

Juan José Rodríguez

SCHELLING ON BEING AND PREDICATION IN HIS ESSAY *CONTRA* FICHTE OF 1806

Juan José Rodríguez – M.A., PhD, Department of German and French Philosophy. Charles University. 5 Ovocný trh, Prague, 11636, Czech Republic; Institute for Transcendental Philosophy, University of Wuppertal. 20 Gaußstraße, Wuppertal, D-42119, Germany; e-mail: juanjo_r_012@hotmail.com

This article explores the intricate relationship between Schelling, Being, and Predication, framed by two core themes that shape its argumentation. The first theme addresses the continuity between the *System of Identity* and Schelling's *System of Freedom*, particularly through a critique of Fichte's idealistic conception of Being. Schelling counters Fichte's inadvertent dualism between consciousness and its real content by affirming the primacy of nature and proposing a realist unity. Drawing from Hölderlin's thesis on the trans-reflexive nature of Being, Schelling asserts the identity of ideal and real grounds as the foundation of a unified reality. The second theme, concerning the theory of the bond, marks a profound shift in Schelling's metaphysical framework, challenging the legitimacy of a system grounded solely in reason. The notion that no being can fully coincide with itself, thereby undermining the establishment of an identity in absolute terms, destabilizes the systematic vision of philosophy as the identity of principle and development. This critique extends to the conception of reason as a substantive principle, disrupting the foundational assumptions of other systematic thinkers of modernity. Through these interconnected themes, the article reveals how Schelling's thought reconfigures the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of modern philosophy.

Keywords: Schelling, Fichte, being, predication, identity, system

For citation: Rodríguez, J.J. "Schelling on being and predication in his essay *contra* Fichte of 1806", *Filosofskii zhurnal / Philosophy Journal*, 2025, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 22–38. (In Russian)

§ 1. Schelling's Philosophy from 1806 onwards

The following topics guide our reasoning in this article on Schelling, Being, and Predication. The first, in which continuity between the System of Identity and Schelling's new essay on the System of Freedom can be seen, concerns the critique of Fichte's idealistic concept of being and consequently the affirmation of the realist thesis on the primacy of Being vis-à-vis thinking. Against a position that, like Fichte's, falls into an inadvertent difference between consciousness

and its real content, Schelling asserts the identity of ideal and real ground based on Hölderlin thesis of the trans-reflexive character of Being (§ 1). The second theme, regarding the theory of the bond, completely changes the conceptual horizon of Schelling's metaphysics and calls into question the claim of a system of reason in general (§ 2). The impossibility of any being to be itself, and consequently the final impossibility of establishing an identity as such affects in turn the world view of the system of philosophy as the identity of principle and development and impends the identity of reason as a substantial principle as conceived by other systematic thinkers of modernity.

Before analysing those above-mentioned themes, we would like to situate the reader briefly both in terms of the periods of Schelling's philosophy and of the topics that we will handle in this paper in the context of his metaphysics around the year 1806. After this brief elucidation it will be clearer for the reader not only the importance of Schelling's Essay against Fichte of 1806¹, but, more significantly, the originality of this article for Schelling's scholarship.

Some authors, especially Theunissen and Oser², have pointed out the central importance and special character of Schelling's reflections between the years 1806 and 1811. Theunissen referred to it as the anthropological period, since in it the human being, as opposed to the purely gnoseological subject, became ever more central. Oser established a discontinuity in this period, both in terms of the primacy of reason in general in Schelling's youth until 1804, and in terms of its rejection in the late philosophy of the 1830s and 1840s. It was only in the period from 1806 to 1811 that Schelling was no longer concerned with the facticity of reason, as in his later philosophy, but above all with the facticity of the individual, which led to his claim to man and freedom as beings independent of God and nature. This period thus forms – as M. Frank and A. Bowie have shown – the origin of Kierkegaardian existentialism as well as the broadest known doctrines of Heidegger and Sartre of the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's.³

Our position coincides with and complements Oser's, while at the same time elaborating the grounds for the emergence of this philosophy of the individual, which lies already in the disintegration of the identity system of 1801–1804. Let us briefly elaborate on both points.

Oser alike, we maintain the centrality and specificity of the period 1804–1811 for the thinking of the factual and individual domain, while, at the same time, we see a continuity between the middle and late Schelling in the definition of the factual in general, which escapes the rationality of the concept or the purely a priori construction in philosophy. This continuity within a discontinuity is the first point we want to emphasise in our remarks.

¹ Full title of Schelling's text is *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine: An Elucidation of the Former* (Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten Fichteschen Lehre. Eine Erläuterungsschrift der ersten) and runs between pages 1–126 of *Schellings Werke* volume VII.

² See Theunissen, M. "Schellings anthropologischer Ansatz", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1965, Bd. 47, S. 174–189; Oser, T. *Sprünge über den Horizont des Denkens. Interpretationen zum mittleren Schelling 1806–1811*, Diss. Berlin, 1997.

³ See Bowie, A. *Schelling and modern European Philosophy. An introduction*. London, 1993; Frank, M. *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen*. Berlin, 1975; Idem. *Die unendliche Mangel an Sein: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik*. München, 1992.

In contrast to both Theunissen and Oser and following Beiser and Lauth⁴ – who, however, did not dwell deeper on this problematic – we locate the origin of Schelling’s middle metaphysics, which revolves around the concepts of finitude, evil, and human freedom, in the disintegration of the idealist identity system. This occurred because it became increasingly difficult for Schelling to think through what we have called the “existence of the finite as such” (omitted for review) in a system conceived according to the categories of identity and unity.

Since the finite as such cannot exist in a mere system of thought, but we are aware of its factual existence, this contradiction can only be resolved by accepting the factual evidence of the finite and working out a solution to incorporate it into a new system that contains two parts and thus is no longer a unified system: that which follows from existence, or negative philosophy, and that which follows from ground or nature and leads to positive philosophy. This claim necessitates some additional clarification. The notion of “existence” is said here in two senses. In the context of the difference between ground and existence, existence refers, as Heidegger states, to that “which lies before the eyes”, and thus to that which can be rationally ascertained in the form of *Was* (“what” as a question of essence), that is, of pure essence. Existence thus conceived is related to light, to that which can be fully clarified by the understanding. By contrast, the existence to which later Positive philosophy refers is not that of what lies before the eyes, but that of pure *Dass* (the fact “that”), that is, of the brute fact of pre-rational, pre-conceptual existence, which means that this second concept of existence is related to the concept of ground as an indivisible remainder that can never be fully elucidated by understanding. Existence, conceived in this way, is that which lies in the night and in the dark, and thus relates to the category of Positive philosophy, understood as non-conceptual or pre-conceptual philosophy.

Due to the systematic complexity of the period at hand we would like to dwell deeper into the question of the originality and of the philosophical stance of this paper.

This is in fact primarily a historic-hermeneutical thesis on Schelling’s philosophy and its periodisation. While Oser and Theunissen situate the beginning of intermediate metaphysics around 1806 precisely in the text against Fichte, or in the emergence of the anthropological moment in 1809 and 1810, we identify its commencement, and thus of the theory of the existence of finitude as such and of freedom of the finite in the period 1802–1804 marked by the introduction of the concepts of finitude, fall and freedom. In this sense, and as it was well seen by Beiser and Lauth, we defend the idea that Schelling is primarily concerned with the issue of finitude and the independence of the finite within the absolute idealist system of identity. Now, while Lauth regards this concern as evidence that Schelling’s system cannot stand as such, and thus pales in comparison with Fichte’s ethical idealism, we read this split between absolute and finitude positively, and not as evidence of a flaw in Schelling’s system, but of the beginning of his new ‘extra-systematic’ or even ‘contra-systematic’ philosophy.

Precisely what we must point out in connection with our historical thesis is the following, namely that the duality introduced by Schelling in his intermediate philosophy is first implicitly and then explicitly lost in the negative interpretation

⁴ See Beiser, F.C. *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism*. Cambridge, 2002; Lauth, R. *Die Entstehung von Schellings Identitätsphilosophie in der Auseinandersetzung mit Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre*. München, 1975.

of duality, and thus in those who try to decode Schelling's philosophy from the systematic point of view of Fichte or Hegel. In other words, if we claim that Schelling's system fails because in discovering the problem of the finite, he cannot maintain a strong position of unity between the absolute and the world, we thereby lose sight of the fact that a positive and speculative result of this failure entails the discovery of the fundamental metaphysical-ontological necessity of rejecting *any* all-encompassing rational system. For in any system based on the notions of identity and unity all independent and proper existence of the finite, and with it of finite freedom, is abolished.

The originality of this article is then twofold, on the one hand historical-hermeneutical, on the other, systematic. As far as its historical originality is concerned, our aim is to present the nuances in the different positions that Schelling assumed towards Fichte, and towards idealism in general, to show the relevance of this evolution in a multifaceted and complex way. In this sense, our article is also original from the thematic point of view, since, in general, both periods of Fichte's critique, namely 1801 and 1806, are neither related nor brought into play in the overall framework of the metaphysics of German idealism. To be more specific about hermeneutic point, it should be noted that we assume Oser's proposal about the evolution of Schelling's thought in this period around 1806, referring to the discovery of the irreversibility of nature in God and, consequently, of the emergence of the ontological problem of the finite, but we go further than Oser in that we extend his thesis, concentrating on the period 1801–1804 and, specifically, on the appearance already in that period of the relevance of individuality and its irreducibility to the concept of the system. We have shown in other articles the difference that opens in Schelling's philosophy around 1802–1804 between the finite in the infinite or infinitely finite, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a new purely finite conception that considers the finite as such and that operates here as a background to our thesis on Being in 1806.

From a systematic point of view we present an argument consistent with the above-mentioned historical thesis, exposing Schelling's shift towards irreversibility between God and nature already in 1806 in a way that refutes the monist-immanent system of 1801 and boldly infer the impossibility of a complete system, insofar as the point of arrival of the system can no longer coincide, as full ideality, with its point of departure and thus an unbridgeable gap opens up between the original absolute and the historical becoming of God through the real-ideal. This systematic thesis allows us to claim an additional, but central consideration, namely that Schelling's thesis on Being, similar to the position on Being as pronominal being in Hölderlin, constitutes the deepest metaphysical basis of Schelling's critique of Fichte's passive and negative notion of nature. In this sense our historical thesis permits us to elucidate a metaphysical problematic key even to the contemporary debate on the origin and ultimate status of reality.

Suffice this to clarify in this introduction how the origin of Schelling's later dualism and anti-rationalism is to be found in the immanent decomposition of his system of 1801–1804, and how this point obscures and calls into question the claim to unity of any possible philosophical system – insofar as it must confront rationality with freedom.⁵

⁵ See Lauth, R. *Op. cit.*; Laughland, J. *Schelling versus Hegel. From German idealism to Christian metaphysics*. Burlington, Hampshire, 2007; Lauer, C. *The suspension of reason in Hegel and Schelling*. New York; London, 2010.

§ 2. Introduction to the Essay against Fichte of 1806

The significance of the essay against Fichte of 1806 lies in two fundamental points, which we will attempt to clarify provisionally below. First and foremost, we refer to the doctrine of the real Absolute or counter-image as Schelling elaborated it since *Philosophy and Religion* of 1804. Let us recall that, to exist externally or according to the real factor, the original or ideal Absolute must give way to the concept of a second, real Absolute, characterised by its external appearance. The consequence of this, however, was that this real production could have no relation of derivation or resemblance to the original ideal so that the Absolute could only become real as another. Hence the relevance of the Christian myth of the Fall to explain the emergence of the real as a detachment from the Absolute. (See *SW VI*, 38–42).⁶

To this thesis, we must now add in 1806 the discovery which we have called the irreversibility of nature in God, and which throws new light on Schelling's speculations on the relation between these two concepts, which our author had left untouched since the *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800. In this work, Schelling presented Transcendental Idealism and Philosophy of Nature as the two sciences that make up the absolute, or the system of philosophy, and explained their reversibility, i.e., that we can begin speculation with consciousness and arrive at nature, or conversely, derive consciousness from nature as the objective subject-object. (See *SW III*, 361–376).⁷ The later system of 1801 takes a similar stand to Spinoza, insofar as claiming an absolute identity or equality between God and nature as the totality of all things – this is a possible interpretation of Spinoza's dictum in the *Ethics*: Deus sive natura. We can again call this thesis Spinoza's monistic-immanent stance, which is echoed in Schelling's system of identity between 1801 and 1804.⁸

Around 1806, Schelling changed this position to underline a non-derivative relation between nature and God, which sees both as independent beings and at the same time makes God again, in accordance with classical metaphysics, a being that transcends nature.⁹ We call this position the thesis of the irreversibility of nature in God. According to the thesis, God expresses himself in nature because God, nature, and man, like all beings, are metaphysically enchained to each other. However, nature is not God, because in nature, as in spirit, the determinations of personality and freedom, which correspond to the particular will

⁶ Full references of Schelling's works, year of publication and location in the complete works: Schelling, F.W.J. *Sämtliche Werke*, 14 Bde. Stuttgart, 1856–1861.

⁷ See further in Nectarios, G.L. *German Idealism and the Problem of Knowledge: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*. Berlin, 2008, pp. 140–143; Snow, D. "Introduction", in: F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*. Albany, NY, 2018, pp. xxv–xxvi.

⁸ See Pluder, V. *Die Vermittlung von Idealismus und Realismus in der Klassischen Deutschen Philosophie*. Stuttgart, 2013, S. 360–368. More on Schelling's turn towards a strong position of unity like that of Spinoza and therefore his distancing from Fichte from the year 1801 and until 1806 in: Nectarios, G.L. *Op. cit.*, pp. 147, 152, 159–160, 162, 166–167, 169; Goudeli, K. *Challenges to German Idealism. Schelling, Fichte and Kant*. New York, 2002, pp. 96–118; Sturma, D. "The Nature of Subjectivity: The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature", *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*. New York, 2000, pp. 216–231; Pluder, V. *Op. cit.*, S. 382–385.

⁹ See White, A. *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom*. New Haven, 1983; Žižek, S. *Visión de paralaje*. Buenos Aires, 2011.

of man, are not yet made effective.¹⁰ This shows not only that nature is separated from God – although not cut off – but also that the constituents of ideal philosophy or spirit, especially human freedom, are not circumscribed and subjected to the immanent circle of nature but stand outside and beyond it.

This further enables Schelling to overcome the problem of the idealist distinction between logical and real movement. Indeed, if the Absolute contains everything and consequently Hegelian pantheism or panlogism would be valid, why should this *logos* go out of itself, or externalise itself? Movement and development are not only impossible but rather not necessary at all.

The true system of identity is that of the undifferentiated Parmenidean being. This is noted by Schelling himself as early as 1801. If the principle contains everything, the real cannot be so, it cannot even be an appearance or an illusion, for even as such, whence would they come? But if the Absolute comes out of itself and is externalised in nature and spirit as in Hegel's system, the movement of externalization and return cannot be real, as we have seen, it must be a purely logical-apparent development "in eternity". What is there at the beginning and at the end must be logically the same: $A = A$. Even a psychological difference in the finite spirit cannot be justified since it forces us to consider something ontologically different.

Although the discovery of irreversibility between nature and God around 1806 suggests that Schelling's system could never be completed because there will always exist a difference in origin between the beginning and the future development of such system, it nevertheless succeeds in elucidating both the reality of effective movement as the prospect of a real development of the world and of man.

Along the following sections, we will bring to the attention of the reader two elements of importance to establish – as we mentioned at the beginning of this paper – both the importance of Schelling's Essay against Fichte of 1806, and, notably, the originality of this article for Schelling's specialists.

The first continues an onto-linguistical line of Schelling research that, since Högbe and Gabriel, sees in the theory of the bond an explanation of the difference between pronominal and predicative Being. Second, a dualistic reading of Schelling that traces back years before the *Freedom Essay* and that takes the ontological problems arising from the System of Identity as the ground for the later distinction between ground and existence, positive and negative philosophy that will accompany Schelling's reflections until his later period of Berlin.

§ 3. The link between the one and the manifold through the doctrine of the bond in the Essay against Fichte

We can now retrace our steps to the main theme of the work, in accordance with our interest in the concepts of Being, predication, and system in the years coming to the *Freedom Essay* of 1809, namely, Schelling's conception of ideal ground and of the impossibility of being oneself. Being and thinking, according to the author, are immediately one: "In our view, there is still no true opposition

¹⁰ This contains a refutation of naturalism in the same direction of Markus Gabriel's work *I am not a Brain* (Gabriel, M. *Ich ist nicht Gehirn*. Berlin, 2015).

anywhere in this relationship; those two are immediately, without a higher bond and in themselves, one.” (SW VII, 52).

This being or God¹¹ is essentially self-affirmation, and this self-affirmation is, conversely, being itself, for otherwise something would lie outside of being, which is impossible: “Affirmation of being is knowledge of being, and vice versa. The eternal, therefore, since it is essentially a self-affirmation, is in being also a self-knowledge, and vice versa.” (SW VII, 52).

The unity of being and thinking is such that they entail no opposition. There is a relation of indifference between the two, since the elements develop as two and not, as in identity, as the original One. It follows that everything that exists in nature is both being and affirmation, and that therefore that something exists means that its being is constant, that it is maintained in being, and that, at the same time, it reveals itself. For this reason, Schelling also says that since the opposition between the real and the ideal is not in itself real, there is also no real contradiction between the systems expressing the two sides of this opposition. This is why our author also states that the *I = I* of the *Science of Knowledge* of Fichte consists of a psychological interpretation of the principle of identity, which, being expressed ideally in the *I*, is also expressed in nature from a real point of view.¹²

Manfred Frank has explained very well this point, according to which we should not take the relative identity of being and thinking that occurs in reflection, and which we should better call indifference, for the ontological absolute identity that grounds both logical ($A = A$) and psychological ($I = I$) identity. The essence expresses the pronominal or ante-predicative identity, i.e., it expresses the very fact that the absolute is, whereas the form refers to the logical-linguistic predicative identity, which only exists on the basis of having first and absolutely posited the identity of the pronominal being.

The difference between pronominal or ante-predicative identity and predicative identity further enables Schelling to distinguish between the identity which is only uniformity of subject and predicate, such as the $I = I$, which simply reiterates the essence of the subject by duplicating it, and that creative identity $A = B$, which explains the real enrichment of knowledge. On this point, usually ignored by interpreters, with the exception of Högrefe, Gabriel, and Frank, Schelling anticipates the difference introduced by Frege between reference – pronominal identity – and sense – predicative identity, thus illuminating an essential logical-metaphysical aspect of theories of meaning.

From the above-mentioned indifference between essence and form, between being and thinking, arises the true and first opposition, namely that which mediates between the one and the manifold. (SW VII, 53).

The impossibility of being oneself thus refers primarily to the impossibility of the pure being-in-itself or the primordial, which precedes everything, to reveal, i.e. to externalize itself, if it lacks an “other” being in which it can put itself into effect (*verwirklichen*):

¹¹ More on Schelling’s change of vocabulary from “Absolute” to “God” in Vater, M. & Wood, D. “Introduction”, in: J.G. Fichte, & F.W.J. Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*. Albany, NY, 2012, p. 13.

¹² See Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität: der Schlüssel zu Schellings reifer Philosophie*. Stuttgart, 2018, S. 122–123, 130.

A being that would be merely itself, as a pure One (namely, if such a thing could be thought, as we now assume), would necessarily be without revelation in itself; for it would have nothing in which it would reveal itself, it could not for that very reason be as One, for being, actual real being, is precisely self-revelation. (SW VII, 53).

The original One, which precedes everything, cannot be as such, since real being consists in this ability to reveal itself in a counter-image (*Gegenbild*), in the imaginative formation (*Ineinbildung*) of another Absolute. The Self must therefore have another in itself in order to reveal itself, and the other must in turn have the Self. The self or the one can only be itself as another, thus in an alienated way:

If it is to be as One, it must reveal itself in itself; but it does not reveal itself if it is merely itself, if it does not have in itself another, and in this other itself the One [...]. (SW VII, 54).

The reification or incarnation of the absolute, as in a previous work of 1804, called *Philosophy and Religion*, implies that the original absolute is differentiated from within itself. For Fichte, however, this does not happen in a determinate way, but abstractly and purely in thinking. Therefore, Schelling asks for the validity of any claims concerning distinctions in being if they are to take place, as in Fichte, merely in thinking. What is the touchstone through which we can discern 'being' in thinking?¹³ Once again, the question arises: what is the relationship between thinking and being, and how does one pass from one to the other?

The existence grasps itself through independent power, remaining left to itself in the *image*, and in such a way that it distinguishes *itself* from being. Now, in that it first looks at itself only badly in its existence, immediately in this powerful direction towards itself (which is compared to what happens when a man *gathers himself together*, and what everyone can find in his self-observation), there arises for it in that direction the view that it (the thing) is *that and that* (what then is just different than that it is *not* the thing, but with which no *that and that* and everywhere no positive character is given) (SW VII, 77).¹⁴

In this process, then, what we call the living bond between the self and the other plays a central role. Indeed, the principle of the copula – which is also the principle of predication – is this inner unity of the One between Being itself and the Other as itself. For this reason, Schelling tells us that the One in Being is the connection between being oneself and being oneself as an Other: “[...] that which is, or exists, as One, is necessarily a bond of itself and of an Other in being.” (SW VII, 55).

Let us recall that in *Bruno* as well as in *Philosophy and Religion* Schelling had spoken of the third = x, which he proposes as necessary for the production of the synthetic identity $(A = x) = (B = x)$ ¹⁵ and which Markus Gabriel regards as the principle for logical space as such, in which all ordinary predicative relations can then take place.¹⁶ The third term is characterised here as the living

¹³ See Snow, D. *Op. cit.*, p. xiii.

¹⁴ Italics from Schelling.

¹⁵ A complete list of references on the concept of “the third” in Schelling’s middle metaphysics includes the following passages: SW IV, 290–292; VI, 46–47; VII, 60, 62, 205, 448; VIII, 213–215; WA I, 28, 128–129.

¹⁶ See further in: Gabriel, M. *Transcendental Ontology: Studies in German Idealism*. London, 2011, pp. 72–80.

bond, the copula =, which makes it possible to establish the identity between being oneself and being an Other in the first place, and thus enables the self-disclosure of being.¹⁷

That there is a relation between the living bond and what Gabriel calls the establishment of logical space is consequently further elaborated. (*SW VII*, 62). There Schelling tells us that the bond or nexus between A and B is never itself put into existence, nor can it exist as such, since it is the bond that makes the existence of A and B itself possible. This becoming and passing away can never be seen or grasped as such, but only being is what is eternal and visible in it.

The concept of logical space is linked with the subject of pronominal being that we introduced earlier. For a logical identity to be established as such, the possibility of any identity, and with it of all predication, need to be posited first. But the way in which this positing is established cannot be the same in which predication takes place precisely because a predicative being depends upon what is originally not predicable, namely, pronominal being – also called by Schelling “unprethinkable being” (*Unvordenkliches Seyn*).

Why is the theory of the logical space as put forward by Gabriel relevant in the present article about being and predication in Schelling and Fichte, and more specifically regarding Schelling stance against Fichte about the self-grounding character of the relative identity between being and thinking? For Schelling, as for Gabriel, the positing of an absolute identity in pronominal being has eminently an ontological meaning, which then grounds both the logical and linguistic dimension of meaning, but for both of them it is key to keep the ontological fundamental meaning of identity, the positing of pronominal being, as different and prior to the establishing of a logical and psychological identity as the one Fichte posits in his *Science of Knowledge*. In doing so both Schelling and Gabriel follow the thesis, first advanced by Hölderlin in 1795, of the fundamental ontological difference between Being and judgement. In judgement, we also find “being”, but only insofar as being appears inside the relational structure of the distinction between subject and object. By following the thesis on the primacy of Being, Schelling and Gabriel reject the reduction of the ontological level of discourse to the epistemological domain first elaborated by Fichte and thus ground the latter on the former.¹⁸

Schnell, on the other hand, does introduce a nuance between Gabriel’s and Schelling’s approaches, namely a difference between a purely theoretical and a non-theoretical – in the sense of non-thetic – or non-discursive approach to Being, such as it takes place in art or in non-discursive speech, a nuance that would contribute to the distinction between Gabriel and Schelling and thus bring

¹⁷ On the underlying logic of the concept of “the third”, see Carrasco Conde, A. *La limpidez del mal*. Madrid, 2013, pp. 254–255; Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität*, S. 248; Idem. “Identity and non-identity”: Schelling’s path to the ‘absolute system of identity’”, *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*. Cambridge, 2014, pp. 130, 133, 138–139, 141; Gabriel, M. *Fiktionen*. Berlin, 2020, S. 140–143, redacted for review, S. 168–170; Tritten, T. *Beyond Presence. The Late F.W.J. Schelling’s Criticism of Metaphysics*. Boston; Berlin, 2012, pp. 77–79; Žizek, S. *The indivisible remainder. An essay on Schelling and related matters*. London, 2007, pp. 76–80, 103. Most notably, the above-mentioned Manfred Frank has clarified the connection between the third element necessary for the generation of a synthetic identity and the medieval logic of *reduplicatio*.

¹⁸ See further Gabriel, M. *Transcendental Ontology*, 2011; Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität*, S. 122–142.

Schelling closer to Heidegger and to a-subjective phenomenology. Gabriel's neutral realism should thus be distinguished from Schelling's neutral *dualism*. In this framework, it would be interesting to ask not only about the "sense of being", as phenomenology does, but – in the line of Frege and Gabriel, the heir of Aristotle – about its "reference" or pole of unity, as we have done in a separate analysis of the *Freedom Essay* and of *The Ages of the World*.¹⁹

The web of forces or the living bond maintains itself in an oscillation between self-affirmation and self-negation, between being posited as existent by the terms it connects and, on the other hand, self-destruction in this very act. In short, the bond arises and disappears, as Schelling claims, as the expression of an eternal desire, reproducing here the Romantic leitmotiv that situates our author close to Hölderlin and Novalis.²⁰ Specifically, the bond that makes the existence of the real as such possible, like Novalis' longing to reach the absolute, is a longing that motivates our searching action, but which can never find its goal and fulfil it as such:

By affirming itself in it, the bond seems to set the connected (*das Verbundene*); but since it does not affirm the same as itself and in itself, in the same act the posited (*das Gesetzte*) is again annihilated; and in this alternation of coming into being and passing away, the connected flows away, as a play of eternal desire to affirm itself [...] (SW VII, 62).

The doctrine of the third term as eternity reproduces a classical theme of the system of identity of 1801–1804, which Schelling had abandoned only in 1811 in the work *The Ages of the World*. As in the 1801–1804 system, Schelling holds to the priority of eternity over time and sees in every moment of time only the put into effect of eternity. This results in a deficiency in the distinction between logical "in-the-eternity" becoming and real becoming and consequently a difficulty in comprehending real change in nature and history, which presupposes a more subtly developed notion of time. Until 1806, as we said, Schelling reproduces the idealistic and monistic-immanent error of seeing all time as an eternal present and consequently of regarding the past and the real future as mere illusions of the finite imagination. This point has been recently refuted by Gabriel when he investigated the central role played by fictional beings in our sociocultural milieu. In sum foundational philosophy, of which Schelling himself was guilty in his System of identity, considers that some things – for instance, thinking, or matter, the present, the thinking subject – are "more real" than others, but in doing so it contravenes the basic premise of the real, namely, that all that is, in any modality of being, is real, including value judgments about what would be "more real". Nonetheless in discovering this equivalence of all modalities of being Gabriel, following here the middle and late Schelling, introduces a meta-metaphysical pluralism that supersedes the metaphysical-axiological primacy of one aspect of being over all the others, being for instance the idea, matter, or any other, allowing the true real to come forth, namely a non-recursive and open infinity of fields of sense.²¹ Schelling will later modify this position to distinguish between, on the one hand, an eternal present proper to the concept and the purely logical becoming of the ideal, and, on the other hand, a present as

¹⁹ See Schnell, A. *Seinsschwingungen. Zur Frage nach dem Sein in der transzendentalen Phänomenologie*. Tübingen, 2020.

²⁰ See Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität*, S. 126.

²¹ See Gabriel, M. *Warum es die Welt nicht gibt*. Berlin, 2013; Idem. *Fiktionen*, 2020.

a historical development in which, through the freedom and action of man, a process of real change takes place in nature and society, acknowledging, as Miklos Vetö would point out, the possibility of coming into being of something new in the world.²² (*SW VII*, 55, 62-63, *passim*).

The Other, which we can also call the counter-image or the real Absolute, is the “bond of the existence of the One”. But because it is other, it is not necessarily something other or external to the One, but the One itself “as” other. This is therefore a real reduplication in the sense of ancient and medieval logic, as it is analysed in the writings of Manfred Frank²³:

This other (to define our sentence more closely), what is it then? Where does it come from and what is it for? It is only through the bond of the existence of the One; thus it is not apart from the One; it cannot, therefore, be different from this One, but can itself only be the One, but as an other. Furthermore, it cannot first be added to the One, or become it, for it belongs to the existence of the One, and is therefore already there itself with this (existing) One, and nothing apart from it. (*SW VII*, 55).

It is Frank who has clearly explained the importance of this modal distinction in Being in the following terms. The positing of a modal distinction in Being is not the same as positing *different* beings. The cardinal importance of the objective and modal interpretation of the “as” particle – in German “*als*” – reflects the fact that, on one hand, Schelling is not introducing his theory of being oneself as other as a purely subjective nuance resembling the “as if” clause of Kantian Third critique, whereas, on the other hand, he does not endorse neither a metaphysical dualism between the ideal and the real – as he attributes to Fichte – but rather a modal distinction between a pronominal and a predicative positing of Being.

The existence is thus defined by Schelling as the copula or inner distinction between the self and the other of the self, the one and the manifold to which we alluded at the beginning of this paragraph:

We can therefore now express our above proposition more specifically in this way, that what is as one, in being itself, must necessarily be a bond of itself as unity, and of itself as the opposite, or as multiplicity, and that this bond of a being as one with itself, as a many, is itself the existence of this being. (*SW VII*, 55).

We must pause here to explain in more detail Schelling’s statement according to which existence is the living link between concepts, the copula between the one and the manifold, the self and the other.

The being of a thing, he says, that, which we regard as positive and real in it, is not the One or the manifold in its one-sidedness, so that the thing either loses itself in an ideality or dissolves into an infinite number of links. It consists rather in the bond which holds its manifold qualities together in one being:

[...] since only the being of a thing is the positive and true of it, you do not regard as the positive and real in the body the one as the one, and not the many as the many, but precisely only the bond by virtue of which, as the first, it is also the other, and vice versa. (*SW VII*, 56).

²² Cf. Vetö, M. *De Kant à Schelling. Les deux voies de l'idéalisme allemand*, T. II. Grenoble, 2000, p. 393.

²³ See Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität*, S. 212–218.

According to Schelling, existence is the indissoluble connection of unity and multiplicity, which is explained by the fact that the same (= x) that is multiplicity is unity, and the same (= x) that is unity is multiplicity.

Existence, Schelling continues, is the connection of all being with itself as multiplicity, or, in other words, its self-affirmation as the other of itself, its externalisation or reduplication of identity. What exists, then, is God, being itself, as a living and really existing unity: “The divine unity is from eternity a living, a really existing unity; for the divine is precisely that which cannot be otherwise than effective (*wirklich*).” (SW VII, 57).

The doctrine of the impossibility of being oneself, and consequently of its characterisation as Other introduces, therefore, a nascent doctrine of alienation. Schelling, however, seems to reject a complete impossibility of being oneself, as we might find in Kierkegaard or Nietzsche, in favour of a theory of the inner differentiation of being, according to which this alienation is only modal and not ontological, and, as we shall see, corresponds only to the dark principle or ground, but not to the existence, which Schelling continues to characterise as “that which reveals itself”²⁴:

[...] it would therefore, if it emerged from itself in that, have to be outside itself in its existence and be alienated from itself, which is without doubt the inconsistency of all inconsistencies; especially since the eternal or God is precisely that whose essence consists in existence.²⁵ (SW VII, 57).

For this reason, Schelling states that no isolated element can exist by itself, but that it is only the copula, the bond, which exists and thus makes existence, in general, possible. There is neither the one as such nor the manifold as such, but only the connection, the bond between the two, which depends on the eternal, that is, on being:

[...] but since even this One does not exist as the One, but only insofar as it is the Many as the One, truly neither the One exists as the One nor the Many as the Many, but precisely only the living copula of the two, indeed this very copula is existence itself alone and nothing else. (SW VII, 57).

God or being thus represents the actual connection between the one and the many, and the connection or bond between the two is the Absolute in the absolute, for it is existence itself by which we characterise God. (SW VII, 58).

Schelling concludes his remarks on the connection or bond as a copula of the real and the ideal with the assertion that this bond is the absolute identity that is completely real. What does he mean by this? That, in the relation between unity and multiplicity, only the bond, which in this sense is its living unity, is alone real and constitutes the true multiplicity. As we have seen in the reduplicative identity of the ideal – that which comes out of itself and is externalised in the counter-image – the bond is the copula of itself and that which is united in the one and in the manifold (= X). (SW VII, 60).²⁶

In diversity, then, unity as such remains, and nothing is really divided. In this, Schelling’s approach – as we know from Hölderlin’s *Judgment and Being* –

²⁴ See Gardner, S. “The metaphysics of human freedom: from Kant’s transcendental idealism to Schelling’s ‘Freiheitsschrift’”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2017, Vol. 25 (1), pp. 19–20.

²⁵ More on this topic in Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität*, S. 127–142.

²⁶ See *Ibid.*, S. 134, 138.

stands in contrast to all theories of reflection that regard difference and multiplicity as real.²⁷

The creative identity of which Schelling has spoken since *Bruno* in 1802 is called “living identity” by 1806. In it, as we say, there is both the conflict inherent in life²⁸ and the unity or appeasement of life.²⁹ The assertion of unity in multiplicity involves the assertion of conflict, since in this self-revelation, as we have seen, the ground of being turns against itself and is embodied only in an Other that maintains a relation of non-identity with the First. On the other hand, there is a unity, for this conflict between Being-Self and Being-Other, between Ground and Existence, takes place only within Being, which, according to Schelling, undergoes no change or transformation but rather remains always in the eternal or in the in-itself: “(Being) it has the opposition eternally and without origin (*ursprunglos*) in itself; but, revealing only the original concord of its self-sameness in it, it emerges from it as completion or absolute totality (*Allheit oder absolute Totalität*).” (*SW VII*, 58).³⁰

The opposite of the essence is transfigured into the essence itself, so that in it the universal is the One and the One is the universal, and existence *par excellence* is fully developed:

In turn, the opposite, or form, which is pacified by the essence, is also transfigured into the essence, and is itself essential in it, so that the One is the universal, and the universal is the One, and so only the existence *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, the existence of all existence, fully bursts forth. (*SW VII*, 58–59).

Some lines later in the essay we can find two interesting elements for our work on Schelling’s system in the period 1804–1811. We refer first to the relation between God and nature as an incessant transition from being oneself to being oneself as other, from the original ideal to nature, understood by Schelling as God’s self-revelation. (*SW VII*, 59). As Schelling has maintained both in *Bruno* and in *Philosophy and Religion* regarding the pantheism of the future – this means that things will be in God but only in a post-historical future – things alienated from the centre and split off from God by freedom must return to God, and nature must set itself up as the complete self-revelation of God. (See *SW VII*, 416, 484).³¹

Secondly, in 1806 we find for the first-time elements of a Schellingian theory of love as a consequence of what we can label as ‘God’s union with nature’. Love is a form of unity of different elements, each of which can be by itself, but is not and will not be without the other. Love is also the form of God’s union with nature, “the eternal bond of God’s self-revelation” in which the infinite dissolves into the finite and, conversely, the finite into the infinite: “This eternal bond of God’s self-revelation, by which the infinite is dissolved into the finite, and in turn the latter into the former, is the miracle of all miracles, namely the miracle of essential love [...]”. (*SW VII*, 59).

²⁷ See further *Ibid.*, S. 128–131.

²⁸ See also *SW VII*, 400.

²⁹ See Vetö, M. *Op. cit.*, p. 318.

³⁰ See also Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität*, S. 128–129.

³¹ Cf. Müller-Lüneschloss, V. *Über das Verhältnis von Natur und Geisterwelt Ihre Trennung, ihre Versöhnung, Gott und den Menschen. Eine Studie zu F.W.J. Schellings ‘Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen’ (1810) nebst des Briefwechsels Wangenheim – Niederer – Schelling der Jahre 1809/1810*. Stuttgart, 2012, S. 279, 281.

§ 4. Conclusions

Before concluding this article on the essay against Fichte of 1806, we would like to draw the following conclusions. As Oser, Beiser, and White rightly point out, Schelling still adhered in 1806 and even afterward to the systematic conception of the system of 1801–1804. We refer to the theme of the unity of reason and to the idea of the finite as such, which strictly speaking cannot take place within a complete system of a priori determinations of reason.

On this note, Oser explains that one should look in vain for a clear and decisive break with the system of identity in the essay of 1806. A similar consideration runs through Heidegger's analysis of Schelling's *Freedom Essay* in 1936. Even in his later work, Schelling always holds to the primacy of the System of Identity over the long-envisioned "System of Freedom", which he characterises only as the highest, and maintains the tension between the pair of rationality-unity on the one hand and freedom-duality on the other. (See *SW X*, 36).

As we have seen, there are two themes that point to the continuity of the 1806 essay with the 1801–1804 system, on the one hand, and to its discontinuity, on the other.

The first, in which continuity between the System of Identity and Schelling's new essay on the System of Freedom can be seen, concerns the critique of Fichte's idealistic concept of being and consequently the affirmation of the thesis of the primacy of nature in view of achieving a realist position of unity. In other words, the philosophy of nature is a philosophy of the unity of reason, the objective, being, and ultimately the real. Against a position that, like Fichte's, posits a strong dualism between thinking and being, between consciousness and its real content, Schelling asserts the unity of thinking and being in the Absolute based on Hölderlin's thesis of the trans-reflexive character of Being. To this extent, Schelling adheres to the standpoint of absolute idealism, which he inaugurated with his exposition of 1801 and was continued by Hegel after 1807.³²

The second theme, however, completely changes the conceptual horizon of Schelling's metaphysics from this point onwards and finally calls into question the claim of a system of reason in general. We are talking about the doctrine of the bond between A and B as the impossibility of any being to be itself, and consequently of the final impossibility of establishing an identity as such. This impossibility, as we have seen, finally affects, on the one hand, the world view of the system of philosophy as the identity of principle and development and, on the other hand, prevents the identity of reason as a substantial power as envisioned – although differently – by Spinoza, Fichte, and Hegel.

The thesis of the impossibility of being oneself has far-reaching implications in Schelling's system of freedom, as a continuation of the theme of the third, which does not appear as such in any reflexive identity ($A = B = A = x = B = x$), as well as in the doctrines of alienation of the nineteenth century. These topics affect in turn the systematic claim of any a priori rational construction and open the possibility of thinking of proper factual and empirical existence as also taken up in the philosophy of modern science. We refer to the following – usually ignored – point: Schelling was the first to point out, anticipating theorists of modern science such as Popper or Hempel, that a true proposition is the one whose opposite is *possible*, and thus to reject the so-called "coherence theories of truth"

³² See Frank, M. *Reduplicative Identität*, S. 141–142.

like the one advanced by Hegel in the Prologue of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (“the truth is the whole”). The coherence theories cannot be valid because the truth is a property that establishes a difference between the ideal theoretical construct (the *explanans*) and the real thing to be explained (the *explanandum*), hence an equivalence between truth and whole can only mean that thinking – truth – does not recognize anything exterior to it – the real – and thus attains absolute certainty, but at the price of falling into absolute vacuity. This problematic position regarding thinking and reality as advanced by Popper in “Three Views concerning Human Knowledge” (1965)³⁵ was broadly anticipated by Schelling in his *Presentation of my Philosophical Empiricism* of 1830.

To come back to the essay of 1806, its the main originality lies in the elucidation of topics of Schelling’s middle period of thought related to the theory of the bond. This theory first allowed Schelling to distinguish between identity and indifference, and thus to characterise the kind of identity that takes place between the ideal and the already unfolded real as “synthetic identity”. This is only possible through the copula in the judgement and on the metaphysical level through “the third” = x, which makes it possible to connect being or the ideal with its disclosure in the real, which Schelling calls “the other”.

The doctrine of the other absolute, already established in 1804, is now generalised by Schelling. We have called this theory “the impossibility of being oneself”. The synthetic identity of being-itself and being-other also unfolds in the realm of time, thus revealing the difference between logical becoming and real becoming that so affects philosophical systems from Spinoza to Hegel. Only through creative or synthetic identity can something truly new come into being.

This doctrine also makes possible, as we have seen elsewhere, the emergence of a form of relative unity that Schelling already calls “love” in his *Aphorisms* of 1806 as well as in his *Philosophical Investigations on the Nature of Human Freedom* published later in 1809.

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³⁵ Popper, K. “Three Views Concerning Human Knowledge”, in: K. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. London, 1965, pp. 97–119.

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Шеллинг о бытии и предикации в эссе против Фихте (1806)

Хуан Хосе Родригес

Отделение немецкой и французской философии. Карлов университет. Прага, Чехия. Charles University. 5 Ovocný trh, Prague, 11636, Czech Republic; Институт трансцендентальной философии, Вуппертальский университет, Вупперталь, Германия. Institute for Transcendental Philosophy, University of Wuppertal. 20 Gaußstraße, Wuppertal, D-42119, Germany; e-mail: juanjo_r_012@hotmail.com

В статье исследуется отношение Шеллинга к вопросу о связи бытия и предикации в рамках двух ключевых тем, формирующих аргументацию исследования. Первая тема рассматривает неразрывную связь между системой тождества и системой свободы Шеллинга, в частности, через критику идеалистической концепции бытия Фихте. Шеллинг противопоставляет непреднамеренному дуализму Фихте между сознанием и его реальным содержанием, утверждая первичность природы и предлагая реалистическое единство. Опираясь на тезис Гельдерлина о трансрефлексивной природе бытия, Шеллинг утверждает тождество идеальных и реальных оснований как основу единой реальности. Вторая тема, касающаяся теории связи, знаменует собой глубокий сдвиг в метафизической концепции Шеллинга, ставящий под сомнение легитимность системы, основанной исключительно на разуме. Представление о том, что никакое бытие не может полностью совпадать с самим собой, тем самым подрывая установление абсолютного тождества, дестабилизирует системное видение философии как тождества идеи и развития. Эта критика распространяется на концепцию разума как основополагающего принципа, опровергая фундаментальные положения других представителей систематической философии. Рассмотрение этих взаимосвязанных тем позволяет показать в статье, как мысль Шеллинга переосмысливает метафизические и эпистемологические основы современной философии.

Ключевые слова: Шеллинг, Фихте, бытие, предикация, тождество, система

Для цитирования: *Rodríguez J.J.* Schelling on being and predication in his essay *contra* Fichte of 1806 // *Философский журнал / Philosophy Journal*. 2025. Т. 18. № 1. С. 22–38.