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Rethinking Schelling. Nature, Myth, Realism

Beyond the Process After Schelling. Freedom and Creativity

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Abstract

Schelling's philosophy can be seen as a unitary project of *dynamic philosophy* in which the philosophy of nature is the theoretical core within a general frame of a philosophy of identity. According to this assumption, that is developed and argued in the first section, this essay shows moreover as Schelling's philosophy is a sort of *process philosophy* capable of integrating the standard definition of it, given for example by Nicholas Rescher, introducing the 'necessary' ungroundedness of being which frees 'actions' and 'creativity' from the necessary chain of the process of nature. Thus described, the process indeed guaranties in particular that freedom that must be at the basis of moral action, seen by Schelling as that action capable of reactivating and freely reproducing that 'love' that guides Copula (the bond of the bonds) in its original and steady movement towards the concretedness of what exists.

Termini di indicizzazione

Keywords: Schelling, Naturphilosophie, Process Philosophy, Freedom, Creativity

Testo integrale

Introduction

- 1 Schelling's philosophy has to be read as a unitary project of *dynamic philosophy* in which the philosophy of nature is the theoretical core within a necessary general frame of the philosophy of identity. Only a particular concept of identity¹ can indeed allow a



process, within which developments and passages from one stage to another, or the emergence of a new state of things, can be possible without leaps or interruptions.

2 Schelling's dynamic philosophy is that form of *process philosophy* Schelling suggests and develops in its entire philosophical journey understood as *Naturphilosophie* from the first studies of 1797 *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* to the period of his positive philosophy, in particular in his 1830 *Einleitung in die Philosophie* and 1844 *Darstellung des Naturprocesses*.²

3 As we will see, Schelling's *dynamic philosophy* has more than a point of contact with a contemporary form of *process philosophy* even if we have to highlight which is the role of freedom and the meaning of creation in its late *positive philosophy*, which is probably the very grounding of what can be called *Schelling's process philosophy*.

First of all, in relation to Schelling's thought, using the term *dynamic philosophy* can be hazardous in the sense that this expression at first seems to allude exclusively to just one part of Schelling's philosophy, namely to his first philosophy of nature, in which, as he himself states, the "dynamic is for physics what the transcendental is for philosophy" (SW³ IV, 75), thus apparently separating the two fields of the Science. But actually these two realms are already unified in the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* where Schelling postulates "the identity of the dynamics and the transcendental" (SW III, 452), thus giving the ground to a parallelism of nature (*Natur*) and mind or spirit (*Geist*), which will influence his entire program of philosophy of Identity.

4 By defining Schelling's philosophy as a *dynamic philosophy*, I mean

- that its object is the *dynamic nature* of being;
- that each form of being, which philosophy reflects on, repeats at a different level that same original *dynamic* that constructs *matter*, as the *primum existens*;
- and that each form or phase of his philosophy 'grounds' on the original *dynamics of nature*, that is the *object under investigation*, at first discovered and inquired by the *philosophy of nature*, which characterizes and follows through the entire development that descends from it.

2. Between nature and freedom

5 To understand how Schelling's philosophy is oriented towards the definition of a sort of *process philosophy*, whose "structure" would be the *dynamic conception of being*, one must of course understand his diverse phases as the development of a single thesis that can be brought back to the definition of the concept of *nature*. On the other hand, recent times have increasingly stressed the thesis that Schelling presents his internal coherence as the very unfolding of his basic nature philosophy texts.⁴

6 Along the ways that brought to stressing the thesis as, so to speak, "continuist" in reference to the complex, articulate philosophical work of Schelling,⁵ Walter E. Ehrhardt's essay *Nur ein Schelling* has indeed had central role. The one written in 1977 presented the thinking of the philosopher from Leonberg as a coherent, unified development, though it hinged not on the question of nature, rather the concept of freedom, a theme Schelling himself defined in a letter to Hegel on Epiphany 1795 as «the alpha and omega of philosophy».

7 It initially appears that the two positions – namely the idea that Schelling's philosophy is the reply to the question "what is nature" or the question "what is freedom" – may converge insofar as the hypothesis of the theoretical continuity of Schelling's philosophical parable overall, but are in contradiction in content and so end up by confirming the difficulty in stating the philosopher's theoretical coherence. Looking closer, one thinks differently. There is no doubt that the theme of freedom is what forms the bearing axis of Schelling's path, but the philosophical approach which for Schelling can grasp and unfold this concept, precisely philosophically and in its entire complexity, is that offered by his *Naturphilosophie*, i.e. a "philosophy of nature" in which what prevails is the "subjective" meaning of the genitive: and this aspect, as we



shall see, emerges more clearly in the philosophy of nature from the second phase of his thinking, which means the one accompanying and following *Philosophical Research on the essence of Human Freedom*. This is where the possibility more clearly emerges of completely facing the ontological question of freedom, in its connection and inescapable contrast with necessity, both possible in fact only after the preliminary antithesis between nature and spirit is faced and overcome, the solution to which depended in turn on an idealistic, or rather real-idealistic philosophy, which should be based in the *dynamic* conception of nature, which Kant partly made re-emerge (SW VII, 333).⁶


8 Obviously, Schelling's philosophy of nature is not to be understood as a sort of second philosophy aiming to investigate the range of nature and of scientific research with the tools of philosophical investigation. In some ways, in that it expressly turns to *being itself* or the *existent in general*, as Schelling states in various places, can be defined as "first philosophy", even though this definition is not sufficient in itself either to clarify the originality that accompanies the project of the Leonberg philosopher, since one cannot through that definition fully grasp the idea of nature as subject, origin or *arkhé* of being in general, or comprehend the complexity of nature, simultaneously understood as inexhausted, inexhaustible productivity and as sum of products⁷.

9 Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is in fact so different from both epistemology, which deals with the justification and formal expression of scientific theories, and the "metaphysics of nature", which aims to offer an overall vision of nature and on the basis of the results of science: attempts that are still alive in contemporary philosophical debate⁸.

10 These two aspects of philosophy of nature – epistemological and metaphysical – are definitely present within Schelling's "philosophy of nature" and cover, so to speak, the "objective" meaning of the genitive, in that they look at nature as the privileged object of philosophical investigation in general: it suffices to think, for example, of how much it considers the – so to speak – epistemological versant, the formulation of the doctrine of powers within a system of Identity or, further, the definition of the *Weltalter* theory to predication⁹, or, as for the theoretical proposal of a form of "metaphysics of nature", of how the systematic attempts from *The First Outline of a System of Philosophy of Nature* up to *Weltalter*, passing evidently through *Philosophical Inquires into the Nature of Human Freedom*, aim to offer a unified vision of nature (understood as *being in general*), coherent with scientific evidence from the period.

11 However, the "epistemological" attitude, just as much as the – so to speak – "metaphysical" one, is unable to describe Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in its complexity, as its originality rather lies in recognising the – never fully objectifiable – "subjectivity" of nature, that is, its freedom or autonomy, and in presenting itself as the *becoming expression of Becoming* (so not as the conceptual elaboration of a second philosophy, which determines nature *objectifying it*), which triggers from nature itself, inevitably making itself part of it not as its inert product, but as a *dynamic*, in turn productive, elaboration; only in this view can one understand what Schelling means in the *First Outline*, stating that «Philosophising on nature signifies creating nature itself» (SW III, 5).

12 The dynamic conception of nature, inserted into a general context of philosophy of identity, is in my opinion able to grasp and explicate that subjectivity without objectifying it, but rather "re-cognising" it as a common, sole root, in which one can "participate" not only in the form of *knowing*, which is always a partial reduction of the process to its products (represented or thought), but if anything in the form of co-scientia, that is, of what Schelling would later describe as *Mit-wissenschaft* of the origin: *active participation in the dynamic process*, which is not so much a sort of anamnesis turned to the past, but rather has to do with the future directly, that is, with the actions and "creativity" man is capable of.

 This philosophical perspective, which could also be defined as an "Idealism of nature", hinders the objectivisation-determination of nature in the entity, in the 'product' (or in the sum of products), hence in the concept that borders it, so as to grasp

and describe instead the continuous becoming of its inexhaustible ‘productivity’, its potential, its *dynamis*, together with its products, which of course include that same “knowledge” around it and its possible epistemological formulations.

- 14 For Schelling, *Naturphilosophie* is the only form of philosophical reflection able to recognise the subjectivity of nature (its *Urständlichkeit*, its autonomy), to take it on as a way to express-explicate what exists and becomes, and especially to understand man’s deeds and his productive action as the free expression of nature itself.

3. The positive of nature

- 15 There can be no such thing as knowledge (*Wissen*) of freedom, just like knowledge of nature: of nature as the free subject of being in general and, embracing all (including the subject that would like to speak thereof ‘philosophically’), there cannot of course be knowledge: *becoming* and *concept* are mutually exclusive. One accesses nature as becoming not through knowing but, if anything – as Schelling states in *Erlangen Lectures* – through *Weisheit* (Schelling 1969: 32-33), which is always practical knowing too, in that it creates. This is actually what happens with positive philosophy, where *an act of will* (SW XI, 565) allows rationality to be upturned: the way of knowing, which proceeds from original *Mit-wissenschaft*, requires an *ecstasy of reason* which has, though, nothing to do with a sort of mystical abandonment of rationality, but rather with a general rethinking of everything from the viewpoint and prerogatives of reason itself. By *ecstasy of reason*, Schelling indeed aims to lead the subject back to the original unity with the Subject which nature itself always is (so, actively participating in the productivity of nature itself), hence outside that subject/object counterposition of a merely reflective knowledge, which Schelling is swift to define, in the Introduction to *Ideas for a philosophy of nature*, as a “disease of the human spirit” (SW XII, 13).

- 16 Schelling’s positive philosophy has to be understood as a step forward in the wake of the *dynamic process* described by his *Naturphilosophie* understood as a negative philosophy, which aims to describe the (*potency of*) being (but not yet the *being itself*) in its development throughout the different *potencies* of the existent. Positive philosophy is in fact in debt to some extent to the premises – as well as theoretical acquisitions – of his *Naturphilosophie*, insofar it is that science that has as object the *being itself* (as in the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*), or the “*existent in general* independently of all particular and contingent determinations” (SW X, 303) (as in the *Exhibition of Natural Process*), and this latter is the result of a *free dynamical* construction: positive philosophy is in continuity with the fundamental thesis of philosophy of nature; the free grounding of the former to some extent depends in fact on the necessity to *free* the *dynamic process* from being a system of necessity, after the passage from the Unconditional of the *being itself* to the free and actual construction of matter.

- 17 As Schelling efficiently writes in his essay *Über das Verhältnis der Naturphilosophie zur Philosophie überhaupt*, “the philosophy of nature is, as such, the entire and undivided philosophy” (SW V, 107). Inasmuch as the philosophy of nature is first of all speculative physics, the crucial issue of this science is the inquiring into the original grounding, that is “into the absolute cause of motion”, which cannot find solution by a mechanical explanation, but rather only through a *dynamic* account, since “mechanical motion is the merely secondary and derivative motion of that which is *original*” and issues “from the fundamental forces” (SW III, 274): the construction of matter is the first achievement of the interaction of these fundamental forces, to which the very *dynamic process* follows, that is nothing but a second (and ongoing) construction of matter at the different levels¹⁰. The *Übergang* (passage) to the ‘real ground’ of being is the beginning of the movement and thus of the dynamic process, but “this actus is an ongoing, always occurring again: this is proven by the always ongoing *καταβολή τοῦ*



κόσμου that acts as a constant grounding and therefore as an eternity for the coming becoming” (SW X, 346).

18 Although Schelling repeatedly returned to this definition during the course of his philosophy, limiting the philosophy of nature to just one part of his whole philosophy,¹¹ this does not change the key assumption, if we consider that part as the fundamental one: as Schelling himself writes in the 1830 *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, the philosophy of nature has to be understood as “the grounding of the entire system,” (Schelling 1830: 55) and only starting with it can an adequate consideration of *being itself* as such take place.

19 If the philosophy of nature is the only philosophy in that it firstly investigates the object *par excellence*, namely the *being itself* insofar as it is unconditioned *absolute activity*, that precedes the following forms of being and at the same time “views its objects in their ongoing becoming” (SW III, 283), *positive philosophy* aims to demonstrate *being* as the (historical) result of a free self-determination and of an *act* (Schelling 1830: 9). For Schelling the ‘historical’ characteristic of this philosophy does not at all lie in the historical narrative in itself (namely in the development of Mythology and Revelation), but in the source of its own object, clearly emerging in a completely ‘ungrounded’ way: positive philosophy is *historic* precisely because ‘it is (un-)grounded’ on the absolute freedom that governs its object, whilst negative philosophy is non-historical since it seeks to deduce the essence of its object and is *grounded* (take note) on the need for logical-rational connections.

4. Ungroundedness and process

20 As Schelling affirms in the *Einleitung*, “philosophy is that science that does not presume anything and absolutely starts from the beginning” (Schelling 1830: 19). Now, the beginning of positive philosophy, as Schelling himself observes during his years in Berlin, is a beginning that “is not capable of any grounding (*Begründung*)” (Schelling 1841-1842: 138), since it is grounded on an act and coincides with the crucial problem of the *creation of the cosmos* and the consistent reconsideration of the relationship between *antecedent* and *consequence* at the beginning of being and in its dynamic development, which must consider the possibility of the creativity and the emergence of something new in the process.

21 That *prius* from which positive philosophy begins, insofar as it is by definition the *antecedens* par excellence, has to be understood as the free act of the beginning from which follows the *becoming-being* (*Das Werden zum Sein*) [*Philebus* (26 d8)¹²] with the eternal possibility of the *novitas*, or new beginning.

22 If the philosophy of nature deals with the passage from the Unconditioned to the *dynamic process* and describes the latter in its development, then positive philosophy is required to take a step forwards (or rather backwards, to the origin of being) to *free* that process from a mechanical (rational) deduction, thus introducing a *free* grounding, as an original act, at the basis of the process itself, and setting the becoming of being, accordingly with its essence, absolutely free.

23 Schelling affirms that the philosophy of nature is not yet positive philosophy but is certainly its natural boundary (*natürliche Grenze*) (Schelling 1830: 38), not only due to the fact that it eliminates the *concept of being as an originary substratum* (SW III, 12) and assumes nature as unconditioned – as we can read in a proposition of the *First Outline* that to some extent can be certainly understood as the manifesto of a ‘positive’ philosophy of nature – but above all due to the fact that philosophy of nature is that science that came closer than any others to the absolute fact (*Tatsache*), namely *that* there is a world and there is a free cause of it, as creator of cosmos¹³.

24 The fact that “it is not because there is thinking that there is being, but rather because there is being that there is thinking” (SW XIII, 162) seems to be rooted in the premises of his philosophy of nature, but it cannot be assumed as a sort of materialistic premise,



or to use the expression of Iain Grant as an extreme form of ‘somaticism’. In ontological terms, this priority granted to being is not enough to explain its internal free *dynamics*. In fact, “being” is in turn preceded by its “becoming-being”, that in turn needs a free dynamic beginning to rescue itself from the necessity of the process, and this free beginning is nothing but the (divine) act of creation, which – as we will see – within the process allows the possibility of free “creativity”.

- 25 Philosophy of nature surely has the merit of having described the construction of matter and the dynamic process, but if the philosophy (of nature) succeeded in defining a process, which is a great achievement, then (positive) philosophy now has to move forwards, to go beyond the process, and in order to do this it is necessary to return to the very (*f*)act of free creation: “so far – says Schelling – philosophy has not gone beyond the concept of process” (Schelling 1830: 60), and “nor has the philosophy of nature broken the circle of necessity” (Schelling 1830: 71), even though the *Freiheitsschrift*, that to some extension has to be read as a work of philosophy of nature, exactly went in that direction:

All nature tells us that it is in no wise by virtue of mere geometrical necessity that it exists; there is not simply pure reason in it, but personality and spirit [...]. Creation is nothing given but an act (SW VII, 395-396).

- 26 Going beyond the process and its necessity, thus returning to the original and free act of creation, is possible only starting “from the fundamental principles of a true nature-philosophy” (SW VII, 371) since “the root of freedom” exactly lies “in the independent ground of nature” (SW VII, 357). In this sense, positive philosophy is nothing but a step forward in the direction already traced by the philosophy of nature, but in some ways so to speak dissolved in the process itself.

- 27 That for Schelling creation is to be understood as a free act leads one to reflect deeply on the ‘nature’ of this act, and the consequences it has in reference to the “creativity” within the process. Even in the preface to the text on freedom, Schelling actually states that only the dynamic conception of nature allows one to overcome the false antithesis of nature and spirit and propensity to considering the authentic antithesis between freedom and necessity (SW VII, 333), which is at the basis of the initial act, and from whose solution is possible to free the dynamic process from the necessary chain that seems to characterise it.

- 28 The dynamism described in the *First Outline of a System of Philosophy of Nature*, from the productivity/product pairing, in the light of the problematic relationship between matter and forces already stressed in the first Introduction to *Ideas for a philosophy of nature*, is indeed at the basis of the ungroundedness of being itself, and leads to the necessity of that *ungrounded argument* for the description of the original becoming-being (*das Werden zum Sein*), which we find again translated in the *Philosophical Inquires* with the introduction of the *Ungrund*, as a point of Indifference and the only description possible of the «Absolute as such»: a dynamic rather than ontological “excess” that could later be described in the lessons of Berlin as the *potentia potentiae* belonging to the unprethinkable being.

- 29 The nature of that original act and its ineradicable ungroundedness become fundamental in the following works of philosophy of nature and in the picture of positive philosophy, where the constant treatment of the problem of creation forcefully emerges. It is in particular in the *Exhibition of the Natural Process*, 1844, that the own, (thus far only) *ideal* attempts at founding positive philosophy completely are found in the description of the passage from the latter to the real or *material*¹⁴ foundation, hence to a fully *dynamic* foundation of being.

- 30 Central to these years’ theoretical context is without doubt the notion of unprethinkable being (*unvordenkliches Sein*), which, if simply read as ontological excess of nature, leads to erroneous materialistic interpretations.¹⁵ The solution probably lies in recognising the *dynamic nature* of this excess as a field that cannot be hypostatised, enclosing in itself nature and spirit in *Indifference* and allowing no kind



of reductionism. Hence the combination I suggested elsewhere¹⁶ between unprethinkable being and the *Ungrund* from the *Philosophical Inquires*.

31 It is precisely the introduction of non-grounding, understood as a possible solution to Kantian opposition of nature/freedom in the sense proposed by dynamic philosophy, that demonstrates the complexity of Schelling's dynamic philosophy and its possible combination with an enriched, in some ways improved notion of *process philosophy*.

32 In consideration of nature, we find ourselves before an inexhausted, inexhaustible productivity that determines products. Now, we may think of nature

1. either as the totality of all entities – understood as products of said productivity – thus in fact choosing Kant's definition as the totality of all things as object of representation (phenomena), which is, on closer inspection, nothing but a development of gnoseologic-epistemological character of the definition offered by Simplicius in the comment to Aristotle's *Physics* as the totality of all things (τὰ φυσικά πάντα πράγματα [*tá physiká pánta prágmata*] (*In Physicam* 198.28));
2. or as infinite productivity, as the *arkhé* whence all arises, as *physis*.

33 Neither definition is satisfying in itself; nor does a solution embracing the two definitions and trying to join them seem sufficient. To think of productivity and products together, but also placing thoughts, *noemata*, in the list of products, one may remake a “physics of everything” on the model proposed by Plato in *Timaeus* (τοῦ παντός φύσεως [*toú pantós phýseos*] (*Tim.* 47a9, 27a25), and followed by Schelling in his *Kommentar*, 1794, in the direction of his first philosophy of nature,¹⁷ oriented towards confirming the naturalness of the transcendental.

34 Yet what this first Schelling move produces is a philosophy of identity in which the freedom and necessity of nature precisely coincide in a process described as dynamic. The two forms of causality, mechanical and dynamic, pinpointed by Kant as separated by an unsurmountable abyss, are apparently resolved and united in an identity *Stufenfolge* which contains different levels of development.

35 But what dominates here is always, only, necessity; the “Law of identity” as perching on the dynamic construction of matter is here recognised as free only in that it coincides with the necessity of process.

36 What really strikes one in the deployment of the potencies from the Würzburg system of identity, where acting (*Handeln*) and art (*Kunst*) – respectively the fifth and sixth, highest, potency – express the sum coincidence of necessity and freedom¹⁸ so do not solve the Kantian opposition but simply avoid it in a form of *libera necessitas* inspired by Spinoza. What Kant in particular demonstrates in the *Critique of Judgement* is the need to think of that defined as a substratum, a basis for unity, between nature and freedom.

The concept of freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws. Hence it must be possible to think of nature as being such that the lawfulness in its form will harmonise with at least the possibility of [achieving] the purposes that we are to achieve in nature according to laws of freedom. So there must after all be a basis *uniting* [*Grund der Einheit*] the supersensible that underlies nature and the supersensible that the concept of freedom contains practically, even though the concept of this basis does not reach cognition of it either theoretically or practically and hence does not have a domain of its own, though it does make possible the transition from our way of thinking in terms of principles of nature to our way of thinking in terms of principles of freedom (KU, *Introduction*, XX, 154).

It is beyond our reason's grasp how this reconciliation of two wholly different kinds of causality is possible: the causality of nature in its universal lawfulness, with [the causality of] an idea that confines nature to a particular form for which nature itself contains no basis whatsoever. The possibility of this reconciliation lies in the supersensible substrate of nature, about which we cannot determine anything affirmatively, except that it is the being in itself of which we know merely the appearance (KU § 81).



37 Precisely that original grounding (*Urgrund*) is defined by the Schelling of the *Philosophical Inquires* as a non-grounding (*Ungrund*), that is as a *dynamic antecedent* that allows and guarantees the freedom of the *consequent*, as here lies the response to the need to free process from necessity. If it must be admitted that philosophy of nature is not yet positive philosophy, in that it looks at the absolute fact of the existence of being and proceeds therefrom, it must be recognised – with the Schelling of the *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 1830 – that philosophy of nature is the limit for the natural boundary of positive philosophy. As has already been observed, “So far – says Schelling – philosophy has not gone beyond the concept of process” (Schelling 1830: 60); if anything it has witnessed, as still Schelling maintains, the transformation of the real or dynamic process into a dialectic process thanks to Hegel. Clearly, this not only betrays the premise of the real process, as according to this the real process is fully resolved in logic and its formal connections, but – especially – it does not allow the process itself to go beyond its deterministic binds. The dynamic process described by the “first” philosophy of nature is indeed for Schelling still a necessary process that must be liberated (“neither the philosophy of nature has broken the circle of necessity” [Schelling 1830: 71]). Nothing will be gained through altering the natural process into a dialectic process; if anything, the process itself may gain something if the cycle of necessity is overcome and the process is liberated to its free flow, recognising at its origin a free act, a free act but one with which the freedom of the entire process is affirmed, meaning: the possibility of recognising at any point of the process at all the possibility of a *new start*, i.e. the possibility of authentic “creativity” and the *emergence* of a new state of things. This is precisely what occurs with the introduction of the *Ungrund* to signify the ungroundedness of the *process* itself (or rather, its non-reductability to a necessary, fully deducible development), an ungroundedness that is moreover confirmed by the real or effective construction of matter (as no longer simply ideal or negative)¹⁹ that we find in the *Darstellung* of 1844 at the height of positive philosophy.

5. Beyond the process?

Before proceeding with the description of what seems to be profiled for the natural process of late philosophy of nature, it is opportune to recall some contemporary definition of process philosophy to which we can compare the process examined so as to check, on the one hand, whether Schelling’s philosophy may be considered a philosophy of process, and, if so, under which conditions and in which terms and, on the other hand, whether Schelling’s proposal may if anything appear as an enrichment for contemporary process philosophy.

38 Process philosophy must be brought back to Whitehead’s thinking and his concept of nature, and it would also be interesting, as well as auspicious, to investigate the points of contact his theoretical proposal has with Schelling’s thinking.²⁰

39 However, what we intend to do in this short essay is to verify to what extent Schelling’s dynamic philosophy may be defined a process philosophy, so it is necessary to follow Nicholas Rescher’s indication, according to which «if there indeed is a “philosophy” of process, it must pivot not on a thinker, but on a theory».

40 Also according to Rescher²¹ it seems sensible to understand “process philosophy” as a doctrine committed to, or at any rate inclined toward, certain basic propositions:

1. Time and change are among the principal categories of metaphysical understanding.
2. Process is a principal category of ontological description.
3. Processes are more fundamental, or at any rate no less fundamental, than things for the purposes of ontological theory.
4. Several, if not all, of the major elements of the ontological repertoire (God, Nature as a whole, persons, material substances) are best understood in process terms.



5. Contingency, emergence, novelty, and creativity are among the fundamental categories of metaphysical understanding.²²

41 As well as the points quoted above, Rescher indicates three fundamental aspects that characterise the definition of process: a) first of all, a process is a complex of occurrences – a unity of distinct stages or phases; b) secondly, this complex of occurrences has a certain temporal coherence and integrity; c) and, at the end, a process has a structure.

42 All the points suggested by Rescher to identify a process philosophy seem to find full confirmation in Schelling's dynamic philosophy; in particular the theses expressed in the introduction to the *First Outline* appear particularly coherent with Rescher's definition.

43 Running through Rescher's points, the priority assigned by the process philosophies at the time and at the change (point 1) is confirmed by Schelling's entire philosophical path. It is indeed evident how time plays a fundamental role; just think of the *Weltalter* attempts, but even before – as is obvious – of the significance it takes on for the development of the productivity of nature in the *First Outline*, 1799, where one witnesses the definition of time as the organic development of process:

We can say of Nature as object that it *is*, not of Nature as subject; for this is being or productivity itself. This absolute productivity must pass over into an empirical nature. In the idea of absolute productivity is the thought of an *ideal* infinity. The ideal infinity must become an empirical one. But empirical infinity is an infinite becoming. Every infinite series is but the exhibition of an intellectual or ideal infinity. The original infinite series (the ideal of all infinite series) is that wherein our intellectual infinity evolves itself, i.e., time. The activity which sustains this series is the same as that which sustains our consciousness; consciousness, however, is continuous. Time, therefore, as the evolution of that activity, cannot be produced by composition. Now, as all other infinite series are only imitations of the originally infinite series, time, no infinite series can be otherwise than continuous (SW III, 285).

44 From this consideration of ontological-dynamic character one deduces a distinction of epistemological character between intuition and reflection, specifying the nature of metaphysical understanding owned by the dynamic process: while the infinite series is continuous through *productive intuition* (and from this one draws a *duration*), the same series appears interrupted and composite through *reflection*. The distinction between intuition and reflection, which, moreover, takes up the theses expressed in the first lines of the Introduction to the *Ideas for a philosophy of nature*, leads back to the subjectivity of nature which cannot be objectified in "reflection", but only assumed in (active) participation in Subjectivity, precisely via an intuitive act that implies and accompanies discursivity of a speculative type.

Further, the Identity of productivity and product, which Schelling also points out in the Introduction to the *First Outline*, corroborates the thesis that sees Schelling's philosophy as similar to a form of process philosophy in that – as Rescher reports at points 2 and 3 – the process is to take precedence over the entities: in Schelling's case, it is clear that the process is not made to coincide simply with productivity, rather with the identity of productivity and products (or things).

In the conventional view productivity vanishes in the product; conversely, in the philosophic view the product vanishes into the productivity.

Such an identity of the product and the productivity in the *original* conception of Nature is expressed by the ordinary view of Nature as a whole, which is at once the cause and the effect of itself, and is in its duplicity (which runs through all phenomena) again identical. Furthermore, with this idea the identity of the real and the ideal agrees, an identity which is thought in the idea of every product of Nature, and with respect to which only the nature of art can be placed in contrast. For whereas in art the idea precedes the act or the execution, in Nature idea and act are rather contemporary and one; the idea passes immediately over into the product, and cannot be separated from it (SW III, 284).



45 One further observes, as in the concept of becoming that Schelling develops through extension of the dynamic process, the concept of gradualness or *Stufenfolge* is conceived, allowing plausible explanation of the various phenomena and various expressions of being, including God (in accordance with point 4 from Rescher's definition). Furthermore, the process described by Schelling doubtlessly presents a "structure" (something Rescher underlines as come inescapable in a *process philosophy*; point c), and it can certainly be brought back to the dynamic process which is articulated according to the doctrine of potencies, albeit in the multiple, differing formulations which the philosopher will propose over the course of his speculation.

As for the final point (5) of Rescher's definition, which we used as a scheme for our comparison for Schelling's philosophy, where it is evidenced as "contingency, emergence, novelty, and creativity are among the fundamental categories of metaphysical understanding" and they have to be understood within a processual context, one must observe how precisely the question of emergence and creativity seem to Schelling problematic and in need of investigation; on the other hand, Whitehead himself observes that the very task of philosophy «is to explain the emergence of the more abstract things from the more concrete things».²³

46 The problem noted by Schelling lies in particular in the fact that it has to do with a process he sees in some ways as closed in the need for its development, and, moreover, unable to justify the differences between the products on a qualitative level.

47 As for the latter aspect, if the identity of productivity and products allows the formulation of an identity process in which the differences are if anything of a merely *quantitative* order, the need to explain the possibility of *qualitative* differences within the process leads Schelling to introduce solutions, still of a speculative type, which turn to the ungroundedness of the process. This is what happens in the *First Outline* with the introduction of "simple actants", which are atoms of force, lacking matter and extension, hinder the linear development of process and allow qualitative difference, hence the emergence of new states of things. But apart from this prudent speculative introduction,²⁴ the *First Outline* theses do not go beyond the system of Identity, which does happen with the development of this fundamental ungroundedness that we find in the *Philosophical Inquires* of 1809, announcing the first problematic aspect revealed by Schelling, that is, the freedom of creativity and possibility for *novitas* within the process.

This in effect opens a breach that should be further clarified: Schelling's dynamic philosophy actually presents an ever more complex ontology than the one described by the model of process philosophy synthesised by the definition by Rescher. Beside productivity, which can be brought back to the notion of process, and to the products of said productivity which can easily be understood as 'things' or entities, we actually have an ungrounded X that guarantees and keeps together productivity and products: the X of the Absolute, which Schelling also calls Copula and which is progressively clarified, precisely thanks to the results and acquisitions of the philosophy of nature, as the indefinable, ungrounded dynamic *arkhé*.

48 It is actually in this context that the identity if the identity that presides over manifestations of the dynamic process is described as a 'force' that precedes and allows the construction of matter. This specification, which is found explicitly at § 54 of the *Exposition of my system of philosophy*, 1801, but which one could already easily deduce from the theses of the *First Outline*, anticipates the introduction of ungroundedness belonging to the *Ungrund* of the *Philosophical Inquires* and can now be also read through the formalisation of the ungrounded argument proposed by Mumford,²⁵ but simply thinking of the dynamic field as a particular "*disposition*", that is, a state or a condition preceding the emergence of being without being its grounds.

Now, in the philosophy of Identity, before the introduction of the *Indifferenz* of *Ungrund* (which in fact describes the dynamic excess of the Absolute as such (*schlechthin betrachtet*), the source of productivity just as much as the series of products) that we find in the *Philosophical Inquiries*, the Copula may be considered contained and resolved in the necessity of the process itself as the bond (*Band*) of the



bonds that openly leads back to the *desmós* of Plato's *Timaeus*. However, the consideration of freedom as a constitutive of being (*Wesen*), which Schelling investigates precisely starting from the *Philosophical Inquiries*, but which has its roots in philosophy of nature, leads it to the path of overcoming the necessity of process, liberating it to creativity and the possibility of the emergence of "novitas": this overcoming, possible at the basis of the ungroundedness of becoming, "opens" the dynamic process beyond its internal recursing, which Schelling had organised in the Würzburg years via the figure of the *Gesamtorganismus*²⁶, in the direction of a futurology implying a physicalism that uninterruptedly proceeds from the real to the ideal, in accordance with a model that is, furthermore, already present – at least theoretically – as an attempt to apply the recapitulation of Kierkegaard²⁷ to the world overall.

49 The result of this introduction is the opening of practice and creativity to freedom. Even in the aphorisms of 1806, Schelling recognised to man the ability to break the unity of the "Concrete", meaning the continuity of process, to act "ethically", yet action was bound to the necessity of this very process, so was not fully free.

The Copula hypostatised in the Concrete – that is: in current realisation, in the product, meaning in the reality of what it holds together – "can only find again itself in the One, and only therefrom can it be expanded into an infinite world, repeating its performance. That One is Man, in whom the bond completely breaks the concrete and returns to itself in its eternal freedom» (SW II, 376).

50 Man's freedom lies in *acting* and *creating*, in the ability to work as a copula, that is the possibility, always present in himself, to incarnate and live the process and the *Liebe* that keeps him together: that love which characterises the tension that animates the copula and binds together ground and existence²⁸ originally distinct from precisely that vital spark that leaves them in tension and attraction.

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

With the *Philosophical researches*, man is recognised on an ontological level with the possibility of breaking the unity of the Copula (the "Concrete"), the *continuum* of the process, so as to create and act freely and continue the process itself, even at the risk of deviating its path. The crisis which the *Ungrund* opens in the circle of the necessity of the process, inserting the abyss of the original creative act, certainly allows ethical action in that it conforms with the universal will, but is contemplated together with the choice for egotistical will, which can then potentially alter the path and degenerate it.

51 Clearly, in Schelling's philosophy, the discovery of ungrounded freedom that presides over process is saved from the identification of that freedom with the act of creation, coinciding with the choice for being and hence for the good. A further confirmation of the direction which freedom "must" undertake – if conforming to the moral – is provided by Schelling with the philosophy of revelation, which works as an "orientation" for a freedom which can as such potentially open the process to unexpected results. And it seems to be also profiled – albeit, one must stress, prudently – in the *Einleitung in die Philosophie* when Schelling, affirming that the advancement of dynamic philosophy had required the birth of "new organs of thought" (Schelling 1989: 57), had in some way prefigured the possibility of a *future* capable of completely unpredictable 'novitas'.

52 What I state here is that with the introduction of the *Ungrund*, Schelling's dynamic philosophy certainly opens up to a form of *process philosophy* that is potentially far more productive than he originally intended, but one may not forget that Schelling's



philosophy is in itself all oriented towards an *ethical* conception of ontological freedom which binds the process to well defined roads: from the choice for universal will in the *Philosophical Inquiries* to revelation, understood as the resolution of the prophecy and presentiment turning to the future in Christianity: “in a philosophy of Revelation we mean only, or eminently, understanding the *Person* of Christ” (Schelling 1841-1842; SW XIV, 35).

One can state that the introduction of the *Ungrund* constitutes, for Schelling, an opportune – though evidently problematic – integration to the dynamic process.

53 As “grounding for the entire philosophy”, philosophy of nature returns the “inborn and indwelling logic of nature” (SW XIII, 103) to the form of the dynamic process, also guaranteeing the possibility of making a system of knowing beyond an apparently unsurmountable *asistasia*.²⁹ Yet this very philosophy of nature seems to contradict this system, its laws, its logic. In fact, the roots of freedom lie in nature; the dynamic process proceeds downstream in accordance with the logic of nature, but that same logic rediscovers upstream an indomitable ungroundedness that characterises the process itself and its unexpected deviations.

54 If it is true that Schelling’s philosophy solves the problem of original ungroundedness with the choice for being and the revelation confirms the choice for good in the freedom that unfolds in the ‘historia’ of revelation, it is equally true that the interruption of the circle of the necessity described by the dynamic process of the first philosophy of nature leaves space for abyssal, ungrounded freedom, and this constitutes the fundamental character of being in general. Precisely this abyssal freedom integrates the notion of process, returning it to vitality and unpredictability and explicating itself in authentic “creativity” as the immediate, continual expression of becoming.

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Note

1 Even in the Introduction to *Ideas for a philosophy of nature*, 1797, a necessary identity is profiled between nature and spirit to understand the facts of nature. However, for Schelling the thought of Identity goes far beyond solving a problem of epistemological character: it is actually a consideration of ontological character, imposed on the very basis of the results of a dynamic conception of nature. For more information on the notion of Identity in Schelling and the sources, cf. Frank 2018.

2 I have shown elsewhere how Schelling's philosophy must be read as the consistent development of his *Naturphilosophie* works, cf. in particular Corriero 2014: 171-193; Corriero 2017a: 7-17; Corriero 2018: 17-35.

3 F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, XIV vols, ed. by K.F.A. Schelling, Stuttgart-Augsburg, Cotta, 1856-1861, cited by volume and page number.

4 See Grant 2006; see also Corriero 2014.

5 As is known, the philosophy of Schelling seems to present different phases at the point in the history of philosophy where the – variously expressed – thesis prevailed, according to which 1) an initial critical-Fichtian phase tending to continue Kant's philosophy, identifying a formal, matter principle for that philosophical programme would be followed by 2) a direct nature philosophy phase to integrate the Fichtean system, which was for Schelling lacking on the natural versant and so in need of integration. Before resistance from Fichte, Schelling would then have aimed to define in autonomy 3) a system of Identity which would later, on the basis of criticism received with particular reference to the lack of difference and movement within this system, have passed through 4) the phase of the philosophy of freedom and consequent 5) Weltalter attempts: failed attempts which would finally have led Schelling to abandon his systematic vocation and thus to 6) separation of the fields of knowing in negative philosophy and positive philosophy. The distinction of Schelling's philosophy into phases is partly owed to Schelling himself in the Munich years, and to Hegel's Lessons in the history of philosophy, though relevance must also be given to the future reconstructions by von Hartmann 1876, and by Metzger 1912.

6 In his *Metaphysische Anfangsgrunde*, Kant endorses a dynamic philosophy of nature, assuming the fact that matter is infinitely divisible and bearing the continuum of nature, thus denying the vacuum. He was against a mechanical philosophy of nature, which maintained an atomistic view of matter, as shown for example by Le Sage with his Lucrece Newtonien.

Schelling partially shares Kant's dynamic view, but for Kant matter is already endowed with forces, while for Schelling forces grounds matter in their interaction and with the introduction of 'simple actants' (atoms of power without extension), which would be responsible of the differences in the constitution of matters.

Kant assumes two forces: attractive force and repulsive (or extensive) force. For Kant, matter is "moving forces which can only be known by experience", while for Schelling matter cannot be object of intuition, and has in its original construction (due to these forces without any substrate) to be object of a speculative explanation, with the hypothesis that must/can find verification in the experience through experiment.

In this speculative way, Schelling seeks to make a synthesis of dynamism and atomism. Schelling shared with Le Sage the need of avoiding that matter is infinitely divisible, and he introduced the hypothesis of simple actants, as obstacles to the absolute activity of nature, thus allowing the different products in nature.



7 «Insofar as we regard the totality of objects not merely as a product, but at the same time necessarily as productive, it becomes Nature for us, and this identity of the product and the productivity, and this alone, is implied by the idea of Nature, even in the ordinary use of language. Nature as a mere product (*natura naturata*) we call Nature as object (with this alone all empiricism deals). Nature as productivity (*natura naturans*) we call Nature as subject (with this alone all theory deals)» (SW III, 284).

8 See for example Esfeld 2008. See also Corriero 2018b.

9 See in particular Hogrebe 1989.

10 «Magnetism, electricity and chemical process are the categories of the original construction of nature (matter): the latter escapes us and lies outside of intuition, the former are what of it remains behind» (SW III, 71).

11 In the preface to the first volume of his *Philosophische Schriften*, Schelling explicitly describes the writings collected there as belonging to the 'ideal side' of his philosophy, thus separating them from those belonging to the 'natural side'. Although the Würzburger System of 1804, in continuity with the 1801 *Darstellung*, aims at combining the two 'wings' of his philosophy in the system, there are many explicit references by the author to the distinction of fields: see, for example, Schelling 1830: 55; SW XI, 372; SW XII, 71.

12 Schelling 1794: 63.

13 But this free act must have its deepest roots in nature itself, in its ungroundedness, otherwise we would have again a firm grounding from which necessarily (no longer freely) descends an act; the 'creator' always needs indeed this 'act' to be called 'creator'.

14 For this topic, I refer to Corriero 2018a.

15 In this context I allow myself to refer back to the first section of Corriero 2012, in particular 40-53.

16 See Corriero 2020.

17 Many interpreters of Schelling's philosophy maintain that the comment on Timaeus lays down the bases for the successive nature philosophy and is in some ways already a text that can be ascribed to this theoretical context; see Krings 1994: 115-155.

18 «§ 316. The actions and destinies of all men are not, if referred to the Absolute, free or necessary, but only apparitions of the absolute identity of freedom and necessity. [...] §. 317. The essence of the soul is one: in knowing and acting, free necessity and necessary freedom. The synthesis, in which free necessity appears as equally knowing and acting, is art» (SW VI, 568-569).

19 See Corriero 2018a.

20 Whitehead indeed speaks of "becoming of nature" in that it has been assigned a temporal character, stating that one cannot grasp from nature the manifestations, which can never exhaust nature as becoming. For Whitehead one cannot simply give a (phenomenological) becoming of the manifestations of nature, or rather – to use an expression from Schelling – of the products of productivity, but it is nature itself that coincides with becoming.

21 See Rescher 2000a; Rescher 2000b.

22 Rescher 2000b: 6.

23 Whitehead 1978: 20. The notion of creativity is certainly fundamental for a philosophy of process, and this aspect is also powerfully highlighted by Whitehead, who insists on the continuity between creativity and becoming; Ibidem: 213: «in the abstract language here adopted for metaphysical statement, 'passing on' becomes 'creativity', in the dictionary sense of the verb create, 'to bring forth, beget, produce'. Thus, according to the third principle, no entity can be divorced from the notion of creativity».

24 The theme is indeed faced and developed in a famous note: «They are the constituent factors of matter. So, if "atomism" designates a theory which assumes something simple as constituent of matter, then the true philosophy is nonetheless atomism. However, since it only asserts a dynamic simple constituent of matter, it is dynamic atomism. Each original quality is for us an actant of a determinate degree, and every such actant is – truly singular. – No individuality is to be attributed to matter without such original unities, which are not the unities of a product, but of productivity. [...] (We have posited simple actants of indeterminate, i.e., of infinite multiplicity in matter, as ideal ground of explanation. This basis of explanation is ideal because it presupposes something ideal, namely, that Nature has unfolded itself into simple factors. If we proceed further down this path we shall arrive at an atomistic system. However, this system, on account of its insufficiency, will finally just drive us back to the dynamic system)» (SW III, 86-87).

25 Mumford 2006: «1. There are subatomic particles that are simple. 2. That which is simple has no lower-level components or properties. 3. The properties of subatomic particles are (all) dispositional. 4. The grounds of a dispositional property can be found only among the lower-level components or properties of that of which it is a property. Therefore, [5] The dispositional properties of subatomic particles have no ground. From which it follows by existential generalisation that, [6] There exist some ungrounded dispositions».



26 It is to be observed that in any case, the organism for the Schelling of the philosophy of nature is to be understood as the third part of the process of nature, which has matter as its first power.

27 In his 1793 work, *Ueber die Verhältnisse der organischen Kräfte unter einander in der Reihe der verschiedenen Organisationen*, which for Schelling constitutes the epochal contribution to the history of nature (SW II, 565), Kiemeyer proposes a theory of recapitulation also extended to the inorganic world. Schelling takes up Kiemeyer's thesis, making of it non-linear use, so it is the unity of recapitulation and becomes the same 'dynamic process': «the continual self- production of matter [...] recapitulated at various levels» [...] «since organic nature is nothing but inorganic nature repeating itself at a higher power; then, with the categories of the construction of matter in general, those for the construction of the organic product are also given» (SW IV, 4).

28 A fundamental distinction which Schelling recognises as a further merit and result of the philosophy of nature (SW VII, 357).

29 In *Stuttgart Lessons*, Schelling actually clarifies how the System is not something to construct and apply to reality, but simply to recognise therein: «To what extent is a system ever possible? I would answer that long before man decided to create a system, there already existed one, that of the world or cosmos» (SW VII, 421).

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