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

(Part 2)

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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

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Part II**

3. Philosophy of Art: Symbol and Irony

a) Aesthetics and metaphysics

Beginning now with an examination of Solger's philosophy of art, the question arises as to how to interpret its place and significance within his philosophy as a whole. Is it a particular case of an application of his metaphysics, or does it signal a key function of artistic experience for his philosophy itself? Is the importance of aesthetics in the corpus simply *de facto* (Solger died before he could develop all the ramifications of his philosophy), or did the philosopher want to define a particular and unique status of art for philosophical reflection?

Historically, Solger's philosophy of art (*Erwin* and the posthumous *Lectures on Aesthetics*) has occupied a decisive position in the reception of his works. Certain commentators have even gone so far as to contend that Solger attributed to art the privilege of resolving by means of action the conceptual tensions inherent in the philosophical thought of revelation.¹⁰¹ Others, in contrast, have underscored the primary and fundamental role of his metaphysics with regard to his aesthetics.¹⁰² But as we will see later, on the one hand the contingent fact that Solger did not have time to publish an exposition of his political philosophy certainly led to a limited understanding of the concept of revelation, and of his philosophy as a whole. On the other hand, concerning the place of aesthetics in the system, Solger himself specifies that, among the different 'ideas' in which the essence reveals itself in our knowledge and in our existence – the true, the good, the blessed, the beautiful – none of them has an ontological priority over the others. They are different points of view on revelation that are equal in rank.¹⁰³ However, Solger also speaks of the philosophy of art as a *propedeutic*, if not for philosophy itself, then at least for the intuition of the idea.¹⁰⁴ If the content

** For Part 1 of this essay, see *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 1 (2019): 39-59. <https://symphilosophie.com/symphilosophie-1-2019-eng/>

¹⁰¹ See M. Ophälders, *Romantische Ironie* (see note 28).

¹⁰² See J. E. Heller, *Solgers Philosophie der ironischen Dialektik* (see note 20); R. Herzog, *Die Bewahrung der Vernunft* (see note 21); M. Frank, *Das Problem 'Zeit' in der deutschen Romantik* (see note 21) and *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (see note 64).

¹⁰³ See, for example, J. Heller, *Solgers Philosophie der ironischen Dialektik*, 123; M. Boucher, *K.W.F. Solger* (see note 19), 49.

¹⁰⁴ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 10, M., 10; letter to Tieck, 15.07.1814, NS I, 316, Matenko 139. Cf. M. Ophälders, *Romantische Ironie*, note 40, p. 76.

of aesthetics is really nothing more and nothing less than first philosophy, then how are we to understand this ‘propedeutic’?

First, art presents the contents of revelation – that intimate unity of eternal essence and temporal existence – as unveiled, or re-produced, by a human activity. Not only through the *poiesis*, the artistic creation, but in the aesthetic experience of the spectator too revelation is seen *from the inside*, in the activity of consciousness – not from the outside as it occurs in nature. Furthermore, by presenting in *things* the very content that philosophy presents in *thought*, art presents this content in a more visible and paradoxical manner for ordinary consciousness.¹⁰⁵ If with Valeria Pinto we are to characterize Solger’s philosophy as a “phenomenology of revelation” because of the crucial role granted in this philosophy to the encounter with what exists, then we understand why art matters: because it unites the idea and phenomenon *in the phenomenon*, in the visibility of surfaces. After spending six weeks in Dresden, where he went every morning to the *Gemäldegalerie*, Solger notes that art, which unites “the most vivid and sensitive presence with the deepest ideality”, is particularly capable of making us understand the importance of *immediate experience* for philosophy. The unique “factuality” of artworks – these things that are not only objects – makes tangible for us the absolute fact of revelation. In them the matter, subjected to decay, obscurity, and destruction, becomes the garment of the idea. For in the work of art we not only find intimately united the concept and the intuition, the idea and the phenomena, but indeed *eternity and time*: the moment of aesthetic revelation is “the innermost reconciliation of the temporal with the divinity, insofar as the appearance itself is recognized as the presence of God.”¹⁰⁶

Artistic revelation, therefore, grants us access with particular force to the condition itself of all finiteness: being (and being-known) only insofar as revelation and the self-annihilation of the idea.¹⁰⁷ The inquiry into the essence of the beautiful leads to a questioning of the essence of the finite,¹⁰⁸ of the appearance as such:

In short, we could say that art is our present real existence [*Dasein*] known and experienced in its essentiality.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. M. Ophälders, *Romantische Ironie*, 36.

¹⁰⁶ Solger, *Erwin*, 121.

¹⁰⁷ See Part One of this article, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁸ M. Ravera, preface to his Italian translation of *Erwin*, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Solger, *Erwin*, 394. Cf. also 389-90.

b) The two directions of artistic activity: enthusiasm and irony

In a letter to his brother in July 1815 that was to furnish a key to reading *Erwin*, Solger formulated in the following manner the problem to which his main work was to respond:

How is it possible for a perfect being (*Wesen*) to reveal itself in a temporal and as such deficient appearance? [...] The solution: Through a perfect action of a certain kind which is called art; this action only exists in the moment where the idea or the essence occupies the place of reality; and thereby precisely destroys the reality for itself, the mere appearance as such.¹¹⁰

Like those of Schelling and of Hegel, Solger's aesthetics is a philosophy of *art*, of the production of beauty through the activity of human consciousness. Art is characterised here as a *perfect action* of which the philosophy of art has to seek the conditions of possibility. Solger's aesthetics, following the duality between self-consciousness and experience of the individual things, investigates these conditions on the one hand within consciousness, in the artistic imagination, and on the other hand, in the phenomenal characteristics of artworks. I will first analyse the "organism" of fantasy (*Phantasie*), or of the artistic imagination, which for Solger is beauty *as* activity – a key for his systematic aesthetics.¹¹¹

Fantasy "is the force of the cognizing in us, which perceives idea and phenomenon as one and the same thing in the appearance itself"; essence and phenomenon are mutually saturated in it and are one and the same.¹¹² If you will, it is an "intuition" of the idea; but like all activity of finite consciousness it is impregnated with the activity of the understanding (*Verstand*) which opposes and links; it is not pure identity but reunited in itself in opposition to itself.¹¹³ As the *dynamic unification of opposing directions*,

¹¹⁰ Solger, Lettre to his brother Friedrich, 11.07.1815, NS I, 360.

¹¹¹ Fantasy is "beauty itself, just as the same is real also as activity, or the creative force of the divine essence that has entered into reality" (Solger, *Erwin*, 205). It is designated by one of the characters in *Erwin* as "the key to Adelbert's entire system" (Solger, *Erwin*, 306) – Adelbert can be considered as the representative of Solger in the dialogue. See Solger, *Erwin*, third and fourth parts; *Vorlesungen*, "On the Organism of the Artistic Spirit", 183-256, M. 146-202; see too F. Decher, *Die Ästhetik K.W.F. Solgers* (see note 21), D. "Die Architektonik des künstlerischen Geistes"; and G. Pinna, "Einleitung", in Solger: *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, M., XXXV-XLIV.

¹¹² Solger, *Erwin*, 138.

¹¹³ "In this manner, there is in the essence and in the perfected itself a distinction and movement and life. If the state of cognition in fantasy is therefore to be recognized as intuition, then it is a wholly peculiar kind of intuition, in which there is alternation, relation and distinction, and which we otherwise only seek in the judgment of the understanding" (Solger, *Erwin*, 312). Cf. Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 189, M., 150.

fantasy is the subjective condition of the possibility of the appearance of the eternal in time.¹¹⁴ An essential part of Solger's aesthetics is therefore devoted to the elucidation of the dialectical relations of the "directions of fantasy." These are the *categories* that allow Solger to work out a philosophical aesthetics based on the principles of his metaphysics, that is to say, to build a bridge between *prima philosophia* and existing works of art. In this sense, and if we set aside the important differences between both their philosophies of art, the "directions of fantasy" in Solger's aesthetics play a role comparable to that played by the "*Kunstformen*" in Hegel's aesthetics.

Solger does not define fantasy as a faculty among others, but as the transformation of our entire consciousness, when it becomes the place of the transition of the divine essence into existence.¹¹⁵ This transition is two-fold.¹¹⁶ 1) Artistic consciousness has to make the unity of the idea pass into relations and phenomenal oppositions in such a way that these appear as the very presence of the divine essence itself: this presentation is rendered possible by *enthusiasm* (*Begeisterung*). 2) The presentation of the idea in finitude is always at the same time the consciousness of the nullity of finitude, and therefore of the annihilation of the idea in its finite presence: it is *irony*, the other main direction of artistic consciousness.

If the idea is to become reality, then the latter has to be conceived as filled with the presence of the idea. It is what we call *artistic enthusiasm* (*künstlerische Begeisterung*). The idea itself, however, has to simultaneously pass over into the antitheses of reality, which suppress themselves against the idea. Therefore, it is connected with a cancellation (*Aufhebung*) of the idea itself, and this provides the artistic soul with the mood we call '*irony*'.¹¹⁷

The dialectical relationship of these two directions structures the entire field of Solgerian aesthetics; as we will see, it appears repeatedly at many different levels in artistic creation and experience. Solger defines perfected art as the "*coincidence of enthusiasm and irony*."¹¹⁸ Art is the phenomenal presence of the essence; but without irony, artistic revelation would only have the sense of an

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Solger, *Erwin*, 198-199.

¹¹⁵ See Solger, *Erwin*, 139-140.

¹¹⁶ See Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 123-125, M., 98-99.

¹¹⁷ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 198, M., 157. Cf. *ibid.*, 199-200, M., 157-158.

¹¹⁸ Solger, Letter to Tieck, 11.05.1816, NS I, 413-414, Matenko 233. Cf. J. Colette, "Enthousiasme et ironie. La dialectique artistique selon K.W.F. Solger", *Études philosophiques* 4 (1992): 487-498.

outrageous delusion pretending to exceed finitude.¹¹⁹ Inversely, if art were only ironical, it would be trivial and would not present us with the idea at all.

Hence, the “life” of the imagination does not engender a completed fusion of the essence and existence, but only one unity of the two which is perceived (according to a Schellingian model)¹²⁰ either under the predominance of the essence, or under the predominance of existence, since we cannot extract ourselves from the existential separation of essence and existence:

If we first grasp the whole as idea and the activity only as its development within reality, then we have *fantasy in the narrower sense*, or the fantasy of the fantasy. – If we grasp reality as the first or as something self-sufficient and place artistic activity into it, so that it develops the life of the idea in reality and leads the former back to the latter, then we call this the *sensibility of fantasy (Sinnlichkeit der Phantasie)*, in which ordinary sensibility is not to be understood.¹²¹

Thus, fantasy in the broadest sense, through which the idea is phenomenalized in the work of art, is the unification of two directions. *Fantasy in the narrower sense* (which Solger also simply calls ‘fantasy’) is the enthusiastic consciousness of the becoming real of the idea; *sensibility of fantasy* (or “sensibility”), i.e. ironic consciousness of the fact that existence in which the idea lives is nothing in itself (and therefore reduces the idea to nothing). “Fantasy” (in the narrower sense) and “sensibility” are both broken down further in turn by Solger in two directions:

a) The ‘fantasy of fantasy’ is understood as the relation of plastic fantasy (*bildende Phantasie/ das Bilden*),¹²² which provides a concept with an individual figure, within symbols (e.g. the gods of Greek mythology); and of meditative fantasy (*sinnende Phantasie / das Sinnen*)¹²³, which starting, in contrast, from particular finite figures, brings them to the idea via the

¹¹⁹ See Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 242-243, M., 191-192; M. Boucher, *K.W.F. Solger* (see note 19), 109.

¹²⁰ See Schelling, *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie*, §46, SW IV, 137.

¹²¹ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 187, M., 148-149.

¹²² “Plastic fantasy is the activity through which the concept can give itself a definite shape, however, conceived as a living idea. Consequently, the concept cannot be a mere universal concept, or self-consciousness on the whole, but a concept that is already defined by properties.” (Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 191, M., 152). Cf. Solger, *Erwin*, 338.

¹²³ “Meditative fantasy consists in the grasping of the antitheses of reality and their dissolution in the idea. It begins with the particular, with the given multiplicity, yet always with relation to the concept. The particular appearance and its concept should be placed back into the idea through relation.” (Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 195, M., 155). Cf. Solger, *Erwin*, 316.

medium of allegories (e.g. Dante's *Divine Comedy*). It should be noted that the two directions start from the 'life of the idea', i.e. they always grasp phenomenal reality as already one with the idea.

b) The 'sensibility of fantasy' on the other hand, starts from what really exists, and is understood as originally opposed to the idea.¹²⁴ It is broken down into sensible execution (*sinnliche Ausführung*)¹²⁵, in which fantasy, entirely immersed in the details of phenomenal existence, brings the latter back to its concept, but in a particular light (e.g. a sculpture of a faun or satyr, to be perceived with their details in relation to the atmosphere of Dionysian celebrations; while Apollo Belvedere would more belong to the *bildende Phantasie* because it is taken for itself as the perfection of the human body); and in *sensation* or *emotion* (*Empfindung / Rührung*)¹²⁶, in which we recognise the diversity of our states of soul as the manifestation of a universal. For this side of imagination, the objects are determined only in relation with the affections they produce in us, however, this effect needs at the same time to have a more general meaning. Solger gives as an example *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. 'Sensible perfection' and 'emotion' are dialectically broken down in turn (here we have to omit the details).

It must be borne in mind that the analysis of the 'sensibility of fantasy', i.e. the description of the presence of the idea that starts from the consciousness of an irreducible and ontological *divergence* between the idea and existence, is one of the original features of Solger's aesthetics among the philosophies of the idealists of art.¹²⁷ In their philosophies of art, both Schelling and Hegel envisaged the unity of the idea and its sensible manifestation *starting from the idea itself*, conceived as the unity of concept and intuition, of the universal and the particular. Solger, on the other hand, does not start simply with the idea but, as we have seen, with the very *transition* between idea and reality, and proposes understanding art as a unification *into equal rights* of the essence and of existence.¹²⁸ With the notion of "sensibility of fantasy", Solger, while remaining in an idealistic framework, gives a place

¹²⁴ See Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 202, M., 160-161.

¹²⁵ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 203-204, M., 161-163; *Erwin*, 319.

¹²⁶ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 210-212, M., 167; *Erwin*, 350.

¹²⁷ M. Ophälders therefore finds in the will to construct a "dialectics of the particular" an original feature of Solgerian metaphysics, which leads Solger to implode the framework of idealism and which also determines the crucial character of aesthetics for this enterprise (*Romantische Ironie*, e.g. 51f., 58f., 61). For a more general situating of Solger's aesthetics within German idealism see: P. Schulte, *Solgers Schönheitslehre im Zusammenhang des deutschen Idealismus: Kant, Schiller, W. von Humboldt, Schelling, Solger, Schleiermacher, Hegel*, Kassel 2001.

¹²⁸ Solger, *Erwin*, 330.

to a kind of speculatively addressed *aisthesis*, including a perceptive and an affective side.

According to both *Erwin* and the *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, completed art is found in the unity of the two directions of the fantasy:

Thus, how can this separation into two be overcome, if there is not a force actively working everywhere to connect together the essence with the appearance and the appearance with the essence, its unity hovering in the course of the antithesis, and thus everywhere presently maintaining the centre of art! However, such a force [...] can only be the understanding.¹²⁹

It is the activity of *artistic understanding* that allows the full co-penetration of the divine essence and temporal existence in the work of art, reuniting the direction of the fantasy and the direction of sensibility. In Sophocles or Shakespeare, for example, everything is at once entirely 'divine' and entirely human.¹³⁰ Giovanna Pinna insists that, with the concept of *Verstand der Phantasie*, Solger wants to emphasize the anchoring of all artistic production in rationality¹³¹, a rationality which nevertheless only finds its living content and its unity by articulating revelation (as seen above).

Thus, the unity of the work of art is not a fixed and static one. In order to describe it, Solger employs the Fichtean image of 'hovering' (*schweben*)¹³², or that of an elliptical movement around two poles.¹³³ The oscillation of artistic understanding aims to bring together these two indivisible aspects¹³⁴: the contemplation (*Betrachtung*) that views the intimate unity of the essence and existence as a co-belonging "as though the eye of understanding here glimpses a whole world enveloped in the brilliance of the idea"¹³⁵; and *Witz*, which grasps this unity as the negation of the negation, starting from the "coincidence of the antitheses in a single point."¹³⁶ In the last pages of *Erwin* we find the following synthetic explanation of artistic revelation:

Therefore, if the idea merges into the particular through the artistic understanding, then [...] [it] becomes the present real, and because

¹²⁹ Solger, *Erwin*, 360.

¹³⁰ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 222, M., 176.

¹³¹ G. Pinna, "Einleitung", in *Vorlesungen*, M., XLI.

¹³² See M. Koßler, "Phantasie und Einbildungskraft. Zur Rolle der Einbildungskraft bei Fichte und Solger", *Fichte-Studien* 21 (2003): 163-181.

¹³³ Solger, *Erwin*, 383.

¹³⁴ See Solger, *Erwin*, 371.

¹³⁵ Solger, *Erwin*, 365. See Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 225-230, M., 179-182.

¹³⁶ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 225, M., 178; see *ibid.* 232, M., 184; *ibid.* 233-234, M., 184-186, and *Erwin*, 372 for illustrations.

nothing is outside of it, the nothingness and transitory itself, and we are overcome by immeasurable grief if we see the supreme scattered away into nothingness by its necessary earthly being. And yet we cannot put the blame on anything else than perfection itself in its revelation for temporal cognition. [...] Now this moment of transition, in which the idea itself necessarily becomes shattered, must be the true seat of art, and in this moment *Witz* and contemplation [...] must be one and the same. Hence, here the spirit of the artist has to gather together all the directions into a single all-encompassing view, and we give the name 'irony' to this view that hovers over and annihilates everything.¹³⁷

Here it concerns *irony in the broad sense*, which is the unity of irony in the restricted sense and of enthusiasm. Irony is "the absolute act"¹³⁸ of the artistic understanding, bringing together in a single experience the two directions of the revelation of the idea in existence. Solgerian irony, like the irony of Friedrich Schlegel, is therefore far from reducing itself to a figure of style or only being a state of mind in which the stakes would be solely aesthetic. It is an activity of consciousness capable of concretely resolving – due to its correlation with a finite individual thing (the work of art) – the metaphysical problem of the *Darstellung* of the absolute.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Solger, *Erwin*, 387. "Artistic irony is the name we give to this centre of art in which the perfect unity of contemplation and *Witz* comes about, insofar as it consists in the canceling of the idea through itself. It constitutes the essence of art and its inner significance; for it is the disposition of the soul [*Gemüt*], in which we recognize that our reality would not be if it were not a revelation of the idea, and that precisely with this reality even the idea becomes something null and perishes. Certainly, reality necessarily belongs to the existence of the idea; however, it is always simultaneously connected with its cancellation" (Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 241-242, M., 191).

¹³⁸ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 189, M., 150.

¹³⁹ Regarding irony in Solger, see especially: K. Nishimura, "Die Struktur des ästhetischen Bewußtseins bei K.W.F. Solger. Die Bedeutung der dialektischen Ironie", *Perspektiven der Philosophie* 6 (1980): 29-45; R. Malter, "L'ironie comme véritable essence de l'art et explication "théorique" par Solger de la façon romantique d'appréhender le monde dans le dialogue *Erwin*", *Études philosophiques* 2 (1983): 163-176; V. Verra, "Tragische und künstlerische Ironie bei K.W.F. Solger", in *Philosophie und Poesie. Festschrift für Otto Pöggeler*, ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt, 1988), vol. I, 235-254; G. Pinna, *L'ironia metafisica. Filosofia e teoria estetica in K. W. F. Solger* (Genoa, 1994); F. Decher, *Die Ästhetik K.W.F. Solgers* (see note 22), 308-329; W. Henckmann, "Le concept d'ironie chez Solger", in *L'Esthétique de Karl Solger* (see note 23), 25-47; M. Ophälders, *Romantische Ironie*, 2004; Ph. Grosos, *L'Ironie du réel à la lumière du romantisme allemand* (see note 23), 115-137; W. Henckmann, "Ironie in der frührezeption Solgers", in *Grundzüge der Philosophie K.W.F. Solgers* (see note 21), 101-155. Cf. *The Critical Mythology of Irony* by Joseph A. Dane (The University of Georgia Press, 1991).

Solger formulates this romantic and idealistic problem in terms of temporality.¹⁴⁰ The “ellipse” that the artistic understanding describes around the two “foci” of *contemplation* and *Witz* expresses “an entirely real being, yet one that eternally returns back into itself.”¹⁴¹ In this “miraculous” becoming, which is no longer a temporal becoming but eternal, and which, however, is phenomenalized and therefore enters into time,¹⁴² existence and the essence are perfectly (dynamically) united. In other words: aesthetic experience is at once outside of time and inside of time. Solger speaks of the *instant* to designate this singular temporality and employs the Boehmian, Leibnizian and Schellingian image of lightning and flashes:

For in the same original unity, here essence and temporality interpenetrate one another, and the one cannot lose itself through the other, without the latter gaining itself through the former. However, both interpenetrate each other by means of the effectiveness of the artistic understanding that constantly unites with itself, yet flashes between the two.¹⁴³

Such a flash, though, takes place only in the interaction between the activity of a conscience, and the objectivity of an artwork, in the “moment in which the activity of the idea concludes in a specific fact.”¹⁴⁴

c) Artistic realizations: symbol and allegory

By constructing the “organism” of fantasy, Solger systematically draws attention to the subjective conditions of the possibility of aesthetic creation and aesthetic experience. Yet precisely because of the very content that is revealed, the unity of the subjective and the objective, we cannot simply understand the subjective activity and its concrete presentation in works of art as opposites facing each other. Solger seeks to understand these works not as a simple vestige of the activity of consciousness, but clearly as its *effective presentation*. The idea that artworks are “living” objects is not simply a

¹⁴⁰ For a more detailed comparative study on this point, see Mildred Galland-Szymkowiak, “Symbol und Zeitlichkeit bei Schelling, Solger und Hegel”, *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 2007/2: 324-354.

¹⁴¹ Solger, *Erwin*, 383.

¹⁴² “[...] a becoming, however, which is not temporal in this perfect understanding, but an eternal and unconditioned becoming, and yet has to be a phenomenal essence. Nevertheless, oh most precious teacher Adelbert, this is clearly the genuine miracle of art” (Solger, *Erwin*, 382).

¹⁴³ Solger, *Erwin*, 389.

¹⁴⁴ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 121, M., 97.

metaphor; for Solger it is what defines them and what philosophy has to rigorously elucidate:

There is immediate life and activity [...] in the work of art. It is not a result, but the organ of activity, the activity itself as a real fact.¹⁴⁵

The whole problem of the systematic analysis of artistic productions therefore consists in elaborating categories that could demonstrate *the internal identity of the works with the activity that constitutes them*. It is in this sense that we have to understand the definitions of the symbol and the allegory.¹⁴⁶ To approach these concepts in semiotic terms, starting from the notion of sign (as T. Todorov did¹⁴⁷), is to start from a set of questions foreign to the one within which Solger constructed the concepts of symbol and allegory.

The beautiful is defined as “the finitude of the idea, the fact that encloses it”, which determines the symbol in the broadest sense of the word; “in this sense all art is symbolic”.¹⁴⁸ Like Goethe¹⁴⁹ and like Schelling¹⁵⁰, Solger defines the symbol as the perfect unity of the idea and its phenomenal manifestation, of ‘signification’ and ‘being’. Unlike Friedrich Schlegel, he does not define the symbolism as a signification or an allusion to the absolute, but as the *presence (Gegenwart)* of the idea, a presence of which he stresses the fullness. The idea “becomes the present real”¹⁵¹; the symbol is “the existence of the idea itself”¹⁵² and not its sign.

¹⁴⁵ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 121, M., 98.

¹⁴⁶ See especially W. Henckmann’s two articles on this topic: “Symbol und Allegorie bei Solger”, in *Romantik in Deutschland. Ein interdisziplinäres Symposium*, ed. R. Brinkmann, (Stuttgart, 1978): 639-651; “Symbolische und allegorische Kunst bei Solger”, in *Früher Idealismus und Frühromantik. Der Streit um die Grundlagen der Ästhetik (1795-1805)*, eds. W. Jaeschke/H. Holzey (Hamburg, 1990), 214-240; G. Pinna, *L’ironia metafisica. Filosofia e teoria estetica in K.W.F. Solger* (Genova, 1994), 91-105; M. Galland-Szymkowiak, “Le symbole chez Solger, ou l’existence de l’idée”, in *L’Esthétique de Karl Solger* (see note 23), 67-97.

¹⁴⁷ T. Todorov, *Théories du symbole* (Paris, 1983).

¹⁴⁸ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 123, M., 99.

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance, Goethe’s letter to Meyer, 13.03.1791 (in *Goethes Briefe* in 50 Bänden, Weimar, 1887-1912, vol. 9, 251; also the essay “Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst”, in J.W. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens* (Munich, 1985f.), vol. 6.2).

¹⁵⁰ See Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, SW V, 411-412.

¹⁵¹ See Solger, *Erwin*, 387.

¹⁵² “The symbol is the existence of the idea itself; it really is what it *signifies*, it is the idea in its immediate reality. Thus, the symbol is always itself true, and never a mere reflection of something true.” (Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 129, M., 103).

The symbol is neither an arbitrary sign, nor an imitation of a model of which it would itself be different, but the true revelation of the idea.¹⁵³

Now, revelation is only there for a consciousness. The necessary vector of the revelation of the idea is the *individual* activity of artistic imagination – by accentuating this point Solger stresses an important difference between his philosophy of art, and those of Schelling and of Hegel. Hence the following definition plays a crucial role in *Erwin*:

The symbol therefore [...] would be in our opinion a thing of fantasy, which precisely as such would be the existence [*Daseyn*] of the idea itself.¹⁵⁴

This is why the symbol “cannot simply appear as the finished product of forces, but also as the life and the effect of the forces themselves.”¹⁵⁵ The ‘forces’ denote the activity of artistic consciousness – of which we have seen that it culminates and is summarized in irony. It is therefore *irony that nourishes the symbol from the inside* and gives it ‘life’; it is the movement of the self-differentiation and self-reunification of the symbol (in the broad sense) in the symbol (in the narrow sense) and allegory.¹⁵⁶

Therefore the symbol in general – or the beautiful – “never appears without this division into symbol and allegory.”¹⁵⁷ Here we are dealing with a dialectical pair in which neither of the two members could be entire and complete without the other,¹⁵⁸ and “superior art” cannot reduce itself to the one or the other, but consists in the interpenetration of the symbolic and the allegoric.¹⁵⁹ The symbol in the broad sense, thing *and* activity, in fact consists in the dialectical relation between the *matter* of art and the *activity* that makes the idea enter into this matter:

In the symbol [= *symbol in general*], when we consider it from the sides of activity, we recognize: 1) the entire effectiveness as exhausted within it, consequently itself as the object or substance [*Stoff*] in which it nevertheless is still perceived as effectiveness. This is the *symbol* in the narrower sense. We recognize 2) the beautiful as substance still caught

¹⁵³ Solger, *Erwin*, 219.

¹⁵⁴ Solger, *Erwin*, 218. See too *Erwin*, 223.

¹⁵⁵ Solger, *Erwin*, 223.

¹⁵⁶ Regarding this terminology, see Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 123 (M. 99), 129 (M. 103-104).

¹⁵⁷ Solger, *Erwin*, 323. Cf. Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 135, M., 108.

¹⁵⁸ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 145, M., 115-116.

¹⁵⁹ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 143, M., 114.

up in the activity, as an aspect of the activity, which still draws itself towards two sides. This is the *allegory*.¹⁶⁰

The individual phenomenon saturated by the idea is *symbolic* in the narrower sense. Because of this fact, here the symbolized idea is not the idea in its pure universality, but an idea immediately particularized. The hallmark of the symbol is therefore the fusion of the universal with “its” particular; it is

the idea in its full reality, in which it does not only appear as a complete and everywhere determined presence, but is also established in this presence through its own perfection without need and striving.¹⁶¹

In the *allegory*, it is certainly always the unity of the essence and phenomenal existence that appears (this is why the allegory is one of the two aspects of the symbolic ‘in general’): but this time the unity is emphasized *starting from the mutual negation* of the essence and existence. The starting point is no longer, like for the symbol, the self-configuration of the idea in existing reality, but the opposition of the idea and the real (an opposition that is as original as their unity). Their unity in the allegory therefore appears not as a fusion, but rather as *an entering into relation*.

The allegory contains the same as the symbol; only that we therein preferably intuit the working of the idea that has perfected itself in the symbol. [...] Here reality is much more recognized as a product of relations whose activity is therein simultaneously intuited [...].¹⁶²

d) The epochs of art

Solger doubles his theoretical aesthetics – polarised at every level by the dialectical movement of revelation – with a philosophical history of art organised in the same way. Symbol and allegory respectively typify ancient and Christian art, or more accurately the “worlds” of artistic representations that characterize ancient Greek polytheism and Christianity. Solger takes up the division into two epochs of the history which was a legacy of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns re-interpreted in Schiller (in the pair: naïve/sentimental), in the Schlegel brothers (in the objective/subjective, antique/romantic distinction) and, differently, in Schelling (antique/modern). In Solger’s systematic aesthetics this “epochal” history is meant to

¹⁶⁰ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 129, M., 104.

¹⁶¹ Solger, *Erwin*, 225.

¹⁶² Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 131, M., 105.

illustrate the categories (symbolism and allegory) that are deduced from the productive activity of artistic consciousness.¹⁶³

The symbol, “the highest perfection of existence [*Daseyn*]”¹⁶⁴, presents an existing individual saturated by the divine unity. The enclosure on itself, the self-completion of phenomenal existence should incarnate the unity of the essence, which is realized in the first place in the double world of Greek mythology, the world of *gods* and of *heroes*. On the side of the idea that enters into existence, the god in fact presents the essence of the symbol in an individual living person, i.e. the “intimate and indivisible fusion of the universal and the particular.”¹⁶⁵ On the side of existence filled by the essence, the same unity is illustrated in the hero.¹⁶⁶ However, we have seen that “even the symbol can never entirely leave the allegory.”¹⁶⁷ “All the relations uniting the symbol to the divine are allegorical.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, the symbol is not the pure identity devoid of difference, where “reality and the idea would mutually cancel one another.”¹⁶⁹ It has to be noted that the gods in Greek mythology are not symbolic without their relationship to *Necessity*, the obscure principle of absolute unity, or to the *Chaos* of the theogonies, which imposes its law on the gods and radiates through them – a relationship Schelling too had stressed in his lectures on the philosophy of art.

For Solger, the allegory is “the supreme vitality of the idea”¹⁷⁰: based on the opposition between the essence and existence it exhibits the unity of the idea *as a relation*. “The essence of the allegory [...] lies in the mere relation.”¹⁷¹ It shows us the presence of the divine through its relation to the finite as such. It is especially illustrated in the world of representations produced by Christianity. The Christian allegory creates a relationship, that is to say, it reunites *and* opposes the divinity and finite existence, which in Greek mythology appeared as the two aspects of one and the same unity. However, through this relationship, allegory makes the extreme terms enter into the life of the idea that were left to the confines of the mythological world: the absolute unity of *Necessity* on the one side, and everyday infra-

¹⁶³ “The ancient and Christian arts represent most perfectly both standpoints, that of the symbol and the allegory. Yet they are historical appearances, whereas the opposition of the symbol and allegory arises entirely naturally from the idea of art in general.” (Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 156, M., 124).

¹⁶⁴ Solger, *Erwin*, 225.

¹⁶⁵ Solger, *Erwin*, 227. Cf. Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, §30, SW V, 391-392.

¹⁶⁶ Solger, *Erwin*, 235.

¹⁶⁷ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 142, M., 113.

¹⁶⁸ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 141, M., 112-113.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, M., 113.

¹⁷⁰ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 133, M., 106.

¹⁷¹ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 132, M., 105.

heroic existence on the other. The Christian mythology develops in an *explicit* manner the dialectical relation between the divine essence and finite existence, a relation that was only latent in ancient symbolism. Solger explains this idea in *Erwin*'s poetic style:

Then what else do you glimpse in the mediator and redeemer than that vital force and activity of God, in a real and mortal shape, which as the Godhead even embraces the already lost and fallen temporal being with immeasurable, gracious love, in order to lead it back again into its lap of blessedness, and which, however, as a man liberates, through faith – which is a yearning that is transparent to itself and sure of its goal – and through temporal annihilation, not only itself but the whole of humanity from the power of the world, and is elevated to his eternal home! Is not here always the one in the other, and refers to the same?¹⁷²

The Christian allegory needs a *symbolic centre*: the Man-God, the existing individual who *is* the divine itself. In line with its etymology, to which Solger makes an allusion at the end of this passage, the allegory indicates something *other* than itself – however not by *signifying*, but in an organic development based on the symbolic unity that appears as the hidden core of the allegory:

To be sure, the real allegorical work always says more than what is found in its limited presence, however, it still does not say anything else than what it bears in itself and livingly develops out of itself.¹⁷³

Thus, Solger is indeed offering a rehabilitation of the allegory, by showing that it too is thoroughly indispensable for great art, just as the symbol is in Goethe's sense, and by basing his study of Christian artworks on the concept of allegory: among others, the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci, Corregio, Raphael, Titian, the poetry and literature of Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Calderon, Goethe, Tieck, Jean Paul.

The Solgerian conception of the symbol (doubled into symbol and allegory) therefore appears as an attempt at synthesizing the two major tendencies in the conceptions of the symbol of that epoch¹⁷⁴: on the one side, the symbol in Goethe's sense (and in Schelling's), the perfect fusion of the

¹⁷² Solger, *Erwin*, 229-230; cf. *Vorlesungen*, 144, M. 115.

¹⁷³ Solger, *Erwin*, 226. K. Wheeler in her anthology *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: the Romantic Ironists and Goethe* (Cambridge/London: 1984, chapters 4 and 5 on Solger) notes that Solger "is distinguishing allegory from symbol in a way quite different from that familiar to English readers. That is, he defines 'allegory' differently from, say, Coleridge [...] the distinction might be better understood by English readers as between 'allegorical symbol' and 'plastic (tending to concrete) symbol'." (*ibid.*, 241, note 3).

¹⁷⁴ Bengt Algot Sørensen, *Symbol und Symbolismus in den ästhetischen Theorien des 18. Jahrhunderts und der deutschen Romantik* (Copenhagen, 1963), 277-286.

universal and the particular, which emphasizes the immanence of the idea in the sensible world¹⁷⁵; and on the other side, the “allegory of the infinite” in the sense of Friedrich Schlegel, presenting reflectively the infinite *as* unrepresentable.

e) System of the arts

Based on his conception of art as the unity of the essence and existence manifested within existence itself, Solger also deduces a system of the arts: he determines the essence and the mutual relations of the arts using the principle of the revelation of the idea.¹⁷⁶ According to him, the classification of the arts following the material utilized by each one does not take into account the fact that art is precisely *not* the reunion of an idea and a matter existing independently of each other, but immediately an intimate unity of the idea and its existence. Thus, the principle of the classification of the arts must be sought in the relation of the idea to the oppositions of the existence in which it reveals itself. Solger is aware of the innovative character of this systematic undertaking¹⁷⁷, for which he uses an additional dialectical pair – *Kunst* (art) und *Poesie* (poesy).

In *art in the broad sense*, the relation of the idea to phenomenal reality can assume two configurations – still according to the schema that we have seen at work in the analysis of the fantasy and the symbolic and allegorical “worlds of art.”

1) Viewed from the side of the idea, revelation is the advent of a unity that cancels the diverse and dominates it. According to Solger, this is the essence of *poesy*, whose material – language – is not a reality facing thought, but indeed the objective side of thought itself.¹⁷⁸ Poesy is art par excellence, the most universal art.

2) Viewed from the side of existence, the revelation of the idea is the unity of the universal and the particular, but at the heart of the irreducible oppositions of finite existence: it is *art in the narrow sense* (the fine or plastic

¹⁷⁵ See Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 134, M., 107-108.

¹⁷⁶ See Solger, *Erwin*, 239-282; *Vorlesungen*, part three. For a detailed study, cf. F. Decher, *Die Ästhetik K.W.F. Solgers* (see note 22), 330-370.

¹⁷⁷ “[...] the classification of art has never been so completely established, and it has especially never been proved in this way why there cannot be more than five arts” (Letter regarding *Erwin*, from Solger to his brother, 11.07.1815, in NS I, 360-361). It is only in the *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* that a complete system of fine arts is presented. In *Erwin*, the pair symbol/allegory is not applied in a strictly systematic manner to the determinations of the relations between the arts (see W. Henckmann, “Symbol und Allegorie bei K.W.F. Solger”, 645; also, Solger, *Erwin*, 264, 266).

¹⁷⁸ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 259, M., 204; *Erwin*, 241-259 on poesy.

arts). “Here the universal will never be found without the particular; however, the concept and particular matter stand in diverse relationships with one another.”¹⁷⁹ In its relation to finite reality, the idea either presents itself symbolically or allegorically. *Sculpture* is symbolic art¹⁸⁰, the expression of a concept in a finite individual. *Painting*, in contrast, is allegorical, because its objects are not immediately identical with the concept, but are linked to it by the intermediary of light.¹⁸¹ Whether the relation of the concept to the phenomenon is mediate (painting) or immediate (sculpture), it is still always the work of the “living effectiveness of artistic consciousness.”¹⁸² It is this very activity of linking that becomes the centre in *music* and in *architecture*.¹⁸³ In fact, only the activity of consciousness confers to the pure corporality of the architectural edifice its unity with thought, and brings an anchor in objectivity to the perfect spiritual fugacity of music.¹⁸⁴

Erwin (1815) was the first published post-Kantian idealistic-systematic aesthetics: Hegel’s compilation by Hotho appeared in 1835-1838, Schelling’s *Lectures* were published posthumously in 1859 – student notebooks were circulating, though, from 1820 onwards in the first case, around 1802-05 in the second one. In the long German 19th century, Solger was considered one of the three major idealist thinkers in philosophical aesthetics¹⁸⁵, if not as the founder of aesthetics understood as a speculative science.¹⁸⁶ However, it should be pointed out that Solger’s aesthetics not only meets a requirement for systematicity (through the permanent dialectical oscillation between the symbolic and the allegorical), but is also committed – more than those of Schelling or Hegel – to describing the living encounter with the works of literature and fine arts.¹⁸⁷

4. History and Philosophy of Mythology

Solger’s interest in mythology largely exceeded the framework of the philosophy of art: classical philology and mythological studies represented an

¹⁷⁹ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 260, M., 205.

¹⁸⁰ Solger, *ibid.*, M., 206, and *Erwin*, 259-266 on sculpture and painting.

¹⁸¹ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 261, M., 206-207.

¹⁸² Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 262, M., 207.

¹⁸³ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 262-266, M., 207ff.; *Erwin*, 269-277.

¹⁸⁴ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 266, M., 208-209.

¹⁸⁵ See R. Zimmermann, *Geschichte der Aesthetik als philosophischer Wissenschaft*, Wien 1858, IV, chapter 2; H. Lotze, *Geschichte der Aesthetik in Deutschland* (Munich, 1868), I, chapter 6 (and II, ch. 4; II, ch. 6; III, ch. 1).

¹⁸⁶ This was the case with Chr. H. Weiße and Fr. Th. Vischer, as W. Henckmann recalls (“Symbol und Allegorie bei K.W.F. Solger” [see note 143], 648).

¹⁸⁷ See G. Pinna, “Einleitung”, in : Solger, *Vorlesungen*, M., XVI-XVII.

essential part of his education and his work. Due to his contact with Friedrich August Wolf, under whom he studied classical philology at Halle¹⁸⁸, with Johann Heinrich Voß the younger, as well as Wilhelm von Humboldt, and due to his readings (Georg Friedrich Creuzer, Martin Gottfried Hermann and Christian Gottlob Heyne) and his involvement in the debates of the epoch, he has to be characterized as “one of the leading philologists of his time.”¹⁸⁹ He translated Sophocles and Pindar¹⁹⁰, and in both Frankfurt-an-der-Oder and Berlin he gave courses on classical Greek and Latin and on mythology.¹⁹¹ Above all, Solger envisioned the project of presenting in five or six books his *Ideas on the Religion of the Greeks and a Number of Other Peoples in Antiquity*, of which he seems to have had a rather precise idea as early as 1810.¹⁹² Toward this end he collected notes on Pausanias, Herodotus, Homer, Hesiod, Apollodorus etc., without however accomplishing the project before his death.

It is therefore problematic for a complete understanding of his thought that researchers have neglected this entire facet of his work.¹⁹³ We possess a compilation made by Karl Otfried Müller using his own lecture notes (taken in Berlin in 1816-1817) and Solger’s papers¹⁹⁴; in addition there exist several texts of Solger.¹⁹⁵ An important exchange of letters with Friedrich von der

¹⁸⁸ W. Henckmann, “*Etwas über das Verhältnis...*”, 420.

¹⁸⁹ W. Henckmann, “*Etwas über das Verhältnis...*”, 413; cf. 421.

¹⁹⁰ Solger regularly collaborated on the review *Pantheon. Ein Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Kunst* (eds. J.G. Büsching and K.L. Kannegießer) with translations of Pindar’s hymns.

¹⁹¹ For a list of the courses given by Solger, cf. H. Fricke, *Karl W.F. Solger. Ein brandenburgisch-berlinisches Gelehrtenleben an der Wende von 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1972), 261-262.

¹⁹² So much so that he had a discussion about this project with the publisher G.A. Reimer. Cf. W. Henckmann, “*Etwas über das Verhältnis...*”, 422. Solger describes his project for the book in a letter to K. L. Krause from January 1810 (NS I, 187-188).

¹⁹³ See W. Henckmann, “*Etwas über das Verhältnis...*”, 411-413. Notwithstanding, one must cite: G. Pinna, “Alle origini degli studi mitologici di K. O. Müller: Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, 14.3 (1984): 1021-1029; G. Arrigoni, “Il maestro del maestro e i loro continuatori: mitologia e simbolismo animale in Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, Karl Otfried Müller e dopo”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore*, 14.3 (1984): 937-1019; A. Baillot, “Aktualität des Sophokles. Zur Übersetzung und Inszenierung der *Antigone*: ein unveröffentlicher Brief von Rudolf Abeken an Karl Solger (Weimar, 1809)”, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 120 (2001): 161-182; W. Jaeschke, “‘Unsere heutigen Mythologen’, oder: Über die Unbequemlichkeit des Denkens”, in: A. Baillot, M. Galland-Szymkowiak (eds.), *Grundzüge der Philosophie K.W.F. Solgers* (Zurich, 2014), 207-223.

¹⁹⁴ *Solgers mythologische Ansichten, aus seinen Papieren zusammengestellt von K.O. Müller*, NS II, 676-717.

¹⁹⁵ *Über die älteste Ansicht der Griechen von der Gestalt der Welt* (NS II, 629-649); *Über den Ursprung der Lehre von Dämonen und Schutzgeistern in der Religion der alten Griechen* (NS II, 650-675); *Ideen über die Religion der Griechen und einiger andern Völker des Alterthums* (NS II, 719-761).

Hagen in September 1819 concerns the edition and translation of the *Song of the Nibelungs* provided by Hagen. In what follows, we will use some of the manuscript notes of a student that relate to a course held in 1818 by Solger on the *Mythology of the Greeks*, conserved in the *Joseph Regenstein Library* at the University of Chicago (Illinois) and unpublished up to now. They were transcribed by Anne Baillot.¹⁹⁶

a) Mythology and revelation

How are we to understand the link between Solger's studies on mythology and his philosophical thought of 'revelation'? In the *Letters Concerning the Misunderstandings of Philosophy and of Its Relation to Religion*, Solger writes that the contents of philosophy and religion are ultimately one and the same: religious consciousness is the experience of revelation, while the task of philosophy is to dialectically elucidate it.¹⁹⁷ But we have seen that this 'revelation' is essentially conceived on the kenotic model originating from Christianity. Could the affirmation of the unity of the content of religion and philosophy really be valid for all the religions, if the speculative content at stake is shaped from the Christian paradigm? And if "Christ is the turning point of history"¹⁹⁸, the point in time that gives a sense to a before and an after, does this imply that Solger interprets other religions only in terms of their value in relation to Christianity?

It is clear that Solger's goal is not to make a theological apology of the Christian religion as it historically exists, nor to teleologically interpret the other religions with regard to Christianity. Rather, it is a matter of asking if his *philosophical* system, whose centre is the thought of revelation, permits us to understand all the forms of human relationship to the 'divine essence', and this includes the testimony of the religions of antiquity: especially Greek antiquity, but Solger also underlines that it is worth studying, for example, Indian mythology, though he distances himself from F. Schlegel.¹⁹⁹ Let us also recall that the philosophical category of 'revelation' does not, strictly

¹⁹⁶ *Mythologie der Griechen* by K.W.F. Solger. Lecture Notes (unknown hand), April 1818, part of the Berlin Collection of the Joseph Regenstein Library (ms 106), University of Chicago, Illinois. Thank you to the Special Collections Research Center of Joseph Regenstein Library for allowing me use this material, and to Anne Baillot for sending to me her transcription of the manuscript.

¹⁹⁷ See *Briefe, die Mißverständnisse über Philosophie und deren Verhältniß zur Religion betreffend*, 51-53; UWB, NS II, 157-158, 178; as well as the whole of chapter 12 of UWB.

¹⁹⁸ "Christ is the turning point of history. What preceded him, refers to him; what succeeds him, flows from out of him" (Letter of Solger to Abeken, 23.01.1818, NS I, 604).

¹⁹⁹ Solger, Letter to Friedrich von der Hagen, 19.09.1819, NS I, 757.

speaking, coincide with the Christian thought of Revelation, but draws critically on it.²⁰⁰

Solger specifies this: under ‘mythology’, he does not understand the simple study of myths themselves, but rather a history *and* a philosophy of religions, one able to describe from the inside the relationship of consciousness to the divinity.

I will not simply discuss mythology in the narrow sense, excluding religion and only mentioning the sagas, but I will include everything that belongs to the view of the religious world of the Greeks. The aim is to grasp the mysteries, the divine services, etc. in their spirit and significance.²⁰¹

The question of the meaning of Greek religion and its relation to the metaphysical paradigm of ‘revelation’ therefore does not receive a response deduced *a priori* from a system that is outside of the historical and cultural data. The hermeneutical questioning must start from historical *facts* – therefore from ancient texts that describe myths and religious practices.

Thus, here we have to correctly find the complete facts for our goal [...].²⁰²

We do not mention the abstract aspect of religion, universal moral concepts, but we will only lay out the facts themselves.²⁰³

In his research on mythology, Solger always prefers a close reading of the texts. He above all recommended philological rigor to Friedrich von der Hagen who edited the *Nibelungenlied*.²⁰⁴ He considered this accuracy as a major quality and recognized it, for instance, in Georg Friedrich Creuzer.²⁰⁵ At the same time, he took care to situate the data relating to mythology and the history of religion in their entire cultural context, in order to stay as close as possible to the meaning that the text or religious practices had for the Greeks.²⁰⁶ According to Solger, this rigor in *historical* study is not in

²⁰⁰ See Part One of this article, the section: “The Unity of Revelation and Speculation.”

²⁰¹ Solger, *Mythologie der Griechen*, 1 verso.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 1 recto.

²⁰⁴ Solger, Letter to Hagen, 11.09.1819, NS I, 748.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 745.

²⁰⁶ Solger, *Ideen über die Religion der Griechen und einiger andern Völker des Alterthums*, NS II, 720-721. See also the letter to K.L. Krause of January 1810: “There should not be a history where there is none possible, i.e. where the historical data is not complete enough, but using the data there should be a study of the spirit, as profound as possible. [...] Of course, all this

contradiction with the understanding of philological data based on a *genuine unifying principle*, which is indeed philosophical. Solger designated his approach to mythology as a philosophical one:

The goal is at once a philosophical one, and even something prevailing, although the philosophical can only be found along historical paths and cannot be founded on suppositions.²⁰⁷

It is this specificity of Solger's methodology that ought to distinguish him from other contemporary approaches. In his view, a philosophical understanding of Greek religion cannot consist in an arbitrary application of philosophical motifs (or "*philosopheme*") that would be external to religious facts – be it a 'physical' explanation relating the myths to natural phenomena or general abstract ideas belonging to ethics or a 'rational religion'.²⁰⁸ Solger is opposed to theories which arbitrarily associate 'empty abstractions' (the good, evil, the divinity...) and sensible images or events (the course of the stars, seasons....) in order to explain the content of mythology; in this case, he argues, the latter are erroneously termed 'symbols'.

The connection, however, between these symbols and religious ideas is not at all touched upon, but is boldly, we could almost say, insolently presupposed.²⁰⁹

Like Moritz²¹⁰ and Schelling²¹¹, Solger contends that myths (and religious symbols) should be explained by means of themselves. This immanent explication points to what they are: an expression of the link between finite consciousness and the divine essence, of the manner in which consciousness

will not be a collection of antique notes, but always only instructs in what belongs to the thing and makes sense. Thus, it can become a work that not only discusses antiquity, but one that also contains something of the manner and being of antiquity." (NS I, 188).

²⁰⁷ Solger, *Mythologie der Griechen*, 1 verso.

²⁰⁸ Solger, Letter to Hagen, 11.09.1819, NS I, 745-746. Solger here takes a stand on an issue that was very topical at this time. The statement that it is possible to see in every mythological figure a "philosophem", i.e. to understand it as the cover of a rational core meaning, was at the centre of the controversy between Gottfried Hermann (1772-1848), who advocated such an approach, and Friedrich Creuzer (1771-1858). On Solger's critical position regarding the *Mythologen*, see UWB p. 185, 193, and my commentaries in the French translation, Solger, *Écrits philosophiques*.

²⁰⁹ Solger, Letter to Hagen, 11.09.1819, NS I, 747.

²¹⁰ See the introduction to the *Götterlehre*, which establishes the principle, adopted by Schelling, of a "tautegorical" understanding of myths. (K. Ph. Moritz, *Schriften zur Aesthetik und Poetik*, ed. H.-G. Schrimpf, Tübingen 1962, 196). Solger mentions Moritz's *Götterlehre* in the unpublished course of 1818 (*Mythologie der Griechen*, 14 recto).

²¹¹ See Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, SW V, 401, 409, 411.

sees how the divine is related to the world.²¹² Solger interprets religions as “systems” in an organic sense: along with the totality of its productions and manifestations, religion is a coherent whole that is deployed in an immanent manner according to a single principle of life which the ‘mythologist’ ought to identify. Based on this, he has to explain the different expressions or forms of religious life – just as the botanist discerns a single ‘system’ in the constitution of plants, a system which he has to study in all its nuances and modifications.²¹³ This single philosophical principle is indeed ‘revelation’:

The inner unity [...], which lies [in the various mythologies], and the star that has to illuminate to us the development and history of this unity in its phenomenal appearance in humankind, is alone that of *revelation*; without this the entirety of world history would be incomprehensible, not to mention the religious ideas that have sprung from this history.²¹⁴

The *spirit* of religion, i.e. the sense it has for human consciousness,

solely and simply consists in the ideas of the presence and the revelation of God, in both the creation and consciousness of man, of the relationship of the world and man to God, and finally of the redemption.²¹⁵

But how can we pass from the principle (revelation) to the concrete interpretation of religious facts?

b) Myth and mysticism

‘Revelation’ consists of a double dialectical movement. The idea configures itself in a finite form, and manifests itself in the particularity of existence. There is no ‘being’ in existence except through this self-manifestation of the idea. Within faith, consciousness grasps itself as nothing vis-à-vis this self-

²¹² This would be close to the position adopted by Schelling in his *Philosophy of Mythology* from the 1820s to the 1840s. Schelling takes up the hypothesis of Creuzer, who raised it “to the level of unquestionable historical self-evidence”: the signification of mythology is religious. Theories that conceive of mythology as the disguise, conscious or unconscious, of theoretical or ethical ‘philosophems’ do not explain the mythological phenomenon better than those which see it as a purely poetical invention. Mythological representations immediately express a relationship between consciousness and the divine (Schelling, *Einleitung zur Philosophie der Mythologie*, I-IV, SW XI, 3-93).

²¹³ Solger, Letter to Hagen, 19.09.1819, NS I, 753.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 752. Solger is aware of the originality of his position: “Yes, I want to do much more than Kanne and all of his ilk, I want to relate it to revelation, and this is why I harbor all the more aversion, that the former start from wholly false points of view and go down erroneous paths.” (*ibid.*).

²¹⁵ Solger, Letter to Hagen, 19.09.1819, NS I, 754-755.

manifestation; in this way, it becomes the very place of the revelation of the idea, which annihilates itself in consciousness. With the help of the pair – *mythology in the narrow sense* and *mysticism* – Solger seeks to trace all the manifestations of the ancient Greek religion back to this double dialectical movement of revelation (self-manifestation and self-destruction).

Through myth, the Godhead enters into human knowledge, through mysticism our knowledge returns back to the divine and dissolves itself there. In the mystery, it is rather the allegorical principle, reality is given. We give ourselves over to higher knowledge; and this shift to a higher knowledge is called ‘allegory’.²¹⁶

The *myth* belongs on the side of the symbol; it illustrates the individualization of the divine, its ‘descent’. On the other hand, in the *mystical* attitude consciousness no longer grasps the divine as something existing, but relates to it as a principle in an allegorical manner.

Each of the two directions is doubled again: the myth contains the symbolic (the form, the configuration of the legend) and the allegorical (the relation of consciousness to the meaning of this legend); in the same way, the mystery contains an allegorical dimension (the pure knowledge of the divine) *and* a symbolic dimension (the aspect of religious *feeling*, of an immediate individual experience of the divine).²¹⁷ The deployment here of the symbol/allegory pair is in coherence with its utilization in the philosophy of art.²¹⁸ However, Solger is not at all interested in interpreting religion by means of art – for which he criticized J. H. Voß.²¹⁹ The 1818 course suggests that religion, from the point of view of revelation, is more original than art.²²⁰

For individual consciousness, religious experience and artistic experience share in common a *temporal* character: they are moments of the fullness of the idea, captured in art as a phenomenon, in religion as an inner experience, but always in an evanescence symptomatic of the irreconcilable tension between the absolute unity of the idea and the infinite dispersion of existence – and yet both are reconciled, but only in an instant. It is precisely the task of philosophy to guarantee, through the patient weaving of dialectical thought, the preservation of these favoured moments.

²¹⁶ Solger, *Mythologie der Griechen*, 5 verso.

²¹⁷ Solger, *Mythologie der Griechen*, 5 recto and verso.

²¹⁸ Cf. also Solger’s letter to Tieck, 22.11.1818, NS I, 688-689, Matenko 485-486.

²¹⁹ Solger, *Mythologie der Griechen*, 3 recto-4 verso.

²²⁰ “(...) art is also only the cloak of religion” (*ibid.*, 2 verso); and contra Voß: “then what is art if it is not related to religion” (*ibid.*, 4 verso).

But should such a perpetuation then remain beyond the reach of non-philosophers? This problem of the “objectivity of philosophy”, that is to say: of the possibility for the content of philosophy to be present in the existence of each and everyone, is shared by Solger with a number of thinkers of his time, including Fichte and Schelling. Both Fichte and Schelling thought at one time or another that they could find in the *aesthetic* point of view a means for rendering the superior content of philosophy accessible to the ordinary person, to human beings “as a whole” (and not merely to their reason). In a sense, this same ambition can be found in the *philosophical dialogue* as Solger conceives it. In equilibrium between art and philosophy, the dialogical form has to make the revelation of the idea accessible in a living manner. The “objectivity” of philosophy would then be achieved via the aesthetic path. But perhaps the dominant and widespread image of “Solger the aesthete” may have prevented interpreters from attributing the rightful place to another path that interested him just as much – the *political* path. Parallel to the perpetuation of the flashes of the idea in the element of philosophical thought, the author of *Erwin* wanted to conceive of another type of stabilization of revelation, within the state and legal and political life.

5. Political Philosophy: the Individual, State and the Concept of Humankind

Once again, there are good reasons for not confining ourselves to the restrictive image of Solger the “aesthete” or the “theorist of romantic irony”. Solger studied law at the University of Halle between 1799 and 1802; he showed interest in political philosophy, especially in his *Philosophical Conversations* (*Philosophische Gespräche*, 1817), as well as in his correspondence with Raumer and with Hagen. The year before his death, he intended to publish a book on the philosophy of right and the State.²²¹ The text *Philosophie des Rechts und Staats* appeared posthumously in 1826 in the *Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*²²²: it is most likely a collection of Solger’s preparatory notes for the courses on political philosophy that he

²²¹ See the letter to the publisher Dümmler, 16.06.1819: “I have not succeeded, my dearest friend, in handing in my book on the philosophy of right and State for this summer. Hence, I have decided to directly offer it to you. Perhaps you could publish it next winter. [...] I sincerely hope that it might be published soon, as so many phenomena in the present time are in need of a vigorous defense and application of what is right [...]” (Nachlass Solger, *Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, Berlin; I am grateful to Anne Baillet for her transcription of the manuscript).

²²² See Part One of this article, footnote 10.

regularly held at the University of Berlin between 1813 and 1819²²³ and it would have probably furnished the materials for the projected book. We are here faced with a difficult text, that is sometimes repetitive, and sometimes rather incomplete. Despite the formal appearance of a unified single text, it might be a juxtaposition of several versions of Solger's course.

If we are to take this text seriously, and that is my intention here, it will inevitably change the focus in the interpretation of Solger's work. The conception of the State and right developed in Solger's writings would seem closer to a Hegelian philosophy of "objective spirit" than to any aesthetic-romantic solution to the problem of the "objectivity" of philosophy – that is to say, thinking of the ways for philosophy itself to become life and reality. In fact, it should be recalled here that in his *Review* of Solger's *Posthumous Writings* (1828), Hegel declared that he "completely agreed in all points"²²⁴ with Solger's political philosophy – a hypothetical convergence which has not yet been the subject of detailed research.²²⁵

a) Limits of revelation in art and in religion

Solger understood the State as one of the forms of the revelation of the idea in existence; he even calls it "the system of the existence of the idea."²²⁶ How should this existence of the idea in the legal and political sphere be interpreted?

²²³ According to Fricke, Solger taught the "philosophical theory of right" (*Philosophische Rechtslehre*) in the summer semesters 1813, 1816, 1817, 1818 and in the winter semester 1819/20; he gave his course on 'politics' during the winter of 1818 and summer 1819 (H. Fricke, *Karl W.F. Solger*, 261-262). (According to the more recent survey by W. Virmond, Solger taught the philosophy of right in the summer semesters 1816 and 1818, and politics in the summer semester 1819 (W. Virmond, ed., *Die Vorlesungen der Berliner Universität 1810-1834*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011, 123, 167, 191).

²²⁴ Hegel, *Solger-Rezension*, HW 11, 272. However, on the *difference between the metaphysics* of Solger and Hegel, see P. D. Bubbio, "Solger's notion of sacrifice as double negation", *The Heythrop Journal* 2009: 206-214.

²²⁵ For a beginning of such a research, see M. Galland-Szymkowiak, "Hegel, Solger und die Theorie des Willens als Grundlage der politischen Philosophie", *Hegel-Jahrbuch* 2009: 160-166; "État, Église et individu. Deux idéalismes face à la question de l'union des Églises protestantes (Hegel, Solger)", *Revue germanique internationale*, 2008/4: 9-31.

More generally on Solger's political philosophy: M. Galland-Szymkowiak, "Individuum, Staat und Existenz der Idee. Die politische Philosophie Karl Solgers", in *Grundzüge der Philosophie Karl Solgers*, ed. by A. Baillot and M. Galland-Szymkowiak (Zurich/Berlin: LIT, 2014), 225-242 – of which I provide a synthesis in the following pages.

²²⁶ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 314. See 329.

In *art* and *religion*, the phenomenalization of the idea coincides with the negation of finite existence.²²⁷ Reality (of the world or of my consciousness) becomes the presence of the idea – a paradoxical one, which cannot last except for the duration of a flash of lightning, for an *instant* of aesthetic or mystical grace.

Each of the two [= art and religion] is a particular world, and each of them is simultaneously existence [*Existenz*], in that [...] each of them merges reality with the idea. However, in this way precisely this reality becomes annihilated in both and yet it ought and must be there. Hence, it can only be if it also elevates itself to essential existence [*Daseyn*].²²⁸

However, if revelation is at the same time creation *and* annihilation of the finite, how is it possible to conceive a texture of the finite such that it does not dissolve itself instantaneously? Is the very idea of an “essential existence” nothing else than a futile oxymoron?

Thus, what is at stake with the conception of the State is clearly to think a modality of the existence of the idea that would no longer be an instantaneous, but a perennial one:

[The State] is an idea *fixed in real existence, a lasting order and a resting universe of acting*.²²⁹

The *State* is the totality of essential *existence* through which the idea of the good is made real in acting as an existing world system [*bestehendes Weltsystem*].²³⁰

Art is certainly an *action* that gives existence to the idea; however, such an existence is purely an individual one (in the subject as well as in the artwork), and therefore a vanishing one. The legal and political organization and life, on the other hand, makes the ordinary world into a permanent actualization of the idea and this happens as a (new) world system [*Weltsystem*].²³¹ Our existence in the society and in the State is no longer an existence that is purely relative and finite, which annihilates itself in the idea (and annihilates it in

²²⁷ “Just as in religion our own consciousness passes into the divine thought as a pure revelation of the latter; so in beauty the reality of the world, in which we live.” (Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 69, M., 56).

²²⁸ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 311.

²²⁹ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 330 (italics in the original).

²³⁰ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 313 (italics in the original). Recalling that Hegel speaks about the State as an “ethical universe (*das sittliche Universum*)” (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, HW 7, 26).

²³¹ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 313, 330. Compare this with: Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, HW 7, 46, §4.

turn): it becomes itself “something lasting and essential”, or again “genuine existence [*zwahres Daseyn*].”²³² Although it is not always the case that Solger distinguishes between *Existenz* and *Dasein*, the latter is here understood as the presence of the idea, while the first rather designates finite existence as such.

Yet to what extent is this compatible with the metaphysical foundations of Solger’s philosophy? How is such a *perennial* revelation of the idea possible if existence is defined as “the nothingness of the essence”?²³³ Solger explicitly designates *individuality* as the key to this problem.²³⁴ What needs to be examined is the individual as a moral agent.

b) Individuality and the arbitrary or free will

While animal individuality immediately has its principle in its genus and is reduced to an expression of this genus,²³⁵ human individuality presents this particularity that it poses *for itself* as such. “The human being puts his representations in opposition to himself as one”: abstraction and reflection make the human being the point where the natural world reverts to an ideal world,²³⁶ where the deployment of the absolute unity in its oppositions becomes the object of a conscious representation. In other words: in self-consciousness, the unity with oneself takes on the significance of an *activity*: the self-positing of the I as one. The individual human knows himself as such through the activity that makes him conscious of the universal identity of the I=I as existing singularly in him.²³⁷

Consciousness of the self as singular *and* plural, universal *and* particular, comes to everyone through the intermediary of *acts* which posit each time their personal identity as simultaneously particular.²³⁸ These acts are the product of his faculty of decision-making or the arbitrary or free will (*Willkür*). “The arbitrary will is therefore the proper act of existence [*Daseyn*], in which the human being is what he is.”²³⁹ The arbitrary will is the existence

²³² Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 330.

²³³ Solger, UWB, NS II, 172; cf. Part One of this article: “Revelation, the transition of the idea into existence.”

²³⁴ See Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 317.

²³⁵ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 165.

²³⁶ On the relation between nature and thought cf. Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 275.

²³⁷ See Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 333.

²³⁸ Compare with Hegel, GPR, §124: “What is the subject, it is the series of its actions”.

²³⁹ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 336; cf. p. 305: “The point of the arbitrary will is therefore the one in which the original infinite existence, *pure becoming*, does not reveal itself as a principle, as in dialectics, but as the real moment of existence, as an existential act.” The expression *Existentialact* (see, too, PhiRS, 273) is probably borrowed from Fichte, *Principien der Gottes-*,

as an act, the active insertion of the individual in a network of real relationships and oppositions. At the same time, arbitrary or free will is the act of a subject that is one and that refers his or her own acts to himself or herself. Solger can then identify this arbitrary or free will with the very individuality of the human being:

The individual itself is therefore nothing but the *arbitrary will* [*Willkür*], and its particular existence [*Daseyn*] is acting, which is only the phenomenon of the arbitrary will. [...] The individual has to constantly act otherwise it would be nothing, and in this acting it is nothing but the arbitrary will.²⁴⁰

Solger again appropriates here the Fichtean model of productive hovering²⁴¹ to conceive the arbitrary as a dynamic unification of the two directions of action, self-determination (or determination by the universal, the ought (*Sollen*)²⁴²) and particular determination (by the drive (*Trieb*)). Like Hegel, he points out that the action itself cannot be understood except as the effectuation of the *unity* of these two directions.

In the actual moment of the arbitrary will [...] the self-determination and the one from outside are no longer opposed, but wholly flow together as One.²⁴³

The individual cannot create this unity, but only receives it from the “absolute fact” of revelation, as we have seen. The action cannot exist “if the *idea* does not flash forth in the moment of cancellation.”²⁴⁴ Solger therefore wants to oppose the formalism stemming from the Kantian conception of morality, by stressing that philosophy cannot consider “[the good] as a universal rule of acting, or as an ideal, an infinitely distant goal.”²⁴⁵ The principle of all action is the unity of the idea (of the good) in me. Nevertheless, *individual moral action* cannot conserve this unity as a unity during its effectuation, during its transition into existence. While the source of action is indeed the unity of the idea of the good that is present in me:

Sitten- und Rechtslehre, the textbook of a lecture course that Solger attended in Spring 1805 (Fichte, GA II/7, 375). On the arbitrary will, see: UWB, NS II, 165-168.

²⁴⁰ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 336-337.

²⁴¹ See for example, Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 303.

²⁴² See Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 302.

²⁴³ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 300; cf. 334-335.

²⁴⁴ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 301.

²⁴⁵ Solger, UWB, NS II, 167.

this unity can only gradually pass over into [the] relations [of existence]; it can only be carried out by means of a particular acting, and never completely, because our existence itself always still contains the concepts of the universal and the particular in their separation. Therefore, the idea of the good is something that *should* become, it is not yet, it is an *ought*, and reality and idea still always remain separate from each other. Reality is presupposed as existent; the idea ought to be, and there never arises a complete interpenetration.²⁴⁶

A singular individual, as such, can only produce an irremediably particular action,²⁴⁷ which does not “reveal” “the” good, but always only the irremediable duality of the dialectical pair: good/evil. Acting in itself, separating itself from the idea becomes “a *real or positive nothing* and this is what we call ‘evil’. However, to the extent that it is idea itself, it is the *good*.”²⁴⁸ The unsurpassable duality of good and evil is thus the ethical correlative of the ontological and gnoseological definition of existence as the ‘nothingness of the essence’.

Hence, even a moral action is not able to produce an “essential existence”, a perennial system of the living idea. For this, according to the recurring Solgerian-Schellingian schema that we have already encountered²⁴⁹, the idea of the good needs to be both a ground (*Grund*) of action *and* already present in the reality invested by this action.

[...] individual action is itself at the boundary between the idea and nothingness and cannot escape the latter if the idea does not continually merge into reality as something subsisting and at once lie at the basis of it, which can only take place through a being (*Daseyn*) which is erected, as it were, over real action by action.²⁵⁰

What has to be thought as the condition of the realization of the idea in *our* daily world (not in those of art or religion) is a second level of existence. But

²⁴⁶ Solger, *Vorlesungen*, 65, M., 52-53.

²⁴⁷ “A subsisting world system should not be sought in the domain of ethics, where everything is rendered real through individual acting” (Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 313).

²⁴⁸ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 306.

²⁴⁹ According to this Schelling-inspired schema (*Freiheitsschrift*, 1809: *Wesen als Grund/Wesen als Existenz*), the absolute unity (the essence) is both the *ground (Grund)* or basis of all existence *and* the essence that has already passed into existence. Cf. for example, Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 301; as well as p. 319: “What the concept creates has to already be opposed to it as being. It has to simultaneously be the *ground* of the same being, which brings it forth”. This schema is found again, for instance, in the symbol/allegory pair in Solger; it also repeatedly appears in the text on political philosophy.

²⁵⁰ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 313.

there is no action except individual action: hence, how can the individual carry out a type of action that surpasses the finitude of moral action?

c) The perennial existence of the idea in the State: the idea of genus (*Gattung*)

What is at stake here is to understand if and how this original unity of self-determination and particular determination is able to pass into effective action without immediately dividing themselves into a pair of opposites (like good and evil). This may take place if the individual does not inscribe its action into a purely relative existence, but into an existence where the unity of the idea is already particularized.

For Solger, such an action is possible if the individual acts according to the idea *understood as the idea of humankind (menschliche Gattung)* – a thesis he may well have derived from Fichte’s 1804-1805 lectures on the *Characteristics of the Present Age*.

[The universal concept of self-determination] must [...] have a real existence and it only has this as a genus insofar as it is presented in the whole by individuals. [...] This concept] is in the [individual] thereby that every individual in its arbitrary will bears and expresses the whole reality of the genus as the universal concept.²⁵¹

Hence, the existence in which the idea of the good can become ordinary reality is not that of things, *but only that of human individuals in their free interactions*, where each one considers the other a singularization of the concept of humankind. In my understanding of Solger’s theory, intersubjectivity opens up a second level of existence: here existence is no longer the nothingness of the essence, but the putting into relation of the idea with *one-self that already exists in an infinity of singular forms*. In order for the idea to unite itself at this second level of existence, each individual is required to relate his action to the unity of humankind. He can relate to it as a universal (the concept of humankind), or as a concept immediately individualized (humankind in ‘this human being’).

²⁵¹ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 315.

Now, such an existence of humankind, in which the genus is completely related to its concept and the individual only lives for the concept of the genus, is called ‘the State’.²⁵²

d) Right, the State, and Political life

Through the manner in which it organizes the inter-individual relations, the State is the *existing* unity of the self-determination and the drive (*Trieb*), a unity that is constitutive of all acting. State is not a simple rule imposed on actions from the outside, but is indeed, Solger writes, “the action itself, yet conceived as original essence and subsisting being (*stehendes Seyn*).”²⁵³ It *accomplishes* what in moral action remains only the principle and the aim.

The State is *the existence of the idea* [*das Daseyn der Idee*]. Morality [*Sittlichkeit*] is *its becoming*. *Individuality* or existence [*Existenz*] governs in morality, perfect existence [*das vollkommene Daseyn*] in the State.²⁵⁴

The presentation of the unity of the idea understood as the idea of genus in a “perfect existence”, is carried out again in two dialectically correlated directions. The *State in the broad sense* includes *rights* and laws on the one hand, which have to relate all particular individual action to the idea of genus, and on the other hand, the *State in the narrow sense*, in which the idea of genus presents itself as an acting individuality.²⁵⁵

In the system of *right* as a totality of laws, the particular drives are orientated according to the concept of genus, and therefore universalized. Solger defines right as “an ethical nature.”²⁵⁶ In fact, ‘nature’ in general is according to him the deployment of the unity of the idea in the oppositions of existence by means of necessary laws; in a deployment of this kind all particularity is included in the universality of the idea.²⁵⁷ The right constitutes

²⁵² Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 318. See the 10th lecture of Fichte’s *Characteristics*. Fichte stresses that a constraint is necessary for individuals to put their forces at the service of humankind; this coercive approach is not to be found in Solger.

²⁵³ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 294.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (Italics in the original).

²⁵⁵ We encounter the duality: essence as foundation / essence as existence, described above in note 248.

²⁵⁶ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 337-338.

²⁵⁷ “The concept of nature is based on the fact that the antithesis develops itself out of the ground and within the identity of the ground, and that the particularity as such expresses the universal concept in itself. If therefore any kind of relation is to take place, in which the universal and the particular merge into one another as the identical, then there has to be an original unity in the two, which would contain the antithesis as the transition of both sides into one another, and this is *moral nature* (*sittliche Natur*) because it only takes place in acting.” (Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 320).

an ‘ethical nature’ because it furnishes a legal framework in which all particular action is primarily related to the universality of the idea of humankind.

Only through nature do the universal and particular pass through a common relation and out of this common ground into one another. Only through an ethical nature can the individuals as individuals still have essential existence [*wesentliches Daseyn*]. This is called ‘right’ [*das Recht*].²⁵⁸

On its side, the *State in the restricted sense* presents “the *free acting [arising] from the idea* as something real”²⁵⁹, that is to say: not as a *Sollen*. Instead of relating particular actions to the idea of the genus, it deploys the latter in existence – however, not by dissolving it, but by *individualizing* it. This is possible because the action of the State does not concern things but *persons*.²⁶⁰ Persons are individuals considered as subjects of right, i.e. individuals acting under the determination of the concept of genus.²⁶¹ Because the State *stricto sensu* is not constituted by anything else than the relations between persons²⁶², it is an *essential existence*, i.e. a legally institutionalized system of relations,²⁶³ unified by the idea of a genus that is being constantly individualized.

The purpose of the State is the acting of the concept of genus as an individual, whereby the acting of all individuals becomes transformed into an acting of the State.²⁶⁴

The action of the State is focused in turn in two directions: on the one hand, by means of *justice*²⁶⁵ it guarantees that particular persons act in conformity with the law; on the other hand, it individualizes the idea of genus in a determinate *constitution*. In the constitution “individuality and the particular existence of the State can be recognized, but not as an arbitrarily finite individuality, but as the concept of genus.”²⁶⁶ It determines the organization of the State and the framework of its action in such a way that this action

²⁵⁸ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 319-320.

²⁵⁹ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 340.

²⁶⁰ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 340-341.

²⁶¹ “However, in persons, the universal concept of acting is only mediated via right” (Solger, *PhiRS*, NS II, 341).

²⁶² Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 343.

²⁶³ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 324.

²⁶⁴ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 353.

²⁶⁵ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 344.

²⁶⁶ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 345. Solger notes that the constitution is *both* something historical and given, as well as the expression of the essence (*ibid.*).

always expresses the universal concept of humankind.²⁶⁷ The concrete *political life* in the State (*die Politik*) is the intermediate term between justice and the constitution. Its function is to constantly unify the individual action (in conformity with the right) of persons and the idea of humankind individualized in the State.²⁶⁸

The political philosophy of Solger, briefly presented here in its main features, is set out in a complicated text that also extends certain points of his metaphysics. It offers a new field of research and prevents us from continuing to consider Solger as a mere “aesthetician”. One of the tasks of future research could be to investigate the relationship between Solger's political philosophy and those of Fichte (mostly the *Characteristics of the Present Age*), Schelling (Solger's text shows proximity with some features of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*) and Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, published a few months after Solger's death.

★

The aim of this article was to present, through an immanent, synthetic, and panoramic reading, Solger's philosophical reflection in its different fields; as well as to show in the course of this exposition how the thought of revelation concretely generates every part of his philosophical system. The ‘absolute and eternal fact’ of *Offenbarung*, the eternal movement of self-revelation and self-annihilation of the idea in finite existence, is the principle, not in the sense of a *Grundsatz*, but in sense of an omnipresent active center, of a constantly renewed experience. Revelation constitutes the ground from which all unity (of being or knowing) is grasped – it includes the unity of the consciousness of the individual self.²⁶⁹ Far from being reduced to reflections on beauty and

²⁶⁷ Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 346. The constitution fixes the relations between the *people* as an empirical totality, and the idea of humankind in its individualization (PhiRS, NS II, 248). The latter can be understood as individualizing in an entire people – *democracy* –, in a group of individuals – *aristocracy* – or in an individual person – *monarchy*, which, according to Solger, best corresponds to an individualization of the idea.

²⁶⁸ “This political life proceeds from the State, is restricted in single individuals only by the concept of right, however, it has the positive goal of transforming all acting of single people and all effectiveness to things into an acting of the State, whereas the individualized concept itself can only ever act as the concept of the whole” (Solger, PhiRS, NS II, 345-346).

²⁶⁹ “Philosophy that commences with self-consciousness and develops everything from it, and is undoubtedly the true philosophy, has in my opinion become so entangled in self-consciousness and its different functions that it has only ever relatively constructed it, and has not arrived at the all-embracing moment where self-consciousness cancels itself again, and only finds itself again in another, which alone is in itself, and in which self-consciousness alone is something truly existing, namely in God” (Solger, Letter to Tieck, 19.11.1815, NS I, 376, Matenko 191).

art, Solger's work aims at systematically explicating human reality (theory of knowledge, religion and mythology, art, morality and politics) according to the intuition and dialectical thought of revelation – the intuition received in faith, and the dialectical thinking carried out by philosophical rationality. By emphasizing that this unfathomable foundation, this eternally renewed event cannot be produced but only received by consciousness, Solger's philosophy testifies to an intuition that is equally present in the work of the later Fichte or the later Schelling, and that inevitably leads to a breach in the philosophical system. Solger wants to construct a position that goes beyond, on the one hand, the limitations of Fichte's transcendental idealism and Schelling's identity philosophy, and on the other hand of Jacobi's dichotomy between faith and knowledge. By doing so he articulates the tension between idealistic philosophical motifs and romantic thinking, the transcendental point of view and the consciousness of the speculative, between an affirmation of the presence of the absolute and an insistence on the unsurpassable finitude of our existence. Reading Solger is an invitation to question the scope and relevance of these classifications in the history of philosophy.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Translated from the French by Laure Cahen-Maurel and David W. Wood and revised in collaboration with the author. I would like to warmly thank David and Laure for their careful work.