

## **SCHELLING'S ANSWER TO THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF METAPHYSICS IN THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF REVELATION**

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### **Abstract**

In seinem Aufsatz setzt sich Gabriel mit dem von Schelling analysierten Verhältnis des Menschen zur Natur auseinander. Dazu wird dargestellt, wie sich die Grundfrage der Metaphysik „Warum ist überhaupt etwas und nicht vielmehr nichts?“ bei Schelling verwandelt in die Frage: „Warum ist denn Vernunft und nicht Unvernunft?“ Dies deshalb, weil durch das Stellen der Grundfrage sich die Welt über einige ihrer Bewohner selbst thematisiert, wodurch eine Bestimmtheit hinzutritt, die nicht ignoriert werden darf. Es geht letztlich darum, die Grundfrage zugleich mit einer Reflexion auf die Frage selbst zu stellen, und dies involviert eben auch den Menschen als denjenigen, der die Frage stellt. Die Formulierung und Beantwortung der Grundfrage kann nicht von unserer eigenen Existenz abstrahieren.

### **I. Introduction**

At present a renaissance of metaphysics is arising in all traditions of philosophy. It is thereby not astonishing that what Leibniz called the fundamental question of metaphysics, why is there something rather than nothing (henceforth ‘the fundamental question’), is returning in a new way. This applies to the projects of so-called speculative realism in the works of Alain Badiou, Quentin Meillassoux, and now Tristan Garcia, as well as to analytical metaphysics, which at least since the works of David Lewis and Peter van Inwagen has picked up the fundamental

question again and discussed intensively its reasoning burden.<sup>1</sup> The starting point in speculative realism as well as in analytical metaphysics is oriented, unlike in classical metaphysics from the Eleates to Hegel, primarily towards a physical model of the fundamental question. The question is understood in the way that it asks for the initial spark of the big bang or – in some speculations in the context of inflationary cosmology and the multiverse-hypothesis – for the many initial sparks, which each initiate a physically describable order. If the fundamental question is formulated against this background, then it is a matter of the existence of physically measureable, and in this sense observable, structures. It then basically asks why there is something physically observable, which often already assumes a variation of modern naturalistic monism oriented towards physics, whose ontology is implicitly or explicitly obligated to the circumstance that everything that exists has to appear in the scope of our best natural scientific theories, paradigmatically those of physics.<sup>2</sup>

German Idealism takes an explicit position against this already in Kant, who after all widely assumes a naturalistic monism for the world of appearance, but yet restricts it epistemologically and opens up at least the possibility of an order based on freedom, the “kingdom of ends”<sup>3</sup>. Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, on the other hand, agree that the starting point of metaphysics cannot entail that we solely, or paradigmatically, examine the conditions under which a universe hostile to cognition and life develops structures that lead eventually, in its expanse and structuring history, to the circumstance that human observers come to the conclusion, more

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude. An essay on the necessity of contingency*, London, Continuum, 2008; Alain Badiou: *Being and Event. 2. Logic of worlds* (trans. by Oliver Feltham), New York, 2005; Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet. Une traité de choses*, Paris, PUT, 2011; for the discussion of the speculative realism on the whole cf. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, Graham Harman (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Realism and Materialism*, Sydney, re.press, 2011; David Lewis: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Malden, MA, Blackwell, 1986; David Lewis, *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Cambridge, MA, Cambridge University Press, 1999; Peter Van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 1993; Peter Van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1990. For the discussion of the range of analytical metaphysics cf. David J. Chalmers, David Manley, Ryan Wasserman (eds.): *Metametaphysics: New Essays on The Foundations of Ontology*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. in contrast detailed Markus Gabriel, *Die Erkenntnis der Welt. Eine Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie*, Karl Alber, Freiburg/München, 2012; Markus Gabriel, *Warum es die Welt nicht gibt*, Berlin, Ullstein, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> GMS, A/B 74. Kant, Immanuel, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 1–22: Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Bd. 23: Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin; Bd. 24: Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Berlin, 1900ff. The following abbreviations are used for individual works: “GMS:” *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (AA 04); “Log:” *Logik* (AA 09); “KpV:” *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (AA 05); “KrV:” *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*; and “NTH:” *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (AA 01).

or less accidentally, that they actually have no place in it. Schelling in particular goes so far as to consider man as the end of inorganic and organic evolution in its entirety.<sup>4</sup> However, he doesn't thereby claim that there is a teleology that unfolds necessarily from the big bang to the history of mankind. Rather, Schelling assumes that man exists due to a "primordial coincidence" (Urzufall)<sup>5</sup>, i.e. a circumstance, which could have occurred or not. But once it has obviously occurred, it is legitimate to ask for the ontologically necessary conditions for exactly this primordial coincidence. Here it becomes clear that these conditions overreach the naturalistic perspective, which is presupposed in a formulation of the fundamental question guided by physics. Human beings exceed nature, even if they are still rooted in it as living creatures.

So Schelling asks the fundamental question based on the presupposition that man exceeds nature. This means, in his interpretation, that man originates ontological determinateness, which is not covered by any naturalistic description. Such determinateness finds its way into the world only through freedom, which we experience daily in ourselves and in others as a surplus to what is given. If there are conditions of our freedom that extend into the realm of the natural, freedom exceeds these conditions. Schelling illustrates this over and over again through the analysis of actions, whose reality consists in a sense open to interpretation, and

<sup>4</sup> Since in the following, I will focus on the *Original Version of the Philosophy of Revelation*, one proving passage from the first lecture of this text will suffice: "Alle Momente der Bewegung, die der Erreichung des Zieles vorausgehen, enthalten nicht das Wahre der Bewegung, sondern können Ursache einer möglichen Täuschung sein, d.i., Irrtum. Die ganze Natur ist eine solche Bewegung. Das Ziel ist der Mensch, das Wahre der Natur; was sonst überall im scheinbaren Verhältnisse steht, das steht im Menschen im wahren Verhältnisse" (UPO, p. 6). Throughout the essay I will be referring to the following works by Schelling: *Tagebuch 1848: Das Tagebuch 1848. Rationale Philosophie und demokratische Revolution*, mit A. v. Pechmann und M. Schraven aus dem Berliner Nachlaß hg. von H. J. Sandkühler, Hamburg, Akademie Verlag, 1990 (hereafter "Diary"); "UPO:" *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, hg. v. W.E. Ehrhardt, 2 Teilbd., Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992; and his *Sämtliche Werke* ("SW"), ed. by K.F.A. Schelling, vols. I–XIV, originally published in two groups: I. Abt., Bd. 1–10 and II. Abt., Bd. 1–4, Stuttgart, 1856–1861. For Schellings's anthropological approach cf. Michael Theunissen's "Schellings anthropologischer Ansatz," in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 47 (1965). On the basis of considerations by Wolfram Hogrebe and Hans Blumenberg I elaborated this in regard to Schelling's late philosophy in Markus Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos. Untersuchungen über Ontotheologie, Anthropologie und Selbstbewußtseinsgeschichte in Schellings "Philosophie der Mythologie"*, Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2006 (especially chap. II).

<sup>5</sup> Cf., for instance, *Diary*, op.cit., p. 229. For an interpretation of Schelling's late philosophy as ontology of contingency cf. Markus Gabriel: "The Mythological Being of Reflection," in: Markus Gabriel; Žižek, Slavoj: *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism*, New York/London, Continuum, 2009; "Nachträgliche Notwendigkeit – Gott, Mensch und Urteil beim späten Schelling", in: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 1/2009; *Transcendental Ontology: Essays on German Idealism*, New York/London, Continuum, 2011.

thus brings ontological indeterminacy into the world. An answer to the fundamental question that would neglect the primordial coincidence that there is human determinacy – meaningful and openly interpretable actions – and not just inorganic and organic matter, remains constitutively incomplete in Schelling's view. Hence, he explains in a famous passage of his later lecture course *Introduction To the Philosophy of Revelation*, to which Kierkegaard was presumably exposed:

Weit entfernt also, daß der Mensch und sein Thun die Welt begreiflich mache, ist er selbst das Unbegreiflichste, und treibt mich unausbleiblich zu der Meinung von der Unseligkeit alles Seyns, einer Meinung, die in so vielen schmerzlichen Lauten aus alter und neuer Zeit sich kundgegeben. Gerade Er, der Mensch, treibt mich zur letzten ver-zweiflungsvollen Frage: warum ist überhaupt etwas? warum ist nicht nichts?<sup>6</sup>

Schelling's motive for binding the fundamental question to anthropology consists in the fact that humans can generate structures (artifacts, actions, texts, philosophical theories etc.), which cannot be simply reduced to their previous history. In this context the fundamental question belongs to the repertoire of a theory of creativity. During various creative periods, Schelling explicitly formulated the fundamental question repeatedly.<sup>7</sup> His whole philosophy can be reconstructed as an answer to this question. The young Schelling already saw Kant's theory of synthetic judgments *a priori* as an answer to the fundamental question, and throughout his life he associated this question, in diverse approaches, with Kant.<sup>8</sup> Also and especially, Schelling's anthropological point of origin can be understood as a radicalization of Kant, who (as is well known) also considered the question of man as the main question of philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

For the following reconstruction of Schelling's answer to the fundamental question in the *Original Version of the Philosophy of Revelation* (henceforth '*Original Version*'), it is important to understand the question always in such a way that it doesn't exclude – through the choice of a reductionistically oriented explanation strategy – any determinacy that we factually recognize *a priori*. To ask why there is anything at all entails, for Schelling, asking why there is something like reason and freedom, which we make use of as a human privilege. If we were to exclude this, we would abstract in an illegitimate way from the facts with which we are consistently confronted. In this sense Schelling accepts, in a unique (and unorthodox)

<sup>6</sup> SW, XIII, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. for example SW, VI, p. 155; VII, p. 174; XIII, pp. 163ff., p. 242. In addition cf. also Karl Jaspers, *Schelling. Größe und Verhängnis*, München, Pieper Verlag, 1955, pp. 124–130.

<sup>8</sup> SW, I, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> Log, AA IX, p. 25.

way, Kant's thesis of the "factum of reason"<sup>10</sup>. There is reason and freedom; the question is, under what conditions is reflexive determinacy, which comes into the world along with reason and freedom, possible?

When we ask the fundamental question, the world thematizes itself through certain of its inhabitants, whereby a new determinacy is added that we can't ignore.<sup>11</sup> From his early works onward, Schelling calls the act of asking the fundamental question without reflection on the question itself "dogmatism"; he opposes this to criticism, which not only asks metaphysical questions but also asks which conditions must be fulfilled such that these questions can be asked. Unlike Kant or Fichte, Schelling understands those conditions themselves as ontological: The questioner exists, so there must be ontological conditions of transcendental reflection.<sup>12</sup>

Behind Schelling's version of the fundamental question and his diverse efforts to answer it stands the following insight, which is also decisive for the reconstruction of the heretofore under-considered *Original Version of the Philosophy of Revelation*. Unlike many other thinkers who follow Kant, Schelling accepts Kant's thesis of *facticity* as well as his thesis of the *contingency of reason*.<sup>13</sup> We discover the facticity of reason because in the "transcendental reflection"<sup>14</sup> on our truth-apt access to the world we realize that we are endowed with a certain 'registry.' This registry, reason (die Vernunft), according to Kant (as is well known) consists of the categories, the two stems of cognition, the ideas of reason, etc. Reason finds itself with this endowment, and defends its truth-aptness against the skeptical objection that this endowment doesn't suffice for our world access, but rather stands like a distorting glass between us and reality. In so arguing Kant attempts, contra various forms of skepticism, to show that reason is truth-apt.<sup>15</sup> To argue for this, he assumes that "being" in the end actually means that something can appear in the

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. KpV, A 56.

<sup>11</sup> For this cf. the Schelling-exegesis in Wolfram Högerebe, *Prädikation und Genesis. Metaphysik als Fundamentalheuristik im Ausgang von Schellings "Weltalter"*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> This figure of explanation I called in another passage on basis of a formulation of Wolfgang Cramer as "transcendental ontology". One can find it not just in Schelling but also in the late Fichte as well as in Hegel. Cf. Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, op.cit.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Markus Gabriel, "Absolute Identität und Reflexion (Kant, Hegel, McDowell)," in: Danz, Christian (Hrsg.): *System und Systemkritik um 1800*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> KrV, A 263/B 319.

<sup>15</sup> Besides the reading spread in the Anglo-Saxon Kant research, which thinks that Kant is either primarily concerned with Cartesian or primarily with Hume's skepticism, Michael Forster showed that Pyrrhonian skepticism, too, plays an important role in Kant. Cf. Michael Forster, *Kant and Skepticism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008. James Conant showed plausibly that there is even a genuine form of Kantian skepticism, which Kant himself confronts. Cf. James Conant, "Spielarten des Skeptizismus", in: Gabriel, Markus (Hrsg.): *Skeptizismus und Metaphysik*, Oldenbourg

“field of possible experience”<sup>16</sup>. “Being”, according to Kant, is not a “real predicate”, but the circumstance that the field of possible experience isn’t empty, which he calls “position”<sup>17</sup>. The field of possible experience is de facto disclosed to us, and Kant argues that our conditions of world access are responsible for “man fitting into the world”, to use a famous phrase.<sup>18</sup> In this way, reason is as we discover it in transcendental reflection; it is a factum itself that appears in the world, a circumstance Kant didn’t sufficiently take into account because he wanted to restrict at least the theoretically recognizable world to the realm of possible experience.

The facticity of reason includes, already in Kant’s analysis, the possibility that there could be another form of world access, which is discussed with regard to God in particular, but also with regard to saints or extraterrestrials, “inhabitants of other stars”<sup>19</sup>. In a few passages, Kant even goes so far as to reckon with an “unknown root”<sup>20</sup>, which connects the two stems, spontaneity and receptivity. Starting from this observation, Schelling assumes that reason could be different from how it appears to us – an assumption which can still be considered Kantian. In its self-appropriation, reason discovers that it can differentiate itself: in its appearance, and in itself as a potential thing-in-itself. If “appearance” in a minimal sense means nothing more than “object of truth-apt thoughts”, then reason, too, in its transcendental self-appropriation, is an appearance. But if reason is an appearance, then the question arises, what it would mean to presuppose a reason in itself?

Reason, and with it the whole world of appearance, the field of possible experience itself, has an origin. It finds itself in a surrounding that it probably cannot pervade but must presuppose – which Kant, in Schelling’s view, showed. Against this background, Schelling poses the question of “phenomenalization”<sup>21</sup> as a central one: How is it that a world accessible to reason is established in the realm of the thing in itself? “Why is there reason and not unreason?” (Warum ist denn Vernunft und nicht Unvernunft?)<sup>22</sup> How is nature able to double itself in appearance

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Akademieverlag, Berlin, 2012. In addition cf. Markus Gabriel, *Die Erkenntnis der Welt*, op.cit., pp. 192–210.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. KrV, A 227/B 280, A 248/B 304, A 610/B 638, A642/B 670, A 697/B 725, A 702/B 730.

<sup>17</sup> KrV, A 598/B 626.

<sup>18</sup> R1820a (AA, XVI, 127).

<sup>19</sup> NTH, AA 01: 349.

<sup>20</sup> KrV, A 15/B 29.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. for this Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder, An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, London, Verso, 1996, p. 14: “As with Hegel, the problem is not how to attain the noumenal In-itself beyond phenomena; the true problem is how and why does this In-itself split itself from itself at all, how does it acquire a distance towards itself and thus clear the space in which it can appear (to itself)?”

<sup>22</sup> UPO, p. 69.

and thing-in-itself? The two-aspects-theory, which assumes that appearance and thing-in-itself are two aspects of the same scope, must also deal with this question.

Kant doesn't return to the question of the dualism of appearance and thing-in-itself because the facticity of reason is his starting point. But this, depending on the reading of transcendental idealism, leads to a skeptical or, *no lens volens*, to a solipsistic position. To avoid this dead end, Schelling asks the fundamental question. Schelling understands this question as a theory of phenomenalization of the thing-in-itself. When Schelling asks, why is there something and not rather nothing, then the focus lies on the 'something'. For 'something' is something particular – something distinct from something else. According to Kant, determinacy is achieved due to the fact that there are judgments, which Schelling interprets in an anti-subjective way, substituting the presumably psychological theory of judgment with a theory of rationality. Under which conditions is rationality, which understands itself as an appearance of a thing in itself, truth-apt?

Because the subject of the fundamental question is so comprehensive in Schelling that his whole *œuvre* could be understood as an answer to it, I will confine myself in the following to lectures 4–11 of the *Original Version of the Philosophy of Revelation*, in which Schelling develops, in a condensed way, a unique response that is to date hardly known, let alone systematically reconstructed. In the center of these lectures stands a *theory of logical time*. Whereas many previous theories of judgment had proceeded from the imagery of logical space and understood judgments through their propositional or inferential content, which positions itself in a logical space, Schelling understands any judgment as a transition from indeterminacy to determinacy. In this transition, the fact that the judgment is supposed to grasp lies, in a logical sense, before the judgment. It is assumed in the analysis of the truth-aptness of judgment that the judgment captures or describes a fact that existed *before* the judgment. This is the “logical past” of judgment. Schelling calls the logical past “that which is before being”<sup>23</sup>. Thereby, he understands “being”, in the sense of determinacy, always as the “logical present”, and connects this especially in the *Original Version* with Eleatism, which stands at the beginning of the history of metaphysics and which reconstructs the truth primarily through the logical present, through the once passed and therefore eternally true or false judgment.

Against this, Schelling sets alongside the “logical past” also and especially the “logical future”. Schelling characterizes this logical future as the center and subject of his late philosophy, which is why he translates god's name in Exodus 3.14,

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<sup>23</sup> UPO, p. 23.

against ontological tradition, not in the present tense but in the future tense.<sup>24</sup> One could say that what Schelling presents in his late philosophy is basically a theory of logical future.

Der Ausgangspunkt der Philosophie ist also das, was sein wird, das absolut Zukünftige: es ist also unsere Aufgabe, in die Wesenheit des absolut Zukünftigen einzudringen. Die Absicht der Philosophie ist, dieses Seins mächtig zu werden, um es zu begreifen, den Zauber desselben zu lösen. Jenseits des Seins kann die Philosophie nur antreffen, was sein wird; daher ist's Aufgabe, das, was sein wird, und dessen Begriff zu bestimmen.<sup>25</sup>

In my contribution I will limit myself to the metaphysical aspect of Schelling's later theory of logical time, to which Schelling doesn't restrict himself because, due to several reasons – which I will omit here – he thinks that metaphysics passes into a history of human self-consciousness, which can only be reconstructed in a *Philosophy of Mythology* or in a *Philosophy of Revelation*.<sup>26</sup>

## **II. The fundamental question in the lectures 4–11 of the *Original Version of the Philosophy of Revelation***

As usual in German Idealism, Schelling makes several preliminary attempts at a beginning. In the fourth lecture of the *Original Version* he defines “philosophy”, and therefore his own project, “als die schlechthin von vorne anfangende Wissenschaft”<sup>27</sup>. Philosophy starts with the beginning. Hereby Schelling distinguishes two ways of understanding this, a subjective mode and an objective mode. The subjective presuppositionlessness of philosophy consists in the fact that one frees oneself “of prejudices and the habit of false thought-connections” (von Vorurteilen und der Angewöhnung falscher Denkverknüpfungen).<sup>28</sup> This is in accordance with the Cartesian maxim, to set aside all assumptions once in one's life and to attempt radical doubt.<sup>29</sup> The objective presuppositionlessness of philosophy, on the other hand, consists in the fact that we assume that there is an absolute truth – which

<sup>24</sup> Cf. For example SW, XI, p. 172: “Wir haben den Namen Jehovah früher erklärt als den Namen des Werdenden – vielleicht war dieß seine erste Bedeutung, aber nach jener Erklärung bei Moses ist er der Name des Zukünftigen, des jetzt nur Werdenden, der einst *seyn* wird, und auch alle seine Zusagen gehen in die Zukunft.”

<sup>25</sup> UPO, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> For this, on the other hand, cf. detailed Markus Gabriel: *Der Mensch im Mythos*, op.cit.

<sup>27</sup> UPO, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> AT VII, 17.

means here, for now, a truth not restricted to certain classes or scopes of judgment – to which corresponds the Aristotelian concept of metaphysics. Schelling understands the individual sciences – following Aristotle’s definition of philosophy as the examination of beings as beings in general – as the restriction of an absolute, in this case maximal, universal – truth. Empirical or mathematical judgments indeed describe what is reasonable, i.e. for Schelling, “was aus der eingesetzten Ordnung der Dinge folgt”<sup>30</sup>. But they don’t describe everything that exists. For we don’t just experience that there is reason but also that there is freedom, which always means, for Schelling in contrast to Kant, that we must presume a certain degree of unreason (Unvernunft). For freedom is supposed to be not just a faculty of reason-realization, but also the faculty that can decide against reason.<sup>31</sup>

Normally Schelling determines freedom in distinction from reason by means of the fact that freedom is a teleological movement, which can be taken as a process through which an intention is to be actualized, though not necessarily achieved. Such a teleological movement can also be taken as an action that does not necessarily lead to the aim – this can be seen through the fact that it would nevertheless make sense if it were interrupted on the way. An action that doesn’t lead to its aim is still an action.<sup>32</sup> If there are not only empirical judgments that describe what happened or mathematical judgments that describe common patterns or structures independent from our volition, but also judgments about our actions, then we can’t presuppose that there is only reason, only necessity but no freedom. To put it simply: Freedom can be recognized through failure, through the abortion of action.

Therefore, according to Schelling, the objective presuppositionlessness of philosophy consists in a basically antireductionistic methodology. Philosophy presupposes that there are actions that actualize an intention in a meaningful way, and which don’t necessarily occur exclusively as natural processes, for example in a causal-nomological and completely closed universe. Schelling calls this presupposition “the objective wisdom” (die objektive Weisheit)<sup>33</sup>. By this he doesn’t mean, as a theological reading could hastily conclude, that we presuppose God’s acting in

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<sup>30</sup> UPO, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> In this sense cf. the definition of freedom as “faculty of good and evil” in the *freedom treatise*, SW, VII, p. 352: “Der Idealismus gibt nämlich einerseits nur den allgemeinsten, andererseits den bloß formellen Begriff der Freiheit. Der reale und lebendige Begriff aber ist, daß es ein Vermögen des Guten und des Bösen sei.”

<sup>32</sup> For this cf. the explanations in Sebastian Rödl, *Kategorien des Zeitlichen. Eine Untersuchung der Formen des endlichen Verstandes*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2005, as well as his *Selbstbewusstsein. Kategorien des Zeitlichen*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> UPO, p. 23.

the world – but rather that we recognize that there is something that we can only understand if we understand it through objective wisdom. This includes actions. When we recognize that someone is crossing the street, we acknowledge objective wisdom – in this case, the circumstance that there is something that we can only explain with recourse to volition.

Die erste Voraussetzung der Philosophie ist, daß in dem Sein – in der Welt – Weisheit sei. Die Philosophie setzt ein Sein voraus, welches gleich anfangs mit Voraussicht, mit Freiheit, entsteht. Ich verlange Weisheit – heißt soviel – als ich verlange ein absichtlich gesetztes Sein. Die erste Erklärung der Philosophie setzt ein Sein voraus, welches gleich anfangs mit Absicht und Freiheit entstanden ist.<sup>34</sup>

Schelling is by no means claiming here that all being arises with freedom, which would lead to an absurd anthropocentrism or creationism. His formulations are considerably subtler. This becomes clear in the last sentence of the above quotation. The phrase “die erste Erklärung der Philosophie” (the first explanation of philosophy) can be understood as *genitivus subiectivus* as well as *genitivus obiectivus*. Philosophy explains itself because philosophy, too, is “ein absichtlich gesetztes Sein” (intentionally composed being). Thus, philosophy explains not only daily actions but also the composing and understanding of philosophical texts. As readers of or listeners to Schelling’s lectures, we already implicitly presuppose an objective wisdom, and here this means simply that we assume that we have to deal with intelligible, inherently understandable being – with language. For “being that can be understood is language” (Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache)<sup>35</sup>. Schelling carries this reflection to extremes, if we conceive of all of his explanations also as possible analyses of their own comprehensibility. Precisely because of this, he develops the philosophical question of the beginning also as a question for the beginning of philosophy. Immediately after the above quotation, Schelling makes this even clearer by writing: „Nachdem dies ausgesprochen ist, ergibt sich gleich die anfängliche Stellung der Philosophie – und etwas anders und Allgemeines.“<sup>36</sup> The initial position of philosophy is its own explanation. But it doesn’t end there. Philosophy is precisely not a content-free self-reference, for which one doesn’t need to give conditions of its truth/truth conditions. For as Schelling often emphasizes, philosophy, too, is fallible, and therefore subjected to truth conditions. According

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 1, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1990. p. 478.

<sup>36</sup> UPO, p. 23.

to the criterion mentioned above, philosophy wouldn't be free if it couldn't fail in principle, or if, for example, it were to formulate only self-evident truths. Freedom of philosophy, like freedom of any action, consists in the possibility of failure, and this means that we have to acknowledge truth conditions that potentially exceed philosophy. In this sense, philosophy exceeds itself and expresses "etwas anders und Allgemeines" (something different and general), which Schelling confines from pure self-reference with the dash in the above passage.

In this way philosophy tries to comprehend its own being, which is a self-referential instance of logical presence. For we acknowledge in philosophy that sentences have truth conditions that precede the sentences in the form of facts. We recognize the logical past of our own logical present as such. But this means that we can't stop "in the once become being" (innerhalb des einmal gewordenen Seins)<sup>37</sup>, in the logical presence of self-referential philosophical thoughts; we have to "exceed these" in order "to understand it"<sup>38</sup>.

To understand what we do when we express truth-apt notions in form of sentences, we have to exceed the pure logical presence of these notions – that is, to presuppose truth conditions in the form of the logical past.

Es ist ein vulgärer, aber sehr treffender, Ausdruck in der deutschen Sprache: Er sucht hinter die Sache zu kommen – statt – er sucht sie zu begreifen, er sucht die Wahrheit zu ergründen. Die Philosophie will hinter das Sein kommen; ihr Gegenstand ist also nicht das Sein selbst, sondern das, was vor dem Sein ist, um eben das Sein zu begreifen. Hiermit habe ich Sie in den Anfang der Philosophie gestellt. Mögen Sie ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf das, was vor dem Sein ist, wenden.<sup>39</sup>

In this very passage Schelling prepares what is probably his most original insight. For in the next step, he induces an entanglement of logical past and logical future. The truth conditions of a sentence, its logical past, become its truth conditions through uttering, which here means asserting, the sentence. Thus, the sentence is the logical future of the logical past, just as the present is, generally speaking, the future of the past. Schelling thus goes at first from a sentence to its truth conditions, from the logical present to the past, and then moves from the past back, so to speak, to the future in order to understand the logical presence of a sentence as a realization of its past.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Allein obgleich wir über das Sein hinausgegangen sind, betrachten wir doch das vor dem Sein Seiende in bezug auf das Sein selbst; wir betrachten, was das vor dem Sein Seiende hernach sein wird. Sonst gibt es kein anderes Mittel, das Sein zu erkennen. Wir wollen das Sein begreifen – also müssen wir das, was vor dem Sein ist, in bezug auf das künftige Sein begreifen.<sup>40</sup>

The truth conditions of a sentence at least codetermine what a sentence means in the first place. They become the truth conditions of the sentence trivially through the fact that the sentence exists, i.e. that it is thought or uttered. But this relation to the sentence can't be a completely superficial feature of its truth conditions. The sentence and its truth conditions cannot be fundamentally divided by an insuperable gap, as is the case of a few sentences with maximal "cosmological role." Based on a concept introduced by Crispin Wright, one can understand the "cosmological role" of a notion as the degree to which the grasp of the notion as notion is necessary to conceive of the object to which the notion is related.<sup>41</sup> The physical notion of energy, for example, has a wide cosmological role because it relates to something that is independent from the fact that we conceive of the notion of energy as a notion. The notion of a notion, on the other hand, has a minimal cosmological role because we conceive of that to which it relates (and under which it falls) only if we conceive of it as a notion. This division of labor is basically compatible with the formulation of sentences with maximal cosmological role, whose factual truth-value we can't ever evaluate.<sup>42</sup>

Schelling sets himself the task "to explain how being could originally emerge" (zu erklären, wie ursprünglich ein Sein entstehen könne).<sup>43</sup> This is not a question of how all being could originally emerge, but of how being could emerge at all. The type of being that Schelling examines is the type of being that arises through volition. For only such being, Schelling says, can we recognize. "*Es ist unmöglich,*

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<sup>40</sup> UPO, p. 24.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, Cambridge, MA & London, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 196: "Let the width of cosmological role of the subject matter of a discourse be measured by the extent to which citing the kinds of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to the explanation of things other than, or other than via, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object. I suggest that the idea which the Best Explanation constraint is really in pursuit of is that some discourses have, in these terms, a subject matter of relatively wider cosmological role."

<sup>42</sup> In fact, Crispin Wright himself defends a form of anti-realism, which binds the concept of truth to discursive practices resp. to the notion of assertibility, in which I don't agree with him. Cf. detailed Markus Gabriel, *An den Grenzen der Erkenntnistheorie. Die notwendige Endlichkeit des Wissens als Lektion des Skeptizismus*, Freiburg/München, Karl Alber, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> UPO, p. 24.

*ein Sein zu denken, ohne einen wirklichen Willen, ohne ein Wollen.*<sup>44</sup> We must want to think a sentence in order to recognize being. Volition in this sense is a condition for the arising of being, namely the being of a sentence, which belatedly presupposes a factual structure as its logical past.

This logical past, thereby, is not only, as Hegel once expressed, “timelessly passed being”,<sup>45</sup> but at the same time the past of a future; it contains the truth conditions of a sentence, which from the standpoint of this past is already located in the logical future. In this way Schelling reconstructs belatedly, or as he says “post factum”<sup>46</sup>, how being, the being of a sentence, originates. This includes volition. Volition is the transition from the will to the deed. We are able to have many convictions that we don’t have yet. We will have many new convictions, and in each moment we develop new convictions about facts that haven’t been in this form before. Schelling calls the ability to synthesize these convictions “will,” and a certain commitment to an already existing conviction “volition.” Thus there are some things that emerge originally, for example sentences of whose truth we are convinced.

In this way, reality, that is factual structure, is included in our will – a process that the late Schelling calls “potentialization” (Potenzialisierung)<sup>47</sup>.

In the following lectures he develops the notion of “purely being” (rein Seienden), which he also calls “blindly being” (blind Seiende). This he understands in a manner similar to what Quentin Meillassoux a few years ago introduced into the discussion as “ancestrality”, that is, facts that temporally precede the presence of convictions – facts before the existence of any epistemic agents.<sup>48</sup> If anything, this includes facts that we describe with some physical statements, for example facts about the big bang or the inflation of the universe, as well as perhaps facts about the origin of our planet, if there hasn’t been any extraterrestrial intelligence in the relevant period. If we understand a “modal robust fact” as a fact that would have occurred had there never been epistemic agents, that is beings, who have truth-apt thoughts, then one could say that Schelling doesn’t ask himself under what conditions there can be facts that are modally robust. Rather, he assumes that there are beings who ask themselves questions, which includes us as readers of texts and

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<sup>44</sup> UPO, p. 24ff.

<sup>45</sup> Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Theorie-Werkausgabe. Auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832–1845*, neu edierte Ausgabe, Moldenhauer und K. M. Michel (eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1971, p. 6 and 13.

<sup>46</sup> SW, XIV, p. 338.

<sup>47</sup> UPO, 86; SW, XIII, pp. 265, 267, and 279.

<sup>48</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After finitude*, op.cit., p. 21: “I will call ‘ancestral’ any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species – or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth.”

thinkers of thoughts, and against this background he asks the question of how a transition could occur from an “epistemically opaque” reality, so-called “purely being”, to “capable of being” (sein Könnenden).

Schelling interprets Parmenides and Spinoza in particular, whom he sees as Eleatics of a sort, as theorists of purely being. “Eleatic unity” is the requirement of a reality without any epistemic agents – the introduction of pure truth conditions without corresponding statements. But not only ancestral statements, but also sentences with a smaller cosmological role,<sup>49</sup> have truth values and therefore truth conditions. This very fact is ignored by Eleatism, which seems to be familiar with the self-reference of thinking and of the text, but doesn’t understand this through the logical present. Rather, the logical present of Eleatism is timelessly being. But even sentences with a minimal cosmological role – which include sentences about notions and about truth conditions – have truth conditions. These sentences, too, are preceded by a logical past, purely being, which in this case includes sentences. The reality that a statement composes of statements precedes the statement, which means that even a sentence that we conceive about itself has truth conditions, which perhaps we can’t completely grasp. This very fact is shown by semantic paradoxes like the liar-paradox or, if one wants to deny the truth conditions of the latter, by the self-referential sentences of the Gödel-type, which are supposed to predicate in a formal system that there are sentences in this system that predicate of themselves (as the result of a proof) not to be provable in this very same formal system. But even if statements about statements have a logical past (i.e. truth conditions), the answer to the fundamental question cannot consist in an ontology that precisely excludes this in restricting the logical past to a certain cosmological role, even if this role is maximal, like the cosmological role of the big bang. One can’t answer the fundamental question by concerning oneself only with the truth conditions of a certain, limited number of statements. For firstly these statements exist themselves, and secondly other statements with a different cosmological role always exist.

Based on this observation, Schelling goes a step further. He doesn’t restrict himself to the ontologically and semantically justified rescue of freedom of will, which he understands as an epistemic faculty of conviction coordination. Thus he in fact defines “being itself”<sup>50</sup> already as “hyper-being” (das Überseiende)<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Exactly here, Meillassoux’s project fails. This is because Meillassoux tries to develop an ontology based on truth-values of ancestral statements. But there are not just truth-values for statements with maximal cosmological role. This conceptually unjustified restriction of ontology to a certain class of statements is not understandable.

<sup>50</sup> UPO, p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: “Man kann die Philosophie auch so unterscheiden: Die andern Wissenschaften bekümmern sich nur um das so oder so Sein der Dinge: Die Philosophie aber nur um das Seiende selbst – sie ist

Schelling indicates here that the notions “being itself” or “purely being” are related to something only because they appear in statements with truth conditions. They are already elements of predicatively determined surroundings. He doesn’t conclude from this, like Berkeley, either that we don’t have any access to being itself or that we should identify this with our access, but rather argues for a concept-realism: the very notion of being is something that exists.<sup>52</sup> Thus, ontology must be compatible with the fact that there is ontology, which means that epistemic agents must ask the fundamental question – a condition that is not fulfilled if one constructs an ontology based only on truth conditions of statements with a maximal cosmological role. Or, in short: reality without thoughts is incomplete, at least as long as there are thoughts. As soon as there are thoughts, which is confirmed through the fundamental question, the notion of “purely being” can no longer be modeled after the logical past of ancestral sentences. Whether we like it or not, we exist, too. “*Eben dadurch verwandelt sich der tote Begriff dessen, was ist, in den lebendigen, einen Fortschritt möglich machenden, Begriff dessen, was sein wird.*”<sup>53</sup>

According to Schelling, one can understand “Eleatism” in general as the answer to the fundamental question that identifies purely being with the truth conditions of ancestral sentences. At the beginning of the ninth lecture of the *Original Version*, Schelling calls this “the sense – and conceptless being” (das sinn – und begrifflose Sein)<sup>54</sup>, and also the “blind” or “dead principle” (blindes bzw. Totes Prinzip)<sup>55</sup>. Eleatism is not able to understand the transition from purely being to action, or rather its fundamental concept is a result of an abstraction of the fact that it is a matter of a fundamental concept of a metaphysical answer to the fundamental question. Schelling doesn’t claim that there are no ancestral sentences with truth conditions. He is not a correlationist in Meillassoux’s sense, who defines “correlationism” as the skeptical-idealistic thesis that we have access only to

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ἡ ἐπιστήμη τοῦ ὄντος. Man kann bemerken: Das, was ist, ist deshalb nicht ein Seiendes; ebenso wie das Weiße selbst – αὐτὸ τὸ λευκόν – nicht ein Weißes ist, weil es das Weiße selbst ist. Das, was ist, als solches betrachtet, ist auch das Überseiende.”

<sup>52</sup> For this see the Schelling-interpretation of Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis. Historische Umriss abendländischer Spiritualität in Antike, Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1998, pp. 702–733, esp. p. 723: “Wie aber ist die Realität des Realen beschreibbar? Dadurch, daß es uns sinnlich und geistig widerfährt, nicht dadurch, daß wir es produzieren. Schelling steigert den transzendentalphilosophisch begründeten Idealismus in einen Begriffsrealismus, der den Begriffen selbst geistige Realität zuschreibt. Diese Uminterpretation impliziert eine Veränderung dessen, was Schelling real nennt. Realität ist nicht mehr der Idealität entgegengesetzt, Idealität ist die Realität der Begriffe. Und warum sollte es keine subjektfreie Semantik geben, wenn es eine psychologiefreie Logik gibt?”

<sup>53</sup> UPO, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> UPO, p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> UPO, p. 50f.

the relation between being and thinking but never to being itself.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Schelling claims that our ontology must be compatible with its own formulation as theory. And ontology exists only when there are epistemic agents. Self-referential statements, which speak about the truth conditions of statements in general and therefore also refer to themselves, are also included in being, like moon craters and the big bang. Accordingly, the fundamental concept or, as Schelling says, “the principle” of a sufficiently systematically established ontology cannot be constructed in such a way that it excludes its own theory-ability – not without leading to idealistic or constructivistic hyperbole that considers being itself as a projection of our statements on the “sense- and conceptual being” (sinn- und begriffliche Sein). To this very same double restriction that opposes, on the one hand, an excessive constructivism and, on the other hand, Eleatism, Schelling points in the following way: “Wir müssen also am Anfang der Philosophie ein nicht ganz totes Prinzip, wie Parmenides, aber doch ein in der Bewegung beschränktes Prinzip annehmen.”<sup>57</sup>

Schelling calls this principle “the intransitive” (das Intransitive) and connects it to the subject in the sense of the subject of judgment.<sup>58</sup> The intransitive is that which does not transition (übergehen), which does not lose itself in its determinations. If I assert that Schelling’s *Original Version* stands in my bookcase, then my bookcase is the intransitive; it doesn’t transition (übergehen) into the *Original Version* in the sense that it stays my bookcase even if I take out the *Original Version*, in the same way as one can take all epistemic agents out of the universe through a simple thought experiment, whereby the universe becomes purely being. In this perspective, the universe is “unity in its duplexity” (in seiner Einheit [...] Doppelheit)<sup>59</sup>: On the one hand, it is the realm where epistemic agents can exist (because they happen to exist in it) and, on the other hand, the realm where they would not exist (for example in the ancestral past or in the ancestral future after a possible extinction of all epistemic agents<sup>60</sup>). In this way, we determined the universe as the intransitive, whereby, however, we haven’t excluded the transition, the transitive, because we recognized now that the transition took place.

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<sup>56</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After finitude*, op.cit., p. 13: “By ‘correlation’ we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined.”

<sup>57</sup> UPO, p. 51.

<sup>58</sup> UPO, p. 52f.

<sup>59</sup> UPO, p. 51.

<sup>60</sup> Ray Brassier indicated rightly that the possibility of the total extinction of intelligent life in the future causes the same problem as the ancestry. Cf. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound. Enlightenment and Extinction*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Seinem Wesen nach ist es intransitiv, d.h., in sich selbst bleibendes sein Können. Aber von diesem Intransitiven ist das Transitive nicht auszuschließen; insofern ist das Transitive in ihm das nicht Gewollte und daher das Zufällige. Von diesem intransitiven seines Wesen wird es durch das Verhältnis zum rein Seienden befreit, und dadurch wahres Wesen. Jetzt erst ist es lauterer sein Können, nicht im Gegensatze vom Sein, sondern das sein Könnende ist jetzt selbst das Sein. Es verlangt nicht ein Sein außer dem sein Können, sondern das sein Könnende ist ins Sein selbst gesetzt.<sup>61</sup>

Through this, Schelling gains two determinations: 'being capable' and 'purely being'. He also refers to these explicitly as subject and predicate.<sup>62</sup> The subject is that to which predicates can be attributed. Through the predicate, the subject becomes "objective being" (gegenständliches Sein),<sup>63</sup> something rather than nothing.

With this, Schelling has inverted the starting point of Eleatism, which he describes in the tenth lecture as "inevitable subversion"<sup>64</sup>. Purely being – in a manner of speaking, the ancestral world without audience or the set of truth conditions of ancestral sentences – becomes "being capable". The ancestral world must already provide the conditions of its appearance, because otherwise it wouldn't have occurred. This transition or subversion doesn't take place just once, but is repeated in each judgment and each action. In judging about the inflation of the universe, for example, it can happen that we err, albeit that we could also err about the truth conditions of statements about truth conditions. In general, the truth conditions of our statements can be radically different from our convictions about these truth conditions. The ambivalent, constitutively fallible position that has come into the world at least since the appearance of epistemic agents, Schelling calls "mind" (Geist).

*"Geist ist das, was im beständigen actus ist und nicht aufhört, Quelle des Seins zu sein – was frei ist, sich zu äußern oder nicht – was im sich selbst Äußern sich nicht selbst verliert."*<sup>65</sup>

When we err, for example by projecting non-existent truth conditions, we don't lose ourselves by so doing. In a false judgment we take responsibility for the judgment in the same way as we do in a true one. Schelling attributes the ambivalence of floating between truth and falseness in a judgment to the mind. In this way, a dual indeterminacy comes into play. On the one hand, it is assumed that something can be like so-and-so, but also different. If I'm convinced that it will be raining, then it could be that it will be raining or that it won't be raining. As

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<sup>61</sup> UPO, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> UPO, p. 56.

<sup>63</sup> UPO, p. 56.

<sup>64</sup> UPO, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup> UPO, p. 56.

soon as we have an epistemic attitude towards truth conditions they are at least epistemically contingent. But with that, at the same time, a metaphysical contingency comes into the world, because our epistemic contingency exists for itself: “the being capable is put into being itself” (das sein Könnende ist ins Sein selbst gesetzt)<sup>66</sup>. On the other hand, we are enabled to revise our convictions through this. Fallibility is not a *factum brutum* that binds us to once-rendered judgments and their sometimes-random truth value; instead it is bound to the faculty of conviction revision. This dual indeterminacy, which reaches on the one hand into the logical past and on the other hand into the logical future, is a requirement for the fundamental question.

Die Philosophie als Wissenschaft, die das Sein von vorneherein erklären will, kann sich ursprünglich keines Ausgangspunkts innerhalb des wirklichen Seins bedienen; denn über dies will sie eben hinausgehen. Nur dadurch, daß sie sich über dieses Sein hinaussetzt, und das Unbestimmte setzt, nur indem sie sich alles Sein als Zukünftiges setzt, setzt sie sich in ein freies Verhältnis zum künftigen Sein. Was sein wird, ist an sich ein Unbestimmtes.<sup>67</sup>

Schelling determines as a result of the previous reasoning that we have now retraced the “freedom of origination of being” (Freiheit der Seinsentstehung)<sup>68</sup>, which can be gained with the help of the mind – which means, in my reconstruction, with the help of a reflexive analysis of the truth-aptness of reflection. For it is at least the case with philosophy that it is a self-thematizing free action.

The next step performed in the eleventh lecture, in which Schelling proceeds to the explicit formulation of the fundamental question, consists, according to him, in achieving the state of “freedom to be” (Freiheit zu sein)<sup>69</sup> in contrast to the state of “the freedom also not to be” (Freiheit, auch nicht zu sein)<sup>70</sup>. In this context, Schelling develops a surprisingly anti-skeptical strategy. For, at first glance, one might think that emphasizing fallibility – which here means the determination of mind as fluctuating between more or less random truth values – leads to skepticism. Everything that is so-and-so for us in the first place could also be different. If that is the case in general, how can we exclude the possibility that there is nothing? Because the notion that something exists at all is also a conviction with truth conditions, which could be different from how they appear to us. Does this not

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<sup>66</sup> UPO, p. 54.

<sup>67</sup> UPO, p. 57.

<sup>68</sup> UPO, p. 63.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

lead to a radical form of nihilism, which might, even now, toy with the thought that there is nothing? “Nun steht ferner alles wirkliche Sein vielem Zweifel bloß – ja man kann sagen: Die Philosophie hat mit dem Zweifel an der Realität des wirklichen Seins angefangen.”<sup>71</sup>

At this point Schelling applies an insight that he won in earlier works in his debate with the Cartesian *cogito*. This insight says that *something* necessarily exists, but from this it doesn't follow *what* exists. The famous difference between *quod* and *quid*, between *that* and *what*, which the late Schelling is known for, stands in the center of an anti-skeptical strategy. From the *cogito* it doesn't follow that there is a thinker, but the *cogito* shows that there is something in the first place, that there are truth conditions at all. Even in the most radical skeptical scenario there is something – even if it is a purely subjectless illusion that doesn't show itself to anyone. Therefore, Schelling undermines the assumption that ontology projects *a limine* (right at the outset) a bearer of thoughts at the beginning of the big bang or, generally, in the ancestral truth conditions. The possibility that there might never have been epistemic agents and, therefore, the circumstance that beings like us contingently exist, must not be ontologically excluded.

Der erste Gedanke ist sonach der des Seienden selbst. Aber eben jene Voraussetzung ist selbst eine zweifelhafte; denn wenn ich bis zum Träger alles Denkens gehen will, so muß ich auch als möglich annehmen, daß überall Nichts ist. Es kann gefragt werden: Warum ist denn nicht Nichts? Anstatt daß also die Wirklichkeit, wie es scheinen kann, durch das abstrakte Sein begründet ist, ist das abstrakte Sein nur durch die Wirklichkeit begründet. Ich muß immer ein wirkliches Sein zugeben, ehe ich auf das abstrakte Sein kommen kann.<sup>72</sup>

Something must be the case, and it may be that nothing in particular is the case yet. Even in the common thought experiment in which one abstracts from everything to motivate the fundamental question, it is assumed that one imagines a “world” in which nothing is the case – a fact that in turn has to exist. “Aber, fragt sich jetzt, wie nach und warum entsteht denn ein Sein? Nur inwiefern es eine erste Wirklichkeit gibt.”<sup>73</sup> We can't avoid presupposing that something is the case. This precedes all possible statements in the form of truth conditions. Reality (the truth conditions) precedes abstract being (the statements). Schelling denotes this structure of presupposition by the neologism “substruction” (Substruktion)<sup>74</sup>; in

<sup>71</sup> UPO, p. 65.

<sup>72</sup> UPO, p. 65.

<sup>73</sup> UPO, p. 69.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

his analysis, substruction is a presupposition for reason and thereby for a theory of rationality. This theory has to assume that groundless being exists, that something exists at all, whatever it may be. However we determine this fact, this determination doesn't come immediately or unexpectedly from the facts to us, which is why we are always located in an ambivalent and contingent epistemic situation.

Der Geist ist also grundlos, er ist ohne vorausgehende Notwendigkeit. [...] In diesem Sinne betrachtet wird die Existenz des Geistes nur a posteriori erwiesen. Denn die Philosophie kann als Wissenschaft a priori und als Wissenschaft a posteriori erkannt werden. Sie ist nämlich in Ansehung der Welt Wissenschaft a priori, in bezug auf den Geist Wissenschaft a posteriori.<sup>75</sup>

This passage is highly ambivalent, due not least to the fact that Schelling's texts don't speak about mind (Geist) – and therefore don't speak about an epistemically contingent and fallible faculty – but are constructed in such a way that thereby the mind of the text (Geist des Textes) is explicitly taken into consideration. Hence, Schelling's texts always oscillate between a determination of philosophy and a determination of being itself. Philosophy is not just a "science of being" (Wissenschaft des Seins)<sup>76</sup> that is ontology in the sense of a science concerning being. It is also a science that belongs to being and therefore a local self-thematization of being.

In the above passage, Schelling works with an ambivalence of adjective and adverb when he says that, "philosophy can be recognized as a science a priori and as a science a posteriori" (die Philosophie kann als Wissenschaft a priori und als Wissenschaft a posteriori erkannt werden). "A priori" and "a posteriori" can be understood as adjectives, or as adverbs. In the first reading, philosophy is considered as a science with the attribute of being *a priori* as it relates to the world, whereas it has the attribute of being *a posteriori* as it relates to mind. This can be understood inasmuch as philosophy realizes that we can't abstract from the fact that there is something in the first place, even if it is just the fact that there is nothing. This, too, would be a reality in the sense of a fact. Even the maximal emptiness of a *nihil absolutum* or the paradox of a logically inconsistent form of emptiness, as some interpreters consider Buddhist logic to be, would be facts.<sup>77</sup> In contrast to this cognition *a priori*, philosophy recognizes the existence of mind as *a posteriori*; it

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Cf. UPO, p. 47.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Volker Beeh, "Nicht ist irgendeine Behauptung die meine," in: Bromand, Joachim; Kreis, Guido (Hrsg.), *Was sich nicht sagen lässt. Das Nicht-Begriffliche in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Religion*, Berlin, Oldenbourg Akademieverlag, 2010.

assumes that there is mind even if it is not necessary and therefore not a priori at least in the classical sense of this expression.

On the other hand, the quoted sentence also relates to our recognition of philosophy if we read “a priori” and “a posteriori” as adverbs. In this case, the sentence would describe our ways of recognizing philosophy itself. According to this adverbial reading, we realize *a priori* that philosophy is a science, namely when we relate it to the world. That means that philosophy has truth conditions that must already exist when it articulates itself as a science. Accordingly, we recognize the existence of philosophy as mind (Geist) – that is as theory-able and accountable expression-formation – only *a posteriori*. For there could also have been no philosophy. Thereby philosophy inscribes itself into being; it understands itself as a case of being with the particular attribute that in being a case of being, it is a “source of being” (Quelle des Seins).<sup>78</sup> For only philosophy is able to concern itself with the fundamental question against the background of a theoretical challenge of its own truth conditions. This attitude, sketched by Kant but epistemically restricted to the realm of the human and maximally reflective, the post-Kantian Idealists radicalized and examined on several different levels. The texts of so-called German Idealism are not just texts that deal with certain factual issues, but also and always texts that deal with the question of under what conditions they arise and what it means to be comprehensible to a reader. Therefore, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel agree that philosophy is in principle an unsurpassable form of reflection – which means that there can be no discipline of “metaphilosophy”, which besides a first order philosophy would also think about philosophy. In its form as ambitious metaphysics, philosophy is an involvement with the fundamental question against the background of an involvement with the facticity of the fundamental question itself.

### III. Conclusion

Schelling answers the fundamental question on different levels, which are generally all entangled through the notion of ontology. On the first level, the fundamental question is how it is possible that reality in the form of statements becomes the logical past, becomes truth conditions. This is Schelling’s version of the question of how reason can emerge from reality itself, from purely being. Schelling contributes to this problem, which tends to absolutize the ancestral, the hint that

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<sup>78</sup> UPO, p. 56.

we also have to take the future being or non-being of statements – whether in the form of conviction revisions or of extinction – into account.

In this general structure, Schelling offers the insight that this very structure repeats itself in each individual action and therefore also in each individual judgment. For it is not the case that reason has arisen only once and we can now rejoice in it; reason has to be established over and over again in revising our convictions and orienting them towards the norm of truth. Reason isn't simply given by nature, but has to be upheld, because it is bound to freedom and therefore bound to the possibility of failure. Consequently, the principal ontological statements are not just valid in the attitude of maximal cosmological role, but also locally. They apply not least to our comprehension of statements, which cohere in the form of theory in one text about statements. Schelling takes this unique circumstance into account through the construction of his text, through the form of expression.

In general, one should accept at least one condition from Schelling if one doesn't want to undercut the standard set by German Idealism. This condition entails that in formulating the fundamental question we should not abstract from our own existence in such a way that we aren't able to understand it afterwards. But this is imminent if we understand the fundamental question only through the truth conditions of ancestral sentences with a maximal cosmological role. The point of German Idealism in metaphysics can be seen in preventing this situation. A metaphysics that eliminates our own existence as epistemic agents from its understanding of reality not only sabotages its reputation but also undermines its own truth conditions. For it assumes that only those sentences that speak about facts that have nothing to do with us can be true. But these sentences are only one sentence-type among others, which is why they don't give the least – may it be positive or negative – explanation about our own existence as beings that are rational, freely acting and oriented towards the norm of truth, and that are – because of their capability for truth – able to fail in answering the fundamental question. Against this background, Heidegger's attention to Schelling and the fundamental question becomes understandable, for Heidegger's hermeneutics in particular is based on examining the classics of metaphysics in regard to their failure. This, however, aids not in the exposure of tradition but in the disclosure of its ambivalence. If Schelling is right, then no current philosophical thought can escape this ambivalence, either, for our capability for truth depends on the chance of our freedom. *“Die Möglichkeit des unmittelbar sein Könnenden ist die eigentliche Natur der Angst; denn es wendet und dreht sich unter der Hand herum und wird ein anderes.”*<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> UPO, p. 33.