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# Performing Reason in Schelling and Hegel

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001)

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETAS

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# Mąstymo performatyvumas Schellingo ir Hegelio filosofijoje

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## Introduction

**Research focus.** “Man infinitely surpasses man”—wrote Pascal. “But if he surpasses himself too much, he does not surpass himself at all”—adds Jean Luc-Nancy.<sup>1</sup> In the contemporary world of all possible excesses, we witness a tendency to abolish and transgress every limit. In its own turn, it puts our sense of determinacy in a state of constant vanishing. Even the sudden re-emergence of borders and restrictions of our daily life due to pandemics only exposed our gradually intensifying state of ambiguity, sense of dislocation and fluidity of knowledge. With the recent emergence of all the flagbearers of the new *beyonds* of new materialisms, speculative realisms, trans-humanist and post-humanist turns, we are facing the necessity to address and reconceptualize our very notion of humanity and of rationality in the face of Anthropocene. But more importantly, what is at stake is the very *possibility* to address this shift in contemporary self-consciousness. The question repeats itself as persistently as ever: how can reason determine itself? What provides sufficient means and criteria for such an inquiry if that which decides for this inquiry is itself put to question? Does reason preserve an authority to determine itself and justify its own legitimacy even in such a way that could exceed it through, for example, science and technology? Or should we rather approach the question of technology and science in terms of reason itself being excessive, or—as Heidegger famously put it in his encounter with Jünger— even being a sign of self-consummating metaphysics? In particular, if the discourse and technology are granted this possibility to generate themselves excessively and by their own capacity to transform all sense into any sense at an enormous speed. In that way, by imposing an uncontrolled control upon our lives, reason, to paraphrase Nancy, indeed becomes detached even from itself. For it becomes detached from itself in becoming detached from the limit as its own possibility—a core notion of modern philosophy since Kant, who apparently was the first to explicitly raise the question of the limit at the centre of philosophy. In this sense, the problem of reflexivity, self-determination and self-relatedness comes to the foreground of the contemporary philosophical arena, where the essence of the philosophical discourse as such and its autonomy are at stake.

By distinguishing cognition and thinking, by showing that only those contents can be accessible that *can* be accessible, Kant made the limits of reason both

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<sup>1</sup> <https://krit.hypotheses.org/1051>

the horizon and the possibility for being to appear and become determinate. Consequently, for Kant's immediate Kant's in the German Idealist tradition, like Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, the whole Kantian approach of transcendental philosophy appeared to be based on the awareness of the fact that our thinking is always already indebted and thereby limited to its own (*f*)activity (*Tathandlung*) and effectivity (*Wirkung*). In the idealist reinterpretation of Kant, reason no longer appears as an imitation or construction of the world, but rather it becomes an ongoing activity which discovers this activity in *medias res*. And that, in its own turn, simultaneously becomes the most liberating and the most limiting stance. This gradual transition made by the idealists from mere epistemological definitions to the investigation into the very activity of reason that alone justifies and limits it allows to address the question, namely—how reason relates to itself despite its constant transformations? How it *remains* itself? In this regard, the *activity inherent in reason's self-limitation* is the basic question of this dissertation. However, such figures like Schelling and Hegel tend to elaborate Fichte's core notion of *Tathandlung* in different ways which are still highly controversial, and thus, the essence of their relationship makes the crucial focus of this thesis.

Indeed, one cannot overestimate the breadth and complexity of the issues evolving around these major figures of German Idealism. During the last decades, this movement has experienced a resurging interest in many fields of contemporary scholarship. A significant shift in the paradigmatic ontotheological narratives, which have for a long time been ascribed to these authors, can be clearly noticed. Despite its scholarly value, this shift has also revealed their potential to contribute to the contemporary debates in reshaping our current philosophical landscape. That is, facing the challenges of Anthropocene, the demand to question the limits and nature of human reason, as well as our understanding of such recently spread notions as 'speculation', 'correlationism', 'reality' or 'actuality'. More precisely, the idealist account of self-determination, of what they call the "experience of consciousness" (*Erfahrung des Bewusstseins*), the question of how reason determines itself, how it steps out of its virtual or merely negative determinations and *becomes* reason in becoming its own event—may seem as a possible response to the current mutation of the sense and the growing state of indeterminacy. In this regard, the general focus and approach of this research is what could be identified as the idealist *performativity of speculative reason*. The research basically sides with such contemporary post-deconstructive readers of

German idealism like Jean-Luc Nancy, Catherine Malabou, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Giorgio Agamben, Werner Hamacher or Rodolphe Gasche, all of whom are searching for alternative ways to bring these thinkers into a fruitful dialogue addressing the urgent demands of our current situation as well as responding to their contemporary critics.

***Aim and objectives.*** The general aim of this dissertation is to investigate *to what extent the Kantian question of the self-limitation of reason can be explicated through the concept of performativity that through Fichte's notion of Tathandlung becomes manifest in the Schelling-Hegel account taken as a whole.* In order to accomplish this, there are several objectives to be fulfilled:

- First, in order to locate Fichte, Schelling and Hegel in the post-Kantian context, it is necessary to clarify Kant's concept of reason and his argument of self-limitation as self-legislation; also to highlight the basic premises of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Critique* which shaped the problematic horizon for the idealists in their concerns with the positive concept of freedom and the primacy of practical reason;
- Second, to delineate the basic tenets of Fichte's reinterpretation of Kant's unity of apperception through his notion of self-limitation as self-positing (*Selbst-setzung*) and his principle of *Tathandlung*.
- Third, to reconstruct the major arguments of Fichte's critique in early Schelling and Hegel: the ontological status of subjectivity, and Fichte's account of the activity of reason and its capacity to account for its actuality.
- Fourth, to examine how self-limitation could be reinterpreted in terms of self-mediation in Schelling and Hegel respectively; and accordingly, what kind of performativity it implies with respect to:
  - the question of self-determination;
  - the problem of beginning, method and initiation of speculative logic;
  - the role of self-relatedness and its transformative potential.
- Fifth, to identify the relationship between Schelling's and Hegel's respective accounts on the activity of self-consciousness, and to evaluate how their encounter can serve as a positive contribution in clarifying the performativity of *Tathandlung*.

***General thesis.*** The general argument of this dissertation is an attempt to justify the idea that *the Schelling-Hegel tandem, taken as a paradigmatic*



*figure of German idealism, redefines the performativity of reason by revealing its affirmative, eventual, and liminal character.*

In contrast to the still prevailing idealistic narratives, which take the subject to be encapsulated within itself, of ontology as reducible to epistemology, and of the tension/opposition/denial of the world and of experience, the idealist performative introduced in this thesis addresses reason as *the taking place of reason*:

1. Kant's transcendental dialectics shows that reason does not have to limit itself by imposing certain boundaries on itself externally but is limited by and through its own experience. His third *Critique* opens a way to understand truth not merely as a cognitive and conceptually defined relation, but it allows to see reason as lying on a more fundamental basis, in an autonomous pre-cognitive power of judgment. In this way, reason constitutes itself as the effect (*Wirkung*) of freedom within nature, reason becomes *self-appearing* reason.
2. Fichte's radicalization of Kant's principle of unity of apperception through his notion of *Tathandlung* ('fact-act')—the facticity of the Ego coinciding with its own activity or Ego existing inasmuch as it acts and acts only within its actions—implies that the self-referring movement of self-consciousness sustains itself only as long as it performs itself to itself.
3. Schelling and Hegel show that Fichte's self-limiting Ego, despite its positive emphasis on the thetic activity of self-consciousness, remains confined in a rigid subjectivity. Its excessive ideality renders it impossible to account for its own actuality. As a result, they expand Fichte's narrow notion of limit understood as conditional and privative *Schranke* by elaborating it to the absolute *Grenze*.
4. Schelling and Hegel, instead of merely opposing or subordinating each other, provide a consummate picture of the performative movement of self-consciousness considered in the post-Kantian idealistic framework. It discloses itself through its affirmative, eventual and liminal character:
  - Schelling-Hegel show that determinacy involves a self-referring action in which the concept (*Begriff*) refers to nothing outside the movement of its grasping (*begreifen*). The concept is not a determinate form but rather an ongoing process of determining and becoming, always exceeding any particular determination, thus disclosing its *affirmative*—deposing and unforming—character.
  - Regarding the question of method, Schelling-Hegel emphasize beginning in the eventual character of *initium* as necessarily preceding and grounding the question of *principium*. In their account,

an actual (*wirklich*) thinking appears to be an initiation to thinking while thinking. It is an event that enters reason interrupting it from within.

- With respect to the transformative potential of consciousness, their account anticipates a necessary dimension of liminal engagement that falls beyond activity and passivity, dialectical appropriation and logical consistency. Self-representation of self-consciousness is reinterpreted in modal terms as an open structure of self-relatedness.

**Method.** The argument structure of this thesis is basically elaborated through several layers: the contextual framework of the post-Kantian paradigm and conceptual patterns of limit and performativity. In order to highlight the relevance of the Kantian heritage, Kant's emphasis on the coincidence of practical and theoretical reason, and its orientation towards the reconceptualization of ontology in the works of Schelling and Hegel, is the thesis relies on the recent works of Karin de Boer (2004, 2015), Dalia Nassar (2013), Alan White (1983) or Gerard Gentry (2019).

The concept of *performativity* began circulating in the field of philosophy of language as early as the second part of the last century (Austin 1962). Gradually it spread in both Anglo-Saxon and continental philosophical discourse far beyond linguistics and it has been widely used in the works of authors as diverse as Searle, Derrida, Habermas and Butler, so that it has become a common word. Despite being a recent invention, this notion has led to the reconsideration of those movements or moments throughout the history of philosophy from Greek and Latin traditions that address language, concepts, logic and subjectivity, insofar as these moments have to do with *acting*, *carrying out* and *making happen*, and not simply stating, describing, referring or expressing (Cassin 2014). These cases do not have any true/false value, for they do not intend 'to say what is seen' but rather 'to make seen what is said' (Cassin). In a sense of being self-referring, performativity in this context is associated more with the notion of 'act' than with that of 'action'. However, our attempt is not to apply this concept merely retrospectively, i.e., in order to investigate, how Schelling and Hegel 'fit' into the contemporary framework of performativity, thereby entertaining, as Frederick Beiser would call it, a certain type of 'ventriloquism' (Beiser 2007). Rather, by relying on their insights and their contemporary interpretations, this dissertation seeks to reconsider and clarify this concept in a threefold manner: i) Rodolphe Gasche (1986, 1998) has already demonstrated the effectiveness of such a strategy by

showing how the performativity of Fichte's concept of *Setzung* can be understood as 'thesis' in the Greek sense. In this way, he opened a way to interpret the idealist performativity against the common thread of its critique in terms of self-grounding, self-justifying, self-presencing and self-knowing absolute transparency. Moreover, by relating it to the question of self-consciousness, he provided the means to radicalize this notion turning it into the question of the way the act is seized *as* an act *during* the act. This thesis further extends and applies with respect to the Schelling-Hegel account. With respect to the question of determinacy, ii) Werner Hamacher's (1997, 1998) concept of *afformativity* is used to expose self-consciousness in its inherent dimension of disruption. That is, instead of being simply self-positing or producing its own content, it also appears as the event of de-posing or pre-posing, being both the 'condition' for the performative and that which also suspends its fulfilment. Understood as the process of forming being itself formless, it appears as never given, nor determinable but nevertheless allowing or *letting* something happen without *making* it happen; iii) with respect to the question of beginning and initiation of thinking through its eventuality, performativity in question is clarified by partly following Jean-Luc Nancy's (1998, 2001) interpretation of the Hegelian *Geschehen*; iv) with respect to the question of relatedness, the dimension of liminal engagement that is neither active, nor passive is exposed by relying on what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1989) recognizes as 'the catharsis of the speculative.' The term 'liminality' is used following ethnographer Arnold van Gennep who coined this term to refer to those phenomena and experiences that have the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs, for example, in the middle stage of a rite of passage. It marks a transitional state, 'standing at the threshold' between different identities, structures and shapes. Anthropologist Victor Turner later developed this concept by showing that liminal experiences may not involve a resolution of this state, they are conditional and do not necessarily result in a change of status (cf. Turner 1974).

***Value of the research.*** The value and contribution of this thesis can be recognized at least in three aspects. First, with respect to the general reception and scholarship in the German Idealism and the question of the Schelling-Hegel relationship after 1807 in particular, the prevailing narrative can be defined as a *diachronic* or evolutionary model. That is one of the authors is usually presented as either advancing (in Hegel's case, cf. Houlgate 1999; 2006; Rosen 2013) or preceding the other (in Schelling's case, cf. Tritten 2012; Freyberg 2008; Matthews 2007; Schulz 1986; Asmuth 2000).

However, insofar as concerns their understanding of the activity of self-consciousness, this model appears to be insufficient. If one takes into account Schelling's and Hegel's emphasis on the necessity to bring the Kantian project of critical philosophy to its extremes in order to "save Kant from himself," it becomes equally possible to justify Hegel's and late Schelling's criticism towards each other. One could successfully justify what Hegel sees as major misinterpretations of the limits of the conceptual in Schelling's thought. Looking from Hegel's perspective, by arguing that conceptual thinking is limited only to the realm of the possible, i.e., being able to produce only the necessary *concept* of the actual instead of actually thinking the actual, Schelling himself can be seen as the representative of negative philosophy, and that is, going back to the "night in which all cows are black" or seeking a "bad infinity." But it is equally possible to reverse the judgment and demonstrate the ways in which Hegel misinterpreted Schelling. It can be shown that what Hegel understands as the absolute immanence of reason, Schelling reveals as what is always ecstatic. Where Hegel identifies the movement of the concept with being itself, Schelling stresses potency and the unprethinkable (*das Unvordenkliche*). The difficulty lies in the fact that even if they both approach the identity of thought and being from different angles, they both still assume it. They both rely on the same performative idealist logic. As soon as we accept that one surpasses the other, the former always appears in the shadow of the latter. Thus, in order to avoid applying such one-sided reductive schemes that would 'resolve' their apparent incompatibility, this thesis suggests an alternative, that is, a *synchronic approach* to the Schelling-Hegel controversy presenting it, not in terms of surpassing, subordination or perversion, but rather seeing it as an *inversion*, a certain chiasmic relation. In this way, the thesis opens a possibility to see Schelling and Hegel as mutually supporting each other, one re-reading and re-writing the other, making explicit what remains implicit in the other. Seeing them as creating a certain continuous movement, then, discloses the unexploited potential 'elasticity' of the idealist speculative logic from within itself and opens another problematic horizon. For instead of sustaining the rigidity of the dialectics of thought and being, the dialectics itself is revealed as being dialectical. Instead of leaving the question of actuality either to the "mercy of reason", to quote Hegel, or surrendering it to the "abyss of reason" as Schelling saw it, bringing them together provides a means to think *between* them.

Second, introducing Schelling as Hegel's counterpart, or sometimes even as a *Doppelgänger*, has a double effect. On the one hand, it contributes to the recent resurgence of interest in Schelling's philosophy in general, and the thinker's late period in particular, which—compared to the width and depth of Hegelian scholarship—still belongs to the periphery. The importance of late Schelling's concept of negative-speculative philosophy and its limits, his notion of contingency and potentiality, and its relevance for understanding modern self-consciousness have been recognized only recently. On the other hand, bringing Schelling and Hegel together also contributes to the recent interpretations of Hegel, which attempt to bring forward those creative dimensions of his thought that seriously take into account questions of accidentality, future, negativity or forming—all that falls beyond or even against the ontotheological framework of Nietzschean-Heideggerian-Derridean readings. Such contemporary authors like Catherine Malabou, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, Werner Hamacher, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe tend to interpret Hegel without simultaneously engaging in discussions with Schelling. Whereas it is quite often the case, as Christopher Lauer (2010), Miklos Vetö (1998), Tom Rockmore (2000) also notice, that what they recognize in Hegel's texts as appearing only implicitly, Schelling articulates more explicitly and rigorously. In other words, involving Schelling in these discussions may provide conceptual tools to further develop important interpretations of Hegel, thereby allowing the issues at stake to be considered from the context of its own immanent critique. Likewise, reading Schelling together with Hegel may also clarify the controversial relationship between negative and positive philosophies in late Schelling—a question that puts the whole idealistic paradigm at stake.

Third, the concept of performativity that is developed and reconsidered throughout this dissertation is also an attempt to contribute to the contemporary debates regarding the very nature and conditions of performativity as such. That is, by moving it from the status of particular utterances to the possibility of establishing a certain *nomos*, order, rule or form, it questions the philosophical enterprise itself. How is thought able to determine itself merely by itself (if we hold to the Kantian assumption that it is a *conditio sine qua non* of philosophy)? How does it legitimize its own claims? And how, after all, does it define its relation to the actual world? In this way, the performativity of self-consciousness discussed in this thesis directly relates to the problem of freedom and self-determination. The thesis clarifies this notion by distinguishing performativity from mere *acting*, understood as mechanical or external execution of certain moves; it also

complicates its self-referential aspect by showing that its point of reference can never be fully determined, as its event coincides with the positing of logos and not vice versa.

*Literature review.* Since, as previously mentioned, the concept of performativity has become a common word, covering a wide range of issues from language to politics and aesthetics, there have been several attempts to approach the idealist tradition within this framework of several different perspectives. Angela Esterhammer in her book *The Romantic Performative* (2001) already attempted to reconstruct the theory of performativity of this tradition by relying on idealist philosophy of language. However, her book is focused more on the question of literature and writing, i.e., with the question of sign and meaning or expressivity—all that could be identified as *pragmatic* performativity, directed to a certain result and accomplishment. By contrast, our attempt is to locate this question on a more fundamental, constitutive level, as Hamacher would suggest, to ask what enables these performative utterances, what kind of performativity is at work in these performatives. In relation to Hegel in particular, Timothy Bahti (1981) has done an insightful study of the introduction to the *Phänomenologie* with respect to the practice of reading, thereby locating the issue in the hermeneutical perspective, through the tension between the reader and the author. Gregor Schäfer (2019) has also attempted to reveal the performative dimension of the idealism in its utopian character and its relation to the political-ethical dimension. However, the question of performativity in Schelling and Hegel simply as such has so far not been widely explored.

More generally, by elaborating the notion of plasticity in Hegel, Catherine Malabou (2005, 2010) comes closer to our intentions as she attempts to think the question of form both in its creative and destructive dimensions as well as beyond the distinction of activity and passivity. Understood as a capacity to give form, to receive it and to destroy it, the plasticity of the Hegelian concept opens a path to think metaphysics as being inherently mutable. Giorgio Agamben (1991), in his own turn, through his analysis of Hegelian discursivity also exposes its eventual and self-referential character. Jean-Luc Nancy (1997) in his reading also emphasizes the role of negativity in Hegel's account of self-consciousness thereby its constant experience of a lack that also makes a crucial moment in this thesis. Thematization of the question of the liminality in philosophy in rethinking its postmodern critique has also been already attempted by David Wood (1990).

However, it is also worth noticing that the performativity in question in this dissertation has no relation to the Marxist interpretation of idealists, nor with the philosophy of action. The Italian movement of the so called *actualism* (e. g. Giovanni Gentile, Bertrando Spaventa, Bruno Bauer, and Arnold Ruge) that appeared in the beginning of the 20th century, despite its emphasis on integrating Fichte's active force in speculative contemplation of the later idealists (passage from *Wirklichkeit* to *Attualità*), this movement still seems to be relying on a rigid distinction between theory and praxis, thereby demanding that one make philosophy *practical*, that is, political, ethical, national etc.

With respect to the recent scholarship done in clarifying the Schelling-Hegel relationship not, as it was mentioned, in terms of opposition, subordination or overcoming, one should mention Christopher Lauer's important study *Suspension of reason in Schelling and Hegel* (2010), where he attempts to reinterpret the concept of *Aufhebung*, not in terms of 'sublating,' as it is commonly understood, but rather of 'suspending.' In this way, by identifying different notions of reason in the development of Schelling and Hegel, Lauer provides tools to approach dialectics itself as that which undergoes transformations thereby exceeding itself. In his book *Freiheit in den Systemen Hegels und Schellings* (1997), Sven Jürgensen attempts to see Schelling and Hegel as both providing legitimate and yet different—*logical* and *analogical*—accounts on the question of freedom, its place within system and relationship to necessity. Regarding Schelling's relation to Hegel in general, one should also mention lucid discussions presented in the essays by Bernard Reardon (1984), Klaus Düsing (1993) and Manfred Frank (1992).

*Research in Lithuania.* Besides individual cases and general research into the history of philosophy, German Idealism has been a rather neglected topic in Lithuania. During the last 50 years, only three dissertations on the topic relevant to this thesis have been defended in Lithuania: in 2014 Edvardas Rimkus defended a thesis entitled, "Kantian Concept of Experience and its Reception" (under the supervision of A. Plėšnys), in 1986. Saulius Arlauskas defended "The Problem of the Unity of Will and Sensuality in J. G. Fichte's Philosophy" (under the supervision of B. Genzelis) and in 1991 Grigorijus Adelšinas defended a thesis "On the Problem of Pure Being in Hegel's Philosophy" (under the supervision of R. Plečkaitis). However, recent years have demonstrated a sign of rising interest in the field, including ambitious

PhD projects and established scholars. It is necessary to mention Rita Šerpytytė's monograph, "Nihilizmas ir Vakarų filosofija" (2007), in which, by examining the phenomenon of nihilism, she specifies the differences between Schelling and Hegel's philosophy. Her text "Galia maštyti. Sąvoka ir negatyvumas Hegelio filosofijoje", which appeared in "Ontologijos transformacijos: medijos, nihilizmas, etika," also examines the role of negativity in Hegel's philosophy. And her recent book "Tikrovės spektrai" (2020) engages in a fruitful dialogue with German idealists and their contemporary interpretations, including the question of performativity inherent in theoretical discourse and its effect to our notion of the actual. In addition to that, Tomas Sodeika's original approach to the question of 'exercising' *Phänomenologie* in his seminar course should also be mentioned.



## I. Problem of the self-limiting reason in the wake of idealism

### I. I. Self-limitation as self-legislation: Kant

#### *The question of Kant's final paralysis*

In a famous and seemingly scandalous letter to Christian Garve written in 1798, i.e., six years before his death, Kant once expressed the necessity to clarify his position regarding his main concerns of the *Critique*. In this letter, alluding to his account on transcendental dialectics he claims: “It was not the investigation of the existence of God, immortality and so on, but rather the antinomy of pure reason—‘The world has a beginning; it has no beginning, and so on, right up to the 4<sup>th</sup>: There is freedom in man, vs. there is no freedom, only the necessity of nature’ that is what first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself.” (Kant 2007: 552) However, just a few lines above, Kant still complains: “I am, as it were, mentally paralyzed even though physically I am reasonably well. I see before me the unpaid bill of my uncompleted philosophy, even while I am aware that philosophy, both as regards its means and its ends, is capable of completion. [...] It must be completed, or else a gap will remain in the critical philosophy. Reason will not give up her demands for this; neither can the awareness of this possibility be extinguished; but the satisfaction of this demand is maddeningly postponed, if not by the total paralysis of my vital powers, then by their ever-increasing limitation” (Kant 2007: 551).

Even though in this letter Kant has in mind a very particular concern, i.e., what he calls the “transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics,” it should not be overlooked how Kant *describes* the antinomical character of his very attempt to complete his project, the necessary drive and the impossibility to do so, to resolve the antinomy of the antinomy itself. It was by limiting and separating the realms of application of pure reason, by distinguishing practical (what should I do?) from theoretical concerns (what can I know?), Kant expected to resolve this “scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself.” However, this division provided an everlasting task for subsequent thinkers and already for immediate successors like Jacobi, Fichte, Reinhold, and Hamann. Many scholars agree that the very concept of *Vernunft* is still one of the most obscure notions in the whole of Kant’s corpus. Questions such as: how reason’s self-legislation can be grounded in its self-limitation, how to account for the relationship and division between practical (or regulative) and speculative (or theoretical)

reason, how reason's unity in this division is possible, and above all, how to accept Kant's proposed primacy of practical reason—all these questions are still among the central debates not only in contemporary Kant scholarship (S. Neiman, P. Guyer, K. Konhardt, H. Allison, J. Freudiger, E. Forster, A. Wood, K. Ameriks, M. Grier, D. Henrich) but also penetrate the works of various major thinkers of our times, *inter alia*—J. Habermas, H. G. Gadamer, J. Searle or R. Dworkin.

However, in accordance with the main focus of this dissertation, namely, *the question of the performativity inherent in reason's self-limitation*, the lengthy passage from the letter quoted above, will concern us for several particular, interrelated reasons: 1) Kant's emphasis on the antinomical character of reason instead of its particular content; the systematic place of antinomy in considering the possibility of philosophy in general and the *Critique* itself, which has often been ignored by his commentators; 2) the sense in which the critique of former metaphysics presented in the Transcendental Dialectic (in particular, the analysis of the 'natural and unavoidable illusion' resulting in ambitions to make *a priori* knowledge of the soul, the world in its totality, and God accessible, as well as the 'amphiboly of the concepts of reflection') can be seen as the driving force of the whole *Critique*; 3) the difference between transcendental ideas and transcendental concepts; and 4) the necessity to separate the realms of reason, which becomes and necessarily *remains* a problem of freedom in the first place.

In order to account for these concerns, we will further focus on the relationship between practical and theoretical reason as it is elaborated in the *Critiques* and Kant's understanding of the excessive nature and the fact of reason.

### ***The excess of reason: amphiboly, illusion, antinomy***

Just before entering the "Transcendental Dialectics," Kant completes the "Transcendental Analytic" with an often overlooked and underestimated appendix titled, "On the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection." In this appendix (and even more in a remark on it), Kant presents what he takes to be a "confusion (*Verwechselung*) of the empirical use of the understanding with the transcendental" (1956: B316; 1998: 366) which becomes apparent when certain concepts (form/matter, inner/outer, identity/difference) are applied either to the things themselves, i.e., when we intellectualize the sensual (according to Kant, this is Leibniz's error), or these concepts are assumed to

be derived from empirical experience, thereby leading to the sensualization of the intellectual (Locke). In order to be able to distinguish between the inquiry pursued with relation to the understanding and the inquiry with relation to sensibility, Kant argues, we need a transcendental topic—a doctrine which, through the transcendental reflection, would provide a comparison between the given representations, that is, whether they belong to the object of sensibility or pure understanding.

However, from the account that Kant gives us, it is still not clear what is the status of this transcendental reflection itself. What is the place of this “place” in the hierarchy of the faculties, if it belongs neither to the pure understanding, nor to the sensibility, and not even to the pure reason? How to understand it as, to follow Kant’s own definition, a certain *Zustand des Gemüts* (1956: B316; 1998: 366)? What Kant seems to show is that in the transcendental reflection concept becomes possible *as possible*, i.e., it is actualized precisely as possible and thus can be grasped as being applied either to the object of pure understanding or sensibility. But does that mean that such reflection itself appears to be amphibolic in a sense that it necessarily takes place as a certain *a posteriori* within every *a priori*? In this regard, it may also be helpful to take into account the distinction between reflective and determinative judgment which Kant makes in the third *Critique*: “If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is *determinative*. [...] But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely *reflective*” (1987: 180; 1974: 312). Yet even if that is the case, it is still not clear how it becomes possible to account for the simultaneous ambiguity of reflexive concepts? That is, how is it possible to discover and recognize this confusion *as* confusion which, nevertheless, according to Kant, is always taking place in the form of transcendental illusion, something necessary and inevitable?

Understanding, redefined by Kant<sup>2</sup> as a “capacity to think the object (*das Vermögen, den Gegenstand sinnlicher Anschauung zu denken*),” and therefore which makes the object possible, provides the concept of possibility, it

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<sup>2</sup>It deserves a separate investigation to look more carefully how Kant radically turns the so far more or less usual distinction between *dianoia-nous, ratio-intellectus* upside down by ascribing objective and empirical cognition to the *intellectus (Verstand)*, which was previously understood as a higher faculty of pure divine and speculative knowledge of god and the essence of being as such. Accordingly, for what he calls reason (*Vernunft*), Kant uses Latin word *ratio* even though it was already used in a somehow similar yet still dogmatic way by Ch. Wolff and others in that period.

provides a possibility to grasp the possible precisely *as what is necessarily possible* and not merely thinkable or imaginable. The space of the possible is the space of a *a priori* synthesis: “If the imagination is not simply there to enthuse (*schwärmen*) but is, under the strict oversight of reason, there to invent (*dichten*), something must always first be fully certain (*völlig gewiß*) and not invented, or a mere opinion, and that is the possibility of the object itself” (1956: A770/B798; 1998: 659). This “fully certain” possibility of the object in general, according to Kant, is the only concept that represents this empirical content of appearances *a priori* and must be always present in cognition. It indicates that the *a priori* synthesis, understood as a way to judge about a certain concept by overstepping its boundaries, i.e., synthetically, is possible only in anticipating the necessary *a posteriority* of its content. It follows then, that if we emphasize the role of the understanding in the “possibilization” of reality—that is, in making possibility a real necessity—every transcendental concept becomes a concept of possibility to appear, to show up. They are concepts of anticipation, of an opening, of something that is about to *happen*. The traditional view that Kant turns metaphysics into epistemology seems to be overlooking Kant’s frequent emphasis on *appearing*, on positing, on affirmation of being in judgment, on the possibility to experiencing something at all in the first place, which is not merely a matter cognizing<sup>3</sup>.

However, if the transcendental presuppositions can indeed be defined as *an a priori of any a posteriori*, it is still not clear, how the understanding can have a concept of the *a posteriori* in advance. How can it have it *a priori*? How can it justify or confirm this necessity, this authority of anticipation, when transcendental cognition is identified as an *a priori* cognition of what is not given *a priori*? The most explicit but no less problematic explanation that Kant seems to provide for us is the inevitable *circular* movement that takes place in this process (and which seems to be often ignored in order to save the ‘consistency’ of Kant’s argument): “They [*transzendente Sätze*] cannot, however, exhibit (*darstellen*) a single one of their concepts *a priori* in any case, but do this only *a posteriori*, by means of experience, which first

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<sup>3</sup>An ontological reading of Kant in a manner akin to Heidegger in *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929), with an exception, perhaps, of Fichte, was never quite popular. Already during his lifetime Kant was identified as proposing nihilism by such figures as F. H. Jacobi (1799). Reinhold, for instance, put all of his own effort into turning the *Critique* into the most rigorous epistemology of science (1790). Hegel, in his *Science of Logic* also claims that if Kant reduced metaphysics to logic, it is about time for logic to become metaphysics (2010: 40; 1986: 45-46).

becomes possible in accordance with those synthetic principles” (1956: A720/B748; 1998:634). That is, even if transcendental judgments differ from mathematical and empirical judgments in that they provide neither pure (as in mathematics) nor empirical intuitions, they still contain “the rule in accordance with which a certain synthetic unity of that which cannot be intuitively represented *a priori* (of perceptions) should be sought empirically” (ibid.). In that case, the possibility of experience coincides with the experience of possibility. Any experience, following the transcendental paradigm, is possible only when these synthetic principles *are already* at work. But if these principles themselves can only expose, and therefore confirm, their validity in experience (even though they never become the objects of experience), in what sense must they be understood as still being strictly *a priori* by providing, as Kant expresses it, “merely the rule”? Can we draw a clear distinction between what is possible and what is actual, between condition and conditioned, between what precedes and what follows experience in this case? Or, perhaps, do we need an approach for a more subtle and mutual relationship? A relationship that would grant a possibility to understand how this circular movement, far from falling into *circulus vitiosus*, is precisely what enables and justifies experience by this apparent self-limitation.

At least in the *Methodenlehre* Kant opens the space to question the rigidity of these distinctions, as well the systematic and constitutive role of transcendental dialectics in the whole critical project—what would become one of the most important tasks for the subsequent thinkers who sought “to save Kant from himself.” The first point to be made is the following: if we assume that the transcendental principle, as an *a priori* synthesis, not only signifies but also *enables* the conditioning relationship as such (be it causality, existence, substance etc.), and if we assume that the principle coincides with the concept of possibility, then it would indeed be superfluous to ask *what is the condition for the transcendental principle? Or how is the transcendental principle itself is possible?* For the transcendental question is already the question of possibility as such, of any possibility. The very nature of the transcendental method/argument is already entangled with self-reference because it establishes itself in exercising itself in experience. In that sense, transcendentality cannot have a ‘meta’ level. Probably, that is why Kant himself explicitly claims that transcendental principles cannot themselves be applied transcendentially (i.e. be “of a use that reaches out beyond the boundaries of experience” (1956: B353; 1998: 386)). They cannot become their own objects because, by grounding and limiting the very possibility of

objective experience, they themselves cannot be experienced in the same manner. Even though the transcendental principles are *discovered* as belonging to the sphere of the *a priori*, they cannot be *applied a priori*, if “being applied” means to presume a certain object with such an intrinsic quality. It may be contended then, that the understanding does not have to limit itself by imposing certain boundaries on itself externally, as if only in order not to fall into contradiction and therefore lose positive cognition. Rather, it limits itself precisely in its demand to be experienced. In order to be applied, it has to take place, it has to appear and it does so only in, through, and as experience: “It is not a dogma, although from another point of view, namely that of the sole field of its possible use, i.e., experience, it can very well be proved apodictically. But although it must be proved, it is called a principle and not a theorem (*Grundsatz und nicht Lehrsatz*) because it has the special property that it first makes possible its ground of proof, namely experience, and must always be presupposed in this” (1956: A737/B765;1998: 642). Thus, it is not merely through self-reference, self-observation or self-construction that reason comes across itself. Rather, Kant shows that thinking is to be thought through, it has to stand up, to appear, to take place and be exercised, thereby becoming not so much a self-knowledge but rather a self-appearing or *self-affection*<sup>4</sup> through which it constitutes and justifies itself in its practice.

Kant often uses juridical metaphors<sup>5</sup> (cf. 1956: A476/B504, A751/B779; 1998: 503, 649) in describing the task of critical philosophy. This raises the question—how we can expect the investigation and prosecution to be properly accomplished when reason acts as a judge and jury in its own trial, when it becomes its own tribunal? Since reason does not have any ‘backstage’, any other ground or criteria than its own eventuality, this apparent self-referring circle appears to be simultaneously superfluous and lacking. It is superfluous in a sense that reason always comes in advance or ahead of itself, for the defendant must first stand up in order to be judged, i.e., the judgment is already taking place. And yet it is lacking in a sense that there is no authority that could stand outside and remain impartial in this court. If critical reason

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<sup>4</sup> The project on which Kant was working on during his last years concerns the “Transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics.” This so-called *Transition* project (published as *Opus Posthumum*) aimed to fill the gap in critical philosophy, to find its missing link. Here he provides a more explicit and detailed account on the idea of *Selbst-affizierung*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Stoddard’s (1988), O’Neill’s (2015) insightful studies on Kant’s usage of legal vocabulary.

becomes aware of categories or forms of intuition only within its own activity, namely, as it thinks them in phenomena, it must assume that the pure concepts themselves must also appear. It must think them and thereby enact them as what Kant calls *selbstgedachte erste Prinzipien*. We do not merely possess them as principles or as innate ideas. As Kant, for example, further clarifies, “I have also thought of certain axioms of intuition; but the principle that was introduced there was not itself an axiom, but only served to provide the principle of the possibility of axioms in general” (1956: A733/B761; 1998: 640). Kant does not grant the axioms of intuition axiomatic status because these ‘axioms’ are not immediately certain, they have to be *shown*, and yet they provide the possibility for those *a priori* synthetic principles to be encountered as immediately certain as axioms.

However, the power of judgment, following Kant, consists of the understanding’s capacity to subordinate particularity to the concept, which is nothing else than the form of synthesis itself, that is to say, a certain *gesture* of generalization. Accordingly, this operation is already directed towards the infinite process of synthesis in every cognitive act. Every phenomenon always appears to be something conditioned in order to be capable of being determined at all. But as soon as the understanding recognizes the universal conditionality of everything phenomenal (since this is the mode in which the understanding operates—it provides a necessary and universal rule for the possible experience in its relational and synthetic character) it grants itself the power to infer and make claims for the unconditional. This, however, can never be given in experience as what is *ipso facto* conditioned. As Kant himself puts it, “If the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned, is also given, through which alone the conditioned was possible. Thus first, the transcendental ideas will really be nothing except categories extended to the unconditioned” (1956: B436; 1998: 461). Accordingly, that means that the *a priori* synthesis reaches the point where it exceeds itself in such a way that it formulates equally acceptable or equally refutable judgments concerning the objective world in its totality. Thus reason, according to Kant, here suddenly encounters its own antinomical character which, in parallel to the amphibolic confusion of the empirical and the transcendental use of the understanding, appears in the confusion of the understanding and pure reason.

The cause of this still necessary illusion (*Schein*) with which reason, according to Kant, “naturally and inevitably” seduces itself, “is that in our

reason (considered subjectively as a human faculty of cognition) there lie fundamental rules and maxims for its use, which look entirely like objective principles, and through them it comes about that the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts on behalf of the understanding is taken for an objective necessity, the determination of things in themselves” (1956: A297/B353-354; 1998: 386). The quest for the highest possible unity and unconditioned completeness of the whole belongs to the reason, which deals with the generation of its own pure concepts, it is the faculty of principles (*das Vermögen der Prinzipien*) or “of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles,” but it cannot provide any additional objective knowledge in a manner akin to the understanding.

What Kant most importantly discovers here, is the ambiguity inherent in every cognition, it is the ambiguity (and not just simply an error), which simultaneously drives, grounds, enables and still forbids knowledge. Yet instead of radicalizing the latter conclusion (like, for example, Hume) and falling into skepticism, Kant realized the belatedness of such a decision. As he famously puts it already in the very first lines of the first edition of the *Critique*, human reason “is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason” (1956: Aviii; 1998: 99). Yet the originality and profundity of Kant’s insight—which will basically serve as a stepping stone for the following thinkers—lies not, as some seem to suggest, in the recognition that reason cannot dismiss these questions due to its perverse inclination for metaphysics and search for the ultimate grounds of reality. To accept this view would make the whole issue which is at stake in the *Critique* inconceivable. Rather, the difficulty lies in the recognition that the apparent antinomical character of reason is an indispensable element for the possibility of knowledge *as* knowledge. For it also discloses its consistency and totality without which any cognition would remain meaningless. Reason always operates in the mode of unity, *as if* (*als ob*) the total sum of conditions would be accessible even though it is obviously beyond any finite experience. For that reason, the main task for Kant in “resolving the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself” is to make it clear, in what sense reason *can* account for its excessive nature and justify its quest for the absolute.



### *The fact of reason*

In the antinomy of pure reason (1956: A405-532/B432-560; 1998: 444-532), Kant clearly shows that the transcendental ideas of pure reason such as freedom, ultimate ground or the highest being cannot have any object. As soon as reason applies its systematic ideas to the possible experience, it immediately runs itself into contradiction, whereby thesis and antithesis can be equally shown to be acceptable or refutable. The transcendental ideas differ from transcendental concepts in that the former can be grasped only problematically, they cannot have any objective determination.

However, Kant is perfectly aware (and this is perhaps what makes it so scandalous) that even after realizing the antinomy *as* antinomy, speculative reason cannot abandon and avoid its systematic ambitions since its drive for unity and completion is the presupposition of the whole critical project. Otherwise it would let itself fall back either to skepticism or one-sided dogmatism, which would directly lead to what Kant calls *die Euthanasie der Vernunft* (1956: A356/B398; 1998:419/409). But why should we seek knowledge at all if we find that it is impossible or at least can never be certain? Why should we write *Critiques* if they cannot fulfil their goals or interests? And yet we do write them. Speculative reason finds itself at a dead end, or at its own limit, but at which it cannot stay: on the one hand, by synthesizing and unifying the representational content of experience, understanding provides conceptual and objective cognition, and thereby expands knowledge. On the other hand, however, the application of understanding cannot be expanded by induction totally and explain the world as an absolute and unconditioned totality of any possible phenomena. It can never become a finished system. Nevertheless, the faculty of understanding, grounded by the unity of apperception, always takes place in a mode of synthesis as “a faculty of unity of appearances by means of rules,” even though the total synthesis of a series of conditions is impossible. In other words, Kant aims to show<sup>6</sup> that such

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<sup>6</sup>In the last part of the first *Critique*, the *Methodenlehre*, Kant makes a clear distinction between *exposition* and *definition*, between *explanation* and *construction*, between *acroamatic proofs* and *demonstrations* in order to describe the apparent “poverty” of philosophical argument: “From *a priori* concepts (in discursive cognition), however, intuitive certainty, i.e., self-evidence, can never arise, however apodictically certain the judgment may otherwise be. [...] Philosophical cognition must do without this advantage, since it must always consider the universal *in abstracto* (through concepts), while mathematics can assess the universal *in concreto* (in the individual intuition) and yet through pure *a priori* intuition, where every false step becomes visible” (A735/B763). Since for the philosophical judgments there are no pure *a*

metaphysical concepts as causality, necessity or substance serve merely as the schemas of a *possible* experience, they are the possibility to *experience* the world and thus cannot be extended beyond any possible experience, as that would render them meaningless and inconceivable.

Likewise, as already mentioned, reason cannot merely dismiss and censor its quest for totality and the unconditional, for the very fact that these ideas inherently belong to reason, not as a content which it can manipulate, prove or believe, but as its *modus operandi*, as its way of acting. And this is not only because otherwise it would be impossible to account for practical reason and the possibility of ethics. As Kant himself notices, “for the very same concept that puts us in a position to ask the question must also make us competent to answer it, since the object is not encountered at all outside the concept” (1956: A477/B505; also *Prolegomena* §56-58; 1998: 504). Reason is obliged to account for its own ideas because the antinomy shows that reason is not only limited within its application but that it is also free. It is capable of formulating and enacting ideas and principles that belong solely to reason. Thus, the problem of its excessive nature has to find its proper place in considering the possibility of the *Critique* itself. The transcendental idea provides the concept of limit which, nevertheless, simultaneously liberates reason from merely serving the pursuit for objective knowledge<sup>7</sup>. Reason cannot complete its

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*priori* intuitions, it cannot construct its object in the same way as, for example, the triangle can be constructed from the concept of the triangle. Thus if we follow Kant’s suggestion that philosophical judgments are those that judge *a priori* synthetically and only *in abstracto*, this already coincides with the definition of the transcendental. This suggests that the philosophical judgment in its very nature consists in inexhaustibly accounting for its own possibility in the first place, instead of being merely applied. It cannot be judged according to its content but rather to its capacity to open the possibility for something to appear.

<sup>7</sup> This view is also held by such contemporary Kant scholars as Richard Velkley, Susan Neiman and Dennis Schmidt. Neiman, for example, claims that “Kant seems to be moving toward a position in which philosophy is no longer a matter of knowledge in the sense he seemed to require” (1994:192), that is, she argues in favor of the regulative, rather than constitutive account. However, by relying on Kant’s reading of Rousseau and by emphasizing the becoming and the developmental character of philosophy as a *practical idea* of reason, she still presupposes a certain ideal or goal of philosophy in advance which still remains problematic for its critical account. The problem of the unity of reason in these accounts are bypassed by limiting philosophy either to the practical or aesthetical judgments. Whereas for our concerns, as we shall see, D. Heinrich’s view is more relevant as he claims: “But it is extremely important that we preserve this unity as a *problem*. From the fact that we cannot justify moral insight theoretically, we should not conclude that objectifying knowledge reached one of its limits in moral insight. Although this is true, it is not the end of all

objective reasonings and provide a totality of determinations because, when it attempts to do so, it destroys itself. In other words, reason can never objectify its own activity, it cannot turn itself into the content of knowledge since it alone is what enables it. Nor can it ask for its own justification in the same way as it justifies knowledge, for it would simply fall prey to a *petitio principii*—reason would ask for what it initially presupposed. However, it is not the case that reason for Kant should merely forbid this knowledge to itself. Rather, Kant simply shows that it is impossible to do so in a consistent way and without falling into contradiction.

In that case, it becomes necessary for Kant to distinguish between regulative and constitutive principles, i.e., between what directs, drives, integrates, unifies, acts or wills and what merely provides synthetic principles or rules according to which objective experience becomes possible, accessible and used for whatsoever technical means. But the difficulty here appears again, because the necessity to separate practical and theoretical reason cannot be grounded in anything else than itself. Otherwise all philosophy would merely become another regulative idea. It would not and could not be real and certain as it would become just another possible way to pragmatically organize and satisfy our thoughts as a hypothetical imperative. That means, this necessity can be grounded only in the fact that reason is *actually, necessarily* and *already* free. In this sense, the question of freedom also becomes not only a question of moral agency, but of justification of the *Critique* itself. And this is probably the reason why the question of freedom had to appear again and even more radically in the third *Critique*, more specifically, in the analytics of the sublime as the experience of the limit of the limit as such<sup>8</sup>. For it is not enough to explain, on what grounds objective knowledge should be possible at all by merely relying on the scientific-technological progress. For it could still be explained as conditioned by our natural, biological or subjective predispositions and so the apparent necessity would become contingent. Kant seems to be aware of this when he claims that his *Critique* seeks for the

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theory. This observation must form the beginning of another way of establishing the unity of ethics and ontology. The facticity of the good must itself become the presupposition of a theory of this facticity” (1994: 86).

<sup>8</sup> As Kant, for example, claims: “For what is sublime in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which though they cannot be exhibited (*dargestellt*) adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility.” (1921: 105; 1987: 99) A much more elaborate account on this can be found in Marcia Cavalcante Schuback’s study (2010).

‘epigenesis of reason’ in contrast to the theories of preformation, which assume our categories of thinking being “implanted in us along with our existence by our author in such a way that their use would agree exactly with the laws of nature” (1956: B168; 1998: 265). For that would leave the whole issue unsolved.

Thus the question here is not how to demonstrate, on a certain meta-level, that the necessary principles of cognition are unconditionally necessary. Rather, the task is to understand, how necessity *becomes necessity*, how principles themselves are possible *as* principles, how reason can grasp itself as ‘originally legislative’, autonomous faculty capable of issuing laws only by and for itself. But what is the fundamental law that can only be the law itself? It cannot be the law *of* or *for* something, that is, the law which refers to something else than itself. It must be the law of law. For that Kant introduces a crucial and yet underestimated notion of *Faktum der Vernunft*. As he puts it, “We may call the consciousness of this fundamental law a fact of reason, because we cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason, e.g., the consciousness of freedom (for this is not antecedently given), but it forces (*aufdringt*) itself on us as a synthetic *a priori* proposition, which is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical” (2002: 46, 1920:142). Here the question regarding the experience of consciousness is already implied. At first sight, it may seem that here Kant betrays all the consistency which he praised as the greatest virtue of a philosopher. He calls a fact that which is not given in reason in advance, but for which it is still possible to account *a priori* and even synthetically, and yet which is not, however, based on any intuition. In Kantian terms, it is formulated as almost insolvable riddle. Even Kant himself admits that “*die Sache ist befremdlich genug*”—the issue is quite obscure (2002: 45; 1920: 142). And yet reason appears to be the most consistent where it finds itself to be the most *inconsistent*.

The fact of reason or the fact *that* there is reason, in order to be approached as the thought of universal legislation (which, accordingly, coincides with the possibility of freedom) can only be approached as what exceeds reason within itself, namely, its own eventuality. It is the fact that reason is already taking place, that it does not know itself, that it has to take decisions and seeks for the whole. In that sense, reason is the effect and the fact of freedom precisely in its undecidedness. Or, to put it more dramatically in a Sartrean manner, it is condemned to be free and to make decisions. Reason has no choice but to be free, even though it can freely choose not to be free. It exceeds itself in a

sense that its principle, in order to become and remain a *principle*, cannot be discovered, created, constructed, deduced or in any other way anticipated in advance since that would deny its unconditionality. Freedom is to be *exercised* and thereby established every time anew, it is to be enacted in order to become what it is. For freedom cannot be merely something to think *about* and possessed once and for all. It cannot be deduced either, because then it would become necessary, and thereby freedom would not be free. Whereas it itself is the possibility of necessity and in that sense, the primacy of practical reason, as Kant suggests, can be defended. The categorical imperative is not and cannot be a universally determined law or provide instructions. Rather, it is a drive towards the universal, a drive towards the whole. As Kant claims, “the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved through any deduction, through any endeavor of theoretical reason, speculative or empirically supported, and hence could not, even if one wanted to forgo apodictic certainty, be confirmed through experience and thus proved *a posteriori*, and yet is—on its own—established” (2002: 66; 1920: 163). It follows then, that in the strict terms of the transcendental deduction, the possibility of reason’s autonomy appears to be grounded precisely in its *impossibility*: reason is free because it cannot know itself as it is in itself, it cannot turn itself into its own object. In that sense, the categorical imperative also coincides with the principle of freedom and reason. And that is why reason itself becomes nature as soon as it discovers its autonomy *from* nature—a point which Fichte, as we shall see, according to his idealist critics, apparently did not reach (at least in his Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*).

Similarly, in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant now no longer focuses on the validity or adequacy of our concepts to the empirical data or our possible autonomy from the sensible world in terms of moral agency. Here, he rather questions the very fact and possibility of this relationship. Not *what* is there to be known in nature (taking for granted that ‘something’ conditioned is already given and only requires determination), but rather how it comes *that* there is something to be encountered or experienced at all. Thus the main concern here becomes the very *activity* and autonomy of the power of judgment, what Kant identifies as the mediating connection between reason (its regulative or practical but yet negative concept of freedom) and intellect (its theoretical concept of nature). Judgment taken as such, according to Kant, “possesses an *a priori* principle for the possibility of nature” (1987: 25; 1921: 31). That is, only because the power of judgment posits its own principle of the purposiveness of nature. It makes nature intelligible and at the same time

external to us. Kant claims, “Insofar as the concept of an object also contains the basis for the object’s actuality, the concept is called the thing’s purpose, and a thing’s harmony with that character of things which is possible only through purposes is called the purposiveness of its form. Accordingly, judgment’s principle concerning the form that things of nature have in terms of empirical laws in general is the purposiveness of nature in its diversity” (Kant 1987: 20; 1921: 25).

In general, Kant’s third *Critique* eventually reveals a possibility to understand truth not merely as a cognitive and conceptually defined relation as it is in empirical sciences which seek correspondence. It allows one to see it as lying on a more fundamental basis, in the power of judgment which—liberated from the caprices of the abstract and formal scientific worldview, which aims to provide positive objectified knowledge—constitutes itself as the *effect* (*Wirkung*) of freedom within nature. Purposiveness without a purpose, a necessary precondition of any coherent and integral cognition. Thus, if we accept that far-reaching and deceptively modest statement of Kant, that “the aesthetic judgment contributes nothing to the cognition of its objects; hence it belongs to the critique that is the propaedeutic to all philosophy” (Kant 1987: 35; 1921: 42-43), then the task for the following post-Kantian philosophy appears to be exactly the effectivity or actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of reason *within* and *as* nature<sup>9</sup>. And precisely the power of judgment, which turns out to be neither conceptual nor empirical, is what enables the unity between reason and nature. Following this line, the Kantian question of the possibility of *a priori* synthesis (or *a priori* synthetic judgments) appears in a new light, because the consequences of the idea of self-limitating reason remained ambiguous: does the basic Kantian assumption of the transcendental philosophy that being can only be known as it *can* be known within the limits of knowing subject leads to the conclusion that thinking absolutely exhausts being or quite the opposite? If reason can indeed limit itself by means of its own resources, what kind of limitation is taking place here if it is not the exhaustion, the end, or the final fulfillment of thought? If there is nothing left

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<sup>9</sup> There are still a lot of controversies focusing on to what extent the general horizon of Kant’s third *Critique* (in contrast to the first or the second) can be regarded as inspiring and shaping the whole spirit of the post-Kantian philosophy in its return to the philosophy of nature, its strong emphasis on aesthetic experience, the question of the absolute and its relation to finitude (e.g. Nassar (2013); Beiser (2011); Frank (2004); Schmidt (2001; 1990); Zöller (2019)). For our concerns, this discussion is relevant as long as it emphasizes the importance of the necessary coincidence of practical and theoretical reason in its attempt to account for itself.

*beyond* the limit, in what sense does it still remain a limit? Apparently, these are the questions which Fichte, the self-declared faithful Kantian, saw as the problem of self-positing reason in the first place, and what later became the core of the late Schelling and Hegel controversy.

## I. II. Self-limitation as self-positing: Fichte

What will be important here, however, in discussing the so-called *Verdienst* of Fichte in further developing the performative character of self-positing and self-limiting reason is Fichte's dynamic account of the absolute *Ich*. It is precisely the threat of drowning that was noticed and so quickly abandoned by Descartes, and only in the end, as we see in his letter to Garve, discovered by Kant, which Fichte attempted to capture as necessarily permeating reason's quest to ground and limit itself within its own resources. Even though (or precisely because of that), as we shall see, Fichte still varied his position rapidly, he recognized the fact that if we look at the "immediately certain" Cartesian egological proposition more closely, we may see that the risk of drowning or even disappearing in one of the reflected images of the self still remains and perhaps becomes even more severe. In other words, the apparent certainty, identity, autonomy and substantiality of the thinking subject, on Fichte's account, appears to be much more ephemeral and owing itself to *action* (*Tat*), *feeling* (*Gefühl*) and *self-intuition* instead of simply *being*, *perceiving* or merely *reflecting* oneself. By simply presupposing the reflecting agent and taking the subject-object relationship as given in advance, reflection becomes insufficient for deducing the necessary subsistence of the *res cogitans*. The proposition 'I think' which Kant called an empirical statement (B422), is thus performative—it literally *brings forward*, it makes it *happen* in the very act of uttering or writing it. Moreover, its performative character makes any attempt to deny or even doubt the fact that thinking is taking place just another exposition of its confirmation. Each contradiction still *performs* the contradicting concept. In other words, it accomplishes itself fully even by running itself down to the contradiction which is also taking place as long as it is thought. Otherwise, it can only rely on its own immediate act which separates the self from itself and thus creates an *aporia* in which the I recognizes itself as being external to itself<sup>10</sup>. In a similar manner, as mentioned in the previous section, Kant's emphasis on the fact of reason which "cannot be proved through any deduction, through any endeavor of theoretical reason,

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<sup>10</sup>It was, above all, the great skeptic David Hume who already noticed that "For my part when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other. [...] I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception" (1896: 130). Kant, in his own turn, converted it into synthetic unity of apperception by arguing for the "function of thinking" and thereby avoiding the problematic ontological and epistemological status of transcendental subject which he discusses in the paralogisms of pure reason.



speculative or empirically supported” and yet is “on its own—established” was necessary in justifying the very possibility of the *Critique*. It required a consistent account on the unity of theoretical and practical reason within itself.

For these reasons, in the following passages it will be attempted to frame the shift which Fichte suggests in accounting on the problem of self-legislation of reason within its own resources. By emphasizing the essentially practical and effective (and not merely regulative or formal) nature of reason he takes the aforementioned incapacity to ground or ‘prove’ freedom within theoretical or deductive means as the only possibility to argue for its actuality and necessity. But more importantly, by doing this he paves the way for raising the question, *to what extent every theory of experience is already and inevitably an experience of the theory itself?* In other words, the ontological horizon of epistemology itself here is put into question as its most limiting and yet justifying force. Fichte’s subject cannot drown because it appears to be substance-less, it has no weight, no ground. It is only hovering and oscillating.

### ***Tathandlung or the (f)act of reason. Fichte’s radicalization of Kant***

During the recent decades, a lot has been done to bring Fichte out of the shadows and margins of the history of philosophy<sup>11</sup>. Such labels as solipsism, atheism, nihilism, subjective idealism, culmination of Cartesian paradigm or a stepping stone from Kant to Hegel are no longer valid in defining the originality and insightfulness of an author, who, during his lifetime was totally convinced that none of Kant’s contemporaries realized the ground-breaking scale of the great discovery made in Königsberg. Already in 1794 (four years after the publication of the third *Critique*), with almost a manifesto Fichte came up with a revolutionary idea of *Wissenschaftslehre* in which he sought to turn Kant’s project of transcendental philosophy into such a ‘doctrine of science’ that could account not only for the *possibility* of knowledge but also for its *actuality*.

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<sup>11</sup> E. g. Breazeale, D. 2013. *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre—Themes from Fichte’s Early Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Zöller, G. 2019. “The Precursor as Rival: Fichte in Relation to Kant”, in: *The Palgrave Fichte Handbook*. Ed. Hoeltzel, S. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp 57-73; Neuhauser, F. 1994. *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Heinrich, D. 1966. “Fichtes Ursprüngliche Einsicht”. In: *Subjektivität und Metaphysik. Festschrift für Wolfgang Cramer*. Eds. Henrich, D; Wagner, H., Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, pp. 188–232.

However, despite the countless efforts, Fichte never made it into a consistent and completed system. And yet even varying his position rapidly, he never abandoned the claim that the possibility of knowledge is grounded upon the self-intuiting, self-positing and self-determining free activity of the Ego in the first place. For that he coined the still problematic term *Tathandlung*, literally meaning “fact-act”. It implies that the facticity of the Ego coincides with and only within its own activity, or Ego existing, in as much as it acts. *Tathandlung* is, according to Fichte, “an activity which presupposes no object, but itself produces it, and in which, accordingly, the acting (*Handlung*) immediately becomes the deed or fact (*Tat*)” (1845: 468<sup>12</sup>). Yet it does not mean, as some of Fichte’s critics, e.g., Jacobi, seemed to suggest, that the Ego dissolves in the phenomenal world or vice versa. Quite the contrary, this, according to Fichte, also establishes the necessary unity and identity of self-consciousness in every cognitive act without requiring one to presuppose any thinking substance in advance. It is as it acts, as it discovers itself in determining the content of thought as the *non-Ego*, but never as a particular determination, but rather as the very act of determining, of grasping, of positing which is taking place. However, in the different presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*<sup>13</sup>, to which we have more introductions than the actual exposition, Fichte gives various complex accounts on the accessibility of this unconditional principle and its relation to the previous metaphysics, including Kant himself. How to understand this self-positing reason<sup>14</sup>, its acting and identity without falling back to dogmatic assumptions? And conversely, how to avoid the arbitrarily constructed standing point which would merely depend on subjective psychological dispositions?

In general, Fichte found himself facing the following issue which Kant apparently left in question or merely ascribed to our given forms of cognition. It is the hiatus left between things and representations. In the first introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), Fichte asks: “What is the source of the system of presentations (*Vorstellungen*) that are accompanied by the feeling of necessity (*Gefühle der Nothwendigkeit*) and of this feeling of necessity itself?

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted after Daniel Breazeale (1993: xiv).

<sup>13</sup> Since Fichte had been working on it from 1794 up until 1810, the whole ambition underwent considerable transformations during the period. Yet the main shift from the “early” to the “late” Fichte is usually presented as occurred in 1799, when he was forced to resign and leave Jena for being accused of atheism.

<sup>14</sup> Obviously, reason understood in Kantian sense is not the same as Ego in Fichte and this gradual transformation from merely regulative to the performative will further be demonstrated.

[...] The system of presentations accompanied by the feeling of necessity is also called *experience (Erfahrung)*, both internal and external. Philosophy, in other words, must therefore furnish (*anzugeben*) the ground of all experience” (Fichte 1845: 423; 1982: 6). That is, Fichte did not find a satisfying response in explaining the actuality of necessity and their peculiar relation. For the question is not how objectivity and thus necessity can be *accessible* to our knowledge (for that was Kant’s question and thus he argued for the necessity of and within the forms of experience<sup>15</sup>). But rather, how the *necessity itself becomes the experienced necessity hic et nunc*, how it takes place, how it comes into being at all? Or, to put it differently, how do I know that I know something *truly*?

If we put it this way, then the Kantian question regarding the conditions of knowledge is preceded by a more fundamental question—what are the conditions of knowing these conditions of knowledge? And it is not merely the same question put onto a higher or *meta* level. By becoming self-referential, it demands a totally different approach and transformed concept of reason compared to that which merely seeks unity and functions in regulative terms. Fichte puts it more explicitly in the second introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (1798-1799), when the question has been raised “whether the system of Critical idealism also possesses *actual reality*, that is, whether the actions (*Handlungen*) of reason it describes *actually* exist. In answering this question, we must distinguish two different senses of the phrase “actually to exist.” If one thereby means to refer to a being within experience, an occurrence in space and time, then the answer to the question is *no*.” And yet “these actions do possess reality for the person who raises himself to the philosophical level; that is, they possess the reality of necessary thinking, and it is for necessary thinking that reality exists. (*Wer sich zur Philosophie erhebt, für den haben diese Handlungen Realität, nemlich die des nothwendigen Denkens und für dieses ist Realität*)” (Fichte 1992: 103–104; 1982: 29-30;).

Fichte is perfectly aware that we cannot think the actuality of the Ego in a sense that the actual is what belongs to the phenomenal spatiotemporal and

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<sup>15</sup> In defining these concepts, Kant seems to be concerned mainly with the modalities of the real: “The schema of actuality is existence at a determinate time. The schema of necessity is the existence of an object at all times” (1956: A145; 1998: 275); or “necessity is nothing other than the existence that is given by possibility itself.” (1956: B111; 1998: 215).

determined experience. In that sense the Ego does not exist, it does not act, but it is *the* acting. The Ego is, according to Fichte, necessary and necessarily present as “grounding” every possible actuality by letting it appear to oneself and appear as itself. But how are we to understand this acting without that which acts and which is neither being, nor creating? What should be emphasized here is Fichte’s attempt to demonstrate the movement of thought following itself only and strictly within its own limits, thinking only what is truly accessible in every perception, namely, the perception itself. That is the major premise of the transcendental philosophy which Fichte tends to radicalize. Before aiming to draw a clear distinction between concept and intuition, reason and understanding, he focuses on what falls within one’s grasp in general. That is, what appears as appearing even though it can *prima facie* lead to the trivial (or even solipsistic, echoing Berkeley) conclusion that *all I can actually ever think and reach are only my own thoughts*. But for Fichte, this by no means presupposes that the external world does not exist, nor that the Ego is something that is already given with its innate ideas that are supposed to serve as the only mode of reality.

Rather, what in Fichte’s approach concerns us, is his attempt to identify the activity of consciousness *together with and as an attempt to grasp this activity*. For in a sense, consciousness can think only what is thinkable and in order to perform thinking, to guarantee its duration and continuity, thinking has to remain thinking, it has to remain *identical*. In a similar manner but used mainly for epistemological and regulative concerns, Kant argued for the synthetic unity of apperception. But consciousness becomes what it is only as it thinks and operates, it has to remain active and Fichte’s point is that it necessarily *acts upon itself*: “The possibility of all consciousness (i.e., determinacy) will be conditioned by the possibility of the self, or of pure self-consciousness. [...] Determinacy follows directly from the fact of being conditioned” (Fichte 1845: 477 1982: 50). And elsewhere: “the concept of the I comes into being only by means of a self-reverting activity; and conversely, the only concept that comes into being by means of such an activity is the concept of the I. By observing oneself while engaged in this activity, one becomes immediately conscious of it; i.e., one posits oneself as self-positing” (1992: 119; 1982: 34). Being grounded in a practical dimension, this “self-reverting activity” of reason for Fichte becomes the Ego which is given in a non-sensible intellectual intuition (incomprehensible for Kant), which is required “in performing the act whereby the self arises for him” and which is “the immediate consciousness that I act and what I enact: it is that whereby I

know something because I do it” (1992: 38). However, even under the “protection” of pre-reflexive intellectual intuition, this self-positing act is not and cannot ever be completed nor fulfilled as that would signify its exhaustion and therefore lead to immobility. This self-referring movement sustains itself as long as it performs itself, and therefore it is such an activity that can never be fully determined, put into any fixed form or identity. That is it cannot merely ‘discover’ itself once and for all. It remains open. Thus the peculiarity of Fichte’s Ego seems to be such that the price it has to pay for its freedom, life and enduring consists precisely in its non-identity, its formlessness and groundlessness.

Understood in this way, such positing activity, by letting the world appear, still becomes *thetic*<sup>16</sup>. It precedes and thereby enables every *synthesis*, as Fichte himself notices (1982: 71; 1845: 502). It is a free and spontaneous act, unconditioned by anything, not even by my own personal will, as it takes place purely by itself just like my waking up in the morning. It is the event of freedom that enables and exceeds every determinacy as it cannot be proved, nor demonstrated and yet remains enduring. For Fichte, it would be absurd to ask then, “why have we started to think at all?”<sup>17</sup> for that would presuppose some transcendent ground which, strictly speaking, could not even be thought, for if it could, it would presuppose thinking and therefore we would merely have to repeat the same question again.

Does it become necessary then, to accept that Fichte’s Ego can justify its freedom (and thereby its possibility) as long as it realizes that freedom is what exceeds Ego within itself? If so, how is it possible to become aware of this? Can the word “awareness” still be used here? In that case, the question “how philosophy itself is possible?” is, nevertheless, not meaningless. For if Fichte argues for the self-positing activity which coincides with what it determines, can it still remain undetermined and thus unconditional once it is grasped (or

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<sup>16</sup> Following Heidegger, R. Gasche has done a remarkable study in showing how the concept of *Setzung* can be understood in a more profound way as “thesis” in the Greek sense. (see Gasche 1998).

<sup>17</sup> A few years later Schelling in his Munich lectures (1827) will formulate this question even more dramatically, and this time even directed against Hegel: „The whole world lies, so to speak, in the nets of the understanding (*den Netzen des Verstandes*) or of reason, but the question is how it entered (*gekommen sei*) these nets, since there is obviously something other and something more than mere reason in the world, indeed there is something which strives beyond these limits (*etwas über diese Schranken Hinausstrebendes*) (2013: 143–4; 1994: 147).

even intuited) as such? If, in being determined in the way just described, the positing activity itself becomes what is posited precisely in being determined *as positing*, what is left for the declared freedom? Even if we know that in *Nova methodo*, Fichte distinguishes between the two fundamental acts of positing, namely, the act of positing itself and the determined positing (1992: 78, 1982: 4), the thesis and the synthesis (which comes together with the antithesis of the world), the question remains the same: what happens when the I actually attempts to exercise and grasp this self-positing if there is nothing to be grasped in it? What happens, when it attempts to *do* it, to posit the self which is nothing else than the act of positing as such? When one attempts not merely to think *about* oneself as, for example, Fichte or any other thinker writes *about* consciousness and thereby *imitates* it, but rather actually attempts to *make* such a move towards itself?

There are many passages where Fichte asks precisely for this personal engagement (in a sense, it could be also called intellectual intuition, which is different from the sensible intuition) of the reader. He even declares that, without this engagement, there could be no use of his whole *Wissenschaftslehre* at all, nor would it be possible to distinguish it from the dogmatism. For example, in the first 1797 introduction to *WL* he begins by calling the reader simply to attend to oneself (*Merke auf dich selbst*) (1845: 420, 1982: 4). As he claims, “this consciousness cannot be demonstrated to anyone; each person must freely create it in himself” (1845: 429, 1982: 11); “I am compelled to presuppose myself as that which is determined by self-determination. [...] for it is not determined but will only be determined by me, and without this determination is nothing, and does not even exist” (1845: 428, 1982: 10); Critical idealism has to “allow the whole compass of our presentations to come gradually into being before the eyes of its readers or listeners” (1845: 442, 1982: 22); “Whoever performs (*vornimmt*) this act of freedom will come to be aware of it, and lay out, as it were, a new field (*Gebiet*) in his consciousness: for one who does not perform it, that which the act conditions does not exist at all (*für den ist das durch ihn bedingte gar nicht da*)” (1845: 449, 1982: 28). The *Wissenschaftslehre* calls upon every person to reflect upon what he does when he says “I” and yet he concludes (!) “we can never be actually conscious of the original act of positing, for it is itself just the condition for the possibility of all consciousness” (Fichte 1992: 82, 85). So what Fichte is asking for when he puts us on the scene, when claims that the selfhood (*Ichheit*), the *lebendiges und fühlendes Selbst*, in contrast to the individuality, is the one that separates itself not only from other persons,

but from everything else? What is the self that shouts if someone hurts it by accident: “Hey! That is *I*, you are cutting *me!*” (1845: 504, 1982: 73).

By assuming that the possibility and necessity of philosophy coincides with its own event, Fichte returns to Kant’s idea of a categorical imperative with a different approach. He expands its fundamental importance for the possibility of theoretical reason and determinacy without yet entering the sphere of moral agency (1845: 472, 1982: 45). If, in the early writings, Fichte still insisted on “demonstrating,” “deducing” or “proving” the necessary foundation and the first principle of all science of knowledge, the later Fichte, in the presentations of *WL 1797*, aimed to gain an advantage precisely from the opposite, from the impossibility to provide any proof at all. Instead, as we saw, he aimed to show that there is no choice but to rely on one’s own elasticity of thought and one’s capacity to form it, to affect it. It cannot be proved but it can be done. In the *dictata* to Fichte’s lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1798-1799), there is a short paragraph entitled, “The Character of the I as the Identity of Practical Power and Intellect” which states: “Free self-determination is intuitable only as a determination to become “something,” of which the self-determining or practical [power] must possess a [freely constructed] concept. A concept of this sort is called ‘the concept of a goal.’ Consequently, for the intuiting subject, the same subject who possesses practical power at the same time possesses the power to form concepts, just as, conversely, the comprehending subject, or [the power of] the intellect, must necessarily be practical” (Fichte 1992: 68). It seems that, understood as a fundamental (f)act of freedom, philosophy for Fichte becomes no more than a self-positing of self-positing or an acting the acting. Yet in that case, those rigid distinctions, upon which Fichte relies, namely, the Ego and non-Ego, form and content, ideal and real, subject and substance, finitude and the absolute, conditioned and the unconditional etc. become at least problematic if not wholly untenable, requiring us to search for a way to think beyond them and their rigidity. For here we encounter several different issues related to what has been said so far.

First, Fichte leaves open the question, how the unconditional self-positing can still be given to us and expressed. He claims that “we can never be actually conscious” of it but, nevertheless, that it is accessible in intellectual intuition. But how does it remain active and not suspended, if, as soon as this self-reverting activity turns to itself *as* itself, it determines itself and thus denies its unconditionality precisely by this act of reverting? Therefore it also seems necessary to answer, to what extent the free self-positing activity has still yet

to be always *performed in the adequate or authentic way* in order to become what it is. And finally, if determining the limits of reason (now understood as this self-positing activity) coincides with establishing these limits, can this self-positing activity ever become transparent to itself, preserve its identity, self-presence and immediacy? If it cannot, could then this performativity of reason—instead of being understood in terms of, *pace* Derrida, immediate self-grounding, self-determining and self-exposing subject—be presented, rather, as *the event or taking place of self-ungrounding, self-undetermining, and self-mediating thought*? These questions need to be investigated further.

These are the questions that will apparently signify Fichte's greatest merit and his greatest fault according to criticisms originating with Novalis and Hölderlin<sup>18</sup> and, as we shall see, reached their peak in Schelling and Hegel. Even though he emphasized the priority of the practical dimension of reason in justifying its unity, Fichte still seemed to remain trapped within the negative concept of freedom of the second *Critique*. As a result, it rendered it impossible to deal with the consequences of his own original insight and to account for the *actual* unity of freedom and necessity. His far-reaching ambitions with such self-referential structures like philosophy of philosophy, knowledge of knowledge or idea of the idea demanded that we search for a radically different approach, allowing the elimination of a *meta*-view stance from above or outside in the act of self-consciousness with all its side-effects. Yet how far Fichte went in resolving these issues with the later presentations of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, i.e., after 1799, is beyond the scope of this work and requires a separate study of Fichte.<sup>19</sup> Having all this said, in the following chapters this essay will attempt to show how in Schelling's and Hegel's analysis of the activity of self-consciousness we can trace a possible response to all this. We shall argue against presenting their unshaken belief in the first principles, completed and closed eternal systems, omnipotence of reason, pure presence or immediacy. That is quite frequently accepted Nietzschean-Heideggerian-Derridean evaluation of the period. They, it will be argued,

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<sup>18</sup> See Novalis *Fichtestudien (1795-6)*; also Hölderlin's *Urtheil und Sein (1795)*.

<sup>19</sup> Recent and quite promising studies include: Zöllner, G. 2018. "Ein ewiges Werden. Die Selbstdarstellung des Absoluten als Wissen beim mittleren Fichte". In: *Systembegriffe um 1800-1809. Systeme in Bewegung*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.; Lang, S. 2018. "Fichtes Begründung der Erscheinungslehre im Zweiten Vortrag der Wissenschaftslehre von 1804". In: *Systembegriffe um 1800-1809. Systeme in Bewegung*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. On Schelling's account, Fichte's reformulated system is even more problematic (see their correspondence in 1801).



provide an approach to see this movement as being driven not by ever-increasing objectification (or stabilization) of knowledge within the limits, means and grounds of infinite subject, but by reason's *incapacity* to provide these grounds and limits. It is an incapacity which coincides with the taking place of liminal thought whose very *eventfulness* determines and embodies the horizon for any identity of thought and being.

In this regard, the fall of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century and the intimation of the forthcoming gigantomachy for the absolute can perhaps best be described through the lines of one of Fichte's students, Friedrich Hölderlin, written in 1795: "*Am Tage, da die schöne Welt für uns begann, begann für uns die Dürftigkeit des Lebens. Wären wir einst mangellos und frei von aller Schranke gewesen, umsonst hätten wir doch nicht die Allgenügsamkeit verloren, das Vorrecht reiner Geister. Wir tauschten das Gefühl des Lebens, das lichte Bewußtsein für die leidensfreie Ruhe der Götter ein. Denke, wenn es möglich ist, den reinen Geist!*" (*Hyperions Jugend*, 1958: 211-212).

### I. III. Self-positing as self-suspending: Fichte's critique in Schelling and Hegel

Given the context of Fichte's critical reception by his contemporaries (e.g., Jacobi or Reinhold) and the rising voice of Schelling and Hegel in the philosophical scene, the aforementioned 'painless peace of Gods (*leidensfreie Ruhe der Götter*)' that appeared to be gained with the absolute activity of the self-intuiting, self-limiting *Ich* of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* soon revealed its hidden and yet necessary despair. For Schelling and Hegel, this 'painless peace' seemingly turned out to be that kind of anaesthetic peace that can only surround God's grave. Or, relating it to the image of Descartes' fear of drowning, it turned out that precisely the weightless *Ich* was the reason of its dissolution and losing itself in its own striving for itself.

One cannot ignore the width and complexity of the issues regarding the relationship between Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. For example, it is the problematic tension between different versions of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, before and after 1799, when the concept of the absolute is transformed dramatically and becomes impenetrable; also early Schelling's<sup>20</sup> still developing *Naturphilosophie* and the system of identity; or early Hegel's gradual escape from Schelling's influence as well as from his theological background. There is still much dispute revolving around the apparent and factual differences between them<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, in accordance

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<sup>20</sup> Even though there is no general agreement concerning the division of Schelling's development (which is also another highly conventional assumption), for the sake of clarity, I side with the view of such Schelling scholars like Jason Wirth (2000) in holding that the basic shift from the 'early' to the 'late' or 'middle' Schelling was made with the appearance of *Freiheitsschrift* (1809). As for Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) is commonly accepted as his first mature breakthrough. In subsequent chapters it will also be shown that there lies another and no less important basis for locating this period since it coincides with the end of friendship and of any explicit communication between the two thinkers.

<sup>21</sup> Recent studies include: Snow, D. E. 2018. *Schelling. Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine: An Elucidation of the Former*. New York: SUNY Press; Hühn, L. 2005. "Die Verabschiedung des subjektivität theoretischen Paradigmas. Der Grund Dissens zwischen Schelling und Fichte im Lichte ihres philosophischen Briefwechsels". In: *Fichte-Studien*. Vol. 25, Leiden: Brill, pp. 93–111; Chédin, M., Galland-Szymkowiak, M., Weiss, M. B., (Ed). 2010. *Fichte/Schelling: Lectures Croisées/Gekreuzte Lektüren*. Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag; Vater, M., Wood, D. 2012. "Introduction". In: *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800-1802)*. Albany: SUNY Press.

with the general framework of our major question, namely, the activity and limits of self-consciousness in late Schelling and Hegel, only two related aspects of their early Fichte's critique will be distinguished and discussed in general terms. That is i) *the insufficiency of the merely ideal and subjective principle of the absolute Ich and its impossibility to account for its actuality* (Schelling's emphasis) and ii) *the apparent confusion of Grenze and Schranke* understood in a Kantian sense<sup>22</sup>, *in understanding the activity of the self-limiting (selbst beschränkend) Ich as the Nicht-Ich* (Hegel's emphasis). It is important to take this approach in its twofoldness: Hegel argues against Fichte's concept of identity, which appeared to him as still contradicting itself since it remained entangled in opposition. Whereas in Schelling's view, this identity remains too abstract and "too identical," missing its differential quality and thus demanding to accept the negativity inherent in the very structure of self-positing consciousness and not merely in its effect. As a result, philosophy of nature was introduced. And yet though emphasizing different aspects, neither Schelling nor Hegel disagreed in identifying the

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<sup>22</sup> As Kant determines it in §57 of *Prolegomena*: "*Grenzen (bei ausgedehnten Wesen) setzen immer einen Raum voraus, der außerhalb einem gewissen bestimmten Platze angetroffen wird, und ihn einschließt; Schranken bedürfen dergleichen nicht, sondern sind bloße Verneinungen, die eine Größe affizieren, sofern sie nicht absolute Vollständigkeit hat. Unsre Vernunft aber sieht gleichsam um sich einen Raum vor die Erkenntnis der Dinge an sich selbst, ob sie gleich von ihnen niemals bestimmte Begriffe haben kann, und nur auf Erscheinungen eingeschränkt ist.[...] Allein Metaphysik führet uns in den dialektischen Versuchen der reinen Vernunft (die nicht willkürlich, oder mutwilliger Weise angefangen werden, sondern dazu die Natur der Vernunft selbst treibt) auf Grenzen, und die transszendentale Ideen, ebendadurch, daß man ihrer nicht Umgang haben kann, daß sie sich gleichwohl niemals wollen realisieren lassen, dienen dazu, nicht allein uns wirklich die Grenzen des reinen Vernunftgebrauchs zu zeigen, sondern auch die Art, solche zu bestimmen,*"(1977: 226). Even though in the most recent English version presented by Gary Hatfield (2004: 104) (also Allen W. Wood 1996) it is suggested to translate *Schranke*—as "limit" and *Grenze*—as "boundary," there is no general consensus how to translate these crucial concepts not only in Kant's but in Schelling's and Hegel's scholarship as well. For example, Theodore M. Green, Hoyt H. Hudson translated Kant's *Die Religion innerhalb der Gränzen der bloßen Vernunft* as *Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason* (1934) which for a long time has been widely accepted. T. K. Abott also translates *Grenze* as "limit." In this text, however, *Grenze* is deliberately translated as "limit" for several reasons: i) for its etymological relation to the concept of "liminality" which also partially furnishes the argument of this thesis; ii) for the German *Grenze* origin in Slavic *грань* – meaning "the brink," "the edge" and also "the threshold" which is also important for tracing the transition from reflection to speculation; iii) taking into account A. V. Miller's (1998) suggestion to translate Hegel's *Grenze* as limit (also G. di Giovanni 2010) and *Schranke* as limitation, thereby locating *Schranke* within *Grenze*.

*crisis of the self-positing subject in its attempt to account for and thereby actualize itself.* They show that Fichte's Ego equally leads to both extremes of absolute identity or absolute difference. And the major inconsistency lies in that they remain *in* and *as* the extremes, there remains a boundary dividing these oppositions and Fichte urges us to choose sides. Whereas the task of speculative thinking, the thought of *Grenze* and not of *Schranke*, as Schelling and Hegel seem to allow, lies precisely in its dwelling *on the limit* (what they for a short time would call the *Indifferenzpunkt*) and, therefore, it is made absolute, where there is no inside, no outside, there is nothing to be given, represented or produced, but only exercised. For the limit itself is something that always remains double—it exceeds itself as soon as it is discovered.

However, the peculiar way in which Schelling and Hegel formulate their critical argument should not be overlooked. For, in its speculative accomplishment, this essay argues, their argument preserves Fichte's emphasis on a *thinking which becomes self-transformative in its very practice*. That is, it remains consistent with its performative character, taking into account that the activity it undertakes also establishes and maintains its content. In that sense, their argument is a perfect demonstration of how thought is actually taking place in contrast to the merely formal enterprise. The point which idealism reached after Fichte demanded to give up earlier presuppositions and rather derive them backwards (what earlier was identified as the *a posteriori* of any *a priori*), instead of merely applying a certain method in advance in order to deduce the desired goal—be it absolute, freedom, unity, nature, reality etc. For Kant already showed that to discover the contradiction also means maintaining it.

***The excessive ideality of the Ego, or what happens when we subjectify the subject?***

Regarding our current concerns, a very eloquent quatrain echoing the Book of Exodus 3:14, written in Schelling's handwriting, should be quoted here: "*Ich bin der ich war / Ich bin der ich sein werde / Ich war der ich sein werde / Ich werde sein der ich bin*"<sup>23</sup>. For it hints at something Fichtean—is the I never the one who is?

Schelling's dissatisfaction with Fichte's one-sided and all-too-idealistic idealism which, according to him, "is not yet philosophy" was painfully felt

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<sup>23</sup> Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Archiv-Sign.: NL Schelling, 86, S. 20.

and directly expressed in their correspondence. It happened even before the appearance of Hegel's famous *Differenzschrift* (1801) and *Wissen und Glauben* (1802), where the major premises and principles of *Wissenschaftslehre* were explicitly ridiculed and criticized. Some scholars even argue<sup>24</sup> that already in Schelling's *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus* (1795) we can find the first traces of Schelling's break with Fichte's pure *Ich*, as, for example, in the ninth letter he contends: "Hence, if I posit all in the subject, I thus deny all of the object. Absolute causality in me does away with all objective causality as objective for me. In widening the limits of my world, I narrow those of the objective world. [...] However, criticism would deteriorate into Utopianism (*Schwärmerei*) if it should represent this ultimate goal as attainable at all (even though not as attained)" (1980: 192, 1859: 336). After realizing the impossibility of accounting for the manifold of the objective world within purely subjective Fichtean terms, Schelling becomes obsessed with the idea of *Naturphilosophie*, "a material proof of idealism" (2012: 44)—as he ambitiously puts it himself. According to him, *Naturphilosophie* should serve as a missing and supplementary element to the system of transcendental philosophy,<sup>25</sup> so that both approaches would accomplish the true and authentic system of identity. However, it is still to be clarified what it actually means to introduce the philosophy of nature as the missing counterpart of transcendental idealism. Why is it necessary,<sup>26</sup> if it is not supposed to be a merely nostalgic gesture towards the *Ding an sich* in the pre-critical sense? How does it affect the structure and activity of self-consciousness? How does it determine the limits of self-consciousness? These are the questions that bring us back to Kant's third *Critique* and to his emphasis on reflective judgment, which, if we recall, "possesses an *a priori* principle for the possibility of nature."

It was already discussed how the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* opened up a possibility for thinking the object, such that it would *not* merely be conceived in terms of a limit within the horizon of necessary laws of empirical cognition, alien to the realm of freedom. Rather, it gives us an opportunity to think the

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<sup>24</sup> Hühn (1998), Bruno (2013), Vater (1984).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur als Einleitung in das Studium dieser Wissenschaft* (1797); *Von der Weltseele* (1798); *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (1799); *Das System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800).

<sup>26</sup> In this context a very important study was made recently by Jason Wirth, who expands the Schellingian question of nature to the relationship of time and the imagination. See his *Schelling's practice of the wild* (2015, Albany: SUNY Press).

object itself teleologically, as purposiveness without a purpose, a being which appears of the *effect* of freedom, even if this effect is still understood in terms of reason's activity *within* and *as* nature. In that sense, the concept of objectivity was provided with its primordial, though critically reinterpreted, ontological character. To this extent, Fichte indeed elaborated upon the third *Critique*, taking it to its extreme horizon. By claiming that the *Ich* as pure, infinite and unlimited activity (*Ich = Ich*) posits, manifests and encounters itself in nature by limiting, forming and determining itself (*Ich = Not-Ich*), he attempted to demonstrate the necessary unity of ideal and real activities, of a subject coinciding with the object. For him every finite phenomena is simultaneously the experience of the infinite self, albeit in a state of permanent resistance to itself. Self-limitation now appeared to be not merely a formal demand to determine the limits of any *possible* knowledge as the rhetoric of the first *Critique* seemed to suggest. Instead, it became the very way thought *actually* discovers and experiences itself, the very way in which it thinks and manifests itself to itself in the finite, i.e., self as always the other. In that sense, it would not be very difficult to trace the ideological origins of *Frühromantik*, what Oscar Wilde once called “Caliban’s fury at not seeing his face reflected in the mirror” back to the writings of Fichte. But how does this self-limitation *actually* take place and perform itself? What kind of absolute is being created? It is important to note that self-limitation relates to the performativity in question via “taking place”—the place, status, position, something determinate. Though for Schelling and Hegel, Fichte’s account would soon prove itself to be no less problematic, its ‘gravest error’ turned out to be the *felix culpa*—precisely what had to be accepted (instead of being somehow corrected or rejected), maintained and established.

Schelling and Hegel discover and make it clear that the closer this account of self-limitation brings us to the promised land of unity between real and ideal, the deeper the gap between form and content, determinacy and indeterminacy. The price the *Ich* has to pay for its purity is nothing more than the whole world. They simply ask: if the pure activity, which ideally is unbounded and absolutely free, comes into being by limiting itself, what else, strictly speaking, can be said of any subject whatsoever except that it exists as undetermined *Nicht-Ich*? Moreover, if the *Nicht-Ich* is conditioned by the *Ich*, then one is forced to admit that the *Ich* must also be conditioned by the *Nicht-Ich*. The apparent contradiction is formulated by Hegel in the following way: “The Ego posits itself as not posited (*Ich setzt sich als nicht gesetzt*). In this move the immanence of the Ego even as intelligence is asserted in respect of

its being conditioned by something other = X. But this only gives the contradiction another form; it has now become immanent itself. The Ego's positing of the opposite and its positing of itself contradict each other" (1977: 128; 1970: 63-64). In that sense, the absolute *Ich* is no longer absolute or it can remain such always only potentially, formally or virtually but never actually. In other words, it can only be *thought about, sought or presupposed* but never *accessed or actualized*. For in reality the *Ich* strives for *Ich*, since it is a drive (*Trieb*), it strives for itself but finds only *Nicht-Ich*, as Novalis also noticed. Every appearance is thus only a negative trace of this pure activity which can only be presupposed since the product and the producing remain separate. The limiting activity does not coincide with freedom. In that sense, the phenomenal-natural-objective world can only be understood as a self-withdrawal of the *Ich*<sup>27</sup>, a world which at the same time remains neither within, nor outside itself. And ironically, this shrinking is precisely the result of an attempt to introduce idealism as the "only possible and genuine system of philosophy." As Schelling also notices in his letters to Fichte: "You believe you have fulfilled the whole demand of speculation through the latter [viz., taking the path of idealism to explain conditioned appearance]; and here is one chief point on which we differ. [...] Either you must never depart from seeing, as you express yourself, and that precisely means from subjectivity, and then every single I, as you say once in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, must be the absolute substance and remain so, or if you depart from it to an equally incomprehensible real ground, this whole reference to subjectivity is merely preliminary" (1856a: 96; 2012: 61). Thus, it follows that if the sole object of philosophy is merely the activity of the I, there is not much left to add to its purity. For it becomes, to paraphrase Hegel, action pure and free—knowing *of* the knowing or intuition *of* the intuition which, as we shall see, is still different from Aristotelian νόησις νοήσεως as understood in the Hegelian and Schellingian manner.

Accordingly, in Schelling's and Hegel's readings of Fichte, the identity of self-consciousness presents itself in a radicalized form of Kant's regulative idea and substantiation of the categorical imperative<sup>28</sup>. In this way, it creates a kind of, to borrow an expression from David Farrell Krell, "tormented

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<sup>27</sup> Werner Hamacher has provided an insightful critique of Fichte's performative *Setzung* by revealing its 'impotential' character (1997).

<sup>28</sup> Joan Steigerwald also notices that "Fichte's science of knowledge thus only transposed the rupture at the core of Kant's system of philosophy into a rupture within the self." (2002: 548).

idealism” (2005: 49), where the *Ich* is absolute only in its struggle to become absolute: its infinite poverty is the infinite possibility of wealth: “*Ich soll gleich Ich sein*” (Hegel 1970: 97). In other words, the excessive subjectification of the subject-object<sup>29</sup> turns against itself and suspends its own striving. What is being posited only exposes an incapacity to posit the positing itself, an incapacity *to become* what it already is. It performs merely its own undoing. As Hegel also puts it, “for Reason itself nothing is left but the impotence of self-suspending requirements and the semblance of a formal mediation of nature and freedom by the intellect through the mere Idea of the suspension of the antitheses. [...] But the antithesis itself has not vanished. On the contrary, it has been made infinite; [...] From this highest standpoint [of reflection] nature has the character of absolute objectivity, that is, of death;” (1970a: 77; 1977b: 140). Moreover, if nature is only the negated *Ich*, then, also the reality of the *Ich* (or what Fichte also sometimes calls *Vernunftwesen*) turns out to be accessible merely as its own corpse: the death of nature within nature itself.

Why then, should this kind of self-limitation ever take place at all, either in thought or in nature? Is there a way to think it not in terms of deprivation, obstruction or even annihilation of life and the real? Is there a way to see it not as leading to the death of life, but maybe—to the life of or within death? The question of nature for Schelling and Hegel thus becomes the question of the very life (or what they call the *Lebenskraft* or *Lebendigkeit* and no longer a mere activity) of self-consciousness, with all its loss and abundance, its worldly despair and ecstasy.

### ***Towards the liminal point of speculation***

In another letter to Fichte, written by the end of 1800, Schelling continues his unexpected—and for Fichte even incomprehensible—gesture, by claiming that “precisely this ideal-real I, which is merely objective but for this very reason simultaneously productive, is in its productivity nothing other than Nature. [...] I simply cannot imagine that in transcendental philosophy reality is just something found, nor something found in conformity with immanent laws of intelligence; for in that case, it would not be the laws of the object of

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<sup>29</sup> In his *Clara* (1811), Schelling also notices that modern philosophy, “Because it wanted to spiritualize itself completely, it first of all threw away the material that was absolutely necessary to the process and right from the very beginning it kept only what was spiritual. But what is to become of the spiritual if it is spiritualized again?” (2002: 2).



philosophy, which is not that which finds reality but is itself that which produces it (*was nicht das Findende, sondern, das Hervorbringende selbst ist*)” (2012: 44; 1856a: 58). This important remark concerns us for several reasons: i) first, it needs to be clarified, how and in what sense Fichte’s act of *positing*, which for Schelling still appears to be passive, and which thereby presumes reality merely as given and found, becomes the act of producing understood as *bringing forth, hervorbringen*; that is, we are concerned with how this concept of producing differs from a mere deduction or self-extension; ii) second, how this producing is related to the problem of self-limitation of reason and self-consciousness; and how it refers to the previously mentioned difference between *Schranke* and *Grenze*.

It seems that, contrary to Fichte’s own impression, what Schelling suggests does not reject Fichte’s concept of self-positing, as he explicitly states that he is not against it; rather, Schelling is expanding it (2012: 45; 1856a: 60-61). Indeed, it appears as an attempt to fully embrace and endure all the burden of the previously discussed consequences of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. That is, Schelling remained faithful to the Kantian critical spirit of thought which thinks only what it lives and knows only what it *can* think and know—thought, which coincides with the opening of the world and follows its own eventuality. Thus, in their quest for the actual, or what Hegel calls *lebendige Anteil* (1970: 15) of thought, Schelling and Hegel ventured on what Fichte *performed*, rather than what he merely declared, deduced, intuited or presupposed.

Therefore what Hegel and Schelling attempt to show us can be expressed in the following way: *if*, instead of the absolute identity or synthesis, for which the *Ich* strives, it were left only with the absolute separation between real and ideal, finite and infinite; *if* self-consciousness could not account for its own activity in any other way than sacrificing its own freedom; *if* every object and determination appears as the most concrete evidence of the unsurpassable finitude and mediation of the self; *and if* one still could not surrender oneself neither to faith (as Jacobi suggested), nor to skepticism (*à la* Schulze); *then*, given the fact of reason, which is already taking place, and given that this taking place coincides with its self-articulation (i.e., transcendental ideas, as Kant showed, cannot remain mute), then all of this could only lead to the recognition that this is precisely how *self-consciousness reaches the absolute by reaching its own limit* beyond which there is no longer any beyond. Its absolute finitude appears to be precisely what makes it infinite. The

impossibility to reach the absolute synthesis becomes the only path towards it.<sup>30</sup> In other words, negativity was found to be lying at the very core and possibility of any synthesis, identity, determination and even freedom—this is the ‘real’ in the *reelle Entgegensetzung* to which Schelling and Hegel are pointing. For “philosophy must give the separation (*Trennen*) into subject and object its due (*sein Recht widerfahren lassen*)” (Hegel 1977b: 156; 1970a: 96) In that sense, the assumed ideal activity of the subject lost its privileged inwardness. It had to be “thrown out of itself,” so to speak, to become itself in the realization and production of and as nature (though Hegel eventually calls it *Vernunft* or *Geist*)—with all that was lying under the so far suppressed idea of nature since Spinoza.

Having said this, we can now understand Schelling’s claim in his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797) that nature “necessarily and originally, should not only express (*ausdrücke*), but even realize, the laws of our mind (*Gesetze unsers Geistes*), and that she is and is called nature only insofar as she does so (*daß sie nur insofern Natur sei und Natur heiße, als sie dies tut*) [...] for the philosopher, experience is in fact not the principle but the task of construction, not the *terminus a quo* but the *terminus ad quem* of construction” (1995: 41-42; 1907: 151). Thus, far from Fichte’s oversimplified interpretation that such construction falls into an error arising from the obvious circularity of deriving nature from intelligence and *vice versa* (ironically, it was Fichte himself who was accused for such inconsistency), Schelling admits it is impossible to ground or deduce the necessary laws of intelligence either in advance or once and for all. If that was somehow still possible, the question of the living thought (or the ideal-real, that comprises the *Lebenskraft*) or even the identity of thought and being—all that would be merely superfluous and unnecessary. And if, as Schelling seems to suggest, there is nothing simply given, not even myself, not even my experience, then precisely because of this undecidedness self-consciousness is open to come into being and become real. Thus the question of the real or nature shows up not merely as the problem of the content or insufficiency of the ideal in its formal character, as Hegel saw it in the case of Fichte. Rather, it shows up as a task for thinking to become, to take place and to live through itself. In this

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<sup>30</sup> It should be also mentioned that already in his *Fichte Studien* (1795-1796) Novalis observed that “*Durch das freiwillige Entsagen des Absoluten entsteht die unendliche, freie Tätigkeit in uns, das einzig mögliche Absolute, was uns gegeben werden kann, und was wir nur durch unsre Unvermögenheit, ein Absolutes zu erreichen und zu erkennen, finden*” (2001: 312).

sense, nature indeed constructs itself *in* and as *our* very inquiry into it, though “from the fact that reason gives laws to experience it does not follow that it has the right to contradict experience” (Schelling 1858: 100). In this sense, the idea of construction could be understood as a radical interpretation of Kant’s concept of exposition (1956: A73/B759; 1998: 639), a proper method of philosophical argument. For Kant construction seemed not applicable to philosophy because it cannot construct its object *a priori* and directly from concepts. Accordingly, construction can only *expose* or *explicate* the necessary conditions for the appearance of the object. Schelling and Hegel, however, seem to employ this term of construction in a rather different sense. For it does not simply refer to an operation executed by a certain agent (e.g., subject) constructing<sup>31</sup>, deducing or forming the object out of some pre-given *a priori* elements (e. g. concepts or ideas), as Kant understood, narrowing construction to the field of geometry. For in their case, construction rather signifies the very limit of the transcendental, or the formation of the transcendental itself. It refers to the construction of the constructible, the realization that not even the concepts themselves are *given*. The possible must itself be exposed *as possible*. As Hegel also puts it, “Nature is an immanent ideality just as intelligence is an immanent reality. The two poles of cognition and being are present in each, so that each has also the point of indifference in itself; [...] For nature is not a stillness of being (*ein ruhendes Sein*), it is a being that becomes (*ein Werden*); or in other words, it is not split and synthesized from the outside, it sunders (*trennt*) itself and unites itself by itself;” (Hegel 1977b: 166-168; 1970a: 107-109). It implies that already in the forming of laws of experience, reason necessarily coincides with the experience of those laws. The concept of nature already presupposes and exposes the nature of the concept.

If that is the case, then the structure of this self-reverting movement that was previously ascribed to the subjective activity of self-consciousness becomes both subjective and objective, ideal and real at the same time. For Schelling it becomes the ‘highest potency of nature’, where the ‘self’ signifies not merely a direction of reference but rather an exhaustion of possibilities, an open coming into being without any reserve or pre-established structures and

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<sup>31</sup> The term itself, however, is still quite controversial and remains to be further scrutinized. Tom Rockmore (2016), for example, provides a very different account on the very idea of construction, narrowing it to the formal epistemological framework. Markus Gabriel (2011), on the other hand, emphasizes the primacy of its ontological-genetical layer and therefore remains closer to our concerns.

principles. The ‘self’ also signifies here a view ‘from within’, so to speak—contrary to any external, neutral or disengaged meta-level approach that is assumed by reflection. Thus if we admit that in the activity of self-consciousness producing *is* also the produced, discovering is also the making and *vice versa*, if reason transforms itself in its very attempt to account for itself, then it follows that with the introduction of *Naturphilosophie* the necessary performative dimension of thought is emphasized even more. However, it should not be overlooked that it became possible only on the basis of a different understanding and location of the *separation, limit* and *negativity*. And it still needs to be clarified, where and how to locate this peculiar *Indifferenzpunkt*—as they call it, this *within*-difference, a point of ‘coincidence’ of neither/nor, neither merely real, nor ideal, neither determinate, nor indeterminate.

If we attentively follow the way in which Schelling and Hegel elaborate their argument against Fichte, it may seem that sooner or later we encounter a certain inconsistency: i) on the one hand, they both claim that, despite its speculative (i.e. synthesizing, unifying) tone or spirit, Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* remains torn apart by reflection. That is, the subject remains separated or negated by the object, yet also mutually conditioned by it. Self-limitation, according to them, was understood merely in terms of privation, thereby putting necessity and freedom, finite and infinite at the extreme poles of the dichotomy. And that rendered them incomprehensible in any other way than through the negation of the other that Fichte intended to avoid in the ideal synthesis of the productive imagination (Hegel 1970: 96). ii) Yet, on the other hand, they also claim that even though the difference remains absolute, the opposition is not yet real. But it has to become real, so that the opposites could also stand and each come into being. Otherwise, one is simply reduced to the other and that results in their mutual nullification (*Vernichten*) or merely formal, ‘thinkable’ character. In what sense, then, should we understand this ‘*reelle Entgegen-setzung*’ and its relation to the self-limitation?

As previously discussed, Fichte’s *Ich* gains determination and thereby comes into being by positing itself as *Nicht-Ich*. In doing so, it suspends its infinite activity. And since the pure *Ich* is understood as nothing else than absolute activity, it means that the *Ich* cancels itself altogether. Any limitation appears to be its negation. Yet in order to solve this contradiction, in his 1800 *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* Schelling makes a crucial move in admitting

that “the self qua self can be unlimited (*unbegrenzt*) only insofar as it is limited and conversely, that it is limited as a self only insofar as it is unlimited” (2001: 38, 1979: 49). On the one hand, Schelling indeed seems to follow the Spinozist understanding of determination as negation<sup>32</sup>, for “every determination is a blotting-out (*Aufhebung*) of absolute reality, that is, negation” (2001: 36, 1979: 47). And yet he immediately adds: “However, negation of a positive cannot be done by mere privation, but only through *real opposition*”<sup>33</sup> (ibid. also see Hegel 1977b: 157-159; 1970a: 97-99). What Schelling seems to suggest here is rather a dynamic extension of Spinoza’s account on the indifferent absolute. For the actual negation of a positive to take place, it is not enough to simply cancel it, for there would be nothing that could literally *take place* instead of it. If I simply admit that, in reality, the *Ich* limits itself by negating itself in *Nicht-Ich*, then either I have to admit that there is still something taking place *as* this negated *Ich*, which is left absolutely unexplained and reached only apophatically; or I run myself into contradiction and claim that reality is really nothing, absolute void and illusion. Thus, a positive can be negated only *as* a positive, and that means that whatever takes place instead of it has also been positively posited and, in a sense, identical with the former—hence, we have a speculatively re-established principle of *horror vacui*. In his second Jena *Systementwürfe* (1804-1805), Hegel also claims: “The limit (*die Grenze*) is true quality only insofar as it is self-connection (*Beziehung auf sich selbst*), and it is this only as negation, which negates the other only in connection with itself. In this way the limit is now synthesis as well, unity in which both subsist at the same time, or real quality [...] The limit is thereby the totality or true reality (*die Totalität oder wahrhafte Realität*), which, [when] compared with its concept, contains its dialectic as well, because the concept sublates itself therein in such a manner that it has become its own contrary” (1986a: 8; 1982: 6). Presented in this light, the real (i.e. qualitative and not merely quantitative) opposition thus provides a possibility to understand absolute as being primarily *relational* and *differential*.

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<sup>32</sup> In Spinoza’s letter written on June 2, 1674 and addressed to his friend Jarig Jelles we find: “*Quia ergo figura non aliud, quam determinatio, et determinatio negatio est*” (EP. 50).

<sup>33</sup> It also resonates with Kant’s distinction between *nihil privativum* and *nihil negativum*. If the emphasis is put on *nihil negativum* then, following Kant’s table of the categories, the difference is no longer of quality, but of modality. (1956: B105-106; B347/A79-80; A292). Hegel was also dissatisfied with Kant’s treatment of modality which was based on “the nonidentity of subject and object” (1977b: 80).

Even though neither Hegel, nor Schelling put it explicitly in this way, it seems that in the case of a real opposition, we encounter a kind of inversion that is added—what is posited becomes positive in the sense of being real, shaped and graspable, even if it is still being posited and grasped as *Nicht-Ich* (now even over-negated). And accordingly, from the side of what is being posited now as positive, the positing activity itself appears as negative without losing its positing and productive power and thus further negates what is being posited. As a result, we have a form of *active negativity* or *negative (and not merely negating) activity* essentially inherent in self-consciousness. The very event of *opposing*, which itself cannot be opposed to anything and therefore remains absolutely identical and unbounded, presents itself more originally than any elements being opposed. This may be another possible reading of the (in)famous *Identität der Identität und der Nichtidentität* (1977b: 156; 1970a: 96), where the first identity serves as a mediating or oscillating liminal point of any determination. In other words, only self-limitation itself is what is infinite and unlimited. Self-consciousness becomes possible as the point of collision between coming into being and passing away. Schelling accurately describes this point as an “infinite extension of the boundary (*unendliche Erweiterung der Schranke*)” (2001: 39; 1979: 50).

Now if we attempt to relate these two types of (un)limiting negations, namely, privative negation and real negation, with the aforementioned Kantian distinction between *Grenze* (absolute limit) and *Schranke*<sup>34</sup> (negative quantum, determination), then the very location of self-consciousness in this transition from reflection to speculation that Schelling and Hegel suggest may become clearer. The understanding (*der Verstand*) and therefore reflection operate within the realm of determinations and thus deal with separations, divisions, distinctions and the highest possible manifold. The limits for understanding or reflecting consciousness point only to the closure, to what falls within them and thereby provides epistemic material. The emphasis is on the *result* of the synthesis. Whereas reason (*die Vernunft*) or speculative thought is the unifying activity, reaching for the highest possible totality. It is concentrated on drawing the limit as such—the last liminal point of thought beyond which there is nothing to be thought or known. In that sense, it is directed towards abolishing any actual ‘beyond.’<sup>35</sup> As Kant in the

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<sup>34</sup> Also see Esposito, C., Beck, S. (2009) who focus on this emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> Schelling will later elaborate it further with the idea of the *Unvordenklichkeit*—the unprethinkability. Hegel, in his own turn, in his *Science of Logic* will later claim: “In order that the limit (*Grenze*) which is in something as such should be a limitation

transcendental dialectic has shown, reason reaches this absolute limit in the antinomies which no longer provide any positive or determinate content whatsoever and yet still display the scene for the excessive activity of reason without which understanding could not fully operate either. In other words, it may be contended that speculative reason, strictly speaking, does not and must not ‘know’ anything determinate precisely because it stands *at* and *as* the limit of any possible determination. It is the limit of the limit itself. In its antinomical character, it is always also beyond the possible and thereby remains im-possible in its imperative ground. In this sense, self-limitation, understood in terms of *Selbstbegrenzung*, cannot be somehow anticipated, deduced or derived in advance, without *actually reaching* these limits. Likewise, it cannot be done once and for all, for it endows reason with its life and force. It can only be done by pushing thought to its extremes until it collapses within itself. And yet, as Schelling and Hegel seem to suggest, for reason to be able to witness this collapse *as* collapse is the greatest moment of its freedom and the highest point of self-consciousness.

Having said all this, Fichte, in his own turn, does not seem to place self-consciousness *on* its absolute limit. Even if it is the *Ich* that limits itself, the limit still remains *Schranke*, a negative quantum. Instead of pertaining to the very essence of the *Ich*, it remains merely its effect and its product, i.e., still something separate. Whereas the speculative limit is not simply a fixed limit *between* something, nor a limit that has anything left beyond itself. Rather, it is at the extreme of any opposition, a point of indifference, a dash.<sup>36</sup> For strictly speaking, it is the limit preceding even its own possibility which thereby becomes possible only because of that. If reflection is a view from the oppositions it has established, speculation is a thought from the very event of separation that is taking place.<sup>37</sup> Or it is the reflection within reflection itself, as Gasche would suggest (1997: 48)—reflection that is exhausted by itself as soon as it is discovered. For Hegel, Fichte’s philosophy is a moment of dead and lost God but it has to remain a moment, for “the pure concept or infinity as the abyss of nothingness in which all being is engulfed (*alles Sein versinkt*),

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(*Schranke*), something must at the same time in its own self transcend the limit. It must in its own self be related to the limit as to something which is not.” (1986b: 143).

<sup>36</sup> There is an intriguing attempt to articulate the concept of absolute knowledge in Hegel in contemporary discourse, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* by R. Commay and P. Neruda (2018).

<sup>37</sup> It is very suggestive that, etymologically, the word ‘limit’—‘riba’ in Lithuanian—is related to ‘ribėti’, ‘ribėjimas’—which refers to the process of rippling or shimmering.

must signify the infinite grief (*Schmerz*) [of the finite] purely as a moment of the supreme Idea, and no more than a moment” (1977b: 190; 1970a: 432). For, at the same time, it is also “the spring (*der Quell*) of eternal movement, the spring of that finitude which is infinite, because it eternally nullifies (*vernichtet*) itself. Out of this nothing and pure night of infinity, as out of the secret abyss (*geheimen Abgrund*) that is its birthplace, the truth lifts itself upward” (ibid; 1970: 431). It is a moment of recognition that the loss of nature simultaneously signifies the loss of myself. And yet, as Schelling and Hegel seem to suggest, precisely *as* this loss of myself, *as* this giving away of myself, the nature returns. It becomes life appearing in the loss of life.

This chapter will hopefully allow us to transition to the major part of the present work. In locating their debt to Fichte, the chapter attempts to delineate the last crucial *terminus a quo* where early Schelling’s and Hegel’s positions and expectations regarding the activity of self-consciousness coincide and, as we shall see, begin to ‘oppose’ in a highly ambiguous way. The following chapters will attempt to show that, contrary to the prevailing attitudes, after the ‘official’ separation with their last letter exchange in 1807, another dialogue between Schelling and Hegel emerges. On the one hand, it seems that the optics of their mature insights regarding the self-exposition and the limits of the concept put side by side reveal such a movement of liminal thought that can only be distinguished in its way of being performed. It will be argued that i) the mutual interdependence of Schelling and Hegel exposes, to use W. Hamacher’s expression, the *affirmative* dimension of thought, whose ii) truth and content lies precisely in its actual *Ausführung* or *Geschehen* (*pace* J-L. Nancy) and which iii), in its performative negativity, suggests a different (or even more elaborate, compared to what the contemporary scholarship suggests) understanding of speculation—a liminal point of thought within itself (*pace* Labarthe). In other words, the suggested twofold reading of the figure of Schelling-Hegel attempts to show that the major limitation of reason lies not in the abysmal gap between thought and being but precisely in their identity—for this identity itself appears to be inescapable and yet abysmal. For thought can never reach to be more than it is nor be what it already is, it can never go beyond its own time or its own event. Thought also cannot exhaust itself altogether, for even the exhaustion would have to take place and would need to be exposed. The furthest it can get, is its own limit, beyond which there is nothing, and from which the



absolute appears as its own falling, a permanent living in and through its own death.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> David Farrell Krell in his *The tragic absolute* (2005) also provides important insights concerning the ‘inhibition’ of the absolute in Schelling. However, by clearly separating romanticism philosophy from idealism, Krell ignores Hegel’s role in this discussion. Moreover, in contrast to our attempt, he focuses on the conflict between the individual and the infinite.

## II. Self-limitation as self-mediation: performing the speculative in Schelling and Hegel

The previous section attempted to show that, if we consistently follow the tenets of Kant's transcendental deduction in its dynamic Fichtean extension, we can no longer assume that reason merely *discovers*, *intuits* or *observes* itself acting in the world. For the 'itself' of self-consciousness can no longer be understood as a necessary ground, nor as a first principle of the phenomenal world. If reason can access only what falls within the horizon of its own activity (or, as Kant suggests, if it can only know what it *can* know), it can never, strictly speaking, reach anything beyond or before the synthesis. For synthesis itself, as Kant argued, is what takes place *a priori*. In that case, self-consciousness discovers itself through the work of synthesis synthesizing itself or, in other words, through the very appearing of the world. Accordingly, as Schelling and Hegel in their reinterpretation of Fichte seem to suggest, it becomes necessary to admit that reason engenders itself and *comes into being* precisely in its attempt to account for itself. In that sense, the question itself, of how philosophy is possible at all already appears to be in the highest proximity of addressing this question. That is, they show that any genuine question contains the power to fashion or even invert the whole approach to what could be identified as an experience of consciousness. In this way, the major shift from the inquiry into the limits of reason to the reason standing on its own absolute limit (now understood as *Grenze*) is made possible. Yet it still remains to be investigated, how this shift in the experience of consciousness, and the emphasis on *consciousness as self-consciousness*, in Schelling and Hegel, is related to *negativity*, *limitation* and *performativity*. How does this emphasis pertain to the transition from reflective to the speculative thinking? This thesis will attempt to show as a part of its general task that, by emphasizing the effects of self-consciousness from different angles, Schelling and Hegel, instead of merely opposing each other, provide a consummate picture of the performative movement of self-consciousness considered in the post-Kantian idealistic framework. In its own turn, it opens a possibility to rethink the performativity of the modern cogito in a different light.

After Schelling's and Hegel's final separation with Fichte around 1801, a new period in the further development and transformations of transcendental idealism began. Their short but mutually invigorating collaboration took place in *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* (1802-1803) and was felt in their

subsequent writings. In general, questions of the limits of reason and finitude were no longer understood merely in terms of legitimacy or activity of the self-positing *Ich*. Instead, limits became crucial in accounting for thought's coming into being, its eventfulness, intensity, proximity to itself and force of transformation<sup>39</sup>. In their quest to account for the genesis of reason and for bringing forth its worldly event—i.e. in their search for the very life of thought within the thought of life—Schelling and Hegel soon realized that these questions could no longer be addressed merely in terms of the subjective and formal activity of consciousness. For no matter how far this approach goes, it still leaves thought without flesh and tongue, bodies without souls, nature without organism. The world remains mute and merely echoes the restrained repetition of one's own indifferent self. In that sense, Schelling and Hegel reached the point where idealism had to encounter its own reality at any price and, precisely in that sense, where idealism would have to become real.

However, despite their common beginnings, i.e., the struggle for the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of reason, understood in terms of the unity of spirit and nature (or the objective subject-object), Schelling and Hegel soon appears addressing these issues in different directions.<sup>40</sup> To put it broadly, for Schelling, a matter of concern seems to be 'the naturalization of the spirit,' so to speak, a task of reintroducing self-determination to the organic life of nature. Whereas for Hegel, it appeared as a movement towards 'the spiritualization of nature itself,' a necessity to derive the real out of the aforementioned 'infinite abyss' of the ideality of the subject. In both cases, it was freedom that had to become actual and to sustain its ontological primacy in one or another form of organic reason. Yet we will attempt to show that, contrary to the still prevailing attitude, the difference pertaining to their respective pursuits is more a difference of *execution* than of the result or expectations. If eventually the nature *is* the spirit for the former, and the spirit *is* the nature for the latter, then the crucial emphasis lies precisely on the copula fashioning the identity. It

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Schelling: "Fichte might have maintained an idealism relative to the standpoint of reflection, whereas I situated myself and the principle of idealism at the standpoint of production: to put this contrast in the most intelligible terms, if idealism in the subjective sense said that the I is everything, idealism in the objective sense would be forced to say the reverse: everything is = I" (2012: 141). If for Fichte it meant a total rejection of idealistic stance, Schelling saw it as a way to bring idealism back to life.

<sup>40</sup> Many scholars agree that, given their own still developing and changing views, the relationship between Schelling and Hegel of the Jena period is very tight and poses a great challenge for any attempt to identify ones influence, dependence or criticism of the other (Lauer (2010), Vater (1984), Düsing (1969)).

should also be noted, however, that regarding the general scope and the main task of this work, the major focus will be dedicated to Schelling's and Hegel's mature writings respectively. It is true that their mutual hostility gradually grew over the apparent incompatibility of their accounts regarding the genesis and the limits of conceptuality. However, the specific tension that clearly emerges between them after 1807 provides an alternative way to understand the speculative proposition in its peculiar performative dimension. For that reason, their early texts, despite their admitted richness and complexity, can only help delineate the basic impetus behind their philosophical endeavors and the crucial issues at stake.

## II. I. *Actus exercitus*: determining the concept or the reference to the absent

### II. I. I. Hegel: giving voice to the night. Negativity in *Dieses* and *Urteil*

#### *Hegel's Jena insight: die Nacht der Welt*

When Schelling left Jena for Würzburg in 1803, Hegel was left as the only representative of the system of identity. In his threefold 1804-1806 Jena *Systementwürfe*, which was not published in his lifetime, Hegel struggled to present the system of identity in its all unifying speculative attempt that paved the way for the *Phänomenologie* and apparently distanced him from Schelling. The twofold division of the system of identity into transcendental philosophy and philosophy of nature soon proved itself to be only preliminary. Both Schelling and Hegel, albeit each in his own manner, eventually realized that neither the Spinozistic reformulation of the system, nor the theory of potencies and ‘quantitative difference’ of identity could provide a sufficient account on the performative potential of self-consciousness. The specific character of this self-erupting and self-interrupting force of life had still yet to be articulated and provided with its proper role.

In recognition of the above problem, the whole system threatened to become merely another form of a still dreaming spirit (*der träumende Geist*), an important image that Hegel uses in his Jena lectures when describing spirit, immersed in its own night, “this pure nothing that contains everything in its simplicity (*Einfachheit*), a realm endlessly rich in representations and images none of which appear to it directly, and none of which are not present (*deren keines ihm gerade einfällt—, oder die nicht als gegenwärtige sind*). This is the night, the interior of nature, existing here—pure self, [...]. We see this night when we look into the eyes of a human, into a night which becomes terrifying (*furchtbar*). For here the night of the world hangs out toward each of us” (Hegel 1987: 172-175). Hegel’s terrifying *Nacht der Welt*<sup>41</sup> should not be

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<sup>41</sup> Giorgio Agamben also puts crucial emphasis on Hegel’s early writings and even his poems as animating his subsequent endeavors, understanding of negativity and the whole aim and meaning of philosophy. However, Agamben does this with respect to his own concerns—the name, the language and the voice (Agamben 1991). Whereas our concern here is more directed to the concept in a form of universality. Also, a detailed study has been made on Hegel’s use of *Nacht* by L. Gwee, see his “Night in Novalis, Schelling, and Hegel” (*Studies in Romanticism*. Vol. 50, No. 1, 2011. Boston: Boston University, pp. 105-24). In general, the relationship between German Idealism and Romanticism is another complex issue and such prominent contemporary authors as, among others, M. Frank, F. Beiser or D. Nassar still

taken merely as an insignificant metaphor used for rhetorical purposes. For however obscure it might appear at first sight, it may clarify some important aspects in further considering Hegel's ambiguous relationship with Schelling regarding their attempts to explain differentiation and determinacy.

The poetic passage quoted above by the early Jena Hegel is of a twofold concern for us. For even though in this context Hegel does not mention Fichte explicitly, it is not very difficult to recognize that in his continuous use of the substantiated form of the Ich (e.g., "*Ich ist die Kraft*" (1987: 178)) he is still dealing with Fichtean issues. On the one hand, in Hegel's attempt to identify different moments of the genesis of the object in its appearing, he remains consistent with Fichte's position that the object is an object only in its being for the subject, i.e., for the gaze that immediately owns it: "When I see something, what I see is in me—for it is I who see it—it is my seeing (*Im Anschauen ist das Angesehene in mir, denn ich schaue ja an—es ist meine Anschauung*). Spirit steps forth of this seeing, and sees its seeing – i.e., it sees the object as its own (*Aus diesem Anschauen tritt der Geist heraus und schaut sein Anschauen an, d. h. den Gegenstand als den seinen*)" (1987: 172).

But when Hegel further adds that the spirit owns the object only by having negated it as a being (*aufgehoben als Seienden*) and by turning it into an image (*das Bild*), he seems to suggest something more specific. Since the power of the image as an inexhaustible capacity to see (*anschauen*) belongs to the spirit, since it is maintained in its hidden wealth ("*es ist in seinem Schatze aufbewahrt*" (ibid.)), it follows then, that every image, compared to the object itself and its being, becomes a moment of inwardness. It becomes an act of not simply perceiving something external, but an act of immediately negating it as something external, self-subsistent or existing. In other words, it is external only as negated external, as literally taken over, perceived (Latin *percipere*, from *per-* 'durch', 'entirely' + *capere* 'take'). For, as Hegel notices, because the image can be always kept in the memory<sup>42</sup>, it remains detached from the thing already in its first grasp. The image belongs to an eye that swallows everything it comes across. In that case, the deceptive light of

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continue to oppose radically regarding its anti-fundamentalism, irrationalism, aestheticism etc.

<sup>42</sup> Hegel also plays with the German word for 'memory'—*Erinnerung*, which comes directly from *erinnere*—'to remember' and taken literally means *er-innere*—'re-internalize'. Memory is where the world is lost so to remember something is always to witness its loss and absence.

the apparent immediacy of an image appears to be lying in the power of this all overwhelming and inverting night of the gaze which comes first.

Hence, what for Hegel becomes so terrifying in this *Nacht der Welt* seems to be precisely this loss of its being that is first and always given within every conscious encounter with the world. This night, which is the abundance of the imagery, is what simultaneously discloses spirit's power to negate its being. It robs the world of its presence and remains indebted for this loss. And since the world gives away itself freely, spirit's lordship over it becomes its hardest burden. In this light, the old Leibnizian question *why is there something rather than nothing?* could now be reformulated into *how does something ever happen to come out of this nothing at all?* Out of this night, the world has to come and yet this return of the world, following Hegel, becomes possible not by putting it simply back to the daylight of its immediacy and self-subsistence, but rather, by giving voice to this night itself, by naming it, i.e. by letting it come into being in being uttered<sup>43</sup>. The peculiarity of this movement that Hegel suggests here signifies another path in questioning the phenomena of consciousness. When an image is uttered, when it becomes a name, it is thrown back to the world and becomes a thing, for in this moment "the internal (*Innerliches*) is posited as being (*Seiendes*)" (1987: 175). The language, for Hegel, this 'name-giving power' (*Namengebende Kraft*) is "the first creativity exercised by spirit (*die erste Schöpferkraft, die der Geist ausübt*)" (ibid.).

Moreover, and here lies another crucial moment in Hegel's insight regarding the genesis of the concept: when the name in its exercise (*ausüben*) is realized as not referring merely to one particular thing but to the thing qua thing, what makes the thing thing in general, when it refers to the essential and necessary relation, then the name becomes universality (*das Allgemeine*). Yet it should be noticed, that Hegel analyses universality not simply according to its application, function or logical structure. He approaches it as a phenomenon in its appearing, as a certain kind of event. In this case, as Hegel is obviously 'dynamising' Kant's categories, universality should not be understood as some rigid form, or stable Platonic ideality, lifted to the spiritual level (as

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<sup>43</sup> Yet it does not seem that Hegel is simply inverting the Christian *fiat lux* with a kind of *fiat tenebris*. In all his debt to his early writings on theology Hegel seems to be struggling with a lifetime attempt to elevate Christianity to the point of philosophy in the death of God. Also cf. Mt 27,45: *a sexta autem hora tenebrae factae sunt super universam terram usque ad horam nonam.*

some still seem to suggest<sup>44</sup>) but rather as a point of tension, where the content becomes or coincides with the movement. For with this gesture, in referring back to itself, language is again negated within itself.

On the one hand, following Hegel's argument, as long as language is taking place, it still remains external and therefore particular. Yet on the other, only in its externality language can become what it is and come into being. The I becomes the object and the object becomes the I (in these passages Hegel uses *Intelligenz*, *Geist* or *Vernunft* in contrast to the one-sided Fichtean *Ich*). Their mutual interdependence reveals their derivative character from the movement of negativity which exceeds any one-sided determination and yet still enables differentiation. That is, already with its performance universality seems to expose itself as a movement of negativity. And if that is the case, then only in its taking place does it become possible to grasp language as language. Because this negative movement is what creates an absence within itself and keeps it in motion, negativity remains self-identical or, as Hegel puts it, "equal to itself" (*sich selbst gleich*) (1987: 183). Yet it seems to remain so not by having a kind of stable or pre-fixed principal identity, but rather merely in terms of a continuing movement, of the 'still going on'. In that sense, such a gesture as the 'self' of self-consciousness also becomes possible if the 'self-' appears to be understood precisely as this immanent absence exposing itself in and conditioning every universality. 'Self-' appears as a movement of becoming or revealing itself as this becoming. In this light, we can also understand Hegel's claim that thinking (*Intelligenz*) moves "to fulfill itself—not through penetration (*Intussusception*), but through the creation (*Erzeugung*) of a content and indeed that in which it has the consciousness of its own activity (*zwar eines solchen, worin sie das Bewußtsein ihres Tuns hat*)" (1987: 185). Since the subject and subjectivity no longer coincide, one may see what characterizes this extended understanding of self-consciousness which is detached from the epistemological or representational subject in the first place. It is the movement of negativity affected with itself, which, in its eventual character—for here content coincides with the movement—always endures transformation.

Having said all this, we can now return to the question of *die Nacht der Welt*. Hegel shows that at least in the form of consciousness, this 'night of the world' cannot and should not be merely (re)cognized, discovered, thought 'about'

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<sup>44</sup> Bristow (2007).



and overcome. For it grounds the very possibility of the world's appearing. The world returns in its loss, as this night is actually performed, lived through from within and thus without collapsing into "the night in which all cows are black" (Hegel 1907: 12). Rather, and contrary to the traditional account on dialectics of double negation, it appears as the experience of the poverty of the concept, to which Hegel returns in different ways and most explicitly again, in his analysis of *Schein* much later. For Fichte, however, pure presence of the daylight and immediacy appeared to be possible only with respect to the form, not to the content, with respect to what is merely subjective, thinkable and not liveable. Whereas for Hegel, as this essay argues from mature writings, with the appearance of the concept and judgment, the former sterility of the daylight is exchanged with the thickness of mediation, truth and being—with becoming and vanishing, method—with engagement. For "Reason thus drowns itself and its knowledge (*Wissen*) and its reflection of the absolute identity, in its own abyss (*Abgrund*): and in this night of mere reflection and of the calculating intellect (*räsonierenden Verstandes*), in this night which is the noonday of life, common sense and speculation can meet one another" (Hegel 1977b: 103; 1970a: 35). Presented in this way, the dimension of negativity must be shown as being explicitly incorporated in thought's experience of itself, its actuality and its coming into being. As a place within reason where thought, accepting a promise of freedom, necessarily loses and abandons its sovereignty due to the effect of its own force.

Thus the question remains the following: in what sense, then, and to what extent can negativity be understood as pertaining to the opening of life, as letting it appear to itself, to be thought through and touched from within? This is, furthermore, a question of life, understood as a "self-shaping (*Selbstgestaltung*) of the totality within the union of freedom and necessity, of consciousness and the non-conscious" (Hegel 1977b: 154, 1970a: 93)? If the birth of consciousness, as Hegel shows, appears as the loss of nature within nature itself, can there still be such a point where the self-shaping of theory would coincide with the self-shaping of nature? Where necessity would become contingent and contingency, necessary in their sole possibility? Where the highest universal would become the most concrete and singular, where distance would become proximity? Another step is to be made in further locating the experience of thought in its performative liminality.

### *Negativity in Dienes and Urteil*

As the name in its weariness, according to Hegel, was elevated to the point of universality, the question of how this universality realizes itself and comes into being out of its infinite night of immediacy remains to be further addressed. It directs us back—albeit now in a different manner—to the fundamental problem of *Urteil*. *Urteilkraft* is that which Kant identifies as an ‘*a priori* principle for the possibility of nature’ or the ‘image of the image’ which grounds the possibility of seeing necessity in that which is merely contingent. It is that which brings forward something *as* necessarily something that is thereby actually and objectively experienced. It was previously showed that in the third *Critique*, Kant was primarily concerned with providing the power of judgment with its proper role in the transcendental synthesis, that is, in placing it as a mediating and autonomous force between reason and understanding, between forces of unity and separation.

However, the question of *what is actually being performed in the act of judgment as such* still remained open. For judgment—taken in its phenomenal sense, i.e., understood as an event and appearing of the concept as such (and not merely as a *result* of a certain mental operation)—is the first actual exposition of thought that discovers itself in its own birth. For here the judgment judges itself, it appears to itself. Accordingly, in the following passages we will attempt to discuss the concept of judgment by focusing on the so far underestimated performative role of the copula<sup>45</sup> in Hegel’s understanding of *Urteil*. More precisely, it will be interpreted as a certain extension of an important and yet undeveloped remark of a small footnote found already in Kant’s *Transcendental Analytic* (1956: A75/B100). Here, as if incidentally, he notices that the three types of modal judgments *problematische* (*möglich*), *assertorische* (*wirklich*), *apodiktische* (*notwendig*) coincide with the three main powers of thought, namely, understanding, power of judgment and reason. These, taken together, Kant simply calls the “moments of thinking in general (*Momente des Denkens überhaupt*)” (1956:

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<sup>45</sup> Even for Kant, as he puts it in his famous refutation of ontological proof of God’s existence, the copula ‘is’ in the judgment is understood as nothing more than “merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations, as existing in themselves. In the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment”; i.e., it serves only “to posit the predicate in its relation (*Beziehungsweise*) to the subject” (1956: A597/B625). The peculiarity of this relation in its relation to the concept and its genesis is left unconsidered. Only the “value” (*Wert*)—possible, actual or necessary—of the copula signifies its function in the judgment.

A76/B101). Does it follow, then, that there is a sense in which all three powers of thinking are put under the label of *judgment* such that they are identified as *moments* of thought that depend on the same primordial self-differentiating *Urteilkraft*? To put it this way elucidates how the investigation into the power of judgment could be understood as the previously discussed ‘propaedeutic to all philosophy.’ Or, as “the first realization of the concept”, as Hegel later presented it in the *Science of Logic* (2003: 302; 2010: 550). Since it deals with the actuality of thought itself in the first place, the necessity or possibility of its contents is determined precisely according to its activity. Thus, the taking place of judging thought *preceding* (or, rather, enabling) a certain referential or epistemic value of any particular judgment remains to be further addressed. For it alone justifies the possibility of even the grasping the transcendental procedures themselves<sup>46</sup>. In other words, the question is the following: what characterizes the aforementioned modality of thinking in terms of thought’s realization in determinacy? How does the concept *perform* itself?

Many scholars agree that it was not until the appearance of the *Phänomenologie* in 1807 that Hegel found his own voice. With the publication of this work, he apparently liberated himself from Schelling’s (whose thought, however, was also under the intense transformation) influence. At this point, Hegel chose another path in questioning the work, the limits of self-consciousness and the idea of speculative logic. Their previous system of identity did not provide a consistent account on the possibility and necessity of the absolute’s differentiation within itself. That is, the question of determinacy appeared as requiring an even more dynamic account. The finite had still yet to be reconciled with and within the infinite through the means of absolute mediation. What is important here for our current concerns in discussing Hegel’s account on judgment, is precisely the moving force and the role of negativity in it. We should also noticed that what, in a certain sense, ‘distanced’ Hegel from Schelling regarding this issue seems to be *the very location and direction* of the moving force of the concept. Schelling’s position, though *prima facie* standing in opposition as incompatible with Hegel’s, will be presented as another *equally* legitimate (i.e., derived from the

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<sup>46</sup> In this sense, I also share the view with K. de Boer, A. White or G. Gentry who hold that Hegel’s philosophical project should be located in a post-Kantian framework, without reducing it, however, merely to the epistemological concerns of transcendental logic as it does, for example, Klaus Brinkmann (2012). As it was attempted to show previously, not even Kant himself can be considered merely in these terms.

same logic) interpretation of determinacy. It could be read as the inverse side of the interpretation introduced by Hegel. In this way, by revealing the ambiguity inherent in the Schelling-Hegel account, we will attempt to expose the peculiar performative dimension of speculative thought.

In addressing Hegel's understanding of judgment, we will concentrate on two major sections: i) where the actual appearance of the concept in general is discussed; and ii) that section in which the dynamic role of the copula in its relation to the negativity seems to be the most apparent. The first chapter of *Phänomenologie*, namely, 'sense-certainty: or the 'this' and 'meaning'' (1977a: 58-67) and 'Judgment' part of the doctrine of the concept in the *Science of Logic* (2010: 550-588; 2003: 351). On the one hand, these two parts may seem as signifying extreme opposites of spirit's development and indeed may appear as addressing very different issues. For in the first case Hegel deals with the empirical consciousness, with the 'beginning', the waking up of self-consciousness, and in the second case we already have a self-relating concept considered in the realm of 'pure' logic, so to speak (even though there is still a way left to the absolute idea and the unity of the concept here is still experienced in its *external* connection). However, there is a strong basis to read Hegel's system as a movement, consisting in the return, repetition and yet gradual intensification of the same dynamic structure of speculative logic which we are attempting to identify here. Therefore, as long as we are concerned with the movement of the concept as such (which Hegel identifies both with the 'simple and immediate unity' and with judgment (2003: 272)), discussing these passages side by side may clarify Hegel's attempt to grasp that particular *move*, which would simultaneously appear as the self-dissolution (explosion) and self-resolution (implosion) of the concept. For it is a move, which would also account for and prevail in the gradual transformation of consciousness.

Given this framework, the analysis of *Dieses* opens up the possibility to consider the judgment appearing in its *latency*. That is, in the seemingly immediate sensuous knowledge of apprehension (*aufnehmend*). While the other extreme point of *Lehre vom Begriff* presents judgment as what it actually is in its shape, a subject-predicate relationship, i.e., a way to determine one concept through the other as the concept itself. Focusing on these two moments of the concept's realization may help us to identify the necessary tension lying in the copula of every judgment both *extensively* (already with its reference to the sensuous experience) and *intensively* (with the reference

to another concept as suggested in the title of subjective logic). In that case, the main difference between the moments of spirit's development could be seen as lying not in the fluidity of the dialectically vanishing content but rather in the *intensity or degree of the agility of the concept*. In other words, the copula of the judgment, instead of being a merely logical, linguistic or existential operator<sup>47</sup> that would simply conjoin or posit subject and predicate, may be presented as signifying the very intensity of the concept's dynamism. This presentation would propose an alternative view to the Aristotelian one, still shared by Hegel scholars today. As in *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle contends that “[...] for not even ‘to be’ or ‘not to be’ is a sign of the actual thing (nor if you say simply ‘that which is’); for by itself it is nothing, but it additionally signifies some combination, which cannot be thought without the components<sup>48</sup>” (16b: 21-25; 1975: 45). Thus instead of merely *defining* the relationship between the elements proposed, Hegelian judgment, it is contended, exposes the *performativity* of the concept in its self-deteriorating determinacy. Moreover, the German word *Urteil* also bears this trace of relating itself to the primordial separation of *Teilung*. It exposes the specifically executive dimension of the concept, and thus, it opens a way of reconsidering the idea of double negation and the question of determinacy.

Since Hegel himself claims that “by starting from the unity of the concept as ground the judgment is considered in accordance with its true objectivity” (2010: 552; 2003: 304), it seems justified to pay attention to the first manifestation of the concept's unity in the paradox of immediate knowledge with which Hegel opens his *Phänomenologie*. *Prima facie*, as Hegel demonstrates, it seems obvious that the most concrete indexing propositions which only indicate the fact that some “this” is there, or “now is night” must be the least universal and the most singular, as well as the least subjective and the most objective. By pointing to something and stating only “this” or “now” or “here” I do not even identify anything yet, nor do I determine it by “adding” a certain concept to it, I say only: “the This is.” Thus the act of perceiving any concrete being appears as the most immediate knowledge, which at the level of this minimum awareness is supposed to provide us with the direct access to the world “in all its richness” (*in seiner ganzen Vollständigkeit*)” (1907:

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<sup>47</sup> Hass (2013), Desmond (1986), Taylor (2006), Hyppolite (1997)—are among those few who take into account the specific ‘engendering’ role of the copula.

<sup>48</sup> „[...] οὐ γὰρ τὸ εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι σημεῖόν ἐστι τοῦ πράγματος, οὐδ’ ἐὰν τὸ ὄν εἴπῃς ψιλόν. αὐτὸ μὲν γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστιν, προσσημαίνει δὲ σύνθεσιν τινα, ἣν ἄνευ τῶν συγκειμένων οὐκ ἐστι νοῆσαι.“ (De Int. 16b: 21-25).

65). However, Hegel is quick to notice that such an immediate, and apparently the most concrete, expression of sense-certainty (*sinnliche Gewißheit*) for the same reasons simultaneously turn out to be the most mediated and the most abstract. The issue lies in the very *essence* of sense-certainty for as soon as I become aware of “this” only as “this,” I only become aware of being in general. Strictly speaking, as Hegel shows, instead of being an example of absolute immediacy, it reveals itself as the most profound mediation, for the “this” in itself indicates nothing and everything at the same time. And the “I” who is indicating this is just as well every “I” and the “I” in general. Thus, as Hegel famously concludes, “it is in fact the universal that is the true [content] of sense-certainty (*das Allgemeine ist also in der Tat das Wahre der sinnlichen Gewißheit*)” (1977a: 60; 1907: 67) or “the pointing-out is the experience that Now is a universal (*das Aufzeigen ist das Erfahren, daß Jetzt Allgemeines ist*)” (1977a: 64; 1907: 71). However, even if we assume that Hegel here attempts to demonstrate that every sense-certainty already implies judgment with a structure of “singular is universal,” how do we then explain such an *experience* which as such is always something particular, different and vanishing? How do we explain this experience of the same, i.e., universal, without succumbing to the merely formal dialectics which reduces movement to its resolution in identity?

Following Hegel’s dialectical analysis of sense-certainty, it seems that “the now” can only be conceived *as* “now” if it is always more and less than this particular and unique instant. On the one hand, it is always more because in order to remain what it is, “this” or “now” must include all those potential moments that are neither this particular “now” nor “this.” On the other hand, it is always less because “this” still signifies any thing, it is universal, and therefore it never grasps that particular and unique “this.” Yet what remains without emphasis in Hegel’s argument is that there is no such thing as “this” or “now” in general, withdrawn from their actual performance in being uttered or written. For, taken in themselves, they have no determination, nor any reference to other determinations. ‘In itself’ they have no meaning whatsoever, except that of an indexing function. But even if this is the case, then to what do these indexicals actually *refer*? What do they *determine* when they are being actually performed if it is never what is actually meant, if we “directly refute (*widerlegen*) what we mean to say” (Hegel 1977a: 60; 1907: 68)?

First, what is important in this observation is that it does not follow from Hegel's argument that these indications of sense-certainty are simply deceiving or incorrect. As if in expecting to grasp singularity, we *de facto* indicate universality such that thereby an inadequacy between *Gewißheit* and *Wahrheit* emerges, which in its own turn must be overcome. Such inconsistency between truth and certainty indeed appears. But the awareness or sense-certainty of "now" and "this" as universals still remain "the same" in every different moment despite its vanishing content. Therefore we cannot admit that all the previous and forthcoming "nows" have been simply negated. In defining this, Hegel here uses the expression "*sich aufheben*" (1907: 72) which in Miller's translation quite accurately appears as "they *supersede* themselves" (1977a: 64), and not simply "annihilate."<sup>49</sup> Following this interpretation, it seems that every "now" or "this" is also necessarily preserved in every instant of its utterance, albeit in a peculiar manner. That holds due to the negativity that both incorporates and supersedes all the other "nows," in order to make this particular instant come across in front of the others. For every "now" to take place *as* "now" it has to be different from all the others, otherwise it would become an immobile point of eternity.<sup>50</sup> This is because it is not merely the content, nor the specific use of a certain type of deictic concepts, nor the experience of time and space that Hegel attempts to capture here. Rather, what he seeks to grasp is the very *movement* of the concept. From this perspective, any particular meaning (*Meinung*) of "this", appears to be given *as* its negation in the universal. Its being appears to be a *being absent*, what Hegel calls *Nicht-seiendes* or *Negatives überhaupt* (1907: 67). But likewise—though Hegel does not put it as explicitly as does Schelling—the universal is manifest as its own negation in any particular "this." The "this" of "this" is grasped precisely as its absence and the universality, in its own turn, performs itself by negating itself in stepping out of its infinitely abundant

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<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that the dual meaning of *Aufhebung*—negation and preservation—that Hegel exploited was also, as Lauer notices, very important for Schelling in articulating the relationship between negative and positive philosophies. (Lauer 2010: 179).

<sup>50</sup> Hegel attempts to justify the idea that the power of negativity also presents itself as a possibility of time and duration in all its modes: "Time, as the negative unity of being outside of itself, is just as thoroughly abstract, ideal being: being which, since it is, is not, and since it is not, is. [...] the concept is the power (*Macht*) of time, which is only this negativity as externality" (Hegel 1970b: 229-230; 1986c: 48-49). Thus the concept does not take place or perform *in* time, rather, it performs the time itself. As Jean Hyppolite also puts it, "time is the extasis of difference, which in the Logos presents itself as the internal movement of determinations" (1997: 188).

immediacy and totality. In other words, in order for this grasping (*begreifen*)<sup>51</sup> or indicating “this” or “now” to be possible at all, all other possibilities must be suspended precisely through this very gesture of grasping and thus this act of self-suspension becomes its self-realising power. Taken in this sense, it follows that universality suspends its force in order to demonstrate it. Determination has to *out*-determine itself in order to determine anything at all. It is a place where being and non-being are held together or, to be more precise, where all being is rooted in non-being.

Given the framework of our current concerns, namely, the negativity of the concept, these indicative ‘latent’ judgments are significant precisely for their negative self-relatedness. This is exposed here as a general movement preceding and yet permeating any particular concept. Instead of coping with certain determinations and thereby “embodying” this relation, it deals with the determinacy as such. Or, put differently, it is rather the copula itself here (for to say “now *is* night”, “it *is* this” or simply “this” etc.—is to turn away from this “this” or this “now;” it is to turn it into its other) is what signifies nothing except the original movement of self-differentiation of the concept. In that sense, every pointing appears to be always pointing away. Pointing to nothing except to the pointing itself. As Hegel himself claims, “Of course, we do not envisage the universal This or Being in general but we utter the universal (*Wir stellen uns dabei freilich nicht das allgemeine Diese oder das Sein überhaupt vor, aber wir sprechen das Allgemeine aus*); in other words, we do not strictly say what in this sense-certainty we mean to say. But language, as we see, is the more truthful; in it, we ourselves directly refute what we mean to say [...]” (1907: 68; 1977a: 60). It follows then, that the previously raised question of *experiencing* the universal turns out to be grounded precisely in its *performativity*—judging, uttering or writing it. This, in its own turn, coincides with the imperative of speculative logic, where the knower is equally affected by the known and vice versa. By creating mediation already in its seemingly most “innocent” cases, by distancing itself from itself in its own birth and practice, the concept drives its whole movement in returning back to itself as an absolute mediation.

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<sup>51</sup> The German word for “concept”—*Begriff* already embodies this move of grasping (*begreifen*), as well as—though slightly different—the Latin *concipere*, which literally means “taking together”, and which is also the origin of English ‘concept.’ Thus such expressions like ‘grasping/conceiving with a concept’ in this context would be a pleonasm.



It is precisely this tension and this movement that seems to be the most important here because, strictly speaking, any “this”, “here” or “now” demonstrates nothing else than the negation of the concept within the concept itself. And if so, this kind of self-relating structure would also open up a possibility to treat Hegelian negation of negation not simply as a mere sequence of formal actions. That is, when the first negation negates something and the second negating the first “returns” what was lost in the first negation. Instead, it would suggest understanding it as an *intransitive* verb (e.g., like when we say “it is raining”; “it dawns” etc.) which no longer has any subject, nor content or object that would remain external to it. It is negativity that reveals itself only in and due its own effect and taking place. It is the negation of negation which becomes the exposure of what is negative *within* the negative, and what makes the negative *negative*.

In order to further clarify this idea, Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of Hegel’s *Dieses* (even though Agamben was more concerned with language and a Heideggerian approach) as presented in his *Language and Death* seems to be quite useful. Here Agamben comes to the conclusion that what is supposed to be expressed in the already discussed sense-certainty indicating judgments, what is the most immediate, individual, and concrete—ultimately refers to nothing else than the event of the discourse itself. What he calls “the taking place of language” (*aver-luogo del linguaggio*): “a *Nichtigkeit*, a negativity that is revealed as always already inherent in sense-certainty at the moment when it attempts to ‘take the This’ (*das Diese nehmen*). [...] But this is not because of the incapacity of language to pronounce the unspeakable [...] but rather, this is due to the fact that the universal itself is the truth of sense-certainty, and thus it is precisely this truth that language says perfectly” (Agamben 1991: 15, 11). *Dieses* signifies nothing else than *the taking place* of thought which is the effect of this self-relating negativity. Moreover, another no less important conclusion can be drawn from these interpretations. Namely, that realizing the negativity inherent in the power of thinking is precisely what gives us an opportunity to discover thought standing on its own point of dissolution. Which, however, is also a first moment of its appearing to itself and coming into being.

### ***Erfüllte Kopula***

This whole issue becomes clearer when we look at the way judgment is presented in *The Science of Logic*. Here, by consistently moving through the logic of being-essence-concept (concept-judgment-syllogism) to the absolute

idea, Hegel reaches the point where he directly focuses on the structure of the *Urteil* as such. And at first glance, he does this in a purely “formal” manner—by taking it as a relation between subject and predicate or singular and universal. However, even in this exposition we can recognize the peculiar performative dimension inherent in the work of the copula. What *happens* to the concept when it is being actually judged? What happens when one concept, which according to Hegel, taken as immediate and undetermined is infinite (2010: 530; 2003: 274), is determined by another concept on the condition that it does not lie in the former analytically.

The judgment, Hegel claims, “can therefore be called the first realization (*Realisierung*) of the concept, for reality (*Realität*) denotes in general the entry into existence as determinate being (*das Treten ins Dasein als bestimmtes Sein*)” (2003: 302; 2010: 550). But how to understand this process of *realisation* and this very ‘entry’? On the one hand, judgment consists of “infinite self-subsisting totalities” which in the act of judgment remain separate; yet on the other hand, the same reflection brings these separate totalities into determinate unity and thus into existence (if we assume that after Kant ‘to exist’ means to be limited and determined) for the first time. In other words, following Hegel’s account, in judgment the power of thinking seems to manifest itself as an original force of *synthesis*, that is, in contrast to the mere application of a particular rule, according to which an object would be predicated in advance. Since the object here is the concept itself which judges itself, there is nothing to be ‘given in advance.’ The rules of formal or even transcendental logic are not sufficient to explain the *act* of judgment for what is put in question here is the *execution* of rule and the *emergence* of the relation itself. However, the synthesis—in order to be grasped synthetically (i.e., in terms of speculative logic)—as Hegel seems to suggest, necessarily incorporates an aspect of disintegration and rupture. That may be also the reason why Hegel always leads and demands the reader to go through every step of thought’s development—in order to show that it is not the content but rather the actual movement and its intensity is what makes the difference.

If precisely the realization of the concept is one of the most important issues in discussing the nature of speculative logic, then precisely the copula of the judgment, instead of being a merely logical or linguistic operator, becomes the locus of the emergence of the content. Even though Hegel himself did not thematize this issue in such a way, we may see it in the different moments of the judgment he presents (judgment of existence, reflection, necessity, and of

concept, cf. Hegel 2010: 550-557), all of which can also be interpreted as signifying the *gradual intensification of the copula*. With respect to the concept, it coincides with the movement of negativity. If we take the structure of the judgment “subject ‘is’ predicate” or, to be more precise, “singular (*Einzelheit*) ‘is’ universal (*Allgemeinheit*)” we will be able to interpret the activity of the copula in at least four different degrees: i) simple identity; ii) opposition; iii) negative unity; iv) performativity.

First, if we take the stance of empirical consciousness, then the judgment, to follow Hegel, appears as a simple *identity* in which the predicate belongs to the subject as a self-subsisting thing which has certain qualities. In other words, the copula here does not ‘move’ the concept yet, since it expresses merely an immediate existence of a certain being through its factual determinations. But the thing can appear to me as something only through its determinations, only in being determined. Otherwise, it becomes inconceivable. Thus strictly speaking, the subject is first preserved in its predicate precisely by being negated by it in the copula. In other words, the subject has already “passed over” (*Übergang*) (Hegel 2003: 307; 2010: 554) into the predicate of a judgment (as it also was in the simple case of “now is night”, where sense-certainty “passed over” into the *experience* of the universal). In the previous example, “now” has passed over into “night” and in this way let the judgment be conceivable. It is clear that even at this point Hegel inverts the classical Aristotelian logic in which the subject-substance (*ὑποκειμένον*) “is something which can be predicated by other things but cannot be a predicate of others” (Cat. 1a 20). As he does this by remaining faithful to the Kantian-Fichtean logic of immanence which cannot presuppose anything beyond its own activity.

Conversely, even after being recognized as identity, copula here also immediately appears as what *separates* and turns the subject-predicate relationship into an opposition, if we take the judgment in its reflective aspect (the second type of judgment introduced by Hegel). Particularity, through reflection, rises to universality, but universality, in turn, becomes particular being. Thus this mutual tension between the subject (this singular) and the predicate (universality) remains as long as this judgment holds true and does not become either tautological or a mere proposition. However, if we go even further and consider a judgment where the predicate necessarily lies in the subject and vice versa, then the copula establishes a relationship that now Hegel would identify as a “negative unity.” For it is no longer its elements,

but the judgment itself is what holds the tension of being singular and universal at the same time (as it also does, for example, in the classical demonstration of the *a priori* synthetic judgment “every change is subject to causality”). For on the one hand, in this case we are no longer thinking of any particular thing, but rather defining one universality with and through another. On the other hand, the judgment remains singular insofar as it is taking place, and insofar as it pertains to the process of the self-realization of the concept. Concept realizes itself in being judged, and thus determined, even though here we are only determining the determinacy itself.

Thus if in the first case we had the structure where “the singular is universal,” then here we recognize rather the opposite, namely, that “the *universal* is universal”. And yet in no way this should be understood as a mere tautology since the subject and the predicate still *negate* each other as independent and separate totalities precisely due to the copula. As Hegel himself notices, “Thus it contains in itself both the form determinations of the extremes and is the *determinate* connection of the subject and predicate: the *accomplished* copula of the judgment, the copula *replete of content* [*erfüllte oder inhaltvolle Kopula*], the unity of the concept that re-emerges from the judgment wherein it was lost in the extremes” (Hegel 2003: 351; 2010: 587). Having said this, the copula, understood as a form of relatedness, eventually appears as the content generating itself through itself *as* mediation. As another contemporary Hegel scholar Andrew Hass also notices, “The ‘is’ does not merely equate; as organic, it also, copulatively, engenders” (2013: 43). If that is the case, however, the concept then, as Hegel’s analysis seems to suggest, escapes any particular place or tangible form within which it could be located. That is, the concept becomes a way of movement which itself escapes any conceptual determination. But how does it escape even itself?

In the case of sense-certainty we saw that the concept negates itself by stepping out of its infinite immediacy, by hovering between being and non-being. And here we see that it realizes itself by negating itself even as a particular determination, for again it oscillates between forming and un-forming, by eventually making only the copula “replete of content”. Determinacy as such thus necessarily remains undetermined not because it is required by the unconditional logic of the first principle but precisely because it is always at work. And since it is always, for this reason, “ahead” of itself (as it cannot turn itself into a rigid shape in order to take place at all and stay in the move), it remains in its immanence *not* simply for not being able to

overstep its boundaries. Rather, it is because this boundary itself is immanent, mobile and constantly re-established, to recall Schelling's *unendliche Erweiterung der Schranke* once again. This unlimited self-limitation becomes just another name of the absolute. Or, put differently, we may say that the limit (here understood as *Grenze*) is always established anew in every act of determinacy and, moreover, it is precisely this *act*, this *Treten ins Dasein*, that makes the limit limiting. Thus what Hegel presents as a concept here could be identified as a peculiar movement of this self-relating negativity through which thought grasps itself only in the moment of dissolution. And if so, then strictly speaking, there can be no "concept of the concept" taken in Hegelian terms of speculative logic. Instead, one may speak of the "concept conceptualizing itself." It grasps itself not as something positive, immediate, determined or identical, but rather as a rupture, as a self-resisting and self-interrupting force creating this liminal zone of passage and ambiguity. And yet it is this point of dissolution which is also a source of creativity, which we have noted Hass also rightly emphasizes.

Indeed, Hegel himself observes that in this movement of the self-dissolving process of the concept's realization ("*Das Urteil ist die Diremption des Begriffs durch sich selbst*") (2003: 304), the copula is fulfilled by filling itself and thus restoring the "unity of the concept that has been lost in the extremes" (2003: 351). But what in this case becomes more important, however, is that the copula 'restores' this unity only by constantly re-enacting negativity inherent in the emergence of each determination. That is the process of its actualization. Yet if Hegel tends to relate the emergence of the concept precisely with the movement of negativity as its inherent 'nature,' Schelling, as we shall see, turns the negativity lying in the power of determinacy against itself and further develops the idea by approaching the issue from the opposite direction. And strangely enough, this is the point which apparently brings us back to the beginning of the *Phänomenologie*, where Hegel mysteriously hints at the "secret meaning of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine" (1907: 73; 1977a: 65).

## II. I. II. Schelling: *Wille in dem Willen* or the leaning towards determinacy

### *An impasse of the absolute (night)*

With the appearance of *Phänomenologie* in 1807, the once fruitful and reciprocal cooperation between the two flag-bearers of idealism Schelling and Hegel ambiguously broke up, leaving a tone of mutual embarrassment. There exist all too well-known clichés of Hegel's famous description of the principle of the absolute identity resembling "the night in which all cows are black" (1907: 12; 1977a: 9) which he provides in the preface of *Phänomenologie*. It has been assumed (even by Schelling himself) as referring to Schelling's system in general for its apparent incapacity to account for the movement and differentiation of the absolute. However, in May 1807, after Hegel has just finished his first draft of *Phänomenologie* in the middle of the night as Napoleon was approaching Jena, he sends a copy to Schelling by adding that "[...] In the Preface you will not find that I have been too hard on the shallowness that makes so much mischief with your forms in particular and degrades your science into a bare formalism. I need not tell you, by the way, that your approval of a few pages would be worth more to me than the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of others with the whole" (Butler; Seiler 1984: 80). As it seems from Hegel's own justification and humbleness of tone, his intentions were far from lowering Schelling's philosophy. Quite the contrary, he seems to suggest that Schelling's judgment of this work remains of the utmost importance. Moreover, he also indicates that he trusts him on these matters as no one else, therefore implying that they still share core principles and convictions.

Nevertheless, Schelling did not seem to be convinced with this rhetoric as he responded: "[...] It [the polemical part of the Preface—B. G.] must therefore, as you have expressed in your letter, apply only to further bad use of my ideas and to those who parrot them without understanding, although in this writing itself the distinction is not made. [...] I confess I do not yet understand your sense in opposing concept (*Begriff*) to intuition (*Anschauung*). By this first term you can only mean what you and I have called the Idea (*Idee*)—which by its very nature is concept in one of its aspects and intuition in another" (ibid.; also Schelling 1870: 121). Indeed, it was Hegel who apparently never replied to Schelling. And given his subsequent repugnant tone towards him used in the public (e. g. his 1816-1818 lectures on the history of philosophy where he criticizes Schelling for simply presupposing the absolute unity

without aiming to demonstrate it (Hegel 1986: 420-454)), Schelling seems to have received the right impression that Hegel just exploited the ambiguity he himself created. It is quite likely the case that Hegel was perfectly aware what he was doing as he wished to hear Schelling's opinion and get his 'approval' for the text. This is because the text included 'rival' claims, one of which Schelling himself explicitly described as 'the opposition between intuition and concept'.

However, since the above was their last letter exchange, it is still not clear whether Hegel and Schelling were caught in a mutual misunderstanding more related to the different aspects of the same issue, or whether their disagreement signified a substantial and irreconcilable contradiction growing between the two thinkers—the latter of which would result in creating a deadlock, threatening the justification of the idealistic perspective in general. Interestingly enough, as we shall see in his later writings, Schelling continued to attack Hegel precisely for the same reasons as Hegel criticized him—that is, for simply presupposing the identity of being and the concept of being, for his incapacity<sup>52</sup> to account for the original impulse and the movement of thought (a path which he, just like Hegel, also called 'a shot from the pistol'), or for attempting to present his merely negative philosophy as a positive account of being. One possible way to approach this ambiguous relationship concerning the limits and performativity of speculative thinking after 1807, is to question the role of negativity which plays in each thinker's account on determinacy. For, as it was already indicated in the previous sections, the tension arising between them does not necessarily create an impasse or suggest a contradiction that could be reciprocally absorbed within the respective dialectics. Rather, it is argued that it may also expose a mutually conditioned movement of thought, available to address the question of self-mediation in the experience of consciousness.

On the one hand, as we saw earlier, the apparent Kantian opposition between intuition and concept that Schelling ascribed to Hegel, as well as the difference between *Gewißheit* and *Wahrheit*, let Hegel locate the movement of negativity within the realization of the concept as such and make it its producing force. That is, for Hegel consciousness operates *within* (or even *as*, but never simply *with*) this opposition. It transforms itself in the very act of

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<sup>52</sup> As Clark Butler also notices "Hegel surely agreed with the late Schelling that the concretely existing world can only be defined, not ontologically or even descriptively exhausted, by negative philosophy" (1984: 81).

recognizing or, as it was suggested, *performing* this ‘oppositonality’ or incompatibility of truth and certainty in every judgment as the actual appearance of the concept. Yet the relation appears to be no longer understood as a relation *between something* but rather, a relation relating to itself. For already Fichte showed that if it was not a self-relating activity in the first place, it would simply be inconceivable. In other words, once recognized as such, the opposition also becomes a form of unity and thus turns the opposing elements into the different moments (or aspects) of the concept. And yet in that sense, as it was attempted to show, this self-relating activity exposes itself as a *self-referring negativity* where the unifying force simultaneously becomes a self-separating force. Thus the determining act for Hegel becomes the act un-determining determinacy itself in order to be grasped and to take place at all. In that sense, Schelling seems to be quite correct in claiming that Hegel opposes concept and intuition. But he is also correct in claiming that in the idea (here understood in a Hegelian sense as a concept of the concept or the concept fully developed in its essence) concept and intuition coincides. For precisely the movement of the concept is what posits this opposition *as* opposition.

For Schelling, however, this negativity, which he takes as inherent in determinacy, appears to such that the absolute unity (what Hegel assumingly called this infamous Night of indifference) for reason remains exposed to itself only in its unreachable-undeterminable-unformed basis. In Hegel’s case it was an emphasis on the self-relating executive aspect of the concept’s negativity that forms the ever-dissolving identity. In this way, thought opens itself to the experience of the absolute precisely in and as the movement of its permanent dissolution, determinacy un-determining itself. In Schelling’s case, as we shall see, the negativity seems to be questioned from the other side. That is, from the perspective of the absolute introducing it as always referring to its essential absence thereby justifying determination in terms of absolute’s *Abfall* or *Sprung*<sup>53</sup> (Schelling 2010: 25; SW I, VI: 38).

### ***The Abfall of the ideal into the real***

If the previous analysis indeed turned out to be convincing, Schelling’s and Hegel’s respective understandings of negativity could further clarify their ambiguous relationship against the common reading—that is, by

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<sup>53</sup> On Schelling’s relationship with apophatic theology, mystical tradition and J. Böhme’s influence see McGrath, S. J. 2012. *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious*. New York: Routledge.



complementing each other in maintaining the ambiguity and thereby disclosing its specific performative dimension. This brings us back to 1804, when Schelling composed his still often overlooked essay *Philosophie und Religion*. For it is significant not only for its being a precursor of the *Freiheitsschrift* (1809)<sup>54</sup> and later Schelling's major distinction between the negative and positive philosophy. Here Schelling, at times even appearing inconsistent, is still struggling to provide a sufficient account of the possible cognition of the absolute. However, for our concerns, the *Freiheitsschrift* is important for its recognition that the absolute, understood genetically—as an immediately present identity of producing and produced, of form and movement—can never be grasped nor derived within the means of objectifying discursive thought and turned into an image. Nor does it seem that reason can have an immediate relationship to this immediacy either. Even less can it be justifiable merely in negative terms, as a kind of unreachable absolute Otherness. In other words, the very question of *how it is possible that the world appears to me at all* (what Schelling calls *das Räthsel der Welt* (SW I, I: 310), *how it comes into being* or *how the absolute can be thought and thought as alive*, is showed to be impossible to address as long as it demands a determined answer and thereby excludes the question of its own possibility. For in that case it would presuppose an external (or put in Schellingian-Hegelian terms, reflective and dogmatic) stance from which the absolute is identified, thus rendering its very concept at least problematic if not entirely untenable.<sup>55</sup> Therefore the issue Schelling is struggling with seems to be the following: if, in order to be addressed, the question of determinacy as such (which amounts to the question of the absolute) necessarily anticipates a self-referential structure and forbids any view from the 'outside', how can it render itself thinkable at all? What kind of approach—if any—does it suggest?

The previously discussed image of the “night of the world” that Hegel uses in his Jena writings argues for the primacy of mediation in every conscious encounter with reality. Self-limitation is understood in terms of self-mediation. The world is brought forward as a manifold of determinations

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Pfau provided an insightful commentary to early Schelling as already anticipating the ‘end of idealism’ in its identity philosophy (1994).

<sup>55</sup> Even though in essence this was already demonstrated by Kant in the *Transcendental Dialectics* and limited within the sphere of regulative ideas of practical reason, the procedure which made the whole *Critique* possible still had to be explicated. Schelling also admits that “Kant showed how meaningless it is for reason to attempt to seek beyond itself to existence through inferences (*Schlüssen*)” (SW II, III: 83).

which negate its self-subsistence and thus bring it ‘back’ to itself as a kind of inverted image of consciousness. Every image is shown to appear already detached from what it refers to, thus presencing the absence. Yet Schelling, however, seems to develop the argument the other way around. As we shall see, he appeals to this ‘night’ not with regards to the world of appearances but with regards to the absolute itself. Thus as he claims, for example, that “the description (*Beschreibung*) of the Absolute as identity of opposites is merely negative and the philosopher demands something *entirely different* (*etwas ganz anderes*) for the cognition of the Absolute” (2010: 12; SW I,VI: 23), what exactly he means by this “*ganz anderes*”?

Together with Hegel, Schelling admits that the self-recognition of the absolute is the sole task of all philosophy and its history is nothing else besides the history of self-consciousness. However, he is also aware that such cognition cannot simply consist of the ‘adequate’ determinations of reality derived from the first principle and comprised into a consistent and stable system.<sup>56</sup> For the ideal also has to *become* itself in becoming real, it has to realize itself. Yet this transition, according to Schelling, cannot be deduced or anticipated from any formal or ideal principle whatsoever because the principle itself is in need of it. Its realization becomes its limit. Necessity cannot justify its own necessity, it cannot justify its own existence. But this raises the question: “How does necessity ever come to our grasp?” Or, using Schelling’s own words, “In what way is this self-recognition to be understood as identity coming out of itself?”—Schelling thus argues: “The independent self-recognition of the ideal-per-se is an eternal transformation of pure ideality into reality (*Das selbstständige Sich-selbst-Erkennen des schlechthin—Idealen ist eine ewige Umwandlung der reinen Idealität in Realität*): in this sense, and in no other, we will now approach this self-representation of the Absolute” (2010: 22; SW I, VI: 34). What Schelling calls here this permanent coming (*ewige Umwandlung*) into reality, which characterizes self-recognition, is thus something very different from what could be identified as the self-contained and self-sufficient undifferentiated absolute identity that some may seem to ascribe to Schelling. More than the result itself (or description), Schelling

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<sup>56</sup> In the beginning of *Phänomenologie*, Hegel also argues that “... [T]he real issue (*Sache*) is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out (*Ausführung*), nor is the result the actual whole (*wirkliche Ganze*), but rather the result together with the process through which it came about (*Werden*). The aim by itself is a lifeless universal [...] the bare result is the corpse (*Leichnam*) which has left the guiding tendency behind it.” (1907: 5; 1977a: 2-3).

seems to search for a way to experience the absolute precisely in its stepping out of itself, in its loss, in the very *quest* for the absolute. But does that mean that the absolute can somehow become real in the sense of becoming finite? Do we fall back into a version of Spinozism where reality is understood simply as an *attribute* of the absolute? Or maybe we are getting closer to Neoplatonism and its doctrine of emanation? How should we understand this *Umwandlung* into reality?

As Schelling further claims, “there is no continuous transition from the Absolute to the actual (*Wirklichen*); the origin of the phenomenal world is conceivable only as a complete falling-away (*Abbrechen*) from absoluteness by means of a leap (*Sprung*). [...] There is no positive effect (*Wirkung*) coming out of the Absolute that creates a conduit or bridge between the infinite and the finite. Furthermore: philosophy has only a negative relation to phenomenal objects; since it demonstrates less the truth of their being than their nonbeing (*sie beweist nicht sowohl, daß sie sind, als daß sie nicht sind*). [...] The absolute is the only actual (*das einzige Reale*<sup>57</sup>); the finite world, by contrast, is not real. Its cause (*Grund*), therefore, cannot lie in an impartation (*Mittheilung*) of reality from the Absolute to the finite world or its substrate; it can only lie in a remove (*Entfernung*), in a falling-away (*Abfall*) from the Absolute” (2010: 26; SW I, VI: 38). In this dense passage, three moments remain of crucial importance for us. They direct us towards the question of self-mediation and its peculiar performative appearance. It becomes manifest in a subtle distinction between *Realität* (as being) and *Wirklichkeit* (actuality) which Schelling hints at but does not seem to develop in detail. In order to clarify this further, it is necessary to address the following issues: i) how to understand that the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) can be thought only as a breaking-away from the absolute, as a leap or removal? That it cannot be derived from anything; ii) how it corresponds to another claim, namely, that the finite world is not real and that the absolute is the only real? iii) And if, accordingly, the absolute (though as *einzig Reale*) does not yet belong to the actuality, nor does it provide any effect to relate to the actual, what can still be conceived as the actual? For it does not coincide with the ‘unreal’ finite objective world either. It seems inconceivable that something could be considered as actual but not real (though not the other way around).

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<sup>57</sup> For reasons unknown, English translators translate Schelling’s *Reale* not as “the real” but as “the actual.”

Regarding the first question: on the one hand, it seems as though Schelling admits that the ideal has to become real such that, even though it does so only in this breaking away or leaping, this fall does not take place *outside* the absolute. This leap or fall remains related to the absolute in this very inverse negative identification. The finite world can be understood as not real in a sense that it does not have any self-subsistence or independence outside the absolute, outside its ideal determinations. But it cannot have its ground, according to Schelling, in the absolute either because that would make it impossible to explain how the finite *becomes* finite and what enables determinacy or mediation. Up to this point, Schelling seems to remain consistent with the logic of Kant's argument that no actual phenomena can be derived from its concept.

On the other hand—and now coming to the second point—the self-representation of the absolute, according to Schelling, coincides with the permanent transformation of the ideal into the real. That is, the ideal grasps itself as it is in its essence (*Sich-selbst-Erkennen*) precisely in its transition to reality. But given the absolute is the only real, it follows that the aforementioned *Umwandlung* is the absolute's transformation within itself. But how else (and where?) could this genuine transformation take place if not in this becoming actual? And who performs this transition? Schelling, together with Fichte and Hegel, realized the necessity to think reason as both transforming and being transformed within and through its own activity. Thus it became inevitable to think the self-recognition as essentially related to the self-*creation* instead of merely self-*discovering*. In other words, the ideal, as Schelling claims, has to realize itself in order to become ideal, it has to be made, it has to perform itself, though without being simply “assimilated (*Vermischung*) into the real” (2010: 14; SW I, VI: 25). For otherwise, if we remember, the absolute remains nothing but a mere lifeless ‘description’. Yet the supposed absolute speculative unity (according to its form Schelling calls it is only “*schlechthin-Ideale*” (2010: 19; SW I, VI: 30)) of ideal-real now taken in its relationship to cognition and the act of thinking cannot be grasped, if it is to be grasped at all, as a simple unmediated stable identity of ‘ideal=real’.

Rather, and Schelling makes this clear, this identity is a permanent becoming. Moreover, although anticipating this movement by referring to it negatively, the movement cannot be deduced or derived from the ideality in a sense of arousing it and setting it in motion. Even to argue for such an activity would

lead to admitting that the absolute is an insufficiency or a lack that renders its absoluteness not absolute. Indeed, this becoming—if it is to be more than a mere repetition of the same or a mere accomplishment and fulfilment of a pre-established order, if the transformation itself is more important than the result and definition—it demands something “entirely else.” To recall Schelling again: “The Absolute would not be truly objective in the real if it did not impart (*theilte*) to it its power (*Macht*) to transform ideality into reality and to objectify itself into particular forms” (Schelling 2010: 23; SW I, VI: 35).

Does this suggest, then, that the self-recognition and eternal transformation of ideal into the real is related to this idea of the actual as the *Abfall*? Does this demand to see this falling-away as necessarily partaking *in* this transformation? And moreover, if this self-recognition is assumed to be demonstrated by philosophy, how would it relate to the claim that, instead of disclosing the existence (*daß sie sind*) of the phenomenal world in determining it, philosophy rather reveals its non-existence (*daß sie nicht sind*)<sup>58</sup>? What kind of actuality would we encounter here? Schelling makes an unexpected turn: “The cause of the falling-away, and therefore also its activity of production (*Producirens*), lies not in the Absolute but merely in the real, in the intuited (*Angeschauten*) itself, which must be regarded as fully autonomous and free. The cause of the *possibility* of the falling-away lies in freedom, and insofar as it is posited by the imaginative formation<sup>59</sup> (*Einbildung*) of the absolute-ideal into the real, it also lies in the forms and thereby in the Absolute; but the cause of the *actual* fall lies solely in the fallen-away itself (*Abgefallenen selbst*) which produces the nothingness of the sensate world only *through and for itself*” (2010: 28; SW I, VI: 40).

First, it is significant that even in considering the absolute Schelling explicitly distinguishes between the ground of possibility and the ground of actuality. To have the ground of its possibility is not enough to justify the very appearing of the real and finite world in the traditional *causa efficiens* sense. For that would still enclose the ideal within itself because any consistent transition would be possible only within what is homogenous. Whereas here the

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<sup>58</sup> It seems also closely related to the previously discussed Hegel’s claims in Jena’s lectures and his *Dieses* analysis.

<sup>59</sup> As Klaus Ottman clarifies, this concept, usually translated as ‘imagination’, “combines image (*Bild*) and education (*Bildung*) with the concept of *Einheit* (oneness or identity), suggesting an imaginative becoming-one through a process of formation” (2010: XX).

question is rather of the *qualitative* and not merely quantitative difference. For that reason, its ‘ground’ of appearing can be thought only as the ‘*Angeschauten selbst*’ or the appearing of the appearing itself. That is to say, the ground of its coming into being, of the fallen-away can lie only in the fallen-away itself. And precisely in this sense of being self-referential it becomes autonomous and free.

But what kind of ground is it then, if it coincides with the very event it is grounding? If the ground of the actual must already be actual itself? Contrary to Hegel, i.e., instead of assuming it as *self-grounding*, what Schelling seems to be anticipating is that the actuality *cannot* be grounded with any rational logic of grounding: “Neither can the falling-away be *explained* (so to speak) because it is absolute and descends from absoluteness, even though its consequence and its necessarily entrained predicament (*Verhängnis*) is nonabsoluteness” (2010: 30; SW I, VI: 42). But that means the actuality cannot be grounded at all. Strictly speaking, it remains *ungrounded* and therefore can take place precisely because of that and make the aforementioned free transformation (*Umwandlung*) possible. In other words, the birth of the actual that allows the realization of the ideal is also the moment of a crisis or, to be more precise, a crisis—κρίσις, a turning point, a moment of decision and separation—*within* the ideal itself. In this way, freedom, soul (what Schelling calls *die Seele*<sup>60</sup>) and actuality become essentially interrelated and mutually conditioning of each other. The actuality understood as *Abfall* and *Entfernung* of the absolute understood as a realm of determinacy appears as necessarily rooted in freedom. For it becomes what it is only in stepping out of infinity and immediacy of the ideal, thereby letting the soul discover itself *in* and *as* this very leap and stepping out. It becomes this hollowing gap, exposed by the fall that appears to itself in this oscillation and tension *between* finite and infinite, universal and particular, identity and difference.

Schelling makes it even clearer when he claims that soul’s “predicament (*Verhängniß*) is that it can only produce that which was (as idea) ideal within it, as real—that is, as negation of the ideal. [...] The soul cannot return to the

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<sup>60</sup> Though clearly distinguishing between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, as ‘fallen reason’ and ‘originary reason’, as a ‘counter image’ (*Gegenbild*) of the absolute, Schelling, however, does not make it clear what is the relation between reason and the soul except that it becomes its active or producing principle. For example, he claims: “In reason the soul dissolves (*löst sich in der Vernunft auf in die Ureinheit*) into originary oneness and becomes equal to it. It is hereby given the possibility to become fully in itself as well as fully in the Absolute” (2010: 40; SW I, VI: 51).

absolute thesis, the absolute firstness (*Eins*), it produces only a synthesis” (2010: 32, 34; SW I, VI: 44, 46). We see that synthesis here, just like *Urteil*, is marked with primordial separation that the synthesizing activity restlessly restores and overcomes in establishing it anew. One way to interpret this “*ganz anderes*” is to realize that precisely because of and through this *negativity inherent in determination* soul becomes free. But the crucial element thus lies in the very *act* of determination but not in determination as such which always remains something merely negative. The finite and the objective, according to Schelling, taken as such are not real and not actual, but the act of objectification is actual. It is the act that becomes the exercise of this *leap* and falling-away in every synthesis and thereby in every coming into being. However, this act does not make the finite disappear in the absolute through their supposed ‘reconciliation’ which thereby annihilates the finite altogether. Rather, it suggests understanding this *Entfernung* as a kind of proximity and relatedness. But this proximity can no longer be understood in positive definitive terms or in relation to the propositional content. As Paul Tillich suggested, far from simply falling prey to negative theology, this becomes an experience of the absolute coinciding with the very loss of the absolute.<sup>61</sup> Although reason cannot *know* the absolute, it can *make it happen*.

Having said this, self-recognition, as discussed above, can be understood as a question of a certain *state* and *relatedness* rather than of a determined content. For the state here becomes the content. What Schelling seems to suggest here is a kind of modal reinterpretation of the mediated truth of self-representation. It is characterized not by, as some argue, “logical anteriority of Being over the conceptual” (Pfau 1994: 27). For in terms of conceptual (ideal) logic, there is no difference between ideal and real, between concept and being. Rather, what makes this difference conceivable is a ‘logic’ of performativity and practice. The experience of a self-loss, a leap establishing and practicing itself in every finite and determined cognition. It renders any particular determination vanishing and inessential, or essential only as an instance of freedom, as a possibility to grasp itself. It may be contended that for Schelling it is the fallen soul that carries out this *Umwandlung* of the ideal into the real precisely through this leap (*Absprung*) to the actual. Moreover, if we admit that the soul *is* this *Abfall*, if its life *is* this *Entfernung*, and this removal of the absolute, then indeed, we are not far from realizing that the actual world, instead of being grounded, rather becomes

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Tillich (1974) has provided an insightful account on reading Schelling from an existential perspective.

*ungrounded* in the absolute. That the *absolute becomes immanent only as an absolute limit*<sup>62</sup> thereby exposing not the ground (*Grund*) (as Fichte would claim) but rather the abyss (*Abgrund*) of reason. It is the negativity which appears to be inherent in reason's actualization. It creates a space for determinacy, thus granting reason a possibility to grasp itself through this separation. Being becomes understood neither simply as antithesis to thought, nor simply as its positing, nor derivative. Rather, it becomes the possibility of thought's *relatedness* to itself. In that sense, we again encounter an attempt to consider transcendentalism in its performative dimension.

Furthermore, in apparently distancing himself from previous theological claims, Schelling would soon come to the still highly controversial conclusion that even God is also exposed to this *Ungrund*—an idea that he will elaborate later on in his *Freiheitsschrift*, a work Heidegger (1971) would declare to be the culminating point of German idealism. Thus, even if the absolute for Schelling is the 'black night' which Hegel seems to ascribe to him, nevertheless, already in his 1804 essay, this night is not such that swallows everything in its indeterminacy. Rather, determinacy itself appears to be necessarily darkened and darkening according to its 'impossible possibility,' so to speak, or its abysmal origin in the *Abfall*. However, what remains to be further investigated regarding our current concerns—that is, reason's performativity in relation to determinacy—is how determinacy exposes itself in its particular manifestations. So far we have been discussing only the general approach regarding the concepts of actuality and negativity. However, it remains still unclear, what exactly, according to Schelling, is determination in its appearance? How does it come into being at all, whether in judgment or in identity? How do we avoid the 'bare formalism' and the repetition of the same, into which the apparent inessentiality of the finite determinations may

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<sup>62</sup> Appealing to Thomas Pfau (1994), Ottman, however, puts it more radically: "Because of Schelling's determination to philosophize on the edge of the "originary abyss" (*anfängliche Ungrund*), i.e., in the face of the Absolute, his philosophy is associated almost by default—with failure, with its own impossibility. In wanting to complete Kant's philosophy, Schelling ended up failing philosophy altogether in an endgame of theory by repeatedly tearing down his own achievements" (2010: XVII). Yet these views tend to overlook that it was Schelling's attempt to justify this state of a "permanent crisis" as lying at the very core of philosophizing. Furthermore, putting Hegel as his counterpart makes it even clearer. Instead of simply giving up theoretical and rational philosophy due to its methodological inconsistencies he searched for its reformulation.



fall? How can life—as that which is actual and yet neither merely real nor ideal—still be thought in these terms?

### *Ungrounding the ground*

After the unexpected end of a friendship with Hegel in 1807, the loss of his wife Caroline and the last painful encounter with his deranged friend, Friedrich Hölderlin, Schelling continued to work on a crucial reevaluation of speculative logic. For him, it was still necessary to address the question of the actuality of reason in its self-relatedness and its appearing to itself. Despite leaving an enormous amount of manuscripts and lecture courses, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (*Philosophical investigations into the essence of human freedom*) remained his last treatise published during his lifetime in the same year of 1809. The idea of *Ursprung* naturally led back to the question of freedom. By furthering a crucial emphasis on its ontological horizon and its relation to self-determinacy, Schelling once again faced the necessity to reconsider the unity of theoretical and practical reason. The concept of identity (*Identität*) had to be clearly distinguished from simple sameness (*Einerleiheit*). Instead of arguing for a negative concept of freedom as a state of undecidedness and complete indeterminacy (or Fichte's pure ideal activity)—thereby narrowing the whole question to the classical problem of *liberum arbitrium*—Schelling struggles to provide a positive account of freedom as a determining power. Not only as a capacity for good and evil, but even more, as a power that is also the power of bringing into being, acquiring form, putting forward. That is, Schelling questions not only the possibility of freedom (as this was already done by Kant, who showed that freedom coincides with the imperative to be free, with reason exposed to its own fact) but its actual manifestation in and as the act of determination. That is, not being negated in the finite or the real but rather as *taking place within* freedom. But in what sense?

As it was discussed previously, according to Schelling, there can be no continuous transition from the indeterminate to determinate, from identity to difference and vice versa. The actual can be conceived only in terms of *Ursprung*—as an absolute limit of the ideal within the ideal which nevertheless enables its own realization. Or as ideal *becoming* ideal. In that sense, reason is the event of this leap. It is what dwells in this permanent falling, losing ground and becoming itself through this loss. Accordingly, the question of determinacy becomes the question of the dynamic or executive

aspect of conceptual thinking—not of its reference, content or immediacy but rather of its taking place, its coming forward.

To further clarify this point, Schelling makes a crucial remark in his *Freiheitsschrift* against Reinhold when considering the apparent confusion in understanding identity: “This body is blue,’ does not have the meaning that the body is, in and through that in and through which it is a body, also blue, but rather only the meaning that the same thing which is this body is also blue, although not in the same respect: and yet this assumption, which indicates complete ignorance regarding the nature (*Wesen*) of the copula, has constantly been made in relation to the higher application of the law of identity in our time. [...] ‘The perfect is the imperfect,’ the meaning is this: the imperfect is not due to that through which it is imperfect, but rather through the perfect that is in it; [...] Just this is the meaning of another ancient explanation according to which subject and predicate are set against each other as what is enfolded (*Eingewickelte*) to what is unfolded (*Entfaltete*) (*implicitum et explicitum*)” (2006: 14; SW I, VII: 341-342). By arguing that any identity (he does not seem to distinguish between judgments ‘A is B’ or tautologies ‘A is A’) signifies more than just simple sameness or connection, Schelling tends to focus on the modality of this relation. That is, on a movement from what is implicit to what is explicit, from what is potential to what is actual, from the immediate to the mediated. In this way, he is shifting the whole question from one-dimensional (or quantitative) differentiation and unification of the concept to the multi-dimensional (or qualitative) *actualization* of the concept. In this way, he emphasizes an originally *relational* rather than merely descriptive-representative character. Any identity, which here is understood as already being an act of determinacy, in its very form establishes a relationship and thus expresses its becoming itself. It establishes such self-relatedness through which it can come into being or be ‘identified’ at all.

As Schelling further puts it, “This principle [*of identity – B. G.*] does not express a unity which, turning itself in the circle of seamless sameness (*Einerleiheit*), would not be progressive and, thus, insensate or lifeless (*unempfindlich und unlebendig*). The unity of this law is an immediately creative (*schöpferische*) one” (2006: 17; SW I, VII: 345). In that sense, distinguishing unity of identity from simple ‘sameness,’ Schelling seems to modify the very concept of identity suggesting that, strictly speaking, we can no longer speak of any identity before its *identification*. This also means that we can no longer assume any prior substantial identity, not even of the

absolute. For something *has to become* something in order to be something. It never just simply *is*. Identity identifies itself not in a sense of reflecting itself as something prior that is merely confirmed in the form  $A=A$ .<sup>63</sup> In this respect, it would render all determinacy superfluous. Rather, Identity is becoming due to the copula—*A is A*, which here is ‘creative.’ However, it is simply the result of a synthesis in the original sense of ‘bringing together’ or ‘unifying.’ There is *no-thing* to unify. Instead, the expression ‘identity identifies’ here refers not only to the becoming but also to the process of disclosure, of entering, releasing or relating to itself (in a sense of *empfindlich*). Schelling here equally refers to all forms of identity to which the law of identity applies: identity, as the determined entity (*A is A*), as the judgment of subject and predicate (*A is B*) or as coincidence of the opposites (*A is ~A*). In all these cases there is a fundamental character of the copula establishing the peculiar relation on which Schelling is focusing in the previously quoted passages.

It seems that in reinterpreting the law of identity through its performative aspect, Schelling radicalizes his earlier question of ‘identity coming-out-of-itself (*aus-sich-Herausgehen*)’ (Schelling 2010: 21; SW I, VI: 31). He puts this ‘coming-out-of-itself’ in the very possibility of identity as such. It is coming-out-of-itself which is also coming-out-to-itself. In that case, Spinoza’s principle *determinatio est negatio* becomes interpreted rather as *negatio est determinatio*, that is, not as determination negating the absolute in a sense of *privatio*, distance or a lack, but rather—as absolute’s mode of appearing. Identity identifies. But that does not mean that the absolute can be determined, rather, the absolute is the determinacy itself, the taking place of determinacy. And yet if the copula, following Schelling, appears to be the original generating force, and not just a simple connection or unification, then what kind of relation does it exercise then? If, according to him, “Idealism, if it does not have as its basis a living realism, becomes just as empty and abstract a system [...] The latter can never provide the principle but must be the ground and medium (*Mittel*) in which the former makes itself real (*verwirklicht*) and takes on flesh and blood” (2006: 26; SW I, VII: 356), what kind of relation is implied here?

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<sup>63</sup> This reading also stands in contrast to the famous Heidegger account in *Der Satz der Identität* (1957) regarding the idealistic concept of identity as a ‘character of being’ which enables idealism to reduce identity (and thus all being) to the products of subject’s synthesis. For him the idealists still hold a view that “*Die Einheit der Identität bildet einen Grundzug im Sein des Seienden*” (Heidegger 2006: 36). Whereas here Schelling seems to suggest quite the opposite relation in which the becoming appears to be the *Grundzug* of identity.

Schelling makes another significant remark related to the crucial and variously interpreted distinction between *ground* (*Grund*) and *existence* (*Existenz*) which permeates the generation of any determinacy. What is important for our current concerns, is this peculiar relationship between them which Schelling explains through the analogy of gravity and light<sup>64</sup>—a common theme occurring in his *Naturphilosophie*: “Gravity (*Schwerkraft*) precedes light as its ever-dark ground, which itself is not *actu*, and flees into the night as the light (that which exists) dawns. [...] Precisely for this reason gravity is neither the pure essence (*reine Wesen*) nor the actual Being (*das aktuelle Seyn*) of absolute identity but rather follows only from its own nature or is absolute identity, namely considered as a particular potency. [...] Incidentally, as far as this precedence (*Vorhergehen*) is concerned, it is to be thought neither as precedence according to time nor as priority of being (*Wesen*). In the circle out of which everything becomes, it is no contradiction that that through which the One is generated (*erzeugt wird*) may itself be in turn begotten (*gezeugt werde*) by it. Here there is no first and last because all things mutually presuppose each other, no thing is another thing and yet no thing is not without another thing<sup>65</sup>” (2006: 27-28; SW I, VII: 358).

This lengthy passage quoted above, considered in relation to Schelling’s attempt to provide idealism with its ‘living ground’ clarifies the previously raised issue. Leaving aside the extensive discussions regarding its implications for the problem of will, god and evil, to which this distinction is usually related, we shall focus only on the core structure of this *dynamic* relation. First, it is clear that the distinction between ground and existence is different from the scholastic *essentia* (quiddity) and *existentia* (quoddity), between cause and effect or matter and form. Schelling remains consistent with the general post-Fichteian attitude that there is no immediate access to self-consciousness understood as a grounding source of determination (a kind

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<sup>64</sup> Schelling is obviously not referring to light in the modern sense as consisting of elementary particles or photons; rather, he is contrasting light disclosure, tangible, determinable and acquiring form with the force of gravity which literally ‘grounds’ the body by attracting it. That is why he is criticising philosophers who often use the concept of ground only formally, without assuming that it is anything real. That is to say, they use the concept of ground that is voided of any real ground.

<sup>65</sup> It should be noted, however, that in the original German text there is no word referring to a ‘thing’, ‘object’ or any entity whatsoever, for it simply says: “*alles sich gegenseitig voraussetzt, keins das andere und doch nicht ohne das andere ist*”. It becomes important in considering primarily processual character of this relationship.

of pure and free self-subsisting ideal activity) that could allow us to make such rigid distinctions. Even though together with Hegel he, as it was showed, admits that every concept is already a moment of self-affection, this self-affection is always mediated. Reason finds that it is always already performing the very operations that make it possible for it to recognize itself within itself. Reason is its ongoing performance of itself that discovers this performance *in medias res*. This is what it makes both self-limiting and self-disclosing. Just as gravity permeates light, it is always at work and yet is not made transparent and cannot be brought to any tangible form.

This also opens a possible way to interpret what the proposed figure of ground-existence attempts to capture. This ‘dark ground’ of existence is neither its cause, nor essence, nor actuality, nor something preceding it, nor simply coinciding with it. Yet this ground remains indispensable, it seems to be precisely what intervenes in determinacy (existence) as sustaining its continuation in its incompleteness. Ground exposes the negative dimension inherent in reason’s performativity as it grounds the impossibility for reason to ground itself prior to its own striving to do so. It is the ground of grounding which itself appears to be ungrounded. It is the immanent limit that keeps thought in motion, for in a sense, it also *is* this motion. It *is* this forming of the form. In that sense, it does not allow to exhaust itself by turning itself into a closed and total system. Even though in missing the appropriate definition and wanting “to bring this way of being closer to us in human terms” (2006: 28; SW I, VII: 359) Schelling calls it ‘yearning’ (*Sehnsucht*) and ‘will’ (*Wille*) he is aware that again, it is only an analogy and remains problematic. For in this will “there is no understanding (*Verstand*) and, for that reason, also not independent and complete will, since the understanding is really the will in will (*Wille in dem Willen*)” (ibid.). Thus if we assume that the understanding is *the will in will*, or the ground in ground—i.e., ground revealed and determined *as* ground; and if the ground or this yearning is the “intimating<sup>66</sup> will (*ahndender Wille*), whose intimating (*Ahndung*) is the understanding” (ibid.)—then the ground expresses a yearning to become and to become oneself. It is a force of life to become life. Then the ground refers to the existence *of* existence itself that cannot be reduced to any tangible form or determination. And yet, conversely, the existence or the understanding is what makes the ground *ground* by, identifying and bringing it to light as that which remains concealed in its own ‘livingness.’ In that sense, Schelling can claim

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<sup>66</sup> In his translation of *Die Weltalter* (2000), Jason Wirth uses “to intimate” in translating the old “*ahnden*” (or “*ahnen*”) which seems here more appropriate.

that “The understanding is born in the genuine sense from that which is without understanding (*Verstandlosen*)” (2006: 29; SW I, VII: 360). Understanding is born in this *becoming* understanding, in the yearning for the understanding, and thus it remains alive as long as it fails to fully determine itself and exhaust this yearning. In other words, every determinacy *exercises* this yearning but never determines it. Likewise, yearning left to itself without any determination is only the blind will to become and never the actual becoming. Only the mutual dependence and reciprocity of understanding and yearning is what creates and characterizes the life *in* the living and the form *in* the forming. Having this said, does it suggest that Schelling is searching for such a light that could embrace the night in its ‘nightness’ without immediately destroying it? That would put him in a sharp contrast to Hegel. To this we shall return.

In bringing back this discussion to the question of identity, determination and copula, we may assume now that in the form ‘A is A,’ the copula also expresses the ground as its creative and engendering force. But it is still not clear, how it affects the status of the determining act itself. What is actually being determined here? What does it mean to determine something at all in this context?

### ***Emphatic judgments***

Even though Schelling’s and Hegel’s respective understandings of judgment appear to be quite similar, and Schelling even praises Hegel for the precision of his analysis (2001: 136; SW I, III: 508), for Schelling it remained still unclear, how actuality relates to judgment. According to the Schelling of his later period, arguably starting from his *Freiheitsschrift*, most of modern philosophy, including his own previous projects, can be understood as merely logical or rational philosophy dealing only with *possible* rather than with *actual* (*wirklich*) experience (SW II, III: 94-104 2007: 155-165). Thus, Schelling’s account on judgment, as well as Hegel’s, is primarily concerned with the executive instead of epistemological dimension.

Prior to Hegel, Schelling already claimed: “If concept and object originally coincide so far that neither of them contains more or less than the other, a separation of the two is utterly inconceivable without a special act whereby they become opposed in consciousness. Such an act is most expressively denoted by the word *Urteil* (judgment), in that by this we first have a separation of what was hitherto inseparably united, the concept and intuition”

(2001: 136; SW I, III: 507-508). Schelling seems to suggest that concepts appear to us as the separation of the act of producing from what is produced—from which follows that the copula in the judgment grounds the possibility of a concept's actuality precisely by distancing thought from itself. Even though Hegel also developed an idea of the self-alienation or self-exteriorization (*Entäußerung*) of the concept, Schelling's approach is quite different and thereby requires a separate analysis.

In the 1830-1831 Munich lectures, Schelling in particular distinguished authentic, or what he called *emphatic*, judgments that demonstrate the previously mentioned negative movement. These judgments are not merely disputes over definitions or tautologies. In them the copula 'is' becomes the crucial element. Otherwise, they would simply be random word combinations: "Just as the 'IS' can be thought with or without emphasis, so too can knowledge be thought as emphatic or not emphatic. In every proposition that is not a true judgment, the 'IS' is posited devoid of all emphasis. If the 'IS,' however, should be emphatic, then the subject of the proposition must be capable of both being and not being what it is" (Schelling 1972: 97)<sup>67</sup>. If we assume that a concept, which taken in itself is infinite (since potentially it can determine every possible object and thus be repeated inexhaustibly), realizes its potential in a judgment, then the emphatic judgment 'A is B' will also signify that A may not have been B, so that A could also be C, D, F, etc. Thus in addition to what it actualizes, copula also necessarily makes present other possibilities precisely by negating them and reveals concept's capacity not to be what it is<sup>68</sup>. In other words, a meaningful or emphatic judgment always presupposes that A can be B only because there are other possibilities that necessarily remain potential in this act.

In this way, the act of judgment becomes a contingent necessity that for Schelling can be grasped as the manifestation of freedom, which is neither subjective nor objective. The decision or the act of judgment disrupts the concept's immediacy by establishing the possibility of birth, creation, as well

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<sup>67</sup> Translation quoted after Matthews (2007: 79).

<sup>68</sup> Marcela Garcia, emphasizes the concept's potentiality, adding, "it is a cut, a 'cision' (*Scheidung*) that presupposes a certain kind of unity (as its condition, as its *past*) and opens up the possibility of a different sort of unity (as its *future*). In this sense, inscribed in judgment itself is a certain historicity in the moments it presupposes, its 'geological layers,' as it were. Any level that is overcome or put behind, still remains as 'sustaining past (*tragende Vergangenheit*)'" (2015: 27).

as non-being.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, conceptual thinking is posited in the never-ending open process of self-redetermination, which Schelling discussed in his Erlangen lectures in 1820. In other words, for Schelling, determinacy appears as a permanent eradication of immediacy. And yet it is such eradication that allows the difference between being and non-being to take place. In that case, the emphatic judgment is an event through which existence distances itself from non-being and always re-appropriates itself anew. Emphatic judgment arises from its immediate infinity as an expression of radical freedom—a capacity to be and not to be. This *emphasis* is a recurrence of life as its highest desire to sustain and to affirm itself. The life which in a form of judgment performs and repeats itself here and now, preserving and revealing itself to itself in all its inexhaustible abundance of the actual (in a sense of *wirklich*) which reason cannot grasp and yet cannot escape.

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<sup>69</sup> As Kyriaki Goudeli also notices, the reflecting act becomes plastic and the creative dimension “is longing reflecting back to see its image. Here reflection depicts longing’s self-formation, longing giving shape to itself, longing expressing itself, giving itself concrete character, individuality and differentiation from an amorphous and self-consuming, untamed craving” (2002: 10).



### II. I. III. Hegel-Schelling: from performative to *affirmative*?

Having said all this in relation to Hegel's and Schelling's diverging accounts on performativity inherent in the act of determinacy, the following concerns must be immediately raised. We saw that Hegel and Schelling make a transition from self-limiting to self-mediating reason, from the question of reason's self-legislation and self-justification to the question of its actuality and self-representation in the phenomenal world, which demands another approach to the problem of determinacy compared to that which Fichte's provide in his Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*. On the one hand, the core principles of transcendentalism suggest that self-consciousness limits itself already in its activity. For it cannot question its own claims for legitimacy prior to their execution in this very question. It has no immediate cognitive access to itself. Thus, legitimacy, in Fichte's extension of Kant's unity of apperception, appeared to be grounded precisely in its operational force, such that theory is to emerge from the practice of reason, while self-cognition becomes possible as an effect of self-affection. The excessive and self-consummating character of reason, detaching reason from reason, discovered by Kant is dealt with by limiting it within the scope of self-experience. Which, however, due to its performative character becomes a process of infinite self-limitation. For that reason, the question of the limit becomes crucial for reason remaining itself and preserving its self-relatedness.

However, the limiting factor inherent in this activity turns out to be no less problematic as it led to the suspension of reason within itself and thereby again, eliminating it from the actual world despite its positing. Accordingly, this negativity of self-limitation was reintroduced as a peculiar force of mediation through and by which thought actualizes itself and comes into being. Yet in its further elaboration in the works of Schelling and Hegel, the role of this performative mediation (i.e., negation and indirectness established within the act of grasping, determining and judging) appears ambiguous in their account on the dynamic nature of the copula. But does this imply that there is an inconsistency lying at the very core of the idealism represented by these two thinkers? Such inconsistency that paves the way for framing idealism in contemporary terms of 'will to power', 'language games', 'phonocentrism' etc.? Or, could this situation be seen such that it opens up the possibility to exploit the ambiguity of the ambiguous without maintaining it?

On the one hand, Hegel indeed shows that in the act of determinacy the concept refers to nothing outside itself or, more precisely, refers to this absencing-of-reference outside itself. Yet due to its own self-mediating nature, the concept likewise captures only the moment of its own immanent dissolution and distancing from itself. Nevertheless, the Hegelian self-resisting force of determinacy also provides a space of disclosure, a possibility to identify this negativity *as* negativity. However, it also becomes clear that the self-determination can never provide a complete image due to its own falling prey to the work of the negative that is being performed in every act of determination. In that sense, though always referring to itself and its own activity, though allowing it to recognize itself *as* itself, self-determination becomes a process of self-determining—where generating tension is concentrated in the copula. And because this becoming never receives a fixed form *ex definitio* demanded by determinacy, self-knowledge in Hegel becomes more adequately expressed as self-per-forming. For, when considered in relation to a determinate content, it becomes self-forming and self-erupting, but with respect to the movement and process, it is a continuation of breaking through in breaking down, so to speak. A conscious process of self-unforming and self-disrupting, which—most importantly—sustains its identity not simply *within* but *as* the movement.

Yet it should be emphasized that this performativity should not be understood only in a formal way, as a mere activity that can be considered separately from *what* acts (in both senses of subject and object), like for example, an object moving in space. A more precise concept of performativity suggested in this interpretation of Hegel's account refers to such an activity that has no significance outside itself, its mode of execution *is* the content. It is not stating or describing anything but *doing* its own deed. In that sense, the actual content here becomes a point of intensity, an experience of one's own power to practice its power of determining. In this way, it can be contended that following Hegel, thought opens itself to the experience of the absolute in and as determinacy constantly un-determining itself. Such pulsing which allows any particular determination—now understood as a point of tension—to appear.

However, as it was showed regarding Schelling's position, the negativity inherent in determination seems to be questioned and thereby developed from the opposite direction. That is, not as reestablishing identity exceeding any particular identity (or what could also be interpreted as the often reiterated

identity of identity and difference) but rather, as always directing outside itself. Although assuming the same performative dimension, actuality and thereby determinacy here, is interpreted in terms of the absolute's *Abfall* or *Sprung*—as a leap and a break within the ideal self-identity. Reason, according to Schelling, can only produce synthesis, which already assumes original separation (as it is also captured in *Ur-teil*<sup>70</sup>). It can determine something actual by carrying out this transformative leap from the ideal to the real. And since reason grasps itself only through concepts, it follows then that every self-determination signifies this withdrawal of the absolute. That, in its own turn, cannot acquire any positive or objective determination. Reason grasps the absolute precisely in its loss, thereby rendering its knowledge untenable and demanding yet another approach in addressing this issue within speculative logic.

Moreover, by further pushing this question to the extremes and reinterpreting the relation between ground and existence (here understood as a determinate and concrete form) Schelling even questions the very notion of identity and its transparency. The ground, understood as a yearning to become, to exist, to be identified, understood as the very forming of the form, necessarily remains what does not and cannot coincide with the form itself. Rather, it is a *drive towards itself* or, as Schelling puts it, it is the yearning for the understanding, which itself in its own right is the 'the will in will' (2006: 28; SW I, VII: 359). If that is the case, then the essence or the 'groundness' of the ground necessarily appears to be (determinate) existence. That is, existence is that in which the ground comes to being, it becomes what it *is*, receives form and identity. But likewise, what holds existence in its duration and extension, what nurtures and maintains it in its development, is the ground which can never be exhausted in any form and thus necessarily remains implicit. The ground remains indeterminable as a process that never comes to completion, a process that could also be another image for the previously discussed excessive nature of reason. And yet it sustains the movement of determination, it sustains its *life*. It is an identity that is created only in its performance and remains such as long as it performs this peculiar relation. For otherwise, identity turns into a bare and meaningless sameness signifying nothing.

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<sup>70</sup> As Hegel also puts it: "The etymological meaning of *judgment* (*Urteil*) in our language is profound and expresses the unity of the concept as what comes first (*das Erste*) and its differentiation as the *original* division (*als die ursprüngliche Teilung*) that the judgment truly is" (2010b: 241; 1986d: 316).

It is the taking place of determination which itself cannot be predetermined in any way, for it already assumes this act, it can be defined as an openness and readiness for determinacy. And, as Schelling's insights further suggest, this peculiar reciprocal relationship seems to be concentrated and manifest in the copula of the emphatic judgment. Thus following Schelling's dynamic account, we may contend that although every determinacy is already involved in a relation of the bringing forth and coming to existence, this essential 'coming' that is traced in the copula, remains necessarily undetermined in order for something determined to appear at all. Strangely enough, we may recall a similar conclusion reached by Hegel, albeit derived from the other argumentation. And this is where we encounter ambiguity. In what sense is this indeterminacy interpreted and exploited here?

As it was mentioned earlier, there have been a lot of attempts to decide the previously discussed issue of determinacy either in favour of Schelling or Hegel, either reducing one to the other or admitting their sheer incompatibility. But does all this indeed require admitting, like some scholars suggest, that Schelling and Hegel provide incompatible accounts? Or perhaps we should side with those who argue that they were addressing different issues and simply pass each other? But maybe it is still possible that none of the above is the case, and far too little effort has been put to see it otherwise. Maybe we should rather attempt to ask if their positions—at least considering their respective understandings of the movement and realization of the concept, of thought experiencing itself—could be seen as *complementing or implying each other*? Could it not be the case that they both furnish a logic of performative reason, which instead of simply contradicting, rather presents their positions as two sides of the same coin or, as someone once suggested, two lungs breathing the same air?

First, it is necessary to observe that this inversion would suggest a different relation rather than a mere opposition. We saw that for Hegel this indeterminacy is introduced as a work of self-relating negativity disclosing itself in the movement of determinacy. In that sense, it coincides with the concept (as *Begriff*) itself since Hegel aims to show that no form and determination can sustain itself in a permanent and fixed identity. For him concept is not a determination but rather an ongoing process of determining and becoming itself which always exceeds any particular determination. From this perspective, the indeterminacy appears to be the 'effect' or the 'outcome' of determinacy. Whereas in Schelling's case, we have the opposite relation—

determinacy actualizes itself in determining the undetermined, the implicit striving to become itself, to come into existence. For Hegel, existence dissolves and overcomes itself in order to sustain itself; for Schelling it is sustained by its incompleteness and inexhaustibility. For the former, it is ‘too much’ of determinateness that, as a “self-moving soul of the realized (*erfüllten*) content” (Hegel 1977a: 32; 1907: 36), leads to transformation. But for the latter it is ‘never enough’ that grounds the movement and becoming. For the first, reason is always ahead of itself, for the second, it is exposed to its own deferral. And yet for both, however, the question is the same—how to account for the movement of thought in its entirety, in its living character, where there is no distinction between form and content, determining and determined. Addressing this question also means locating the point where logic, ontology and actuality become inseparable.

Schelling’s concept of the *Abfall* suggests that actuality can only be explained in terms of a crisis within the ideal and the disruption of logic. That the ideal realizes itself and becomes itself in abandoning its purity and immediacy, that is, in becoming determined. Hegel’s *Nacht der Welt*, however, in its own turn emphasizes the other side and implicates that in every conscious encounter the immediacy of the actual world is already lost and negated by the ideal. By turning being into an image, consciousness already absorbs it and turns into the abundance of the imagery of the memory. It is what simultaneously discloses its power to negate the actual being in its immediate presence. In that sense, the first grasp of the world is already the world in its absence. The actual for Hegel seems to be the loss and negation of the actual. It follows then that the ideal is likewise the crisis and disruption of the actual (inverse to Schelling), it performs itself as the absent actual (or more precisely, actual absence) to which it nevertheless returns through this negativity in determination. Therefore in both cases of Schelling and Hegel we are compelled to admit that i) the relationship between intelligibility and actuality *cannot be addressed in terms of logical necessity, derivation or even consistency*. Rather, it implies an *action, move or gesture* which establishes a certain breach either way; ii) however, it is precisely through this opening of the breach that the intelligible becomes actual and *experiences* itself *as* itself in becoming determined. This becoming of determinacy is concentrated in the work of the copula; iii) moreover, reason experiences itself not simply as a self-positing activity that remains transparent to itself and sustains permanence. Since reason is the experience of reason in the first place, since it is the engendering copula, it never acquires any determination, and thus,

strictly speaking, it does not *know* itself (if knowledge means objective, complete and determinate content). It is the taking place of itself preceding any 'self.' It is the opening in which the self is *becoming* self.

Now the question is, what are Schelling and Hegel doing here by orientating reason from the cognitive to the performative dimension, if they are not undermining each other's argument? Moreover, what kind of performativity is now being implied if instead of granting itself pure presence and absolute immediacy reason takes the immediacy away from itself precisely in its execution? If we put them side by side, it may appear that one is addressing only one side of the question. By asking, how *consciousness* grasps being (thus emphasizing the subjective pole), Hegel sees the inescapable, to use the terminology of its age, *idealization* of the real. In other words, the question of how the object is overtaken by the subject, or how subject relates to the object, already assumes the direction in which the object *is* indeed overtaken or *appropriated* by the subject. Accordingly, the major task of philosophy becomes bringing ideality back to the real again, to make spirit worldly, to find a place within reason where actuality is constituted as "the movement of the life of truth." For, according to Hegel, "Science dare only organize itself by the life of the Notion itself (*das eigene Leben des Begriffs*) [...] its element and content is not the abstract or nonactual (*Unwirkliche*), but the actual, that which posits itself and is alive within itself (*in sich Lebende*)—existence within its own Notion (*Dasein in seinem Begriffe*). It is the process which begets and traverses (*erzeugt und durchläuft*) its own moments" (Hegel 1907: 36, 31; 1977a: 31, 27).

Yet we can also put this question from the other side, as Schelling seems to do, by asking—how consciousness grasps *being* (thereby emphasizing the objective pole), how being renders itself thinkable *as* being or, put in Schelling's terms, how the absolute differentiates itself? Or simply, how the *object* relates to the subject? In that case, the question presupposes the opposite movement: the ideal loosing itself in the real, i.e., becoming finite and determinate. In that case, the crucial issue that remains to be addressed for philosophy is how to avoid submitting reason to the two extremes—on the one hand, thinking being merely in negative terms (the major concern for late Schelling), and on the other, dissolving itself into the manifold of phenomena, to which Schelling refers in dealing with the concept of pantheism in his *Freiheitsschrift*. In other words, it is the task of grasping the ideal already within the real, as for Schelling "it is by no means adequate to claim that

‘activity, life and freedom only are the truly real (*wahrhaft Wirkliche*)’ with which even Fichte’s subjective idealism (which misunderstands itself) can coexist; rather, it is required that the reverse also be shown, that everything real (*Wirkliche*) (nature, the world of things) has activity, life and freedom as its ground or, in Fichte’s expression, that not only is I-hood all, but also the reverse, that all is I-hood (*daß nicht allein die Ichheit alles, sondern auch umgekehrt alles Ichheit sey*)” (Schelling 2006: 22; SW I, VII: 351)

What we encounter here is a kind of circular movement of which Schelling’s and Hegel’s respective positions make implicit phases, as one begins where the other finishes. If the emphasis is on the question of the subjective (indeterminate, ideal, consciousness) pole, as it is for Hegel, then its development gravitates towards the objective (determinate, real, being),  $S \rightarrow O$ , the subjectivity assumes a kind of concave image. Likewise, if the force of question is concentrated on the objective pole, as it seems to be in Schelling’s case, then it leans towards the subjective,  $O \rightarrow S$ . Then the subjectivity is acquiring a kind of convex shape. That is, due to the negativity inherent in reflection, one is always directed outside itself, depending on the mode of question which already stages a certain horizon and directs the movement of thought. Although for both Schelling and Hegel the task of speculative logic is the actuality of the Absolute—coincidence of form and content, concept and intuition, subject and substance—what distinguishes them is not their apparently contradictory arguments, nor is it one’s surpassing the other. Rather, it is their way of *executing* this task that makes the difference and apparently leads to different conclusions.

To put this movement formally, we could depict it in the following way: if we question the subjectivity (or the determining aspect, S) in its relation to the objectivity (or the determinate aspect, O), then the movement is oriented towards the objectifying subject,  $S \rightarrow O$ . For spirit, which is the night of the world, has to *become* world. But this movement has the reverse movement left implicit in it. For it is also what *enables* the former due to the ambiguity of the relation. This movement cannot simply assume the priority of the subjectivity freely exercising the power of determination since objectivity likewise shapes subjectivity. That is, the world, as the breaking away of spirit, becomes spirit and thus  $O \rightarrow S$ . In that case, we have something similar to the following sequence: If  $S \rightarrow O$  then it implies that  $O \rightarrow S$ ; but if  $O \rightarrow S$  then the implicit is  $S \rightarrow O$ ; but if  $S \rightarrow O$  then ... etc. One reaches the point where it becomes the other due to its excessive character which thereby limits itself.

The difference in the expressed activity depends on one's point of departure, the relation between *terminus ad quem* and *terminus a quo*. It is important to note, however, that such reciprocal movement does not lead to anything like an infinite regress or what Hegel would call 'bad infinity.' On the contrary, this Schelling-Hegel figure seems to suggest an organic movement of thought in which subjective and objective poles have no priority over each other, where the convex *terminus* becomes the concave and vice versa, where reason-coming-out-of-nature *becomes* nature-coming-out-of-reason. In this way, it suggests a clear difference between what could be—not without insufficiencies—identified as reason *determining itself* (for it assumes a one-sided self-objectification and thus stable S-O distinction) and *self-determining* (*das Sichselbstbestimmende*) reason<sup>71</sup>, which this figure of Schelling-Hegel represents. Self-determining reason here becomes νοήσεως νόησις in a sense of not thinking *of* thinking implying thinking 'about', i.e., making itself its own object. Neother it is thinking that extends and exteriorizes itself outside itself by infinitely re-producing its own contents and generating its means of control. On the contrary, it opens up a space for thinking which sustains itself as long as it relates to itself and relates precisely through limiting and resolving its excesses. It is thinking which experiences itself in its "*bacchantische Taumel, an dem kein Glied nicht trunken ist; und weil er jedes, indem es sich absondert, ebenso unmittelbar auflöst,—ist er ebenso die durchsichtige und einfache Ruhe*" (Hegel 1907: 31). For precisely in its performativity reason also is able to suspend the ambiguity which following Kant it inevitably creates due to its excessive nature. That is, it becomes thought that *thinks*, reason that *reasons*. By exercising its power to think, it actualizes itself and thus comes into being, though due to its living nature it is always only (be)coming and never arriving. Put more precisely, it is the *taking place*. It is *die einfache Ruhe* which does not explicitly violate Aristotle's problematic concept of κινεῖν ἀκίνητον (Met. 1073a 25-30), an action without moving, for to take place in the performative sense described here does not presuppose movement simply as a permanent *flux* and alteration (for there is nothing to *alter*). Rather it is the exposure of the taking place within the taking place. It is the point to which Schelling and Hegel bring us if we

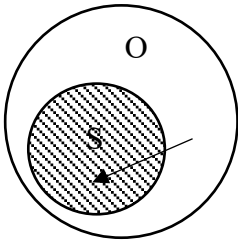
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<sup>71</sup> Malabou also suggests distinguishing between *self-moving* 'automatic' and *self-legislating* 'autocratic' movement, arguing in favor of the former as that "that which goes, comes, and acts propelled by its own motion" (2005: 158). The 'automatic' self-initiation and self-causation that Malabou suggests in reading Hegel, despite its eventual clarification distinguishing its *eventuality* from a blind mechanism, is avoided here due to its undesirable technical connotations in common discourse.

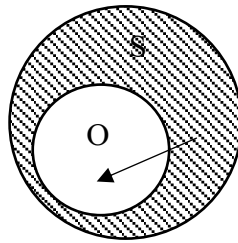


attempt to see them in a kind of *polyphonic* movement, in which a certain convergence creates its own peculiar sequence. It has no fixed *terminus* that could be sustained or paused like a single shot in the film. Rather, it is this peculiar *moving* image which takes place but which does not coincide with any particular image though in a sense is all of them. If one, however, still attempted to provide it a graphic image, it could be depicted in the following way (grey area marks either convex (i) or concave (ii) subjectivity; white area—the field of determinacy, that is, either O penetrates S (i) or S penetrates O (ii) and one turns into the other as soon as it reaches its climax point in the transition from one determination to another<sup>72</sup>):

i) Schelling:



ii) Hegel:



Having said this, it seems justified to argue that the respective understandings of performativity of reason that Schelling and Hegel attempt to expose instead of merely contradicting each other rather form a unified picture of self-consciousness. For taken separately, neither of them provide sufficient resources to justify this overall movement. Since the insights of the one, as Lauer also points out, “are so tied up with insights that only the other made explicit, that a minimally coherent narrative entails discussing both of their contributions” (2010: 6). Consequently, one can ask—what implications does it have for understanding the movement of the conceptuality and its experience? That is, how it *affects* or *transforms* this movement as such if, as it was suggested, it is directly related to the very way it is being executed? Taking into account this peculiar character of self-mediation, which this section attempts to outline, namely, the one that neither grounds itself, nor provides itself transparency, nor any positive knowledge, nor even stable form, it seems more appropriate to call this movement, as Werner Hamacher

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<sup>72</sup> Another analogue for this process could be taken from chemistry—Briggs-Rauscher reaction is such an example of non-equilibrium thermodynamics with far-from-equilibrium behaviour, during which the concentration of one or more components exhibits periodic changes.

has suggested in another context, an *affirmativity* of reason. According to Hamacher, instead of simply self-positing, it is the act of de-posing or pre-posing—an event preceding and lying at the core of any positive representation. In his essay “Afformative, Strike”—Hamacher discusses Benjamin’s concept of violence and introduces this neologism. However, its precise definition can be expanded outside the legal context in which it appears and also serve for our purposes in discussing the activity of self-consciousness. As Hamacher describes it, “*afformance* ‘is’ the event of forming, itself formless, to which all forms and all performative acts remain exposed. [...] It is not the opposite of positing and cannot be defined as the negation—determinate or indeterminate—of a position as long as the logic of negation is governed by the premises of positional or propositional logic. [...] But while affirmations do not belong to the class of acts—that is, to the class of positing or founding operations—they are, nevertheless, never simply outside the sphere of acts or without relation to that sphere. The fact that affirmations allow something to happen without making it happen has a dual significance [...] the field of phenomenality, as the field of positive manifestation, can only indicate the *effects* of the afformative as ellipses, pauses, interruptions, displacements, etc., but can never contain or include them” (Hamacher 1991: 1139). These sentences summarize our previous discussion. The experience of the afformative (not affirmative) is the experience of disruption, crisis, fall or loss which nevertheless ‘allows’ or lets “something happen without making it happen.” It is thus also the experience of opening, of survival in the ruins. For only the ruins bear witness and betray this *event* of ‘forming, itself formless’ which is never given, nor determined but lived through.

## II. II. *Initium-principium*: initiation of thinking *while* thinking

Given our preceding analyses related to the question of determinacy in Schelling and Hegel and their peculiar *Doppelgänger* effect, where the validity of one's account necessarily implies and continues the other, we must now discuss the question of the beginning of speculative thinking. For as it was previously showed, their apparent contradiction lies in the very way they approach the subjectivity in its self-relatedness and actuality. Their difference seemingly depends on where one 'begins,' so to speak, 'where' one enters the movement and what relation one develops in directing self-consciousness. In that case, the question of the beginning indeed comes forward. But if, as it was also argued, despite being elaborated in opposite directions, their accounts nevertheless result in the *same* movement of self-consciousness, is the question 'where to begin?' not then superfluous and inessential?

Yet on the other hand, the exposition of Schelling's and Hegel's respective arguments simultaneously discloses a dimension that remains implicit and anticipated in the other. The work of self-resisting reason reaches for each thinker's point of departure, where Schelling's *Entfernung* of the absolute becomes a moment of its *Rückkehr* in Hegel, and the latter becomes the former. Thus the moment of this peculiar 'entering' or 'stepping in' becomes decisive. For it establishes the specific relatedness which drives the movement that each assigns to thought. Thereby we will argue that Schelling's and Hegel's attentiveness to the nature of this relatedness appears to be of crucial importance. Yet it becomes clearly apparent only if we read Schelling and Hegel together. But how then should we understand this 'difference'? In what exactly does it consist? And what kind of 'entrance' do we refer to in this case? These are the questions that must be addressed in the following chapter in order to further examine and clarify the performativity of self-mediating reason in Schelling and Hegel. In this way, we may see that instead of acquiring a rigid form in a system that is at once developed and completed throughout the history, their idealist thinking preserves its potential for transformation. For it never overcomes its own beginnings.

So far, we have been discussing the dynamic structure of determinacy as a process of self-mediation, *given* that the specific movement of self-consciousness is already taking place. But it remains still unclear, how does one ever get *into* this movement of self-determination? To put it in Schelling's own words from the 1827 Munich lectures, again, though "The whole world

lies, so to speak, in the nets of the understanding (*den Netzen des Verstandes*) or of reason, but the question is how it entered (*gekommen sei*) these nets” (2013: 143–4)<sup>73</sup>? Put the other way around, it adds another dimension to our previously raised question of how reason actualizes itself and becomes *wirklich*, how it comes into being and experiences itself. For now the emphasis is put on how being (or world) entered (*gekommen sei*) reason at all, how it became thinkable and not how it came to exist in general. That means that one also hears a no less profound question lying implicit in the latter, a question that now demands one to ask—when does reason *comes forth as* reason, when does it grasp itself *as* itself and *in* its own grasping? What discloses reason in its reasonableness? Does this power lie solely in the intentional act of self-consciousness and its determinations? But if, to recall Schelling again, “all beginning lies in an absence (*Mangel*), the deepest potency, which holds fast (*geheftet*) to everything, is nonbeing (*das Nichtseyende*) and its hunger for being” (SW II, I: 294)<sup>74</sup>, is not then, rather the case that precisely in this taking place of *das Nichtseyende*, reason is exposed to the possibility to *become* itself—to become actual? As ever since Fichte it was assumed that there is no reason preceding or lying underneath its own activity. For the beginning, as Hegel also suggests “has for the method no other determinateness than that of being the simple and universal (*das Einfache und Allgemeine zu sein*); this is precisely the determinateness that makes it deficient (*dies ist selbst die Bestimmtheit, wegen der er mangelhaft ist*)” (2003: 554-555; 2010a: 739).

Again, what is put to question here is no longer the *logic* of ontology, which was a major epistemological concern for the Kantian transcendental idealism, but rather, the very possibility of ontology itself. The λόγος of τὸ ὄν now faces the task to disclose its own λόγος<sup>75</sup> not in its determinations or predicates but in its *eventuality*. Thus given that philosophy in the idealist tradition was primarily understood as the free self-exposition of the absolute, furnished by speculative logic, the previous question now coincides with asking: how and

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<sup>73</sup> One may be tempted to interpret late Schelling in the classical pre-critical *rei et intellectus* scheme, thereby putting the reality of the world independent of reason and thus giving up his idealistic stance, but such reading would ignore his admitted debt to Kant.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted after Matthews (2007: 34).

<sup>75</sup> It is worth noticing that much earlier, in his short essay called “Monologue” (1789) Novalis used a term—‘logologie’. Albeit in a slightly different context and perhaps using it quite ironically, he nevertheless seems to be aware of the peculiar *logologic* nature of modern ontology (cf. Sodeika 2015: 27-67).

when thinking *relates* to itself, how it is set and kept in *motion* as a self-performation, as a coming to its own origin that never existed and yet which is about to appear.<sup>76</sup> What keeps thinking *alive* in its previously discussed dissolution and resolution of determinacy that exceeds reason? What enables and sustains the *lebendige Anteil*, the *Lebensverlauf* of speculative logic?

It becomes clear, however, that the question of the beginning itself—at least in the given context of modern subjectivity—appears to be no less ambiguous and problematic. On the one hand, the paradigmatic orientation of critical philosophy after Kant is essentially an inquiry into its own inquiry and its activity. For “The a priori conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience” (Kant 1956: A111; 1998: 227). In that case, it naturally follows that the question of beginning could no longer be approached as the question of the beginning of the world, first cause, *actus primus* or the original ἀρχή of all things.<sup>77</sup> Nor would it be sufficient to argue for some subjective principle of beginning, such as the unity of apperception, empirical sensations or even *res cogitans*. Rather, the beginning which is put in question is the beginning of thought, of its path towards itself. And contrary to some still prevailing attitudes, its hermeneutical complexity, as we shall see, was not ignored nor by the idealists themselves. For on the other hand, it is clear that the question, even if understood in the previously described sense, already surpasses itself. As Hegel puts it: “The individual who is going to act seems, therefore, to find himself in a circle in which each moment already presupposes the other, and thus he seems unable to find a beginning, because he only gets to know his original nature (*Wesen*), which must be his End (*Zweck*), from the deed (*Tat*), while, in order to act, he must have that End beforehand” (Hegel 1907: 261; 1977a: 240). From the point of view of ordinary formal logic, this appears inconceivable. It seems that we are falling straight to the *petitio principii* or *circulus vitiosus*, for “what constitutes the method are the determinations of the concept itself and their connections” but these in their own right coincide with the “determinations of the method” (Hegel 2003: 553; 2010a: 738). Yet

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<sup>76</sup> As it was previously showed, in the context of Schelling and Hegel, it would be more appropriate to say that ‘reason is becoming’ instead of ‘reason is becoming *itself*’, for there is no prior origin or ground to be ‘discovered’ as underlying, preceding and sustaining reason’s activity.

<sup>77</sup> Schelling thoroughly addresses this question in another his major work *Die Weltalter* (1811-1815) in his theory of potencies and their historical development. Since the question of *cosmological* beginning remains beyond the scope of this text, it cannot be discussed here in detail.

the apparent logical inconsistency that Hegel is describing in *Phänomenologie* is precisely what, instead of being resolved, should rather be maintained and appropriated. He clarifies this in the *Science of Logic* by arguing that “for that very reason one has to start immediately (*unmittelbar anzufangen*), and, whatever the circumstances, without further scruples about beginning, means (*Mittel*), or End, proceed to action (*zur Tätigkeit zu schreiten*)” (ibid.). But what does this ‘*zur Tätigkeit zu schreiten*’ mean? Does it suggest that there is only one way to proceed or rather the opposite? If Schelling seems to take another path to reach this same conclusion, does that mean that the answer is left ambiguous?

First, it has to be made clear that here the problem of the beginning is understood as an attempt to address the question of how reason *enters* the movement of self-consciousness where the “beginning, means, and End, all in one” (ibid.). It cannot be simply an indication of the presupposed first principle, truthful method or transcendental predispositions that made possible the world’s entanglement in the ‘nets of the understanding,’ as questioned by Schelling. For, as Kant and Fichte have already shown, this very inquiry remains intelligible only if it already operates within these ‘nets of the understanding’ and is, in that sense, always in its own end. Reason cannot step outside itself, nor suspend itself in order to judge its own operations before they could even take place. In its first moment of inquiry, it is already ahead of itself and thus always appears belated. Put in idealist terms, such an ‘instructive’ and methodical-technical account for the beginning of philosophy would only create an external-reflective relation, thereby leaving unaccounted for the genesis of the questioner’s own *locus* and *praxis* of consciousness. And, more importantly, the very *moment of entering, of stepping into* thinking, would remain still unexplained, as if someone could learn how to swim solely by reading textbooks on swimming techniques. But what is there to be *explained* though, in this case?

We will attempt to show that Schelling’s and Hegel’s response to all this is such that it does not simply suggest indicating and providing instructions. Rather, it is such an account that would actually coincide with *the making of* this step, that would *be* the entrance itself. In other words, what they both attempt to show, it is argued, is that the question of the beginning of philosophy responds and relates to itself as soon as it is put forward. It relates to itself through its own supersession and thereby remains indebted to its own event. The stepping in likewise appears to be the stepping back, becoming

oneself coincides with coming *back* to oneself. In that case, the first task appears to be finding not ‘where and how to begin?’ but rather, understanding the question itself. For what, precisely, are we asking? Are we asking for a coming back to the beginning that never took place?

## II. II. I. Hegel: reason in tune with its simple rhythm

The most common approach to Hegel's account on the beginning of philosophy, especially in his *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812) in which he explicitly addresses the issue in detail, has been to question his *method* and whether or not he succeeds in justifying his claim to 'presuppositionless thinking.' The latter issues indeed covers a wide variety of topics following the overall exposition of the system—dialectics, double negation, the preserving power of *Aufhebung*, immanent critique, not to mention the ambiguous relationship between *Phänomenologie*, *Encyclopedia* and *Logik*—all that still continue to nurture and form our philosophical landscape. Even one of his closest contemporary readers, namely, Schelling took the same approach and criticised Hegel for positing the concept of pure being as a *terminus a quo* (=beginning). As if this concept, due to its presupposed dialectical structure resolving itself into the unity of being and nothing, assumingly allowed one to derive all the necessary differentiation, determinacy thereby providing us with an absolute method (Schelling 1994: 134-163; SW I, X: 126-164).

Yet Hegel himself seems to be preoccupied with quite another problem related to the question of beginning which he did not take so seriously in *Phänomenologie*. As in the 'doctrine of being' of the *Science of Logic* he claims: "to want to clarify the nature of cognition (*über das Erkennen ins reine kommen*) prior to science is to demand that it should be discussed outside science, and outside science this cannot be done (*bewerkstelligen*), at least not in the scientific manner (*wissenschaftliche Weise*) which alone is the issue here" (Hegel 2010a: 46; 1986b: 67). What Hegel identifies here is the peculiar Tantallic nature of philosophical enterprise. For on the one hand, cognition, understood in the broadest sense (*ἐπιστήμη, νοῦς*), is indeed the subject matter of philosophy (here as *Wissenschaft*) and its task is to seek to attain access to it. But that also presumes that either i) we must already know *what* is our goal and object—for if we did not even know what we are looking for, how could we proceed at all, and even more, in 'a scientific manner'—but that renders our enterprise superfluous; or ii) given that our science must provide us with the insight into the origin and nature of cognition which we do not possess, it remains unclear, *what* actually drives our pursuit? For Hegel, however, neither seems to be the issue.



Before going further, it should be noted that in the contemporary scholarship it is quite often the case that the paradox of initiation of thinking in Hegel's logic is interpreted in either of the following ways: either it is attempted to defend Hegel's claim for presuppositionless thinking, which has already been justified and demonstrated by the immanent movement of spirit's determinations in the *Phänomenologie* or *Philosophical propaedeutic* (e. g. Stephen Houlgate, Terry Pinkard, William Maker, Stanley Rosen); whereas others tend argue that Hegel establishes a rigorous methodology (and thus provides the principle and method for the beginning of logic) by essentially further developing Kant's project of transcendental ontology/epistemology (Robert B. Pippin, Michael N. Forster, Markus Gabriel, Gerhard Martin Wölfle). However, contrary to these strategies, it will be argued here that the paradox of the beginning which is presented in Hegel's *Science of Logic* should rather be maintained instead of resolved. With additional reference to the fourth chapter of *Phänomenologie*, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that precisely the *impossibility* of (the principle of) the beginning appears to be that, which allows thinking to proceed in its very collapse. In this way, again, by relying on the suggested interpretation which emphasizes the performative aspect of the paradox, it is also sought—despite his severe critique of Hegel—to relate this position to Schelling's and thereby to disclose their mutual interdependence in a new light.

First, what Hegel in the previous quote draws our attention to is not just a temporary methodological inconsistency that demands a specific approach in order to be resolved as soon as one discovers the right 'conceptual tools,' so to speak. Rather, what he identifies here is a situation which inevitably modifies the whole approach. What he seems to suggest is that precisely due to this impossibility to provide reason with any clear directions in advance, it has to step forth and come into being. It exposes itself to its own eventuality. Philosophy appears to be its own permanent task, its own returning to itself. It demands such a stepping out (which is also, as we shall see, a stepping in) that can only be done without any external or prior directions. What Hegel seems to refer to with his use of the 'outside' (*außerhalb*) here seems to signify precisely this lack of relatedness which makes possible this entering of becoming. But what does it mean?

What is not often emphasized and more often overlooked or even ignored is Hegel's understanding of the very notion of method which, according to him, "may appear at first to be just the *manner* in which cognition proceeds, and

this is in fact its nature.” But “method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content—for it is the content in itself, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which moves the subject matter forward. [...] If the content is again assumed as given to the method and of a nature of its own, then method, so understood, is just like the logical realm in general, a merely external form” (1986b: 50; 2003: 550-551; 2010a: 33, 736). What Hegel calls ‘a merely external form’ is method understood and considered only one-sidedly, i.e., in its applicability to the self-subsisting content (be it history, spirit, reality, truth etc.) thereby leaving its own accessibility unaccounted and its form unchanged. Yet for Hegel, the method itself is in constant transformation and never remains immune to its own consequences. Thus method’s relation with the beginning understood in the sense of an *undertaking*, of an *actual initiation*—a sensitivity to one’s own (as if all-preceding) present activity concentrated ‘on the tip of pen,’ to use Descartes’ image—remains of crucial importance, if it is to be considered in a speculative proposition which has to do with thinking taken in its executive mode. Thus, it is also the question of “The beginning as such, on the other hand, as something subjective in the sense that it is an accidental way of introducing the exposition (*zufälligen Art und Weise, den Vortrag einzuleiten*), is left unconsidered” (Hegel 1986b: 65; 2010a: 45). What Hegel draws our attention to is thereby what he calls *einzuleiten*, the initiation to the *Vor-trag*, the carrying out, which can no longer be understood as a mere introduction to or exposition of philosophy in a common sense, as something that could be done prior to its actual execution. Therefore it is what Hegel defines as *hineinzukommen in die Philosophie* (1986b: 72), a ‘proceeding to action’ upon which we shall focus further. For put in a close light with Schelling, their account on the beginning of philosophy opens a space to think it between metamorphosis and rupture, anticipation and surprise, arbitral decision and mere chance. For there indeed appears to be no way to ‘enter’ philosophy, strictly speaking. No doors, no windows. Only a self-embracing accident, an initiation to thinking *while thinking*<sup>78</sup>.

Hegel seems to provide a twofold attempt to account for the question of the initiation of (speculative) thinking in both *Science of Logic* and *Phänomenologie*. In the former he struggles with the very concept of beginning as such and what could be identified as its ‘self-exploding indeterminacy.’ Whereas in the latter (at least what we encounter in the fourth

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<sup>78</sup> Following Schuback (forthcoming: 102).

chapter), there is an attempt to identify the motivating force within the transitive forms and liminal points of self-consciousness. In both cases what is being performed is a movement of particular determination being carried out to its extreme point so that its collapse discloses itself for a transformation.

Already in the opening chapters of *Logic*, Hegel makes it clear that the content of speculative thinking is its own movement, its own experience of itself and, thereby, its own becoming itself in this experience<sup>79</sup>: “thinking or more specifically conceptual thinking (*begreifende Denken*), is essentially elaborated (*abgehandelt*) within it; its concept is generated in the course of this elaboration (*erzeugt sich in ihrem Verlaufe*) and cannot therefore be given in advance” (1986b: 35; 2010a: 23). For philosophy “contains thought (*Gedanken*) in so far as this thought is equally the fact as it is in itself (*die Sache an sich selbst*) [...] a matter for which the form is nothing external” (1986b: 43; 2010a: 29). Accordingly, this signifies a peculiar point of self-relatedness, where there is no separation between the process (*Verlauf*) of thinking itself and ‘what is being thought.’ This process, this *Verlauf* also comes close to *Verlaufen*, losing oneself in it, a path lost in its wandering, where the experience of itself becomes the experience itself as ‘the fact as it is in itself.’ But all this poses a question, how does conceptual thinking (*begreifende Denken*), whose concept (i.e., the very ‘conceptuality’ of the concept) is yet to be engendered and enter this movement of self-relatedness? Moreover, if it is still assumed that conceptual thinking is reflective (objectifying, separating, limiting) in its nature, how does it overcome itself in becoming speculative?<sup>80</sup> When and how does the self-withdrawal become self-relation?

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Giovanni: “For Hegel, on the contrary, ‘method’ is the rhythm (*Lebenspuls*) of experience itself. It is an ordering which is internal to it and the consequence of the fact that experience is an idealizing process from beginning to end” (2010: liii).

<sup>80</sup> R. Gasche has provided an insightful account of how the transition from reflection to speculation is possible or even inevitable in idealists critique of Kant. For he focuses on what he calls the ‘self-destruction of reflection’, impossibility to follow the demands of reflective thinking in order to account for its own legitimacy, i.e., an attempt to reflect upon the reflection itself reveals the unity underlying the divisions and separations it established thereby rendering their rigidity untenable: “Because what is reflected within it has lost its power of separation and fixation, it has become, so to speak, a self-relating relation without related poles. It is identical to Reason, or logos” (1997: 63). However, Gasche does not seem to consider the question of its actual performance.

### *Vanishing of the Vanishing*

At first sight, it may appear compelling to accept Hegel's suggestion in the *Science of Logic* to begin with what is the most indeterminate, most objective and immediate, the bare fact of thought as such, what he also calls 'Reflexionsausdruck' (1986b: 68) or simply—pure being, *reine Sein* (in a similar manner, he proceeds with the analysis of *Dieses* in *Phänomenologie*). That is, like some scholars suggest, to solve the aforementioned problem of presuppositionless thinking by beginning thinking from the beginning of thought (understood as its principle) *through* the thought of the beginning. Therefore the method, therefore the entrance. But such a reading would be misleading as it would once again give priority to the principle rather than explaining the initiation of thought. Since Hegel still insists, "that which has priority (*das Prius*) for thinking ought to be also the first in the process of thinking (*Erste im Gange des Denkens*)" (1986b: 66; 2010a: 46). This unity of *Prius* and *Erste* should grasp thought right on its threshold, where there is nothing yet determined, distinguished or differentiated and nevertheless already taking place. In other words, thought is expected to grasp its own original movement *within* the movement, immediately, without any image. How, if at all, can it be related to the unity of being and nothingness and becoming to which Hegel continues to refer in the opening of his *Logic*? It is suggested that, instead of providing a consistent way to proceed from the indeterminate immediate to the determinacy and differentiation, Hegel rather demonstrates the self-destructive character of any such attempt to do so. Nevertheless, this attempt still performs a different entering and thereby gives a sense in which the *gewußter Begriff* could disclose itself as *an und für sich Seiende* thereby justifying the claim that "that which exists in and for itself is the conscious concept and the concept as such is that which exists in and for itself (*das an und für sich Seiende gewußter Begriff, der Begriff als solcher aber das an und für sich Seiende ist*)" (2010a: 29; 1986b: 43).

First of all, Hegel is aware that the question of the beginning can only be raised by the mediated consciousness which is no longer (or not yet) in this beginning, for it is operating within the field of determinations. But likewise, it is precisely this separation that is created by mediated reflective thought, which nevertheless constitute the possibility to raise such a question at all. Therefore, pure being, according to Hegel, can and must be thought in its twofoldness, both as substance and subject: "pure being is the unity into which pure knowledge (*reine Wissen*) returns, or if this knowledge, as form, is itself still to be kept distinct from its unity, then pure being is also its content. It is

in this respect that this pure being, this absolute immediate (*dies Absolut-Unmittelbare*), is just as absolutely mediated (*absolut Vermitteltes*)” (1986b: 72; 2010a: 50). But what can be actually thought of pure being? Does it differ from the *concept* of pure being? And does it differ from the concept as such?

By claiming that the concept of being can be thought only as pure indeterminateness and emptiness (*Unbestimmtheit und Leere*) or just empty thinking, Hegel also admits that “as the indeterminate immediate it is, in fact, *nothing* (*Nichts*), and neither more nor less than nothing” (1986b: 83; 2010a: 59). That is, in order for the pure being to remain pure in thought, it necessarily appears as nothing. Yet nothing (or, to be more precise, non-being (*Nichtsein*)), as “complete emptiness, complete absence of determination and content” also *is* as soon as we express it. Such a coincidence of their mutual ‘*Bestimmungslosigkeit*’, however, cannot be posited as an identity since one can be perceived and defined only as the negation of the other. Yet the negation cannot remain static either, for the only possibility to think pure being is to think it as nothing that ‘has passed over’ (*nicht übergeht, sondern übergegangen ist*) (ibid.) into being and vice versa. Or, as Hegel puts it, “their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing (*Verschwindens*) of the one into the other: becoming, a movement in which the two are distinguished, but by a distinction which has just as immediately dissolved itself (*aufgelöst hat*)” (2010a: 60; 1986b: 83). What Hegel seems to demonstrate here is that when we actually attempt to grasp being or nothing as such, we only *perform* this *vanishing* (*Verschwinden*), the *Nichts-Sein* of determinateness—“as said in one: nothing as it is in becoming” (ibid.).

Thus the *concept* of being seems to coincide with the *being* of the concept (or the taking place of thought, the determinability as such) in a sense that the indeterminacy or, to be more precise, the determinateness-less, *Bestimmungslosigkeit* of being can only be grasped as a nothing, which is likewise conceived as a complete lack of determination. In other words, thought and being coincide in nothing, which in its own turn is vanishing, such that it coincides in the “restlessness of the negative” as Nancy has also suggested, taking thought as the nothing of being.<sup>81</sup> If we follow Hegel’s own proposed definitions of being and nothing, i.e., not as two particular entities,

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<sup>81</sup> As Nancy also notices, “one cannot articulate the ‘event’ without concealing its eventfulness [...] What concerns us here is thus less the concept *of* surprise, than a surprise *in* the very concept [*à même le concept*], surprise essential to the concept” (1998: 95-96).

but rather as moments in the movement of self-determination, it appears that there can be no absolute determination that would not immediately imply and establish its otherness. Even though there is no prior identity from which it could be separated from, as this otherness appears to be its only point of reference. That is, thought grasps its own movement in a thought that is always pointing away from itself and yet this pointing away, once grasped as such, appears to be a moment of its self-relatedness.

Being for Hegel is not just the concept of totality, a set of all concepts, as Schelling thought and as some still seem to suggest, such as would allow reason to deduce all reality and its contents. For mediated consciousness, reason appears in the form of its boundary, as non-conceptual within the concept. And from the standpoint of the beginning, its potent in-determinacy is that which initiates the concept and leads to its differentiation. What Hegel seems to describe in these passages is a situation in which reason, as if unintentionally but necessarily, falls prey to its own attempt to determine the determinateness. For what else is *Reflexionsausdruck* if not the taking place of thought? And yet precisely in this failure to capture its own movement it loses itself *in* its course thereby letting it move forward. In other words, determinateness itself escapes any determination in order for something to be determined at all. In that sense, again, we see that ‘self-determination’ here would rather refer to the process of the opening, of self-differentiation and self-relatedness instead of simple self-transparency or self-reference. There is a sense in which determinacy coincides with indeterminacy. Thus, Hegel seems to present this negativity lying at the very core of conceptuality as its ‘explosive charge,’ so to speak: “Being as entirely abstract, immediate self-relation (*Beziehung auf sich selbst*)<sup>82</sup>, is nothing but the abstract moment of the concept; it is its moment of abstract universality that also provides what is required of being, namely that it be outside the concept (*außer dem Begriff zu sein*), for inasmuch as universality is a moment of the concept, it is also its difference (*Unterschied*) or the abstract judgment wherein the concept opposes itself to itself (*indem er sich selbst sich gegenüberstellt*) (Hegel 2003: 404; 2010a: 627). Hegel seems to suggest such an isomorphism of being and thought where the intrinsic asymmetry, here understood as a moment of thought’s self-relatedness, is due to an inherent negativity that exposes itself through a permanent transformation. The state of indeterminacy turns out to be the unintentional ‘effect’ of the work of the concept.

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<sup>82</sup> Also e. g. *sich beziehende Negativität* – translator uses “self-referring”, that in our case is quite misleading.

Hegel emphasizes that the major issue appears to be the *becoming* (*Werden*), preceding any particular determination (and thereby dialectics as commonly understood). He demonstrates that any attempt to proceed from the firm ground or ‘absolute principle’ either appears to be arbitral and one-sided, or collapses in indeterminacy. Yet this indeterminate movement is also what enables determination, since the becoming—if it is to be thinkable at all—once grasped as such, demonstrates its self-resisting nature which alone grants it a moment of a halt. For it “is a ceaseless unrest that collapses into a quiescent result (*haltunglose Unruhe, die in ein ruhiges Resultat zusammensinkt*),” and it is “the vanishing (*Verschwinden*) of being into nothing, and of nothing into being, and the vanishing of being and nothing in general; [...] It therefore contradicts itself in itself, because what it unites within itself is self-opposed; but such a union destroys itself (*zerstört sich*)” (Hegel 1986b: 113; 2010a: 81). The movement of determinacy, following Hegel, remains twofold, then. On the one hand, since no determination can sustain itself in itself, the original nature of the concept as such reveals itself as what could be identified as ‘the agility of the form.’ However, it is also such a self-un-forming which allows its suspension within itself in a shape of determination, which becomes a moment, a grasp of its own enduring. In that sense, any particular *Begriff* is the sublation<sup>83</sup> of becoming, a moment of its upholding, whose result is what Hegel calls ‘*Verschwundensein*’ (ibid.), a moment of vanishing held and sustained in its intensity and self-relatedness.

Can one assume then, that what has been described so far leads to the initiation of thought and provides an adequate response to the ‘accidental way of introducing the exposition’? In a sense, the exposition still remains *accidental, zufällig*, for the initiation is indeed an accident, *der Zufall*, an event that befalls thinking *while* thinking, in the experience of its collapse. For this unity of being and nothing ‘that destroys itself’, according to Hegel, this impossibility to determine it in any positive way and capture it in a tangible form becomes a pivotal moment. Reason appears exposed to itself in its performative negativity that clarifies the meaning of speculative proposition. At this point, its performativity is to be emphasized in particular as it draws our attention from the act *of* negation to the act *in* negation, to paraphrase Austin (1962:

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<sup>83</sup> *Aufheben*—Hegel makes an extensive remark on the use *Aufhebung* and its important polysemy (1986b: 113-114; 2010a: 81-82). In contrast to the most common translation as ‘sublation’, Lauer (2010) has suggested ‘suspension’ which more closely resonates with our concerns.

99). For thinking enters itself *in* performing the failure to do so in any consistent and determinate way. If that is indeed the case, it turns out that the actual *impossibility* to begin from the beginning presents itself as a *possibility* (or perhaps, opportunity) for Hegel's logic to proceed in a rupture. To proceed in its self-relatedness, in its groundless ground and in the permanent task of immanence.

The strategy of maintaining the paradox of the beginning in Hegel's logic, instead of resolving its consistency, is also supported by Hyppolite, who traces there even the emergence of dialectics<sup>84</sup>: "The immediacy of the beginning, because it is the beginning, is in itself its own negation and the instinct to sublimate itself as beginning. [...] It does not start therefore from an origin but from the very movement of starting (*mouvement même de partir*)" (Hyppolite 1997: 167, 69). What Hyppolite identifies here as "the very movement of starting" can be seen as the realization or execution of this self-destructive movement of determinacy which manifests itself as thoughts (im)potency to move forward. In other words, the beginning that Hegel sought for in the beginning of his *Logic* is *realized* as the impossibility of such a beginning. The beginning which begins can be grasped only as an infinitely suspended vanishing point of becoming, what Hegel eventually describes as the *Verschwinden des Verschwindens*, vanishing of the vanishing, which is nothing else but the 'determination of the whole (*des Ganzen*)' (Hegel 1986b: 113; 2010a: 81).

Having this said, it should be also noted that even understood in this sense, beginning is by no means a phase or a moment that could be left behind. Since the beginning starts only 'from the very movement of starting' and there is no 'zero point' from which one could begin, likewise, it cannot be overcome. As Hegel himself puts it, "the advance from (*Fortgang ferner*) that which makes (*macht*) the beginning is to be considered only as one more (*weitere*) determination of the same [...] Thus the beginning of philosophy is the ever present (*gegenwärtige*) and self-withholding foundation (*sich erhaltende Grundlage*) of all subsequent developments" (1986b: 71; 2010a: 49).<sup>85</sup> The beginning of thought is a past that itself has never passed, that always remains present in this passing as long as it takes place. In the same way life is related

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<sup>84</sup> Stanley Rosen also notices that "Dialectic is not synonymous with logic but refers to the work of negativity by which logical content is produced and accumulated" (Rosen 2013: 67).

<sup>85</sup> Translation altered.



to the moment of its birth, which is bound with its presence as long as life goes on. And philosophy is the life of thought, the life that gives itself to thought as long as it remains, to quote Nancy, “an inchoate thinking that knows itself as such” (2016: 162). It is the dwelling at thought’s outfall—thought’s, whose presupposition is its own supposition, its own life pulse and hence its sole vocation is to stay, now in Hegel’s own words, “in tune with its simple rhythm (*ihrem einfachen Rhythmus gemäß sind*) for it is the course of the fact itself” (Hegel 1986b: 50; 2010a: 33). Thus in his account on the concept of method Hegel also seems to return to the original—though speculatively reinterpreted—meaning of *methodos* as μέθοδος, (μετά, ὁδός), that is, following after, taking the path. And yet if one still wanted to ask what Hegel is *actually* doing in writing the beginning of *Logic*, one possible response could be that instead of giving us a clear definition of beginning or simply criticizing it, he actually carries its very concept to its extreme point and performs its own *Aufhebung*. This also coincides with what he already identifies in the beginning of the *Phänomenologie* as necessity that “one should take on oneself the strenuous effort of the Notion (*die Anstrengung des Begriffs auf sich zu nehmen*)” (1907: 39; 1977a: 35). Moreover, in a similar vein, Nancy extends the *Aufhebung* effect to the practice of reading: “There is nothing else to read but the text, and there is nothing else to do but to repeat this reading: everywhere, its propositions are philosophical propositions, and reciprocally, everywhere, the *aufheben* ‘repeatedly occurs.’ [...] The *Aufheben* is not a concept whose intelligibility a demonstrative play of propositions might lead to; *aufheben* is to read propositions, to read a writing whose form ‘undergoes a change’ and that requires, indeed, a painful effort” (Nancy 2001: 84-85). Indeed, one has no way but to suffer and endure all the severity of thought in oneself, to live it through, with all its gravity and suddenness (and in that sense, also to live through its hopelessness). One has to do so in order to reach the highest proximity and intimacy—which is, according to Hegel, the sole ὁδός of philosophy. In that sense, it remains impossible to *enter* philosophy in the same way as the man in Kafka’s famous parable, *Against the Law*, where one could not enter the law, because either he was already in it, or he was unable to enter it at all, for there was simply *no outside*, no such place *from which* he could enter.

But what if, according to Schelling, there is no *inside* either?

## II. II. II. Schelling: the tension of the bow

The question of the initiation of thinking, of the ideal realising itself and stepping in actuality in order to become itself was also a great concern for late Schelling. Although taking another path, just like Hegel he realized that a mere exposition of the method, structure and the basic principles of speculative logic leaves the whole question addressed only provisionally. If one sought for the unity of truth and certainty, i.e., for certainty in its truth and truth in its certainty—the *gewußter Begriff*, if one sought for the point of coincidence of experience and thought, one had to admit that such unity (if it is to be a *unity* and not a mere sameness) could not be simply deduced and derived from one or the other. And yet, as this thesis attempts to show in Hegel's case, one can *appear* in the other. As we shall see further, the question of the actuality of thought, of how the world enters those *Netzen des Verstandes* is also crucial for late Schelling. And it is especially important in his struggle to account for the transition from what he calls the negative (*philosophia ascendens*) to the positive philosophy (*philosophia descendens*). However, in contrast to Hegel, Schelling attempts to approach this issue from the opposite way. Even though it is the same attempt to think the unity of substance and subject, he does this not in terms of the immanent movement of the *concept* (substance *within* the subject) but rather, in terms of its *reference* (subject *within* the substance). That is, not of its *a quo*, but rather of its *ad quem*. For that reason, Schelling's reappropriation of the distinction that Plato makes in the *Sophist* (237a-258c) between μή ὄν (non-being, relative or affirmative negation) and οὐκ ὄν (factual negation, deprived of all being), as we shall see, also becomes significant. Both Schelling and Hegel attempt to grasp thought standing on its limit. And yet one is pushing for its inclusive aspect, and the other, its exclusive aspect.

In the earlier discussions we outlined the major issue regarding the ambiguous relationship between Schelling and Hegel in their respective understandings regarding the nature of determinacy, its realization in objectivity and finitude, its movement and dissolution. Their accounts on what actually takes place in the appearance of identity and what conceptualizes the concept in the moment of judgment eventually led to the twofold performance of self-consciousness. If that is the case, then despite their mutual hostility they both engage in the same circle of the suggested *affirmative* movement of speculative thinking, where the self-exposition of the absolute coincides with reason exposing itself to the experience of gradual eradication and self-destruction of its reflective

forms, i.e., of an eradication caused by its own excessive nature driving itself beyond itself. If this is indeed the case, then the crucial issue for the idealists in their struggle for actuality (as *Wirklichkeit*) becomes neither the cognition of the absolute, nor its pure all-sublating dialectical movement (*motus alternus*). Rather, it is the mode and intensity of reason's self-relatedness in the process of its ever-renewing self-disruption.

Having said this, then, the suggested emphasis on the relatedness instead of a mere appropriation could already be recognised in Schelling's subtle treatment of *Grund-Existenz* reciprocity, in identifying understanding as the 'will in will' in his *Freiheitsschrift* or in his early idea of *ewige Umwandlung* of the ideal into the real in *Philosophie und Religion*. It could also be seen as a possible response to reason's detachment from itself made possible by Kant and inevitable by Fichte (as discussed previously).<sup>86</sup> Brought back to the question of the beginning and initiation of thought, it is no surprise that Schelling was not satisfied even with his own early attempts to provide a systematic account of a 'real and vital concept' of freedom. For, locating it at the very core of philosophy, the possibility and eventuality of philosophy, he realized the necessity to address freedom in its ontological aspect. He saw a necessity to relate it to its original undecidedness (*Unentschiedenheit*) as "man stands on the threshold (*Scheidepunkt*); whatever he chooses, it will be his act: but he cannot remain undecided" (Schelling 2006: 41; SW I, VII: 374). That is, man finds himself already belonging to a nascent life, already decided precisely in and through his indecision. And because of that he remains exposed to his own decisiveness that is yet to take place. It is an exposure of creation, of horizon left open for a life to be lived, for "nothing at all can remain ambiguous (*Zweideutiges*) in creation" (ibid.). How then, does this standing on the threshold relate to the experience of engendering thought? Thought that relates to itself in becoming aware of its own original non-being from which it is yet bound to step forth and become life<sup>87</sup>? And how, after all,

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<sup>86</sup> Lore Hühn, for example, reads Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* in the light of Fichte's 'metaphysics of evil'—see her *Fichte und Schelling oder: Über die Grenze Menschlichen Wissens* (1994. Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler).

<sup>87</sup> Schelling often emphasizes the ideas of a living and suffering God, without which human history, according to him, remains incomprehensible (Cf. "God is a life, not merely a Being (*Seyn*). All life has a destiny, however, and is subject to suffering and becoming. God has thus freely subordinated himself to this as well, [...] Being becomes aware of itself only in becoming. In Being there is admittedly no becoming; rather, in the latter, Being itself is again posited as eternity; but, in its realization by opposition, it is necessarily a becoming" (2006: 66; SW I, VII: 403).

can it avoid remaining ambiguous, that is, without falling prey to the dialectical liquidation of all sense?

### ***Immer im Folgenden***

In 1833, residing in Munich, not long after Hegel's death in 1831, Schelling held a lecture course on the history of modern philosophy (*Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*). In this course, probably for the first time in public, he severely criticized the overall project of Hegel's *Logic in toto*, including Hegel's account on the previously discussed question of the beginning in particular. According to Schelling, the Hegelian unity of pure being and nothingness can only be understood as a pure tautology or negative determination. That is, the tautological unity indicates only the realm of the possible, only the *conditio sine qua non* of reality, and it is therefore incapable of explaining the possibility of determinacy, of differentiation, and its relation to reality (SW I, X: 125-6). It is not our intention, however, to consider and evaluate the legitimacy of Schelling's argument against Hegel put in a Kantian framework. For he seems to be approaching Hegel's position with another understanding of the concept. Hegel's concept, as he calls it, is 'a mere abstraction' thereby relating the issue more to the beginning understood as *principium* and not as *initium*, despite the fact that Schelling himself seems to be arguing in favor for the latter<sup>88</sup>. However, our concern is the tension arising between their positions on the *actual, wirklich* (and not merely possible) entering the movement—'in die Bewegung hineinzukommen' (SW I, X: 129) of the concept in its self-determination. For that reason, we shall focus on Schelling's treatment of negativity which he elaborates with no less acuity than Hegel, as well as his understanding of the concept of being (*das Seyn, das Seyende*) as the *prius* of thinking. For here, the very idea of *entering* (as one can enter only that which is already there, literally *taking place*), of *stepping and coming in* is put in contrast to the abstract beginning of *creatio ex nihilo*. It suggests that rather a shift in the *state* is what becomes crucial for the beginning, a shift in the particular *mode* of self-relatedness, a certain mode of being inside and within. But what kind of proximity Schelling's own argument suggests in this case?

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<sup>88</sup> In that sense, it seems reasonable to side with those scholars who claim that in his critique of Hegel Schelling basically made himself a straw man (cf. Houlgate (1999), White (1983), Rush (2014) Brinkmann (2010)). However, it is still worth considering Schelling's own suggested 'critically re-evaluated' Hegel's conceptions as they may provide some clarifications and conceptual basis for Hegel's argument (see Lauer (2010), Jürgensen (1997), Schwab (2018)).

In the same lecture on Hegel, commenting on his understanding of the concept of pure being, Schelling claims that “it is not something *of* which I have a concept, but is itself only the concept of all beings (*alles Seyenden*) as something which is to come (*den Begriff alles Seyenden als eines Folgenden*). It is that which never was, which, as soon as it is thought, disappears (*sowie es gedacht wird, verschwindet*) and Is only ever in what is to come (*immer nur im Folgenden Ist*)” (SW I, X: 150; 1994: 152). On the one hand, we already see that Schelling sharply contrasts with Hegel, where the latter emphasizes the positive aspect of the indeterminacy of pure being, presenting indeterminacy as a movement *within* determinacy. Taking it as the paradigmatic case demonstrating how the *act* of determination (pure being as *Reflexionsausdruck*) escapes its own objectification, Hegel thereby attempts to show that precisely due to its ‘anemic’ character—being, which is identical to nothing, while nothing is identical to being—determinacy always moves from within itself, always in the mode of determining. And its self-relating negativity is what simultaneously provides a possibility for something to be grasped in a tangible form. Even if only as a moment of *suspension* of this movement of mutual vanishing of being into nothing. But Schelling, in his own turn, focuses on the indeterminacy of being in its absence of any content. That is, treating its negative aspect not in terms of *emerging* but rather in terms of *withdrawing*. However, for him it is such a withdrawal that is also the opening of the horizon for something to appear.

On the other hand, for both Schelling and Hegel being indeed signifies nothing, but their treatment of this *nothing* is quite different. The latter questions its effect on the concept itself in the moment of it being uttered, while the former—on the very uttering of this moment. That is, either concept is in relation to being or being in relation to the concept.<sup>89</sup> Even though they both stand on the same inescapable line of conceptuality, since the “whole world lies in these nets,” this subtle distinction apparently leads to the crucial consequences. For Hegel being eventually appears to be identical to its concept (as its momentum or instantaneousness) but not to itself. For Schelling, being is never identical to its concept and this, according to him, is precisely what moves and animates conceptuality. The concept’s being only

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<sup>89</sup> Put in contemporary terms of linguistics, we may even identify their accounts as an attempt to address the relation between sense and reference (Frege), signifier and signified (Sausurre), between what is being actually said and what is intended and how they shape each other.

“ever in what is to come”—*immer im Folgenden Ist*, and never in that which is present, does not simply refer to the gap between thought and being. Rather, and here Schelling relates the concept of being to *Existenz* and *Wirklichkeit*, it also implies a certain mode of existence to the concept of being. For it is also a concept of possibility exposed to its own possibility, being *as* what is to come to itself as a structure of enduring, of waiting, of openness and future. It is the space embracing the im-possible accident, i.e., preceding every possibility, as Schelling later puts it in his 1841-2 Berlin lectures, “*von der Wirklichkeit, die aller Möglichkeit vorausgeht*” (Schelling SW II, III: 162). In other words, the concept of actuality becomes an openness to actuality that makes possible even the possibility itself (in Hegel’s case it was the possibility of possibility=concept). Thus, for Schelling, “that is why it is the beginning of all real (*reellen*) thinking—because the beginning of thinking is not yet thinking itself (*der Anfang der Denkens ist noch nicht selbst Denken*). Actuality that anticipates (*zuvorkommt*) possibility is also actuality that anticipates thinking. But that is precisely why it is the first real object of thought (*erste eigentliche Objekt des Denkens*) (*quod se objicit*)” (ibid.).

In this way, Schelling introduces a concept of contingency preceding all necessity,<sup>90</sup> for here being itself is put in the place of the subject, not of an attribute (which is also not in the case of Hegel because *moment* is not an attribute). For how else could one understand his claim that “one cannot think of an actuality that precedes (*vorausgehende*) all possibility” (ibid.), if not as admitting that one cannot think anything prior to thought’s own *eventuality*, that one cannot presuppose anything beyond the act of presupposing? It seems that Schelling attempts to capture thought in its first affirmation and its first addressing *in his very attempt to address this addressing*. And this, however—to borrow an analogy from Agamben—coincides rather with a voice and not with a word. It is an affirmation that itself lacks all sovereignty, ground and authority. For it is a ‘mere accident’, so to speak, which yet releases the latter forces in making possible the possible itself, in uttering the word of logos. In this sense, the possibility of thought grasped by thought itself can only lie in its im-possibility—actuality that anticipates, *zuvorkommt*

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<sup>90</sup> Markus Gabriel (2011) develops the same argument in his interpretation of Schelling, albeit he favours of Hegel’s philosophy, as if Hegel’s inverse argument for ‘necessary contingency’ would overlook the true nature of contingency, which is, however, not the case. For he does not simply prioritize necessity and the rule of logos, rather, he sees contingency as a possibility for a necessity to *become* necessity.

the possible. It is thought which is given a possibility to become itself in realizing its power of powerlessness.

Moreover, from Schelling's claim that the properly understood concept of being is the first real object of thought, it still follows that thought begins with nothing but its own anticipation. Yet in that case, it also implies a different understanding of the concept's executive character, again bringing us back to the previously suggested image of convexity in what Schelling calls *ecstatic* reason. For the ability to *grasp* (*greifen*, *Begriff*) that which is to come, inherent in the very form of 'concept of x', already assumes that the concept always refers outside itself. For it is always a concept 'of' something, even if it is the concept *of* the concept. In other words, following Schelling's argument, conceptuality is characterized by the structure of presupposing, of pointing away from itself and positing itself outside itself. In that sense, it may be seen as disappearing 'as soon as it is thought.' Yet this moment of disappearing plays a crucial role, as even the disappearing must also *appear* somehow. This may also show how the *real* beginning of thought could, in Schelling's view, not yet be the thinking itself but only its anticipation. In order to become itself, it has to *become* thinking while thinking, it has to take place and step into actuality to enter itself. But at this point, one can immediately raise the question—how does reason do this if conceptuality, according to Schelling, deals only with what is to come? If it operates *within* the anticipation, whereas actuality can be thought only as such that precedes it? Can thought anticipate its own anticipation?

What Schelling seems to suggest here is that even if it cannot *anticipate*, it nevertheless can still *participate* in this anticipation of itself, and here lies an often-overlooked subtlety of Schelling's point regarding the asymmetrical identity of thought and being. He argues: "Being is indeed the content of pure thought, but only as potency. But what potency is, according to its nature, is, so to speak, a leaping toward being (*auf dem Sprung in das Seyn*). Thus, through the nature of its very content thought is drawn outside itself. [...] That which just is (*das bloß Seyende*) is being (*das Seyn*) from which, properly speaking, every idea, that is, every potency, is excluded (*ausgeschlossen*). We will, thus, only be able to call it the inverted idea (*Umgekehrte Idee*), the idea in which reason is set outside itself." (SW II, III: 102, 163; 2007: 166, 203). – But how, then, is reason able to posit that from which all concept-potency is excluded? How can reason think the unthinkable? The question, however, already offers too much. When Schelling defines the concept of being as an

im-possible actuality (in contrast to reality, i.e., possibility) that precedes thinking, he is, nevertheless, still aware that he is able to make this claim only from the standpoint of the concept without overstepping its limits. However, it does not follow, that “the object of these thoughts is only the concept or concepts” (Schelling SW I, X: 144; 1994: 146). That is, instead of developing a formal transcendental ontology or arguing for the transcendent as the unthinkable origin of thought and its radical exteriority, Schelling rather questions the very essence of the concept in its appearing, i.e., what makes possible the *possible*? What makes thought *thought*? He addresses these questions in the corresponding manner—instead of providing a definitive, positive systematic account, he *performs* the concept in its anticipating character, in its ‘leaping towards.’ In other words, precisely by recognizing itself as it is in its lack and belonging to what is to come as *Folgende*, conceptuality carries out its own coming to itself. It becomes its own *Folgende*, it becomes an idea and thereby falls into the proximity of its own anticipation. Yet it happens without grasping it as an objective content, for the idea of the idea turns out to be not any kind of highest/original/absolute idea but rather an ‘inverted idea (*Umgekehrte Idee*)’—reason posited outside itself, outside its own force of positing.<sup>91</sup> That is, reason realizes itself in disclosing its own nature of potentiality, in appearing to itself and, most importantly, in *relating* to itself. It appears to itself in being touched upon itself, in being summoned (which also literally means ‘being secretly warned’—from Latin *summonere*) to itself and responding to this summoning. In this way, reason interrupts the reality and movement of the merely logical/possible/potential and thereby erupts itself, for it is an eruption that takes place as *interruption*—in between and within, as a whole.

### ***Spannung des Bogens***

It must now be clarified how the previous discussion of the concept of being in its negativity and potentiality contributes to the question of beginning and initiation to thinking. Already in the third draft of *die Weltalter* (1815), we find an attempt to address this question, where Schelling, in a provocatively Hegelian manner claims that “the first beginning can only be in negating

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<sup>91</sup> As M. Frank also notices, “there is no concept of being outside the concept which appears on the horizon of a self-cancellation (*Selbstaufhebung*) of reflection,” and Bowie, “One cannot positively say what being is, but this does not mean that it disappears from philosophy: it is the dependence of reflection on what cannot appear as knowledge that means that being must be prior to knowledge. Being cannot appear as itself precisely because something appearing as something is what defines the structure of reflection and knowledge” (Frank 1984: 354, cit. after Bowie 1993: 136).



oneself as that which has being [...] The beginning of the line is the geometrical point—but not because it extended itself but rather because it is the negation of all extension. One is the beginning of all number, not so much because it itself is a number but because it is the negation of all number, of all multiplicity. [...] No beginning point (*terminus a quo*) of a movement is an empty, inactive point of departure. Rather, it is a negation (*Verneinung*) of the starting point and the actually emerging (*wirklich entstehende*) movement is an overcoming of this negation” (2000: 16; SW I, VIII: 224). This lengthy and dense passage draws our attention to a few moments that should be emphasized in order to further clarify Schelling’s position and its relationship to Hegel. By introducing negativity as lying at the very core of all proceedings, Schelling, however, develops an alternative line of argument compared to Hegel<sup>92</sup>, thereby making explicit those tensions that seemingly remained unaddressed in the *Science of Logic*. By relating these insights to the previously discussed nature of conceptuality provided by later Schelling, we may see that his account on the beginning of philosophy, as it was in Hegel’s case, is also performative and not merely descriptive. However, Schellingian initiation, in contrast to Hegel, is more related to the act of *withdrawal*, and *self-abandonment* of the concept. That is, for Hegel, it is an immanent movement of determinacy that shows that either philosophy starts immediately and already from within, “from the movement of starting” or it does not start at all. For Schelling, however, the beginning also has an eruptive/accidental character such that thought is always already thrown outside itself. In both cases, however, self-relatedness plays a crucial role. Either the concept ends with a failure to begin and thereby begins (Hegel), or it starts with this failure to begin and thereby ends in entering itself (Schelling). In other words, even though they both develop their arguments by introducing dialectical movement, it still seems that each exploits only one side of it, without taking into account that the other is also operating and remains ‘at work,’ so to speak. For there appears to be a difference between negation that affirms itself thereby negating itself, and negation that negates and thereby affirms itself.

Having said this, we should consider the specific concept of negation as the necessary *prius* of all movement and its overcoming (*überwinden*) that Schelling develops in his account on the beginning. What first draws our attention is the claim that the true beginning *has to negate itself as that which*

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<sup>92</sup> Wirth also notices that this seems to be the first time when Schelling attempts to provide his response to Hegel.

*has being*. Moreover, it is even emphasized that it has to be ‘*ausdrücklich gesetzt*’—expressly posited as that which does not have being, because it is not enough for it simply *not to be* (ibid.). How are we to understand Schelling’s emphasis on the expression? How do we understand the beginning, as he puts it, as the “tension of the bow (*Spannung des Bogens*)”? One possible way to interpret it is to relate it with Schelling’s notion of ecstatic reason positing itself outside itself. Such a ‘*meontic*’ (following Plato’s *Sophist* and its concept of *me on*) approach leads in the following direction: that which begins, necessarily begins in the absence. However, it is not a mere void but rather, one could say, a self-relating absence, an active absence, experienced *as* lack or what he calls the ‘self-wanting’ of being. A being that wants itself and negates itself as that which is accomplished and actualized. It is a self-negation that is also an openness and longing, a call for itself that is not yet itself. In other words, Schelling seems to suggest that the only possible way to think the question of beginning is to think it in relation to its future, to what is to come. And to that extent, from what negates the beginning *as* beginning, and yet allows it to proceed: “negation is the first transition whatsoever from nothing into something” (ibid.). Schelling thus makes it clear that in order to sufficiently account for the question of beginning, it is not enough to provide the ground or the principle, some fixed and determinate point of departure that could guarantee logical consistency of the subsequent argument. And here lies the shift in the paradigm of modern philosophy started with Kant’s idea of the positive concept of freedom of the third critique. What is necessary, is to think reason in its eventuality, in its living appearance.

Thus just like Hegel, Schelling also makes crucial the problem of *becoming* and the initiation of a transitive non-place between nothing and being, which is an event that would lie inherent in our very notion of beginning and, moreover, be performed already in our attempt to grasp it. For that is the indispensable element of the speculative proposition in Hegel’s case and the beginning of positive philosophy for Schelling. In that sense, put in terms of temporality, the beginning becomes the question of the past which is yet to come. No ground, no first origin, for it is such a *prius* that takes place only *in posterus*, for the *prius* here is the coming itself as the accident of the world that one is called to enter. For that reason, Schelling had to reconceptualize the ambiguity of the concept as such: for on the one hand, in order for such a beginning to be able to take place at all, its concept has to be revealed to itself in its potentiality. It has to be exposed to its own accidentality and therefore

remain open. In that sense, its concept, which first “has to be produced (*muß erzeugt werden*)” (SW II, III: 77; 2007 143), is indeed the *prius* of all movement, the beginning *preceding* all beginning as the infinite power<sup>93</sup> to be (*das unendliche Seynkönnen*) that “is not just the ability to exist, it is also the immediate *prius*, the immediate concept of being itself” (SW II, III: 63; 2007: 133).

Yet on the other hand, however, the very awareness of this task touches upon the question of why this disclosure should ever take place at all? What drives reason towards itself, and thus makes the possible *possible*? To what extent even does the possibility remaining in its potentiality, “being equal to nothing and open to everything” (Schelling SW II, III: 75; 2007: 141), already belong to the actual? This is perhaps one of the most original of Schelling’s insights, which permeates his late attempts to defend the claim that, adequately understood, the negative philosophy is the entrance to the positive philosophy. For the question brings us back to admitting that the potentiality of the potential and its *potential* to be disclosed as such exceeds itself to the sphere of the actual, to what is to come. In Schelling’s own words, the concept of being “is not the potency of something that it *not yet is* because then it would not even be being (*nicht das Seyende*), but it is rather the potency of that which it already Is (*was es schon Ist*)” (SW II, III: 77; 2007: 143). That would suggest that Schelling is trying to identify here a specific *actual* relatedness and reciprocity of potential and actual, of each participating in each other and yet remaining themselves. For once grasped as such, possibility does not belong to itself, as its being (being disclosed, recognized and affirmed *as* itself) is already indebted to what is to come. It belongs to that which exceeds it as *its own im-possibility*. In that sense, a mere possibility, instead of being understood as pure virtuality, absolutely detached from the actual—in a manner similar to how one hundred thalers in Kant’s thought differ from the actual same amount of thalers in his pocket—here *actualizes* its necessary origin in potency.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> B. Matthews suggests translating it as ‘capacity’ but that seems to be inaccurate translation, as despite its misleading subjective connotations, it overshadows its peculiar negativity that cannot be exhausted. A more appropriate term here seems to be ‘power’. From this point one can see the relation between potency and possibility. More on this see, for example, Agamben, G. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>94</sup> It is not enough just simply to state like B. Matthews that “there is an identity between thinking and being, but this identity includes within itself difference, which in this context is the precedence of being over thinking. That which simply exists is

But the question still looms before us: if the beginning, understood in its leaping towards, in the readiness of its void to be penetrated, in its negativity that remains unexhausted by any concept is indeed ‘only the tension of the bow’, then when is the bow released? Which is the moment when the tension, the seizure (as much as it relates to ‘seize’, ‘grasp’—*greifen*, seized in *Begriff*) is finally released and the world is thereby released altogether? When the hand holding the bow realizes that the limit of the tension is already reached and it cannot be sustained any longer? When the stretching move suddenly halts and stays in repose, as there is nothing else left to do, only to embrace yourself with the coming? From Schelling’s account it does not follow that it necessarily ever takes place. This tension (*die Spannung*, cf. Hegel’s *Antstrengung*) of the bow can still take for an indefinite time with a string being unreleased. Logic can circulate within its own immanent determinations without ever recognizing itself, without being touched upon itself, without being seized by this tension, without hearing its own call for itself. Since all that would already mark the birth of self-consciousness, it would mark thought thinking itself *while* or *within* thinking. What Schelling, in contrast to Hegel, seems to be pointing at more strongly, is that the actual beginning of philosophy always throws reason outside itself. ‘Outside’ meaning outside its own anticipations, logical consistency, control and sovereignty. Nevertheless, precisely because there is no beginning point that could be an absolute and empty point of departure, thought can still operate in being detached from itself, entangled in reflectivity, distant from its own experience and thus never entering itself. Yet the initiation of thought appears to be such an accident that, once started, becomes inevitable and fatal. It is such a release that could only be understood as a letting go, as pointing away, as a gaze dwelling not on the concept itself but rather on the prefix ‘of’ of the concept *of*, which it opens and yet never reveals.

In other words, following Schelling’s argument, reason does not enter itself and become actual by simply having being (or actuality) as its object. It does not enter itself in merely thinking *about* itself. In order to enter itself, it has to relate to itself *as* itself, and in that sense, if it has not recognized itself *as* such, it does not relate at all in any genuine sense, nor does thinking become actual in simply having *itself* as an object. Rather, the power and uniqueness of

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that positive being that exists before all thought and the actual reality upon which all thought feeds” (2007: 49), for it does not take into account the very fact of its *thinkability* and peculiar access to reason.

philosophy—as well as its force of liberation—lies precisely in that it cannot determine itself. It cannot be seized with its own projections upon itself as it can never be objectified as a whole. Likewise, and this is Schelling’s great emphasis, the actuality of reason that is experienced in reason relating to itself, is different from any conceptual cognition. As some suggest,<sup>95</sup> one could even contend that reason enters itself precisely at that moment, when all discourse fails, when all determinations are overthrown. Or, it could also be identified as a *mediated mediation, seized seizure* (eventually becoming a *caesura*) in which, however, one immediately encounters an ambiguity inherent in this redundant expression. For either it is mediation appearing *as* mediation, i.e., disclosing itself in its truth, without infinitely doubling itself and remaining in its self-relatedness; or it is a mediation that mediates itself in a sense of becoming objectified, in distancing itself from itself. Instead, what Schelling and Hegel show, and as it will be further argued, *actual thinking is thinking experiencing itself as itself in its own taking place*. It is an event that enters reason, interrupting itself from within as that which yet has no rational/necessary ground—why it should ever take place at all?

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<sup>95</sup> Tritten (2012).

## II. II. III. Schelling-Hegel: the eventuality of thought

Given the preceding analyses regarding the question of beginning of speculative thinking, we see that the responses of Schelling and Hegel to the question of the initiation of thinking, when put side by side, again create an ambiguous relationship that needs to be further scrutinized. We should take a closer look at this ambiguity and question its meaning in order to see what is being created in this hiatus between Schelling and Hegel. We should also determine what kind of—if any—modified understanding of performativity it might suggest. In a similar way, just as we attempt to show in the case of self-determination, the proceeding of reason's actualization is put in contrast to a mere grasping, perceiving and validating with respect to the epistemic value of our claims.

We saw that instead of simply deducing a consistent systematic methodology of the absolute unfolding and becoming itself in the objective world, both Hegel and Schelling proceed in inquiring into the very concept of beginning. The dimension of eventuality was introduced as an indispensable part of the critical exposition of self-appearing reason initiated by Kant and radicalized by Fichte's notion of *Tathandlung*. What could be regarded as a 'principle' here appeared to be the *execution* of thought's power to think, an imperative to begin in order to begin, an initiation to thinking *while* thinking—another aspect of performativity at work. Yet this is the moment which also forms a crucial point of tension between Schelling and Hegel. For they—though relying on the same presuppositions of the dialectical logic of idealism—seem to provide a twofold way for the actual beginning of philosophy by relating it to the concept of being. For following their argument, it is precisely the determination of being that anticipates thought's potentiality to actualize itself. Furthermore, put more broadly, it is a question that also brings us back to the problem of logic becoming *onto*-logic, of thought's relation to being. Accordingly, these two interrelated aspects will be discussed further.

On the one hand, it would indeed be difficult to argue against the claim that for both Schelling and Hegel thought relates to being precisely in reason becoming itself, in revealing itself to itself or, put in their terms, in the process of self-manifestation of the absolute. For both of them the concept appears as the nothingness of being. However, as long as it concerns the previously discussed later Schelling of Berlin and Munich lectures, the elaboration of the latter argument appears to be executed in a sharp contrast to Hegel. Albeit

relying on the same idealistic framework inherited within the tradition, Schelling locates the negativity of the concept in its *potentiality*, as an *Unendliche Seynkonnen*, thereby presenting it as always being driven and exposed outside itself. Whereas Hegel presents this negativity as that which always refers back to the concept. For him it is such a pointing away which dissolves its point of reference as soon as it reaches its goal and thereby preserves it only in negation, i.e., in sublation. Thus, the difference between Schelling and Hegel apparently lies in a different elaboration of the same idealist identity of thought and being in its asymmetrical relationship. For one thing is being that negates while the other is being that is negated. Accordingly, this twofold approach leads to different beginnings. However, instead of standing in a sharp contradiction, it will be argued further, they disclose a consummate image of the idealist performative. They both emphasize the question of the initiation of actual thinking, whose execution, as they both admit, cannot be logically anticipated or necessarily derived from the first principles. It rather starts, to recall Hyppolite again, from the *movement of starting*. Yet what remains ambiguous, is the direction of this very ‘movement’ that needs to be addressed here.

For Hegel, the impossibility to proceed with any immediate first determination only demonstrates reason being primordially entangled within the ‘logic of becoming.’ That is, reason is already affected by the work of negativity, which due to its self-relating aspect enables determinateness and allows movement. Following this line, thought enters itself by realizing that there can be no point of departure, *from* which it could proceed. There can be no ‘beyond’ which could allow logic to turn itself into its own object, considered in isolation from the attempt to do so. Beginning thus cannot be *grasped*, determined or known a priori. It can only be *made*. In that sense, the question of beginning for Hegel is no longer the question of the first impetus or setting up in motion. Rather, it is a question of a *moment*—suspension of the movement in its taking place and yet without bringing it to a halt. From this comes Hegel’s *synchronic* account on the beginning of speculative logic, standing, in his own words, ‘in tune with its simple rhythm’.

For Schelling, however, for whom “the force of contraction (*die Kraft der Zusammenziehung*) is the real and actual beginning of everything” (SW I, VIII: 344; 2000: 107), the question is approached with yet a different emphasis. For him it is the negation of beginning that allows one to move forward. Understood as a state of contraction or as the point of tension (to

recall his image of the tension of a bow), the beginning of a positive philosophy requires a gesture of release, of letting off. For, as a structure of anticipation, which precedes all being in its potency, a concept taken as such refers to its own overcoming in actuality. However, the release is such that it cannot be initiated merely through its anticipation. It is such a release that lies only *immer in Folgende*, in its own accidentality. Thus instead of initiating itself, thought is rather *being initiated*.

This section will attempt to show that, grasped from both perspectives, the beginning of speculative (in Hegel's terms) or positive (in Schelling's view) philosophy coincides with a movement of thought interrupting itself from within. What seems to be left unnoticed in Schelling's case, and yet made explicit by Hegel, is the self-relatedness that is already taking place in thought realizing (in both senses of 'becoming aware' and 'becoming') its own potentiality. For this realization is a moment in which thought comes into being as its own *immer in Folgende*. It comes into being precisely in performing itself as 'what is to come' to itself. However, what seems to be left without emphasis in Hegel's case and yet thematized by Schelling, is the identification of what exceeds conceptuality in the development of logic as its own accidentality instead of its mere activity and operations. Accordingly, by putting these both argumentative optics together, one is presented with such a peculiar self-interruption of reason which needs to be further explicated.

### ***The 'impossible' alternative***

First, it is important to notice that both Schelling and Hegel occasionally hint at a kind of 'hypothetical' alternative to furnish their argument, which, nevertheless, both of them immediately reject as inadequate. Schelling, for example, in discussing the concept of being, describes the ambiguity which frames the tension between him and Hegel. Yet he does not give a sufficient reason why the other possibility should be immediately denied. He identifies this twofold approach for the genesis of the concept of being, in the following way: "For either the concept must come first, and being must be the result (*die Folge*) of the concept, so that it would then no longer be the unconditional being, or the concept is the result of being and we must then start from being, devoid of the concept (*vom Seyn anfangen, ohne den Begriff*), and precisely this is what we want to do in the positive philosophy" (SW II, III: 164; 2007: 205). The only legitimate way to proceed, according to Schelling, is to proceed with being devoid of all concept. But the question remains, how one can escape the concept (of being), if its conceivability depends on the logic of



conceptuality, including—its negation. Schelling’s own response to this in his attempt to begin with ‘being, devoid of the concept’ seems to offer an interpretation where the concept—instead of being, as some suggest<sup>96</sup>, somehow overcome—is conceived in its potentiality and exteriority. That is, instead of drawing a clear distinction between concept and being, Schelling rather locates the question of the concept within the framework of being and non-being, i.e., within the modality of being. For Schelling, the concept appears as the non-being within being, as an *Umgekehrte Idee*—the non-being which belongs to being as an inverted being. It is the nothing, which exists and takes place in its potentiality. But if that is indeed the case in Schelling’s interpretation, then the ‘other’ path to understand the genesis of being—the result, *die Folge* of the concept—also becomes legitimate. In that sense, the difference between Schelling and Hegel is more a matter of the emphasis and relatedness rather than of contradicting strategies.

In a similar manner, Hegel, in his *Phänomenologie*, like the goddess in the poem of Parmenides who famously *forbids* the path of non-being, also hints at another, although in his view, insufficient, alternative. It is the supposedly empty ‘monochromatic’ formalism which proceeds with the absolute immediacy and indeterminacy of the intellectual intuition that he famously refers to as “the night in which all cows are black.” Or it is those systems that begin as if with ‘a shot from a pistol’ (2010a: 45; 1986b: 65). Hegel’s own attempt to provide a consistent account on entering what he calls the presuppositionless philosophy deals precisely with what is *ausgesprochene*, what is expressed: “what is called the presupposition of philosophy is nothing else but the need that has come to utterance (*ausgesprochene Bedürfnis*)” (1977b: 93; 1970a: 24). That is, it deals with being, as we saw, understood as nothing else than *Reflexionsausdruck*, being in and as the act of determination. Schelling’s *Folge* of the concept here becomes its *moment*. But regarding Hegel’s approach, there also remains a question of the element of eventuality. Namely, how to articulate the executive aspect of the concept which leads to its transformation? How to articulate its movement that shapes the difference and union between concept and being? In other words, the issue is to show how the concept *becomes* at all and, moreover, how it becomes actual, how it becomes itself in coming into being. Putting it in the contrasting light of Schelling’s perspective, one may see that Hegel’s strategy rather aims to show how, due to the work of negativity, being discloses itself as the non-concept

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<sup>96</sup> Matthews (2007), Bowie (1993), Tritten (2012).

*within* the concept, as the nothingness of the concept. For being, understood according to Hegel's *Logic*, as indeterminate and immediate pure self-identity, escapes itself as soon as one attempts to grasp it—for it becomes nothing. The itself of itself disappears. Following the movement of this vanishing, the concept thus appears as the very *escaping* and *vanishing* of the self of being. However, in revealing itself to itself in this way, the concept becomes what it is and thereby acquires its own self-identity. In other words, this escaping of the self turns out to be precisely the self of the concept, which, nevertheless, refers to nothing else but its own execution.

Yet it does not mean, however, that in both Schelling and Hegel, where being is reinterpreted in terms of the concept's self-relatedness, that the tension is resolved in one or another reduction. Rather, what the account of Schelling-Hegel suggests is the eventual reinterpretation of being, which indeed coincides with the taking place of thought, but which can never be exhausted within any determination. More specifically, it is the taking place which is identified not through any positive result or cognitive value but once again, through thought's *relatedness to itself*. But how does all this discussion regarding the idealistic notion of being relate to the question of beginning, of the initiation of thinking that is important for us? What approach does it suggest and how, after all, does it clarify the relation between Schelling and Hegel regarding the performativity of reason they both assume?

### ***Release or repose?***

Schelling and Hegel, each in his own manner, exploit the ambiguity of the relationship between being, on the one hand, and the concept of being on the other in the idealistic framework of speculative logic. Following their logic, there appears at least two possible senses in which the concept of being coincides with the being of the concept: either the concept appears as the manifestation of being as its *potency* (Schelling), or being appears as the manifestation of the concept's *moment* (Hegel). If one carefully follows the path of their argument, one may further see how it contributes to the question of beginning in the respective interpretations of Hegel and Schelling. Schelling emphasizes the potential aspect of the concept as presented in his negative philosophy, describing the beginning of philosophy through the image of the 'tension of the bow.' Therefore, the actualization of thought demands a gesture of *release*, of reason positing itself outside itself, releasing and overthrowing its own immanent determinations and authority. For according to Schelling, "pure thought, in which everything develops of

necessity, knows nothing of a decision (*Entschluß*), of an act (*Handlung*), or even of a deed (*That*)” (Schelling SW II, III: 173; 2004: 211). In that sense, the beginning of positive philosophy, according to Schelling, receives its final concept from the negative (or, understood in a Kantian sense, aprioristic) philosophy “only as a demand (*Aufgabe*), not as a principle” (II, III: 93; 2004: 154). Thus once again it should be emphasized that, following Schelling’s view, there can be no methodical prescription or description furnishing a firm principle of philosophy paving its way towards the absolute subject=object. There can be no necessary steps or rules to be imitated except that the imitation itself should be dismissed. Rather, it demands a performative move—an act, a decision—where one has to begin in order to begin. For as he puts it, even “the concept of being must, therefore, be produced (*erzeugt werden*)” (SW II, III: 77; 2004: 143) as that which is “not not to be posited (*nicht nicht zu setzende*)” (SW II, III: 70). In other words, reason has to create its own event. It has to reach the place where its event is made to happen—an event which is yet to come and through whose power of attraction it can come into being. Thus it is such an entering that coincides with the departure and self-abandonment of reason within reason—what Schelling calls a constant overthrow, *Umsturz der Vernunft* (SW II, III: 152).

But since Hegel, at least in his *Logic* proposes an inverse strategy, presenting being itself as the *moment* of the concept (what from Schelling’s perspective could be defined rather as *Begriffskönnen* instead of his own *Seynkönnen*), the question of beginning also becomes an issue of a moment or even of the *momentum* of the concept, i.e., its certain velocity. Following the preceding analysis, it seems that for Hegel, entering the speculative logic coincides with grasping determinacy as the already discussed “vanishing of the vanishing (*Verschwinden des Verschwindens*)” (Hegel 1986b: 113; 2010a: 81). That is, grasping the movement from within the movement, *as* it moves, grasping it in its repose, in its *moment*—sublated becoming, which both constantly allows and suspends itself. For that reason, Hegel proposes what could be identified as the *synchronic* account on the beginning of logic, thought, remaining “in tune with its simple rhythm” (Hegel 1986b: 50; 2010a: 33). The reciprocal passing over of being and nothing into each other, the movement of their unity that Hegel describes in the beginning of his *Logic*, though being completely abstract and determinate-less, revealed the peculiarity of the taking place of determinacy as such. The impossibility to provide any ‘first’ determination or the concept of totality appeared to be precisely what allows concept to move. For Hegel, reason becomes itself (and thus enters the movement of its own

becoming) only by realising that it has always already been ‘inside’ this movement. The moment of this realization is crucial. For even though it is made possible by thought’s failure to find any firm ground that could serve as its point of departure in order to proceed with the rest of the system,<sup>97</sup> this realization *realizes* its content. It performs its own coming into being, it is the self-performance or the being coextensive with this performance. That is, through the movement of negativity, which, contrary to Schelling’s reading, does not simply *produce* the contents of reality (Schelling SW I, X: 134). Rather, *by means of this very movement* which one cannot escape, thought reveals its own inequality to itself. And this inequality is something that demonstrates not so much that there is a difference between concept and being but rather that the concept *is* this difference—with an emphasis on the transitive aspect of the copula.

Now one can even more clearly see that the genitive case used in the expression ‘the concept of being’ can be interpreted at least in its twofold relatedness, remaining consistent with the general appeal to identify the subject-substance structure. For either i) the subject in the proposition is being, which implies that being manifests itself *as* and *through* thinking. Thought then is the appearance of being for it is being that thinks, and thus *the concept is being*; or ii) the subject of this proposition what is taken to be thought. From the latter it that follows that thought has being as its content or a point of reference. Being is thought, thus *being is the concept*. But can one really say which sense represents Schelling and Hegel respective accounts? It seems that it is each or neither. For each pushed to its extreme reaches the point where one becomes its other. The other remains implicit in it thereby creating a circular movement, which ultimately suggests rather that *the concept is being of the concept of being*.

For as long as being, as Schelling insists, is considered as the *content* of a concept or its subject matter (*Sache*) as that which exceeds conceptuality, it indeed remains a potency. Since “through the nature of its very content thought is drawn outside itself (*außer sich gezogen*)” (SW II, III: 102; 2004: 161). But he also claims that “The truly logical, the logical in real (*wirklichen*) thought, has in itself a necessary relationship to being: it becomes the content of being (*es wird zum inhalt des Seyns*) and necessarily passes over into the empirical (*geht nothwendig ins Empirische über*)” (ibid.). However,

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<sup>97</sup> As that, following Gasche’s reading, would presume external-reflective stance, positing without taking into account the very act of positing (1997: 38-55).

actualized potency cannot alter the potential character of the concept as long as the concept remains a concept. But that means that an actualized concept must also be a ‘potentialized’ concept, so to speak, a concept brought to being and disclosed in its true nature. In that case, the content can no longer be separated from its bearer. For the non-concept of the concept here coincides with the very appearing of the concept, with the taking place of the concept. And in that sense, being can indeed be identified as its *moment*, as Hegel would suggest. But having this said, then, it seems that the idealist principle of the ‘identity of identity and difference’ undermines its final resolution thereby leaving the relatedness of identity and difference indeterminate. However—and most importantly—without ceasing to be a *relation*.

For Hegel, it is not just the concept as such that is all there is in the absolute spirit, but also its organic *movement* that refers to nothing but itself, remains in constant transformation and endures its own self-overcoming. And to think conceptuality from the perspective of its own formation is to think it also in its actualization, in its becoming itself. It is to think conceptuality from the perspective of its genesis, put in a sharp contrast to its mere *application*. And this is what brings Hegel much closer to Schelling than it may *prima facie* seem. The question of the beginning thus appears as the question of entering the movement of becoming. It is the question of entering the “actuality and the movement of the life of truth”, for “The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose (*durchsichtige und einfache Ruhe*). [...] In the whole of the movement, seen as a state of repose, what distinguishes itself therein, and gives itself particular existence (*besonderes Dasein*), is preserved as something that recollects itself, whose existence is self-knowledge (*dessen Dasein das Wissen von sich selbst ist*), and whose self-knowledge is just as immediately existence” (Hegel 1977a: 27-28; 1907: 31). This passage taken from the preface to *Phänomenologie* remains consistent with Hegel’s overall synchronic account of the beginning of speculative philosophy. For one enters it rather as a choreographer, where all of *what* is being created, *besonderes Dasein*, coincides with *how* one moves and *how* one relates to this movement. There is no other way to start dancing but to start dancing. And as long as one remains in tune with the rhythm, all moves within the same pace. Since there is no dissonance the relation is immediate and the movement indeed becomes a ‘state of repose’ without being brought to a halt.

We also saw that, for Schelling, negation is understood as the force of contraction, *Zusammenziehung*, i.e., drawing together and concentrating. For him it is the real and actual beginning where the initiation of thought becomes an event when reason discovers the concept in its potentiality, in its poverty of the actual and in its leaping towards it (*auf dem Sprung in das Seyn*). Here the force of contraction is the suspension of being within being: “In this entire movement, therefore, thought of itself truly possesses nothing in its own right (*nichts für sich hat*), but allocates everything to a foreign knowledge (*fremden Erkennen*), namely, that of experience (*Erfahrung*), until it arrives at that which no longer has the capacity to be external to thought (*das nicht mehr außer dem Denken seyn könnend*), to that which remains abiding within thought (*das im Denken stehen beleibende ist*). With this, thought arrives at that which is simultaneously itself, namely, at a thought that has escaped from its necessary movement and now freely sees itself, and with which precisely for this reason, a science of free thinking begins” (Schelling SW II, III: 102; 2004: 161). Here we reach the still widely discussed<sup>98</sup> problematic relationship between what Schelling calls the negative and positive philosophies, the transition from the former to the latter, from potential to actual. For it is not the case that the end of the negative philosophy is the beginning of the positive. Rather, by taking into account Hegel’s position, we have attempted to show that negative philosophy being exposed to its negativity is precisely the moment when it becomes positive, as it actualizes itself in relating to itself as itself.

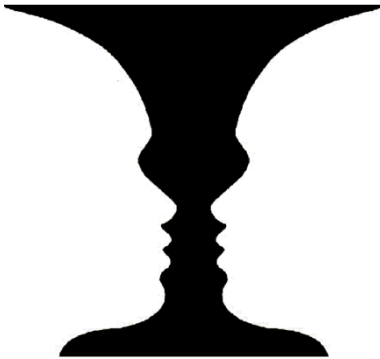
Putting this issue in its inverse relationship to Hegel and with regard to the performativity of thought may indeed suggest a possible reading. If it is indeed the case that their difference lies more on the mode of the *execution* of the same task, rather than on their sheer incompatibility, then entering the self-actualization of thought that they are attempting to identify ultimately appears to be a movement of different intensities. If Schelling pushes for being as the inverted idea, then one could equally claim that Hegel’s focus is the idea as the inverted being. Thought enters and thus becomes itself either in its self-release or self-sublation. In both cases, however, in order to proceed, thought

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<sup>98</sup> e. g. Buchheim, T. 2001. “Zur Unterscheidung von negativer und positiver Philosophie beim späten Schelling”. In: *Berliner Schelling Studien 2: Vorträge der Schelling-Forschungsstelle Berlin*. Berlin: Total Verlag; Garcia, M. 2011. “Schelling’s Late Negative Philosophy: Crisis and Critique of Pure Reason”. In: *Comparative and Continent Philosophy*. Vol. 3. No. 2, New York: Taylor & Francis, pp.141-163.

has no other way but to take place, to become its own event and accident, to perform itself to itself. As long as it is a continuous and open process of self-forming as much as self-unforming, reason reaches its own vanishing point, where necessity and contingency, activity and passivity, interior and exterior can no longer be separated. In this case, one may see how Schelling ‘compensates’ or highlights precisely what Nancy misses in Hegel, for: “What he rejects thereby is *not* the dimension of the ‘happening’ as such, for which he would seek to substitute the simple stable identity of being and of having-always-already-been. Upon closer scrutiny, we perceive that he is rather rejecting an understanding of *Geschehen*” (1998: 94). What Nancy finds in Hegel lying only implicitly, comes to the fore by reading him together with Schelling, and what appears as “the essence of precisely that which shies away from a logic of essence understood as substance, subject, or ground, in favor of a logic of the ‘happening’ (*arriver*)” (ibid.)

One possible image to illustrate the ambiguous Schelling-Hegel relationship in this ‘logic of happening’ could be the famous set of bi-stable (i.e., reversing) two-dimensional forms—what is often called a Rubin’s vase effect, named after the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin. It is usually used in the context of explaining cognitive capacities allowing one to identify figure-ground relation.



The image demonstrates that in order for the figure to appear from the background, it has to have unequal contours compared with the remaining part of the image. However, when the contours of the figures are equal, ambiguity starts to appear in the previously simple inequality, and the eye begins ‘forming’ what it sees; but when one tries to make sense of it as a whole,

contradictions arise. Each figure keeps mingling with the other as their contour is the same. It is impossible to grasp such an image as a whole and at once, as if in the case of a static form. But one can grasp the image by moving one’s eyes *within* it. That is, no longer by being a passive spectator but by *engaging* in one’s own seeing, in the forming of the image and making sense of it. Instead of merely seeing, in this case, one can *experience oneself seeing*. And this seems precisely what the Schelling-Hegel figure also shows to us. Or rather, it does not show us anything as long as one wants to grasp it at once and as a whole. It begins to make sense only if one sees it within its *passing*

*over* into the other, if one engages “the event as such: empty time, or presence of the present as negativity, that is, *as it happens*, and, consequently, as non-present and all this in such a way that it is not even ‘not yet present’” (Nancy 1998: 97). However, if that is indeed the case, this poses yet another question which requires a no less extensive elaboration and thus will be discussed in the next chapter. For what does it really mean to be *engaged* in thinking?



### II. III. *Per modum affectus*: an imperative for desperate thinking

The preceding discussions regarding the question of initiating the actualization of thought in Schelling and Hegel—especially with its emphasis on eventuality and execution—brought us to the point where one encounters yet another question raised from the following issue. We saw that in accordance with the previously suggested interpretation, in order to enter the movement of its own becoming, reason cannot provide itself with any prescriptive means in advance. It cannot depart from any first a priori discovered principle or positive determination that could be excluded from its ‘accidental exposition’, as Hegel puts it, and which would provide a source for positing reality. At most, it acts as the presupposition of the actual, which nevertheless befalls reason in its being exposed to its own negativity, in the collapse of determinacy. That is, it befalls reason as its own event, *in* and *while* it is taking place, as it thinks without allowing any external view from outside. However, we are reaching the moment where one could justifiably argue for reason being as much active as passive, thereby putting the performativity in question in demand of clarification. Further investigation into this aspect in particular should also help us to distinguish the idealist performative from a mere technical-external (or instrumental) performativity<sup>99</sup> that includes a set of certain actions which—once executed and accomplished—produces the desideratum in advance.

For on the one hand, reason indeed has to produce (*erzeugt*) the concept of beginning (or being), to develop and bring it to its limit, in order to put itself on its own threshold, so to speak. Even if it has to realize that there is no other way to proceed but to proceed (*zur Tätigkeit zu schreiten*’, as Hegel puts it in *Phänomenologie*) or even if, as Schelling suggests, it has to realize that “only the power that contracts and represses the being can be the initiating power (*welche das Wesen einschließt und zurückdrängt, die anfangende seyn kann*)” (SW I, VIII: 225; 2000: 17), reason still preserves an authority to construct its concepts of self-determination and its own activity remains the sole criteria of their legitimacy. On the other hand, however, as Schelling and Hegel also show, the actuality or becoming of thought (which also amounts to the unity of subject-object or the coincidence of act of thinking and its content which is implied in Fichte’s *Tathandlung*) is not simply produced as the necessary *result* of consistent conclusions derived from a logically developed concept

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<sup>99</sup> E. g. Austin’s illocutionary acts whose performative force lies in its being uttered. In the cases of promising, warning, swearing.

or syllogism. For one could still think the identity of subject and object reflectively, i.e., from the point of view of the understanding, thereby approaching all knowledge as its object, externally or formally, without taking into account its relation and the possible impact—*die Wirkung* on the very act which led to it. Self-affection can still be grasped without the self affecting the self, the concept can be produced and yet never take place or have an effect. For the question of the actual exceeds the question of a mere necessity. And this issue, it will be further argued in the following chapter, seems to be precisely what marks the transition from reflective-formal to speculative (Hegel), or from a negative to a positive (Schelling) account of self-consciousness. In this way, the idealist performative reveals another dimension, namely, that of liminal engagement. For taken in the former—merely reflective or negative—sense, no concept is per-formed and pre-formed from within, i.e., in its self-referential character, thus allowing it to release its transformative or even destructive potential. Instead, it remains encapsulated within the preestablished framework of rigid distinctions and oppositions in their—as Kant already showed—no less rigid dialectical suspension. In other words, the reflective subject can still remain thinking merely *about* the subject or the world without ever experiencing its thoughts, i.e., without ever bringing them to *action* in effecting the very way they are being actually thought or experienced. But what exactly makes it otherwise? What is being presupposed in this anticipation of actual thinking, understood in the speculative or positive sense suggested by these idealists? What mode of self-relatedness must be necessarily involved in this process of self-determination in order for it to take place and have an effect at all? What kind of peculiar *Zustand des Gemüts*—to borrow Kant’s expression once again, does it imply? By once again bringing Schelling and Hegel into a closer dialogue and revealing the ambiguous intertwining of their thoughts, further sections will serve as an attempt to disclose yet another—*engaged* dimension of the idealist performative in question. In its liminal character, it falls beyond activity and passivity, beyond merely acquiring or losing form.

## II. III. I. Hegel: *Weg der Verzweiflung*

Among Hegel scholars, it is not very often the case that the notion of despair which occurs in the introduction to the *Phänomenologie* where Hegel describes the *Weg der Verzweiflung* of self-consciousness, receives any substantial role in understanding the nature of speculative thinking in its relation to the previously discussed “strenuous effort of the concept”. Even if considered as something more than a mere rhetorical ornament, many commentaries and interpretations usually discuss it in the context of Hegel’s relation to Christianity, “the infinite grief of God’s death”, the concept of sacrifice, the end of history or the place of finitude in the development of the absolute spirit. Considered in this framework, one also seems to be provided with a ground to extend this line through the very end of the fourth chapter of *Phänomenologie*, where Hegel explicitly discusses the formation of unhappy consciousness (*das unglückliche Bewußtsein*). That is, relating it to the form of self-consciousness being inwardly torn apart between itself as individual and as universal. It recognizes itself as contradictory, incomplete and thereby suffers from its incapacity to realize that the separation of consciousness is rather the effect of the consciousness of separation itself, that the inner *is* the outer and not one *because* of the other.

However, what most of these interpretations frequently tend to overlook or at least leave implicit is the question of how this notion of the ‘pathway of despair’ relates to the *actual* execution and transformation of speculative reason that Hegel follows with such a scrutiny throughout the whole of his work? Namely, how and when the self-determining thought reaches such a critical point, such a degree of intensity, that it can no longer sustain itself in its current shape? In other words, where lies its destructive and yet vital potential to remain in its becoming without being utterly destroyed? And moreover, how does it clarify the very notion of *becoming* itself in these critical moments? These are the questions that, in contrast to the dominant interpretation strategies, appear as demanding yet another approach. Thus by focusing on Hegel’s comments in the first part of *Enzyklopädie* and *Phänomenologie* it will be our attempt to elucidate this issue a little more, in accordance with the general framework of the idealist performative in question.

In the previous sections it was already showed that the initiation of thought for Schelling and Hegel ought to be understood in its *eventual* character

instead of a mere prescription of the necessary deductions derived from the first principle. In that sense, the concept of beginning of philosophy loses its temporal horizon and reveals reason as always standing on its own threshold. Reason became primarily understood as *the becoming of reason*, as *the taking place of reason*. Therefore by distinguishing despair from a mere misery and hopelessness, detaching it from the sense of hope, salvation, grace or even consolation, we will further attempt to show how and why precisely in the experience (or eventually the state) of despair thought is exposed to a possibility of its own radical transformation. It becomes exposed to the most profound experience of thought (and thus of itself) in its all-embracing totality, its tremendous force of penetration and gravity to which it cannot resist but only surrender. To take a phrase of Barbara Cassin in her discussion of the performatives, “it [performative]sets out not to say what it sees, but to make seen what it says” (2014: 205).

Having all this said, one should more carefully consider the following lines of the introduction to the *Phänomenologie*:

“Natural consciousness will show itself to be only the concept of knowledge (*Begriff des Wissens*), or in other words, not to be real knowledge. But since it directly takes itself to be real knowledge, this path has a negative significance for it, and what is in fact the realization of the concept, counts for it rather as the loss (*Verlust*) of its own self; for it does lose its truth on this path. The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of doubt (*Weg des Zweifels*), or more precisely as the way of despair (*Weg der Verzweiflung*). For what happens on it is not what is ordinarily understood when the word ‘doubt’ is used: shilly-shallying (*ein Rütteln*) about this or that presumed truth. [...] On the contrary, this path is the conscious insight (*die bewußte Einsicht*) into the untruth of phenomenal (*die Unwarheit des erscheinenden*) knowledge, for which the supreme reality (*das Reellste*) is what is in truth only the unrealized concept. [...] the resolve, in Science, not to give oneself over to the thoughts of others, upon mere authority, but to examine everything for oneself and follow only one’s own conviction (*Überzeugung*), or better still, to produce everything oneself, and accept only one’s own deed (*Tat*) as what is true” (1907: 54; 1977a: 49).

This lengthy passage in our context appears to be of crucial importance and thus will concern us for several reasons, namely, i) for the semantic parallel that Hegel draws between the concepts of doubt (*Zweifel*) and despair (*Verzweiflung*), if one does not take it to be a mere wordplay; ii) for clarifying, to what extent the realization of the concept necessarily coincides with the consciousness directly “taking itself to be real knowledge” as much as being in a constant loss of its own self and truth; iii) and eventually, for accounting on what does it mean to “accept only one’s own deed (*Tat*) as what is true”.

### ***An extreme point of doubt***

Regarding the first issue, that is, the primordial relationship between *Zweifel* and *Verzweiflung* which Hegel himself emphasizes through its German origin in the quoted passage, one indeed comes across an unexpected parallel. Let us first recall the general framework of the whole movement which seems to be quite consistent: as we already saw it in Fichte’s *Tathandlung*, in the process of its development and self-determination, self-consciousness always moves within the circles of reflective understanding, that is, it recognizes itself in turning itself into its object, as something that is already posited with its first act. Thus it identifies itself through its objectification, its truth becomes what it posits and thereby what allows it to ‘take itself to be real knowledge’. However, as soon as it becomes aware of the fundamental role of the very act of positing which mediates the subject to itself, i.e., establishes the very possibility of this self-relatedness, a new relation is being created and thus a different objectivity or phenomenality now defines the subject. And this shift, in which truth and certainty are being revealed in their inequality is followed, as Hegel suggests, by the constant sense of ‘the loss of the self’ of consciousness. It happens until it reaches the point where its determinate self becomes ‘an inessential moment’, where it becomes permanently lost in the self-forgetfulness of the very work of thought. However, it is precisely for this reason, that what Hegel attempts to grasp through this movement as actually taking place, is not so much the development of (natural) consciousness but rather, what he calls ‘the realization of the concept’—what given the preceding discussions here could be identified as the self-relatedness of relation itself. But what Hegel seems to address in this shift only in passing and perhaps too hastily in all of *Phänomenologie*, is *how* and *when* precisely this conscious insight (*die bewußte Einsicht*) into its untruth, which acts as the *modus operandi* in the realization of the concept, takes place and leads to the transformation establishing a new relatedness. Is it possible to recognise a consistent dialectical and necessary transition at this point? Or is it rather

some kind of peculiar *intensity* that has to be also reached *within* the dialectical movement in order to have such an effect? Such a weariness of thought that suddenly collapses.

When Hegel describes this experience of consciousness losing its own self and truth as a pathway of doubt and despair, he seems to be at least implicitly aware that he is pointing at something that cannot be reduced to objective knowledge, nor verified according to some objective criteria. But can one simply take it as a psychological ‘side-effect’ that follows consciousness’ movement towards the absolute knowledge as it realizes its own untruth as if it was a kind of mistake or an error? Or rather, it can also be seen as having a substantial significance for taking on oneself ‘the strenuous effort of the notion’—thinking that cannot be reduced to or explained merely according to the laws of formal logic? In this context, the concept of doubt holds to its original sense of ambiguity, of being rather twofold or double—*Zwei-fel*. Nothing close to the state of hesitation or distrust, the “shilly-shallying (*ein Rütteln*) about this or that presumed truth”—as here Hegel obviously refers to Descartes. Rather, it is this state of the untruth of certainty (that it still has) that consciousness discovers and thus makes it twofold. And as it holds to both, it becomes ambiguous. It is contrary to that scepticism which sees in this untruth only the negative side and thus quickly turns what is only a *determinate* negation into the general and abstract truth of all uncertainty of truth. In contrast to this withdrawal from judgment and decision, the former path of doubt rather finds itself in interiorizing, experiencing and suffering this untruth *as its own* untruth. For that reason, as Hegel puts it, in being understood as “a *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition (*der Übergang*) is made through which the progress (*der Fortgang*) through the complete series of forms comes about of itself” (1907: 55; 1977a: 51). In that sense, by relating determinate negation with the state of doubt as being twofold or ambiguous, i.e., both negating and affirming, it becomes possible to speak about continuity that is being preserved even through constant interruptions. The immediacy, through which, according to Hegel, a new form arises, also has its place in understanding the transition from one form to another that needs to be clarified. For it hides a very simple and yet uncanny message—*thinking has no detours*.

First, it should be observed that precisely because it has to do with this very transiting and passing over, the immediacy of transition cannot refer to any

sudden shift. Otherwise, there would be no *transition*, only leaps without a possibility being recognized as such (strictly speaking, for any change to take place at all, something must be preserved in that which undergoes the change, in order to be recognized as a *change*. Alternatively, we have separate entities). Likewise, it is not the case that as soon as consciousness discovers its untruth, it is outright transmitted to another domain of knowledge and thus acquires another shape. That might be an argument for Spinoza, but not for Hegel. He seems to be aware of the untenability of this view most obviously in his constant emphasis and focus on the process of *actual execution* and *experience* of thinking rather than on its result. Already in the *Differenzschrift*, where he discusses the difference between reflective and speculative reason in its relation to the absolute, Hegel observed the clear difference between *Wissen* and *Kenntnis*—between knowledge and mere information. The latter indeed allows reason to act indifferently to itself, to remain detached and unaffected by its own content. All knowledge can be treated as a mere information, i.e., objectively. But thinking then becomes, as Hegel notices, “an alien phenomenon and does not reveal its own inwardness. It matters little to the spirit that it is forced to augment the extant collection of mummies and the general heap of contingent oddities; for the spirit itself slipped away between the fingers of the curious collector of information (*neugierigen Sammeln von Kenntnissen*)” (1970a: 16; 1977b: 86). In this respect, for such curious consciousness even its own untruth may just appear as a simple error in its reasonings *about* itself. It may ultimately alter the content of its ‘knowledge’ but not necessarily affect the very activity it undertakes and the way it experiences itself. For that reason, such thinking remains always partial, limited and confined into its own rigid forms that keep it distant from itself as well as from its own formation. But Hegel’s extensive elaboration on the work of negativity seems to suggest something entirely else.

It becomes clear that the aforementioned immediacy of consciousness’ transition through negation that Hegel describes cannot be mediated in a sense of being objectified, determined and thus exteriorized. Rather, it is something that has another quality that is neither passive, nor active, namely that of *enduring* (in a modified sense close to Aristotle’s *πάσχειν*—meaning ‘being affected’, ‘being acted upon’, ‘to suffer’ or ‘undergo’ (*Cat.* 1b25-2a4)). For how could one objectify or exteriorize such a thing as *doubt*? And yet, it is precisely what characterizes thought in its development and most importantly—as we are arguing for—what in a state of despair preserves its continuity in the loss of unity and determinate identity. Perhaps one may even

say that by introducing such notions as despair, doubt, sacrifice or even boredom (1907: 54, 73, 135, 155; 1977a: 49, 66, 122, 137) Hegel assumes a dimension of *pathos* as being indispensable from the movement of *logos*. Or at least indispensable from speculative thinking. But would it be possible to articulate such *patho-logical* thinking in terms that would indeed preserve its unity?

Let us return to the question of ambiguity and twofoldness that natural consciousness, according to Hegel, is bound to undergo in realizing the concept. Since for it “the supreme reality is what is in truth only the unrealized concept”, that is, what it experiences as the real is also something that is yet unrealized, consciousness becomes aware of this in the “conscious insight” into the untruth of its certainty as much as into the uncertainty of its truth. In that sense, it becomes *zwei-faltet*, two-fold and thus falls into doubt. Now it may be important to notice that the prefix ‘*ver-*’ in the German language often refers to some kind of extreme or excessive quality of the root verb; it also means ‘to do’ or ‘to become’ what the stem following this prefix refers to; and it can be used to indicate that the action referred to by the stem has a negative connotation. In our case, we have to clarify the word *Ver-zweiflung*. Consistently following Hegel’s argument, one may say that in despair we have an *extreme* point of doubt, doubt that is accomplished. But how should one understand an accomplished doubt or twofoldness in its extreme? Put in Hegel’s terms, one may say that it is a transition *from the untruth of certainty to the certainty of untruth*. Or, to be more precise, when this twofoldness becomes an experience of relatedness. When it becomes an act of giving away of the extremes, of releasing and relieving oneself without yet abandoning the substance of doubt. Without going anywhere *beyond*, for despair is a state that is neither active, nor passive.

In this regard, it may be useful to pay attention to another related passage in the *Enzyklopädie*, where Hegel observes that “The higher aspiration of thinking [...] is grounded in the fact that thinking does not let go of itself (*nicht von sich läßt*), that even in this conscious loss of being at home with itself (*Beisichsein*), it remains true (*getreu*) to itself, ‘so that it may overcome’, and in thinking bring about the resolution of its own contradictions. [...] Despairing over its inability to achieve by its own lights the resolution of the contradiction into which it has placed itself (*verzweifelnd, aus sich auch die Auflösung des Widerspruchs, in den es sich selbst gesetzt, leisten zu können*), thinking returns in the resolutions and appeasements that have become part of



the spirit in its other modes and forms. In the course of this return, however, thinking did not need to fall into the *misology*—a phenomenon Plato had already witnessed—of acting polemically against itself” (1986b: 55; 2010a: 39). What is important in this passage and needs to be elaborated is Hegel’s observation that even in despair consciousness ‘remains true to itself’. That means it preserves a certain self-relatedness and relationship between truth and certainty. For precisely through this experience of loss of itself *as loss*—since if it was not a total loss, it could not acquire another form—the concept undergoes its realization and forming. And since the concept, as the idealist approach seems to suggest, is nothing else but its own realization or forming of the form, it is a simultaneous event. The experience of loss is also a moment of one’s formation. However, this simultaneity is essentially marked with negativity, a self-extending gap, so to speak, which is precisely what opens a space for both radical interruption, change and yet continuity. But does all this suggest that consciousness can never exhaust the event of thinking? That consciousness itself is rather being exhausted by this event? Meaning that it is being constantly altered by its own deed (*Tat*) thereby rendering the question—‘*who* performs this deed?’ always of belated significance. For here performing (as acting) always comes first.

This question seems to be encountered in another form in the last sections of the fourth chapter of *Phänomenologie*, where Hegel attempts to describe various forms and transformations of self-consciousness, as it sublates its current form and receives yet another. For many reasons it is commonly regarded<sup>100</sup> as one of the most obscure parts of the whole book. Consistently moving through the historical examples of stoicism, scepticism and the unhappy consciousness, Hegel seeks to identify different forms of self-consciousness’ relation to itself in the experience of its activity, or, in other words, different *intensities* between the individual and the universal that characterize the experience of self-consciousness, until he reaches the point where the latter twofoldness overcomes itself through the middle term (*die Mitte*) or the mediating relation itself (*die mittelbare Beziehung*). This overcoming becomes such an action (*Tun*) whose content is “the extinction

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<sup>100</sup>Pippin (2011). Even though it is missing in other editions, given our concerns, it is worth noticing that in Georg Lasson’s Leipzig edition the last section before entering “the certainty and truth of reason” has the following subtitle: “*Das Selbstbewußtsein zur Vernunft kommend. (Die Selbstabtötung)*” (1907: 147). Thus in order to realize the extent of its radicality, one can understand this ‘self-consciousness coming to reason’ even in terms of its *suicide*. (cf. Kant in his *Critique* also speaks about ‘*die Euthanasie der Vernunft*’ (1956: A356/B398)).

(*die Vertilgung*) of its particular individuality which consciousness is undertaking” (1907: 149; 1977a: 136). In this way, according to Hegel, the supposed unity of the actual and self-consciousness ought to be realized. However, the very *undertaking* of this ‘extinction’, which Hegel leaves without much elaboration, is what interests us at this point. How is it related to the question of despair, to the loss of itself while remaining true to itself? How this particular self-relatedness is actually being established? Can it be anticipated?

Regarding our preceding discussions, it seems that it is precisely this middle term, the mediating relation itself that becomes that extreme point of doubt which Hegel calls *Verzweiflung*. It becomes an extreme of the extremes pertaining to the relationship without abandoning it. In that sense, it is not so much a moment of literal *overcoming* understood as going ‘beyond’ or ‘leaving behind’ that makes all the difference but rather a certain *shift in the focus*, a certain shift in relating to oneself. But what precisely leads to this shift from the untruth of one’s certainty of oneself to the certainty of this untruth? Here Hegel makes an important remark: “In the struggle of mind (*im Kampfe des Gemüts*) the individual consciousness is only a musical abstract moment. In work and enjoyment which make this unsubstantial existence a reality (*als der Realisierung dieses wesenlosen Sein*), the individual can directly forget itself (*kann es unmittelbar sich vergessen*) and the consciousness of its own particular role in this realization is cancelled out (*niedergeschlagen*) [...]. But this cancelling-out is in truth a return of consciousness into itself, and, moreover, into itself as the actuality which it knows to be true (*wahrhafte Wirklichkeit*)” (Hegel 1907: 147-148, 1977a: 135. tr. alt.). Now one can more clearly see how the previously described experience of despair may be related to the self-forgetfulness which makes the crucial difference. For it is precisely through its work, its effort and labour of thinking that consciousness realizes its own untruth and thereby loses itself. That is, it does not simply *discover* its untruth but rather *creates* and performs it to itself by its own deed. That is why taken as such, this very work of cancelling-out, bringing down or de-pressing (*nieder-geschlagen*) is also a return into itself. But it becomes this return in the self-forgetfulness in work, in becoming the work itself. In that way, what is cancelled out is no longer replaced with another determinate content. One gives away oneself by letting oneself be fully embraced with this work of desperation, by letting drown what is heavy and has already hardened.

For the sake of clarity, it may also be worth noticing that the English use of the word ‘desperate’, in some cases indeed has a meaning that is quite close to our intended one. When, for example, one says ‘he desperately fought’ or ‘he desperately resisted’—meaning that one was so focused and immersed into one’s activity that the object of desire fell away to the periphery, as if one were to act only for the sake of acting, without any reserve, any limits, so as to forget himself in this doing. Such a one loses an awareness of himself outside of this doing. Perhaps this may be a way of reading Hegel’s demand to “accept only one’s own deed (*Tat*) as what is true”—that is, *to think desperately*. In that case, the opposite of despair would be rather indifference, ignorance and apathy, instead of hope or salvation. It would then be neither a side-effect nor a temporary state that one could overcome once and for all. Even when Hegel himself claims that, in its self-sacrifice, consciousness “obtained relief (*Ablassen*) from its misery” (1907: 150; 1977a: 137), he does not say that through this relief it reaches salvation, becomes full of joy and grace, because “action (*Tun*) is only really action when it is the action of a particular individual” (1907: 151; 1977a: 138;). But this particular individual becomes aware that he is in a position of constant self-renunciation through all his endeavours to determine itself. What remains then? Not *the individual*, but rather the individual *action*, the event of thought, the hardship and the “strenuous effort of the concept” itself and not its result. That is, once this self-renunciation is indeed accomplished and despair becomes desperate in its fatigue, so to speak, it exceeds itself by invoking a different relation to itself. And this, in its own turn, becomes a crucial moment of transformation. For it is not the content that changes, but rather—one’s relation to it. When self-consciousness “has the certainty of having truly divested itself of its ‘I’ (*seines Ichs sich entäußert*)” (Hegel 1907: 150; 1977a: 137), one begins to hear that ‘*musikalisches moment*’, as if each of these I’s was a kind of note in the overall sequence of thought—lost already in its birth and yet always returning in its defeat.

Having all this said, can such *desperate thinking* indeed appear as an essential aspect of the idealist performative? Of reason thinking itself and thus *enduring* itself, of thinking which embraces its own—to recall again the words of young Hegel—*lebendige Anteil*? Of thinking that cannot be reduced to the objective knowledge, *Kenntnis*, something that reason could simply acquire and possess as an accomplished result. In that case, one can indeed think of a sense in which the absolute knowing would not be confined only to the final sections but runs through the whole of the *Phänomenologie*. Appearing not in the final

telos of the absolute spirit towards which reason gradually progresses, but rather, in its constant sense and experience of totality—for despair is also an experience of thought in its totality. In a total collapse that survives itself. In that sense, pushing it to the extreme, one may even contend that following Hegel's *Weg der Verzweiflung*, one's thought does not really *live* if one does not think desperately, it is not actually becoming, because it remains attached to a certain fixed form. It preserves something of the self that avoids being touched, that resists any impact and change. Or it is simply something left at the very core that avoids being questioned. In that case, one does not really think but merely imitates thinking without actually engaging it. Reason becomes detached from reason if it no longer affects itself and no longer relates to itself. For living thought cannot stand and thus sustain its own rigidity and mere objectivity. The moment of its eternity becomes the moment of its death—negation that no longer gives any birth. Whereas the core idea of the idealist thinking is that the *form is the forming of the form*, it is life that embraces both life and death.

All this clearly resonates with the overall idealist urge (with the simultaneous rise of *Naturphilosophie* succeeding Fichte<sup>101</sup>) to secure the vitality of thought in its organic nature and as a system developing within freedom. To recall Hegel's words in the *Enzyklopädie* again, “Since philosophy differs only in form from the other ways of becoming conscious of this content that is one and the same, its agreement with actuality and experience (*Übereinstimmung mit der Wirklichkeit und Erfahrung*) is a necessity. Indeed, this agreement may be regarded as at least an external measure of the truth of a philosophy, just as it is to be viewed as the highest goal of the philosophical science to bring about the reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with the reason that exists (*die Versöhnung der selbstbewußten Vernunft mit der seienden Vernunft, mit der Wirklichkeit hervorzubringen.*)” (1986d: 47; 2010b: 33). However, to clarify this point, one needs to take into account Schelling's position to which we shall turn in the next section.

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<sup>101</sup> Among others, Dalia Nassar (2013) made a valuable study for understanding the basic aspirations of romantic philosophy in its response to Kant's rigidities.

## II. III. II. Schelling: *die Hemmung* of knowledge

After the appearance of *Freiheitsschrift* (1809), Schelling realized the necessity to radicalize the ontological horizon of the question of freedom, thereby expanding it far beyond the moral or theological framework. Becoming another name for the absolute, freedom here is no longer understood as a mere independence from external determination, but more as an ability to provide itself a form, an image and appearance. In other words, the question of freedom becomes the question of the possibility of the world as such, of *that* there is something rather than nothing, of *that* there is reason rather than unreason. By locating it at the very core of the possibility of form, necessity and logic, Schelling brought the problem of the limit to its existential and finite dimension. Tension appearing between freedom understood as the primal force or drive of the actual world, and its finite manifestations—which he provisionally underlined in this treatise—had to be further addressed from within the structure of self-consciousness, i.e., from within the possibility to grasp this tension as such, and not only as an ‘objective principle’ but rather as that which is experienced *through* and *within* its whole movement of coming to being. Or, as Schelling himself puts it in his 1821 Erlangen lecture, this is experienced where “the movement itself and my knowledge of this movement, each moment of the movement and my knowledge of this moment are one in each instant” (SW I, IX: 238; 1997: 236). Thus the question is “how can we interiorize this eternal freedom (*wie können wir jene ewige Freiheit innerwerden*), how can we know its movement?” (SW I, IX: 221). In other words, turning freedom into the very *mode* of consciousness’ self-awareness in the actual world Schelling opened the possibility to ask, what precisely makes necessity to operate or appear *as* necessity and not only *what* appears as necessary throughout this movement and thus remains so. To put it differently, the problem which later Schelling brings forward is crucial—what makes us to think in terms of necessity at all, in those, to recall again, *Netzen des Verstandes* (Schelling 2013: 143–4)? And if the question itself already anticipates the structure of necessity in the very moment it opens itself, does not it suggest that the impossibility which it seeks to clarify is grounded on nothing else but pure accidentality? For to argue that necessity is justified by necessity itself is to provide a tautology and thus leave the Leibnizian *principium rationis* exposed in its inevitable obscurity.

However, it is not enough, as some (Tritten, Gabriel) tend to suggest, to argue for Schelling’s originality by simply demonstrating that he reveals radical

contingency lying at the very core of the structure of necessity and thus enabling it. For on the one hand, contemporary readings of Hegel's *Logik* (e. g. Malabou, Agamben, Nancy) also highlight dialectic's potential for reason's radical mutability where even the notion of contingency itself appears contingent. On the other hand, even admitting that, the crucial question still remains unaddressed in these contingent necessities, namely, how this necessity is nevertheless *realized*, how it comes into being and *becomes* necessity through its contingent basis? Does it also imply—as in the case of Hegel's *Weg der Verzweiflung*—a certain *pathos* of reason? If so, how does it affect our understanding of knowledge? These are the questions to which Schelling apparently attempts to respond in his Munich and Erlangen lectures, upon which we will further focus. For here, considering the activity of self-consciousness, Schelling emphasizes the significance and the fundamental role of such notions as *Selbstaufgegebenheit* (self-abandoning) or *wissende Nichtwissen* (knowing ignorance), which may help us to further clarify the idealist concept of reason in its engaged performativity, where there is nothing to be produced, nothing to be known, strictly speaking, but only entertained, exercised and dwelled upon.

First, it is important to notice that along with Kant's *Methodenlehre*, Schelling also admits that “philosophy is not a demonstrative science” though immediately adding that “philosophy is, in order to be able to express it with one word, a free act of spirit (*freie Geistesthat*); its first step is not a knowing, but is better expressed as a not-knowing, a giving up of all human knowledge (*Nichtwissen, ein Aufgeben alles Wissens für den Menschen*)” (SW I, IX: 228; 1997: 227). Accordingly, what Schelling aims to describe in the activity of reason's self-determination is the very status of its ‘non-demonstrative’ contents both in their relation to its particular actual appearance and reason's experience of itself. Once again, what is put into focus, it will be further argued, is reason which knows itself not as much as it *objectifies* itself but rather as much as it *endures* itself. Thus with respect to our concerns, what needs to be clarified further is this particular Schelling's use of *abandoning* (*ein Aufgeben*) knowledge which exposes self-consciousness to its essential nature as a ‘free act of spirit’. ‘Abandoning’ is understood, not as some gesture which appears only in the beginning, but as a certain state that remains throughout all its own movement and preserves its continuation. But what peculiar mode of thought does Schelling here anticipate, such that the movement itself and knowledge of this movement, according to him, can coincide?

### *Natura anceps of freedom*

In his unfinished treatise *die Weltalter* (1811-1815) and Erlangen lectures in particular Schelling attempts to describe the being of the phenomenal world in terms of what he calls ‘*laute Können*’ (SW I, IX: 225). It is pure ableness, an open and permanent crisis that we call reality, where freedom appears as the liveliness of the form, as freedom to acquire form, to lose form, to remain in all forms and yet in none exhaustively. Instead of simply assuming it as the transcendent ground of all beings in a pre-critical dogmatic manner, Schelling introduces freedom as an active immanent drive of life, the life itself which also embraces death, destruction and extinction (thereby expanding Schelling’s former notion of nature), for “it is a concept that is stronger than I am, a living, a driving concept (*Begriff, der stärker ist als ich, ein lebendiger, ein treibender Begriff*). It is by nature the most agile thing, indeed it is agility (*Beweglichkeit*) itself” (SW I, IX: 237; 1997: 235). However, and what is relevant in the context of this thesis, Schelling also must reconsider the status, role and task of the knowing subject in its relation to this agile and transitory nature of form. What does it mean that the concept exceeds, that it is ‘stronger’ than, the thinker? How is this excess to be thought and experienced? We shall put aside those controversial metaphysical and voluntarist interpretations relating to Schelling’s views, for example, Nietzsche’s *Wille zur Macht* or Schopenhauer’s *Urwille*. In this case, only those clarifications are needed that are relevant to the question of self-consciousness.

Taking this into account, the excessive nature of life, which Schelling attempts to articulate by elaborating a vital ontological concept of freedom, is expressed in the following way:

“It is eternal freedom, but it is also not such that it could not also not be freedom, specifically through the passage into another form (*Übergehen in eine andere Gestalt*)—and here we see from whence the proper duplicity of being and not-being, its *natura anceps*, comes to it; [...] There is nothing that it would be and nothing that it would not be. It is in constant motion, it cannot be restricted (*einzuschließen*) to one form, it is the incoercible [...] forever invincible force that ends up consuming each form it adopts (*die jede Form, in die sie sich eingeschlossen, immer selbst wieder verzehrt*) [...] it does not remain in anything and destroys (*zerstört*) each form. What it replaces the destroyed form with,

however, is nothing but the same form again. Here, then, we cannot recognize any progress (*Fortschritt*), but only inhibition (*Hemmung*). Reluctantly, it drives each form towards self-destruction (*Selbsterstörung*)” (SW I, IX: 217-224; 1997: 217-224).

Several moments from this long passage should be emphasized. First, it is significant that freedom, according to Schelling, in order to sustain itself, must necessarily preserve a possibility to be unfree, to suspend itself while still remaining itself. What he identifies as its ambiguous nature, its *natura anceps*, leading to the duplicity between being and not-being, is the essence of freedom that *is always becoming freedom*. Being freely exposed to its own annihilation, it has to confirm and establish itself anew in every instant. It has to be a decision constantly made for itself, as Kant also implies through his notion of *Faktum der Vernunft*. For this ambiguity is not a mere play of one-dimensional oppositional dialectics, which Schelling himself rejects in many cases, nor is it a paraphrase of the ontological argument for God’s existence, nor a simple return to Fichte’s tension between theoretical *Ich* and practical *Nicht-Ich*. Rather, what this ambiguous *natura anceps* of freedom elucidates, is the crucial difference between ontic and ontological levels, between the form and the forming. On the one hand, the duplicity of being and non-being, of both form and the destruction of form that freedom embraces should not be understood in terms of opposition but rather as different *moments* of the same movement of life. Life embraces destruction without ceasing to be life, as Jason Wirth also emphasizes (2004: 93), for life is not identical with being. Following Schelling’s argument, when this freedom, understood as the living drive, is enclosed in a particular form, when it becomes a determinate being—it inhibits and suspends itself thereby preserving being in its being. Thus freedom remains, it does not annihilate itself, for this inhibition is also its coming into being precisely through its stepping outside of the form. Freedom releases itself in breaking through being, in overcoming it by wearing it out.

What is called non-being, then, is rather the weariness of being, it is *freedom in this passing*, which is not, and cannot manifest itself in a tangible form, yet which is still operating as long as the world continues to exist. Yet that does not assume that ‘in itself’ it is simply shapeless and formless, “but only that it did not remain in any particular form, was not tied down by any given one” (SW I, IX: 219; 1997: 219). Thus what Schelling seems to be emphasizing



through his organic notion of freedom<sup>102</sup> is the crucial insight that the same force which preserves being (or form) and sustains its continuation, which makes life persist, precisely for this reason is also what eventually destroys it by exhausting and consuming it from within. In other words, the force of annihilation lies at the very core of what keeps one alive. In that sense, what makes being *being* or, to put it differently, what gives form to the form, what allows the identity of any identity A=A—always to exceed it. Yet it has to be made clear that through this excessive violent force also comes the possibility of form’s inner primordial transformation. And here we encounter the question of thinking. For following Schelling, not-being (or not-form) should be understood not as a mere opposition to or negation of being but rather as a certain *being-not* that grounds being as its living force which nevertheless does not coincide with it. If that is indeed the case, then the following question is twofold: on the one hand, how reason can grasp this movement as such? That is, if its knowledge is always determinate (in order to count as knowledge and even of itself) how it can recognize this living force that escapes every form and determinateness? On the other hand, if every particular form is only something that is constantly led to destruction, if every positive and objective content is only relative and exposed to a permanent transition, such that, as Schelling puts it, ‘we cannot recognize any progress (*Fortschritt*), but only inhibition (*Hemmung*)’—then what is there *actually* to be known at all?

At this point, Schelling reconsiders the very notion of knowledge and the activity of self-consciousness. That is, he no longer thinks it in terms of acquisition, possession, construction or even projection, but rather in terms of *modality*—as a peculiar relatedness, a certain state or position, *Zustand* of mind. That is, instead of simply interrogating reality and thus accomplishing the desired result, reason operates in the mode of specific intensity and concentration which Schelling will define as reason’s ‘retarding force (*retardierende Kraft*)’—the sole and the actual force of the philosopher. Yet before going to that, he claims in another passage: “By becoming effective (*wirkend*) and adopting a form, it [*freedom—B. G.*] becomes knowing, it receives (*erfährt*) knowledge, and thus goes from form to form, proceeds from knowledge to knowledge, but only in order to, in the end (*zuletzt*), break through to the bliss of ignorance again (which at that point is a knowing ignorance (*wissende Nichtwissen*)) [...] Science originally develops only when a principle departs from its original state of ignorance and becomes

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<sup>102</sup> Following Matthews (2011) definition.

knowledge (*wissentlich*) and, after it has gone through all forms, returns to its original ignorance” (SW I, IX: 222; 1997: 222). It seems consistent that instead of searching for a way to explain how reason can *grasp* and *know* this movement, Schelling rather seeks to show how reason *corresponds* to it. By redefining the same movement in terms of knowledge, he rather questions knowledge as such. What he identifies as *wissende Nichtwissen*, ‘knowing ignorance’ or ‘knowing not-knowing’ to which science must eventually return, is no longer knowledge understood in the usual sense of acquiring or producing positive content. And yet this knowing ignorance is neither a mere surrendering oneself to the abyss of relativism which renders all knowledge only partial and thus contingent, nor an embracing oneself with the sterility of scepticism. On the contrary, what Schelling seems to be describing at this point, is such knowledge that *relates to itself in this passing from one form to another*. It relates to itself in exposing itself to its own essence, to what makes knowledge *knowledge*. That is, not to the possibility of *knowing something* (as that would be only a formal inquiry) but rather to the possibility of such mysterious phenomena as *knowing* (or ‘knowability’) *per se*—in a way which radicalises Kant’s critical imperative. For this knowing is the experience of *that* there is knowing: formation of the form itself, *a posteriori of every a priori*. But how does this experience actually take place then?

### ***Anhaltende, retardirende Wissen***

Schelling seeks to clarify this subtle relation by claiming that “Ignorant knowledge (*nichtwissende Wissen*) now relates to it [formation of knowledge—B. G.] as the force that slows down and retards its movement. [...] and this slowing, retarding, reflecting knowledge (*anhaltende, retardirende, reflektirende Wissen*) is actually the philosopher’s knowledge, is what he can call his own in this process. For the movement takes place entirely independently of him, and—very importantly—it is not he who moves in his knowledge and thereby generates knowledge [...] but on the contrary, his knowledge is in itself immobile (*Unbewegliche*). It is not merely ignorance (*Nichtwissen*), but sets itself against knowledge, resists (*Widerstrebende*) the movement, stops it (*Aufhaltende*). [...] the philosopher or this knowledge is in constant communication (*Unterhandlung*) with the driving element which, as it were, desires knowledge incessantly. He must make every step difficult (*Schwer*) for it, he has to struggle with it for every step of the way” (SW I, IX: 238; 1997: 235-236). First, it must be emphasized that thought’s retarding force which Schelling identifies here does not coincide with the activity of forming, of enclosing into form as it may *prima*

*facie* be assumed in the usual terms of bringing particular to the universal. For the generation of the epistemic content of knowledge (if it is, *pace* Kant, to be objective-scientific knowledge and not merely a kind of subjective delusion), as Schelling observes, takes place independently of thought's will, and it is not that "which moves itself in knowledge (*bewegt sich in seinem Wissen*)" thereby supplying itself with contents. In other words, the world befalls human reason in the way it is, and despite its contingencies, its facticity cannot be freely reinvented at any instant. And yet this generation of reality is incessant and excessive (put in contemporary terms, this surplus could also be recognized in the excessive production of language, information, images or technology thereby rendering itself the most indeterminate and ungraspable). Thus by speaking in terms of velocity and pace, Schelling is thinking far beyond rigid distinctions between truth and falsity, being and non-being, chaos and order, identity and difference. For he attempts to think them not even in their (dialectical) *unity* but rather in their *ambiguity*.

But why does Schelling so persistently insist on this retarding force? Because of his extremely important insight that *the excess of knowledge destroys knowledge*. The excess of being destroys being. And that reason itself is inherently ambiguous in that it strives for the infinite and, without resisting itself, it becomes self-destructive. Thus this retarding force appears as what holds and suspends this endless striving without simply abolishing or limiting it. As this striving is also what enables reason, it also brings reason to being. And the inhibition is what already takes place by itself, for reason spontaneously thinks in the mode of determinateness. Nevertheless, if the movement of this excessive production, in Schelling's terms, can be described as an infinite consumption, a constant passing through forms, acquisition of form only to be overcome and replaced ever again, then the task of thinking indeed can be only a constant negotiation, *Unterhandlung*—acting against but also from within this excess. That is why Schelling still calls it knowing (*Wissen*) albeit knowing ignorance (*sic!* not ignorant knowing). For as he also puts it, "In philosophy, man is not the one who knows, but the one who resists what actually generates knowledge (*Wissenerzeugenden*), and who in free thought and in constant contradiction stops this generating element, reflects it" (SW I, IX: 243; 1997: 240). Thus what remains for thinking, realizing its force of withholding, is precisely inhibiting the inhibition itself. Or inverting the structure of this self-consuming movement within itself. Then thought's activity actually becomes the most intense passivity that it seeks for.

Yet this setting oneself against knowledge should not be understood such that it simply seeks to preserve a particular form in its stability and solidity. Nor does it aim to resist the very movement of forming as if to release oneself from the ever-renewing confines of the form. In contrast to both of these alternatives, what Schelling seems to suggest with this demand to “make every step hard (*Schwer*)” is to experience the passing *as passing and while it is passing*. To take thought’s hardness on oneself, to bear it as it is with all its bliss and anguish. For what this retarding and slowing force eventually opens up is the possibility of *dwelling, staying in and enduring*. That is, instead of being totally immersed and mired by this movement of self-consummation, thought is capable to reflect on it in its totality—which here means not only to withhold oneself in it without, however, detaching oneself from it. More importantly, this slowing down also means to be able to *experience* this movement as such. For being part of something does not yet mean that one experiences it. Nor awareness. By means of this deceleration, reason does not and cannot alter this excessive movement as such but yet it can create a certain lacuna of repose within it, where it is indeed nothing to be known, strictly speaking. Yet there is plenty to take place, to witness. For the living of life itself is dwelling in this open process of forming *in transitu*.. In that sense, this knowing-not-knowing, *wissende Nichtwissen* appears to be knowing *within* not-knowing or knowing which is exceeded by not-knowing. That is, rather, such a knowing ignorance eventually becomes a state of knowing-not, a peculiar structure of self-relatedness that thought can have of itself. And that indeed amounts “to be in all and to remain in none”, as a knowing that coincides with its own movement. For this dwelling is precisely what opens this peculiar dimension of *engaged* thinking—thinking that not merely *acts* but also *participates* and thus experiences and knows itself to be participating.

This violent opening to freedom is a moment when reason frees itself even from itself, from its own coercion of authority and yet exposes itself to its own eventuality where what is left is only the highest proximity to itself, relation relating to itself. Or, as Malabou also puts it in her reading of Hegel, “orientation is towards the event and it is capable of withstanding the violence that comes with it” (2005: 191)—for reason is nothing more than this very withstanding and enduring which endures. Thus in seeking to disclose itself to itself, to experience itself reason can never become its own object. For Schelling shows that every object qua object, every form as such and even every law is inherently self-destructive due to its belonging to freedom. But what is left in these very processes is reason understood as a structure of self-

relatedness. If reason is reason as long as it is reason relating to itself as dwelling in this *wissende Nichtwissen*—it necessarily remains open and responsive to its own eventuality, to its own taking place, whatever comes with it. For that is also the *pathos* of logic being a constant question to itself—constantly calling and longing for itself. And finding itself as this very longing.

## II. III. III. Schelling-Hegel: catharsis or caesura of the speculative?

The previous sections attempted to show how the idealist question of reconciling self-consciousness with existence, actuality and experience—understood as the fundamental task of philosophy—can be interpreted in terms of asking how self-consciousness *exists*, how it comes to exist and how does it experience itself *as* self-consciousness. In this way, the emphasis is put not on the final result but rather on the way towards it, on the processual and executive element lying in the notion of accordance, *Übereinstimmung*. Moreover, since Hegel himself admitted that from other ways of knowing philosophy differs only in *form*—for the content, according to him, is one and the same (2010: 33; 1986: 47)—it follows that what makes all the difference is rather the *mode* of thinking or what was previously described as the very *effort* of thinking. For what Schelling and Hegel show, is that only a total engagement of thought, surrendering its authority as much as its servitude, endows reason with its life, enables such thing as its becoming or transformation. In other words, it implies not that reason simply produces its contents through its activity as the common superficial understanding of the idealist performative assumes. Nor is it performative only in the epistemological sense that it establishes its own normative criteria for legitimating its quest for truthfulness. Rather, it is performative in that its actuality, and thus its truthfulness, is characterized by a certain *relatedness* to itself. This does not occur by a kind of objective determination that reason dialectically appropriates and possesses about itself, i.e., as if recognizing itself in the self-manifestations of the absolute in the actual world, but rather by the *intensity* and *proximity* that it acquires of itself *as* and *while* it thinks. For it is the very *work* of the concept that is being carried through, that is, the very *effort* of thinking that counts the most. Thus, Hegel’s insistence that “one should take on oneself the strenuous effort of the Notion (*die Anstrengung des Begriffs auf sich zu nehmen*)” (1907: 39; 1977a: 35) expands the understanding of self-reference by adding to it this particular executive (or, as some suggest, one may even be tempted to say—*existential* or *experiential*<sup>103</sup>) aspect.

Likewise, when Schelling, in his lectures on Hegel, asks “What prevents the philosopher, in order to accommodate (*unterzubringen*) a concept, from also being satisfied with a mere appearance (*bloßen Schein*) of necessity or,

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<sup>103</sup> Kojève (1969), Nancy (2001), Sodeika (2015).

conversely, being satisfied with a mere appearance of the concept?" (SW I, X: 138, 1994: 143). He urges for something that exceeds the mere necessities and exigencies of the concept and thus avoids reducing all thought to conceptual rigidity. For as Schelling notices, "It is not the concept which fills itself (*erfüllt sich*), but rather the thought (*der Gedanke*)" (ibid.). What is demanded then, is that the reversal that Schelling speaks about in following Hegel's exposition of how the becoming itself becomes the principle and the principle the becoming, or how the last becomes the first. Schelling concludes that Hegel "had not just spoken of this reversal but had tried it and really established it (*nicht bloß von dieser Umkehrung gesprochen, sondern sie versucht und wirklich aufgestellt*)," thus demonstrating "a serious attempt really to undertake (*wirklich zu unternehmen*) that reversal" (SW I, X: 157; 1994: 157).

It is not our aim, however, to test the validity of Schelling's critique of Hegel, which, as has been already shown, has its own separate field of controversies in the contemporary scholarship. What is relevant in our context is the two philosophers' common emphasis on a certain self-relatedness and on an absolute engagement of thought that, if presented from both of their different perspectives, provides a more elaborated notion of the liminal performativity in question. Which oscillates between and thus—beyond activity and passivity. For their different accounts stem from the same question, namely, what prevents philosopher from a mere *appearance* of philosophizing, from a mere *imitation* of thinking and arbitrary manipulation of concepts? What is this *wirklich Denken* that these idealists are restlessly insisting on? Can there be such a concept of necessity that preserves itself despite its various shapes? That preserves its living force within the form itself without collapsing into the transcendent eternal super-logic of absolute spirit, driving itself through the history towards its final telos?

Despite several statements regarding this engagement as the *Anstrengung des Begriffs*, *Weg der Verzweiflung* or *bacchantische Taumel*, Hegel, as it was attempted to show, does not fully elaborate this issue. Thus, as it is often the case, one may indeed be tempted to conceive the movement of self-consciousness only in its discreet systematic development, where the previously discussed intensity of thought coincides with its final resolution in the absolute knowledge. For that reason, through its emphasis on the role of individual consciousness, Schelling's position presented in the Erlangen lectures allows one to highlight the irreducible and transformative character

of an *engaged* thinking which does not, however, coincide with what could be identified as the interiorization or appropriation of knowledge. What Schelling presents as the retarding force of reason is not what simply preserves knowledge but rather what allows one to experience its unceasing movement. Nevertheless, Hegel's account, in its own turn, allows one to preserve a positive effect that Schelling does not fully articulate through his notion of *Hemmung*. Accordingly, regarding their relation with respect to the question of self-relatedness, several moments should be underlined which could further help us to disclose their ambiguous relationship regarding: i) the way how the element of passivity is integrated in the activity of self-consciousness; ii) the mode of thought's persistence in the manifold of its forms.

On the one hand, we saw that Hegel's *Weg der Verzweiflung* or what was suggested to be identified as the path of desperate thinking is characterized by consciousness's movement towards itself through various forms of self-consciousness. Undergoing a constant transformation of its relation to itself which thereby also leads to a constant loss (*Verlust*) of itself, consciousness becomes aware of itself not as having a particular stable essence but rather as a specific open structure of self-relatedness. Its potential for metamorphosis lies in the reopening gap between its truth and certainty which being recognized and experienced as such establishes another relation that endures within this gap. However, as Hegel seems to suggest, no transition is possible without the total experience of losing oneself (*sich Entäußerung*), without a sense of despair which, as it turns out, liberates oneself from oneself, releases (*Ablassen*) oneself from its stiffened shape. In this sense, by becoming desperate, so to speak, in its self-renunciation (*Verzichtleistung*), consciousness opens itself to becoming, to the very work of the concept without, however, falling prey to its destructive potential. For it appears as destructive as long as one concentrates on its results and finite forms, whereas reason does not have any fixed form, it cannot be reached as a certain result or product of knowledge. Reason is the becoming of reason, it is the taking place of reason. In that sense, the engagement of thinking, the effort of thinking becomes a liminal experience. For it preserves reason in its proximity to itself despite its constant transformations. Thus in Hegel's case, we recognize such an effort of self-release, of constant giving away oneself, as if it was a state of active passivity that one eventually reaches. It surrenders itself to this movement of surrendering. For it becomes thought which consciously dissolves in its thinking, it becomes this becoming which no longer seeks to



attach itself to any particular form or shape but rather aims to remain at the threshold of this very forming and unforming, where there is neither interior, nor exterior. For that reason, in order to engage thinking, one must be open to sacrifice as “Through these moments of surrender (*Aufgebens*), first of its right to decide for itself, then of its property and enjoyment, and finally through the positive moment of practising what it does not understand (*des Treibens eines unverstandenen Geschäftes*), it truly and completely deprives itself of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of the actuality in which consciousness exists for itself. [...] Only through this actual sacrifice could it demonstrate this self-renunciation” (Hegel 1907: 149-150; 1977a: 137). What Hegel refers to the positive moment of consciousness “practising what it does not understand” seems to be this labour of thinking itself because it is such which through its practising constantly exceeds particular consciousness by transforming it, or at least preserves a potential to do so.

On the other hand, in Schelling’s case, this structure of self-relatedness is elaborated from the other side. Instead of letting oneself be consumed by each form, identifying oneself with each and passing through each by wearing it out—that is, instead of releasing oneself to this movement of releasing, he argues for retarding this movement, for bringing it to a halt. Since he emphasizes the inhibiting nature of freedom, as its inhibition means the appearance of form and being (albeit being constantly driven to its self-destruction), he naturally ascribes the force of inhibition to thinking and attempts to exploit it. For it coincides with the *modus operandi* of the whole movement. In this way, by turning it against itself from within, thought becomes the place where this movement actually relates to itself for the first time and thus becomes experienced *as such*—it comes into being. That is why Schelling describes the knowledge of the philosopher as *unbeweglich*, unmoving—for it is rather a state of mind that he has, a certain relatedness to the world. Whereas what is understood as a ‘movement’ here would mean falling prey to the generation of forms and thus content of knowledge. Yet the thought of the philosopher, following Schelling, here has to do rather with *dwelling, enduring and living through*. Thus put in contrast to Hegel’s ‘active passivity’, one may argue that Schelling rather suggests a kind of ‘passive activity’. The difference is the same as between left and right hands.

In this context, it may be also worth noticing that already in his eighth letter on dogmatism and criticism, young Schelling observes: “We awaken through reflection, that is, through a forced return (*abnöthigte Rückkehr*) to ourselves.

But no return is thinkable without resistance, no reflection without an object. We designate as alive an activity intent upon objects alone and as dead an activity losing itself in itself. Man ought to be neither lifeless nor merely alive” (SW I, I: 325; 1980: 179). If we take this ambiguous hovering of being neither intent upon the object alone, nor merely losing itself to itself, being neither lifeless, nor merely alive, that is, being somehow ‘undead’, as a paradigmatic state of self-consciousness that returns to itself, we may recognize how Schelling radicalizes and further develops this being ‘undead’ of the philosopher into the systematic account on the question of freedom in his later writings. Being *undead*—no longer simply alive, but alive in a sense of enduring one’s death.

Having all this said, we see that both Schelling and Hegel recognize the same excessive self-consuming movement of formation and knowledge that reason undergoes. They both locate destruction and creation as belonging to the same living force and conditioning each other. They both realize the impossibility to step outside this movement which thus demands to redefine the essence of reason in its relation to itself in modal terms. So that one could remain in this movement without being consumed by it, to maintain it without accepting it, without turning it into the rigid form (Hegel) or without disappearing in its vertiginous vanishing (Schelling). That is, engaging it, staying within it but also resisting through this very engagement. However, by emphasizing different ways of relating to this movement, different ways to be engaged in it, they—it seems without being explicitly aware of this—also reveal the ambiguity permeating every attempt to deal with this ambiguous movement. That is, their accounts put side by side suggest that any attempt to provide a one-sided resolution to the question of relatedness always remains insufficient, as it already demands to relate to it. In other words, this task remains radically performative in that sense, that it demands thought to relate even to its notion of self-relatedness. And in that case, most importantly, relation cannot be strictly determined neither in terms of inhibiting nor releasing dialectics. It must necessarily remain indeterminate, in order to preserve its resisting or exceeding force, in order *not* to become knowledge, not to be consumed by the movement it seeks to respond to. It must necessarily remain meaningless in order to be able to create the *experience* of meaning.

For this reason, one may also recall what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, following Hölderlin, identified as ‘the caesura’ or ‘the catharsis’ of the speculative, which “does not do away with the logic of exchange and alternation” but it is

“the disarticulation which represents the active neutrality of the interval between [*entre-deux*]” (1989: 234-235). Labarthe indeed provides an insightful and provocative interpretation by inverting the modern understanding of tragedy and its reductionist speculative readings. Despite basically being focused on the writings of Hölderlin, his fundamental question around this issue directly points to and summarizes our own concerns, as he asks: “How is it, in other words, that the speculative (de)constitutes itself—I mean, dismantles itself, deconstructs itself in the same movement by which it erects itself, installs itself and constitutes a system? And what does this imply about the possibility and the structure, about the logic, of truth and of property in general?” (1989: 212). However, his interpretation does not provide a detailed account and being oriented towards another objective, understandably lacks ‘speculative’ rigour. He interchangeably uses words ‘caesura’ and ‘catharsis’, whereas our reading of Schelling and Hegel disclosed a peculiar difference between them. For caesura, which has to do with retarding, suspending and arresting force, as we saw in Schelling’s case, is but one strategy. Whereas what could be identified as catharsis, as releasing oneself from oneself *through* this being torn apart between the infinite and particular, by giving away oneself to this tearing, as Hegel suggests, is yet another relation. However, what Labarthe (although having in mind Hölderlin<sup>104</sup>) generally recognizes—and this is most important—is that these strategies indeed “touch upon something that dislocates *from within* the speculative. Something that immobilizes it and prohibits it—or rather, distends and suspends it. Something that constantly prevents it from completing itself and never ceases, by doubling it, to divert it from itself. [...] Or that interrupts it, from place to place, and provokes its ‘spasm.’ [...] Thus, he who desires difference and exclusion excludes himself, and suffers, to the point of irreversible loss, this inexorable unlimited differentiation that the hyperbolic introduces in its doubling of the dialectical-sacrificial process in such a way as to prevent its culmination and paralyse it *from within*” (1989: 227, 233).

It follows then, that what indeed resists the self-consummating movement of dialectics from within and without, every waiting to complete itself, is also what equally preserves it, what nurtures it, what sustains the life of this perpetuation of death without allowing to accomplish itself in the perfect resolution of death within death. And yet once again, what the figure of

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<sup>104</sup> Hölderlin’s relation and influence on his former roommates Schelling and Hegel is a separate and important issue that demands a separate study.

Schelling-Hegel now seems to suggest is far from the promise of any final resolution, peace of mind, salvation of knowledge or the purity of meaning. For they realized that the impossibility to die is much more threatening than vanishing. What they do suggest, instead, is a possibility of beholding. Not saving the world, nor escaping its never-ending ends, but rather, making one wish to be there precisely the moment when it falls—to bear the true hardship of being the daughters of Θάυμας.

## Conclusions

1. Consistently following the tenets of Kant's transcendental dialectics in its dynamic extension to the third *Critique*, one can no longer assume that reason merely *discovers*, *intuits* or *observes* itself acting in the world. The 'itself' of self-consciousness cannot be understood either as a necessary ground, or as a first principle of the phenomenal world. If reason limits itself by its own activity and can access only what falls within the horizon of this activity (or, if it can only know what it *can* know), it can never, strictly speaking, reach anything beyond or before the synthesis. In that case, self-consciousness appears as a work of synthesis synthesizing itself, the horizon for the appearing and disappearing of the phenomenal world.
2. Fichte radicalizes Kant's notion of the unity of apperception by demonstrating how the question of the conditions of knowledge must be necessarily preceded by the inquiry into the conditions of knowing these conditions. He introduces his notion of *Tathandlung*, the facticity of the Ego coinciding with its own activity or Ego existing in as much as it acts and only within its actions. In this way, he provides a way to think the necessary unity and identity of self-consciousness in every cognitive act without presupposing any thinking substance in advance. The self-referring movement of self-consciousness sustains itself as long as it performs itself. By emphasizing the essentially practical and effective (and not merely regulative or formal) nature of reason he takes the Kantian incapacity to ground and justify freedom within theoretical or deductive means as the only possibility to argue for its actuality and necessity. Self-limitation is reinterpreted in terms of the self-positing Ego.
3. On the one hand, in its speculative accomplishment, Schelling and Hegel preserve Fichte's emphasis on thinking, which is self-transformative in its very practice. On the other hand, in their critique of Fichte's self-positing Ego we can trace the basic shift from the question of *activity* of reason to the question of its *actuality*. Schelling and Hegel provide an approach to see the movement of self-consciousness as being driven, not by ever-increasing objectification of knowledge within the means and grounds of infinite subject, but rather, by reason's incapacity to provide these grounds and limits. They expand Fichte's notion of self-limitation through the negative activity of self-consciousness, which is the liminal

point between coming into being and passing away. For Schelling and Hegel, taken their accounts together, self-consciousness acts as a point where there is no inside, no outside, there is nothing to be given, produced or created but only exercised. Consciousness itself appears established through this acting and thus cannot be conceived as preceding it.

4. By identifying negativity and limitation as essentially inherent in the very act of grasping, determining and judging, Schelling and Hegel allow us to see, how self-limitation appears as what itself is infinite and unlimited. Accordingly, what is presented as the ‘infinite extension of the boundary’ enables reason’s permanent becoming along with its constant re-determination and re-actualization. Self-limitation becomes the mode of self-mediation. In this respect—instead of merely opposing or subordinating each other—Schelling and Hegel redefine the performative, i.e., self-referring, self-positing, self-determining dimension of the modern *cogito*. Reason, now interpreted as *the taking place of reason*, is exposed in a threefold way:

- 4.1. With respect to the question of determinacy, Schelling and Hegel show that the relationship between intelligibility and actuality cannot be addressed in terms of logical necessity, derivation, adequacy or even consistency. Rather, determinacy implies a self-referring action, a gesture in which the concept refers to nothing outside itself. Or, due to its negative character, it refers to the absencing-of-reference outside itself, thereby abolishing the distinction between form and content, determining and determined. However, due to its own self-mediating nature in the copula, the concept likewise captures only the moment of its own immanent dissolution, as universality suspends its force in order to demonstrate it in particularity. In this way, reason experiences itself not simply as a self-positing activity that remains transparent to itself and sustains permanence. Instead, it takes place preceding any ‘self,’ it is the opening in which the self is a *becoming* self. In this sense, instead of being introduced simply as a self-positing performativity, this activity appears as the event of de-posing or pre-posing—what is more appropriately identified as the *affirmativity* of reason.

- 4.2. With respect to the question of the initiation of speculative logic, Schelling and Hegel emphasize beginning in the sense of an *initium* as preceding the question of *principium*. What could be regarded as a

‘principle’ appears to be the *execution* of thought’s power to think, an imperative to begin in order to begin, an initiation to thinking *while* thinking. In that sense, the question of beginning is no longer the question of the first impetus but rather, a question of a *moment*—entering the movement in its taking place, without bringing it to a halt. Schelling-Hegel’s eventual interpretation of the beginning of philosophy opens a space to think it between metamorphosis and rupture, anticipation and surprise, arbitral decision and mere accident. It is the permanent dwelling at thought’s outfall—where thought’s presupposition is its own supposition.

- 4.3. With respect to self-relatedness and transformative potential of self-consciousness, it anticipates a necessary dimension of *liminality*. Schelling and Hegel show that consciousness is performative not merely in the epistemological sense that it establishes its own normative criteria for legitimating its quest for truthfulness. They both recognize the excessive self-consuming movement of the generation of knowledge that reason constantly undergoes, where it becomes aware of itself not as having a particular stable essence but rather as an open structure of self-relatedness. By being reinterpreted in modal terms, their proposed engaged thinking remains in this self-consuming movement without being consumed by it either as a force of inhibition (Schelling) or release (Hegel) of the speculative. Following the Schelling-Hegel account, consciousness’s actuality and truthfulness become characterized by the *intensity* and *proximity* to itself, which its *self-relatedness* shows to be neither active nor passive.

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## Notes

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