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Between Romanticism and Idealism: Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, Philosophy as the Thought of Revelation

(Part 1)

*Mildred Galland-Szymkowiak**

ABSTRACT

This article argues for a reading of Solger's philosophy centred on the concept of revelation (*Offenbarung*). It aims to show how in this philosophy, developed mainly between 1815 and 1819, ontology, epistemology, philosophy of art, philosophy of mythology and political philosophy, are all systematically articulated around the paradoxical experience of the revelation of the idea in existence. Solger attempts to develop a position that can integrate and surpass on the one hand the transcendental idealism of the early Fichte and Schelling's philosophy of identity, and on the other hand Jacobi's dichotomy between faith and knowledge. He shares with the romantics the concern for a philosophy that is itself life. Going beyond the reduction of Solger to a theorist of romantic irony or a proto-Hegelian lost in mysticism, the goal here is to more precisely determine his philosophy from out of itself and its links to the post-Kantian constellation.

Keywords: Solger, revelation (*Offenbarung*), faith, system, dialectics, idealism

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente une lecture de la philosophie de Solger centrée sur le concept de révélation (*Offenbarung*). Il s'agit de montrer comment dans cette philosophie, élaborée principalement entre 1815 et 1819, ontologie, théorie de la connaissance, philosophie de l'art et de la mythologie et philosophie politique sont articulées de manière systématique autour de l'expérience paradoxale de la révélation de l'idée dans l'existence. Solger cherche à élaborer une position qui puisse intégrer et dépasser, d'une part, l'idéalisme transcendantal du premier Fichte et la philosophie de l'identité de Schelling, d'autre part, la dichotomie jacobienne entre foi et savoir. Il partage avec les romantiques le désir d'une philosophie qui soit elle-même vie. Au-delà de la réduction de Solger à un théoricien de l'ironie romantique, ou à un pré-hégélien égaré du côté de la mystique, le but est ici de cerner sa philosophie à partir d'elle-même, et de ses liens à la constellation postkantienne.

Mots-clés : Solger, révélation (*Offenbarung*), foi, système, dialectique, idéalisme

* Permanent Researcher, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), THALIM, INHA, Galerie Colbert, 2 rue Vivienne, 75002 Paris, France – mildred.galland@cnrs.fr

On the two hundredth anniversary of Solger's death

„Die Philosophie ist also nichts anders als das Denken über die Gegenwart des Wesens in unserer Erkenntniß und Existenz, oder mit andern Worten, über die göttliche Offenbarung.“¹

„[eine] Offenbarung,
d.h. (...) ein[e] wirklich[e] und nicht blos eingebildet[e] Wahrheit“²

At the intersection of the major currents of post-Kantian German thought, Karl Solger's philosophy not only engages with the transcendental idealism of Fichte and the young Schelling, with the speculative idealism of Hegel and Schelling's philosophy of identity, but also with the romanticism of Ludwig Tieck or the Schlegel brothers, and even with F. H. Jacobi's "non-philosophy". The hypothesis of the following study is: Solger's thought can be comprehensively grasped as a philosophy of revelation (*Offenbarung*).³ Metaphysics, aesthetics, philosophy of mythology, and political philosophy, will be broadly reconstructed to the extent that they are deployed and rendered more concrete under the different aspects of the concept of revelation. For Solger, philosophy has to stand at a highly fragile and paradoxical centre, one uniting the knowledge of the absolute and the finitude of individual existence, while maintaining an acute consciousness of their opposition.

From the point of view of the history of philosophy, Solger's thought reveals an interest in questioning categories that had long become fixed, but that the scholarship on idealism and romanticism in the last few decades has fortunately shown to be porous. Moreover, the manner in which Solger's philosophy holds in tension the temptation of nihilism, and the desire to believe in the true, the powerlessness of thought and the affirmation of the presence of the Idea, is not without contemporary resonances. Solger rejects for example that inevitable sterile pendulum game swinging between blind religious faith and empty rationalism. He asks how it is possible to do philosophy in an epoch that considers it to be useless. He keeps the idea that individual existence cannot be surpassed, but places at the centre of

¹ "Philosophy is therefore nothing else than the thinking of the presence of the essence in our knowledge and existence, or in other words, of divine revelation", Solger, *Über die wahre Bedeutung und Bestimmung der Philosophie*, NS II, 116. (See the end of the essay regarding the bibliographical abbreviations.)

² "(a) revelation, i.e. (...) a real and not merely an imagined truth", Solger, *Über die wahre Bedeutung und Bestimmung der Philosophie*, NS II, 175.

³ The importance of the concept of revelation has already been noted. See especially Luca Ghisleri, *L'Unità nella dualità. L'ontologia della rivelazione di K.W.F. Solger* (Milan: Mimesis, 2007). However, the present article is the first attempt to re-examine revelation with respect to the whole of Solger's philosophy.

philosophy the experience of a truth that annihilates the individuality. In many respects, Solger's philosophy requires a re-reading today that recognizes its uniqueness and situates it in its rightful historical and intellectual context.

1. Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger (1780-1819): Life, Works and Reception

a) Biographical overview

Born 28 November 1780, in Schwedt-an-der-Oder, Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger embarked on a career as a civil servant in the *Kriegs- und Domänenkammer* in Berlin after the completion of his studies in classical philology and law at the university of Halle. In 1806 he quit his position to devote himself exclusively to philology (and to related studies in mythology) and to philosophy. He studied in particular the works of Kant, Fichte and Schelling, as well as those of Spinoza, Plato and Giordano Bruno. During the winter 1801-1802 he attended Schelling's⁴ lectures in Jena, and in 1804-1805 he was an auditor of Fichte in Berlin.⁵ However, it was firstly as a philologist, or more precisely, as a translator of Sophocles that he became known; this work launched his academic career. In 1804 he published an anonymous translation of *Oedipus Rex*⁶; in 1808 there appeared under his own name a groundbreaking translation of the entire tragedies of Sophocles.⁷ The same year he obtained his doctorate in philosophy and made the acquaintance of Ludwig Tieck. From 1811 onward the latter became a close friend with whom Solger had intense discussions, particularly during the composition of his principal work, *Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne*

⁴ The courses given by Schelling in Jena in the winter semester 1801/02 especially concern the "Introduction to the idea and limits of true philosophy" (*Einleitung über die Idee und Grenzen der wahren Philosophie*), in *F.W.J. Schelling: Briefe und Dokumente*, ed. H. Fuhrmans (Bonn: Bouvier, 1962), vol. 1, 235. They were most likely based on his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) and on the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801). Solger subsequently read the 1809 treatise *On Human Freedom*. See too W. Henckmann, "Solgers Schellingstudium in Jena 1801/1802. Fünf unveröffentlichte Briefe", *Hegel-Studien* 13 (1978): 53-74; and "Etwas über das Verhältnis des Ideals zur Nachahmung der Natur in der Kunst. Ein Aufsatz Solgers zur Auseinandersetzung mit Schelling", *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 16 (1972): 409-52.

⁵ Solger attended the third series of lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* given by Fichte in Nov.-Dec. 1804 (cf. NS I, 131), and the lectures on the *Philosophische Charakteristik des Zeitalters* (Nov. 1804-March 15, 1805), and the course, *Principien der Gottes-, Sitten- und Rechtslehre* (beginning Feb. 6, 1805). Cf. R. Lauth, "Über Fichtes Lehrtätigkeit in Berlin von Mitte 1799 bis Anfang 1805 und seine Zuhörerschaft", *Hegel-Studien* 15 (1980): 9-50; and Fichte, GA II/7, 375. "It's a sheer delight to get to know and to compare him [Fichte] and Schelling, the two greatest men of our epoch in this field." (Solger, letter to his brother Friedrich, 1 December 1804, NS I, p. 134).

⁶ *Königs Oedipus*, translation in the meter of the original (Berlin, 1804).

⁷ *Sophokles*, in the meter of the original, translated by K.W.F. Solger, 2 vols., Berlin 1808 (then 1824, 1837 and Munich 1977).

und die Kunst (Erwin. Four Conversations on Beauty and Art).⁸ A long sojourn in Dresden in 1812 permitted Solger to spend time at the Art Gallery in direct contact with works of art. During his lifetime, there also appeared a series of *Philosophische Gespräche* (Philosophical Dialogues) in 1817, as well as a *Review* of August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature).⁹ It was only several years after his death that more voluminous material was published, providing the public with a better knowledge of his thought. This occurred in 1826 with the two-volume edition of Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich von Raumer: *Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel* (Posthumous Writings and Correspondence)¹⁰, which collected together a number of significant philosophical texts and a large portion of his correspondence. In 1829 Karl Ludwig Heyse (a student who had attended the lectures of both Solger and Hegel) edited Solger's *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* (Lectures on Aesthetics) that had been delivered in Berlin in 1819.¹¹

In October 1809 Solger was nominated to the University of Frankfurt-an-der-Oder, where he taught philology (Greek tragedy) and philosophy (aesthetics and logic); he declined the inhabitants' offer to become the mayor of the town, in order to devote himself to his scientific research. Furthermore, he always considered his role as husband and father to be important. In August 1811, he was called to the newly founded University of Berlin as professor of philosophy and mythological studies. Solger gave lecture courses on aesthetics virtually every year, numerous courses on logic, dialectics, and the foundations of philosophy, regular courses on mythology and the Greek and Roman classics; and especially after 1813, he also lectured on the philosophy of right and political philosophy. Moreover, he became increasingly interested in the philosophy of religion.

In July 1814 Solger took over the role of the rector of the University (which had been occupied by Fichte until his death in January 1814). After the assassination of Kotzebue by the student Karl Ludwig Sand, he drew up

⁸ *Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst* [Berlin 1815, then 1907], ed. W. Henckmann (Munich: Fink, 1970).

⁹ Solger, *Rezension: A.W. Schlegel, "Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur"*, *Jahrbuch der Literatur* (Vienna) VII (1819): 80–155.

¹⁰ Henceforth NS I and NS II. Although this edition does not meet current scientific standards, these volumes have constituted (because of the difficulty of the dialogue *Erwin*) one of the principal means for the diffusion of Solger's thought.

¹¹ There is now an excellent recent edition by G. Pinna (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017). The *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* (henceforth: *Vorlesungen*) present the contents of *Erwin* in a more systematic and accessible manner, much like in a manual. In fact, Solger would have not agreed with the publication of these lectures (cf. the letter to F. von Raumer of 22 March 1812, NS I, 225); in addition, questions could be asked about a possible Hegelian distortion by Heyse. See, too, the Italian translation: K.W.F. Solger, *Lezioni di Estetica*, trans. by G. Pinna (Palermo: Aesthetica, 1995); and the French anthology: *L'art et la tragédie du beau*, translation and introduction by A. Baillot (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2004).

a text of protestation in the name of the Berlin university senate against the Carlsbad decrees that were aimed at restricting the freedom of the universities and the press (11 October 1819). From 1818-1819 Solger warmly supported the nomination of Hegel to Berlin and was then his colleague for several months. Their intellectual relationship was characterised by mutual respect and appreciation. Solger writes for instance: “I admire Hegel very much, and agree with him, surprisingly, in many places. In dialectics we have both taken almost the same path, but entirely independently of one another, and have at least tackled the matter entirely from the same and indeed from a new side.”¹² However, this friendship wasn’t given time to flourish: on the 25th October 1819, before his thirty-ninth birthday, Solger’s life was brutally cut short by illness. A saddened Hegel writes: “The day before yesterday I accompanied Solger to his final resting-place; his tomb is not far from Fichte’s. It will therefore be mine too, next to my colleagues. Judging by these two, philosophers do not seem to grow old here.”¹³

b) Reception

Without ever becoming a ‘classical’ philosopher in the manner of Fichte and Schelling, or an iconic figure of Early German Romanticism like Friedrich Schlegel or Novalis, Solger has nonetheless never entirely disappeared from philosophical consciousness.¹⁴ He was read relatively little during his lifetime. Already at that time his friends criticized the complexity of his philosophical dialogues, while he himself deplored his lack of serious readers. Read and admired after his premature death by Hegel, Goethe, Kierkegaard and Friedrich Theodor Vischer, he was considered up until the start of the 20th century as one of the seminal authors of philosophical aesthetics. However, even from the outset the reception of his philosophy was not just confined to his aesthetics. For example, Hegel’s *Review of his Posthumous Writings and Correspondence (Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel)*¹⁵ demarcated him from the romanticism of Friedrich Schlegel or Novalis, which was allegedly subjectivist, and recognised in him a genuine understanding of the ‘speculative’, albeit an abstract one. The kind words of the master

¹² Solger, letter to Tieck, April 26, 1818, NS I, 620, Matenko 423. Cf. also Solger’s letter to Hegel, May 1818 (in *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1953), vol. II, 189. See M. Galland-Szymkowiak, “La critique hégélienne du dialogue solgérien. Dialogue, systématique, intersubjectivité”, in *Formen der Philosophie. Deutschland und Frankreich 1750-1830*, ed. A. Baillet and C. Coulombeau (Hanover-Laatzten: Wehrhahn, 2007), 149–71. Regarding Solger’s understanding of Hegel’s philosophy, see my commentaries in Solger, *Écrits philosophiques*, 290–91.

¹³ Hegel, letter to Creuzer, 30.10.1819, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, vol. II, 220.

¹⁴ The following state of the research does not presume to be exhaustive, but simply to provide an overview.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Solgers „Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel“*, *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1828.

subsequently piqued the interest of Hegelian historians of philosophy, who were inclined to characterize Solger as the missing link between Schelling's philosophy of identity and the philosophy of Hegel.¹⁶ Other commentators view him as an intermediary between Fichte and Hegel¹⁷, and some as Schellingian.¹⁸

Solger research experienced a first renaissance (in German studies and in philosophy) in the 1930s, notably by authors who ascribed to him – due to his interest in phenomenal appearance and the finitude of existence – a position close to that of the emergent existential phenomenology.¹⁹ But Solger was also studied for his own sake.²⁰ A second renaissance started in the 1960s and 1970s, with the re-issuing or re-editing of his works.²¹ In addition, a large number of detailed critical studies were published from the second half of the 1990s onwards, in German and in Italian²²; the reception

¹⁶ Cf., for example, K. Rosenkranz, *G.W.F. Hegels Leben* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1844), 282.

¹⁷ F. J. Schmidt, "Solger", in *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, vol. 54 [1908] (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1971), 381.

¹⁸ E. von Hartmann, *Die deutsche Ästhetik seit Kant*, in Hartmann, *Ausgewählte Werke* (Berlin: Haacke, 1886), vol. 3, 61; T.W. Danzel, "Über den gegenwärtigen Zustand der Philosophie der Kunst und ihre nächste Aufgabe", in Danzel, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. O. Jahn (Leipzig: Dyk, 1855), 52–3, 54 sq.; F. Überweg, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Part 4: *Die deutsche Philosophie des 19. Jahrhunderts und der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Mittler, 1923), 56 sq.; X. Tilliette, "Schelling, l'art et les artistes", in Schelling, *Textes esthétiques*, ed. A. Pernet (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978), XLI.

¹⁹ O. Becker, "Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers", *Festschrift für Husserl, Ergänzungsband zum Jahrbuch für phil. und phän. Forschung* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1929); M. Boucher, *K.W.F. Solger. Esthétique et philosophie de la présence* (Paris: Stock, 1934). Boucher maintains that Solger is not a romantic (186–87) and should not be reduced to a "theorist of irony", which is nothing "but a consequence" in his philosophy (274).

²⁰ J. E. Heller, *Solgers Philosophie der ironischen Dialektik. Ein Beitrag zur romantischen und spekulativ-idealistischen Philosophie* (Berlin: dissertation, 1928) (which distinguishes Solger from both the idealists and the romantics); and the articles of O. Walzel: "Methode? Ironie bei Friedrich Schlegel und bei K. W. F. Solger", *Helicon* 1 (1938): 33–50; "Allgemeines und Besonderes in Solgers Ästhetik", *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 17 (1939): 153–82; "Tragik bei Solger", *Helicon* 3 (1940): 27–49.

²¹ R. Herzog, *Die Bewahrung der Vernunft. Eine Untersuchung der Metaphysik K.W.F. Solgers* (Munich: dissertation, 1967; for Herzog, the key to Solger is his metaphysics); M. Frank, *Das Problem 'Zeit' in der deutschen Romantik. Zeitbewußtsein und Bewußtsein von Zeitlichkeit in der Frühromantischen Philosophie und in Tiecks Dichtung* [1972] (Paderborn/Munich/Vienna/Zurich: Schöningh, 1990), 97–129. The numerous articles of Wolfhart Henckmann, the chief contributor to the renaissance of Solgerian studies, will be cited throughout our study.

²² We will refer here only to books. See G. Pinna, *L'Ironia metafisica. Filosofia e teoria estetica in K.W.F. Solger* (Genoa: Pantograf, 1994); V. Pinto, *Filosofia e religione in K.W.F. Solger* (Naples: Morano Editore, 1995); the works of Valerio Verra and those of Marco Ravera; L. Ghisleri, *L'Unità nella dualità*.

In German: F. Decher, *Die Ästhetik K.W.F. Solgers* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1994); D. Potz, *Solgers Dialektik. Die Grundzüge der dialektischen Philosophie K.W.F. Solgers* (Hamburg: Dr. Kovac, 1995); P. Schulte, *Solgers Schönheitslehre im Zusammenhang des deutschen Idealismus: Kant, Schiller, W.v. Humboldt, Schelling, Solger, Schleiermacher, Hegel* (Kassel: Kassel Univ. Press, 2001); A. Baillet, M. Galland-Szymkowiak (eds.), *Grundzüge der Philosophie K.W.F. Solgers* (Berlin/Münster: LIT Verlag, « Ideal&Real », 2014) (this volume contains contributions on the different areas of Solger's philosophy).

of Solger developed in the Francophone world in parallel;²³ while there is currently very little secondary literature on Solger in English.²⁴

Among others, a current is discernible that tried to disengage Solger from his somewhat limited reputation as an ‘aesthete’ or ‘theorist of romantic irony’, conferring upon him instead a much broader place in the history of philosophy by emphasizing the fundamental features of his metaphysics. This is the perspective that we will be adopting, by choosing to present the entirety of his thought based on the central idea of ‘revelation.’

Even if Solger was not part of the Jena group of romantics, who formed around the Schlegel brothers, Schelling, Novalis, and the journal *Athenaeum* (1798-1800), constituting the inner core of Early German romanticism between 1796 and 1800/1801, he shared (through the intermediary of Tieck among others) the interests of the romantics. For example, the question concerning the *presentation* (*Darstellung*) of the absolute in finite reality, which was philosophical in general and aesthetic in particular, or again, his reflections on *irony* and the *symbol*. Like the romantics, he sought a form of philosophy that is less abstractly universal than the systematic presentations, a form of thought capable of achieving the synthesis of philosophy and “life.”

At the same time, Solger’s philosophy is constructed within a framework, and he employs philosophical motifs that are certainly those of

²³ See the works of Jacques Colette, the rediscoverer of Solger in France, half a century after Maurice Boucher: “Art, mystique et négativité: K.W.F. Solger”, *Études philosophiques* 1 (1983): 69–86; “Enthousiasme et ironie. La dialectique artistique selon K.W.F. Solger”, *Études philosophiques* 4 (1992): 487–98. See furthermore the translation and introduction to: Hegel, *Compte-rendu des Écrits posthumes et correspondance de Solger*, trad. J. Reid, N. Tondut under the title *L’Ironie romantique* (Paris: Vrin, 1997); A. Baillot, *Genèse et réception de la pensée esthétique de Solger entre 1800 et 1830*, doctoral dissertation, Université Paris VIII, 2002 (<https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00783069/document>); A. Baillot (ed.), *L’Esthétique de K.W.F. Solger* (Tusson: Du Lérot, 2002); X. Tilliette, “Dans le sillage de Schelling: l’intuition esthétique de K.F. Solger”, in *Divinarum rerum notitia. La teologia tra filosofia e storia*, ed. A. Russo and G. Coffele (Roma: Studium, 2001), 619–29; M. Galland-Szymkowiak, *Présence de l’absolu. Le problème esthétique du symbole et ses enjeux philosophiques dans les systèmes postkantien (Schelling, Solger, Hegel)*, doctoral dissertation, Université Paris IV, 2005; Ph. Grosos, *L’Ironie du réel à la lumière du romantisme allemand* (Lausanne: L’Âge d’Homme, 2009), 115–37; K.W.F. Solger, *Sur Sophocle et la tragédie antique*, translation, introductions and annotations by N. Angehrn (Lausanne: L’Âge d’Homme, 2010); K.W.F. Solger, *Écrits philosophiques*, introduction, translation and commentaries by M. Galland-Szymkowiak (Paris: Vrin, 2015).

²⁴ English-language research on Solger is mostly in the fields of German and literary studies: René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, vol. 5, The Romantic Age* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 298–303; Moshe Barash, “Solger”, in *Modern Theories of Art*, 1. “From Winckelmann to Baudelaire”, ed. M. Barash (New York/London: New York University Press, 1990), 305–08. However, there are a number of recent articles in English published by Italian scholars on the metaphysics of Solger: Paolo Diego Bubbio, “Solger and Hegel: Privation and Negation”, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 173–87; “Solger’s Notion of Sacrifice as Double Negation”, *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 2 (2009): 206–14; L. Ghisleri, “Absolute, Revelation and Nothing in the Thought of K.W.F. Solger”, in *Nichts, Negation, Nihilismus. Die europäische Moderne als Erkenntnis und Erfahrung des Nichts*, ed. A. Bertinetto and C. Binkemann (Berlin/New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 107–17.

the idealistic philosophy of Fichte and Schelling. He refuses to be labelled as an “aesthetics professor”²⁵, writing in 1817: “My philosophy has now extended itself so far that I can develop it with complete certainty. It is neither the Fichtean philosophy, nor – as some appear to believe – the Schellingian, rather I am convinced that it is a new and particular development of German philosophy.”²⁶ And: “It is not some kind of recast Schellingianism or Fichteanism that I’m presenting. I believe that I have found a standpoint from which I can also construct these side roads.”²⁷ Solger’s philosophy, which essentially develops between 1815 and 1819, is situated in continuity with the transformation of Kantianism accomplished in Fichte’s transcendental idealism and in the young Schelling. Furthermore, Solger shares some of the answers given by Schelling up to and including 1809, but also by Fichte in 1804-1806. Nevertheless, he also roundly criticizes them, and has been described as their “bad conscience.”²⁸ This is because he sets transcendental and speculative idealism in confrontation with a person who radically challenged it (and in this way helped to determine it). And that person is: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Solger’s valorisation of the inner experience of “revelation” in “faith”, the importance he grants to existence and to the individuality, are all inconceivable without Jacobi’s influence. Solger’s explicitly admits such an influence. He particularly seeks to reconcile, on the one hand, the systematic idealistic understanding of consciousness and the world, and on the other hand, the affirmation of a transcendence of the absolute; he wishes to grasp how it is deployed in “life”, in the individual and contingent experience of existence.²⁹

2. Philosophy as the Thought of ‘Revelation’

a) The post-Kantian problem of the principle of philosophy

Like Fichte and Schelling, Solger considered the vocation of philosophy to be a systematic science (for him philosophical systematicity was a requirement, although distinct from the *form* of a systematic presentation).³⁰ The early Fichte and the early Schelling developed a construction of philosophy as science (*Wissenschaft*). It could only be founded on a principle that was at once *absolutely immediate*, i.e. that could not be deduced, that was given like a fact in the subject (as indicated by the terms *Tatsache* in

²⁵ Solger, letter to Tieck, 1.1.1819, NS I, 707, Matenko 511.

²⁶ Solger to Abeken, 15.11.1817, NS I, 573.

²⁷ Solger to Keßler, 8.11.1817, NS I, 568.

²⁸ M. Ophälders, *Romantische Ironie. Essay über Solger* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 19 (cf. p. 61).

²⁹ My commentaries in the volume, Solger, *Écrits philosophiques* (pp. 245–317), underscore the confrontation points between Solger and Fichte, Schelling, Jacobi and Hegel.

³⁰ Cf. M. Galland-Szymkowiak, “La critique hégélienne du dialogue solgérien” (see note 12), 160–63.

K.L. Reinhold and *Tathandlung* in Fichte), and *absolutely universal*, i.e. likely to ground the totality of our theoretical and practical relationship with everything that *is*. Therefore, starting from the thinking subject, in early post-Kantianism it was a matter of finding a first principle of philosophy³¹ that was unconditional and universal, and which attested to the inner and fundamental unity of being and thought. Only after being founded on a principle of this kind could the philosophical *system* legitimately present itself not as an arbitrary description but as an exposition in the element of thought, of the unity of being and thought that grounds the whole of reality. With his concept of *revelation* as the principle and centre of philosophy, Solger furnished an original solution to a problem lying at the heart of the post-Kantian constellation.³² However, by doing so he questions both the Fichtean and Schellingian perspectives, and finally the very status of the problem itself.

b) Solger's theory of knowledge and conception of philosophy

In a manner similar to Fichte and Schelling, Solger also inherited the project of understanding the conditions of the possibility of knowledge from Kant's critical philosophy. He distinguishes between two types of knowledge. In 'ordinary knowledge' (*gemeine Erkenntnis*), knowing is *thinking*, that is to say, abstracting and judging,³³ linking concepts and intuitions, and opposing and comparing. This knowledge is purely relative – a relativity that is at the same time an essential character of our existence.³⁴ Nevertheless, we experience within ordinary knowledge the demand that the concept and intuition fully coincide, or again, a non-relative 'fixed point'. The access to "higher knowledge" (*höhere Erkenntnis*) of this kind is indicated in us by the *conviction* that the relation established by our consciousness, e.g. of a concept and an intuition, is well and truly the expression of their essential identity:

We only call our state 'conviction' if we do not merely have the relative connection in our consciousness, but also if the knowledge of this

³¹ Cf. Ch. Asmuth, "Anfang und Form der Philosophie. Überlegungen zu Fichte, Schelling und Hegel", in *Schelling: zwischen Fichte und Hegel*, ed. Ch. Asmuth, A. Denker and M. Vater (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Rodopi, 2000), 403–17.

³² For a more detailed exposition of Solger's position in this context, cf. M. Galland-Szymkowiak, "Philosophie und Religion bei K.W.F. Solger. Ein Beitrag zur nachkantischen Frage nach dem Prinzip der Philosophie", in *Der Eine oder der Andere. Gott in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie und im Denken der Gegenwart*, ed. Ch. Asmuth and K. Drilo (Berlin/Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2009), 191–206.

³³ Solger, *Über die wahre Bedeutung und Bestimmung der Philosophie, besonders in unserer Zeit* (henceforth: UWB), NS II, 70.

³⁴ "Existence is precisely the moment of the most perfect reciprocal action between the universal and the particular." (Solger, *Philosophie des Rechts und Staats* [henceforth: PhiRS] in NS II, 263–365, here NS II, 301). Cf. Solger, UWB, chap. 2.

perfect unity enters into the same. If by means of classification and comparison of natural objects with their general concepts we discover that some kind of newly discovered creature belongs to this or that genus, then this does not depend on the fact that I assign to it a special aspect of infinite multiplicity under the empty form of this generic concept; but that I assume this concept is present in the thing in the entire fullness, which comprises its unity; and that it fills the thing with its essence, and communicates to it all the determinations and expressions which are generally compatible with the thought of such an essence.³⁵

The ‘conviction’ not only refers to the unity of the concept and the intuition, but also to the coincidence of the activity of the cognizing subject with which it cognizes itself, i.e. to the unity of thinking and being. Solger uses the term ‘*idea*’ to designate these points of unity in knowledge. He defines the idea by means of the identity between matter and the form of knowledge.³⁶ However, by the *matter* of knowledge, he not only understands, like Kant, the sensible manifold, but the concepts unifying the manifold as well, yet each time under a particular angle; and by the *form* of knowledge, he understands the unity of the consciousness linking the matter of knowledge into a whole.³⁷

If philosophy wants to become a science, it must take the *idea* as its principle, the point of unity of the subject and object, that is constitutive of all knowledge. Or more precisely: not merely this point, but the manner in which it effectively constitutes our cognitions, i.e. the *dynamic of the transition* of this higher unity *in* the relations of ordinary cognition. The task of philosophy is not simply a matter of showing how the universal and the particular fuse into each other, but how the *idea* (the absolute unity of the universal and particular) *and existence* (pure relativity, non-unity or difference of the universal and the particular) merge into one another.³⁸ This *transition* will constitute the core, the principle on which the totality of our knowledge will be founded and recognized as a knowledge of what *is*. What has to be overcome is the opposition between, on the one hand, a network of concepts in relation to which the particular is never more than something possible, and on the other hand, the undeniable but inexplicable encounter with the individual existence of empirical things.

Fichte and Schelling, stresses Solger, had certainly considered that it is essential for philosophy to “elevate relative knowledge into an essential unity

³⁵ Solger, UWB, NS II, 80.

³⁶ “In and for itself knowledge must be the unity of the universal and the particular, and therefore also the unity of the form and the substance, and this is one of the primary meanings of the word ‘idea’”. (Solger, UWB, NS II, 91).

³⁷ Solger, UWB, NS II, 90.

³⁸ “(..) what merges into one another in revelation is indeed not the universal and particular, but the idea itself and existence on the whole” (Solger, UWB, NS II, 124–25).

of opposites.”³⁹ They attempted to determine how this absolute unity grounds all reality for us: their goal was to “determine the whole of reality (*Wirklichkeit*) through philosophy”, or to “give a wholly specific positive content to philosophy”⁴⁰. However, instead of situating themselves at the *very point of the transition* of the idea into reality (at the “centre of consciousness”⁴¹), they situated themselves on either one *or* the other side of this transition.

Moreover, Solger explains, in the *Grundlage* (1794-95) Fichte made the absolute unity of opposites into a principle of philosophy – with the absolute I as the pure activity of self-positing.⁴² The “I am” indeed gives us a point of unity in our knowledge, since the subject in the “I am” is its own predicate. But, according to Solger, on the one hand, this unity results from an activity of the connection of the I with itself; on the other hand, the I remains opposed to the real and cannot truly be shown as the latter’s productive principle, unless one assumes that the unknown *Anstoß* stimulates it to this productivity. Hence, the absolute unity is never present as such in our existence.⁴³ As for *Schelling*, Solger notes, in his philosophy of identity he wished to demonstrate the reality of absolute unity – ‘reason’ or ‘absolute identity’ – in any being.⁴⁴ Yet he failed to show how absolute identity passes over into *temporal, finite reality*, or into empirical “factual consciousness”⁴⁵: thus, here as well reason (higher cognition) remains solely “formal”.⁴⁶ To put it another way: in Schelling’s system of identity, it is not a question of the reality of our existence, but simply of a reality that is always already in the absolute. Inversely, in order to explain how absolute identity assumes an infinity of forms, Schelling is forced, according to Solger, to furtively introduce relations and oppositions into the identity that depend in fact on finite existence. The very finitude of existence is here neutralized in advance as it were.

Fichte and Schelling have therefore lost “the moment of transformation that alone is the true act of cognition, in which the antitheses are simultaneously one and cancel out each other.”⁴⁷ Thus, the principle they

³⁹ Solger, UWB, NS II, 130.

⁴⁰ Solger, UWB, NS II, 135.

⁴¹ Solger, UWB, NS II, 128.

⁴² Cf. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer* (1794-95), in GA I,2. Cf. Solger, UWB, NS II, 130.

⁴³ Solger, UWB, NS II, 131.

⁴⁴ Cf. Schelling, *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (1801); “Presentation of my System of Philosophy”, English translation in: *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800-1802)*, edited and translated by Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany/N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2012), 141–205. Cf. Solger, UWB, NS II, 132.

⁴⁵ Solger, UWB, NS II, 133.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Solger, UWB, NS II, 130.

assigned to philosophy is only a partial one,⁴⁸ and does not permit philosophy to reach a “conclusion (*Abschluß*)”⁴⁹, to fully complete the idealist project by showing how the idea effectively constitutes the reality of our knowledge and existence. Their philosophies make “within the complete circle of philosophy a restricted movement in a one-sided direction”.⁵⁰ If philosophy wants to be a systematic explanation of everything that exists starting from absolute unity, then it has to give itself as a principle the very point of the junction between the idea (in its eternity) and existence (in its temporal finitude), their mutual transition from the one into the other.

c) Revelation, the transition of the idea into existence

In order for philosophy to arrive at a “conclusion”, it requires “the first foundation and presupposition itself to become once again a fact and a full, living experience.”⁵¹ The idea, the basis of philosophy, must become our existence and even in its contingency. The *idea* is also called by Solger the *essence (das Wesen)*, i.e. which we could explain as the thought unity of being and thought. Thus, the essence (or the “divine essence”) needs to become our existence. However, in its relativity and temporality⁵² existence is precisely what the absolute idea, the one and eternal, is *not*, i.e. its nothingness or nothing (*Nichts*). Hence, to explain the *presence* of the idea (or the existence of the essence), is nothing else than to nullify the negation of the idea itself, i.e. to show the nullity of finite phenomenal appearances:

Existence in and for itself is only what the essence is *not*, the *nothingness of the essence [das Nichts des Wesens]* (...). Consequently, the essence reveals itself as such, or it only becomes real essence *by cancelling and annihilating this nothingness*. For us it is only there in this complete opposition with the nothingness.⁵³

In fact, if the “divine essence” did not continually annihilate the existence in which it reveals itself, it would not be revealed *by itself* anymore, but would depend in some manner on finite properties through which it would have to reveal itself.

The higher art of existing [*dazuseyn*], is to reveal oneself, and to reveal oneself means to destroy one’s nothingness, i.e. to be there through oneself; both are entirely One.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Cf. Solger, UWB, NS II, 128, 135.

⁴⁹ Solger, UWB, NS II, 134.

⁵⁰ Solger, UWB, NS II, 134.

⁵¹ Solger, UWB, NS II, 129.

⁵² Manfred Frank has particularly stressed the Solgerian determination of finitude as temporality (*Das Problem ‘Zeit’ in der deutschen Romantik*, 21990, 97–129, 505–6).

⁵³ Solger, UWB, NS II, 172.

⁵⁴ Solger, letter to Tieck (01.01.1819), NS I, 703, Matenko, 508.

To know the presence of the idea in our existence cannot signify anything else than to understand the nullity ('nothingness') (*Nichtigkeit*) of our existence, that is, the fact that *by itself* it neither contains nor produces any *being*:

The highest knowledge of the essence in our existence [*Daseyn*], is wholly one and the same with the complete conviction of its nothingness.⁵⁵

That the absolute exists, or is "real", therefore signifies that it must annihilate the purely relational and relative character of phenomenal appearances. But the significance of Solgerian dialectics goes even further: it is not only a matter of negating phenomenality in general, but clearly even the phenomenality of *the absolute* itself. "Revealing oneself means destroying *one's* nothingness": hence, the absolute must abolish its *own* existence if it has to reveal itself *as* absolute. For nothingness (the existence) is not a second principle, a second kind of being that the idea would have to destroy, but indeed its *own* non-being (what it is not); from the point of view of the absolute itself, there is no nothingness.⁵⁶ Thus, the revelation of the idea in and through the annihilation of finite existence is at the same time the *self-annihilation* of the idea as far as it exists:

(...) the essence, insofar as it is entirely nothing, once again cancels itself, which means the same as saying that as essence it would make itself real, or it would become immediately there.⁵⁷

According to Solger, the foundation of all being and of all truth resides in this "divine self-revelation and self-sacrifice."⁵⁸ However, this sacrifice⁵⁹ or this self-annihilation of the essence does not mean that the absolute is hidden or concealed from us: revelation, Solger underscores, is complete and entire. It is the full presence of the absolute idea for our finite consciousness. Because for a finite being the *presence* could not mean a *parousia*, a fully positive advent of the absolute as such – but only a fullness that is simultaneously its own evanescence. Revelation is *whole* to the extent that it

⁵⁵ Solger, *Briefe, die Mißverständnisse über Philosophie und deren Verhältnis zur Religion betreffend*, NS II, 31.

⁵⁶ "Everything that is genuine is only the revelation of God, and we know of no other genuine existence [*Daseyn*] and acting than what consists in the continual annihilation of our self, i.e. of our appearance [*Schein*] in order that this revelation freely radiates forth. With God it will be different: there, the nothing is really nothing, which for us, however, is solely something insofar as it appears to us" (Letter of Solger to Keßler, 16.5.1818, NS I, 631).

⁵⁷ Solger, *Philosophische Gespräche*, 317.

⁵⁸ Solger, *Philosophische Gespräche*, 320.

⁵⁹ See P. D. Bubbio, "Solger's Notion of Sacrifice as Double Negation."

is *kenotic*⁶⁰, that it is nothing more than the very destruction of that which reveals itself.

Precisely through this nothingness of the idea as an earthly appearance [*Erscheinung*] (...), we first arrive at the point of recognizing it as real and everything that appears to us as the being of the idea.⁶¹

d) Ontology and the epistemology of revelation

The starting point of Solger's philosophy, which is inscribed in the post-Kantianism tradition, resides in *self-consciousness*⁶² and an inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of knowledge. Ontology for him does not merely have a realistic meaning, but is identical with an epistemology (or a theory of knowledge).

"Revelation" is the actualisation of a foundation for consciousness, renewed at each moment in existence. But *what* exactly is revealed? With regard to the absolute unity in itself, Solger notes:

Thus, we cannot say anything more about it except that it was originally there, independent of the relation and merging activity, that it is there merely in and for itself, that it is the eternal, the concluded and perfected.⁶³

Because the absolute as such is absolutely one, and existence does not consist, in contrast, of anything but differentiations, oppositions and relations, then *strictly speaking* absolute unity does not *exist*. Solger also calls it an "obscure being", and notes its radical transcendence and unknowability.⁶⁴ However, Solger's own perspective consists less in insisting on this transcendence (Fr. Schlegel or Novalis insisted much more on this), than showing that the absolute, or rather the absolute idea (which is what we can know of "obscure being") is certainly *present* – albeit as a *kenosis* that keeps simultaneously referring to its absence. Of course, we cannot know anything at all about the absolute unity as such. However, our existence is no *other kind* of being than this "obscure being", it cannot receive its being except from this. Considered in itself, existence is nothingness, but at the same time it is indeed the sole place possible for the real presence of the idea.⁶⁵ Solger

⁶⁰ Cf. M. Ravera, "Presentazione", in Solger, *Erwin. Quattro dialoghi sul bello et sull'arte*, ed. and trans. by M. Ravera (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2004), 9, 11, 12–13.

⁶¹ Solger, *Erwin*, 388–389.

⁶² Cf. Solger, Letter to Tieck (19.11.1815), NS I, 376, Matenko 191.

⁶³ Solger, UWB, NS II, 91.

⁶⁴ Solger, *Philosophische Gespräche über Seyn, Nichtseyn und Erkennen* (henceforth: USNE), NS II, 232. Cf. M. Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 318.

⁶⁵ "Hence Solger's dialectics turns out to be ontic dualism (two types of being) but still ontological monism (a single ground)", D. Potz, *Solgers Dialektik*, 159 (see note 23).

defines existence as “true positive nothingness (*das wahre positive Nichts*)”,⁶⁶ “nothingness” in itself, devoid of its own consistence with respect to Being, “positive” insofar as it seeks to posit itself as valid on its own, outside of revelation, and therefore to become “evil”.⁶⁷

Solger emphasizes that we certainly have an experience of the unity in our relative knowledge and existence. From the point of view of knowledge, “*conviction*” is the certitude to have reached within thinking, the unity of thought and being. From the point of view of being, it is the unity of *individually existing things* which impose their irrefutable presence on us, their one and only being-there.⁶⁸ In the two cases, consciousness detects or confirms the presence of a unity that *it knows it did not create itself*. Even though philosophy has indeed the unity of self-consciousness as a starting point, according to Solger that unity cannot be understood either as posited by the I in a free act (Fichte), or discovered by the I as its own foundation in a process of abstraction going beyond the subject-object division (Schelling in 1801): at the expense of a grounding powerlessness, the unconditional unity is received by the I as the radical exteriority of its most intimate foundation.

The task of philosophy therefore consists in elucidating the conditions of the “presence” of this unity in existence, or again, to discursively expose the modalities of ‘revelation.’ From an ontological point of view, revelation is defined as the deployment of being by means of its non-being: being enters into existence by opposing itself to a non-being (which is nothing in itself), in order to finally infinitely recreate its own unity in the diversity of the finite, in individuals.

(...) then being attains a reunion with itself already in every point of non-being, but always only by means of the particular.⁶⁹

From an epistemological point of view (not dissociated from the preceding), revelation is revelation of the *idea*, ‘higher knowledge’ *within* ‘ordinary’ finite and relative knowledge. The idea is the “eternal act of unity”⁷⁰ to oneself, by means of finite existence and knowledge. It assumes different configurations (ideas of the good, of beauty, of truth, of blessedness), depending on whether it appears to us as mediated or immediate, in external objects or in consciousness.

If we have discarded the shell of the nothingness, then we shall clearly perceive how the whole of nature is nothing else than the existence

⁶⁶ Solger, Letter to Tieck, 7.12.1817, NS I, 579, Matenko 395. Cf. the letter to Tieck of 19.11.1815, NS I, 378, Matenko 192 ; of 1.01.1819, NS I, 703, Matenko 508.

⁶⁷ Cf. Solger, UWB, NS II, 168, and the letter to Tieck, 2-4.02.1817, NS I, 512, Matenko 346.

⁶⁸ Cf. Solger, USNE, NS II, 207; UWB, NS II, 76.

⁶⁹ Solger, USNE, NS II, 249.

⁷⁰ Solger, UWB, NS II, 93.

[*Daseyn*] of God dissolving itself in its harmony, how religion, morality and art are nothing more than the different reappearing deed [*That*] in reality of the self-destruction and self-revelation of the divine essence. ... They too are all one and the same, only viewed from different standpoints.⁷¹

e) The unity of revelation and speculation

If the task of philosophy consists in elucidating the “*what*” of revelation, to conceptually describe the manner in which the unity of the idea is diffracted in the different domains of our finite cognition and existence, philosophy could not, however, give an account of the “*that*” or the very *fact* of revelation through its own (discursive) means. Thought cannot produce the fact of unity but only receive it from revelation.

Solger discovers this “fact” in the contents of the Christian religion, with the existence, death and resurrection of Christ (seen in themselves, but also in their connection with Christian salvation). Nonetheless, the ‘eternal fact’, the principle of philosophy, does not *coincide* with the ‘historical’ fact of the life and death of Christ. Or to use the words of Valeria Pinto, Christ and the cross constitute the *prototypos* for the genesis of philosophical dialectics (whereas artistic irony would be the *ektypos*).⁷² This fact that philosophy chooses as its own centre “is not a relative fact, but the absolute fact, which for us, however, only ever exists at once in a relative form.”⁷³

... The deed of the self-annihilation and self-revelation of God [is the] sole object of philosophy ... This event is not at all simply an external one, insofar as we picture to ourselves that it has occurred in Christ, but the fact and the eternal world law, that repeats itself everywhere and at every moment in its effect, are thoroughly one and the same. Just as in the son and in his death God sacrificed himself in the visible world, and therefore entirely cancelled this and destroyed it as appearance: thus, the Father continues to live on in the universal subsistence of this world and sacrifices himself in it at every moment whenever he descends down again as son in the appearance and again destroys himself as such in the consciousness of every single one of us.⁷⁴

By choosing “revelation” as the principle of philosophy, as the “absolute fact”, Solger follows the lead of the Reinholdian and Fichtean reflection on

⁷¹ Solger, *Philosophische Gespräche*, 320. Also: “Hence, that there is a multiplicity of ideas is due (...) to the different relation that the one and the same eternal idea has with existence and ordinary consciousness, in which it expresses itself along different paths and in different formations. However, in all of them this relation is the unity of the one essence with itself, which precisely for this reason is a living and not a dead unity, because it unfolds itself in existence and in the cancellation [*Aufhebung*] of it and its opposites, to become once again united with itself.” (Solger, UWB, NS II, 95–6).

⁷² V. Pinto, Introduction to: Solger, *Scritti filosofici* (Napoli: Guida Editori, 1995), 12.

⁷³ Solger, UWB, NS II, 175.

⁷⁴ Solger, Letter to Keßler, 16.05.1818, NS I, 631–32.

the principle of philosophy as a ‘fact’, i.e. on the immediacy and autonomy of this principle. But he profoundly renews this reflection by showing that the immediate and self-sufficient foundation sought by the post-Kantians in the unity of self-consciousness points back to an even more original act given in the eternal fact of revelation: “Without revelation there is no genuine self-consciousness.”⁷⁵ Solger, who is again inspired by Jacobi while simultaneously criticizing him, chooses to give the name “faith” (*der Glaube*) to the inner experience of the revelation of the divine essence:

This word does not designate an indefinite inkling or even a conjecture; it is rather the clearest and most certain element in our entire cognition; for only through it do we really arrive at bringing together our consciousness as something that is single and immediately present. In every other view our consciousness only ever remains partially and relatively present.⁷⁶

Accordingly, Solger’s central thesis is the following: the contents of faith and philosophy are one and the same.⁷⁷ Philosophy as a whole consists in the *thought* of “divine revelation”, of the “presence of the essence within our knowledge and existence”,⁷⁸ which is only *experienced* in faith:

Revelation is everything; in one case it is experienced, while in another it is conceived and understood, or becomes an insight and is raised to consciousness.⁷⁹

But the division between experience and thought of revelation is unavoidable because it results from our finitude; the two are distinguished only “because we are thrown into existence (*in das Daseyn geworfen*), where the existence of the essence known to religion, and the essence of existence unveiled by philosophy, have to be distinguished from one another, because we are not God, but through him we reside in the eternal and the true.”⁸⁰

Only by placing the given ‘fact’ of revelation at the centre of the philosophical thought is the latter guaranteed to be veritably alive and connected with the real; that is to say, it is situated at the very point of the

⁷⁵ Letter of Solger to Abeken, 23.1.1818, NS I, 602. Cf. also for instance *ibid.*, 601; letter of Solger to Tieck, 4.2.1817, NS I, 513, Matenko 346–47.

⁷⁶ Solger, UWB, NS II, 98. Also Solger, *Philosophische Gespräche*, 256.

⁷⁷ Cf. E.g. Solger, UWB, NS II, 157, 169, 174, 179; *Philosophische Gespräche*, 255; Letter to Abeken, 23.01.1818, NS I, 598–99, 605. On this theme of the unity of speculation and revelation, cf. W. Henckmann, “Solgers Auffassung der Einheit der Offenbarung und der wahren Philosophie”, in *Religionsphilosophie und spekulative Theologie. Der Streit um die göttlichen Dinge (1799–1812)*, ed. W. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 1994), 221–50; F. Decher, “Unité de la révélation et de la spéculation. Remarques sur le fondement mystique de la philosophie solgérienne”, in *L’Esthétique de Karl Solger. Symbole, tragique et ironie*, 49–65.

⁷⁸ Solger, UWB, NS II, 116.

⁷⁹ Solger, UWB, NS II, 178.

⁸⁰ Solger, *Briefe, die Mißverständnisse über Philosophie und deren Verhältniß zur Religion betreffend*, NS II, 52.

transition from the idea to existence. Far from simply illustrating a philosophical theorem here, the Christian doctrine of revelation (as incarnation and redemption) furnishes philosophy with the “absolute fact”, which is both internal (in its content) and external (in its existence) for philosophy. Without this fact, it is incapable of becoming a systematic whole. This philosophical understanding must be clearly distinguished from the immediate experience of the fact of revelation, and for which understanding cannot be a substitute. However, the philosophical content and significance of this fact can only be determined by philosophy itself and not by religion.⁸¹ The positivity of Revelation in the fruitful tension of its identity and its difference with the philosophical (dialectical) concept of revelation, is certainly central to Solger’s thought, which for he himself is Lutheran.⁸² Nevertheless, his project is not a philosophical religion, but a philosophy.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide here a detailed comparison between the Solgerian and the Schellingian approaches to the relation between revelation and philosophy, so we will only highlight a few points. The late Schelling states: “reason, insofar as it takes itself alone as the source and principle, is incapable of any effective knowledge”⁸³; revelation on the other hand, contains something that philosophy cannot possess without it, “something that goes beyond reason and is more than what reason contains.”⁸⁴ In both philosophers there is the idea that philosophy will only be complete if it fully reflects the “factuality” of this revelation – factuality that is the other of reason, but can only be understood as such through reason.⁸⁵ Both of them are also aware that taking revelation into account through and in thought, and conceiving its very factuality, can only profoundly modify the way philosophy understands itself.⁸⁶ However, Schelling’s philosophy of Revelation is only one part of philosophy, whereas for Solger the whole of philosophy should recognise itself as the thought of revelation.

⁸¹ “It is yet entirely certain that his science [= the science of the philosopher] is essentially distinguished from every other science due to its comprehensiveness. Every other one has something presupposed and given, either a definite form of knowledge, like mathematics, or a definite matter, like history, the theory of nature and so on. It alone has to create itself; and since this is impossible from the outside, then it has to take place from the inside, and even this means nothing else than: the essence itself has to be revealed in it” (Letter of Solger to Tieck, 4.2.1817, NS I, 507, Matenko 342). On the relation between philosophy and religion according to Solger, see: V. Pinto, *Filosofia e religione in K.W. F. Solger* (see note 22), especially chap. I; M. Galland-Szymkowiak, “Philosophie und Religion bei K.W.F. Solger” (see note 32).

⁸² Cf. L. Ghisleri, *L’Unità nelle dualità*.

⁸³ Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, SW XIII, 152.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 171.

⁸⁶ Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, SW XIII, 142.

f) Dialectics and dialogue

To philosophize, is to conceive the omnipresent recurrence of the absolute fact of revelation; it is to comprehend the oppositions and relations of ordinary knowledge “as the development of an original unity”⁸⁷, as the “illumination of the idea in existence.”⁸⁸ The philosophical tool most adapted to this endeavour is *dialectics*, the description of a double movement: here the absolute idea posits itself in existence and negates the nothingness of its own phenomenalization. For Solger, only the *dialogue* could be an appropriate form for this conception of philosophy. If the author of *Erwin* here shares an affinity with certain romantic tendencies, his theory of the dialogue should above all be understood as intimately related to his conception of dialectics.⁸⁹

According to Solger, philosophy could not be founded on an undifferentiated intellectual intuition of absolute unity,⁹⁰ but only on a living and differentiated intuition, of the idea relating to itself by means of existence. Thus, philosophy does not coincide with a higher knowledge separated from ordinary knowledge, rather, it consists in a dialectical relation between these two modes of knowledge. Ordinary consciousness is nothing unless the unity of the idea is discerned in it; however, this is possible only through the means of ‘thought’, i.e. through putting into relation differentiating and opposing – the characteristic traits of ordinary knowledge. Hence, the two modes of knowledge simultaneously have a relation of identity *and* a relation of mutual negation.⁹¹ Only the philosophical form of the *dialogue*, according to Solger, is capable of realising this dialectical relationship. The Solgerian dialogues are striking in their literary value,⁹² presenting highly individualized personalities interlinked by multiple relationships of alliance or opposition that develop throughout the length of the discussion: here there is no absolute knowledge of the absolute, but the individual consciousness of the reader progressively discovers the common core of different false opinions because of their mutual negation.⁹³ The

⁸⁷ Solger, UWB, NS II, 92.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ On the Solgerian theory of the dialogue see: M. Frank, “Einverständnis und Vielsinnigkeit oder: das Aufbrechen der Bedeutungseinheit im ‚eigentlichen Gespräch’”, in *Das Gespräch*, eds. K. Stierle and R. Warning (Munich: W. Fink, 1984), 87-132; W. Henckmann, “Lehren und Lernen der Philosophie: zur Dialogtheorie bei F. Schlegel, Schleiermacher und Solger”, in *Lehren und Lernen der Philosophie als philosophisches Problem*, eds. H. Girndt, L. Siep (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1987), 103-160 ; *ibid.*, “Die Dialogform”, in *Erwin, Nachwort*, 492-501; M. Galland-Szymkowiak, “La critique hégélienne du dialogue solgérien” (see note 12).

⁹⁰ This is Solger’s criticism of Schelling’s conception of intellectual intuition (cf. F. Decher, *Die Ästhetik K.W.F. Solgers* (see note 22), 377).

⁹¹ Cf. Solger, UWB, chapter V.

⁹² Cf. R. Wildbolz, *Der philosophische Dialog als literarische Kunstwerk. Untersuchungen über Solgers “Philosophische Gespräche”* (Bern/Stuttgart: Haupt, 1952).

⁹³ Cf. Solger, *Erwin*, 85.

dialogue does not offer an impersonal truth, it arouses reflection in the first person: it is therefore an appropriate form for the expression and experience of a revelation which, in the Solgerian conception, is always the *individual* experience of the presence of the divine unity for a singular consciousness.

In Solger, dialectics is at once immanent and transcendent, or ‘horizontal and vertical’⁹⁴: the analysis of the unity of the idea into the relations of the understanding is immanent for finite existence, but the very fact itself that a unity is revealed, the fact that in the self-negation of ordinary knowledge there shines the lightning of higher knowledge, is not created by consciousness but always received, as “the eternal fact” of revelation. The Solgerian dialogue is characterized by an intermediate content that reflects the at once immanent and transcendent character of dialectics: it is not a (false) dialogical presentation of theses initially determined and that can be furthermore expressed *more geometrico*⁹⁵, neither is it a dialogue in which the truth would emerge solely from the finite interactions between the characters. The aim of a dialogue is not to construct the truth – for the latter, consisting of the eternal fact of revelation, is always already there⁹⁶ – but to indicate a correction of the individual opinions one by means of the other, to finally present the true *within* finite existence. Solger writes:

I would like to present the ideas in such a way that one would recognize them again in all their diffractions in the real world, and see how in the end they do not consist as universal forms, but how they permeate all appearances, and how when we get up and drink coffee in the morning we have to start to live in accordance with them (...).⁹⁷

Solger also takes in account the idealist project of philosophy conceived as a systematic science, articulating in discursive relations the connection of the whole of reality to a principle.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, if he refuses the *form* of philosophical writing which is typically of a system (that of Schelling’s *Darstellung* or of Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*, both following the very movement of the absolute in “science”), and prefers the form of the dialogue, it is because his philosophy excludes the idea of absolute knowledge of the absolute, and therefore a philosophical exposition coinciding with a complete understanding of the absolute (which is the system in the sense of Hegel).

⁹⁴ Cf. J. Heller, *Solgers Philosophie der ironischen Dialektik* (see note 19), 198.

⁹⁵ Cf. Solger, UWB, NS II, 196–97.

⁹⁶ “I would really like thinking to be allowed to be wholly apparent in life again, to happily express and currently present it; this cannot be created through all constructing and demonstrating, but can only be purified and developed” (Letter of Solger to Tieck, 26.04.1818, NS I, 620, Matenko 423).

⁹⁷ Letter of Solger to F. von Raumer, 12.03.1812, NS I, 224–25. The demands to which Solger subjects the philosophical dialogue make it difficult to read, as his friends had already noted. No doubt this is one of the reasons for Solger’s poor reception in the history of philosophy (cf. Solger, UWB, NS II, 190).

⁹⁸ Cf. Solger, Letter to Tieck, 5.12.1813 (NS I, 296–297, Matenko 102). See M. Galland-Szymkowiak, “La critique hégélienne du dialogue solgérien”(see here note 12), especially note 8.

The focus of philosophizing must remain the individual experience of revelation, which breathes its spirit⁹⁹ into philosophy and is engendered by reading the dialogue. Hence, the latter is just as much a product of art (an immediate experimentation of the true) as philosophy (a discursive elucidation of relations in which the true is deployed). Solger's philosophy of art, the part of his oeuvre traditionally the most studied, is therefore also coherent with the metaphysical principle of revelation.¹⁰⁰

Part II of this article will be published in the next issue of Symphilosophie.

ABBREVIATIONS

GA: J.G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. R. Lauth, H. Jacob, Erich Fuchs *et al.* (Stuttgart/Bad-Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962-2012), 42 volumes.

HW: G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832-1845, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp, 1969 ff.).

NS I & II: K.W.F. Solger, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, 2 vol., ed. by L. Tieck and Fr. von Raumer (Leipzig, 1826); identically re-edited Heidelberg 1973.

Philosophische Gespräche: K.W.F. Solger, *Philosophische Gespräche*, Berlin 1817; identically re-edited Darmstadt 1972.

Vorlesungen: K.W.F. Solger, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, ed. K.W.L. Heyse, Leipzig 1829; identically re-edited Darmstadt 1973.

Écrits philosophiques: K.W.F. Solger, *Écrits philosophiques*, introduction, translation and commentaries by Mildred Galland-Szymkowiak (Paris: Vrin, 2015).

Matenko: *Tieck and Solger. The Complete Correspondence*, ed. P. Matenko (New York/Berlin: Westermann, 1933).

SW: F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling, 14 vols. (Stuttgart/Augsburg: Cotta, 1856-1861)

⁹⁹ “Without this grounding and illumination through the essential, through the presence and the pure consciousness of the eternal in us, even the forms in which the spirit pours through the matter of cognition would be enticed to become ghostly appearances, to become semi-madness” (Solger, UWB, NS II, 192).

¹⁰⁰ An earlier version of this text was written in French in 2008 and translated into English by David W. Wood and Laure Cahen-Maurel. It was originally commissioned for a handbook on Early German Romanticism, which in the end did not see the light of day. A French version of it was published in 2015 as part of the Introduction to my translation of the principal writings of Solger: K.W.F. Solger, *Écrits philosophiques*, introduction, translation and commentary by Mildred Galland-Szymkowiak (Paris: Vrin, 2015). For the present publication in English, the article has been supplemented, revised and the bibliography updated. I sincerely thank Laure Cahen-Maurel and Giulia Valpione for their invitation to publish it in *Symphilosophie*.