the volume: (AA) *F.W.J. Schelling: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, im Auftrag der Schelling-Kommission der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed. by J. Jantzen, T. Buchheim, W.G. Jacobs, and S. Peetz, Stuttgart 1976. (AS) *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 6 volumes, ed. by M. Frank, Frankfurt am Main 1985. (SW) *F.W.J. Schellings sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgart 1856-1861, reprinted as *Schellings Werke*, ed. by M. Schröter, München 1927. Citations are to the section, volume, and page number. For English translations, see the bibliographies provided at the end of the Introduction and of each essay.

of *Novalis in Schelling's Philosophy*. Here Joan Steigerwald uncovers four shared concerns of Novalis' romanticism and Schelling's Idealism. First, she explores the reflections on the duplicity of identity and its mediation in the statement «I am I». On the one hand, Novalis claims that this is a *Scheinsatz*, whose «differentiating and combining» is the «necessary deception of the mediated I». For the interdetermination of the divided self, a «binding mediator» between the oppositions is needed, «both separating and unifying» feeling and reflection, being and representation (p. 36). Schelling, in turn, calls into play the same binding not just by critically reflecting upon the subjective conditions of self-awareness, but detailing the conditions required for a factual knowledge. The oppositions between mind and nature resulting in our engagement with the world must be traversed with the aid of «a mediating Link [*ein Mittelglied*]». This is, as Steigerwald shows, neither conceptual representation nor sensory intuition: it borders on both, to the point that its «operations of binding – as operations of the imagination, schemata and productive intuition – remain opaque» to the reflecting I (p. 37). In Steigerwald's analysis is particularly stimulating, secondly, the metatheoretical argument of the science of sciences on which both philosophers seem to share an agreement. Philosophy, Schelling claimed in his *On University Studies* (1802), is the «science of all sciences» because it is the «absolutely universal science». It directs us to the absolute and universal in each particular science (*SW I/6*: 211–18) by offering critical reflections upon it. In turn, in Novalis' *General Brouillon*, each fragment represents each science's self-conception and its critical reflection upon its others. The relationship between the sciences is thus experimental and not hierarchical, provided by juxtapositions capable of exposing their margins and incompletions, and yet unveiling what is «unthought» within them. Consequently, as Steigerwald states, «no unified system of science can emerge through such a project, only multiple fragmentary perspectives, always in opposition, yet endlessly generative» (p. 39). Novalis' depiction of his encyclopaedia project as «a living, scientific organon» should therefore not been misunderstood, as if Novalis were invoking a coherent totality, in which all parts are related through the idea of the whole. It refers rather to dynamic and reciprocal relationships of the processes of living entities.

This topic is taken up in the third point of resonance explored in this rich essay, namely the theory of «potentiation». Here we are introduced to Novalis' discourse on «romanticizing», and to Schelling's system of difference and identities of potencies in his *Würzburg Lectures* (1804). This leads us to the last point, the figures of darkness and light. Such an issue is crucial in Novalis' *Hymns to the Night* (1800), which cast the relation of the finite and infinite by throwing out the presumption that the interplay between phenomena and noumena was a relation of simple opposition; and in Schelling's *On the World Soul*, where Schelling refutes the idea of an unrestricted power, in favour of powers viewed as «boundary concepts [*Grenzbegriffe*]», each one conceived «only always in conflict with its opposite».

Steigerwald's essay is «speculative, not historical» (p. 32). It doesn't provide historical evidence of the relations between the two philosophers, nor attempts to enclose either Novalis' or Schelling's work within the thought of the other. In reading one against the other, thereby invoking the kind of meta-critical method advocated by Schelling and Novalis, the paper results extremely suggestive and productive. However, the 'paratactic' exposition of the two authors leaves unanswered the historical question on the possible sources common to the two authors and adumbrates the reliance for those same questions on other figures, whose influence is rather well documented.

The third essay inaugurates the section on Schelling's philosophy of nature. In *Freedom as Productivity in Schelling's Philosophy of Nature* Naomi Fisher considers Schelling's attribution of freedom to nature in the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), the *On the World-Soul* (1798), and the *First Outline for a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799). The thesis is that there is one concept of freedom that unifies the realm of nature and of human: freedom as productivity. If production in accordance with principles is overall active, so, says Fisher, «we can make sense both of the claim that nature acts freely and of the claim that human freedom is an escape from the bondage of nature» (p. 53). To do so, the author engages in the analysis of the kind of freedom that defines nature, organism and humans. In relation to the first, Fisher claims that according to Schelling nature is an unconditioned totality. Since there is no external condition on its necessary lawgiving, it is absolutely free, being the source of its own laws. Thus, nature's productivity, while free, is lawful – to the point that freedom and necessity are perfectly united: nature is indeed autonomous. As regards to the second referent, the living (non-human) organism is free only in a conditioned sense: it is partially determined through foreign influence, but it gives itself laws, and so is free and responsive to the external environment. What about the human beings? Human freedom reveals as a special kind of freedom. Human opposes to *all of nature*, including oneself (*AA I/5: 71*). Through our own productive activity, we alienate ourselves from nature and begin, for the first time, to produce consciously. With the reflection there is a *new source* of lawfulness, which marks a break with the natural world: the one emerging from her conscious deliberation, whereby one's conscious productivity needs not automatically align with one's organic, unconscious productivity. So, Fisher concludes, the incompatibilism that results «is not between law and caprice (i.e., the laws of nature and the caprice of the human will), but is rather between law and law: the laws of unconscious nature and the laws – consciously endorsed principles – of the human being» (p. 63). For this reason, Schelling can be said to have elaborated a unitary conception of freedom as lawful productivity, «but with several distinct loci or sources» (p. 54).

The pervasiveness of freedom makes a milestone of the philosophical path of Schelling. Nevertheless, the relation between reflection and unconscious, as well as their compatibility and the placement of the mind in nature, is an issue on which interpreters differ considerably. More generally, it is at the origin of

a flourishing debate, some of whose positions are also displayed in the volume. Does nature prefigure subjectivity? Do we have a bottom-up theory, showing the *progressive* generation of consciousness, or a top-down one, accounting for a *retroactive* argument for the emergence of subjectivity? That such a problem emerges particularly in the *Freedom* essay, where Schelling develops «the ideal part of philosophy» to complete his project of «Naturphilosophie», is not a surprise. In our discussion, we prefer then to jump to the contributions addressing this text (7, 9, 6) and come back later to the other ones (4, 5).

Markus Gabriel's reading in *Schelling on the Compatibility of Freedom and Systematicity* (Essay 7) opens precisely with our aporia: how can the world as a whole be compatible with the general requirements of its intelligibility for us? We can sum up the argument in the following way. Schelling's idea might suggest a sort of metaphysical naturalism, according to which we have to account for the intelligibility of what there is in a traditionally bottom-up way: either as a straightforward diachronic bottom-up account (the structures responsible for the intelligibility of what there is result causally from a long evolutionary pre-history), or a synchronic representation (there are metaphysical atoms grounding higher-level phenomena such as consciousness). Against such a view, Gabriel argues that «we need to adduce reasons in favour of any metaphysical (be it diachronic or synchronic) picture of the world-whole» (p. 143). For if we thought of the world-whole as being in principle beyond our grasp, no mind-nature problem could even come to the fore. On the contrary, in order to think of the mind-nature problem as so much as soluble, our picture must be compatible with our conditions of knowing the world fundamental structures. Consequently, we have to assume first that the world-whole does not elude our grasp in such a way that we cannot even really pose the question of how mind fits into the natural order. So, concludes Gabriel, «the very notion of a bottom-up account [...], which presents us with mental and physical phenomena to be integrated into a coherent conception of that whole, relies on our capacity to encompass the whole in a philosophical system» (p. 143).

Our account of the world-whole is indeed grounded in our reliance on a world-picture that is epistemologically prior to any resulting bottom-up metaphysical architecture. The result is, though, *not* that we have to privilege a point of view over the other, but that «we have to travel both ways when tracing the outlines of the very terrain to be charted by our metaphysical theorizing» (p. 144). To understand what it means to privilege one over the other, Gabriel's strategy works in three steps: (i) first, he reconstructs the way in which God can be seen as the common ground between mind and nature: the idea of God-as-ground (nature) stands for the metaphysical bottom-up direction of explanation, whereas God-as-existence (intelligibility) equals the epistemological top-down account; (ii) secondly, he investigates how Schelling's «higher realism» – a metaphysical view which spreads freedom over the entire universe – works against Spinoza viz. dogmatism (as a first-order quasi-physical account, unable to account for the top-down intelligibility conditions that need to be respected)

and against Kant (who divides natural objects from those of practical attitudes, the latter belonging to a «kingdom of ends»); (iii) thirdly, Gabriel shows how «good» and «evil» in real freedom (*SW* 1/7: 353) designate the relation of a person's expression of freedom to background conditions of her action. Any action, whose individuation resists integration into a wider background, counts as evil. In turn, «good structures establish an equilibrium in light of an insight into the ontological stability conditions of the existence and maintenance of a (social) domain of action» (p. 151), whereas any privileging on ground (God-as-nature) over intelligibility (God-as-existence), *and vice versa*, counts as evil.

A *variatio* on this theme is offered in *Nature, Freedom, and Gender in Schelling* (Essay 9) by Alison Stone. Here the author develops a feminist account of the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* and the *Freedom* essay, i.e. of Schelling's gendered contrast between the feminine, chaotic ground and the masculine, rational actuality of God. The point of departure is the following statement: we as subjects of cognitive experience must really be free if we are to know the world; this freedom is only possible if nature really is spontaneous as well. What is at stake here? On the one hand, Stone claims, nature and non-human organisms must have features that approximate to human freedom at a lower level, including the power of self-organization. Since nature «anticipates free subjectivity» (p. 172), apparently, we have a bottom-up argument. Nevertheless, the claim is rather a 'if-statement': nature must really exhibit forms of proto-freedom «if human beings are really to have freedom, as they must do to have the capacity that they do to gain knowledge» (p. 171).

Such a top-down movement – if we want to adopt the language of Gabriel's essay – is reinforced when we face the gendered features of the organism, ending up in a circle. Inorganic nature is not per se already determined in masculine and feminine, which is a distinction pertaining to living-beings. However, in that it displays a duality of forces, «this makes it explicit, retrospectively, that productivity and inhibition have gendered connotations» (p. 173). The association of the feminine with the materiality and the masculine with the productive force is implicit and historically established.

When coming to the *Freedom* essay, things become more sophisticated. In this text the two powers are no more just «forces», but are aspects of God, its ground and existence. Moreover, inhibition, which in the *Outline* was necessary for the production of natural forms but not itself directly productive, is in the *Freedom* essay generative: «its generativity makes it possible for God to exercise creative agency, which he does in realizing more fully the generative movement into existence in which the ground already consisted» (p. 179).

At the end, Stone briefly discusses Žižek's reading<sup>4</sup> of the political outcome for the feminine once one tries to develop «the ontological priority of the ground». In this respect, the scholar is certainly right in highlighting

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<sup>4</sup> S. Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, London 1996. Id., *A Leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism'*, «Critical Inquiry», XXIV, 1998, 4, pp. 988–1009.

the urgency of investigating the gender connotations present in Schelling's thought, which belong to his philosophy on a par with any other metaphor. The ontological priority of the ground is, however, decidedly questionable, with hard consequences for the assessment of gender and the political status of the feminine. Its primacy could be reversed, as explicitly stated in a notorious passage, recalled by Stone herself: «God has in himself an inner ground of his existence that in this respect precedes him in existence, but, precisely in this way, God is again the prius of the ground insofar as the ground, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist actu» (*SW I/7*: 358). If this is the case, it is clear that the political appropriation of this issue, that Stone examines, comes in this essay not to a resolution, but rather to a first clarification for future reflections – in the awareness, perhaps, that a triumphant or univocal enhancement of the ground is not among Schelling's ambitions.

A different attempt at reconstructing Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is to be found in Brady Bowman's *Schelling on Eternal Choice and the Temporal Order of Nature* (Essay 6). The author shows that Schelling's philosophy of nature in *Philosophy and Religion* (1804) and in the *Freedom* essay cannot be assimilated to contemporary naturalism, in that it incorporates eternal choice theory: nature includes freedom and is not a causally closed system. According to Bowman, in a certain sense Schelling sustains a kind of naturalism: the absolute achieves actuality only through the agency of finite (*SW I/7*: 404; *SW I/6*: 63). On the other hand, though, he attributes a final, supernatural purpose to nature, namely, redemption and reconciliation with God, and declares the human being, as the means to that end, to be the centre of the natural world (*SW I/7*: 403–5, 411). «Far from holding nature to be the measure of all things and hence the proper basis for science, then, Schelling is here committed to the view that nature as a whole is to be measured by the degree to which it tends toward a supernatural end» (p. 117). To this end, in *Religion* essay Bowman (i) addresses the topic of absolute indifference, (ii) shows how, within the absolute, the absolute and its counter-image are present in a simple unity, (iii) investigates how the properties and relations can be considered *present* and *actual* only to the extent that there is some negation of this indifference. The conclusion, which applies also to the *Freedom* essay, is that we have to think of the original determination of the absolute – the negation of its absolute indifference – as an act of absolute spontaneity and freedom. That difference is not actually present in the absolute, as if the absolute were a self. It is so only by virtue of the act through which a counter-image of the absolute «seizes upon itself in its selfhood» (*SW I/6*: 39), thereby falling into the mere appearance of being, that the absolute comes to enjoy actual determinateness. So, what is most basic to the natural order, namely, its self-externality in the spatial and the temporal order, as well as its laws, are grounded, for Schelling, in an essentially free and morally pertinent action on the part of the individual – an enduring «provocation of naturalism in its full extent» (p. 132).

With this in mind, we can now come back to the earlier writings of Schelling, namely to his ‘proper’ philosophy of nature, whatever this means beyond a historiographic category. The fifth essay of the volume is *From World-Soul to Universal Organism: Maimon’s Hypothesis and Schelling’s Physicalization of a Platonic-Kabbalistic Concept*. Here Paul Franks considers that which in *On the World-Soul* comes into play only once: the world-soul itself. In his reconstruction, Franks examines Schelling’s relationship to Jewish thought, maintaining that he draws on Platonic as well as Kabbalistic ideas for his theory of a contractive and expansive world soul. The starting point is, though, not Maimon but rather the three alternatives towards Spinozism, explicitly referring to kabbalah, that are depicted in Jacobi’s 1780 conversation with Lessing, reported five years later in his *Spinoza Briefe*: (i) a Spinozism equivalent to kabbalistic metaphysics shorn of all transcendence and ensoulment; (ii) an ensouled yet naturalistic physics featuring the world-soul; (iii) the privilege of the individuation of the first person through second-person address. Lessing, who is said to have wavered between the first two options, refers to the cosmic pattern of systole and diastole: the *zimzumim*, which still allows him to think the soul only as an effect. Conversely, Schelling aims at situating the world-soul within an account of the generation of the world. To this end, after 1804, he adds the first, pre-creation *zimzumim*, which enables him to follow the kabbalistic solution of the relationship between the Infinite and the world-soul: since the latter is the self-limiting contraction of the former, they are both identical *and* different. Thus, God is at once both transcendent and immanent. Secondly, following Kant’s account of natural ends, Schelling thinks the world-soul as cause *and* effect of itself.

What constitutes it is therefore, in Franks’ reading, «the unitary principle in accordance with which the organization of matter evolves, over geologically long periods of time, into the selforganization of organism proper, and ultimately into the free self-organization of conscious subjects’ lives» (p. 85) – something that not surprisingly resonates with some issues of the ‘philosophy of freedom’, as we have seen. For Schelling seems to be indebted both to a process depicted by Maimon’s 1790 article on the world-soul and to an evolution process, modelled upon Goethe’s conception of metamorphosis, but pertaining to nature and not merely to species. Despite the name, once again, «universal organism» is not the thesis that the entire world is self-organized in the way that organisms are. Instead, it means that the world constitutes a systematic whole in which there is a single principle of the equilibration of opposing forces which, over a very long period of time, gives rise to more complex systems of equilibration, including organisms and conscious beings. Such a reconceived world-soul could therefore enrich a conception of nature, whose underlying metaphysics is monistic and systematic.

This question leads us to the fifth essay, *Deus Sive Vernunft: Schelling’s Transformation of Spinoza’s God* by Yitzhak Y. Melamed. The author explores *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801), a text written *more geometrico*, following the style of Spinoza’s *Ethics* – the model whose exemplarity Schelling

explicitly recognizes: «Concerning the manner of exposition, I have taken Spinoza as a model here, since [...] [he] came nearest my system in terms of content or material and in form» (*AA* I/10: 115). While Spinoza's influence over the exposition is stated unmistakably in Schelling's preface, the content of this composition might seem quite foreign to Spinoza's philosophy. Melamed shows that the situation is more complicated. He suspects that at a deeper level Schelling is attempting to transform Spinoza's system by replacing God, Spinoza's ultimate reality, with reason. To prove this, he outlines the formal similarities and differences between the two texts. While both *Presentation* and *Ethics* contains definitions (*Erklärungen*), propositions, corollaries (*Zusätze*), and demonstrations, the former does not have axioms and its definitions are not concentrated at the opening of the book but are rather spread throughout it. This gesture could be read, according to Melamed, as an «attempt to outdo Spinoza's monism by breaking the distinctions between the various kinds of assertions which together constitute the system» (p. 102). What is at stake, though, is not just a rhetorical isomorphism. As far as the content is concerned, it should be noticed that *Vernunft*, which the *Presentation* opens with, is the «indifference point» of the object and subject – like Spinoza's God. The destitution is accomplished in the classical German philosophy by reframing the formula «outside God there is nothing» through the replacement of God with the I (Fichte) and reason.

Still, the productivity of these reflections is not confined to the *Presentation*. Melamed's insight seems to us meaningful also regarding what we find in the *Freedom* essay. This at first looks like a further reversal: «nothing is prior to, or outside of [*außer*], God» (*SW* 1/7: 358). Interesting enough, this should be read neither as a kind of afterthought, nor as a simple act of substitution, from Spinoza's God, to reason, to another God. In our view, this passage should be understood as a further deepening into the question of intelligibility (and its grounding) at its most disruptive core: 'God' designates the domain in which mind and nature, that are not 'thing' with thing-like properties, have to be placed. This means that, in the text designed for spelling out the limits of pantheism and fatalism, Schelling's own solution to the problem is delivered *precisely by literally paraphrasing* the spinozistic formula.

The question of God and philosophy is tackled in the volume's eight essay, which investigates the problem through the lens of an essential concept in Schelling's work, namely personality. In *The Personal, Evil, and the Possibility of Philosophy in Schelling's Freiheitsschrift*, Richard Velkley tries to account for the intrinsic relation between personality and the possibility of philosophy, in virtue of which the will to system reveals unable to fully account for itself. The scholar first discusses the features which pertain to 'personality' according to Schelling, by reflecting on one structural contradiction: persons must already be what they strive to be. Paraphrased in terms of the 'yearning' that assimilate both God and the finite, one could say that «the One yearns for something it is not and yet it is already that for which it yearns» (p. 160). This structural circle leads to the second

issue at stake, namely philosophy. In an overly familiar formula, philosophy is the search for self-knowledge. The problem is how this can be pursued, for in the quest of comprehending one's own thinking, one must employ the same thinking to get beyond and behind oneself. One must already be in charge of one's thinking while at the same time being truly infinitely remote – a situation that, according to Velkley, is at the core of Schelling's theological interests.

The conclusion of the essay is very intriguing. The will to system, to an absolute ground independent of the personal, reveals itself unable to account for the dialogic movement that inhabits thinking and prevents the latter to fully capture itself in concepts. In light of all this, the author maintains that «philosophy never grounds itself because “philosophy has always already grounded itself”» (p. 166). Unfortunately, Velkley does not delve deeper into this specific relationship between personality and system with respect to the *Private Lectures of Stuttgart* (1810), where Schelling seems to inquire the very problem of an antecedent and a subsequent in the systematic activity, when he writes that «long before man decided to create a system, there already existed one, that of the cosmos [*System der Welt*]» (SWI/7:421).

Such a question constitutes the ideal opening for the last three essays, dealing with Schelling's charge against Hegel's negative philosophy. The problem is first outlined by G. Anthony Bruno, the curator of this volume, in *The Facticity of Time: Conceiving Schelling's Idealism of Ages*. Anthony Bruno contends that the logical system that Hegel constructs in order to account for meaning cannot explain why this account is meaningful in the first place. Then, he «threw himself into the methodological discussion in such a way that he thereby completely forgot the questions which lay outside it» (SWI/10: 143). Against this logical inquiry, which strikes out every extra-logical element, in the *Letters* Schelling notes that if we want to establish a system and principles, «we cannot do it except by an anticipation of the practical decision. We should not establish those principles unless our freedom had already decided about them» (SWI/1: 312–13). Past and future are thus settled as the conditions of reason itself.

Like Velkley, Anthony Bruno finds this trait of systematic philosophy in the 'character', i.e. in the existential commitment to the thinking activity: one cannot express her character once for all, she must strive endlessly to fully actualize it. Decision in this sense is the resolve to live a kind of life. This in turn is Schelling's idealism of ages, as explored by Anthony Bruno in the third draft of the *Ages of the World*. There are two conclusions against Hegel, at which the author comes. First, contingency is not restricted to the resolve «of considering thinking as such», as at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, but rather extends to «my pursuing its complete construction» (p. 195); second, since Schelling, not unlike Kant's transcendental idealism, begins «by countenancing extra-logical presuppositions, viz., the past – reason's grounding transcendental condition as signified by free decision – and the future – reason's guiding transcendental condition as signified by system completion and character actualization» (p.

199-200), he is «modernist»: i.e., he interrogates his own contingency; Hegel, on the contrary, risks being «post-modern»: he «neglects a critique of critique», in that he doesn't face the need of putting into question his «own endorsement of presuppositionlessness» (p.202).

Similar accusations are in no way new in the Hegelian debate. Against them, it is perhaps worth noticing that the Logic does not *presuppose* what is contingent and what is not, nor asks merely for endorsing the scientific perspective that is said to be without any presuppositions. Hegel's strategy seems rather to build on a twofold movement. On the one hand, the need for relinquishing any presupposition may be defended as the *result* of a path of the consciousness which has failed to prove that knowledge must rely on something external to it that should measure its truth. This result, as William Maker among others has persuasively shown, in turn equals its «self-sublation»<sup>5</sup>: the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not say to the *Logic* how it should proceed in its analysis of pure thinking. Yet Hegel does not stop here, nor leaves the 'resolve' merely 'outside' the science. Maybe emphatically, the Logic is said to do nothing more than to further articulate that beginning, which is not made with a concrete 'I', nor with the 'I am I', but with the abstract beginning as such. This in turn doesn't disqualify the act of freedom that, according to Schelling, would have a temporal (not empirical) precedence on the system. At the end of the Logic, in the *Concept*, we experience a more extensive comprehension of being free, which is conscious of its own presuppositions, justifies them and is in the position to advocate its genesis. Such a move is nevertheless not guaranteed, nor anticipated from the outset. What is peculiar in the Logic is rather the estrangement to which the reader is exposed: the discourse progressively re-writes its own exposition in the light of its own moment – culminating in the 'Method', which once again re-writes the whole logical path. That this is hardly compatible with a pure presence, devoid of every temporal struggle, can be testified by the reading-experience itself.

In the eleventh essay, *Thought's Indebtedness to Being: From Kant's Beweisgrund to Schelling's Quelle*, another point against Hegel is made, though in our view less disruptive and directed especially against some outcomes of Kant's project. Here Sebastian Gardner elucidates Schelling's late challenge to Hegel's system in *Abhandlung über die Quelle der ewigen Wahrheiten (On the Source of the Eternal Truths)* by drawing from an alternative interpretation of Kant's 1763 *The Only Possible Basis for a Proof of the Existence of God*. At stake in the two texts is a similar reflection on modal notions to compel ontological commitment. According to Schelling, in the *Beweisgrund* Kant was right to move from thought to being, but wrong to suppose that the being to which thought must move can be conceptualized simply as 'necessarily existing being'. In challenging this kind of inference, the Critical Kant was justified. But he was wrong to conclude that the only move that thought can make is to a mere idea.

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<sup>5</sup> W. Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel*, New York 1994, p. 76.

Indeed, this does not avoid a commitment to Spinozism, since the slack that Kant assumes, between the unique necessary being and the *Realitäten* that supposedly supervene on it, cannot be sustained. On the other hand, it inevitably resolves itself into the «contingency-denying, and ontologically nihilistic», system of Hegel (p. 227). The argument, reconstructed following Omri Boehm<sup>6</sup>, is very technical and presupposes certain familiarity with modal questions in Kant. For Schelling, conversely, thought is indebted to being for its own possibility. That this cannot be viewed *ab initio*, states Gardner, is a consequence of the fact that «philosophical reflection lies at the end of a real process which begins with God and in the course of which God's structure has been inverted: God came to think his own being, while we, as God's derivatives, exist from the beginning through God's thinking» (p. 229) – a path that in the essay is unfortunately too quick sketched.

Closer to the efforts of Anthony Bruno, but with a noticeably different purpose in mind, is Dalia Nassar's essay *An 'Ethics for the Transition': Schelling's Critique of Negative Philosophy and Its Significance for Environmental Thought*. Nassar argues that Schelling's critique of logicism affords an insight into a problem facing environmental philosophy: how can our conceptual awareness of climate change be transformed not just into a more complex picture, but into existential action? The problem detected in the actual environmental ethics is the need for an «ethics for the transition», capable of demonstrate how to cope in the absence of a compelling grand vision. At the heart of this dilemma lies the question of time, and more specifically, the relation between time, thought, and action. Here comes Schelling into play, diagnosing a pathology he identifies in a certain logicism as that of Hegel. While Anthony Bruno refers to the well-known accusation of 'pure presence', Nassar takes into account a not less frequent objection to Hegelian philosophy: its reliance on the past, as well as its incapability of accounting for the future – and, in turn, for action. Logicism is therefore identified with a specific temporal structure, that is mostly retrospective. According to this vision, knowledge is concerned with antecedent conditions – whether transcendental or historical-transcendental – and grounded in what has been and cannot be otherwise. It cannot deliver insights into what is or what may be otherwise, «insight into a present or a future whose conditions cannot be logically derived or determined through what precedes» (p. 237). To discuss this issue, Nassar first explores Schelling's critique to Fichte's *Grundsatz* in its misconception of reason as grounding reality. Second, she discusses Schelling's «metaphysical empiricism», according to which positive philosophy must be first concerned with «thatness [*das Daß*]», and only secondarily concerned with «whatness [*das Was (was es ist)*]» (SW II/3: 100).

At this point, Nassar refers once more to the exemplarity of character: as much as the understanding of a person is never gained at once, nor can be exhausted *a priori*, but depends on her own acts and thoughts, so, Schelling

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<sup>6</sup>O. Boehm, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza*, Oxford 2014.

states in his 1833 *Munich Lectures*, positive philosophy itself is concerned only with the “consequences” of acts – with their appearances in the world – and not with their a priori conditions. Therefore, Nassar concludes, Schelling offers insight into how philosophy ought to transform itself if it is to respond to a moment of crisis – a moment which is tied to our (apparent) inability to act in the present for an unknown future.

Two more consequences are involved. First, in that Schelling’s goal is to offer an alternative account of knowledge, concerned with the present or the actual, knowledge «depends on active knowers» (p. 245): they are not mere contemplators of an eternal order, but are rather in a position of responsibility. To this crucial point it may be noticed that the picture according to which knowledge is something resulting from our active and lasting engagement is not at all alien, for instance, to Kant – nor it is to Christian Wolff, the investigator of the «reasons of things». Not only was the validity of his thought to be commensurate with its practical outcome<sup>7</sup>: as he argues in the *Preliminary Discourse on Philosophy in General*, the knowers partake directly in the progress of knowledge (§38), within research communities in which they play an active and creative part. If it is sure that the notion of progress and action is significantly different in these thinkers, the example briefly quoted reminds that it is not so easy to divide between ‘retrospective’ thinkers and those open to transformation.

The second conclusion of Nassar is equally interesting. According to her, Schelling would be capable of bringing forth a different attitude towards our present: «the continual engagement with what is before me, with what can be otherwise» (p. 246). While Hegel would remain trapped in a certain image of the present as of what could not be otherwise, positive philosophy demands that we restrain our imaginings of a future, which over-determines both the future and the present and, in so doing, assume precisely the account of reality that underlies negative philosophy, i.e., what is, is the necessary. In this case too, something more could be said on Hegel’s account, which goes in a similar direction of *thinking* transformation. In being «its own time apprehended in thoughts [*ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*]» (GW 14,1: 15)<sup>8</sup>, as we can read in the preface of his *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, philosophy thus works precisely on the image we are most exposed to: that of our ‘present’. What is actual? Which are the tendencies that marks our time? What is at stake in a time of crisis<sup>9</sup>? At this point, the situation becomes more complex. There are shapes, movements which are no more actual, but nonetheless are not concluded, thereby informing with their pattern our (mis-)understanding of the present; on the other hand,

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<sup>7</sup> In the *Annotations* added in 1724 to the *Rational Thoughts on God, the world and the human soul* of 1720 Wolff declared that in his philosophy he aimed “always at praxis” (§ 72), and that even in metaphysics, “which is usually considered purely speculative”, he did not teach anything in which “the intention was not aimed at praxis”.

<sup>8</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. by K. Grotzsch, E. Weisser-Lohmann, Hamburg 2009. My translation.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel’s Logic, Obliquely. Melville, Molière, Beckett*, New York 2018, whose first Chapter is “Thinking in Times of Crisis: Hegel’s Logic of Transformation”.

there are new forces pushing forward, whose comprehension is nevertheless left open: their own emergence sets a measure to come.

Hegelian philosophy doesn't *prescribe* its own presumptions to the future: regarding the urge to «give instruction as to what the world ought to be», writes Hegel, «philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it» (GW 14, 1: 16). Thinking is, though, not devoid of this temporal dimension. Quite the contrary: precisely in refusing to give recipes to the future, philosophy can engage with what truly *is*, thereby freeing us from some apocalyptic pictures of present and future together – the aim proper to Schelling and, actually, to the classical German philosophy as a whole, if it is true, as Foucault notes, that with Kant the 'present' becomes a proper object for philosophy in a radically new sense<sup>10</sup>.

These, of course, are matters of interpretation on which commentators may differ. What is beyond doubt is the productivity of ending this challenging series of essays with Nassar's contribution. Her thesis, according to which in Schelling's critical stance toward rationalism rests an important continuity between his earliest works from 1795 and 1796 and his late lectures, takes us back to the beginning. Moreover, it brings to the fore the question of 'continuity' as such.

Apart from Nassar's attempt, in the volume there are only few sketches of systematization of Schelling's thought in a positive sense (and not just as the repeated confutation of the same point, as in the case of rationalism). The curator of the volume too refuses such a responsibility and relies rather to the canonical «phases» of the development of Schelling's philosophical path<sup>11</sup>. Even though this meta-question would be an interesting topic of discussion, the refusal is far from an oversight, and could be productive in the opposite direction. At stake seems to be the attempt at replicating the way in which Schelling himself was philosophizing. In proceeding chronologically, the reader is confronted with the problem of how to approach a unified interpretation of a thinker who adopts multiple methods for addressing a wide range of philosophical issues – thereby experiencing a sense of alienation by facing «fragments of a whole» (SW I/7: 334–5). The problem of «phases» of Schelling's philosophy emerges nevertheless, as well as the interplay between the texts. And yet, as Steigerwald has shown, such incompleteness and dialectic can become endlessly generative. Better: they let us experience *actu* the proper activity that philosophizing and its writing instantiate.

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<sup>10</sup> M. Foucault, *What is Enlightenment?* in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by P. Rabinow, New York 1984, pp. 32-50.

<sup>11</sup> For a 'continuity thesis' that treats Schelling as a philosopher of nature throughout, see I.H. Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, London 2006; Id., *The Hypothesis of Nature's Logic in Schelling's Naturphilosophie*, in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*, ed. by M. Altman, London 2014. For a new collection of essays, which explores the relevance of Schelling's philosophy of nature to the contemporary debates, see E.C. Corriero, I.H. Grant (eds.), *Rethinking Schelling. Nature, Myth, Realism*, «Rivista di Estetica», LXXIV, 2020, p. LX.

To this extent, since in Schelling's philosophy «a target shifts with every decision on how to grasp it» (p. 6), some repetitions too are not only unavoidable but also worthwhile. They show some tensions – as in the case of his philosophy of Nature, or his confront with Spinoza, whose exemplarity underlines a sense of life-long appreciation and strong refutation. What is unfortunate in this regard is that the essays do not contain explicit references to colleagues' publications in the volume. An open dialogue would have benefited the volume with a more extended self-awareness on a plurality of ways of elaborating on the similar topics.

Overall, the book has therefore undeniably many strengths, starting from the fact that it is informed by an extensive and recent secondary literature. In spite of the excellent quality of the contributions, the volume has some limits.

First, the text entitled “Schelling's Philosophy” is a little unbalanced on the first phases of Schelling's thinking, and especially on the *Freedom* essay. It is undoubtedly one of the richest and most evocative texts. And yet it would have been interesting to see how Schelling's Anglophone reception could investigate other issues. This applies both to other texts, such as *The Private Lectures of Stuttgart* or the *Erlangen Lectures*, which deal with some crucial topics explored in the volume, as well as to other themes, such as religion, history and history of philosophy in Schelling's «positive philosophy» and to art itself, whose exemplarity for the philosophical activity itself is spelled out only in the last sketches of Ostaric's, Fisher's and Nassar's essays.

Second, there are two shortcomings that perhaps deserve to be made explicit, in view of further research on classical German philosophy. They depend, on the one hand, on the absence of a figure that is pivotal in Schelling's confrontation with the theme of rationalism, freedom and personality, and with Spinoza: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. With the exception of Franks' essay, and a few others references, the dialogue with Jacobi seems to be very underestimated. Yet it is Jacobi who can be seen as elaborating a *Handlungsphilosophie* in contrast to Fichte ethico-practical solution, not relying just on a theoretical «immediate, intuitive faculty» of the supersensible, as Lara Ostaric argued (p. 22), but on the experience of agency<sup>12</sup>. It is he that Schelling quotes in *Of the I*, where we read that the aim of philosophy is «to unveil and reveal that which is» (AA I/2: 77), i.e. *Dasein*. It is he who spelled out the limits of rationalism as relying just on the antecedents and getting stuck in the regress. It is he one of the main references for the discussion of 'personality', which for Schelling's *Of the I* was an obstacle to freedom, while in the *Freedom essay* makes God's own essence as the «highest personality» (SW I/7: 394-396). It is he that lodged the objection that «the concept of freedom is incompatible with the system at all», which frames the investigations in the *Freedom essay* (SW I/7: 336-337) – to keep silent about the explicit *Streit* about personality and naturalism between Jacobi's *On Divine Things and their Revelation* (1811) and Schelling's *Memorial for*

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<sup>12</sup> See B. Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache. Die Vernunftkritik Jacobis*, München 2000.

*Herr Friedrich Henrich Jacobi's Writing "On Divine Things"* (1812). It is Jacobi's reconstruction of Spinoza, finally, which stands as an enduring provocation for Schelling's thinking until his *Lectures on the History of Modern Philosophy*, to which unfortunately not much space is given in the volume (though at least two of the terms of the title would have profited of this). It is not by chance that they reaffirm Schelling's veneration for Spinoza (SWX, S. 35 f.), while, at the same time, anachronistically ending with Jacobi<sup>13</sup>.

This absence, which rests on a certain stereotyping of the *éminence grise* of classical German philosophy, is followed by a more extensive one. This regards the concrete context in which Schelling's thinking germinates. His sensitivity to «questions of lasting metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, and theological importance» (p. 2), as recalled in Anthony Bruno's introduction, is what needs to be vindicated in the Anglophone Schelling's *renaissance*. However, it should be noted that the genesis of these issues is not only, nor primarily intra-philosophical. On the contrary, it relies on a rich scientific debate, which is marked by the emergence of new disciplines for the study of life<sup>14</sup>; on institutional debates on the status of philosophy as a university discourse; on historical ferments and social upheavals; on constitutional debates and reflections on right. In a book that has the merit of collecting in a single editorial operation contributions responsive to contemporary issues, the rootedness of Schelling's philosophy in the wider historical-scientific context of confessional struggles, political discussions and the reorganization of knowledge after the end of the *Schulphilosophie*, would have deserved a greater attention.

This task seems to us one of the challenges posed by a dense and brilliant work, which definitely represents a milestone in the process of unhinging and debunking certain historiographical distortions on classical German philosophy. The likelihood that this volume will lead to further attempts to vindicate the critical bite of Schelling's philosophy seems almost certain.

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<sup>13</sup> See Ead., „Der Himmel im Verstande“. *Spinoza und die Konsequenz des Denkens*, in «Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte» Heft V/1, 2011, pp. 15-28.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of Schelling's philosophy of nature in relation to contemporary research in the history of biology, see A. Gambarotto, *Vital Forces, Teleology and Organization: Philosophy of Nature and the Rise of Biology in Germany*, Dordrecht 2018.