

The Mediation of the Copula as a Fundamental Structure in Schelling's Philosophy

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Abstract

In the *Freedom Essay* Schelling provides four different accounts of the copula, two of which are largely implicit. In this paper I focus on the first of these accounts, which I call the "mediated account." I argue that this explanation of the copula articulates a fundamental ontological structure in Schelling's philosophy. In the first half of the paper I analyze the structural features of the account, drawing on Schelling's more extensive treatment in the *Ages of the World*. In the second half of the paper I argue that Schelling's fundamental distinction between that-which-exists and the ground of existence exhibits the same structure as the mediated account of the copula. This has implications for understanding the enigmatic relationship of these two principles to the *Ungrund*. I conclude by briefly suggesting other applications of this fundamental structure in Schelling's philosophy.

Near the beginning of the *Freedom Essay* Schelling provides an extended discussion of the copula – the word "is" in judgments, when it connects subject and predicate. At first glance, the purpose of this discussion seems to be to shed light on the meaning of pantheism, which is the subject of this part of the treatise. The word "pantheism" implies that there is an identity of all things with God – an identity that can be expressed in the statement: "God is all things." But what is the nature of this identity? In other words, what is the meaning of the word "is" in the sentence "God is all things"? One misinterpretation of pantheism results from interpreting this identity as complete sameness or lack of difference: "God is all things" means "There is no difference between God and things." According to Schelling, however, the word "is" in this sentence does not mean that the subject ("God") is completely the same as the predicate ("all things"). Indeed, the identity between subject and predicate also requires difference, if the sentence is to be mean-

ingful. Thus the statement "God is all things" not only allows but requires things to be meaningfully differentiated from God.

In the course of the discussion of the copula, Schelling provides four different accounts of its meaning – two of which are largely implicit.¹ On the surface, these accounts might seem to be Schelling's contribution to the philosophy of language or logic (in the narrow sense). Thus Schelling's intention would merely be to clarify the logic of the copula in order to correct a mistaken conception of pantheism. Below the surface, however, the logic of the copula has implications that go beyond mere logic: the logic of the copula expresses fundamental features of Schelling's ontology. Schelling hints at these deeper implications when he associates a misunderstanding of the copula with a misunderstanding of the law of identity,² which he had long regarded as the principle of his philosophy.

In this essay I will focus on the first of the four accounts in the *Freedom Essay*, which I call the "mediated account." According to this account, the copula connects the subject and predicate through an underlying substratum, which does not appear at all in the original sentence. I argue that this account of the copula articulates a fundamental ontological structure in Schelling's philosophy. In particular, this account of the copula provides a key to understanding Schelling's fundamental distinction between that-which-exists and the ground of existence, as well as the enigmatic relationship of this distinction to the *Ungrund*.

In the first part of this essay I will outline the general features of the

¹ According to my count, his four explanations are the following: (1) the subject has a mediated connection with the predicate (the account treated in this essay); (2) the subject relates to the predicate as *antecedens* to *consequens*; (3) the subject relates to the predicate as *implicitum* to *explicitum*; and (4) the subject relates to the predicate as ground to consequence. The first three are contained in Schelling's discussion of the copula at Schelling 2006, 13 f. / SW VII, 341 f. The fourth is only explicitly mentioned later (cf. Schelling 2006, 17 / SW VII, 345 f.). One can pose the question of how these accounts relate to each other and whether they are incompatible. I will not be treating this question here. My own position is that these accounts do not contradict one another, and all four accounts apply to sentences in ordinary language. However, not all accounts apply to certain "speculative" sentences like *das Gute ist das Böse*: it does not seem that one can apply the third account to this sentence.

² Cf. Schelling 2006, 13 / SW VII, 341. Citations from the *Freedom Essay* are drawn from Schelling 2006 with some slight modifications. All other translations of Schelling are my own.

mediated account, supplementing what Schelling says in the *Freedom Essay* with his more developed treatment in the *Ages of the World*. In the second section I will examine more closely the structural characteristics of this account with a view to its ontological implications. In the third section I turn to the fundamental distinction in the *Freedom Essay* and the relationship of this distinction to the *Ungrund*. Here I will attempt to show how the fundamental distinction displays the same structure that is articulated in the account of the copula. In the final section I will conclude by suggesting wider applications of this structure and by posing the question of the place of logic in Schelling's philosophy.

1.

In light of the privileged place that Schelling will later give to the mediated account of the copula in the *Ages of the World*, it is curious that he does not give a direct explanation of it in the *Freedom Essay*. Nevertheless, he makes an indirect reference to this account immediately after introducing the topic of identity: “[I]n no possible proposition [...] is stated a sameness or even an unmediated connection of [the subject and predicate, M. T.]”³ No possible proposition states “an unmediated connection.” This means that all propositions state a *mediated* connection of the subject and predicate. But what kind of mediation is involved? Schelling's interpretation of his first example sentence provides a clue: “[T]he proposition, ‘This body is blue’, does not have the meaning that the body is, in and through that in and through which it is a body, also blue, but rather the meaning that the same thing which is this body is also blue, although not in the same respect.”⁴ In the example sentence the subject “this body” does not have an immediate connection with the predicate “blue.” Instead they are connected by virtue of their belonging to “the same thing [*das-selbe*].” In other words, the same thing – unnamed in the original sen-

³ Schelling 2006, 13 / SW VII, 341; trans. modified. Here I believe the phrase “auch nur ein unvermittelter Zusammenhang” should be translated “even an unmediated connection,” instead of “even only an unmediated connection.” *Nur* is here a modal particle, not an adverb.

⁴ Schelling 2006, 13 / SW VII, 341; trans. modified.

tence – is both (a) this body and (b) blue. Finally, Schelling adds that the same thing is not this body and blue “in the same respect [*Betracht*].” The same thing is in one respect this body and in another respect blue. Being this body and being blue are different aspects of the same (underlying) thing.

Schelling provides a more explicit and elaborate explanation of the mediated account in the *Ages of the World*. In fact, Schelling discusses the account in all three drafts, and he does not mention any of the other accounts of the copula that he had provided in the *Freedom Essay*. I suspect that the emphasis on this account reflects Schelling's recognition of its importance for articulating a fundamental ontological structure in his philosophy.⁵ Indeed, the context in the *Ages of the World* confirms this structural importance: in each draft the discussion of the copula arises in the course of a reflection on the relationship between the two principles in God – although Schelling designates these principles in different ways. Moreover, in the first two drafts Schelling refers to the origins of this account in Leibniz's defense of the Trinity. Leibniz had sought to explain how God the Father is not the same as God the Son, even though both are God.⁶ The Trinitarian origin of the account is no coincidence: already in the 1802 *Further Presentations* Schelling had recognized the significance of the Trinity as a symbol for the three-in-one structures in his philosophy (cf. SW IV, 390), and Trinitarian language is prominent in the *Freedom Essay*.⁷

In the *Ages of the World* Schelling expresses the meaning of the copula symbolically: “The true meaning of every judgment, e.g. ‘A is B’, can only be this: that which is A is that which is B, or that which is A and that which is B is the same [*einerlei*].” (SW VIII, 213) A few lines

⁵ The context in the *Freedom Essay* also gives a possible reason why Schelling does not emphasize the account there. The context is the discussion of pantheism and the meaning of the identity of God and all things. It is not immediately clear how the mediated account relates to the question of pantheism. One would have to say that the same thing that is God is also all things; but what is the “same thing” in this context? The other accounts of the copula seem to fit better. For example, God relates to all things as ground to consequence.

⁶ The name of the text is *Defensio trinitatis per nova reperta logica (Defense of the Trinity by means of New Logical Discoveries)*, cf. Leibniz 1669. For a discussion of the context and content of this treatise, cf. Antognazza 2007, 16–33. Leibniz cites the work of Johann Raue (1610–1679), who first had the insight that the “real copula” is unexpressed in the original sentence. Cf. Antognazza 2007, 23 f.

⁷ Cf. Schelling 2006, 30, 32 / SW VII, 361, 363.

later Schelling introduces the symbol X to represent “the same thing” that is both A and B. If we apply this symbolism to the example in the *Freedom Essay*, A is “this body,” B is “blue,” and X is the unnamed “same thing” that is both this body and blue. It is noteworthy that Schelling in this passage states that *every* judgment has the meaning given in this account. When we examine the structural features of the account more closely, we will see that there are difficulties with applying it universally, and that even the explanation of the account itself betrays different meanings of the copula.

Before discussing the structural features in more detail, I would like to mention one other distinctive feature of Schelling’s account. In explaining the meaning of the sentence “A is B,” Schelling (following Leibniz) expands this sentence into the form “the same thing (= X) that is A is also B.” This expanded form introduces elements such as X that are not mentioned in the original sentence. Accordingly, understanding the true meaning of the copula involves unfolding elements that are hidden or implicit in ordinary language. This explains why Schelling claims – somewhat mysteriously – that the concept is the enveloped judgment, while the syllogism (*Schluss*) is the unfolded judgment (cf. SW VIII, 214; WA I, 28; WA II, 129). The concept is the enveloped judgment, because implicit in the simple concept A is the judgment “A is X.” And the syllogism is the unfolded judgment, because implicit in the judgment “A is B” are three sentences that form a syllogism: (1) A is X, (2) X is B, therefore (3) A is B. Schelling even expresses his intention to develop such reflections in a future work on the “noble art of reason.” (cf. SW VIII, 214) In any case, Schelling emphasizes the connection of this account of the copula to the theme of revealing or unfolding what is hidden – a theme to which we will return.

2.

With these general characteristics of Schelling’s account in mind, I would now like to examine more closely its structural features in order to see how these features reveal a fundamental ontological structure in Schelling’s philosophy. There are three structural elements in the mediated account: (I.) the X that is introduced in the explanation, (II.) the subject and predicate (A and B) in the original sentence, and (III.) the word “is,” which appears multiple times and in different roles.

(I.) X is perhaps the most interesting element in the entire account. Schelling uses the symbol X to represent “the same thing” that is both A and B. X is the *ὑποκείμενον* or what underlies both A and B and thus allows them to be identified. As such, it mediates the identity between A and B. What is truly remarkable about X is that it does not appear at all in the original sentence, even though it plays the central role in the account. In the first draft (1811) of the *Ages of the World*, Schelling notes that this X is not always named (cf. WA I, 28), and in the second draft (1813) he develops this thought further: every judgment affirms the sameness of that X which unites A and B, “regardless of whether this really appears [*hervortritt*] as such, or [remains, M. T.] hidden [*verborgen*], or is even something thought.” (WA II, 129)⁸ The X, therefore, has an anonymous, hidden character. Heidegger notes in his interpretation of the *Freedom Essay* that we typically do not pay attention to the “is” in sentences but take it for granted.⁹ Although its meaning has the greatest importance, it remains hidden in plain sight. The unnamed X is also ignored, but unlike the “is,” there is no direct mention of it in most sentences.

The “is” and the X have something else in common: Schelling refers to both using the Latin word *copula* and its German equivalent, *das Band*. “[I]n no judgment, even in a merely tautological judgment, is expressed the sameness of what is connected (subject and predicate), but only a sameness of the being/essence [*Wesen*], the bond (the copula).” (SW VIII, 213) The Latin word *copula* means “link” or “bond.” On a grammatical level, the word “is” serves as the copula, because it links the subject to the predicate. But on an ontological level, this linking of the subject to the predicate is accomplished by X – the “same thing” that is in one respect the subject and in another respect the predicate. Thus, on account of its role in linking the subject and predicate, the words “copula” or “bond” can also refer to this single substratum. The copula, appearing in judgments as the simple word “is,” is also a *something*. In fact, in works leading up to the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling uses the words “copula” and “bond” as a way of designating absolute identity.¹⁰

Finally, in the passage just cited from the third draft (1814/15),

⁸ Cf. WA IV, 263: “das bis dahin verborgene gemeinsame Wesen beyder = X.”

⁹ Heidegger 1985, 74f. / Heidegger 1936, 90.

¹⁰ Cf. SW VII, 204: “Thus in each thing the *copula* or absolute identity is the *eternal*, by

Schelling uses the word *Wesen* in reference to X. And in the first draft (1811) Schelling writes: “The bond in the judgment is never a mere part of it [...] but its entire essence [*Wesen*], and the judgment is really the unfolded bond itself.” (WA I, 28)¹¹ As is well known, the word *Wesen* is one of the most important and most difficult words to translate in Schelling. Like the Greek word οὐσία, *Wesen* can mean (1) essence or nature, or (2) a being (for example, *Lebewesen* means “living being”).¹² Both meanings have as their root the meaning “what it (really) is.”¹³ I suspect that Schelling often exploits the ambiguity of the word *Wesen* in such a way as to move beyond the distinction between the two meanings. In the context of the copula, both senses apply. On the one hand, the copula is a being – a substratum that underlies both subject and predicate. On the other hand, the copula is the essence of the judgment: the true nature of the judgment – what it is essentially – is the copula. The word *Wesen* will be important when we relate this account of the copula to the fundamental distinction in the *Freedom Essay*.¹⁴

(II.) The subject and the predicate (A and B) are the next structural elements in Schelling’s account. They are what is connected (*das Verbundene*) by the copula (cf. SW VIII, 213). But what precise status do they have in relation to X? We can take a first clue from Schelling’s interpretation of the sentence “The body is blue” in the *Freedom Essay*. Schelling expands this sentence to read: “[T]he same thing which is this

which the thing itself is immediately resolved [*aufgelöst*] in the creating substance.” Cf. also SW VII, 56–59 and SW II, 360–362.

¹¹ The theme of unfolding appears again in this passage, but this unfolding is different from the unfolding we discussed before. Here things are unfolded out of X, whereas before X was unfolded out of the judgment “A is B”.

¹² *Wesen* can also have a third, verbal meaning in connection with its etymological relation to the verb *Sein*. Thus Schelling refers to *das rein Wesende* (cf. SW XIII, 212; SW II, 364). I thank Philipp Höfele (Freiburg) and Iain Grant (Bristol) for calling my attention to this meaning in our conversations.

¹³ In Schelling’s dialogue *Clara* the pastor asks: “In this bodily state is [not] the essence [*Wesen*] of the human being, or what is really human in man [*das eigentlich Menschliche im Menschen*], the soul?” (SW IX, 51).

¹⁴ Schelling also uses the word *Wesen* in explaining his fourth example of the copula in the *Freedom Essay*, for which he also (implicitly) makes use of the mediated account of the copula: “[W]hat is necessary [*Notwendiges*] and what is free [*Freies*] are explained as one, the meaning of which is that the same thing [*dasselbe*] (in the last analysis) which is the essence [*Wesen*] of the moral world is also the essence of nature” (Schelling 2006, 13 f. / SW VII, 342; trans. modified).

body is also blue, although not in the same respect [*in dem nämlichen Betracht*].”¹⁵ The subject (“this body”) and the predicate (“blue”) are both respects or ways of regarding the same underlying X: it is in one respect this body and in another respect blue.¹⁶ Because they are different respects, there is no contradiction if both are identified with X, even though they are different. The principle of contradiction in Aristotle reads: “[T]he same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject *in the same respect*.”¹⁷

The fact that A and B are both aspects of X has an interesting consequence: both have the same relationship to X. As a result, it makes no difference which is the subject and which is the predicate – at least if this is a complete account of the meaning of the copula, which seems to be Schelling’s intention in the *Ages of the World*.¹⁸ Accordingly, “A is B” means the same as “B is A”: judgments of identity are symmetrical.¹⁹ This is significantly different from the other accounts of the co-

¹⁵ Schelling 2006, 13 / SW VII, 341.

¹⁶ Schelling even cites an example from Leibniz, in which the same thing is in one part (*einem Theil nach*) wood and in another part iron (cf. WA I, 28). Thus it is the divisibility of this single substratum, or its ability to be considered in different respects, that allows it to join the subject and the predicate together in identity despite the difference between them. This recalls the task resolved by the third principle in Fichte’s 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. The I and the not-I can be united in a single consciousness, because this consciousness is divisible (*teilbar*): it is in one part the I, and in another part the not-I. Thus one can rightfully say that the I is the not-I.

¹⁷ Aristotle 1984, 1588 (*Metaphysics* IV 1005b19f.); my emphasis: “τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ ἅμα ὑπάρχειν τε καὶ μὴ ὑπάρχειν ἀδύνατον τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτό.” Cf. Schelling’s use of the preposition *nach* (the equivalent of the Greek κατὰ) to mark out different aspects of the human being, thus applying the structure of his account of the copula (cf. SW VIII, 214f.).

¹⁸ In contrast, Schelling provides other accounts of the copula in the *Freedom Essay*, and these accounts are not symmetrical. These accounts may serve the role of supplementing the mediated account, which (at least in certain contexts) is incomplete. In any case, it does not seem coincidental that Schelling designates the ideal principle with the symbol A and makes this the subject of the sentence: Schelling had long associated the ideal with the subject and the real with the object or predicate of a sentence.

¹⁹ Bernhard Rang also notes this symmetry in Schelling’s account in the *Ages of the World*. Cf. Rang 2000, 19. Wolfram Högbe, in contrast, interprets them asymmetrically. He translates Schelling’s account into predicate logic as follows: $Fa \rightarrow (\exists x) (x = a \wedge Fx)$, where $A = a$, $B = F$, and $X = x$. This means that B is a predicate, whereas A is a singular term that is completely interchangeable with X. Cf. Högbe 1989, 81f. I do not believe this interpretation has an adequate basis in the text, and it seems to undermine the significance of the copula (X) as what mediates the identity between A and B.

pula in the *Freedom Essay*. For example, if the subject relates to the predicate as what is enfolded to what is unfolded (*implicitum et explicitum*), the meaning of “A is B” is quite different from “B is A.”²⁰

The question of symmetry is related to the place of predication in the account. Remarkably, in the first draft of the *Ages of the World* Schelling describes X as “that same thing of which the subject and predicate are both predicates.” (WA I, 28) Both A and B have the same status: both are predicates of X. As a consequence, B is both a predicate of A and a predicate of X – although its status as predicate of A does not seem to be relevant in this account. In any case, X assumes the place of a subject that underlies the predicates, following the traditional Aristotelian scheme. And yet, we will see ways in which Schelling’s account does not follow the Aristotelian model. For one thing, although Schelling characterizes A and B as predicates or aspects of X, he also gives them a substance-like character. For example, he writes that the subject and predicate are “each for themselves already a unity” and the copula is the unity of these unities (SW VIII, 214). This mixed status of A and B – sharing traditional features of both substances and predicates – is also a characteristic of the potencies in Schelling, as well as the modes of substance in Spinoza.

One final way to characterize A and B is in terms of revelation. We saw before that X has a hidden, anonymous character and does not even appear in the original judgment. A and B are therefore ways of revealing X, or ways of allowing X to come to appearance. In itself X is inaccessible.²¹ In fact, in the first draft of the *Ages of the World* (1811) Schelling calls the judgment “A is B” the “unfolded bond” or copula (WA I, 28). This implies that A and B are previously enfolded in X, and

²⁰ Cf. Schelling 2006, 14 / SW VII, 342.

²¹ In a remarkable passage in the *Prolegomena* Kant writes: “It has long since been noticed that in all substances the subject proper, namely what is left over after all accidents (as predicates) have been taken away and hence the *substantial* itself, is unknown to us [...] Pure reason demands that for every predicate of a thing we should look for its appropriate subject, and for this, which is again necessarily only a predicate, its subject and so on to infinity (or as far as we can reach). But it follows from this that nothing which we can reach ought to be taken as a final subject, and that the substantial itself can never be thought by our understanding, however deeply it penetrated, and even if the whole of nature were disclosed to it; because the specific nature of our understanding consists in thinking everything discursively, i.e. through concepts, and hence through nothing but predicates, to which the absolute subject must always be lacking” (Kant 2004, 137f. / Prol., AA 4, 333).

by being unfolded in the judgment they reveal explicitly what X was implicitly.

(III.) The final structural element in the account is the word “is.” This is, of course, the word that the account of the copula is meant to explain. But something interesting happens in the course of this explanation. We start with a single “is” in the simple judgment “A is B.” But in Schelling’s explanation of the meaning of this judgment, the “is’s” are multiplied: “That which *is* A *is* that which *is* B,” or “The X that *is* A and the X that *is* B *is* the same” (SW VIII, 213; my emphasis). Now instead of just one, we have three instances of the word “is.” The question therefore arises: does the word “is” have the same meaning in each of these instances? It seems as if Schelling’s answer is yes. As we noted above, Schelling states that his explanation applies to every judgment. This account of the copula would therefore apply not only to “A is B” but to the various statements that are part of the explanation of “A is B”: “X is A,” “X is B,” and even “X is X.” But if the account of the copula applies to itself, this would lead to an infinite regress. It would also require an infinite multiplication of the word “is” as well as the number of underlying substrates that would take the place of X. “X is A” would mean “The same Y that is X is also A.” But then “Y is X” would mean “The same Z that is Y is also X.” And so forth. Each attempt to explain the copula introduces more copulas that require explanation.

Despite Schelling’s claim of universality for his account, we can actually distinguish three different uses of the word “is” and thereby avoid this regress. Each of these three uses of the word “is” corresponds to a different kind of identity.

(i) The use of the word “is” in the sentence “A is B” is the one that Schelling explicitly treats. We can call the identity expressed by this use of the copula a *mediated identity* because A and B are identified only through the mediation of X. Schelling also refers to this as a “doubled identity [*verdoppelte Identität*]” (cf. WA I, 28), or a “unity of unities” (WA II, 129; SW VIII, 214), since A and B are each already a unity.

(ii) The use of the word “is” in the statements “X is A” or “X is B”²² does not express a mediated identity. Instead they express the immedi-

²² One can pose the question whether one should write “X is A” or “A is X.” I prefer “X is A,” since this places X in the place of the subject and A in the place of the predicate,

ate identity of the underlying substrate (X) with one of its forms or aspects. As we noted above, Schelling uses the word *Wesen* in reference to X: it is the “essence” of both A and B, or the “being” that underlies them. Accordingly, since “X is A” identifies A with its “being/essence,” we can call this an *essential identity*.²³

(iii) Finally, Schelling also uses the word “is” in his account to identify the X that is A and the X that is B – in other words, to identify X with itself. Remarkably, Schelling uses the German word *einerlei* to express this identity: “The X that is A and the X that is B is the same [*einerlei*], namely the very same [*dasselbe*] X” (SW VIII, 213).²⁴ *Einerleiheit* for Schelling means complete sameness, or identity without difference. This is reinforced by Schelling’s use of the word *dasselbe* (“the very same”) both in this sentence and in the example in the *Freedom Essay*. We can therefore call the identity expressed here *numerical identity* or complete sameness. It is remarkable that this kind of identity plays an important role in Schelling’s account of the copula, since he seems to be dismissive of a conception of identity as *Einerleiheit* in the *Freedom Essay*.²⁵ Here we see that *Einerleiheit* is one of the essential moments in understanding the copula. Indeed, far from expressing a single kind of identity, the copula articulates a complex structure with three different kinds of identity expressed within it.

thus reflecting their ontological relationship. Schelling, however, seems to prefer the other formulation. In the second and third drafts of the *Ages of the World*, he writes “A ist = X” and “B ist = X” (WA II, 129; cf. SW VIII, 214). In the first draft, however, he writes “A ist X” and “X ist B” (WA I, 28). In other instances it is ambiguous which is subject and which is predicate, because the statement appears in a dependent clause: *das, was A ist* can mean either (1) that which is A, or (2) that which A is. In any case, Schelling does not seem to emphasize the difference between the subject and predicate positions in these sentences.

²³ However, this designation is potentially misleading, since Schelling also calls the first kind of identity (mediated identity) an “essential unity,” since things are united by virtue of sharing the same essence (cf. SW VII, 422).

²⁴ Immediately before this Schelling writes that a judgment does not express the sameness (*Einerleiheit*) of the subject and the predicate but rather the sameness (*Einerleiheit*) of the essence or copula.

²⁵ Cf. Schelling 2006, 13–15 / SW VII, 341, 342 f.n.

3.

With these structural features of Schelling’s account of the copula in mind, I now want to turn to Schelling’s fundamental distinction in the *Freedom Essay*. Here we will see that this distinction exhibits the same structure as the mediated account of the copula. Accordingly, we can use Schelling’s account of the copula to help us understand the fundamental distinction, as well as the enigmatic relationship of this distinction to the *Ungrund*. The importance of the fundamental distinction for the *Freedom Essay* cannot be overstated: Schelling notes that his investigation is based upon it,²⁶ and it is connected to all of the major themes in the work. For our purposes I want to focus on certain structural features of the distinction that relate it to Schelling’s account of the copula.

These structural features are evident in Schelling’s first formulation of the distinction: “The philosophy of nature of our time has first advanced in science the distinction between being [*Wesen*] insofar as it exists and being [*Wesen*] insofar as it is merely the ground of existence.”²⁷ There are two words that appear twice in this formulation: the word *Wesen* (“being/essence”) and the word *sofern* (“insofar as”). The distinction concerns a single being (*Wesen*), which is considered in two respects: in one respect it is that-which-exists (*das Existierende*), in another respect it is the ground of existence.

The distinction of two aspects of a single, underlying being is also a feature of the mediated account of the copula, as we saw above. Accordingly, we can reformulate the fundamental distinction in terms of Schelling’s account of the copula: *The same being (= X) that (in one respect) is that-which-exists is (in another respect) the ground of existence*. In the first formulation of the distinction, being (*Wesen*) corresponds to X, that-which-exists corresponds to A, and the ground of existence corresponds to B.

We noted above that Schelling also uses the word *Wesen* in reference to X in the *Ages of the World*. The being (*Wesen*) mentioned in the fundamental distinction shares another feature with X: its hidden or withdrawn character. Indeed, it is easy to forget that the distinction concerns this single being, since it seems to disappear from Schelling’s

²⁶ Cf. Schelling 2006, 27 / SW VII, 357.

²⁷ Schelling 2006, 27 / SW VII, 357; trans. modified.

subsequent discussion. For the greater part of the *Freedom Essay* Schelling develops the relationship between that-which-exists and the ground of existence without reference to any being that underlies the two. And yet it is my contention that this being (*Wesen*) reappears towards the end of the *Freedom Essay* in the discussion of the *Ungrund*. In fact, when Schelling states his intention to explain the *Ungrund* “completely determinately,” he reintroduces the word *Wesen*: “The being/essence [*Wesen*] of the ground, as of that-which-exists, can only be that which comes *before* all ground, thus, the absolute considered *simpliciter*, the non-ground.”²⁸ The *Ungrund* is the *Wesen* that underlies the ground and that-which-exists. In terms of Schelling’s account of the copula, the *Ungrund* is the X.

Admittedly, Schelling’s use of the word *Wesen* in this passage is somewhat ambiguous. What is the precise meaning of the genitive in the phrase “being/essence [*Wesen*] of the ground”? Schelling provides a clearer formulation in his published reply to Eschenmayer concerning the *Freedom Essay*:

God has the ground of his existence *in himself*, in his own original being/essence [*Urwesen*], to which the existing God (God as subject of existence) also belongs. In my treatise I designate clearly enough this original being/essence [*Urwesen*], from which God himself only steps forth through the act of his manifestation (S. 497). (SW VIII, 165)

Here Schelling cites the passage on the *Ungrund* in the *Freedom Essay*.²⁹ A few lines later Schelling adds: “[P]recisely because [the two principles, M. T.] belong to a single being/essence [*Wesen*], they must be distinguished, even opposed in another respect.” (SW VIII, 165) The *Ungrund* is therefore a being (*Wesen*) to which the two principles belong. The German phrase that I have translated “belong to [gehören zu]” does not indicate possession, but rather that the two principles are constituents of a larger whole, which is the *Ungrund*. This also explains the sense of the genitive in the passage from the *Freedom Essay*: the *Ungrund* is the being (*Wesen*) of each principle in the sense that each principle belongs to this being.³⁰

²⁸ Schelling 2006, 69 f. / SW VII, 407 f.; trans. modified.

²⁹ “S. 497” in the original edition, cf. Schelling 2006, 68 / SW VII, 406.

³⁰ This use of the genitive may seem backward: would it not make more sense to use the genitive case for that *to which* something belongs, and not that which belongs to something else? Nevertheless, this use of the genitive is common in everyday language. For

Finally, we noted that Schelling in the first draft of the *Ages of the World* refers to A and B as predicates of X. In the passage in the *Freedom Essay*, the two principles are also predicates of the *Ungrund* – although they are predicates of a peculiar sort: they are predicated as non-opposites and each for itself.³¹ Moreover, even though they are predicated of the *Ungrund*, the two principles also have a substance-like character, which one would not usually associate with predicates. Thus, Schelling refers to them as “principles,” as well as “forces” and even “wills.” We have seen that this is also a feature of A and B in the account of the copula: although they are aspects and predicates of X, each is itself already a “unity.”

What conclusions can we draw from these parallels between the fundamental distinction and Schelling’s account of the copula? First, the account of the copula provides us with a way to articulate the relationship between the *Ungrund* and the two principles. The *Ungrund* is the *copula* or what connects that-which-exists and the ground of existence. By underlying both principles, it gives them a “mediated” unity: the same being/essence that exists is also the ground of existence. The principles are not related directly in this unity, but only through a mediating X: in the *Freedom Essay* Schelling expresses this absence of any direct relation by saying that the principles are predicated “in disjunction and each *for itself*.”³² By providing this mediated unity, the *Ungrund* serves an important dual function. On the one hand, it gives the system an ultimate unity, since both principles are predicated of a single X. On the other hand, since the principles are not related directly, it allows for them to maintain their independence from each other and thus their genuine distinction.³³

Moreover, the account of the copula can help us to understand one of the other puzzling features of the *Ungrund*: its lack of predicates.³⁴

example, in the phrase “my parents’ community,” the word in the genitive case (“parents”) refers to constituents of a larger whole (their community).

³¹ Cf. Schelling 2006, 69 / SW VII, 407.

³² Schelling 2006, 69 / SW VII, 407.

³³ As Manfred Frank notes in his interpretation of Schelling’s account of the copula, “[d]ie Identität besteht vor dem In-Beziehung-Setzen.” (Frank 1985, 121) In my interpretation of the *Ungrund* this lack of relation is essential and connects the *Ungrund* to Schelling’s previous accounts of the absolute. Cf. SW VII, 154: “Nothing in relation, thus nothing that can stand in opposition, is affirmable through reason and of God.”

³⁴ Cf. Schelling 2006, 69 / SW VII, 406.

How can the *Ungrund* lack any predicate when Schelling also affirms that the two principles can be predicated of the *Ungrund*? We can understand this in terms of X in the account of the copula. In one sense, A and B are the predicates of X. But one can also ask what X is *in itself*, or what is it that underlies the predicates. As what underlies A and B, X is neither A nor B: it has no predicates, but lies hidden and anonymous. This explains why Schelling uses the phrase “Neither-Nor [*Weder – Noch*]”³⁵ in the discussion of the *Ungrund*: though both principles are predicated of it, considered in itself it is neither the one nor the other.³⁶

However, it is important to note that the relationship between the principles and the *Ungrund* is more complex than the relationship between predicates and an underlying substrate. We already noted that the principles themselves have a substance-like character. In addition, Schelling writes that the *Ungrund* is in each of the principles the whole.³⁷ Thus, the principles are not only in the *Ungrund* (as its predicates): the *Ungrund* is in the principles!³⁸ There is a sense in which this is also true in the account of the copula, as we have seen. The concept is the “enveloped judgment,” because implicit in the simple concept A is the judgment “A is X,” and implicit in the simple concept B is the judgment “B is X.” This implies that X must somehow already be contained in the concepts of A and B; otherwise it could not appear in the corresponding judgments, which are unfolded out of A and B.

4.

We have seen how Schelling’s mediated account of the copula articulates an ontological structure, and that the fundamental distinction in the *Freedom Essay* exhibits this same structure. I want to conclude by indicating wider applications of this structure in Schelling’s philosophy.

³⁵ Schelling 2006, 69 / SW VII, 407.

³⁶ Cf. Schelling’s use of the neither-nor construction in *Philosophy and Religion* (cf. SW VI, 23f.).

³⁷ Cf. Schelling 2006, 70 / SW VII, 408.

³⁸ Cf. the following passage from the *Stuttgart Private Lectures*: “An essential unity is meant; *one and the same* thing [*Sache*] is posited in both forms, but it is in each of these form its own being [*Wesen*] and not the very same being. [...] Because the same being/essence [*Wesen*] is in each one, there is between them an *essential* [...] unity” (SW VII, 422).

First, from its application to the fundamental distinction we can conclude that this is not just one ontological structure among many, but the basic structure at all levels of reality. This is because the distinction not only pertains to God, but to all things, including human beings. Indeed, after Schelling’s initial characterization of the distinction in God he adds: “A reflection starting out from things leads to this same distinction.”³⁹ A little later in the *Freedom Essay* Schelling notes that “both principles are indeed in all things.”⁴⁰ Accordingly, this distinction articulates a fundamental structure of reality, which can be applied at every level of the system.⁴¹ And since essential elements in this structure are articulated in the mediated account of the copula, we can conclude that the account of the copula expresses a fundamental ontological structure for Schelling’s philosophy.

But this structure is not new with the *Freedom Essay*. Indeed, I want to suggest that it also characterizes the doctrine of potencies in Schelling’s philosophy of identity and beyond. There are many difficult questions surrounding the concept of potency at the various stages in Schelling’s philosophical development, and I do not want to suggest that Schelling has a single *Potenzenlehre* that applies throughout his writings. Nevertheless, there are certain general features of the potencies that we can relate to the account of the copula. In general, the potencies are different forms or ways of expressing a single underlying reality. If we apply Schelling’s logical symbolism, X is this single underlying reality, and A and B are different potencies. The same thing (= X) that is one potency is also another potency, though not in the same respect. Considered in itself, the underlying reality is without potencies (*potenzlos*) (cf. SW VI, 212) – just like X, considered in itself, is hidden and without predicates. All the potencies are one, because they all have the same essence (*Wesen*). (Schelling refers to this as qualitative indifference, at least early on in his *Identitätsphilosophie*.) We can therefore say that this single essence is the *copula* of the potencies in the sense of the mediated account: the potencies are not united here directly, but

³⁹ Schelling 2006, 28 / SW VII, 358.

⁴⁰ Schelling 2006, 32 / SW VII, 363.

⁴¹ According to Heidegger, Schelling’s distinction constitutes the basic structure (*Grundgefüge*) or determination of “self-contained being[s] [*des in sich stehenden Seienden*]” (cf. Heidegger 1985, 107 / Heidegger 1936, 129). Heidegger thus labels the distinction the “*jointure of Being* [*Seynsfuge*]” (Heidegger 1985, 108 / Heidegger 1936, 130).

through the mediation of a common essence. Moreover, as the potencies unfold they come to reveal different aspects of this essence, just as the predicates A and B reveal different aspects of a hidden X.

This unfolding of the potencies is a development – both in the general sense of a gradual process and in the etymological sense of unfolding what was previously enfolded or enclosed. Indeed, *every* development shares the structure articulated in the mediated account of the copula. We can see this clearly if we consider the place of identity and difference in the concept of development. A development unfolds in different moments or stages – regardless of whether it is the development of the cosmos or the life of a human being. Despite their difference, the moments of the development form a unity insofar as a single being (= X) underlies them. The development is a development of a single being. In one of the fragments of the *Ages of the World* Schelling expresses these structural features of development in the same language he had used in the account of the copula:

In every development there is sameness of the being/essence [*Einerleyheit des Wesens*], thus one and the same being/essence is the first, the last, and what is in the middle between them. Therefore, as *that* which these are, this one being/essence is outside of the development and thus outside and above time as well. (WA III, 208)

Here Schelling uses the term *Einerleyheit* with respect to the being/essence underlying the development, just as he had used this term with reference to X in the account of the copula. The different moments in the development are all identified with the same being (= X), and this allows them to be identified with each other: that which is first (= A) is that which is last (= B), because the same thing (= X) that is the first is also the last.⁴²

One of the most remarkable applications of this structure to development is Schelling's interpretation of the tetragrammaton (*yhwh*), the "untranslatable" name of God given to Moses. According to Schel-

⁴² Cf. Schelling's reply to Jacobi concerning the question of whether we can have immediate knowledge of a personal God. Through reason we can have immediate knowledge of absolute identity, but this is not yet knowledge of a personal God: "To be sure, this knowledge is a knowledge of God to the extent that the being/essence of that absolute identity is *implicite* God – or, to be more precise, it is the *very same being/essence* [*dasselbe Wesen*] that is transfigured into the personal God. [...] I posit God as the first and as the last, as A and as O, but as the A he is not what he is as the O" (SW VIII, 81).

ling's account in the *Ages of the World*, this name expresses the divine consciousness of eternity, which he renders in the form of a statement: "I am who I was; I was who I will be; I will be who I am." (SW VIII, 263 f.)⁴³ In this statement God (the divine "I") expresses his consciousness of his own eternal identity in and through the various moments of the divine life. "I was who I will be" because the same thing (= X, = the eternal "I") that I was (= A) is also what I will be (= B). Moreover, Schelling notes that it is not enough that God recognizes himself as the one who was, is, and will be; God must also recognize himself as the one who is *the same* (*Derselbe*) as the one who was, is, and will be (cf. SW VIII, 264).⁴⁴

* * *

Having noted that Schelling's mediated account of the copula articulates a fundamental ontological structure in his philosophy, we can conclude with the question: *why* does his explanation of the copula reflect his ontology? Did the logic come first? Or (what seems more probable) is Schelling reading elements of his ontology back into his account of the copula?⁴⁵ There may be some truth to the latter charge, since some of the language he uses in the account seems to be designed for application to the "speculative" elements of his philosophy and does not serve as well for interpreting the copula in ordinary language.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, these questions presuppose something that

⁴³ Similar statements appear in various fragments of the *Ages of the World*. For example, at the beginning of one fragment, Schelling refers to a story according to which the primal being addresses the traveler to the temple at Sais from underneath the veil of the image of Isis: "I am that which was, which is, and which will be; no mortal has lifted my veil" (WA III, 187).

⁴⁴ This same developmental structure also applies to the (mysterious) relationship between love and the *Ungrund* in the *Freedom Essay*. The same thing (= X) which is the *Ungrund*/indifference (A) is also love (B). Indifference is this X, but "not yet" as love; love is this X, but "no longer" indifference. It is not clear whether the *Ungrund* has the place of X or A in this scheme: this depends on the interpretation of the phrase *der anfängliche Ungrund*, and perhaps Schelling intends for it to be ambiguous (cf. Schelling 2006, 68, 70 / SW VII, 406, 408).

⁴⁵ These are, of course, the same questions that have long been debated in Leibniz scholarship.

⁴⁶ For example, Schelling says that both A and B are unities for themselves. This fits perfectly with his account of the two principles in God, but it does not seem to fit as well

Schelling would reject: the separation of logic from metaphysics or ontology. Especially in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, we tend to think of the copula as a theme that belongs to logic or the philosophy of language, which has no direct relevance to metaphysics. Schelling, however, does not separate logic in its highest sense from “metaphysics” or philosophy proper. Any such separation would have to rest on a distinction between the ideal realm of thought and knowledge (the province of logic) and the real realm of being (the province of metaphysics). But from the standpoint of reason, the ideal and the real are originally one.

Of course, this does not mean that all forms of logic reveal the basic structures of being. Schelling is sometimes very critical of what he refers to as “common logic,” which is an abstract product of reflection and distorts reality (cf. SW VI, 150, 185; SW VII, 218). But it would be a mistake to consider this the only kind of logic. In the 1804 *Würzburg System* Schelling defines one sense of logic as “what it was for the Greeks before Aristotle: the science of reason [*Vernunftwissenschaft*]. Then it is speculative philosophy itself” (SW VI, 529).⁴⁷ Logic in this sense is not a mere a tool (ὄργανον) as it was in the Aristotelian tradition. Schelling transforms logic into a science of reason that is indistinguishable from the highest philosophy. In fact, in the 1806 *Aphorisms*, after rejecting the formal interpretation of the law of identity characteristic of common logic, Schelling writes: “Regard that law in itself, know the content that it has, and you will view God” (SW VII, 148). The same could be said of the copula: regard it in itself, know the content that it has, and you will view God. Logic in its highest form thus becomes divine contemplation.⁴⁸

with sentences in ordinary language like “This body is blue.” Is “blue” already a unity in itself?

⁴⁷ In the same passage he also says that logic can mean (2) the system of reflected knowledge in Kant’s transcendental logic, and (3) logic in the customary, Aristotelian sense, which is an abstraction from the real (cf. SW VI, 529f.).

⁴⁸ This connection between logic and the divine nature is also present in Hegel. In the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel famously remarks that the content of logic is “the presentation [*Darstellung*] of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit” (WdL, GW 21, 34).

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