



k a b i r i

The Official Journal of the North American Schelling Society

Volume 1 (2018)

The Ungrounded Nature of Being: Grounding a Dynamic Ontology from Nature-Philosophy to Positive Philosophy

Emilio Carlo Corriero

The fact that in around 1844, and at the height of his positive philosophy period, Schelling dedicates himself to drafting a work entirely dedicated to issues in the nature-philosophy, such as the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* (*Darstellung des Naturprozesses*), in the explicit attempt to give continuity to the speculative physics theories set out in the 1799 *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*) and in the 1801 *General Deduction of Dynamical Process* (*Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Processes*) in particular, raises a number of questions of both a historiographic nature and, above all, of a more strictly theoretical nature, which merit an in-depth analysis.¹ The *Presentation of the Process of Nature*, together with the other works from Schelling's later *Naturphilosophie*, brings into question all of the interpretations that split Schelling's philosophy into different phases,² as well as highlights how his interest in the nature-philosophy did not die out between the late 1790s and 1806. In addition, and far more significantly, the presence of a work such as the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* in that theoretical context, in which Schelling was working in particular on the grounding of positive philosophy and on its relationship with negative philosophy and on the passage from the latter to the former, leads us to reflect

¹ See *Darstellung des Naturprozesses*, SW X: 301-390.

² The first to introduce this distinction within Schelling's philosophy was probably Eduard von Hartmann. For a literature survey on Schelling's reception and the readings which describe his philosophy as a sum of different phases see Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 3 and note 3.

on the radical role and relevance of the nature-philosophy for Schelling's entire philosophical development, as well as on the particular relationship that his positive philosophy has with *Naturphilosophie*.

But what kind of relationship exists between Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and his positive philosophy? At first, it could be tempting to say that there are no crossover points between these two 'phases' of Schelling's philosophy,³ yet, upon further consideration, one realizes that such a claim basically rests on the definitions (hasty in some cases and which at the very least should be rethought⁴) that we give to these phases, as well as, to some extent, on the same interpretation that splits his philosophy into distinct and successive phases, all of which should be set aside in favour of a concept that sees the internal unity⁵ and continuity of Schelling's project. Following from these preliminary considerations, the argument that I hereafter intend to maintain and verify is that the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* shows once more that it is precisely the *Naturphilosophie* that constitutes the backbone of Schelling's entire philosophical agenda,⁶ not in the sense that the entire Schelling's philosophy has to be seen as a nature-philosophy, but rather in the sense that his nature-philosophy has to be read as the "grounding of the entire system of philosophy," as Schelling himself states in his *Introduction to Philosophy*.

What I claim in this essay is not that positive philosophy can be reduced to nature-philosophy, but rather that the former is grounded on the theoretical results of the latter, in such a way that the issue of a free act of creation at the beginning of being arises as a (necessary) consequence of the natural process elaborated in the *Naturphilosophie*. Recently Sean McGrath has argued against the idea that positive philosophy is to be intended as a nature-philosophy, since "revelation is not a natural occurrence but an act of freedom," namely an act that is unprethinkable, while the being analyzed by nature-philosophy "is not unprethinkable being," but eminently "prethinkable being."⁷ I agree with the claim that positive philosophy is not a nature-philosophy, but I argue in this essay that the late nature-philosophy aims exactly to analyze the free act of creation as a consequence of a specific antecedent, that is the ungroundedness of the dynamical process that it investigates. Moreover, I will show how

3 In recent literature on Schelling, the affinity between his nature-philosophy and his positive philosophy has been shown and sometimes developed. See Marcela Garcia, "Schelling's Late Negative Philosophy, Crisis and Critique of Pure Reason," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 3 (2), (2011): 141-164, and Iain Hamilton Grant, "The Remains of the World: Grounds and Powers in Schelling's Later Naturphilosophie," *Schelling-Studien* 1, (2013): 3-24.

4 For example, in the way suggested by Sean J. McGrath in the introduction to his *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3-6.

5 Cf. W.E. Erhardt, "Nur ein Schelling," *Studi Urbinati* 55 (1977): 111-122, in which the author claims that the concept of freedom constitutes the core of Schelling's philosophy.

6 The reconstructive work by Iain Hamilton Grant moves in this direction, in his *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*.

7 S.J. McGrath, "Is the Late Schelling Still Doing Naturephilosophy?" *Angelaki*, 21:4 (2016): 121-141.

the construction of matter in the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* is in continuity with the grounding of the idea of the necessary being and with the role assigned to the unprethinkable Being (*unvordenkliches Seyn*), and how both the ideal and natural moments of the grounding of “what exists” (*das Existierende*) basically aim to trace a form of ungrounded dynamic ontology, which characterises Schelling’s entire philosophical project.

Nature-Philosophy as a Positive Philosophy

The basic idea that we have begun to highlight, and from which we now intend to move forward, is that the nature-philosophy is really the theoretical core of the subsequent developments in Schelling’s philosophy, and that even positive philosophy is indebted to some extent to the premises—as well as theoretical acquisitions—of the *Naturphilosophie*.

To understand this particular relationship that exists between Schelling’s nature-philosophy and his positive philosophy, we must first unravel the proper meaning to be given to these ‘phases’ of the philosopher’s thought. Schelling is quite explicit in his definition of *Naturphilosophie*, despite several misunderstandings that in some ways still negatively influence its proper understanding, and there are many passages in which the philosopher, claiming the originality of his project, warns the reader and the scholar of reducing his nature-philosophy to a theory of nature, which would aim to apply a particular philosophical theory to the latest and most significant results of the science of the time, or rather a study simply aimed at inserting the results of science into a system of knowledge.⁸ The *Naturphilosophie* is not, therefore, a form of secondary philosophy which aims at ‘systematically’ studying a specific field of being, such as ‘nature,’ reading it as a part of or a ‘phase’ in a given ‘system of being,’ but as Schelling writes in his essay “On the Relationship between Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy in General” (*Über das Verhältnis der Naturphilosophie zur Philosophie überhaupt*), published in 1802 in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* (*Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*), which he edited together with Hegel, “the nature-philosophy is, as such, the entire and undivided philosophy” (SW V: 107). Or rather, inasmuch as it is an *a priori* study of the idea of nature, it does not have a particular and determined field of being as theme, but focuses directly on the ‘becoming’ of being itself, and precisely and only in this sense it is the only authentic philosophy.

Although Schelling repeatedly returned to this definition during the course of his philosophy, limiting the nature-philosophy to just one part of

⁸ See in particular the “Introduction to the Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature” (1797); SW II-1-73, “The Introduction to the First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature” (1799); SW III: 269-326, and the essay “On the Relationship between Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy in General” (1802); SW V: 106-124.

his whole philosophy,⁹ this does not change the fundamental assumption. As he writes in the 1830 *Introduction to Philosophy* (*Einleitung in die Philosophie*), the nature-philosophy is the only and true philosophy because of the fact that it is only from this, due to its being “the grounding of the entire system,” that an adequate consideration of being itself can begin as such.¹⁰ Given this interpretation, and to continue with our claim to continuity, if the nature-philosophy is the only philosophy in that it pre-eminently investigates the object par excellence, namely being itself insofar as it is unconditional (unthinged) and indeterminate, all that remains is to attempt a possible definition of positive philosophy.

The task immediately appears considerably more complex. At first it is tempting to resort to the *ex negativo* definition provided by Schelling himself in opposition to negative philosophy based on the known distinction between the different subjects under investigation: if negative philosophy is the philosophy which focuses on the *Was* of being, i.e. the essence (what it is), then positive philosophy has the *Daß* of being as its subject, i.e., the very fact of its existence (that it is). This distinction does not really tell us much about the philosophical project underlying positive philosophy, since it seems to be a simple introduction necessary to the historical narratives of Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology and Philosophy of Revelation. In other words, given the indubitable (and ungrounded) existence of being, nothing would be left for philosophy but the historical narrative of its phases. Now, positive philosophy is certainly an historical philosophy in the sense that it is the recognition of what just exists and the resulting ‘description’ of its ‘history.’ It is worth observing, however, that for Schelling the ‘historical’ characteristic of this philosophy does not at all lie in the historical narrative in itself, 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, while negative philosophy is non-historical since it seeks to understand the essence of its object and is grounded on the need for logical-rational connections. However this does not mean that historic philosophy can do without rational philosophy, which is, in fact, “necessary for the foundation of each system.”¹¹ The real theoretical core of positive philosophy, as can be effectively deduced at the beginning of the various accounts offered by Schelling, is precisely the necessity of its ‘grounding,’ which is however only ever intended as a grounding of ‘speculative’ order.

9 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” (SW VII: 331-335). 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, F.W.J. Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (1830), ed. by Walter E. Ehrhardt (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1989), 55; SW XI: 372; SW XII: 71.

10 Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 55.

11 Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 10.

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*).”¹² What at first looks like a limit of positive philosophy compared with negative philosophy, which considers being as starting from a ground, is instead a true gain in Schelling’s position compared with a form of philosophy that intends to reduce the real to the rational. In my view, this original position of positive philosophy derives from his first deliberations in the *Naturphilosophie* and the theoretical problems that the latter aimed at resolving. Just as the nature-philosophy moves from the unconditional of being itself, since it describes not the being but rather the becoming-being (*das Werden zum Sein*), namely an ongoing process, so positive philosophy must start from the absolutely positive, from the absolute *prius*, that is from that which can never be known *a priori* at all (and so it is unprethinkable, i.e., *unvordenklich*); this allows therefore, indeed presupposes, “something positive, such as will, freedom, action, and not something simply negative, penetrable through the sole need of thought.”¹³ In the approach that we propose, the fact that Schelling here evokes “will” or “freedom” as that “something positive” from which historical philosophy comes, is not a problem at all. We know that from the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* onwards, will and liberty must be understood as rooted in nature, in fact as manifestations of nature itself, that is as (anthropomorphic) expressions describing an area that the intellect would not otherwise describe.¹⁴ What should be taken into account with these considerations is that the *prius* from which positive philosophy begins, insofar as it is by definition the *antecedens* par excellence, can only coincide with the free beginning, or rather with the becoming-being (*das Werden zum Sein*), which was already the subject of Schelling’s considerations regarding the well-known *Philebus* (26d8) passage in the comment to *Timaeus* in 1794.¹⁵ In other words, if the nature-philosophy 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 (characteristic of a negative nature-philosophy), thus introducing a free grounding, as an original act of creation, at the basis of the process itself, and

¹² Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 13.

¹³ Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 13.

¹⁴ As a parenthesis, note how Schelling, in an attempt to research the natural roots of human freedom, matches will (*Wollen*) with original being (*Urseyn*), and thus with the dynamism that goes with this match, and later how positive philosophy brings the same will alongside the tensions that rule the dynamics of the concepts of speculation: “The highest speculative concepts are always simultaneously the most profound ethical concepts” (SW XIII: 67); English: F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 135. Positive philosophy starts *ipso facto* only with a wanting. SW XIII: 93.

¹⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, *Timaeus* (1794), ed. Hartut Buchner (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1994), 63.

setting the becoming of being, accordingly with its essence, absolutely free.

In the 1830 *Introduction to Philosophy*, Schelling affirms that the nature-philosophy is not yet positive philosophy but is certainly its natural boundary (*natürliche Grenze*), not only for the fact that it eliminates the concept of being as an originary substratum and assumes nature as unconditioned—in a proposition of the *First Outline* that to some extent can be certainly understood as the manifesto of a ‘positive’ nature-philosophy (SW III: 77)—but above all for the fact that the nature-philosophy is the science that got 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 cosmos. Nature-philosophy has surely the merit of having described the construction of matter and the dynamic process, but if the nature-philosophy succeeded in defining a process, which is a great achievement, then (positive) philosophy has to move forwards, to go beyond the process, and in order to do this it is necessary to return to the very fact of free creation: “Philosophy has not gone beyond the concept of process,” and “neither the nature-philosophy has broken the circle of necessity,”¹⁶ even if the *Freiheitsschrift*, which to some extent has to be read as a work of nature-philosophy, 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: 395-96).¹⁷

In an attempt to reconstruct Schelling’s philosophy as a unitary and organic development, and therefore trying to follow on from his thesis that it is the concept of freedom that constitutes the unitary axis of his entire philosophy, Walter E. Erhardt suggested (in an early 1980s essay¹⁸) seeing the relationship between the nature-philosophy, correctly understood, and positive philosophy as one would the relationship between a body and its organs. In this organic unity that has freedom at its core, there would be no room for a materialistic reading of Schelling’s philosophy, since the nature-philosophy is not based on a banal ontological priority given to nature as opposed to the spirit (the mind). While it is true that, as much in the first theses of the nature-philosophy as in the fundamental positions of positive philosophy (and in contrast to the formulation of Kant’s table of categories), Schelling gives modal-ontological priority to actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) rather than possibility (*Möglichkeit*)—a reversal that is due partly to the influence exerted by Hölderlin¹⁹ and partly to

16 Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 60, 71.

17 F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 69-60.

18 Walter E. Erhardt, “Die Naturphilosophie und die Philosophie der Offenbarung. Zur Kritik materialistischer Schelling-Forschung,” in *Natur und geschichtlicher Prozess. Schelling zur Naturphilosophie F.W.J. Schellings*, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 337-359.

19 Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Frühe Aufsätze und Übersetzungen*, ed. by Michael Franz, Hans Gerhard Steiner and D.E. Sattler (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern: 1991); Cf. also Manfred Frank, *Natura e Spirito. Lezioni sulla filosofia di Schelling*, ed. by Emilio C. Corriero

Kant's own pre-critical views that described being as absolute *Setzung* (absolute position)²⁰—such a priority given to *Wirklichkeit* does not portray a materialist concept, but rather always refers to an actual-dynamic ambit that from the beginning precedes and accompanies the construction of matter and later the definition of being itself.

As stated at the start of the *General Deduction of Dynamical Process*, “the science of nature has a unique task: to construct the matter” (SW IV: 1). Now, such a task, which according to Schelling can be fulfilled using the speculative method, refers to the description of a “dynamic process” that underlies the grounding of being and therefore also the constitution of matter as the *primum existens*, and it repeats continuously and at different levels and potencies of being itself, thus accompanying being in its continuous constitution/creation of itself.

If Schelling intends, as clearly he does, to follow and probe the various phases and potencies of this process with his nature-philosophy, then it goes without saying that what constitutes the very essence of his *Naturphilosophie* has to be the investigation of the original grounding of being: an investigation that, given the non-objectifiability of the object under discussion, is necessarily doomed to failure and merely hypothetically (or rather speculatively) depicts the unconditional that precedes being and its forms as ‘absolute activity.’

While it is true that from the thesis expressed in the 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy (Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie)* onwards, matter is certainly depicted as the *primum existens*, where the principles of the real and ideal are united, nevertheless this still presupposes an absolute and even unconditional identity, whose essence is nothing but force: “The essence of the absolute identity, in that it is the immediate cause of reality [*Realität*], is FORCE. It comes from the concept of force. Since each immanent grounding of reality is called force” (SW IV: 145). Schelling's assertion should be read under the premise that absolute identity is to be understood as the absolute actuality (*Wirklichkeit*, whose etymology refers to effectiveness [from the meaning of the German word *wirken*]) of being, which is not to be read as the absolute *Setzung* (absolute position) of Kant's pre-critical work, *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, but rather as the absolute *Thätigkeit* (absolute activity) of the *First Outline (Erster Entwurf)*: that is, as the unconditional being that determines the subsequent (ontological, not chronological) and constant distinction in the various realities (*Realitäten*), forms, of being in its own (always becoming) dynamic.

In the later development of Schelling's thought, this actuality would be described as the absolute freedom of the infinite subject, as the infinite potency of being, that is, as the eternal freedom of the *urständliche Subjektivität*

(Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2010), 97f.

20 Cf. Manfred Frank, “Existenz, Identität und Urteil. Schellings späte Rückkehr zu Kant,” in Manfred Frank, *Auswege aus dem deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 312-374.

(original and never objective subjectivity, from which comes every possible form of Being), as had already been described in the 1821 Erlangen Lectures.²¹ But the infinite potency of being is nothing more than the substance of reason in so far as it is the “infinite potency of knowing” (SW XIII: 75); what positive philosophy is seeking instead is the being itself:

The potency (the immediate content of reason) is indeterminateness per se (το ἀόριστον [*to aóriston*]), insofar as it can be potency, subject, matter (since these are synonymous expressions), or even being (*das Seyende*). Consequently, one does not have being itself as long as one has not excluded from it what is material or simply potential (that which can be) (SW XIII: 75).²²

According to Schelling, what makes the potency of being possible is what there is even before the content of reason: the being that Schelling describes as unprethinkable (*das Unverdenkliche*). By virtue of the modal-ontological priority given to actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) in contrast to possibility (*Möglichkeit*), the unprethinkable being literally comes before reason (in that it is infinite potency of knowing), which thinks and precedes it ontologically, ensures the infinite potency of being, and can at most be depicted as *potentia potentiae*, which corresponds to *Wirklichkeit*. The actuality is *potentia potentiae*: that potency (inappropriately named), which has the (same) potency within its power, while being the first to ontologically ground the plan, the potency, of this *dynamis*.²³ The “blind Being” shows what can be only *post actum*; even “the being of God himself comes before his thought.”²⁴

The pure *potentia*, the beginning of negative philosophy, was even incapable of being potency and it could not be regarded as such. Only the pure being is the potency of the potency, and since it cannot be potency of the *actus*, it is materially already *potentia potentiae*. What always has its being first is actually something which can will or begin; precisely due to the fact that it

21 “Freedom is the essence of the subject, that is, it is itself nothing other than eternal freedom The absolute subject is the eternal, pure power (*Können*), not power for something (and thus already limited), but power for power, power without intention and without object; this is the highest possible state, and wherever we see it we seem to see a ray of that original liberty ... that it is will: not the will of a being that is distinct from it, but nothing but will, the will itself ... in a state of perfect indifference (an indifference which in turn includes itself and the non-indifference); and at least historically it is perhaps well known that precisely this indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*, *Indifferenz*) was used as a form of what is more properly known as the Absolute.” F.W.J. Schelling, *Initia Philosophiae Universae*. Erlangen Vorlesungen WS 1820/1821, ed. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969), 22.

22 Schelling, *Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, 143.

23 F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 162-164.

24 Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 163.

has its being as independent from itself, it has its being first and is sure of it.²⁵

Although Iain Hamilton Grant maintains that nature-philosophy is already a sort of positive philosophy, since its sources cannot be thought in advance (according to the principle articulated in the positive philosophy, “it is not because there is thinking that there is being, but rather because there is being that there is thinking” (SW XIII: 162),²⁶ in an essay published in the first volume of *Schelling-Studien*, he shows how the late nature-philosophy is in greater continuity with the late negative philosophy than it is with the positive, since the object of nature-philosophy is first of all the “potency of being.”²⁷ In partial amendment of Grant’s claim that the absolute activity of the unconditional described in the *First Outline* emerges again (in another form) in the infinite potency of being of the later Schelling, I propose instead that the absolute activity of being is rather manifested in the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of the unprethinkable being (*unvordenkliches Seyn*), since this latter has to be read in continuity with the absolute subjectivity (*Urständlichkeit*) of nature. As additional proof of this, as we shall see, in the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* the passage from the idea of being as existent to its effective (material) realisation happens thanks to a *universio* that inverts the order of subject (-A) and object(+A) in which reason thinks of being as potency of being from the start, and therefore as subject (-A).

In this sense, inasmuch as it addresses the impossible grounding of being—speculatively describing it as a dynamic ambit, that is, as that which cannot be ‘thought’ by reason simply as what can be, but exclusively as that which has always been (and thus before it could be merely the substance of reason), like original *dynamis*, like *potentia potentiae*—the nature-philosophy must be understood, from its beginning and more so in its later expressions, as a positive philosophy. On the other hand, one can definitely say that Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* starts with his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* (and *Philebus*), a dialogue that in his Berlin Lectures Schelling himself does not hesitate to define as a philosophical work in which “a transition to the positive” is carried out (SW XIII: 100).²⁸

25 Schelling *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 165.

26 Schelling, *Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, 202.

27 Iain Hamilton Grant, “The Remains of the World: Grounds and Powers in Schelling’s Later *Naturphilosophie*,” *Schelling-Studien* 1 (2013): 3-24; Cf. Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*; Grant, “Everything is Primal Germ or Nothing Is. The Deep Field Logic of Nature,” *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* 19, 1 (2015): 106-124.

28 Schelling, *Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, 159.

Thinking What Exists

Considering the first proposition in the 1799 *First Outline*,²⁹ which echoes the opening of *Ichschrift (Of the I as Principle of Philosophy)* (SW I: 163ff.), the character of *antecedens*, there clearly described as the unconditional, cannot in any instance relate to one thing in particular or a state of things. In fact, it is always and only due to becoming, or rather to power, in other words to what has effectiveness-actuality (in the sense of *Wirklichkeit*) in its consequences, compared to which, in fact, it is mere power-potency. And if, as Schelling observes, “nature is what behaves in accordance with a law of antecedence” (Schelling XI: 375), its beginning evaded any onto-theological ‘foundation’ (*Begründung*), just as the beginning of positive philosophy can never be described in onto-theological terms.³⁰

The beginning of positive philosophy therefore finds realization in the consequences that determine it as *antecedens* (will, freedom), and therefore in the history of being,³¹ but just as the *Naturphilosophie* is not a mere theory of nature, and indeed, insomuch as it is above all speculative physics, is about the very idea of nature and specifically the origin of the dynamic process,³² so positive philosophy is not reducible to the narration of Mythology and Revelation, but is above all speculative science because it deals with the impossible ground from which this narration must/can start. It is in fact, as we shall see shortly, also the ‘speculative’ method that guides the unification of *Naturphilosophie* and positive philosophy, which is a method that, unlike Hegel, Schelling does not use in a way which allow negative philosophy to overstep its limits (SW XIII: 80), but rather to ‘describe,’ through hypothesis, the ‘positive’ (dynamic) grounding of being insofar as it exists.

29 “The unconditioned cannot be sought in any individual ‘thing’ nor in anything of which one can say that it ‘is.’ For what ‘is’ only partakes of being, and is only an individual form or kind of being. Conversely, one can never say of the unconditioned that it ‘is.’ For it is BEING ITSELF, and as such, it does not exhibit itself entirely in any finite product, and every individual is, as it were, a particular expression of it” (SW III: 77). English: F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. by Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 13.

30 Paraphrasing Aristotle in the 1854 *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy (Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie)*, Schelling points out that the ‘law of antecedence,’ which is found in the powers and in particular when dealing with the beginning, had been widely disseminated and used by nature-philosophy and that it is precisely via the latter that it must be demonstrated (SW XI: 376); cf. Grant, “The Remains of the World.”

31 On the freedom of grounding in the late philosophy, see Claudio Ciancio, “Essere e libertà nell’ultimo Schelling,” *Giornale di metafisica* XXVI, 69-90 (2004): 84ff.

32 “For, inasmuch as the first problem of this science, that of inquiring into the absolute cause of motion (without which Nature is not in itself a finished whole), is absolutely incapable of a mechanical solution. Because mechanically motion results only from motion to infinity, there remains for the real construction of speculative physics only one way open, the dynamic, with the presupposition that motion arises not only from motion, but even from rest” Speculative physics “occupies itself solely and entirely with the original causes of motion in Nature, that is, solely with the dynamical phenomena” (SW III: 274). Schelling, *First Outline*, 195-196.

But for now let us limit ourselves to the noted affinities and move on from these to consider the progress of *Presentation of the Process of Nature* more closely. The work effectively and specifically offers itself as an exposition, or exhibition, of that dynamic process that in the early years of the Nineteenth Century Schelling had attempted to ‘deduce’ (in *General Deduction of Dynamical Process*). Such an exposition actually ends in the development of that connection that Schelling establishes here between *Naturphilosophie* as speculative physics and the speculation about the deduction of the positive philosophy principles; that is, in transitioning from the ‘ideal foundation’ of the beginning of positive philosophy to the ‘real foundation’ of being as a ‘construction’ of matter.

As often happens with Schelling’s works, the deliberations in the opening lines of the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* are of fundamental importance for the subsequent theoretical development of the text. In just a few effective strokes, Schelling introduces us to the context of positive philosophy while still pinning down the starting point of his first nature-philosophy: he immediately declares that the subject of philosophical investigation in general, and of the nature-philosophy in particular, is “the existent in general, independently of all particular and contingent determinations” (SW X: 303). Now, the existent in general, precisely in that it is independent of any particular determination, cannot be conditioned by anything, nor can it be described as the totality of beings (as Kant would have it), because that would mean having to still deal with a concept that was dependent on particular determinations. It is therefore to be read as being in clear and direct affinity with the unconditional being itself (*Seyn Selbst*), which was already the subject of the first of Schelling’s works and which is described, for example, in the first principle of the *First Outline*.

If the definition of the subject of philosophical investigation in the 1844 *Darstellung* takes us back, so to speak, to a research field that is already well-known, in order to further clarify the context within which he intends to move, and in full awareness of the ‘positive’ character of his philosophy, Schelling immediately poses some questions that define the path that the investigation must follow: “What is the existent? What belongs to the existent?” But above all: “What am I thinking when I think what exists?” (SW X: 303). Asking this question—*Was denke ich, wenn ich das Existirende denke?*--together with the first question “What is the existent?” means immediately re-creating that divergence between negative and positive philosophy necessary to the exposition of the natural process that Schelling aims to produce. In fact, answering the question “what is the existent?” seems to imply precisely a solution of ‘negative’ philosophy, which aims at the *Was* of being. Yet already in this first question, the subject of the investigation resists any negative definition since—Schelling specifies in the opening—the existent in general must be understood “independently of all particular and contingent determinations,” namely unconditionally. The existent in general can therefore be the subject only of a ‘positive’ philosophy, which focuses on being insofar as it itself constructs

the *a priori* both of being and of thinking. To further clarify Schelling, in fact, poses the question: “What am I thinking when I think what exists?” This question clearly introduces the relationship between being and thinking in the context of positive philosophy, i.e., it is made clear 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).³³ This precedence attributed to being is hardly a novelty within Schelling’s philosophy, one to be found only in his books and essays from his positive philosophy years, since this ontological priority already underlies Schelling’s first philosophical formulations.

Thinking of the existent means to somehow create a concept of it, but the concept of the existent certainly cannot have an ontological priority over being itself. Forty-five years earlier in his *First Outline*, Schelling had made clear the need for nature-philosophy to eliminate the ‘concept’ of being as an ‘original concept’: “The concept of being as an originary substratum should be absolutely eliminated from the nature-philosophy, just as it has been from transcendental philosophy. The above proposition says this and nothing else: ‘Nature should be viewed as unconditioned’” (SW III: 78).³⁴ With this brief step, which rightly could be considered, as it were, the precursor of the ‘positive’ nature-philosophy, Schelling intended to clarify that since the privileged subject of the nature-philosophy is being itself, insofar as it is unconditional (unthinged), it cannot in any way be defined/understood using a concept, since the latter in qualifying the subject to be conceptualized already assumes some form of conditioning.

The question “what am I thinking when I think what exists?” therefore aims to highlight, in the possible answers that it evokes, how a general ‘thinking of the existent’ cannot happen except speculatively: it is impossible, in fact, to think of the existent in general as coming from a ground, and thus ‘negatively.’ Thinking the existent in general implies free thinking, or rather speculative thinking, that is, it goes “looking for opportunities that allow achievement of a particular purpose in science” (SW XIV: 345). Thinking the existent in general means, therefore, to think of its becoming (the becoming-being), that is, its ‘ground-ing.’ When and if I think what in general exists, I cannot, in fact, think of it once and for all. The German expression *wenn*, which ties the first part of the question (what am I thinking/*was denke ich*) with the second (I think of the existent/*ich das Existierende denke*), can be translated either with the temporal adverb ‘when,’ or with the hypothetical conjunction ‘if.’ The latter option introduces a sceptical connotation that should probably not be undervalued: is it really possible, in fact, to think of the existent in general? Thinking the existent in general would mean thinking about the concept that describes it, about the act and about the process of conceptualization all at the same time, but the existent in general must be understood “independently of all particular

33 Schelling, *Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, 202.

34 Schelling, *First Outline*, 14.

determinations,” and its concept is certainly a particular determination of it. Thinking the existent in general in onto-theological terms is therefore effectively impossible. Thinking the existent in general cannot therefore mean anything more than thinking about its becoming, its foundation (ground-ing), which ends precisely ‘when’ I think it, or rather, when I am constructing it. Besides, in the same determination of the being itself within the Berlin lectures, Schelling clarifies how in the end his concept is not something that is immediate, but should instead be produced (SW XIII: 77).

Thinking of the existent in general means ‘to think’ of its dynamics, i.e., ‘to create it,’ just as philosophising about nature means to create nature itself (SW III: 67). In fact, the speculative hypotheses that form the basis of Schelling’s positive philosophy project re-employ the speculative physics method that underlies his *Naturphilosophie*. According to the definition given by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, speculative knowledge is opposed to the knowledge of nature and “concerns an object, or those concepts of an object which cannot be reached in any experience.”³⁵ In the ideal foundation of Schelling’s positive philosophy, speculative knowledge and knowledge of nature remain opposed and distinct until history enters the fray and knits them back together. In the case of the nature-philosophy, however, the distance between speculative knowledge and knowledge of nature (or experience) is abolished through the construction of the matter, i.e. in the transition to the ‘real ground,’ which can be rightfully understood as the last element of Schelling’s metaphysical empiricism. The originality of Schelling’s speculation compared to that of Hegel,³⁶ most likely resides in the natural-philosophical application represented by speculative physics.

To speculate about the existent in general is not the result of a “mechanical” (SW IV: 345) and necessary thought but of a free one, however, this does not mean that it loses its scientific nature, since historical verification (*a posteriori*) must confirm the correctness of the assumptions made, as happens with speculative physics hypotheses which Schelling believes need to obtain empirical confirmation.

In the introduction to the *First Outline*, Schelling explains what he meant by speculative physics by showing how it is not an *a priori* knowledge of nature, but simply the only expository method suited to discussing nature (that is, to think of nature) as it is itself inescapably *a priori*, i.e. the antecedens par excellence: “It is not, therefore, that WE KNOW Nature as *a priori*, but Nature IS *a priori*; that is, everything individual in it is predetermined by the whole or by the idea of a Nature generally. But if Nature is *a priori*, then it must

35 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), B 662/527.

36 Cf. Klaus Düsing, “Spekulation und Reflektion. Zur Zusammenarbeit Schellings und Hegels in Jena,” *Hegel-Studien* 5, (1969): 95-128; R.W. Meyer, “Zum Begriff der spekulativen Physik bei Schelling,” in *Natur und Subjektivität*, ed. by Reinhard Heckmann, Hermann Krings und Rudolf W. Meyer, (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1985), 129-155.

be possible to recognize it as something that is *a priori*, and this is really the meaning of our affirmation” (SW III: 279).³⁷ Now, the speculative hypotheses of positive philosophy are first and foremost about the ‘grounding’ of being itself, or rather the inference of the principles of existence. This is particularly evident in the first lectures of *The Philosophy of Revelation (The Grounding of Positive Philosophy)* or even more in *Another Deduction of the Principles of Positive Philosophy (Andere Deduktion der Principien der positiven Philosophie)*.

Universio and Unprethinkable Being

In continuity with the 1801 General Deduction thesis, which states that the only real task for the nature-philosophy is to construct the matter (SW IV: 144), the speculative hypotheses in the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* focus directly on the constitution of matter, or more precisely and to use the Kantian terminology to which Schelling directly refers, expressly on its construction. Compared to the progression of *Another Deduction of the Principles of Positive Philosophy* for example, which, starting from what comes before any thought, aimed at finding “in the unconditional being or the existent ... the real monad, that is what is permanent, the principle that stands above everything” (SW XIV: 337), the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* goes beyond the ‘ideal foundation’ and requires the actual construction of matter through that *universio* which makes the transition from idea to reality actual and real.³⁸ It can be said, in fact, that the *Presentation of the Process of Nature* completes the positive journey Schelling embarked upon with his first nature-philosophy, presenting with his first stroke the ideal inference of the existent, which is characteristic of positive philosophy, and, therefore, in keeping with his natural-philosophical aim of exposing, or “exhibiting,” the dynamic process, namely its transition to the reality of the matter as a possible (free) real ground of being.

Through the construction, the Kantian separation between speculation and experience is eliminated,³⁹ and yet that transition from pure speculation, which gives back (so to speak) the ‘ideal foundation’ of the beginning of positive philosophy, to the construction of matter, which in Schelling’s eyes constitutes the passage (Übergang) to the ‘real ground’ of being (i.e., the beginning of the movement and thus of the dynamic process), is also an *a priori* foundation. The construction of matter, the true task of the nature-philosophy, is, in fact, always and in any case *a priori*, since nature itself is *a priori*. It is about an *a*

³⁷ Schelling, *First Outline*, 198-99.

³⁸ The *Universio* had been already described by Schelling in the *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, cf. Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 115ff. Moreover, Schelling uses the same expression in the context of his *Philosophy of Mythology* describing with it the passage from unity to the first plurality, cf. for example SW XII: 90-93; SW XIII: 304.

³⁹ Michael Rudolphi, *Produktion und Konstruktion. Zur Genese der Naturphilosophie in Schellings Früwerk*, (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 2001), 131ff.

priori thought that is not focused on being intended as ‘what can be’ as happens in negative philosophy, but rather on ‘being in action,’ which is an effect of the dynamic *a priori* (or becoming *a priori*), which nature is and has always been.

In fact, in response to the question, “What am I thinking when I think what exists?,” Schelling immediately presents an ideal inference of what in general exists, which essentially recalls the steps of *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, and obviously begins with the subject $-A$, insofar as it has an intransitive capacity to be, which can be contrasted with the pure object $+A$. But “what the existent properly is only exists where the subject and object is one and the same” (SW X: 304), i.e., in the third $\pm A$. However, as Schelling clearly shows in the development of his exposition, the existent in general does not come in a single shape, but inasmuch as it is perfect, it has in itself “the beginning ($-A$), middle ($+A$) and end ($\pm A$) closed on itself” (SW X: 306). Now, the existent thus obtained is only the idea of reason, and the problem that arises in the exposition of the natural process is how this idea can now shift to reality: this is exactly what constitutes the natural-philosophical problem, that goes together with the ideal grounding itself of positive philosophy which *Presentation of the Process of Nature* aims to resolve.

Even if that which just is (*das bloß Seyende*) is a pure idea, though “not in the sense of the word as understood in negative philosophy,” because it is an idea in which every potency is excluded—and we can call it the inverted idea (*umgekehrte Idee*) “in which reason is set outside itself” (SW XIII: 162/203)—we are still always concerned with an idea, which requires a transition to the pure reality of matter. Once the immediate capacity-to-be has transitioned to existence, it will cease to be the essentially being-becoming matter, the *primum existens* (A^2): “the first of being to proceed from the Idea,” as a result of a becoming; but:

The last aspect of becoming that we present is that what exists as having become, which was the original subject, becomes again $-A$, the true subject, or as B it is the false subject that cannot be subject; to be returned again to the true subject it must first become object, acknowledge itself as not-subject, and as object it is precisely *potentia veri subjecti*, not mere matter, but an existent and thus as such *actus* and potency. For this contradiction lies in the essence of what we call matter (SW X: 310).

To explain the transition that he introduces here, Schelling takes advantage of the *universio* concept that describes the inversion of the one, namely the subversion of the principles that had constituted the idea of reason of what exists in general. As the transition to actual reality is possible, it is in fact necessary that what was the subject ($-A$) of the ‘preactual’ existent becomes the object, while the object ($+A$) becomes the subject. That matter in the form

of B becomes the subject is not, however, something that can be affirmed with necessity: even though the subjectification of B is indispensable to creation, B has the freedom to define itself (“we cannot unconditionally posit the subordination of B under +A” [SW X: 311]). In the speculative context within which Schelling works, this means that not only the transition from idea to reality remains a speculative hypothesis, but also that the matter as *primum existens*, that is as a real ground (*Realgrund*) for the existence of subjects that arise from it, retains its freedom. And this freedom, that later manifests itself as space, coincides with the matter’s freedom to offer itself as a potency.⁴⁰ “The metaphysical concept of matter is perhaps the most difficult because matter must be something actual, thus *actus*, and of course in turn acts as potency for what it is to become” (SW X: 310).

In order to understand the ambiguity of the metaphysical concept of matter in the context of positive philosophy and the *universio*, as introduced by Schelling, I believe one must go back to the concept of unprethinkable being. In the description of being itself given at the start of *Presentation of the Process of Nature*, one effectively retraces the steps of the *Grounding*, starting from the infinite potency of being as the substance of reason: “what I must think.” Pure object necessarily contrasts with such a subject, and helps to establish the subject-object of being itself. Now, in order to arrive at the idea of the existent, it is certainly more intuitive to start with the subject as potency of being (–A) rather than with the pure act of the unprethinkable being, as happens in the *Another Deduction of the Principles of Positive Philosophy*. However, when understanding the transition of the idea of the existent to the effective-actual matter becomes central, starting with the *unvordenkliches Seyn* as blind actuality, the *Wirklichkeit* from which what can be (*das Seynkönnende*) derives allows one to understand the dual nature of the matter, inasmuch as it is both act and potency, more easily without introducing the *universio* that is needed in the earliest exposition of the idea of the existent.

As *potentia potentiae*, the unprethinkable being, which never offers itself as the substance of reason but if anything as a premise of being and reason itself, is the absolute *Wirklichkeit* which ensures the *Seynkönnende* itself, what can be other, that opposes it and helps to establish the idea of the necessary existent. If indeed it can be said that on the ideal level we find in unprethinkable being that same dynamic that actually repeats itself, on the real-effective level of nature, in the construction and becoming of matter, it does not open the way to a form of speculative materialism,⁴¹ since Schelling never describes

40 “With the setting free of until now merely possible subjects the subject itself, in which they were mere possibilities, must also at the same time become free from the narrows in which it until now found itself, and attain broad, open freedom; this breadth and freedom is space in which (it is essentially to think it this way) the self-extaining subject was already visible from the first as information [*Auskunft*] about itself, simultaneously as the form in which each subject—unrestricted by others—achieves actual existence for itself” (SW X: 313-314).

41 If still in the *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus*, Schelling seems to maintain a form

unprethinkable being (*unvordenkliches Seyn*) as necessary being, but on the contrary and using the Aristotelian definition, he describes it as the “purely contingent,” thus reaffirming the ungroundness on which it rests and ensuring it a free internal dynamic.⁴² “What simply can be as such (*das Seynkönnende*) would have no right to exist alone; however, once the sheer *actu*, i.e., once the merely contingent necessity is, the merely possible (*das bloss Mögliche*) may assert its demands just as unprethinkable being first makes it possible for potency to appear” (SW XIV: 338). What can be (*das Seynkönnende*), which appears ‘after’ the unprethinkable being (*unvordenkliches Seyn*) as such, is not something different from it, but solely and only the same as the merely existent. Between the two there must be a unity that Schelling defines as necessary nature, which is “the necessarily existent in its nature and in its essence” (SW XIV: 339).

Aristotle claims that “the matter, therefore, which is capable of being otherwise than as it usually is, must be the cause of the contingent,”⁴³ but we must remember that Schelling describes unprethinkable being (*unvordenkliches Seyn*) not simply as contingent, but as purely contingent, thus emphasising the impossibility of tracing its foundation to some cause. In Schelling’s original dynamic, in which the opposition of what can be (*das Seynkönnende*)

of speculative materialism, the introduction of the pure contingency of unprethinkable being (*unvordenkliches Seyn*) aims at denying this hypothesis. At the end of that work, Schelling deals with the question of the *creatio ex nihilo* and he introduces alongside the distinction between the μη ὄν [*mē on*] and the οὐκ ὄν [*oúk ón*], a third defined as the “non-existent” (*materia informis*): das *Unseyende* (what is not). If the μη ὄν [*mē on*] is that which is, in the sense that only the effective, real (*wirkliches*) being is excluded from it, while in it persists the possibility of being, the οὐκ ὄν [*oúk ón*] is, instead, that from which not only the reality of being is excluded, but also being in general, and therefore also the possibility of being. Since the definition of οὐκ ὄν [*oúk ón*] does not allow any passage to being and that of μη ὄν [*mē on*] shows that being is already contained in it, although in the form of potency, Schelling introduces, as said above, the *materia informis* as a non-existent: “as a sheer presupposition, as ὑποκείμενον [*hypokeimenon*] of effective creation, this blind being is absolutely not anything, it is not a specific and delimited thing, it is not a real being, but simply that which ... in order to be needs a power opposed to it” (SW X: 285). This passage precedes and implies the successive introduction by Schelling of the pure contingency of *unvordenkliches Seyn* (in the *Darstellung* still described as *materia informis*), in order to highlight once again how his philosophical position cannot be easily described as a mere speculative materialism.

42 “The unprethinkable being precedes everything else insofar as it is purely contingent, but it cannot be configured as the beginning of everything, since it, insofar as it exists simply *actu*, does not preserve a dynamic capacity to act as the principle, but only as the ‘essential presupposition,’ which further more appears only in this manner *a posteriori* in the process already underway. In fact, if the unprethinkable being is to be defined as purely contingent it must be possible to oppose it to something that can be altered, or something “with regard to which ... it can behave as something contingent” (according to the Aristotelian definition).” Emilio C. Corriero, “The Necessity of Contingency in the Late Philosophies of Schelling and Heidegger,” *Nature and Realism in Schelling’s Philosophy*, ed. by Emilio C. Corriero and Andrea Dezi, (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2013), 65.

43 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. William D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, NY: Random House, 1941), 1027a/781.

to *unvordenkliches Seyn* sets off the whole ontological process, we find an intimate essence of this substantial (and always dynamic) identity, namely a ‘force’⁴⁴ that allows the original tension and the process that follows; it cannot therefore be excluded that this force could be that pure material (the spiritual matter), that ‘absolute cause’ (to which it is subject in eternity and therefore exceeds the confines of the principle of sufficient reason) that brings about the pure contingency of *unvordenkliches Seyn*. We are clearly at the level of pure speculation,⁴⁵ and only in this sense are we authorised to formulate this sort of hypothesis. Nonetheless, Schelling’s introduction of (pure) contingency in the field of positive philosophy, which does not present a formal dialectic but rather the current dialectic in the field of freedom, deals directly with the material power of being, since only this original contingency ‘grounds’ the possibility of being in general. “With this contingency is posed the possibility of a power that removes [*aufhebende*] that unprethinkable being ... The blind being is, due to its contingency, precisely the (material) power of that power opposed to it.”⁴⁶

The free principle that stands above all else, and is the object of Schelling’s *Another Deduction*, is therefore that necessary nature which is made up of a ‘becoming’ that is organised in three fundamental moments, which describe the unique inner dynamic of the unprethinkable being: 1) unprethinkable being, inasmuch as it is purely contingent, 2) the potency to be other as a necessary opposition to unprethinkable being, and 3) the free fluctuation, inasmuch as it is pure spirit, between the latter and the former. On the basis of this ‘ungrounded’ dynamic organisation, Schelling therefore tries to construct a post-metaphysical principle: a free foundation (grounding) of being that preserves in its permanent dynamic the being in its ungrounded becoming. Thus understood, unprethinkable being, as the *actus purus* that makes what-can-be possible, constitutes the ideal model for the natural dynamic that leads to the construction of matter, which, as we have said, “must be something actual, thus *actus*, and of course in turn acts as potency for what it is to become” (SW X: 310). Having to also present itself as potency, matter, as the free real ground of being, constitutes the basis for a conception of being that Schelling matures and develops over the years and which can be defined as a dynamic ontology⁴⁷: an expression that clearly intends to refer to the well-known Sophist passage according to which being is essentially nothing other than *dynamis*⁴⁸;

44 As it was described by Schelling in the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (SW IV: 145).

45 “To speculate means going in search of possibility that allows a given purpose, in science, to be reached. They are certainly only possibilities, which must be demonstrated, later, as reality; just as, in a deduction, what is in the first proposition is a hypothesis, in the conclusion is a demonstrated truth” (SW XIV: 344f.).

46 Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 169.

47 Cf. Emilio C. Corriero, *Libertà e conflitto. Da Heidegger a Schelling, per un’ontologia dinamica* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2012).

48 “I suggest that anything has real being that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things that they are

both active power of being and passive potency of being. This expression can in fact describe and summarize, in my view, Schelling's ontological conception throughout his whole philosophical journey. The freedom of the matter actually lies in its becoming and behaving as "potency," a freedom that is not lost in the transition to reality, but which instead, and precisely because of the essential character of its ungrounded foundation, transmits and communicates itself in every form and potency that the existent takes on.

In concluding the *Grounding of the Positive Philosophy* with the description of the transition from the idea of reason to the reality of matter, Schelling does not abandon the speculative field. He thus reaffirms the absolute ungroundness that 'grounds' and sustains being, its potencies and its manifestations from the free act of creation to the ongoing process of nature.

nothing but power." Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Francis M. Cornford, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 247e/992.