

Acting the Absolute

Theoretical premises of Schelling's ethics

EMILIO CARLO CORRIERO*

ABSTRACT: Is it really plausible an *ethics without ontology*? The controversial status of moral philosophy, its lack of foundations and the difficulties connected with its argumentation usually entail within the contemporary philosophical debate an approach which has a bias for a theory of ethics independent from a philosophical *Weltanschauung*. This is in particular due to the fact that the widespread “naturalism” in philosophy, would eliminate the room for freedom as necessary condition of any moral action. Indeed the fundamental question of moral philosophy lies in the possibility to solve Kant's third antinomy, in a way that Kant himself seems to outline in its *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

This was at the end the main aim Schelling pursued in its philosophy of nature, thinking of it as the *grounding* of the entire philosophy, ethics included. The particular *nature* of the grounding, that Schelling finds in his inquiries, entails freedom as the main character of being in general and of human being in particular. For its particular position in the world, its *Mit(t)wissenschaft* of creation, the human being is able to act according to the law of Identity, and its action — when it is *ethical* — repeats and continues the action of the Absolute.

KEYWORDS: Schelling, Philosophy of nature, Ethics, Freedom, Absolute

Schelling's ethical reflection develops around the notion of freedom that is defined as a consequence of a particular dynamic concept of Nature in his 1809 *Philosophical Inquiries*. This concept is possible for Schelling only within a philosophy of Identity, and it is for this reason that, in order to understand the foundations of Schelling's ethics, it is crucial to consider the theoretical outcomes of the 1804 *System der gesamten Philosophie und der*

* Università degli Studi di Torino; emilio.corriero@unito.it.

Naturphilosophie insbesondere (System of all philosophy and of philosophy of nature in particular) where Schelling attempts to describe in a complete way his philosophy of Identity.

In his *System of transcendental Idealism*, Schelling undoubtedly intended to continue his project of a philosophy of Identity that had already been hinted at in his earliest writings as well as in his 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, where, in questioning the relationship between the internal world and the external one, he asserts that nature must not only express but also truly realize the laws of our spirit, because «Nature is visible Spirit, Spirit is invisible Nature». In the text from 1800, however, he did not insist enough on the importance that Nature assumed in the *System* as a whole, and despite what he said in the foreword, that the purpose of the *System* was to «extend transcendental idealism to the system of all knowledge», investigating the continuity and parallel between nature and the intelligent principle, he found himself sketching «a progressive history of self-consciousness», inevitably ending up favouring the transcendental moment at the expense of the natural one.

If it is true that understanding of the general development of Schelling's thought, and of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* in particular, requires the recognition of the value of previous works on the philosophy of Nature, it is equally true that, as Jürgen Habermas rightly pointed out in his doctoral thesis, Schelling was not entirely consistent with the theoretical premises that anticipated his own *System*, since although he intended to give autonomy back to the Non-I and therefore not merely raise Nature to a simple position (*Setzung*) but rather to a presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) of the spiritual, he did not follow this theory through to the end. On that path, in fact, he should have described transcendental philosophy simply as a 'relative' beginning, that is as the mere continuation of natural philosophy (or process) and in no instance as an absolute beginning, as was actually the case (Habermas 1954: 160). The fact, then, that in 1800 Schelling published the *General Deduction of Dynamic Process in Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, with which he somehow balanced the "transcendental" positions of the *System* by providing a real physical explanation of idealism, further testifies how the *System of Transcendental Idealism* was not able to condense in a coherent way the two sides of Schelling's philosophy, the ideal side and the natural one, into a complete philosophy of Identity.

When, for example, in § 63 of the *System* Schelling presents the relationship between Nature together with its dynamic process and transcendental idealism in terms of parallelism, stating that «in physics dynamism fulfils the function that transcendentalism has in philosophy», he juxtaposes the natural moment and the transcendental one without yet composing them into a single philosophy of (dynamic) Identity. This was already becoming

apparent when the suggested symmetry between the dynamic and the transcendental was further clarified by the assumption that «every dynamic movement has its ultimate foundation in the very subject of nature, that is in the forces of which the visible world is mere structure» (SW, I/4, p. 76).

For Schelling, the composition of the philosophy of Identity based on the full recognition of the unique Subject of Nature began to assume greater freedom and autonomy of its own after his break from Fichte, which was anticipated by the collapse of the project to direct the *Kritisches Journal* together and evident from the hasty and incomplete drafting of the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*.

Schelling intended that this text should aim at unifying the two sides of his philosophy in an identity vision and it contains very significant ideas for his philosophy in its entirety, as well as the certainly clearer and more linear exposition of the complex and differently expressed “doctrine of powers”. However, it is a rather fragmentary work and certainly cannot be defined as a true System. In spite of this, it was exactly from this brief text onwards that Schelling began to reconsider the two sides of his philosophy from an identity point of view, followed by an attempt once more, in 1804, at a possible welding through the *System of all philosophy and of philosophy of nature in particular*, this time accentuating the natural moment, in accordance with the positions already expressed even in the *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre* of 1796/97. Precisely in these early writings, in which the guiding themes of the philosophy of Nature were expounded in a context that was still Kantian, the passage from the I (Ich) to the Spirit (Geist) was taking shape, a passage that was not merely terminological, but rather directly consequent to a proper reading of the philosophical problem of Nature. The temporary abandonment of the Fichtian I / Non-I terminological conflict, which inevitably placed the emphasis on the gnoseological moment at the expense of the ontological one, favoured the extension of the ontological field to the graduality (*Stufenfolge*) of Nature and Spirit. The choice to introduce the notion of Spirit that in itself assumed the natural field and therefore foreshadowed the subsequent introduction of the Absolute was not at all an arbitrary stylistic choice, but rather significantly the mere consequence of a positive idea of Nature, as a *position of itself* and a necessary *presupposition* of (subsequent) self-awareness.

In the *System of transcendental Idealism* Schelling could not follow these theoretical premises through to the end because he was hampered by the theoretical link with Fichte’s theses of the *Doctrine of Science*, which he valued at that time. The extension of the ontological field, which already in the *Abhandlungen* involved a terminological shift from the I to the Spirit and its organic structuring determined, on the one hand, by the consideration of Nature as an essential presupposition of the spiritual and on the other hand

quite clearly by the influence exercised by Kant's theses on the organism, led Schelling after the *System of transcendental Idealism* to reconsider his thinking, starting with the idea of absolute Identity in continuity, as has been said, with his first philosophical steps developed in the wake of the joint reading of Kant and Plato (cf. Schelling 1994).

At the time of Jena, Schelling not only had to deal with Fichte's refusal to accept 'natural' integration in his *Doctrine of Science*, he also had to face the hostility shown by the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* which focused precisely on the theses and outcomes of his philosophy of Nature, which were certainly against the positions held by Kantian criticism. In *Darstellung* (1801) we see the presentation, in open opposition to Fichte's philosophy of reflection, of a non-objective theory of knowledge (of the Absolute), which will be taken up again in *Further presentations* (1802) and then again in the *System of all philosophy* (1804), and which will constitute the cognitive foundation for the possibility of a philosophy of Identity and for the determination of the possible relationship between the finite and infinite.

It can be affirmed that the "realism" of Schelling's positions, that is, his idealism of nature and the relative estrangement from Kantian gnoseology, certainly derived from his reflections in the field of the philosophy of Nature (cf. Corriero-Dezi 2013), which in their turn arose not only from mere scientific interest, but also from Schelling's original impulse to complete the results of Kantian philosophy in a systematic way and therefore, to use the expressions that were nevertheless not adequately established by Schelling in his *Formschrift*, to weld the *form* and *content* of Science into an identity oneness. Herein lies evidence of the thematic continuity I mentioned above, whose clarification does not so much help to surpass the now outdated interpretation of Schelling's philosophy split into epochs — a much-discussed interpretation strewn with controversy — and therefore restore an underlying theoretical unity to Schelling's course, but rather to offer another vision of a significant part of the complex legacy of classical German idealism, which certainly goes beyond Kantian boundaries by seeking the grounding of the transcendental, and therefore the gnoseological and epistemological guarantee in the past 'history' of Nature, or rather in the ontological (and dynamic) context that always precedes any possible reflection on it. A context, however, from which it was necessary to expect the source of the ethical foundation of Schelling's system.

The writings that range from the *Presentation of my system of philosophy* to the *System of all philosophy and of philosophy of nature in particular*, in which Schelling develops the definitive detachment from Fichte and the philosophy of reflection, effectively summarize the originality of the position of the philosopher from Leonberg and they shed light, on the one hand, on the developments of Hegel's philosophy, which is known to be strongly

influenced by Schelling's philosophy of Identity, and, on the other, on the so-called turning point of Schelling's philosophy of Freedom, which in a hasty and malicious reading would gather its 'theosophical-religious' momentum with *Philosophy and Religion* (1804).

In order to verify these findings, however, it is necessary to retrace, albeit briefly, the stages that lead to the Würzburger *System*, in which the foundations of the philosophy of Identity are laid, something that a scholar like Manfred Frank does not hesitate to define as the true original contribution given by Schelling to Western philosophy (Frank 2010: 25; cf. Frank 2018). Only from the understanding of the foundations of this system can it be understood how Schelling's ethical vision cannot in any way set aside a consideration of a general ontological nature determined by a particular concept of nature as absolute subject, which is both an inexhaustible origin and a continuous dynamic process.

As Schelling's son himself states in the introduction, the 1804 *System* is the only place where his father presented the philosophy of Identity in its entirety. In particular, although the natural part has a predominant role both theoretically and for the number of pages dedicated to it, the Würzburger *System* presents for the first time the complete exposition of the ideal series, which had seen the explication of the moment of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) in the *Bruno* dialogue and the moment of action (*Handeln*) in the *Philosophy and Religion* text. In the *System of all philosophy*, these two moments are described in the last part, *Construction of the ideal world and of its powers*, precisely as the first and second powers, followed by art (*Kunst*) as the third and last power of the ideal series. The *System of all philosophy* is divided, in fact, into two parts: the first, which focuses on general philosophy, poses and thematizes the concept of the Absolute which is then described, in the second part, by way of its manifestations and its differentiations through the doctrine of the powers. This second part is itself divided into three sections: (a) the philosophy of Nature in general, that is the construction of Nature or of the real totality, (b) the philosophy of special Nature, i.e. the construction of individual powers, and (c) the construction of the ideal world and of its powers.

As Schelling's son, editor of the work published posthumously, always observed, within the *System* (to be precise, from § 277 to § 291) the doctrine of infinite knowledge is taken up again, as self-knowing of the absolute Identity and described here as an absolute affirmation. Despite the terminological shift (typical of Schelling) this doctrine of knowledge and transcendental logic is the same as the one we find underlying *Bruno* and it had already been presented in the Jena lectures in which Hegel himself had been able to take part. In fact, that is where the real leap from transcendental philosophy to the monism of the philosophy of Identity lies, which

Schelling openly presented right at the beginning of his *Presentation* in 1801 and which was what Fichte's criticism focused on. As can be seen from the correspondence between the two philosophers in the months following the publication of *Darstellung*, and in particular from the letter to Schelling dated 31 May 1801, Fichte's accusation is directed at the proposition that opened that text in which Schelling claimed (without further proof) that absolute reason coincides with «the total Indifference of the subjective and of the objective», thus emphatically excluding any grounding of transcendental knowledge and any recourse to subjectivation. Although this work does not seek to justify its position nor oppose the idealistic objection, according to which even if it is true that reason is the *indifference* of the subjective and objective it still remains to be clarified *who* is to know that eternal identity of Subject and Object, Schelling will return to the problem in the subsequent *Further Presentations* and then again in the 1804 *System of all philosophy*, through the redefinition of intellectual Intuition and the determination of a non-Objectifiable Absolute, whose definition will still be at the heart of *Philosophical Inquiries* and, later, of the Erlangen Lectures. It is here that the idea is formulated that the non-objectifiable subject (*Urständlich*) actually coincides with nature as a continuous and never objectifiable *arché*, and therefore with the Absolute as such (*schlechtin betrachtet*).

On the role assigned to intellectual Intuition and its distance from the mere subjectivation typical of an abstraction, Schelling's discourse appears quite clear when intellectual Intuition is described in a natural and not only spiritual context; once again we see confirmation of how the philosophy of Nature decides the theoretical course of Schelling's entire philosophical project. In his essay *On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature*, published in 1801, Schelling states:

The reason that those who have grasped idealism well have not understood philosophy of nature is because it is difficult or impossible for them to detach themselves from the subjective [element] of intellectual intuition. — For the purpose of philosophy of nature, I demand intellectual intuition as it is demanded in the doctrine of science; however, I demand, in addition, abstraction from the *intuiting* in this intuition, an abstraction which leaves behind for me the purely objective [element] of this act, which in itself is merely subject-object, but in no way = I (SW, I/4, p. 87).

In this passage the distance that Schelling takes from the philosophy of reflection is ultimately established, but at the same time it is affirmed that intellectual Intuition is an act (*Akt*) — certainly distinct from the I, in that it precedes it — through which Nature affirms itself. A few pages further on, in fact, we see that Schelling deals with that Subject-Object in the philosophy of Nature, which defines Nature, in its *self-construction*

and that to understand this we must already be elevated to the intellectual Intuition of Nature (in the subjective sense of the genitive; cf. SW, I/4, p. 97). The link between intellectual Intuition and construction in philosophy is well clarified in a note in the fourth section of the 1802 *Further Presentations*, where the movement of the subject–objectifying itself of the Absolute is clearly expressed and therefore also the way in which the Infinite and the Finite arise from the Absolute:

Since one asks reason not to think of the Absolute as either a thought or a being, and yet to think of it, from such a reflection comes a contradiction since in the thinking of it everything about it is either a thought or a being. But it is precisely in this contradiction that intellectual Intuition intervenes and exhibits the Absolute. In this passage we find the moment in which the Absolute is positively intuited. (In the reflection, therefore, intellectual Intuition is only negative. Only through this positive intuition is the philosophical construction or — which is the same thing — the presentation of the Absolute possible in general (SW, I/4, p. 391 ff.).

The concept of construction (and self–construction), which to understand fully one must first of all read the writings on the philosophy of Nature starting with *Ideas* from 1797, is central to the entire philosophy of Identity in general and to the *Würzburger System* in particular, and in this context it echoes the initial theses of the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), which states that «philosophizing about Nature is to create Nature», which, far from being simply a fancy aphorism, typical of a certain romantic culture, means instead freeing Nature from being a mere product (which in this case would be nothing but the sum of evanescent *Schein–produkte*) and lead it back to the *activity*, to therefore restore it back to life and to its free creative development. Such a description of the natural aspect inserted in a philosophy of Identity implies, in Schelling’s journey, the extension of the gnoseological–constructive problem of the idea of an evolving Absolute, that is of the idea of a dynamic monism.

The controversy with Fichte regarding subjectivation leads Schelling to argue in the 1804 *System* that such a cognitive approach always leads to a regression to the infinite in an attempt to identify the last in the series from which knowledge derives, and also that demanding a subjectivation of absolute reason would always shift the in–itself (of reason itself) into the position of object (or product) with the result that it would definitively lose its *status*, that is its essential characteristic. Schelling’s solution is therefore that of an Absolute that knows itself and constructs itself and that can never become the object of knowledge, because as soon as it becomes one, it ceases to be the Absolute. This inevitably brings with it problems, which are unsolvable for the philosophy of reflection, regarding the relationship that this Absolute has with the finite and on the possibility of grasping the

‘passage’ from the infinite of the Absolute to the finite of its manifestations, but it does leave the door open to an understanding that presupposes an action that conforms to the original act that characterizes the Absolute.

On the theoretical level, the solution offered by the 1804 *System* is that of a finite that has a *double life* in the Absolute, one as a single thing separate from itself and one as an infinite idea, so that however — as Dieter Henrich observes in his *Andersheit und Absolutheit des Geistes* (Henrich 2001: 142–172) — the Absolute also has a double relationship with respect to the single finite thing, since it is always one and the same with respect to the constitution and removal of the finite, that is to say to the placing and the denial of it. If it is true that the formula One–All dominates in monism, here ‘One’ surpasses the ‘All’. Henrich writes that the One is not only the individual, but rather in relation to what it includes within itself, it is exactly what the natural image of the world presupposes as immeasurable multiplicity: the One is at the same time the All. Only the thought of absolute Identity allows us to think of this One as a totality, but it is evident that such a perspective leads to problems of an epistemological nature as soon as this Oneness is deprived of its own dynamics. In order to make the Difference inside the Identity of the Absolute possible, Schelling denies that it can be of a qualitative order — since this would contradict the very essence of Identity — and admits only differences of a *quantitative* order which he can explain through the doctrine of the powers. Now, if we admit the Difference inside the Absolute through the powers, which by Schelling’s explicit admission do not apply to the Absolute *par excellence* (*schlechthin Betrachtet*) but exclusively to its manifestations, we have not thereby clarified the *nature* of the Absolute nor the relationship that it has with the finite. Moreover, without having to refer to *Philosophy and Religion*, which, in controversy with Eschenmayer, testifies to the difficulty of explaining such a relationship, we find already in the *System* of 1804 an explicit reference to the ‘fall’ (*Ab-fall*), a sort of *defectio* of finite things to clarify their *non-being-in-God*, even if fundamentally they are in God (SW, I/6, p. 552).

The term “*fall*” should not surprise nor can it enable easy interpretations that cast a dark light on the course of subsequent speculation: it simply describes in evocative terms, terms with a “religious” background (in accordance with the entire course of Schelling’s philosophy), the non-being of particular things with regard to the Absolute *par excellence*. Since this, as an absolute form, coincides with absolute knowledge and therefore consists of the particular and universal oneness, nothing is outside of this oneness and every particular thing is only because it is in relation to the Absolute (that is, it has a *double life* in the Absolute), but in itself it is a mere *nothingness*. An Absolute understood in this way, however, cannot be grasped by reflexive thought, since it is in no way reduced to the complex relationship with the

finite, from which any effort of thought inevitably comes. Every attempt to think of the Absolute through reflexive thought is doomed to failure: the hypothetical form, the categorical one and in the end the disjunctive one that Schelling presents in the *Würzburger System* (cf. § 291), and which he then develops in a more articulated way in *Philosophy and Religion* (SW, I/6, 21 ff.), cannot grasp the Absolute *par excellence*. Moreover, already in a note in *Further Presentations* Schelling clarified the cognitive tension for the Absolute and the impossibility of realizing this aspiration:

Everyone is driven by nature to seek the Absolute, but when they try to grasp it through reflection, it slips away. It floats eternally around them, but they cannot grasp it (SW, I/4, 357).

The Absolute cannot be grasped through reflection because it does not precede Identity, rather it *is the Identity itself of the Absolute that always precedes every possible reflection*. Since the Absolute is the Identity of Identity or *copula*, it cannot be grasped through reflection. This thought, which has its roots in Schelling's very first philosophical passages and which in the *Form-schrift* (1794) had a provisional and still simply formal definition as "*Urform der Wissenschaft*" (original form of science), will go through a progressive conceptual expansion, especially in the *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom*. The idea of an antepredicative and prereflective Identity will be clarified, so to speak, through the introduction of the *Indifference* that precedes every distinction and that alludes to a "practical" ambit, that is, to the original will. If the Absolute of Identity is in and of itself involved in the dynamics that allow for its internal differentiations, the *Indifference* of *Philosophical Inquiries* does nothing but point out the difference between the Identity of Identity, of the Absolute *par excellence*, and the Identity of the Absolute and its relationships. This is clearly not an addition, but only a redefinition of it. If the strength in Schelling's early philosophy of Nature had been, as we have seen, to request the expansion of the ontological space determining the passage (even if temporary) of the I to the Spirit, then in *Philosophical Inquiries* Schelling gave the philosophy of Nature the credit of having clarified the distinction between essence (*Wesen*) as grounding and essence as existence. In his *Philosophical Inquiries* however, prior to this distinction Schelling inserted the non-grounding (*Ungrund*), namely the *Indifference*, that is that X (which strictly speaking is = 0) which *can be* in a transitive sense A and B, and which constitutes, once entered *into* difference, their identity, the copula, that is, the "=" of the A = B equation. This *nothingness* of the X constitutes in fact the "essence" of the Absolute *par excellence*; a nothingness that, however, has nothing to do with the nullity of finite things, since this is a simply relative nothingness, so to speak. The *nothingness* of the

Absolute is instead the ontological (and dynamic) guarantee for existence, the absolutely free grounding/non-grounding that allows the distinction and the manifestation of the Absolute itself. As is clear, it is not about a being-in-power, since, on the one hand, this would already involve some form of existence in itself and, on the other, because the being-in-power can be the object of a reflexive knowledge, which, as we have seen, is in no way able to describe the Absolute *par excellence*.

The Absolute thus described, which will still be the object of investigation in the Berlin lectures as a non-deductible Principle of all, already appears aporetically in the pages of the *Würzburger System*, as an inevitable outcome of monism. The problem, however, remains when one thinks about what determines, or commands, the passage from this absolute nothingness to the manifestations of the Absolute itself which, on the one hand, allows the actuality of the One-All of the Absolute and, on the other, the nothingness of the single finite expressions. Schelling will continue to ask himself the question, even if directed differently, in the years in Berlin in the *Another deductions of the principles of positive philosophy*, when he will ask himself what ultimately drives the *Seinkönnende* opposition to the *unvordenkliches Sein*, thus allowing the Beginning of being and its possible forms (cf. Corriero, 2019).

The solution should probably be sought in the dynamic meaning (or it would be more correct to say *supradynamic*, since the exposition of the dynamic process concerns the Absolute in its manifestations) that Schelling assigns to the Identity of Identity as the intimate “essence” of the Absolute. In § 52 of the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, Schelling resolutely affirms that «the essence of absolute Identity, as it is immediately a *Grund* of reality (*Realität*), is strength», thus inserting in the X of the Absolute, which can determine and command A and B and has always contained them in an indistinct Oneness, a *supranature* capable of *being* (in a transitive sense) its manifestations and of starting the movement distinctive of the becoming Absolute.

We can say, of course coercing Schelling’s words a little (but quite legitimately I think), that Nature so affects the constitution of the idea of Absolute, in its highest exposition that can be found, in fact, in the *Würzburger System*, that it also directly influences point o of the beginning, where in some way a *supradynamic* that allows and commands the *ontology* that follows can be seen. In my opinion, and with the right perspective (or rather within the context of a wider philosophy of Nature), one can bring together under this viewpoint the introduction of the idea of *Wollen* (Will) coinciding with *Ursein* (original being) in *Philosophical Inquiries* and the subsequent description of *ewiges Mögen* in the *Erlangen Lectures* (where, moreover, the theme of the non-objectifiable Absolute explicitly returns), which holds together

the concepts of *power* and *will*. These concepts are to be read as the attempt to make the *supradynamic* sphere of the Absolute *par excellence* “humanly comprehensible”, never completely graspable through reflective reason: a sphere to which the philosophy of Identity directly refers in its intrinsic and essential link with Nature, hinting at an ethical solution, as recognition of its own belonging to nature and of the deep original consciousness.

In reading and re-reading § 52 of the *Presentation of my System of Philosophy* one cannot help thinking about the affinity of this “force” (*Kraft*), placed as the “essence of absolute identity”, with the “absolute will” that in the 1809 *Philosophical Inquiries* is described as coinciding with the original being: *Wollen ist Urseyn*. The way I see things, therein lies the knot that needs to be untied in order to grasp the (supra)relationship that binds nature and freedom in Schelling’s system and that allows us to understand the practical solution to the theoretical problem.

When the transcendental (and still formal) freedom that Schelling introduces with Kant as a principle of theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy, in a context that is still very much linked to Fichte’s criticism and philosophy, is recognized as a seal of the *autonomy* of nature (Krings 1985: III–128; cf. Grant 2006), as a prerequisite for an identity–dynamic development of nature and spirit (cf. Corriero 2018), it becomes the original principle and dynamic essence of the existent generally commanded by the original *Wollen*, which is expounded and manifested according to the different degrees of spirit and nature. The identification of the original being (or rather the essence of absolute identity) with the “force” in *Darstellung* (1801) and the *Wollen* in *Philosophical Inquiries*, should be read initially in continuity with the passage from the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* where Schelling states that «the concept of being as an originary substratum should be absolutely eliminated from the philosophy of nature, just as it has been from transcendental philosophy» (SW, I/3, p. 11) and, after with a passage from *Einleitung in die Philosophie* which underlines how the absolute *prius*, the beginning of being, always presupposes «something positive, therefore will, freedom, action, and not something merely negative, penetrable through the sole necessity of thought» (Schelling 1989: 53). In both cases it is clarified how at the foundation of being there is a tension, a *power* and not something that can be conceptually grasped. This *potential tension* identified by the philosophy of nature with the “force”, corresponds to the original *Wollen* of *Philosophical Inquiries* and with what this entails in relation to Schelling’s overall ontology, as well as the ethical articulation that comes from it.

Now, this original *Wollen* splits into a selfish will or will of grounding and a universal will or will to love. For Schelling, the ethical position evidently responds to the latter in that it repeats the original creative act of the

unification between grounding and existence through the will to love or the copula, that is to say of the Absolute, since this latter binds the finite beings to the infinite and to each other. On the strength of an original *Mit(t)–wissenschaft* of creation, that is both *co–scientia* and central science, man is in a position to act ethically, that is to say freely in accordance with the universal will to love. For Schelling, the freedom of man lies in that superior possibility, offered and guaranteed by the degree of spirituality possessed, of recovering through the *Grund der Seele* (grounding of the soul) that superior power which, on the one hand, unites him to every other being (within which a double life tosses and turns) and, on the other, binds him to the original act of creation through an original *Mit–wissenschaft* that distinguishes him as «that One [...] in which the bond completely breaks the concrete and returns to itself in its eternal freedom» (SW, I/2, p. 376). In one passage from the Erlangen Lectures, the role assigned to human freedom is further clarified:

a) Only man returns to that abyssal freedom [...]; he is allowed to go back to being the beginning; he is therefore the restored beginning. b) In man the dark memory of having once been the beginning, the force (*Macht*), the absolute centre of everything, certainly tosses and turns. And he is in fact just that in a double sense: 1) Because he is the same eternal freedom that existed at the beginning, but he is this freedom because he is restored; therefore he would be the absolute centre first and foremost because he is that beginning, and also 2) because he is freedom restored (SW, I/9, p. 227).

By virtue of his superior *cum–scientia* of the original act, resisting the “will of grounding” that intends to abstract the finite from its relationship to the infinite (isolating it in its *nothingness*), man is placed in a position to be able to convert the mere *Wollen* into a will to love, that is, to restore the creative function of the copula (its being first and foremost *natura naturans*), conforming to an action that must be able to produce creations (concrete or abstract) that preserve their relationship to the infinite, their freedom in and of itself. It can therefore be affirmed that in the freedom of man, in so far as it is translated into ethical action, there is a passage from the pure *Wollen* — still blurred between the selfish principle and the universal principle — to the “will to love”, or universal will, as the adhesion of human reason (as the power of the absolute) to the eternal copula. It is in fact in acting that the particular “knowledge” of the Absolute of Nature is achieved, which as a non–objectifiable Subject cannot be known–grasped but only participated in on the basis of a *Mitwissenschaft* that allows the individual subject its continued belonging to that one subject.

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