CHAPTER 5

"Exhibiting the particular in the universal": philosophical construction and intuition in Schelling's Philosophy of Identity (1801–1804)

Daniel Breazeale

The idea that philosophy is in some sense a "constructive" enterprise has a long and distinguished pedigree. Equally venerable is the claim that there are deep parallels between the methods employed by the mathematician, especially the Euclidian geometer, and by the philosopher. To be sure, there is an equally long tradition that disputes these claimed affinities and insists that philosophy is not *mathesis* and is incapable of constructing its concepts. A close examination of these same debates reveals that partisan enthusiasm has often been allowed to obscure the fact that both advocates and critics of philosophical construction have all too often held very different understandings of what is – and what is not – involved in, required for, and implied by "construction" in philosophy.[1] This is particularly true of the debates concerning philosophical construction that occupied the attention of German philosophers in the immediate wake of Kant's unequivocal proscription of the same.

The following remarks focus upon a small, but significant, episode in this longer history, namely, upon F.W.J. Schelling's efforts to appropriate the notions of "intellectual intuition" and "construction in intuition" (both of which are prominent features of the methodology of J.G. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, especially during the earlier or Jena period of the same) and to revise them in light of his new System of Identity during the first years of the nineteenth century.

[1] For a general survey of the history of the concept of philosophical construction see Taureck 1975. A full account of the development of the concept of philosophical construction in German philosophy during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would have to take into account not just the writings of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, but also those of many other philosophers, including F.H. Jacobi, J.S. Beck, Salomon Maimon, and C.H. Hojer – not to mention, in the case of Schelling at least, Plato and Spinoza.

In his writings and lectures of the period between 1801 and 1804[2] Schelling introduced and expounded a new System of Philosophy, the so-called System of Identity. Abandoning his earlier strategy of presenting the Philosophy of Nature and Transcendental Philosophy as two complementary branches or "sides" of philosophy – one "objective" and proceeding from raw matter to the emergence of intelligence and the other "subjective" and proceeding from the pure I to the emergence of nature, and each proceeding "genetically," from one step in the self-construction of nature or intelligence to the next, higher one – he now proposes to begin with the immediate intellectual intuition of "absolute reason," understood as "the total indifference of the subjective and objective" (DSP, AA 1.10: 116; Schelling 2001a: 349).

The law or principle of such absolute identity, and thus the only proposition that is true unconditionally or in-itself, is the proposition A = A, which is the only "form" in which the "essence" of original identity can be said to exist. Reflection upon the relationship between the "essence," the "being," and the "form" of absolute identity reveals a crucial difference between the essential "qualitative indifference" of subjective and objective factors in absolute identity considered with respect to its *Wesen* or "essence" and the "quantitative difference" of these same factors that is implicit in its very "form" or "mode of being" (A = A, in which the subject must be capable of being discriminated from the predicate or object, but without negating the essential identity of A).

This is the framework within which the Philosophy of Identity operates and within which it "constructs" a totality of finite things, or rather "ideas," since philosophy, as a pure a priori science, concerns itself with "things" only as they "really are" and not as they present themselves within empirical experience. What concerns us, however, are not the further details of Schelling's new system, but rather the distinctive *method* by means of which he establishes his starting point and then proceeds to "construct" his system of philosophy. So let us consider eight of the more salient features of Schelling's new conception of philosophical construction: (1) its "absolute" standpoint, (2) its principle (the law of rational identity), (3) its organ (intellectual intuition), (4) its actual method (exhibition of the particular in the universal), (5) its elements (ideas of reason), (6) its product (the System of Identity), (7) its truth and reality, and (8) the unteachable, innate capacity for intellectual intuition (philosophical genius).

[2] These include DSP, FD, VM, PK, and several important essays published in 1802 in the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, including VNP and CP.

I The "absolute" *standpoint* of philosophical construction

What is philosophy? According to Schelling's *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie*, philosophy is distinguished from every other science in that it can be pursued only from "the standpoint of reason," which is also "the standpoint of the absolute" (DSP, AA 1.10: 117; Schelling 2001a: 350). Neither "objective" nor "subjective," the standpoint of philosophy is the highest and most universal standpoint possible. Philosophy pursued from this absolute standpoint rejects the exclusive standpoints of both "realism" and "idealism," each of which, he maintains, defines itself primarily by its opposition to the other. In contrast, genuine philosophy, like absolute reason itself, rejects the kind of thinking that posits a fundamental opposition between subject and object, ideal and real, mind and nature, or knowing and being. The kind of thinking that posits such oppositions produces a philosophy of mere "understanding" rather than one of "reason" and occupies the standpoint, not of "speculation," but of "reflection."

Like Fichte's revised presentation of his own system of transcendental idealism *nova methodo*, Schelling's new System of Identity begins with an act of *radical abstraction*, but with one even more radical than that postulated by Fichte, whose "pure I," according to Schelling, though a kind of "subject-object" in its own right, is nevertheless not the absolute, as is made plain by Fichte's frank admission (at least during his earlier or Jena period) that philosophers, like human beings generally, are confined within the circle of consciousness and that philosophical deduction must come to an end with the recognition of those "incomprehensible boundaries" – the manifold of feeling, the "invitation" to limit our own freedom out of recognition of that of another, and the pre-deliberative determinacy of the pure will – within which we simply find ourselves to be confined.[3] Fichte therefore fails, according to Schelling, to attain the absolute standpoint of reason,[4] for in order to occupy this standpoint one must abstract not only from the *objects* of consciousness, but also from the *subject* as well (DSP, AA 1.10: 116–17; Schelling 2001a: 349. See too FD, SW 1.4: 256). As part of philosophy's move beyond the standpoint of consciousness, it must also dispense with the kind of thinking typical of the latter, the kind of thinking that Schelling associates with "the method of reflection," which

[3] See Fichte AA 1.5: 184; Fichte 1994: 149.
[4] See Schelling's extended critique of Fichtean idealism in FD, SW 1.4: 353–61.

"works only from oppositions and rests on oppositions" (DSP, AA 1.10: 115; Schelling 2001a: 348).

Instead, one must think of philosophy as a kind of "primordial knowing" or *Urwissen*, a "knowing of knowing," which contains within itself all other instances of cognition, as particulars included in "universal" or "absolute" cognition. Since all knowing involves some reference to the object known, and since absolute knowing cannot, by definition, be conditioned by its object (in the way that ordinary knowledge clearly is), then in this case we must begin by positing the *identity* of the knowing subject and the known object, of ideality and reality; i.e., we must posit "the pure dissolution of the particular in the universal," in which the "opacity" of the former is illuminated by the "transparency of a universal rational cognition" (VM, SW 1.5: 215–16; Schelling 1966: 9). We must, in other words, think of absolute cognition as *identical* to the absolute itself. The uncompromising abolition of the opposition between thought and being, which is and has always been the goal of both theoretical cognition and practical striving, is thus not the *conclusion*, but the *starting point* of Schelling's new Philosophy of Identity.

II The *principle* of philosophical construction (the law of rational identity)

If philosophy *begins* with the claim to have overcome the eternal oppositions that have plagued nearly all previous philosophy, then, one may well wonder, what still *remains for it to accomplish?* What is the philosopher supposed to *do* once he has situated himself at the "absolute" standpoint of indifference, where he finds himself to be not just immediately *aware* of, but even *at one with* the absolute itself? Schelling's answer is that philosophy's new task now is to *show* or to *demonstrate* precisely *how* those oppositions and multiplicities that are and remain such a fundamental feature of actual human experience, both sensible and intellectual, appear when viewed from his lofty new absolute perspective, thereby grasping and exhibiting them not as they *appear*, but as they *really are*.

The distinctive character of this new task was suggested – albeit unwittingly – by Kant in his characterization of mathematical construction as the "exhibition of the universal in the particular" or as the "presentation" of a concept in a pure intuition. Philosophy's distinctive task, according to Schelling, is precisely the reverse: namely, "the exhibition of the particular in the universal" (CP, SW 1.5: 131; Schelling 2008: 275); or rather, since the opposition between "particular" and "universal" is itself abolished from the

standpoint of the absolute, the task of philosophy may be described as the "*exhibition of the unity of the particular and the universal in their absolute indifference*" (CP, SW 1.5: 131; Schelling 2008: 275). Or, in the more colorful language employed by Schelling in his popular *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*: "The primary and necessary task of philosophy is to comprehend the birth of all things from God or the absolute" (VM, SW 1.5: 324; Schelling 1966: 122). As this last quotation indicates, though Schelling may have borrowed the *language* of his account of philosophical construction from Kant's discussion of mathematical construction, the *model* for his actual presentation of his Philosophy of Identity is not Kant, but Spinoza, whose system, according to Schelling, offers the best example of what it means to "exhibit the universal in the particular" (DSP, AA 1.10: 115; Schelling 2001a: 348),[5] inasmuch as the whole point of the same is actually to show that "all is one," *hen kai pan*.

The task of philosophy is therefore not to *prove* anything by means of discursive arguments, but rather to *display* or to *exhibit* directly the identity it begins simply by *asserting*, and the proper name for such an exhibition is *construction*. Schelling thus understands construction not simply as the proper *method* of philosophy, but rather as *identical* to philosophy itself, the sole business of which is to exhibit the universal in the particular. But he acknowledges the need to provide some account of *why* this is indeed the proper task of philosophy, which is, presumably, what he means when he asserts, in his 1802 essay *Über die Construktion in der Philosophie*, that philosophy must *begin* by "constructing construction" itself (CP, SW 1.5: 137; Schelling 2008: 279).

Philosophy cannot start with *definitions* or *axioms*, from which it might then deduce further propositions or prove various theorems;[6] nor can it commence with some hypothetically postulated first principle or *Grundsatz*, which it might subsequently hope somehow to *confirm*. Instead, it must *exhibit itself* directly *as* absolute knowing; and the only way it can do this is by actually *showing* how all other kinds of knowing are related to and included within absolute knowing. Thus, insofar as philosophy succeeds in

[5] In FD Schelling mentions another reason for his choice of Spinoza, namely, the latter's recognition of intellectual intuition as the highest of the three modes of cognition (SW 1.4: 355). In CP Schelling praises Spinoza for his "geometrical method," though he adds that this method has been completely misunderstood by many of its previous admirers and that Spinoza himself "did not go far enough back in his construction" (CP, SW 1.5: 126–7, 126; Schelling 2008: 272).

[6] Kant, claims Schelling, was wrong in thinking that axioms and definitions are true principles or starting points. They are actually nothing but boundary points, and as such, are required by particular sciences, but not by the absolute science of philosophy, which begins instead with what is "absolutely first." On this point, see CP, SW 1.5: 237; Schelling 2008: 279.

actually "constructing" the asserted identity of the universal and particular, it will thereby also have succeeded in "constructing itself" as reason. By "exhibiting the particular in the universal" it will also exhibit itself as absolute cognition, that is, as philosophy. Since, according to Schelling, it is only by introducing the "method of construction" into philosophy that the latter can progress beyond those oppositions in which the Kantian and Fichtean systems remain mired, then an account of this same method will constitute "one of the most important chapters in the science of philosophy" (CP, SW 1.5: 125; Schelling 2008: 271).

The *rule* or *principle* guiding the kind of "construction" envisioned by Schelling is precisely the same as the principle of his philosophy as a whole: namely, the principle of identity, understood not merely as a formal law of analytic thinking (A = A), but also as a *synthetic* principle (i.e., as the "law of rational identity," a law that, unlike the purely formal law of identity, asserts the *identity of opposites*). As the principle of philosophical construction, what the law of identity asserts is the identity of *particulars* and the *universal* (or, as we shall soon see, the identity of *ideas* and the absolute).[7] Since the proper business of philosophy *is* construction, and since the principle of construction *is* the law of identity in this form, it follows that anything that cannot be subordinated to this principle, that is, anything that cannot be constructed, simply has no place whatsoever within philosophy (CP, SW 1.5: 134; Schelling 2008: 277).

In the case of Schelling, however, any talk of a rule or principle of philosophical construction can be misleading; for the principle of rational identity serves for him not as a law of *thinking*, but rather, as we shall see, as a rule for *intuiting* particulars in their relationship to the universal or absolute. It is, in other words, not a rule for intellectual *inference*, but a guideline for *seeing with the mind's eye*.[8] Schelling's method of construction is therefore not a discursive means of *deriving* one thing from another, but rather a strategy for articulating and *displaying* the indifferent unity that is grasped all at once in the original intuition of the absolute unity of the real and the ideal, with which the Philosophy of Identity begins, a means of

[7] See FD, SW 1.4: 345, CP, SW 1.5: 134–5; Schelling 2008: 277. See too Schelling's marginal note to DSP, in which he writes that "all construction proceeds from relative identity. Absolute identity is not constructed, but simply is" (DSP, AA 1.10: 142n.; Schelling 2001a: 368n.).

[8] It is therefore misleading of Temilo van Zantwijk to describe the principle of identity as Schelling's "single rule of construction," a "rule of inference for deriving particular things from the absolute" (van Zantwijk 2001: 112). It is true that Schelling explicitly introduced the law of identity in DSP, but only as "*the ultimate law for the being of reason*" (AA 1.10: 118; Schelling 2001a: 350), and by no means as a "rule of inference" for philosophical construction. Furthermore, he often and explicitly denies that construction can be characterized as "derivation."

viewing the same not abstractly, but *concretely*, as something other than a "night in which all cows are black."[9]

There can, as Schelling cheerfully admits, be no "argument in favor" of the kind of constructions encountered in his Philosophy of Identity. Such constructions do not constitute *proofs* in the logical sense, in which one proposition is formally deduced from or entailed by another, from which it acquires its certainty; instead, each philosophical construction must stand purely on its own as a self-contained whole, and it cannot obtain its certainty from anywhere else; instead, it must be *self-evident*. Nor are philosophical constructions *explanations* in the scientific sense, in which one thing or event is "explained" by relating it to some external cause or effect. Explanations of this sort always, according to Schelling, lack the distinguishing features of truly *rational* cognition: namely, universality and necessity (See FD, SW 1.5: 344 and VM, SW 1.5: 322; Schelling 1966: 120–1 and PK, SW, 1.5: 418; Schelling 1989b: 53–4). Properly understood, philosophical construction does not "explain" anything, but simply "articulates or presents" [*aussprechen oder darstellen*] it.[10]

The philosophical constructions that constitute Schelling's Philosophy of Identity are not meant to provide a *genetic* account of anything in the Fichtean manner, nor are they to be understood as *deductions* or *derivations* in the transcendental sense, in which one thing is derived from another as the condition for the possibility thereof. Such methods, according to Schelling, are entirely inappropriate for a philosophy that begins with what is utterly and absolutely "unconditioned" by anything.[11] Moreover,

[9] This, of course, is Hegel's snide characterization of Schelling's method of construction in the Preface to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. It is much less frequently noted that Schelling had already employed very similar language to defend himself – in advance – from precisely such criticism.

[10] In discussing the differences between "theory" and philosophy, Schelling remarks that, *properly understood* (as they generally have not been) both theory and experimentation "limit themselves to mere articulation and presentation of appearances themselves, and in this they are the same as construction, which is equally unconcerned with explaining anything" (VM, SW 1.5: 322; Schelling 1966: 121). For a vigorous critique of the commonly accepted notion of "scientific theory," which includes a proposal for a new understanding of theory consistent with the a priori procedure of Schelling's philosophy of nature, see the brief "Einige allgemeine Betrachtungen" that appeared in the second number of the first volume of Schelling's *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* in 1800 (SW 1.6: 527–33).

[11] See FD, SW 1.4: 340–2: if one begins with the unity of the infinite and the finite, then one has no need to "deduce" or "derive" either from the other. Nor is it the proper business of philosophy to "deduce" the conditions necessary for the possibility of actual experience, inasmuch as philosophy, according to Schelling, is not at all concerned with the world of appearances, but confines itself entirely to the a priori realm of the absolute. It is therefore quite wrong to claim (as does Ende 1973: 50–1) that it was Schelling who first combined the idea of "derivation" with that of philosophical construction. It was instead Fichte who first accomplished this, and, by the time of the Identity Philosophy Schelling was explicitly *denying* that philosophical construction constitutes a "derivation" of anything.

transcendental derivations, along with genetic accounts based upon the same, always proceed, as Fichte acknowledged, by means of the law of reflective opposition, a law that has no purchase within the domain of absolute identity.[12] For a similar reason, Schelling also objects to calling his method of construction *synthetic* (even though the principle of identity is a synthetic principle). Even if Fichte's "synthetic method of philosophizing" may be considered a "true image of the absolute method," it still falls far short of the latter, and it does this precisely because it continually "pulls apart in reflection" and "represents as a process" what is, in fact, as grasped by the true method of philosophical construction, something "unitary and internally related" (FD, SW 1.4: 399; Schelling 2001b: 390). If what the philosopher purports to "derive" from his first principle is, as it must be, always already contained in his initial starting point, then surely it is more accurate to say that what the philosopher does in his constructions is not to *derive* or *deduce* anything new, but simply to "exhibit" or "display" [*darstellen*] what is contained in this starting point. Philosophical construction is therefore nothing more than a way of *making explicit* something that was *implicit* form the start.

For all of these reasons, Schelling describes his own philosophical constructions not as proofs, derivations, or deductions, but as "demonstrations" in the geometrical sense: *ostensive* rather than *discursive* proofs. Such constructions all share the same goal and strategy: to *make visible* or *self-evident* the ultimate unity of reality, to *exhibit* or to *display* the particular in the universal, to *demonstrate* the unity of the one and the many – and to do so in the manner of a geometrical proof that "exhibits" in a particular figure a necessary and universal truth about all such figures, *directly and self-evidently*.

The relationship between philosophical construction and the governing principle of the same, the law of rational identity, is perhaps most eloquently expressed in a rhapsodic passage near the end of §IV of the *Fernere Darstellungen*, in which Schelling invokes the vision of ultimate unity (and thus the obscure grasp of the "one true philosophy"), which he claims was shared by Pythagoras, Plato, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Spinoza, and Leibniz: the insight that "nothing is clearly cognized in both its particularity and its absoluteness except when the all is actually comprehended in the all and when this almost divine chaos is represented both in its unity and in its

[12] Deductions guided by what Schelling calls the "law of relative opposition" are always thoroughly "conditional," and anything "derived" in this manner is always "conditioned" as well. On this point, see FD, SW 1.4: 396–8; Schelling 2001b: 388–9.

confusion, by means of a construction that is carried through to totality, that actually grasps all in all" (FD, SW 1.4: 402).[13] And this, declares Schelling, is precisely what he intends to do in his Philosophy of Identity: actually to carry out this construction that was only called for and anticipated by his venerable predecessors, thereby putting an end once and for all to the era of opposition and reflection and ushering in the new age of eternal harmony, in which the inherent divinity of all things will at last be firmly grasped by the human mind. No longer will this profound truth remain a matter of accidental insight; the sole purpose of Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie* and of its method of a priori construction is precisely to lay this truth before our eyes and to exhibit it in a *form* as absolute and unchanging as the *content* itself – transforming the "night of the absolute into day" (FD, SW 1.4: 404; Schelling 2001b: 391) by means of philosophical construction.

III The *organ* of philosophical construction (intellectual intuition)

Though Schelling's indifferent absolute can clearly be considered a kind of "universal," it is manifestly not an *abstract concept of the understanding*; for if it were, then it too would be enmeshed in the reflective oppositions characteristic of the latter. Instead, it must be understood as an *idea of reason* – though much more in the positive, Platonic than in the regulative, Kantian sense of the same. This is why Schelling readily concedes that the "essential unity" from which philosophical construction must proceed cannot be "proven" [*bewiesen*], that is, cannot be inferred or derived from anything else (though, he says, one can prove that *without* presupposing this indifferent unity there can be no genuine science whatsoever) (VM, SW 1.5: 215; Schelling 1966: 9).

This, however, is *not* to say that philosophy must begin with a "hypothesis" or "postulate," both of which Schelling unequivocally rejects; for even though it cannot be *proven* (i.e., cognized indirectly by means of something else), the absolute *can*, according to Schelling, be *cognized directly* – not simply *thought of* as *possible*, but *intuited* as *real*.[14] And indeed, as we

[13] Compare this with the very similar passage in *Bruno*, SW 1.4: 307–10.

[14] As Schelling explains, this immediate cognition of the absolute deserves to be called "intellectual intuition," because all intuition involves an identification of thought and being, an immediate grasp of "what is" (which is, of course, also how Kant had characterized intuition and is why both he and Schelling agree that reality can be given only by means of intuition). For this reason the mere *thought* of the absolute (as that which exists immediately through its concept) is not sufficient, for, as

have seen, it is precisely and only by means of such an intuition of the absolute that one raises oneself to the standpoint of reason or philosophy, inasmuch as such an immediate grasp of the absolute is precisely what *defines* this standpoint. (In clarifying his admission that the absolute starting point of philosophy cannot be "proven to anyone," Schelling explains that this is to be understood in the same sense in which light cannot be "proven" to someone who is born blind [FD, SW 1.4: 366; Schelling 2001b: 380].)

Like the intellectual intuition encountered in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schelling's intellectual intuition is immediate and self-evident, but unlike the latter it is not identical to the philosopher's "inner intuition" of the self-positing I, but is directed at an object that is at least intentionally distinct from the I: the absolute – though of course, as Schelling hastens to remind us, nothing finite – and least of all the I – is really "distinct" from the absolute. In his writings on Philosophy of Nature Schelling had already criticized, if only implicitly, Fichte's "subjective" notion of intellectual intuition, and had purported to supplement the same with what he called "objective intellectual intuition," which requires that one abstract entirely from the intuiting subject and raise oneself to an "intellectual intuition of nature" (see AAE, AA 1.10: 92, 94, 100). But as it functions in the Philosophy of Identity, intellectual intuition is neither "objective" nor "subjective" in either of these senses; instead, it is "absolute," inasmuch as it is the direct awareness *of* the absolute and (insofar as absolute cognition is itself identical to the absolute) *by* the absolute.

Intellectual intuition functions in two distinguishable ways in the context of Schellingian construction: first, it is the indispensable means by which one gains initial access to that absolute standpoint from which philosophical construction *stricto sensu* becomes possible in the first place; second, it is the instrument or organ by means of which one accomplishes the actual labor of philosophical construction. Both of these functions are essential to philosophy as Schelling understands it during this period; hence his stark admonition: "without intellectual intuition, no philosophy" (See VM, SW 1.5: 255; Schelling 1966: 49).

a mere thought, it is not a *true* or *real* cognition of the absolute. The reality of the absolute must therefore be discovered in the same way all reality is discovered: that is, directly or by means of intuition. But in the case of the absolute, of course, we are concerned not with an intuition of any *sensible* reality, but with the reality of the absolute itself. See FD, SW 1.4: 368–9; Schelling 2001b: 382.

Regarding the first function, Schelling writes in *Fernere Darstellungen* that to occupy the absolute standpoint is to "see directly" [*erblicken*] for oneself the unity of thought and being, "not in this or that context, but simply in and for itself, and thus as the self-evidence of all self-evidence, the truth of all truth, that which is purely known in everything that is known: this is to elevate oneself to the intuition of absolute unity and thereby to intellectual intuition as such" (FD, SW 1.4: 364; Schelling 2001b: 378). This is the kind of intellectual intuition he appears to be referring to when he speaks of "a preliminary and purely formal kind of absolute cognition" (FD, SW 1.4: 366; Schelling 2001b: 380), which has as its content nothing but the indifferent unity of thought and being, form and essence. As such, it may be described as "the first speculative cognition," or as that intellectual intuition that is the "principle and ground of all philosophy" (FD, SW 1.4: 368; Schelling 2001b: 381–2), or even as the "absolute cognition" that is the essential instrument or organ of all philosophizing, inasmuch as it is only through such a preceding intuition of absolute identity that subsequent philosophical construction becomes possible in the first place (FD, SW 1.4: 339).

It is, however, the second function of intellectual intuition that most clearly illuminates Schelling's method of construction in his writings of this period and is therefore our main concern. Intellectual intuition in this sense is to be understood as the "overall capacity to see the universal in the particular, the infinite in the finite," and, as such, is described as the "unchangeable organ" or tool that is an indispensable condition of all genuine knowing (FD, SW 1.4: 362; Schelling 2001b: 377). To illustrate what this means, Schelling uses the example – derived from Goethe[15] – of the botanist who, as it were, "sees through" the individual specimen before him in order to grasp "the plant as such," in order "to see indifference within difference," something that, according to Schelling, is possible only by means of intellectual intuition. It is therefore only by virtue of this second function of intellectual intuition that the philosopher is able to move beyond the indifferent unity of his absolute starting point and "give birth" to a "totality of cognition," that is, to a complete *system* of philosophy (FD, SW 1.4: 391; Schelling 2001b: 384). The gist of the "absolute method" required for the construction of such a system is clearly stated in the very title of §IV of *Fernere Darstellungen:*

[15] For a discussion of Goethe's investigations of the *Urpflanze* and the influence of the same upon Schelling and others, see "The Methodology of the Intuitive Understanding," Förster 2012: ch. 11.

"On philosophical construction, or how to exhibit all things in the absolute" (FD, SW 1.4: 391; Schelling 2001b: 394).[16]

IV The actual *method* of philosophical construction or demonstration (exhibition of the particular in the universal)

As we have now seen, Schelling's method of philosophical construction is neither synthetic nor analytic; instead, it is "demonstrative" (a term that Schelling normally employs as an exact synonym for "constructive" [See VM, SW 1.5: 252; Schelling 1966: 46; CP, SW 1.5: 126–7; Schelling 2008: 273, and FD, SW 1.4: 392n., 407; Schelling 2001b: 385n., 393] and which he claims to have to borrowed, like the term construction itself, from mathematics). In every such "demonstration" something particular or finite is demonstrated or exhibited "in" something universal or infinite; and the essence of *philosophical* demonstration consists in the absolute *identification* or *equation* [*Gleichsetzung*] of the former and the latter. "These," writes Schelling, "are necessary and absolutely one in every construction, and only insofar as this is the case can any philosophical construction whatsoever be called absolute" (FD, SW 1.4: 393; Schelling 2001b: 393–4).

Mathematics, especially geometry, which for Schelling provides the best illustration of the method of construction or demonstration employed by philosophy, provides no "explanations," but demonstrates the truth of its theorems directly by means of construction. It does so in accordance with the principle of identity – here understood neither as a strictly logical, analytic principle nor as a "synthetic" one in the Kantian or Fichtean sense. The sole principle guiding such construction is the one with which we are already acquainted, the *law of rational identity*, for which the oppositions of analytic and synthetic, thought and being, infinite and finite, simply do not exist.

In accordance with this law, mathematics treats space and time (which Schelling characterizes as the universal images or attributes of the absolute) as the absolute itself and then proceeds to "demonstrate" the universality of the properties of the particular figures or relationships with which it is concerned by actually "constructing" them in pure space and time. What is "expressed" [*ausgedrückt*] or exhibited in such constructions is precisely the unity of the particular and the universal, and this is what endows such demonstrations with their characteristic certainty, self-evidence, and universal validity. With respect to its form, albeit not its content,

[16] In reference to the description of philosophical construction as the "absolute method" of philosophy, see FD, SW 1.4: 399; Schelling 2001b: 390.

mathematical cognition captures the essence of absolute cognition and therefore can provide us with an essential clue for understanding philosophical construction.[17] But for Schelling the key to understanding the universality and self-evidence of mathematics lies not (as it did for Fichte) in the *activity* of constructing, but rather in what one *becomes able to see* when one demonstrates or "exhibits the universal in the particular" in this manner.[18]

Philosophy displays the same unity that mathematics does – the unity of the finite and the infinite, of being and of thinking – but it has the more difficult task of "intuiting this unity immediately in the essence of the eternal itself and exhibiting it in reason" (FD, SW 1.4: 346–7). Both sciences exhibit in intuition the unity of being and thinking, but whereas mathematics exhibits it either in the finite, the realm of being (which is where geometry displays this unity, i.e., in space) or in the infinite, the realm of thinking (which is where arithmetic displays this unity, i.e., in time), philosophy displays it directly in the absolute, a domain in which there is no division between being and thinking, the finite and the infinite.

In accomplishing this, neither mathematics nor philosophy can rely merely upon concepts and the kind of cognition associated therewith (cognition via mere understanding or *Verstand*); instead, they must each display their distinctive types of unity by means of what Schelling calls "*Urbilder*," primordial images or forms, which involve no separation between thinking and being, the finite and the infinite, particular and universal. But the kind of *urbildliche Erkenntniß* proper to philosophy differs from that found in mathematics in that the former possesses *content* as well as form. But since this content is neither empirical nor capable of being exhibited in the purely formal kind of intuition characteristic of mathematics, it can be intuited only *intellectually*, and thus Schelling baptizes this content with an ancient, Platonic appellation: *ideas* (see FD, SW 1.4: 347).

One obvious implication of this account of the employment of intellectual intuition in philosophical construction and one often emphasized by Schelling himself is that the domain of philosophical construction is by no means limited to the pure I and the constitutive acts of the same. On the contrary, in order to engage in such construction we must "abstract entirely from the subjectivity of intellectual intuition" in order to raise ourselves to the standpoint of absolute cognition and to cognize by means of intellectual intuition "the absolute in and for itself" (FD, SW 1.4: 256).

[17] Concerning the relationship of mathematical to philosophical construction, see especially FD, SW 1.4: 345–8 and CP, SW 1.5: 128–40; Schelling 2008: 273–81.

[18] On this point, see Krings 1982: 347.

For Schelling, philosophy begins with an ascent to the "standpoint of reason," the standpoint of absolute identity. And once he has attained to this standpoint, the chief job for the philosophical construction worker is simply to look around and see for himself how *particularity* presents itself from this universal standpoint and reconciles itself therewith. As Schelling explains in §14 of his *Darstellung meines Systems*, since philosophy as such considers things only as they are "in themselves," that is "as infinite and absolute identity," then "true philosophy" – as Spinoza alone of all previous philosophers clearly grasped – "consists in the proof that absolute identity (the infinite) has not stepped outside of itself and that everything that is, insofar as it is, is infinity itself" (DSP, AA 1.10: 121; Schelling 2001a: 353). And, as we have also now seen, such a "proof" can consist only in the "demonstration" or "exhibition" of this claim with respect to some particular thing or unity. Hence, the distinctive task of philosophical construction is to *show* or to *reveal* the asserted identity of the particular and the universal, and to do so, more specifically, by "displaying" the former in the latter, thereby *directly demonstrating – i.e., constructing* – the truth in question (see FD, SW 1.4: 407; Schelling 2001b: 393).

Any such construction will necessarily be both universally valid and self-evident, because it – by definition – transfers the identity of form and essence (thought and being), which is the nominal criterion of truth itself, from the absolute starting point of philosophy to the particular unities "constructed" by the philosopher from his superior "standpoint of reason" (FD, SW 1.4: 408; Schelling 2001b: 394). Perhaps the best way to understand what philosophical construction actually consists in for Schelling is to think of it not as a way of "doing" anything, but rather as a *new way of seeing*, as a mode of vision in which one "sees" the particular in its unity with the absolute (and the absolute as present in the particular).

Though Schelling's conception of philosophical construction may have its proximate roots in Kant's account of mathematical construction, what most influenced him was not Kant's attention to the necessity of actually "doing" something – drawing a line, for instance – in order to produce a mathematical proof, but rather his description of mathematical construction as an "exhibition of the universal in the particular." This is a description that places the locus of mathematical self-evidence not in *machen* but in *darstellen* – in how a particular geometrical figure "exhibits" itself as a universal – that is to say, in how it allows us to *see* in this particular figure something that is universally and necessarily true of all such figures.

Significantly, however, Schelling's description of philosophical construction reverses the order contained in Kant's account of mathematical

construction, since, as we have seen, for Schelling, the essence of philosophical construction consists in *the exhibition of the particular in the universal (that is, in the absolute)*. Kant, to be sure, uses similar language in characterizing the task and method of philosophy and in distinguishing the latter from that of mathematics he declares that "philosophical cognition thus considers the particular only in the universal, but mathematical cognition considers the universal in the particular."[19] But, for Kant, the philosopher "considers" [*betrachtet*] the particular in the universal only by subsuming something – an individual percept or another concept – *under a concept*, whereas mathematics is able to "consider the universal in the particular" by exhibiting or demonstrating the universal in the particular via the act of *constructing* it. Schelling's disagreement with Kant on this point is precisely over whether or not philosophy can "consider the particular in the universal" in the sense of "exhibiting it in the universal," which is to say constructing it in pure, non-sensible intuition. Indeed, this is precisely what Schelling claims philosophy is able to do: "to exhibit the particular in the universal," a claim that he says is supported by a long "tradition," one that conceives of the universal not as an abstract "concept" that is formally opposed to the "particular," but rather as already united in its essence with the particular. In short, Kant's failure to endorse the idea of philosophy as the exhibition of the particular in the universal is simply a corollary of his failure to grasp the universal as an "idea" of reason in the *positive* sense (see CP, SW 1.5: 131; Schelling 2008: 275).

Schelling's reversal of the Kantian account of the procedure of geometry and his application of the same to philosophy is made possible by the fact – at least according to Schelling – that, unlike the geometer, the philosopher actually *begins with the universal* (that is, with the indifferent absolute as originally grasped in intellectual intuition or absolute cognition) and proceeds from there to the particular, which he then, so to speak, *assimilates as an idea* to that absolute unity he has previously grasped. The whole point of such "construction" is simply to make evident or to "demonstrate" (and thus to prove) the general claim that is already present, albeit only abstractly and as a mere promissory note, in the first, absolute cognition with which the system begins: namely, that *all really is one*.[20]

[19] KrV, A714/B742.

[20] For a provocative and original alternative interpretation of Schelling's conception of philosophical construction, particularly as applied to the Philosophy of Nature and derived almost entirely from VNP, see Ziche 2002. Ziche contends that for Schelling the absolute is neither itself an element of philosophical construction nor an object of the same. Instead, he argues that it is intuited only as the most general condition for the possibility of such construction. The role of the absolute in such a

The only way to demonstrate the truth of this claim, to "cash out" this promissory note, is by actually viewing the particular "through the lens," as it were, of the universal, thereby "exhibiting" the particular not merely *in* the absolute, but, with respect to its reality or essence, as *identical with it*. And this, according to Schelling, is precisely what Kant claimed is accomplished by mathematical construction (See CP, SW 1.5: 139; Schelling 2008: 180).[21]

V The *elements* of philosophical construction (ideas of reason)

As we have seen, the task of philosophical construction is "to exhibit all things in the absolute" (FD, SW 1.4: 391; Schelling 2001b: 394). But when Schelling refers to "all things," he is not really talking about what we commonly understand by this term, that is, the finite, empirical "things" of sense experience. On the contrary, the "things" with which philosophy is exclusively concerned and which it is charged with "constructing" must be understood not as concrete phenomenal appearances, but rather as things "as they are in themselves," that is, as they are viewed "from the standpoint of reason," a standpoint for which "there is no finitude" (DSP, AA 1.10: 121; Schelling 2001a: 353. See too FD, SW 1.4: 288; Schelling 2001b: 385). There is therefore no place within philosophical cognition as such (and thus, it would sometimes appear, no place within the absolute itself) for finite, sensible things. Thus, concedes Schelling, philosophy "has nothing to do with the actual world" (FD, SW 1.4: 408–9; Schelling 2001b: 395). This also implies that philosophical construction stands in no need of any "confirmation from experience" (See VM, SW 1.5: 325; Schelling 1966: 123–4 and "Einige allgemeine Betrachtungen," SW 1.4: 530). Indeed, one of the reasons that Schelling, following Plato, praises the study of geometry as good preparation for philosophy is precisely because it teaches one "to see what is essential and to lift oneself out of the realm of change" (CP, SW 1.5: 129; Schelling 2008: 174). Schelling thus describes his Philosophy of Identity as consistent with the "genuine Platonic

construction is thus similar to that of space in the construction of a geometrical figure: it is the universal *medium* within which such construction occurs (220). Ingenious as this interpretation may be, it utterly fails to explain what it might *mean* to construct a particular "within the horizon" of the absolute or how one can do this without "intuiting the absolute itself," which is, after all, the *real content* of what Schelling describes as "absolute cognition."

[21] Schelling also acknowledges his debt to Kant's construction of matter in VM, SW 1.5: 332; Schelling 1966: 130.

doctrine" precisely because "it has a purely negative relationship to the things of appearance; rather than proving that they are, it proves that they are not" (*Philosophie und Religion* [1804], SW 1.6: 624).[22]

Genuine philosophy, says Schelling, "cannot acknowledge the actuality of the world of appearances *as such*, not even insofar as *what it is in-itself* is contained in the absolute, but can recognize only its absolute lack of actuality" (FD, SW 1.4: 409; Schelling 2001b: 395). Inasmuch as philosophical construction succeeds in *exhibiting the particular in the universal*, this means that "the particular is annihilated as a particular – that is, in its opposition to the universal" (FD, SW 1.4: 393). It follows that the "particulars" that philosophical construction "displays within the universal" are neither finite spatio-temporal things nor sensible images or *Bilder* nor generalized concepts derived from such things and images; instead, the particulars that philosophy constructs are the archetypes or *Urbilder* of sensible things: not finite things or particulars, but *particulars that are also universals*. Schelling's proposed names for these "particular universals" that are the direct objects of philosophical construction include: "particular unities" (FD, SW 1.4: 398; Schelling 2001b: 390), "particular schematisms of world-intuition," "eternal prototypes of things" (VM, SW 1.5: 255; Schelling 1966: 49), and "potencies" of the absolute (FD, SW 1.4: 395; Schelling 2001b: 387).[23] But his favorite name for them is simply "ideas," and he therefore describes philosophy itself as "the science of ideas" (VM, SW 1.5: 255; Schelling 1966: 49).

It follows that the only way to engage in philosophical construction, that is, the only way to "exhibit particulars in the absolute," is to *cognize them* – not via discursive thinking or argumentation, to be sure, but, directly, by means of intellectual intuition – *in their particularity as absolute*, that is, to cognize them *as ideas*, which Schelling rapturously describes as "blessed beings," indeed, as "gods themselves, inasmuch as each idea is for itself absolute and yet is comprised in the absolute form"

[22] Because, for Schelling, philosophy cannot *explain* or *deduce* or *derive* finite appearances from the absolute, there is simply no *transition* to be made from the latter to the former, and thus the relationship in question can be characterized only as a "distancing" or "fall" from the absolute. As Ernst Cassirer points out, one of the most problematic implications of Schelling's philosophical program during this period is that it implies the *nothingness* of finite things in space and time, inasmuch as such things cannot be "constructed" and thus have no standing in relation to the absolute and no reality of their own. But this also means that Schelling has no way to explain the brute facticity of our experience of such things; indeed, he cannot even account for their *possibility*. See Cassirer 1974: 63.

[23] In his lectures on the philosophy of art Schelling also calls these ideas "potencies" [*Potenzen*] of the absolute. See PK, SW, 1.5: 367; Schelling 1989b: 15.

(FD, SW 1.4: 405; Schelling 2001b: 392). If the task of philosophy is to grasp a particular by connecting it with the absolute as its principle, then it cannot accomplish this task unless in one and the same act of comprehension it comprehends both (1) how everything is in principle *one* and (2) how within this absolute unity every *particular* form is, as particular, *distinct* from every other, while still sharing with all these others the same absolute essence or reality.

Schelling's name for the kind of cognition that is involved in philosophical construction is "*urbildliche*" cognition (FD, SW 1.4: 347), and it should be obvious that such cognition is not simply a component of philosophical construction, but is *identical* with it. Both "construction" and "*urbildliche* cognition" designate one and the same thing: namely, seeing the particular in the universal and doing so in a way that both abolishes and preserves the distinction between the particular and the universal. Insofar as the particular is truly exhibited in the universal, the former displays the absolute in its entirety, and the difference between the two is purely *ideal*. Schelling thus compares the difference between the idea and the absolute to that between an original and a copy, both of which have the same real essence (see FD, SW 1.4: 393–4; Schelling 2001b: 396).

In accordance with this conception of philosophical construction, he redefines construction in his *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums* not as "exhibition of the particular in the absolute" or "in the universal," but rather as "exhibition of the real in the ideal, of the particular in what is purely and simply universal, in the idea" (VM, SW 1.5: 325; Schelling 1966: 123. See too VM, SW 1.5: 255; Schelling 1966: 49). The task of philosophical construction is to demonstrate – that is to *show in intuition* – how each particular idea is not merely "contained in" but is, at least with respect to its being or essence, "identical to" the absolute. And the way the philosopher accomplishes this is by displaying the relation of each particular idea to all the other ideas, i.e., to the *totality*, of the same. This is why the final product of philosophical construction in the Schellingian sense is not, as with Fichte and other transcendental idealists, an accurate *Bild* of concrete self-consciousness and its world of experience, but rather, a complete and self-enclosed *system of ideas*, in which all differences between "particular unities" are merely ideal, whereas essential reality is one and self-identical. To grasp an idea in this manner, via intellectual intuition, as contained in the absolute, is precisely to *construct* it *as an idea*, and indeed the *only* things that philosophy can truly construct are "ideas" in this sense (CP, SW 1.5: 134; Schelling 2008: 277. See too CP, SW 1.5: 140; Schelling 2008: 289).

VI The *product* of philosophical construction (the System of Identity)

As we have just seen, the necessary result of philosophical construction according to Schelling is the "exhibition in intuition" of a complete totality of "particular unities," a demonstration that reveals not only the internal relation of each of these unities or ideas to the indifferent absolute unity, but also and thereby the relation of each of these ideas to all the other "particular unities." In short, the product of philosophical construction is and must be *a system of ideas*, for this is what one "sees" when one views such particulars "in the universal," i.e., whenever one "constructs" them in intuition.[24]

From this it follows that philosophy itself, insofar as it merely *describes* or *articulates* what it has constructed in intuition, must take a rigorously *systematic form* not for any external reasons, but for purely internal ones. The systematic structure of philosophy is simply a reflection of the systematic structure of the absolute itself, as expressed and cognized in the universe of ideas. "Only for reason," writes Schelling in *Fernere Darstellungen*, "is there one universe; and to grasp something rationally means to grasp it above all as an organic member of an absolute whole, in its necessary connection with the same, and thereby as a reflection of absolute unity" (FD, SW 1.4: 390).[25] To "construct" something philosophically is therefore *simply to see or to recognize its proper place in a larger, systematic whole*.

The systematic structure of philosophy is thus simply a reflection or mirror of the fundamental structure of the universe itself. And the completeness of the former can be insured only by carrying the task of philosophical construction through to the end, that is, by continuing until every *possible* determinate unity has been "constructed" in the absolute[26] – though Schelling has almost nothing to say about how the philosopher is supposed to *know* that he has, in fact, finally constructed all that can ever

[24] See Vater 2000: 223 for a good formulation of the intimate relationship between Schelling's *method* of construction and his *system* of philosophy.

[25] This is the feature of Schellingian construction that is emphasized by Frederick C. Beiser in Beiser 2002.

[26] Admittedly, Schelling is frustratingly vague on this point, but in his lectures on the philosophy of art he writes that "the principle of construction is, in another and higher sense, the same as that of ancient physics, namely, *that nature abhors a vacuum*. Thus wherever there is an empty place in the universe, nature fills it. Less metaphorically expressed, no possibility is left unrealized in the universe; everything that is possible is actual. Since the universe is *one* and indivisible, it cannot flow out into anything without flowing out in its entirety" (PK, SW 1.5: 419; Schelling 1989b: 54).

possibly be constructed. Thus it is not surprising that he uses the same word – "construction" – to designate both the *method* by means of which the philosopher intuits the innermost nature of the absolute *and* the *systematic structure* of his Philosophy of Identity.

VII The *truth* and *reality* of philosophical construction

The task of philosophy, Schelling recognizes, is certainly not "that one should *simply* construct *anything whatsoever*; instead, the point is that it has to be constructed *correctly*" (AAE, AA 1.10: 100). The process we have been describing, though it is freely accomplished by the philosopher when he "constructs" his system, must therefore not be understood as in any sense a "fictional" one, in which the philosopher's constructions have validity and reality only in the context of his own project of construction. On the contrary, philosophical construction of the Schellingian variety must be understood as the indispensable means by which the philosopher *recognizes* an eternal reality that is in no sense dependent upon his individual construction of it.[27]

Whereas the philosopher exhibits the ideas in the absolute, the absolute, for its part, may also be said to "exhibit itself" in the ideas. As Schelling puts it, the absolute posits itself both objectively and subjectively, as both infinite and finite (that is to say, both as the indifferent universal and as the totality of particular unities or ideas), and it posits both in a single act (FD, SW 1.4: 391n.; Schelling 2001b: 384n.). This is the process that Schelling calls "the mystery of creation," a process through which the absolute posits itself not as one but as many and knows the many as itself. To further characterize this rather mysterious process, this "act by which the absolute subject objectifies itself" (VM, SW 1.5: 325; Schelling 1966: 123), Schelling often employs the difficult term *Ineinbildung* or *Einbildung* ("in-forming," "identification," "forming into one," "imaging," "imagining"). Though this term certainly recalls, as it is surely meant to, the function assigned to *produktive Einbildungskraft* (productive imagination) in Kant's and

[27] Temilo van Zantwijk proposes a very different interpretation of Schelling's conception of philosophical construction, according to which the latter is supposed to *constitute* its objects, the sole reality of which always remains dependent upon the philosopher's construction of them (van Zantwijk 2001: 108–11). He fails, however, to provide any convincing evidence for this interpretation and seriously misreads the passages he does cite. There is, to be sure, a real sense in which philosophical, like geometrical, construction *proves* the existence of its objects, but to concede *this* is by no means to concede that the *reality* of such objects *depends upon* the philosopher's proof of the same via construction. And indeed, it would appear impossible to reconcile such a thesis with Schelling's "Platonic" commitment to the independent reality of the absolute and the ideas.

Fichte's accounts of the transcendental constitution of experience, for Schelling it does not refer to the world-constituting activity of the cognizing subject, but rather to something much more "objective," to that process of *Subject-Objectivirung* by means of which the absolute becomes, for itself, an absolute object. Thus, employing language that harkens back to one of his very first literary efforts, his juvenile essay on Plato's *Timaeus*, Schelling describes the process in question as "the divine in-forming of original and copy that is the true root of every being" (FD, SW 1.4: 394; Schelling 2001b: 386).[28]

In the end, the only reason it is even possible to engage in philosophical construction in the Schellingian sense, the only reason it is possible for the philosopher to "exhibit" the particular in the universal, is because such a way of considering the particular and the absolute simply expresses or reflects the extra-philosophical truth about both. The absolute is present from the start, in its entirety, within everything, even though we first cognize it, indirectly and obscurely, only as an abstract concept of the understanding and then, subsequently and more adequately, as a necessary idea of reason, and finally – through direct intellectual intuition – as the absolute itself, which is always present within each of these ideal determinations. When we have finally arrived at this final point, which is of course precisely where philosophy *begins*, then we are for the first time able to grasp that both ideas and finite things possess reality (if indeed, the latter can actually be said to possess any reality at all) only in their relationship of identity with the absolute, which is the ground of all reality. By means of philosophical construction, therefore, we finally succeed in grasping particulars as they really are and have always been: as universals in their own right and as comprised in the absolute, of which each determinate idea is no more than a "particular schematism," *als Formen göttlicher Einbildung*, determinate forms of the "divine in-forming" (FD, SW 1.4: 395; Schelling 2001b: 387).

What the philosopher accomplishes through his constructions in intuition is *consciously to reintegrate* the multiplicity of ideas into that absolute unity from which they originally proceed. Thus, if we can

[28] To further complicate matters, Schelling also uses the term *Einbildung* on at least one occasion to describe the philosopher's "construction" of the idea (see CP, SW 1.5: 135; Schelling 2008: 278). For an insightful analysis of his use of the terms *Ineinbildung* and *Einbildung* (and the relation of the same to Fichte's *Einbildungskraft*) see Marquet 1968: 238–59. For a rather different interpretation of the *Ineinbilden* as the "l'autoschématisation de l'Absolut" within the context of Schelling's "transcendental theogeny" (understood as the process through which the absolute gives birth to the infinite totality of particular ideas), see Maesschalck 1997.

describe the absolute as "expressing itself" or "flowing out into" the particular ideas, we can, in turn, describe philosophy as "the accomplished shaping into one or in-forming [*Einbildung*] of the particular in the universal, or as the dissolving of the former into the latter" (VNP, SW 1.5: 122–3; Schelling 1985: 378–9).

Though it may at first have seemed as if the indifferent absolute with which we began our philosophizing was a purely abstract and empty formal self-identity, philosophical construction reveals that this was *never* the case. By "exhibiting the particular in the universal" the philosopher comes to realize for himself what the absolute was for itself from the start: namely, a unity containing within itself multiplicity; not just a formal *identity*, but a real *totality*. But of course, only those who have actually *constructed for themselves* the manifold of ideas in the manner described by Schelling, only those who have actually *seen for themselves* this absolute unity of unity and multiplicity, of universality and particularity, will be able to grasp this vital truth: namely, that one cannot truly cognize the particular unless one can cognize the absolute as its principle *and* that one cannot truly grasp the absolute without grasping how the unity of the same comprehends a totality of distinct, ideal forms (i.e., the universe of ideas). What is *demonstrated* or *exhibited* through such construction is thus the very same thing that was merely *asserted* by absolute cognition when it first arrived at the standpoint of reason: namely, the "absolute *unity of the ideal and the real*" (FD, SW 1.4: 406; Schelling 2001b: 393). It is one thing simply to *proclaim* "*hen kai pan*," but it is something else altogether to *demonstrate for oneself* the truth of this claim by means of philosophical construction.

The philosopher who has accomplished this task of construction does not simply *assume* or *suppose* that his constructions correspond to the structure of ultimate reality. On the contrary, what justifies his claim that they do is the same thing that justifies those of the geometer concerning the truth and universal validity of his claims: namely, the incontrovertible and immediate self-evidence that accompanies anything that is constructed in and for pure intuition. The *truth* of Schelling's System of Identity is therefore supposed to be vouchsafed by the *method* of the same. "In philosophical construction it is purely by means of intellectual intuition that absolute cognition is also recognized to be what is preeminently real, the absolute itself, and it is by this means as well that the modes of this cognizing are recognized to be the only true and real things" (FD, SW 1.4: 370; Schelling 2001b: 382–3). Thus, as Schelling himself clearly recognizes, in committing oneself to the method of construction as he understands it, one commits oneself at the same time to affirming the identity of the ideal

and the real – in short, to what Schelling calls "*absolute idealism*, in which absolute reality is given immediately with absolute ideality" (CP, SW 1.5: 136; Schelling 2008: 278).

Thus, even though Schelling had previously conceded that the ultimate test of the correctness of his own Philosophy of Nature could rest only upon the correspondence between what is constructed therein and nature itself as revealed through experience (AAE, AA 1.10: 99–100. See too EE, SW 1.3: 20; Schelling 2004: 19), he now shrinks from applying this same test to the even more ambitious constructions found in the Philosophy of Identity. Instead, he now insists that philosophy should pay no heed whatsoever to empirical evidence, inasmuch as the sensible world of appearances is simply less "real" than the intelligible world of ideas, with the construction of which philosophy is exclusively concerned. On this point, his Platonic predilections are unmistakably clear: the real world is the world of ideas that is directly intuited by reason, not the sensible world of appearances, and it would be absurd to pretend to measure the former by its conformity with the latter.

VIII The unteachable, innate *capacity* for intellectual intuition and philosophical construction (philosophical genius)

The motto of philosophy, according to Schelling, is "*odi profanum vulgus et arceo*": "I hate the unhallowed crowd and bid it keep out" (VM, SW 1.5: 261; Schelling 1966: 55, quoting Horace, *Odes* III, 1). The method of construction employed within the System of Identity is thus *not for everyone*, inasmuch as it presupposes a "capacity for grasping the absolute" that simply *cannot be learned* (VM, SW 1.5: 266; Schelling 1966: 60. See too FD, SW 1.4: 350–60; Schelling 2001b: 376–7), but must simply be present in advance. To be sure, simple possession of the raw talent in question is not enough to make one a philosopher – for this one must first cultivate and develop one's innate capacity – but the capacity itself must already be present "as something already decided, concerning which no doubt is allowed" (FD, SW 1.4: 361; Schelling 2001b: 376). The simple truth of the matter, at least according to Schelling, is that not everyone possesses the innate capacity in question. Some people simply lack altogether the requisite "inner organ of intuition." No matter how hard they may struggle to lift themselves by their bootstraps, they will never attain the standpoint of reason, and no matter how diligently they may squint their inner eyes, they will never be able to "exhibit the particular in the universal." Such people, says Schelling, are simply

anschauungslos, and when presented with instances where philosophical construction is required, they will be "unable to construct anything or to combine anything spontaneously" (VM, SW 1.5: 243; Schelling 1966: 36. See too VM, SW 1.5: 256; Schelling 1966: 49).

Nor did Schelling think that those who lack the necessary organ of intellectual intuition were likely to be able to *acquire* it through study and practice. Indeed he often seems blithely unconcerned with addressing the problems and confusions of anyone not already securely situated at the "standpoint of reason." He does occasionally suggest that one way to lead those not already at the standpoint of reason toward the same is by sharpening the opposition between the kind of "absolute cognition" presupposed by the Philosophy of Identity and all other kinds of cognition, particularly the kind associated with the "mere understanding" and its "standpoint of reflection," thereby helping them to see for themselves the inadequacies of and oppositions contained within the latter (see VM, SW 1.5: 248–9; Schelling 1966: 42–3).[29] And on occasion he also praises the study of mathematics as a useful propadeutic to philosophy, but he seems to have had little confidence in either of these programs of pre-philosophical education and, beyond this, he utterly fails to provide any positive guidance for the perplexed, would-be philosopher of identity.[30]

It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that Schelling did not customarily give introductory lectures on philosophy, nor offer colloquia for beginning students, nor publish popular writings designed "to force the reader to understand." On the contrary, he ridiculed the concerns of certain other, unnamed philosophers about the apparent incapacity of some people to do philosophy; indeed, he actively opposed their efforts to provide such people with some means of access to philosophy and recommended, instead, "cutting off sharply any access to philosophy and isolating it on every flank from ordinary knowledge, so that there is no road or path leading from it to philosophy." The philosopher, he bluntly maintained, should simply declare that "here is where philosophy starts,

[29] As Ernst Cassirer notes, the only arguments Schelling ever provides for his way of proceeding are purely *negative* ones, consisting in criticism of other ways of proceeding, as found in empiricism, mechanism, and, in general, the philosophy of reflection. See Cassirer 1974: 259–60. On this same point, see too Verra 1979: 38.

[30] One of the chief deficiencies of Schelling's theory of construction is his refusal to take seriously the "problem of the starting point," the problem of how to move from the ordinary standpoint to the standpoint of reason. As Michael Vater has observed, Schelling has virtually nothing to say about this issue, nor does he offer any account of how and why the standpoint of reflection and understanding arises *within and from* the absolute in the first place (something that Fichte, of course, goes to great lengths to explain). See Vater 2000: 228–9.

and anyone who is not already at this point or who shrinks from it should stay away or go back to from where he came" (FD, SW 1.4: 362; Schelling 2001b: 377).[31]

Rejecting all propadeutic measures as ultimately in vain, Schelling simply implores his reader "intellectually to intuit the indifference of the ideal and the real immediately in yourself, in absolute cognition: this is the beginning and first step of philosophy" (FD, SW 1.4: 348). If one requests assistance in doing this, then all Schelling can tell him is that this is, alas, not an ability that can be *taught*, at least not by philosophy (See FD, SW 1.4: 361; Schelling 2001b: 377). Not everyone will be able to lift himself to the standpoint of reason, which is the standpoint from which philosophical construction first becomes *possible*, just as not everyone possesses the "instrument" or "organ" by means of which such construction becomes *actual:* namely, "the capacity to see the universal in the particular, the infinite in the finite, the two combined into a living unity" (FD, SW 1.4: 362; Schelling 2001b: 377). Just as some people are born without the organ of external vision, so, believed Schelling, some are born without that of intellectual intuition and hence without the innate capacity for *urbildliche* cognition.

IX Conclusion

Let us conclude with three questions concerning Schelling's new conception of philosophical construction:

(1) How is Schelling's constructive *method* of philosophizing related to the original self-construction of philosophy's *object*, whether the I or the absolute?

Not only does Schelling rely upon construction as his *method* for philosophizing, but he also claims that the *object* of his philosophy – the self-identical absolute – must also be understood "constructively," that is to say, as having in some sense *originally constructed itself*, prior to and independently of the philosopher's theoretical construction of the same. This raises many difficult questions concerning the similarities and

[31] One must therefore agree with Jürgen Weber's judgment that Schelling's project of philosophical construction, for all of its importance for his philosophy of identity, remained little more than a vague program (Weber 1995: 98), as well as with Bernard Taureck's complaint that Schelling utterly fails to provide any *foundation* for this notion of construction and mainly just repeats over and over the alleged *results* of the same (Taureck 1975: 259) – a complaint with which most readers of Schelling will surely concur.

differences between these two "constructions," and one may be tempted to resolve these questions by thinking of the philosopher's activity as simply a "reconstruction" of the original "self-construction" of the absolute. Schelling, however, resists such a description, and he does so for a good reason.

Schelling, as we have seen, is unambiguously committed to the *reality* of that process of *Ineinbildung* by means of which the absolute differentiates itself into the ideas, and thus he affirms the *real self-construction* of the particulars in the universal, and (at least on most occasions) he seems to understand this as a process wholly distinct from the philosopher's construction of the same.[32] Thus the philosopher's construction, his exhibition of the particular (the idea) in the universal (the absolute), is perhaps best understood as a purely *ideal* construction (or reconstruction), one that follows a path that is just the *reverse* of the one followed by the absolute in its *real* self-construction.

Though Schelling sometimes appears to endorse such an interpretation of the relationship between these two "constructions," this only raises new questions and problems concerning his method. One of these concerns the relationship between, on the one hand, the absolute's original self-construction, which Schelling sometimes describes as a unified process, the *real* aspect of which is the self-identical absolute and the *ideal* aspect of which is to be found in the particular unities or ideas, and, on the other, that *rational* or *absolute cognition* with which philosophy is supposed to commence. In several places, most notably in *Darstellung meines Systems* and in the first section of *Fernere Darstellungen*, Schelling characterizes "absolute cognition" as the philosopher's immediate and intuitive cognition of the point of indifference with which the entire system begins. Such cognition, maintains Schelling, is not really *external* to its object (the absolute) but is instead an essential *aspect* of the same; indeed, it is *identical* with it. The absolute is thus not "absolute" at all unless – to recall Aristotle

[32] A recent school of interpretation has challenged this claim and maintains, quite implausibly, that both the absolute and the universe of ideas are, in fact, first *constituted* in and by philosophical construction. Here I am referring to the work of Hermann Krings (See Krings 1982: 350; Krings 1985: 111–28) and others (Löw 1979 and Boenke 1990) who minimize the "realistic" side of Schelling's account of construction and propose to interpret it instead strictly as a process of "logo-genesis," that is, as the external application of a "logic" that allows the philosopher to incorporate some determinate particular into a pre-existing conceptual scheme (the universal). Indeed, though such an interpretation, which treats "ideas" as quasi-concepts, mediating between sensible particulars and the absolute, certainly has its appeal, it is very difficult if not impossible to reconcile it with Schelling's strong and repeated emphasis upon the purely *intuitive* character of philosophical construction and with the *reality* he associates with products of the latter. This kind of purely "logical" interpretation of Schelling's conception of construction has in turn been subjected to withering criticism by Jürgen Weber (Weber 1995: 100).

and to anticipate Hegel – it also "knows itself as the absolute." This claim, however, is difficult to reconcile with the previously indicated *distinction* between the philosopher's construction of the ideas (that is, his cognition of the absolute) and the absolute's own self-construction, just as it also calls into doubt the *independent reality* of the absolute.

(2) Is Schelling's method "circular"? (What is the relation between his metaphysics and his epistemology?)

Schelling's symmetrical account of the relationship of philosophical construction to the original self-construction of the absolute also harbors a certain tension with respect to what guarantees the *truth* of the latter. On the one hand, construction in intuition is supposed to be self-evidently true and thus to require no confirmation from anything outside itself; on the other, the truth of what is constructed by the philosopher is, as Schelling sometimes explicitly suggests, confirmed or verified by its *correspondence* with the original self-construction of the universe, that is, with the universe of ideas. The tension between these two views of the relationship between philosophical construction of the absolute and the absolute's own self-construction points to a deeper, underlying *circularity* in Schelling's account: if philosophical construction is in some sense *confirmed* by the reality of the ideas, and yet if the ideas are, in turn, *accessible* to us *only* by means of philosophical construction, then the whole doctrine of the ideas and the absolute begins to resemble a self-confirming feedback loop.[33]

One way to thematize the tension we have been discussing between the method of philosophy and the object of the same is to characterize the ambiguity concerning how to understand this relationship as betraying an uncertainty concerning the proper relationship of *epistemology* to *metaphysics*. Whereas most modern philosophers, starting with Descartes, have affirmed a certain *primacy* of the former over the latter, Schelling, following self-consciously in the footsteps of Plato and Spinoza, generally *reverses* this relationship and affirms the philosophical primacy of metaphysics over epistemology (even while affirming the identity of knowing and being in the absolute). And surely it is plausible to attribute many of the obscurities we have highlighted in Schelling's "contemplative" method of philosophical construction and the strikingly repetitive and unsatisfactory character of his explanations of this procedure in comparison with the richness of his descriptions of the absolute itself and of the teeming universe of ideas and potencies associated with it as a consequence of his privileging of

[33] Cf. Verra 1979: 38 and Cassirer 1974: 259.

metaphysics over epistemology and of his failure to provide a convincing defense of the truth of these claims.[34]

(3) How is one to *evaluate* philosophical constructs based on the "self-evidence" of "intellectual intuition"?

Schelling claims that "we are by no means concerned with *simply* constructing *anything whatsoever*; instead, our concern is that it be constructed *correctly*" (AAE, AA 1.10: 100). But precisely *how* is one to determine whether the System of Identity has indeed been "constructed correctly," if, in the end, the sole criterion that Schelling recognizes and invokes for judging the correctness of his philosophical assertions and constructions is the alleged self-evidence of intellectual intuition?

How is one to evaluate such claims? Can we stipulate in this case as well that it is not enough simply to *have* an intellectual intuition, but that what is needed is a *correct* one? Surely not, since the whole *point* of basing philosophy upon the evidence of intellectual intuition is that such evidence is *always* supposed to be *immediate* and *indefeasible*. For anyone who actually *has* such an intellectual intuition there can simply be *no question* concerning the alethic status of the same, which is always supposed to wear its truth on its sleeve, as it were.

Surely it is unnecessary to catalogue the potential dangers of relying upon such a method of "exhibition in intuition," utterly uncontrolled by anything outside itself, including the laws of *thinking*. If construction in intuition comes down in the end to nothing but entertaining a certain *immediate vision of reality*, accompanied by the heartfelt assurance that *every* properly qualified person can and must share this vision, then what happens when this simply proves not to be the case? What happens if others report a *different* intellectual vision of the absolute and of the ideas of reason? Or what if they report no "vision" of these at all? In the eyes of many a skeptically inclined reader, Schelling's comments concerning the similarities between his own constructions as a philosopher and the *insight* of the mystics and the *inspiration* of the poets serve not as evidence of the profundity of the Philosophy of Identity but as red flags of caution.

Schelling, of course, would not be deterred by such caveats. To paraphrase Kant's polemical attack on certain self-styled neo-Platonists of his own day, *soi-disant* "men of genius" and "philosophers of intuition," who profess nothing but contempt for the hard work of philosophical thinking

[34] Limnatis suggests that in this Schelling turns epistemology into metaphysics of a pre-Kantian type. See Limnatis 2008: 127.

and who conduct their own demonstrations "from the top down," thanks to their "inner oracle" of "divine intuition": *if someone is determined to believe in such an oracle, no one can stop him.*[35] Or, as Nietzsche puts it: "The concepts 'true' and 'untrue' have, as it seems to me, no meaning in optics."[36]

[35] *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie* [1786], Kant AA 08: 406.
[36] "Epilogue," Nietzsche 1968: 647.