

## Schelling's Real Materialism

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### Abstract

In this paper, some of Schelling's core ideas on consciousness and nature are investigated with the aim of emphasizing their historical and systematic relevance to the current discussion on consciousness and panpsychism. The focus is on the reasons and consequences of Schelling's "turn" from his early Fichtean idealism to the "real materialism" of his later Identity Philosophy. It is shown that Schelling's way of coping with the ontological problems of the emergence of consciousness from a natural basis is by all means comparable to current panpsychist strategies dealing with these topics. The paper concludes by presenting some of the prospects of, as well as a critical discussion of, the impacts of Schelling's assumptions.

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### 1. Introduction

What justifies reconsidering a speculative metaphysical system like Schelling's when it is generally considered to have been refuted long ago? To my mind, a justification can be found in its impacts on the current discussion of questions concerning the emergence of consciousness. These impacts are of both historical interest and systematical import. I will attempt to focus on both aspects in the following sections. But let me begin with some comments on the title of this essay.

The title suggests that Schelling is a materialist. If materialism is taken as "the view that every real, concrete phenomenon in the universe is physical" (Strawson 2003a, 49), then it seems to beg the question to assume that Schelling is a materialist – at least with respect to his historical position as one of the primary representatives of German Idealism. This of course is not what I wish to maintain. I do not hold that Schelling is a "mere" materialist who assumes that the physical realm, taken as the "in itself [...] wholly and utterly non-experiential" (Strawson 2006, 11) is the ultimate layer of reality. In fact, I suggest interpreting Schelling's position as a form of "real materialism" – the monistic thesis that the mental and the physical are two aspects of one fundamental "kind of stuff" (Strawson 2006, 7), classically labeled

with the term “matter”.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, “real materialism” is a kind of dual- or double-aspect monism.

The core thesis of this position is bound to two basic principles of Leibniz’s and Kant’s philosophy: the principle of sufficient reason and the principle of continuity between all appearances.<sup>2</sup> According to these two principles, nothing suddenly “pops up” into existence without sufficient grounding. In the scope of questions concerning the emergence of mind from matter, it is assumed that matter is intrinsically equipped with all the necessary qualities to provide a smooth emergence of all the concrete high-level phenomena and their intrinsic features. Hence, the underlying basis, nature, must contain – at least potentially – all the qualities that may emerge as higher-level properties at a later evolutionary stage. Now, if one (like Strawson) takes consciousness (experience) to be neither reducible nor emergent, but rather as a fundamental property of our reality (on a par with physical properties) then, as a matter of fact, matter must already be intrinsically experiential.

It naturally follows that one is driven to the further conclusion that experience must be assumed to be ubiquitous as well. This claim of course turns “real materialism” into panpsychism, the position that treats both mental and physical properties as being equally fundamental and ubiquitous.

I will justify my claim that Schelling was a “real materialist” by highlighting the similarities between his position and Strawson’s thesis. Schelling himself labels his position “real idealism” (which is strongly reminiscent of Strawson’s coining) (Schelling 1801a/1995, 18;

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<sup>1</sup> Strawson (2006, 3) mainly uses the term “physical stuff”: “I have replaced the word ‘materialism’ by ‘physicalism’ and speak of ‘physical stuff’ instead of ‘matter’ because ‘matter’ is now specially associated with mass although energy is just as much in question, as indeed is anything else that can be said to be physical, e.g. spacetime—or whatever underlies the appearance of spacetime.”

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kant 1781/1787, B254f. Here, one also has to bear in mind Kant’s analogies of experience: “*mundo non datur hiatus, non datur saltus, non datur casus, non datur fatum*” – a development by leaps and bounds within nature would conflict with the analogies of experience and hence would make theoretical knowledge of the world impossible. (cf. Kant 1781/1787, A229/B282).; Cf. also Leibniz in a letter to De Volder (1699): “This is the axiom I employ: *no transition happens by a leap*. In my opinion, this is a consequence of the law of order and is based on the same reason by virtue of which it is generally recognized that motion does not happen by a leap.” (Leibniz 1699/1996, 315; GP II, 168)

SW I/4, 86), or “ideal-realism” (Schelling 1800/1978, 41; SW I/3, 386).<sup>3</sup> The demonstration of these similarities reveals Schelling’s position as a major historical ancestor of the current debate on panpsychism.

Philosophers (like Strawson) who vindicate a thesis like “real materialism” typically reject reductive materialism, but nevertheless hold a realistic position concerning consciousness. At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, materialism was not really a controversial position<sup>4</sup> insofar as most of the philosophers took it for granted that consciousness is *one of*, if not *the*, fundamental aspect(s) of our reality. Rather, the prevalent philosophical attitude, and as such Schelling’s direct conversational partner, was idealism. In contrast to Strawson, who nowadays feels the need to emphasize that “experiential phenomena are as real as rocks” and that a theory that does not account for this fact ignores an essential feature of our reality, Schelling points out that a theory that takes everything as derivative from consciousness, and therefore fails to account for the autonomy and vitality of nature, ignores an essential feature of our reality. Hence, oddly enough, even if both positions diverge with their considerations based on systematically opposite theses, their theoretical target is one and the same. The essence of this target-position, in Schelling’s own rather metaphorical formulation, is that “there is nothing in the universe that is only body,” i.e. that has only physical properties, which is not “as such also and immediately soul,” i.e. also has mental properties (Schelling 1804/1995, 227; SW I/6, 217). This of course strongly suggests that Schelling’s position is panpsychist at the core.

The plan: Section 2 discusses Schelling’s critique of idealism inasmuch as it serves as an essential impetus for the development of his “real-idealism” and his first outlines of the

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to Schelling’s works in English translation (if available) as well as by abbreviation SW, volume and page of the *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by K. F. A. Schelling, Stuttgart u. a. 1856-61. If no translation is available, I quote the original source. All other English translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup> However, one can even find some critical remarks of Schelling’s on materialistic positions as well, e.g. in writing that consciousness will presumably never be “explicable from physical causes” and “that in this respect it is completely indifferent whether the body is regarded as an accidental aggregate of organized particles, or as a hydraulic machine, or as a chemical laboratory.” (Schelling 1797/1988, 37, SW I/2, 49)

*Naturphilosophie*.<sup>5</sup> Section 3 investigates the core ideas and concepts of Schelling's identity-philosophy, concluding by showing its implicit panpsychism. Despite the primarily historical character of the present essay, I will conclude in Section 4 by outlining some positive prospects of Schelling's position for the current debate on panpsychism as well as discussing two critical objections.

## **2. Turning away from Idealism**

Idealism is commonly held to be the metaphysical thesis that every concrete thing depends ontologically on a mind which is thus held to be the ultimate layer of reality. The material world is derivative from a grounding subjective dimension. In the following, I present Schelling's concept of "real-idealism" as a consequence of his critique of such a kind of idealism. This critique focuses on two essential deficiencies:

- (1) Idealism takes nature to be merely the sum of constituted things and their causal relations with respect to a constituting subject rather than as a vital, autonomous and self-constitutive realm.
  
- (2) Consequently, the constituting subject as an essentially incarnated "natural" subject errs in that she takes her body (the extended thing she is reflectively conscious of as belonging to her) to be a mere product of a one-way constitution of consciousness rather than as a necessary condition for this kind of consciousness.

Both (1) and (2) are consequences of an idealism that takes the human, self-conscious mind to be its one and only fundamental principle. The paradigmatic Idealism targeted by Schelling is Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. In the following passages I will attempt to set up an understanding of the basic principles of Fichte's idealism, with a short meditation on the concept of knowledge, in order to gain a better understanding of Schelling's critique:

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<sup>5</sup> For a systematic exposure of this development see Blamauer (2006).

Knowledge is knowledge *of the world*. Yet what we are *able* to know of the world is determined by the *conditions of knowledge* as such: It is determined by our basic principles and cognitive limits of gaining knowledge of the world. Following Fichte, these basic principles can be found in the basic structures of our thinking. And the most essential structural distinction in our thinking is the distinction between the subjective *act* and the objective *content* of our thought(s). This distinction is itself determined by its origin in self-consciousness, which Fichte describes as follows:

A thing, to be sure, is supposed to have a diversity of features, but as soon as the question arises: 'For whom, then, is it to have them?' no one who understands the words will answer: 'For itself'; for we must still subjoin in thought an intellect *for* which it exists. The intellect is, by contrast, necessarily what it is for itself, and requires nothing subjoined to it in thought. (Fichte 1991, 17)

Because:

*That whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing* is the self as absolute subject. (Fichte 1991, 98)

Now, two consequences can be drawn from these lines of thought: (1) It obviously makes no sense to postulate a reality "behind" the one, which is accessible by our thought. Because, what sense would it make to refer to a "reality" no one is ever able to conceive or even think of and which thus can never be a possible content of knowledge? (2) The act of thinking has a certain feature that radically distinguishes it from every other possible content of thought (as the intended, conceived, imagined etc.): it is the intrinsic property of self-giveness and hence the presence of the act to itself *as its executor*. In other words: it is the fundamental property of self-consciousness that establishes a radical difference in the way things are in contrast to a (self-) conscious subject's way of being.

The being of things is always a being for a self – as such, it is dependent and relative. In contrast to this, the self is superior insofar as it is essentially *for itself* – it is absolute (in the sense of being non-relative). With such a move, Fichte tries to assure the epistemic primacy of

the subject of knowledge above any kind of objective concreteness. This consequently leads Fichte to the formulation of the idealistic principle of principles:

Nothing is posited, to begin with, except the self [...]. But that, which is opposed to the self = the not-self. (Fichte 1991, 104)

And further:

The source of all reality is the self, for this is what is immediately and absolutely posited. The concept of reality is first given with and by way of the self. (Fichte 1991, 129)

Everything that is not self is automatically transformed into a boundary of the self. For Fichte, the objective world is the breaking point of the striving self that serves as the self's limitation (Fichte 1991, 108f). Interestingly, the concept of "nature" is used by Fichte more or less in the sense of "essence" (the nature of self, the nature of intelligence etc.). The realm of material being is mostly referred to with the concepts "not-self," "objective reality," "world," or "real world". However, if the material realm is the one we usually refer to as nature – the realm of inorganic as well as organic being – then in Fichte's system, nature is just an abstract concept playing a specific functional role. Schelling retrospectively insinuates this fact in his *On the History of Modern Philosophy*:

Nature for him [Fichte, MB] disappears in the abstract concept of the non-I, which designates merely a limit, in the concept of the completely empty object, of which nothing can be perceived except that it is opposed to the subject [...]. (Schelling 1827/1994, 107; SW I/10, 90 f.)

Such a concept of nature leaves out some fundamental aspects of our reality. To use Hegel's famous words: nature is transformed into a "dead object"<sup>6</sup> that entirely lacks its autonomous and vital character – hence, the character of being in itself productive and free and not being merely a "product" of a constituting mind. For Schelling, in contrast to Fichte, the fundamental nature of nature consists precisely in its "continual self-reproduction" (Schelling 1799/2004, 215; SW I/3, 303), and hence of being an identity of productivity and product. As

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<sup>6</sup> In his famous "Differenzschrift" from 1801, Hegel emphasized that in Fichte's philosophy, nature functions only as "condition of self-consciousness" and it is therefore "essentially definite and dead": Its basic character is one of "polarity". (Hegel 1970, 76)

such, it is also the real and vital basis (or ground) of existence and as such also the real basis of the existence of mind itself. Fichte completely ignores this point in his concept of nature. In the *Science of Knowledge*, mind has an epistemological primacy with regard to the appearing things. However, Fichte obviously mistakes the epistemological primacy of the mind (“*dignitate prius*”), with its ontological primacy (“*natura prius*”), because even if the mind is epistemologically primary, it nevertheless supervenes on a natural basis, which is ontologically first (Cf. Schelling 1810/1995, 39; SW I/7, 427; Frank 1985, 110 and Frank 2007, 319, 324).

However, Schelling’s reasons for assuming that mental phenomena necessitate a material basis are quite unclear. I argue that they can be attached to two assumptions:

i. Although Schelling was firstly an idealist, he nevertheless recognized the important role of human physicality in experience and cognition. And he attempted to integrate this insight into his speculations: in his early writings, by adding a *Naturphilosophie* as the missing part of transcendental philosophy; and later by integrating both lines of thought into his identity metaphysics. The reason he provides for the necessity of this augmentation is that a solely transcendental-idealistic perspective on human mind-body relationship necessarily leads to a “collision of idealism with experience” (Schelling 1801a/1995, 15; SW I/4, 83).

ii. Schelling’s speculations were mainly governed by Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason. Hence, if we can neither account for nature as an autonomous vital realm, nor for our own human nature as essentially embodied conscious beings by applying only principles of subjective idealism, then we have to set up a better theory that provides sufficient reason to cope with these phenomena.

Whereas Fichte posits the self as the principle of all principles, Schelling reminds us of the fact that the self-cognizing mind is itself something generated and hence grounded in a more basic principle (Cf. Schelling 1801a/1995, 16; SW I/4, 84). As Andrew Bowie correctly pointed out, Schelling wanted to provide a “genetic theory of subjectivity,” which assumes

that “subjectivity emerges from nature” and develops to a point of self-cognition (Bowie 1993, 34). If we ask how such a genesis of consciousness from nature is possible at all, the answer will be: only if we assume nature to originally be intrinsically equipped with the necessary features to provide for the emergence of consciousness. This is more or less Schelling’s line of reasoning, which I will develop in the remaining sections of the present essay.

Everyday experience seems to entail that the other subjects of our environment (humans and animals as well) are not merely mind-less robots or zombies, but rather vital conscious subjects, having feelings and experiences like ours. However, according to Fichte’s principles, the objective world exists merely in opposition to the self, present only by means of its extrinsic properties: Things are constituted by the self in their relations between each other and the self. However, as a matter of fact, a self can never constitute another self, insofar as the self’s being is not exhausted by its extrinsic relations to other things and other selves. In fact, being a self is essentially bound to the fundamental intrinsic property of possessing a subjective inner life. The intrinsic nature of conscious subjects cannot be understood in terms of constitution through other selves. But Fichte’s transcendental point of view entails only *one* intrinsic nature: the one of the subject of experience itself, and thus – as Schelling concludes – it cannot provide a sufficient explanation for what is going on in the world.

Hence, Schelling writes in his *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* in opposition to Fichte’s idealism:

Fichte could keep to the position of reflection with idealism, whereas I would have taken up the position of production with the principle of idealism. To emphasize this opposition in an understandable manner, idealism, taken in its subjective meaning, would have to assume that the self is everything, which, in the objective meaning, means, vice versa: everything is = self. (Schelling 1801b/1995, 41; SW I/4, 109)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. also his later formulation in the *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* (1807/1992, 24; SW I/7, 351) where Schelling expresses the difference between his and Fichte’s position, where for him (Schelling) “not only the Ego [is] all, but contrariwise too, all is Ego.”



In the following (Section 3), I lay out the core ideas and principles of Schelling's "real-idealism" as the monistic thesis that reality is *One* being governed by two fundamental principles: the mental and the physical or the ideal and the real.

### 3. Schelling's Real Materialism

Materialism – in contrast to idealism in the above definition – is the metaphysical thesis that the ultimate layer of reality is physical<sup>8</sup> (or "material," in an older formulation) and consciousness is a derivative phenomenon logically supervening upon solely physical processes.

Following the ideas that have been developed in Section 2, neither idealism nor materialism in the given definitions can explain what nature actually is: the metaphysical basis of our and any other animal's conscious lives. Nature is hereby primarily taken as the ground of a continuous and smooth, but nevertheless creative, evolutionary process. Given that – according to (i) – the human subject, besides having essential mental aspects, is also an essentially natural subject, possessing an organic body, the evolutionary process must at some stage reach this level of an incarnated human being. And since – according to (ii) – *ex nihilo, nihil fit*, nature (as the basis) must already be intrinsically equipped to provide the emergence of the mental features like those found within human beings like ours.

With respect to these requirements, Schelling tries to set up a rather economical position, namely a kind of metaphysical monism that takes this evolutionary course as the development of *One* as the basis of everything. Within the framework of metaphysical monism, the physical aspects of reality and the mental aspects of reality are thus – as Manfred Frank correctly emphasized (1985, 84f.) – merely "effects" of an even more fundamental, dynamic substratum of which both are "imperfect expressions." This of course entails the ubiquity of both physical and mental aspects: it entails panpsychism.

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<sup>8</sup> I use the term "physical," again, in Strawson's sense to denote the "in itself [...] wholly and utterly non-experiential" (Strawson 2006, 11).

### 3.1. Double aspect monism

Following Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason, every actual concrete object is either ontologically fundamental or dependent on something fundamental. This entails the existence of one fundamental level being the one from which all the other levels derive. Otherwise, the idea of grounding would lead into infinite regress. In the case of Schelling's monistic position, all concrete actual objects are to be taken as derivative moments of One fundamental whole which serves as the source of their reality.

In his *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* of 1801, Schelling presents the following descriptive scheme of the relationship between mental and physical with respect to the all-encompassing ground (Schelling 1801b/1995, 69; SW I/4, 137):

$$\begin{array}{ccc} {}^+A=B & & A=B^+ \\ \hline & & (A=A) \end{array}$$

*Above the line:* A stands for the mental, subjective or ideal aspect of reality; B stands for the physical, objective, or real aspect of reality. *Below the line:* A=A expresses the absolute identity, but in fact postulates nothing concerning the reality of any of the two aspects, neither subjective nor objective. *The whole table is:* Expression of the Absolute *as manifest*. The self-identical One manifests itself in nature to a greater degree under the objective, real aspect  $A=B^+$ , whereas it manifests itself in conscious experience to a greater degree under the subjective, ideal aspect  ${}^+A=B$ , but all as aspects of one and the same kind, and never as absolutely A or absolutely B.<sup>9</sup> Only the full articulation of the scheme is the correct expression of the One in question.

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<sup>9</sup> For two prominent and extremely enlightening discussions of Schelling's concept of identity cf. Högrefe (1989) and Frank (2007, 312-414). Cf. also Grau (1999) for a discussion of Schelling's identity thesis within the scope of the analytical tradition.

Obviously, the identity of A and B does not mean that mind can be identified with functional roles and, further, with the physical as such, as present identity theories suggest.<sup>10</sup> For this would simply confuse consciousness with the physical aspects of reality and thereby render them all the same. But this is the complete opposite of Schelling's original intentions. To him, it would have been just as absurd to reduce the mind to nature as it would be to reduce nature to mind – this is something I have tried to point out Section 2.

Schelling himself rigorously emphasizes the qualitative distinctiveness and hence irreducibility of both aspects to each other, which accompanies their characteristic fundamentality:

I have also called this relationship, which is neither merely subjective nor merely objective, but rather both even if in different proportions, the quantitative difference. Namely between the principles as such, between A and B, there is not a mere quantitative difference, but the *most decidedly qualitative*; in every real thing, be it whatever kind, the subjective and the objective, the ideal and the real are always together, only to different degrees. (Schelling 1810/1995, 57f; SW I/7, 445f.)

Now, the conclusion drawn from this monistic concept of the One as the ultimate fundamental basis of being culminates in Schelling's concept of a layered reality: the idea that the structure of nature displays the developmental stages of the One. These stages are called "potencies."

### *3.2. Ground, potencies and the possibility of emergence*

Schelling writes:

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. also the *Stuttgart Private Lectures* (1810): "The opinion is here not that the real and the ideal are numerically or logically one and the same; an essential unity is meant; indeed one and the same thing is posited in both forms, but in each of these forms it is its own, not all the same nature" (Schelling 1810/1995, 34; SW I/7, 422).

[...] [P]hilosophy must accept, therefore, that there is a hierarchy of life in Nature. Even in mere organized matter there is *life*, but a life of a more restricted kind. This idea is so old, and has hitherto persisted so constantly in the most varied forms, right up to the present day. (Schelling 1797/1988, 35; SW I/2, 46)<sup>11</sup>

The idea of a “hierarchy of life” in fact entails the idea of a layered nature. And this point must of course be interpreted in the light of Schelling’s initial monistic claim that the universe is just one process, even if driven by two essentially divergent aspects. The One as the ontological basis of the many entails a *continuous* evolution within the natural order of things.

Interestingly, the argument from continuity has recently been discussed in connection with questions concerning the possibility of emergence of mental properties.<sup>12</sup> Here, two notions of emergence have been distinguished: so-called “weak” and “strong” emergence. Whereas strong emergent phenomena “are not *deducible* even in principle” from low-level facts, weak emergent phenomena are simply “*unexpected* given the principles governing the low-level domain” (Chalmers 2006, 244). However, if we follow Thomas Nagel, *there are no* strong emergent properties of complex systems:

All properties of complex systems that are not relations between it and something else derive from the properties of its constituents and their effects on each other when so combined. (Nagel 1979, 182)

If we combine this refutation of strong emergence with (1) the fact that *there is* experience, (2) the assumption that experience is an *irreducible aspect* of reality, and hold that (3) the strong monistic intuition of the homogeneity of the universe is correct, as Schelling did<sup>13</sup>, the

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<sup>11</sup> The resemblance to Leibniz’s philosophy is obvious here, and Schelling explicitly emphasized this point in his later lectures *On the History of Philosophy*. Schelling: “*Leibniz* was the first to call the world of bodies which are inorganic and generally termed ‘dead’ a *sleeping* monad-world; the soul of plants and animals was for him the monad that was just *dreaming*, only the reasonable soul was the waking monad. Although he only expressed this gradation metaphorically, it should be overlooked that he did so; it was the first beginning of looking at the One essence of nature in the necessary sequence of steps of its coming-to-itself, and can, as such, be regarded as the first seed of later, more living development.” (Schelling 1827/1994 80; SW I/10, 54)

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Strawson 2006, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Schelling 1798/1958, 553; SW I/2, 485: “One cannot actually think of any dynamical correlation without

result is a sound argument for panpsychism. Actually, Schelling himself wrote:

If there were not a point where the mental and the physical are completely intertwined, matter would not be, though it is undeniably the case, capable of raising itself into the same again. (Schelling 1993, 32; W I, 58)

Thus Schelling also refuted – like Nagel and Strawson – the idea of strong emergence. In fact he held that every concrete object is the product of a smooth and continuous developmental process based on combination and rearrangement of the fundamental features already present in the ground. The stages of this evolution are labeled with the suggestive term “potencies.” This term is ambiguous inasmuch as it denotes on the one hand the potential entailment of each stage in the ground, and on the other hand, denotes the different levels of this development. Thus Schelling takes nature to be a structured whole, which can be differentiated in itself by its different developmental stages, whereby the differences are conditioned by the fundamental intrinsic features of nature itself. The stages are therefore exponentiations of the originally intrinsic features. Schelling describes the dynamic interrelatedness of the different developmental stages in a poetical manner in the following quotation:

Every kind of life is a consequence and interlinking of states, since every previous ground is the mother, the birthing potency, of the following ground. In this way, the natural life is the series of stages to the mental; sooner or later it reaches a point at which it cannot go further and at which it is in need of a higher one in order to be elevated above itself. (Schelling 1813/1958, 636; SW I/8, 260)

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assuming *the original homogeneity of all matter*. [...] If the raw stuff, before passing into discrete matter, was uniformly distributed throughout the universe [...] all matter would have to originally interpenetrate itself therein, as one has to assume such interpenetration of diverse matter by one common medium in every perfect solution, because the dissolution is only perfect if it is *thoroughly homogenous*, i.e., as Kant proved, if there is no infinitely small part in it that is composed of the solvent and the body to be dissolved.” Or like the formulation in the *First Outline*: “Since therefore the divisibility of matter proceeds to infinity, then every material must remain infinitely homogenous as far as it is divided. Infinite homogeneity, however, is recognized solely in the permanence of qualities, thus the permanence of qualities is the condition of the possibility of mechanical divisibility.” (Schelling 1799/2004, 20; SW I/3, 22.)

Schelling's potencies can thus be definitively interpreted as stages of (weak) emergence, in the sense that every step brings a *new* manifestation of the One into being, even if *restricted* and *bound* to the intrinsic features of the basis. The creative factor lies within the idea of free recombination of these fundamental features. Schelling can thereby avoid the postulation of brute emergent properties (and thus adhere to Leibniz's principle) by nevertheless entertaining the idea of a creative evolution that brings about (relatively) new features.

### *3.3. Schelling's panpsychism*

According to Strawson, panpsychism is the "view that the existence of every real concrete thing involves experiential being even if it also involves non-experiential being" (Strawson 2006, 8). This is more or less the same definition he provides for "real materialism" and "realistic monism." Thus, to Strawson, being a real materialist is being a realistic monist, and both entail being a panpsychist (cf. Strawson 2006, 26).

Coming back to what has been outlined in Section 2.1 and 2.2, we can sketch the following outline of Schelling's position:

- \* Reality has two fundamental features: physical features (the real) and mental features (the ideal) (Sections 2 & 3).
- \* The fundamental layer of being is the animate ground of existence, which comprises both fundamental features (Section 3.1).
- \* There are no leaps within the smooth developmental process of nature (refutation of strong emergence) (Section 3.2).
- \* The concept of potencies refers to the idea that each stage of being is just a modification of the particular proportion of the two fundamental features already present in the fundamental layer of reality (Section 3.2).

Schelling summarizes these points in a rather poetical way in one of the fragments of the drafts for the *Ages of the World*:

Thus, already by their inner nature, entity and being, [...] nature and the spirit world, are related to each other. But this is only abstractly stated, as if these were fixed concepts. The truth is that this inner unity is a more and more nascent, and in the proportion of separation a developing one. For nature and the spirit world originate always to the same extent from the eternal unity. (Schelling 1993, 65; W I, 119)

Therefore:

[N]o part of nature [could be] mere being or mere affirmed [...], but rather, each [is] in itself likewise self-affirmation [...] like consciousness or the self; it follows that each thing, comprehended in its true essence, could be examined with absolutely the same validity as a way of being as well as a way of self-cognition. (Schelling 1806/1995, 614; SW I/7, 53)

Hence, with respect to the abovementioned issues, it could be said that Schelling is obviously a real materialist, and thus a panpsychist in his hearts of hearts.

Having clarified the structure of Schelling's reasoning in Sections 2-3, I will finally provide reasons why I think this position may be of general interest to the current debate on panpsychism. I will pursue this point as well as some significant objections in Section 4.

#### **4. Prospects and objections**

Starting with the positive impacts of Schelling's considerations concerning mind, nature and reality, one point that seems especially striking is Schelling's attempt to establish the concept of self-consciousness within his overall identity-metaphysics – an attempt that finally led to his metaphysical vision of a creative, self-cognizing universe. Of course, such an attempt may appear to some as leaving the place of down-to-earth philosophizing too far behind and allowing wild speculations free rein. But Schelling is in good company with Thomas Nagel who once said that:

We know so little about how consciousness arises from matter in our own case and that of the animals in which we can identify it that it would be dogmatic to assume that it does not exist in other complex systems, or even in systems the size of a galaxy, as the result of the same basic properties of matter that are responsible for us. (Nagel 1979, 195)

So setting aside the unease about the speculative aspects and impacts of his considerations, Schelling emphasizes some crucial points concerning the nature of consciousness, which are – to my mind – also of major interest in the current discussion on the mind’s place in nature.

Schelling was an idealist from the beginning. Thus, the initial point of departure of all his reflections on metaphysical questions was consciousness. Hence, phenomenological clarification of the nature of consciousness was an essential presupposed condition for all further reflections on metaphysical topics.

This phenomenological analysis of consciousness, i.e. an analysis of the phenomenon precisely in the way it shows itself, irrespective of other theoretical preconditions, is something that is rather neglected in the current discussion on consciousness. Here, consciousness is generally taken to be the phenomenal quality of otherwise psychological states of awareness. And the leading questions are then e.g. how phenomenology can emerge from the physical; whether phenomenology is constitutive of intentional content; if phenomenal properties are causally relevant to our actions, etc. But hardly anyone asks whether this characterization of consciousness in terms of phenomenal quality is sufficient or even adequate to comprehend the subjective dimension of experience. Hence, whereas the focus of the current debate lies more on the specific quality of an experience, the “likeness” so to speak, I would like to shift this focus more to the subjective character, the “being for,” which seems to me the more important factor inasmuch as the quality of an experience is nothing without there being a subject experiencing this quality.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Frege (1956) and Strawson (2003b), who recently emphasized this point as well.



With the concept of the subjective dimension of experience, I include the question concerning the conditions of possibility of a kind of consciousness like ours: a consciousness that has the ability, while experiencing a world (by perceiving, acting, feeling, etc.) of being at the same time *conscious of* experiencing the world. And this – the genesis of a self – is primarily what Schelling focused on in his attempt to ground transcendental philosophy in a *Naturphilosophie*. Yet just as truth “cannot tolerate a more or less” since “what is only half true is untrue” (Frege 1956, 291), we cannot conceive of the self – at least in its minimal sense – in terms of incremental growth: there cannot be “little,” “less,” or “more” consciousness *of* experience. Either experience is present to a subject or it is not – and if it is not, then one can hardly make sense of the notion of experience at all. However, clarification is needed if we want to understand Schelling’s attempt to think of this self as something dynamical, which indeed has a kind of “history,” as Schelling points out.

As argued in Sections 2-3, a coherent explanation of emergent phenomena is possible only if we take the emergence-base to be intrinsically provided with the fundamental features that can be later found in more complex forms in higher-order systems. Now, if Schelling wished to explore the genesis of the self, then he had to assume that something like a self-property is already present in the ground whence the “full-blown version” of the human self, so to speak, then develops. So the idea is not that a self *as such* (in its fundamental reflexive structure; the minimal sense of self) develops in steps, but that a self *qua cognized*, a self in its highest form of being able to cognize itself *as being a self*, is a product of a process of continuous self-objectification.

Schelling’s basic thesis is now that the structure of this process shows itself in transcendental reflection as well as in the developmental process of nature. He then further assumes that if the intrinsic nature of the phenomenon in question is just the mirrored intrinsic nature of its ontological basis, then one can draw conclusions from reflexive insights in the phenomenon about the nature of the basis itself. This of course is only possible when dealing with phenomena to which one has direct intrinsic access – and the only phenomenon known to me where I have such access is my own consciousness: “Created from the source of things and

equal to it, the human soul has co-cognizance with the Creation” (Schelling 1813/1958, 576; SW I/8, 200).

In the following, I will try to sketch the core of Schelling’s argument for the structural analogy of self and nature as concisely as possible.

According to Schelling, self-consciousness is a dynamic process of “becoming-an-object-for-itself.” This dynamic structure of self-consciousness can be outlined with the following three statements:

Self-consciousness is the act whereby the thinker immediately becomes an object to himself [...]. (Schelling 1800/1978, 24; SW I/3, 365).

The self *becomes* an object; hence it *is* not originally an object. (Schelling 1800/1978, 36; SW I/3, 380)

The self is intrinsically an object only *for itself*, and hence for nothing external. (Ibid.)

In this “becoming-objective” of the self *for itself* it is manifested as the original source and identity of this process of becoming. It is a reflexive, self-constitutional structure, because the self constitutes itself within this act of making itself into an object *for itself*. Hence, the constituted and the constitutional are one and the same, even in a different respect: Because if the subjective should be – according to its own nature – *for itself*, this is only possible if the subjective act transforms itself into something objective, and hence into something different from itself. So in this process the self never reaches what it originally intends to reach: itself *as itself*. In other words: that which produces itself never dissolves into its product, but rather goes beyond it. The product, in contrast, as the conditioned, points back to the producing force, the originally unconditioned. This dynamic structure is not only the original structure of the self, as Schelling further assumes – even if we have only evident epistemic access to this subjective manifestation of it – but rather the structure of nature itself. We can find the same dynamics as those of self-consciousness within nature as “*original identity in the duality*” (Schelling 1800/1978, 31; SW I/3, 373). Referencing the Spinozan distinction between *natura*

*naturans* and *natura naturata* he writes: “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)” (Schelling 1799/2004, 202; SW I/3, 284). So if we follow the outlines in Section 3 and take nature to be the ontological basis of self-consciousness, then nature itself has to be taken to be structurally equivalent – at least in principle – to the structure of higher-order human selves. The conclusion Schelling draws from these considerations is that the whole evolutionary developmental process is to be understood as progressive, step-by-step self-cognition of the One.

Let me finally introduce two objections into these speculations.<sup>15</sup>

*Objection (1)*: A consequence of Schelling’s monism is that it is not the human subject who cognizes the universe, but rather the universe which cognizes itself *through* human cognition. But why should we construe the universe according to the structure of a being who occupies such little space in the overall developmental history of it and of whom we must assume that it will sooner or later pass by without any interference by the universe itself?

*I would reply (with Hogebe)*: As a matter of fact we have *no epistemologically neutral* picture of the universe, and hence human cognition, perception and reasoning is essential to this picture. However, this of course does not imply that the *existence* of the universe is dependent on these features. But Schelling’s argument is rather that: *if* cognition, perception, and reasoning exist, *then* this must be an intrinsic feature of the universe itself – cognition, perception, and reasoning *exist*, thus they *are* intrinsic features of the universe.<sup>16</sup> Ergo, if the

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<sup>15</sup> The first objection was originally raised (and answered) by Hogebe (1989, 54f.). The second one is an objection that was brought to my attention by Freya Mathews at a conference. Freya Mathews, “Panpsychism as Paradigm,” presented at the workshop “The Mental as Fundamental,” University of Vienna, May 14<sup>th</sup>- 16<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Hogebe (1989, 52) calls Schelling’s line of reasoning the “Wittgensteinian Schelling-argument” and it goes like this:

P(0) There is only one world.

P(1) The world is everything that is the case.

P(2) What the case is, is a property of the world.

P(3) It is the case that experience exists.

objection doubts that *our* cognition, perception, and reasoning is essential to the universe, then the objection is all along with Schelling in that he specifically emphasized that (i) it is *not* our knowledge that produces the universe, but rather the universe that produces our knowledge; and that (ii) it is *not* the individual self who thinks the universe but rather the universal self that thinks through the individual. The following, second objection focuses precisely on these last two points.

*Objection (2):* It is hard to make sense of the relationship between, say, the universal self and, say, the individual self. If the individual self is in its last consequence identical to the universal self – as the theory suggests – then it begs the following question: Why are my experiences not yours and vice versa? This problem – in analogy to the “combination problem” – can be called the “reverse combination problem.”

*I would reply:* This is a pressing objection in that it theoretically challenges the overall structure of Schelling’s theory as such. Obviously, your feeling pain is not my feeling pain, and your seeing red is not my seeing red, but – according to Schelling’s assumptions – both are experiences of the One, and hence ways in which the One cognizes itself. If we take a look at the reasons that drove Schelling to universalize the Self – namely that the self is neither the product of reflection, nor the product of combination – it is hard to see how one could avoid these problems, at least the mereological one concerning the relationship of parts and whole, from this perspective. A universal “principle of decomposition” would be needed to make intelligible the “division” of the One into the many selves. Unfortunately, Schelling did not provide such a principle. Thus, as in the case of the combination problem, no suitable solution to the problem has been offered since. However, I do not want to say that such a solution is necessarily unachievable, but just that no such solution has yet been found.<sup>17</sup>

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C(5) The world has the property that experience exists.

C(5) The world experiences itself.

Of course, as Hogebe admits, the reflexivity in (5) cannot be gained from (4), but is rather – from a logical point of view – obtained merely by fraud. However, Schelling’s reasoning nevertheless goes into a relatively similar direction.

<sup>17</sup> However, remarkable preliminary attempts towards a solution of the combination problem have recently been developed in Seager 2010 and Skrbina 2009.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, I wished to demonstrate two things. Firstly, to portray Schelling as a direct and still relevant predecessor of current panpsychists by pointing out some fundamental similarities in their lines of reasoning. Even if recourse to his historical interlocutors was inevitable for the disposition of the basic claims of his philosophical system, it was my main concern to emphasize the up-to-date-ness of his lines of reasoning, as outlined in Section 2 and 3. Secondly, to point out, as I ultimately did in Section 4, how and why Schelling's concept of consciousness, as being essentially self-consciousness, can contribute to the current discussion on consciousness and panpsychism, and why a reconsideration of his thoughts may shed new light on this debate.<sup>18</sup>

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