



# k a b i r i

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## The Implications of Schelling's Metaphysics of Contingency for Phenomenology<sup>1</sup>

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In *Ecstasy of Reason*, Jean-François Courtine states that F.W.J. Schelling's late, "positive philosophy" is "not a sublime ground of being as a whole, but the contrary itself of a ground, the attempt of a phenomenology of ... the divine!"<sup>2</sup> Schelling's paradoxical idea of the non-ground which grounds everything that is, a decisive feature of his philosophy from 1809 to 1854, will guide this essay through an account of the link between Schelling and phenomenology. As a main representative of contemporary phenomenology, I take the work of Hungarian philosopher László Tengelyi, particularly as presented in his magnum opus *World and Infinity: On the Problem of Phenomenological Metaphysics*, published in 2014—the year of his death.<sup>3</sup> This decision is not based on Tengelyi's worldwide notoriety as a phenomenologist (his work has been overlooked by much of the English literature on phenomenology). It is rather anchored in the importance of Tengelyi's clear, original exposition of a "phenomenological metaphysics," which links Husserl's late phenomenology to contemporary phenomenology in France (specifically to Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-François Courtine and Marc Richir), while also demonstrating that

1 This piece is written in memory of László Tengelyi, my educator and mentor at the University of Wuppertal from 2013-2014.

2 Jean-François Courtine, *Extase de la Raison: Essais sur Schelling* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 166: "La philosophie positive n'est pas une fondation sublime de l'étant dans son ensemble, mais le contraire même d'une fondation, l'essai d'une pensée phénoménologique à propos du ... divin!" The meaning of the term "positive philosophy" will be dealt with in detail below.

3 László Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit: Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik* (Freiburg & Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 2015).

phenomenology can offer a metaphysical alternative to Martin Heidegger's constitution of metaphysics as "ontotheology."

I will begin with a defence for the return to metaphysics after phenomenology, as motivated by a critique of the reduction of the history of metaphysics to ontotheology. Parallels between Tengelyi's and Schelling's respective criticisms of and alternatives to ontotheology will be demonstrated. Subsequently, I will show the double-sided relationship that Schelling and Tengelyi bear to Kant's philosophy. On the one hand, they appreciate Kant's endorsement of the distinction between essence and existence and his positing of the abyss (*Abgrund*)—the groundless ground—of reason. On the other hand, both thinkers are critical of Kant's treatment of experience and how it largely reduces experience to that which is conceived as the *possibility* of experience. From this point, Schelling's construction of the groundless ground<sup>4</sup> as the "unprethinkable being" (*unvordenkliches Sein*)—the locus of pure act—and its direct significance for Tengelyi's metaphysics of contingent facticity will be discussed. I will then conclude by defending the relevance of this metaphysics of contingency, and as initiated by Schelling and developed in a phenomenological context by Tengelyi, for the revival of metaphysics today.

### Metaphysics Before and After Heidegger's Critique of Ontotheology

There exists a widespread anti-phenomenological, anti-metaphysical current in contemporary philosophy. This trend, particularly within "speculative realism," is first marked by the opposition of *ontology*—specifically realist ontology—to phenomenology. We are told that "Speculative realism signals the end of phenomenology" and it is therefore "ultimately necessary to close the door on phenomenology as an approach to realism."<sup>5</sup> Along with this approach comes the imperative to target and dismiss those "who believe that phenomenology can disclose something about the divine, God, or radical alterity."<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, *ontology* is defended as a modern, superior endeavor to its outdated counterpart, metaphysics. In the wake of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology,<sup>7</sup> which will occupy us in detail below, metaphysics continues to

4 Schelling's groundless ground (also referred to as the non-Ground [*Ungrund*] or abyss) "becomes" the ground of God; it marks the beginning of the process by which God grounds himself and comes to know himself through creation. See Milos Vetö, *De Kant à Schelling: les deux voies de l'idéalisme allemande*, vol. 2 (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2000), 266.

5 Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), xi.

6 Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*, xiii. Sparrow further argues that "phenomenology holds metaphysical commitments despite itself and that phenomenology can only underwrite a rhetoric of realism, not metaphysical realism" (xiv). Furthermore, phenomenology is ultimately judged by Sparrow to be "in principle strong correlationism, and, as such, prohibited from making realist metaphysical commitments" (xiii).

7 Ontotheology, in the broad sense invoked by Heidegger, refers to the attempt to theorize all of

be widely viewed as a categorical, logical pursuit which begins with God or an equivalent principle as the first cause of the whole of substance, nature or being (which is in turn taken to be intelligible). Even Markus Gabriel, who astutely acknowledges the current misguided “prohibition of metaphysics and free thought” as “nothing other than a manifestation of the aggressive suspicion that free thought cannot be refuted by weak spirits, but only suppressed by committees, philosophical societies, and journal editors,”<sup>8</sup> in the end opts for ontology over metaphysics.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, there appears to be a relationship between, on the one hand, the failure of the metaphysical attempts to develop a totalizing theory of everything, and the perceived poverty of phenomenology in its alleged inability to speak directly about God or ontological themes on the other. For example, Tyler Tritten criticizes “contemporary thinking about God, at least from the so-called continental perspective,” as having “abandoned any possibility of elaborating an ontology of God, relegating itself instead to phenomenological or hermeneutical descriptions and analysis of religious experience.”<sup>10</sup> Phenomenology is taken in such contexts to be a restrictive method of doing philosophy, which can say nothing of God or foundations, because it is constrained to the domain of experience. I argue, however, that the analysis of experience and metaphysical claims are far from mutually exclusive. I propose that the downgrading of the possible role of experience in metaphysics is largely due to a reductive, relative view of experience in epistemology. As will be shown, the question of the manner by which experience could serve as a source of knowledge is far from simple.

But before arriving at an analysis of experience, our first task at

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being and its possibilities by positing a first principle or cause (such as God), from which and of which we can achieve certain knowledge through concepts or universals.

8 Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011), 34. Gabriel here establishes a positive link between metaphysics and human freedom. Moreover, he warns against the naïve attitude of “contemporary naturalists” and “analytic metaphysicians” towards metaphysics. Far from futile, Gabriel describes metaphysics as in fact “system-theoretically motivated metatheory, a practice of higher-order thought, and not some wild speculation about the supernatural.” Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 36.

9 Gabriel’s positions towards both metaphysics and phenomenology are highly subtle, and equally appreciative as critical. I will return to them below. It is worth noting that although Gabriel describes his project in *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) as the construction of a “realist ontology,” he is nevertheless critical of “contemporary ontology,” accusing it of having “returned to mostly materialist variations of Presocratic metaphysics with a hint of Plato and Aristotle.” Moreover, Gabriel describes the assumptions grounding contemporary approaches to ontology as “fundamentally flawed beyond repair.” Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 2, 5.

10 Tyler Tritten, *The Contingency of Necessity: Reason and God as Matters of Fact* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 5. Tritten evaluates the contemporary perspective of the philosophy of religion as largely a “phenomenological hermeneutics of religious life.” His goal in *The Contingency of Necessity* is thus to reinvigorate the philosophy of religion in a “post-metaphysical” manner—particularly through Schelling’s late work—and thereby to produce an ontology of God. Tritten, *The Contingency of Necessity*, 6.

hand is to clarify why Schelling and Tengelyi's return to metaphysics is not a return to ontotheology. Both figures similarly invoke Aristotle and analyses of medieval philosophy to demonstrate a counter-ontotheological-tendency in the history of metaphysics. I will now show in parallel, beginning with Tengelyi and proceeding to Schelling, the complex position in which they both situate Aristotle in the history of metaphysics, and then defend that Duns Scotus, rather than Thomas Aquinas, is the true thinker of ontotheology. Precisely why Schelling and Tengelyi's return to metaphysics is also not merely a return to ontology will be clarified in the last section of this essay.

According to Tengelyi, at best, the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics occurs "only during a certain epoch of European thought," beginning with Duns Scotus and Henry of Ghent, extending through the late scholastics (particularly Francisco Suárez) and ending in Baumgarten, Wolff, and the pre-critical Kant.<sup>11</sup> The movement of German Idealism, particularly through the work of Hegel and Schelling, thus marks a break from closed, naïve, "old," arguably ontotheological, metaphysical thinking. As Gabriel states, both Hegel and Schelling "spell out a metaphysical truth of skepticism."<sup>12</sup> This post-Kantian skepticism is discussed in reference to experience as a source of both knowledge and "nonknowledge" below.

As is well known, the term "ontotheology" was used by Kant before Heidegger. Kant's employment of the term refers to the theological pursuit of the knowledge of God (understood as the most real, original being) through reason, rather than, for example, revelation.<sup>13</sup> In his opposition to ontotheology, Kant differentiates the *concept* of something (and thereby the corresponding, logical analyses which pertain to it) from its existence.<sup>14</sup> Reason, for Kant, "can only ever attain to the concept of reality, whether it be of the world, the soul or

11 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 99: "Diese [ontotheologische] Verfassung ist der Metaphysik vielmehr nur während einer bestimmten Epoche des europäischen Denkens eigentümlich."

12 Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 1. Gabriel here, rather polemically, states that this "metaphysical truth of skepticism consists both in a realization of our finitude and in the adjacent insight into the nonexistence of the world." Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 1-2. The meaning of the "nonexistence of the world" is debatable and ambiguous, and is discussed by Gabriel in detail in *Fields of Sense*.

13 Schelling accepts Kant's critique of ontotheology, particularly Kant's critique of the "ontological argument, wherein the attempt is made to derive the actual being of an *ens originarium* from the necessary idea of reason." Bruce Matthews, "Translator's Introduction," in F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 61.

14 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A567/B595: "No objects at all can be represented through pure concepts of the understanding without any conditions of sensibility, because the conditions for the objective reality of these concepts are lacking, and nothing is encountered in them except the pure form of thinking." More specifically, Kant states, "The aim of reason with its ideal is, on the contrary, a thoroughgoing determination in accordance with *a priori* rules; hence it thinks for itself an object that is to be thoroughly determinable in accordance with principles, even though the sufficient conditions for this are absent from experience, and thus the concept itself is transcendent." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A571/B599.

God.”<sup>15</sup>

In medieval philosophy, according to Tengelyi, a general scepticism towards Aristotelian metaphysics (or Aristotelian “physicotheology”) begins. This movement is initiated by Duns Scotus and Henry of Ghent. Henry of Ghent objects to Aristotle that an appeal to the experience of movement “is evidently inadequate to prove that the First Mover is truly God.”<sup>16</sup> The resulting insight is for that any *a posteriori proof* of God to prove anything or to have a metaphysical relevance for Scotus and Ghent, it must definitively refer back to the investigation of God’s essence *a priori*.<sup>17</sup> This signifies the demoting of experiential content and the primacy of the *a priori* within ontotheological metaphysics. In this medieval-ontotheological metaphysics, God, as the “first being,” is “included in the universal concept of being and made the object of a special science within the universal science of being as such.”<sup>18</sup> The pursuit of God’s existence is thereby confined to the science of universals.

Before moving on to the contemporary French critique of the medieval distortion of Aristotle, let it be noted that already in medieval philosophy, there are approaches to metaphysics which are not “ontotheological.” For example, in twenty-first century literature, phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion and Sean J. McGrath have argued that Thomas Aquinas is far from being an ontotheologian.<sup>19</sup> Tengelyi notes the particularity of the structure of Aquinas’ metaphysics, which “remains open to a revelational theology that differs from it.” In order for the world to receive revelation, the “circle of reasons” cannot be closed.<sup>20</sup> On this point, Aquinas is markedly different from Scotus, whose univocal concept of being, notes Tengelyi, is a *thing* without actual existence that manifests itself through abstract, “transgeneric” concepts.<sup>21</sup> Aquinas,

15 Matthews, “Translator’s Introduction,” 29.

16 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 98: “Der Hinweis auf die Erfahrung der Bewegung ist offenbar unzulänglich, um zu beweisen, dass der Erste Beweger wahrhaft Gott ist.”

17 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 98: “Daraus geht deutlich hervor, dass ein Gottesbeweis, der *a posteriori* angelegt ist, also im Ausgang von der erfahrenen Welt zu Gott gelangt, solange nichts beweist, als er sich nicht mit einem ganz anders angelegten Gedankengang verbindet— nämlich mit einem Gedankengang, der sich zur Aufgabe macht, das Wesen Gottes im Ausgang von den disjunktiven Transzendentalien *a priori* zu konstruieren.”

18 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 98: “Gott [wird] als erstes Seiendes in den allgemeinen Begriff des Seienden eingeschlossen und zum Gegenstand einer besonderen Wissenschaft innerhalb der allgemeinen Wissenschaft vom Seienden als solchem gemacht ... Das ist der entscheidende Schritt zur Ontotheologie im Sinne von Heidegger.”

19 See Jean-Luc Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theology,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 38-74, and Sean J. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 216-242.

20 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 99: “Bei einer Struktur der Metaphysik, die offen für eine sich von ihr unterscheidende Offenbarungstheologie bleibt, wie dies bei Thomas von Aquin der Fall ist, kann nämlich der Kreis von Gründen und Begründen nicht geschlossen werden. Aus diesen Überlegungen ergibt sich die Schlussfolgerung, dass keineswegs jede Metaphysik durch eine ontotheologische Verfassung charakterisiert ist.”

21 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 97: “Für diese Selbstständigkeit der Metaphysik *als scientia*

like Schelling after him, leaves an openness beyond rational theology for the revealed God that acts. Therefore, Tengelyi praises Aquinas' accentuation of "the Being-act [*Seinsakt*] (*actus essendi*) of beings," which "would deprive the general science of beings as such of its unlimited universality."<sup>22</sup> Schelling similarly posits a fundamental act before reason at the very beginning of the "positive" philosophy, which he calls "*actu acting being*" (*actu Actus Seyende*) (SW XI: 563). The free acting God outside of the web of universal concepts is the God who *can* reveal himself to creation. Tengelyi notes the ambiguity in characterizing a notion of being *without* this fundamental characteristic, for such a lifeless conception of being has an obscure relation to the question of its own actuality.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1990's, a trend began in France to revisit the history of ancient and medieval philosophy to find new tendencies that counteract traditional, particularly ontotheological, readings. One such thinker, on which Tengelyi heavily relies, is Olivier Boulnois. Although Boulnois, a specialist of Scotus, may be little known to the English-speaking audience, Tengelyi highlights his influence on the methodological shift in the practice of researching the history of philosophy in France. Boulnois, along with Jean-François Courtine (who is undoubtedly more known to the larger Schelling audience, for his two Schelling books remain crucial to the international reception of the late Schelling<sup>24</sup>), searches for alternative principles, categories or tendencies guiding and shaping the "metaphysical typology" in which a given thinker develops her or his work, rather than focusing on juxtaposing the essential positions themselves.<sup>25</sup> Boulnois, in *Being and Representation*, specifically uncovers Scotus' key move of *subordinating* and *assigning* the first being to the general in his philosophy, instead of merely *explaining* the relation between these two terms. Furthermore, Boulnois not only underscores the issue of (in)commensurability of an impotent, univocal being with the universal as discussed above, but also highlights the problem of whether such a being can *exist* at all. Thus, at the end

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*transcendens* muss allerdings ein gewisser Preis gezahlt werden: Der abstrakte Charakter des transgenerischen, aber dennoch univoken Begriffs des Seienden ist dafür in Kauf zu nehmen."

22 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 97: "Nichts könnte von diesem Ansatz weiter entfernt sein als die Idee, den Akzent mit Thomas von Aquin auf den Seinsakt (*actus essendi*) des Seienden zu setzen. Diese Akzentsetzung würde ja die allgemeine Wissenschaft vom Seienden als solchem ihrer uneingeschränkten Allgemeinheit berauben."

23 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 87: "Was ist aber ein Seiendes, das ebenso sehr bloß möglich—und das heißt: unwirklich—wie wirklich sein kann? Es ist offenbar nichts mehr als ein Etwas überhaupt, ein aliquid, eben gerade nicht nichts, non nihil (aber beinahe nichts), ein Ding (*res*) von einem bestimmten Sachgehalt (*realitas*), aber gegebenenfalls reine Potentialität ohne aktuelle Existenz." Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 97.

24 See Jean-François Courtine, *Extase de la raison. Essais sur Schelling* (Paris : Galilée, 1990) and Schelling, *Entre temps et éternité—Histoire et préhistoire de la conscience* (Paris: Vrin, 2012).

25 Tengelyi also claims that Courtine's and Boulnois's method continues the legacy of structuralism, and that in their interpretations of Heidegger, they allow the "heuristic potential" of the latter's understanding of metaphysics as ontotheology to be explored in new ways (which are not exclusively negative). See Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 99-111.

of Scotus' universal science, Scotus claims knowledge of the first being should be achieved, but the problem is that this inquiry begins with the general.<sup>26</sup>

Courtine and Boulnois, along with Marion and Rémi Brague, investigate core issues in Heidegger's understanding of medieval metaphysics and neglect of Neoplatonism in support of the argument that the history of metaphysics cannot be reduced to ontotheology. First of all, Heidegger's oversights in Neoplatonism, according to Boulnois and here cited by Tengelyi, conditioned his insufficient treatment of the relationship between Aquinas and Scotus.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, Courtine's work on Francisco Suárez<sup>28</sup> exposes the mediating role of the latter on the twentieth century reception of Scotus. While Heidegger acknowledges this essential role of Suárez, at the same time, "he does not notice that Thomas Aquinas is separated by a gap from Duns Scotus and the already-turned-to-Scotus Suárez."<sup>29</sup> This leads to a substantial historical blind spot in Heidegger's construction of the history of metaphysics as ontotheology, for reasons cited in reference to Aquinas above.

Tengelyi declares that as Courtine publishes his Suárez book, it is "no coincidence" that his 1990 collection of essays on the late Schelling simultaneously appears. More specifically, Tengelyi maintains that the subject of Courtine's "metaphysical-typological investigations" is the same subject of the late Schelling's philosophy, namely "the outline of a historical philosophy," and the opposition of purely *a priori* philosophies of history.<sup>30</sup> Schelling thus occupies an under-evaluated place and influence on this particular

26 See Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 98.

27 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 104. Tengelyi cites Boulnois' claim that Heidegger reads Aquinas as a Christian Aristotelian, and does so without taking into account the "Neoplatonic dimension" of Aquinas' thinking. Boulnois further exposes the problems caused by Heidegger's insufficient knowledge of the influence of Arabic philosophy on medieval philosophy (especially the meaning of Avicenna for Aquinas). Thus, Heidegger "ist blind für den Einfluss des Neuplatonismus auf die Aristoteles-Rezeption der Hochscholastik, wie er blind für den Einfluss der arabischen Philosophie auf die peripatetische Metaphysik des Mittelalters ist. Nur deshalb kann er der Metaphysik im Ganzen eine allumfassende Wesenseinheit zuschreiben, ohne dessen inne zu werden, dass er sich mit seiner Idee einer ontotheologischen Verfassung der Metaphysik von vornherein nur im Rahmen einer bestimmten Avicennainterpretation bewegt." Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 103-104.

28 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 105. According to Courtine, Suárez straddles between a Thomist position and Scotist premises and arguments: "Suárez 'einen Standpunkt einnimmt, der ihn offensichtlich auf die Seite der Thomisten stellt, sich aber dabei auf Argumente stützt, die der scotistischen These bereits das Wesentliche zugestanden haben.'"

29 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 103: "[Heidegger] bemerkt nicht, dass Thomas von Aquin durch eine Kluft von Duns Scotus und dem bereits an der scotistischen Wende orientierten Suárez getrennt ist."

30 László Tengelyi, *Welt Und Unendlichkeit*, 107. "Es ist kein Zufall, dass [Courtine] gleichzeitig mit seinem Suárez-Buch eine Aufsatzsammlung über den späten Schelling veröffentlicht, die uns übrigens noch im Einzelnen beschäftigt wird. Worauf es ihm in seinen metaphysiktypologischen Untersuchungen eigentlich ankommt, ist der Entwurf einer geschichtlichen Philosophie, so wie sie bereits von Schelling, dem Verfasser der 'Weltalter'-Fragmente und der Vorlesungen über Mythologie und Offenbarung, jeder apriorisch konzipierten Geschichtsphilosophie, sei es Fichte'schen oder auch Hegel'schen Typs, aufs Schroffste gegenübergestellt wurde."

methodology of doing historical, metaphysical research and its relation to French phenomenology. Notably, both Schelling and the French historical, phenomenological thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries defend the position that the meaning of events—including events in the history of philosophy—cannot be conceptualized in a purely *a priori* fashion.<sup>31</sup>

Courtine, Marion and Brague, along with Marc Richir—who translated Schelling’s *Freedom Essay* into French and published four essays on post-1809 Schelling—are all thinkers who transition from historical, metaphysical research to phenomenology. Integral to this transition is the aforementioned “groundless ground” of metaphysics, which features first in Schelling and reappears subsequently in Heidegger.<sup>32</sup>

For example, Courtine’s critique of the reading of representationalism into Aristotle by Duns Scotus and his followers leads him directly to phenomenology. Tengelyi explains that:

The transformation of the Aristotelian *phantasia*/imagination (φαντασία) into a *repraesentatio* negates [*abhebt*] the direct contact with the appearance of the apparent, and even has a ‘complete withdrawal of presence as appearance’ (*retrait complet de la présence comme manifestation*) as its consequence.<sup>33</sup>

Tengelyi clearly defends this critique as the precise “phenomenological inspiration of Courtine’s metaphysics-typological research.”<sup>34</sup> In short, Courtine, Marion and Brague were all influenced by their metaphysical responses to Heidegger’s construal of the history of metaphysics as ontotheology in their future research directions.<sup>35</sup> According to Tengelyi, these thinkers specifically demonstrate that

31 By trying to describe a “historical change of worlds” in the history of metaphysics, it could be argued that Courtine’s historical methodology itself is a challenge to ontotheology and a-historical transcendental metaphysics. Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 107: “Anders als Honnefelder geht es Courtine keineswegs um eine fortschreitende Verwissenschaftlichung der Metaphysik als Transzendentalphilosophie, sondern um einen geschichtlichen Wandel von Welten.”

32 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 111. Courtine “geht ... von der Heidegger’schen ‘Grundfrage der Metaphysik’ aus” und findet “dass die ontologisch angelegte Metaphysik viel weniger mit dieser Grundfrage zurechtkommt als die ihr gegenüberstehende Metaphysikformation. Dieses Urteil begründet seine Rede vom ‘nihilistischen’ Hintergrund’ des gesamten Forschungsvorhabens der Ontologie.” Tengelyi thus claims ontology has a “nihilistic background,” for a thesis about being is simultaneously a thesis about nothingness. Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 111.

33 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 112: “Er zeigt, dass die Umwandlung der aristotelischen φαντασία in eine *repraesentatio* die unmittelbare Föhlung mit dem Erscheinen des Erscheinenden aufhebt und sogar einen ‘vollständigen Entzug der Gegenwärtigkeit als Erscheinens (*retrait complet de la présence comme manifestation*)’ zur Folge hat.”

34 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 112: “Hier wird die phänomenologische Inspiration von Courtines metaphysiktypologischen Forschungen offensichtlich.”

35 The influence of Heidegger on Courtine is self-evident. See his book *Heidegger et la Phénoméologie*, and his multiple published articles on Heidegger. Alexander Schell explains Marc Richir’s relationship to Heidegger in detail in Alexander Schnell, “Au-delà de Husserl, Heidegger



traditional metaphysics cannot be limited to ontotheology, and furthermore, that the “ontotheological constitution” of metaphysics is consequently not a suitable “guide to research on individual authors and schools.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, they open the path for a “systematic renaissance of metaphysics” within the phenomenological tradition. Inga Römer accordingly explains that Courtine discusses the “end of the ‘end of metaphysics’” as a metaphysical position.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, Tengelyi asserts that the interest in Schelling in France grows “from the conviction that in Schelling’s late philosophy, the beginnings of a ‘first decisive overcoming of ontotheologically composed metaphysics’ is visible.”<sup>38</sup> He specifies that this has been the central motivation behind Courtine’s Schelling investigations since the 1970’s.<sup>39</sup>

### Schelling’s Critique of Ontotheology

Tengelyi, referring to Courtine, proclaims that Schelling specifically “works on a critique of ontotheology.”<sup>40</sup> Schelling’s late challenge to “ontotheological” thinking bears similarities to the critique of the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics levelled by Tengelyi and the French phenomenologists. Although I will deal primarily with Schelling’s critique of ontotheological metaphysics in the 1841/42 *Berlin Lectures*, it is noteworthy that András Schuller has demonstrated that Schelling begins this enterprise already in the Freedom

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et Merleau Ponty: la phénoménologie de Marc Richir,” *Revue Germanique Internationale* 13 (2011): 95-108, <https://journals.openedition.org/rgi/1124>: “By radicalizing in a ‘transcendental experience’ in a certain way, Heidegger opened a path to a phenomenological *ontology*.” Schnell explains that Richir chose a third position “beyond” the dualism of the transcendental and the appearance, the constituting subject and object, and that he was profoundly influenced by Heidegger. See Schnell, *La phénoménologie de Marc Richir*, paragraphs 15-20. Brague shares affinities with Courtine on his Heidegger interpretation. See Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 52. For the methodological influence of Heidegger on Brague, see Rémi Brague, *Aristote et la question du monde: Essai sur le context cosmologique et anthropologique de l’ontologie*. (Paris: PUF, 1988). Here, Brague analyzes Aristotle through Heidegger’s concepts in *Being and Time*. Finally, Marion found Heidegger’s method hermeneutically useful for understanding other thinkers. See Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 25.

36 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 26: Es “machte deutlich, dass die ontotheologische Verfassung zwar nicht als erschöpfende Wesensbestimmung der traditionellen Metaphysik gelten kann, sich aber auch nicht allein dazu eignet, als Leitfaden zu Untersuchungen über einzelne Autoren und Schulen verwendet zu werden.”

37 Inga Römer, “From Kant to the Problem of Phenomenological Metaphysics: In Memory of László Tengelyi,” *Horizon* 5, no. 1 (2016): 115-132, here 121.

38 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 144.

39 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 143-144: “In Frankreich erwächst ... dieses Interesse ... aus der Überzeugung, dass in Schellings Spätphilosophie die Anfänge einer ‘ersten entscheidenden Überwindung der ontotheologisch verfassten Metaphysik’ sichtbar würden.”

40 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 143: “Man kann ... behaupten, dass er—wie Courtine sagt—an einer Kritik der Ontotheologie arbeitet.”

Essay.<sup>41</sup>

Firstly, in the *Berlin Lectures*, Schelling presents a dual evaluation of Aristotle and then turns to the issues of the modification and replacement of Aristotelian philosophy in the medieval tradition. Schelling seems to agree with Henry of Ghent's problem concerning the identification of Aristotle's First Mover with God.<sup>42</sup> Despite finding a new appreciation for Aristotle on the one hand,<sup>43</sup> the late Schelling nevertheless suggests that defending Aristotle's God means accepting "renunciation," for this God is "*terminus*," and thus would not correspond to the demand of our consciousness" (SW XIII: 107).<sup>44</sup> This "demand of our consciousness," for Schelling, is the *willing* of a free God of revelation: the God who progressively reveals himself through mythological and political history.<sup>45</sup> Aristotle's God, says Schelling, is just a "principle from which to explain the world ... the ideal creator *to* which—but not *through* which—everything has come to be" (SW XIII: 108).<sup>46</sup> Schelling's God, on the other hand, is *longed for* by the individual, and is thus more than God as a concept or principle.

From this point, Schelling criticizes the "rational dogmatism or positive rationalism" of medieval philosophy, which he deems to be even more problematic than Aristotle's metaphysics. Schelling claims that such forms of rational philosophy came to take the place of "the pure Aristotelian philosophy" in the "Christian schools" (SW XIII: 108).<sup>47</sup> Even though he was a mere principle, Aristotle's God was at least posited as the foundation of

41 See András Sculler, "Der Satz vom Ungrund: Der schellingsche Überwindungsversuch der Ontotheologie als Vorläufer der phänomenologischen Metaphysik bei László Tengelyi," in *Welt und Unendlichkeit: Ein deutsch-ungarischer Dialog in memoriam László Tengelyi*, ed. Markus Gabriel, Csaba Olay, and Sebastian Ostritsch (Freiburg & Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 2017): 79-96, at 87-94.

42 Joris Geldhof makes the interesting observation that instead of substance, "relation" is the "most important [Aristotelian] category" for Henry of Ghent, Franz von Baader and Schelling. However, he notes that "It is improbable that Baader and Schelling knew the work of Henry of Ghent." Joris Geldhof, *Revelation, Reason and Reality: Theological Encounters with Jaspers, Schelling and Baader* (Leuven, Paris, & Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), 84.

43 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 157. "Er findet zwar gerade in seiner Spätphilosophie einen neuen Zugang zu Aristoteles, so dass er ihm zu dieser Zeit sogar mehr abgewinnen kann als dem bis dahin immer bevorzugten Platon." Tengelyi also notes Schelling's appreciation for Aristotle as a thinker who begins from the presupposition of that which exists and from experience (157), but also repeats Schelling's critique of Aristotle as a thinker of negative philosophy. Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 157.

44 F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 164.

45 As we *experience* the world as finite, limited, historical beings, we creatively apply and re-apply concepts to this very experience in order to make claims about its meaning. As McGrath notes, the recognition of the limits of thought allows us to be "possible receivers of revelation, that is, recipients of an act of knowledge originating outside of reason and nature." Sean J. McGrath, "Is the Late Schelling Still Doing Nature-Philosophy?" *Angelaki* 20, no. 4 (2016): 121-144, here 122.

46 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 164.

47 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 165.

the world. Much of medieval rationalism, on the other hand—as exposed in reference to Scotus above—aims to arrive at an “existing God” by beginning in universal reason. Its method for coming to God’s existence proceeded through concepts alone (SW XIII: 108).<sup>48</sup> It thus concerned only the concept-God whose predicates are deduced, and not the acting God who is willed for or even posited.

This approach, in the form of the “syllogism” or “inference,” or reason understood as the “capacity to deduce” (SW XIII: 37),<sup>49</sup> “*began* in a rational way to arrive at a positive result” (SW XIII: 108).<sup>50</sup> This “syllogistic knowing,” according to Schelling, attains the proposition but not the root of the content itself (SW XIII: 41) Schelling thus problematizes the approaches to attaining knowledge of “supernatural and supersensible” objects, such as the “nature of God and his relationship to the world,” through general principles and laws, particularly when God is claimed to be the *result* of this process (SW XIII: 34-36).<sup>51</sup> Scotus is the most emblematic representative of this mode of argumentation. His metaphysics was doomed to fail because “the coherency it achieved was merely a coherency in our thoughts, but not in the matter itself” (SW XIII: 41).<sup>52</sup> In brief, proving that God exists, according to Schelling “cannot be an issue for reason” (SW XIII: 58).<sup>53</sup>

As stated above, Aquinas is the exception, for he does not equate existence with essence. Rather, all essences require an additional *act* of existence in order to be. As Gilson writes, “the act which makes substance exist can and even must be added to the act of form which causes substance ... all form is act, but all act is not form.”<sup>54</sup> In the vocabulary of contingency, and foreshadowing the metaphysics of Schelling and Tengelyi, one could thus say that, in Aquinas, the act of form—the act which instantiates beings—is dependent upon a more primordial act of existence. This is a second order of deep contingency. Schelling explicitly recognizes Aquinas as a source of this insight. Aquinas separates, he notes, “what allows itself to be known from the mere nature of things and what does not ... everything that refers to existence is more than what can be realized from the mere nature of things and, thus, also with pure reason” (SW XIII: 172).<sup>55</sup> In short, both Aquinas and Schelling thus defend an acting God who exceeds that which reason can supply to humankind (SW XIII:

48 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 165.

49 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 115.

50 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 165.

51 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 113.

52 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 118.

53 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 129.

54 Etienne Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 104.

55 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 210. Alluding to a judgment of his own previous philosophy of nature as a purely rational, not “positive,” philosophy, Schelling here adds: “With pure reason I cannot, as was said, even realize the existence of some plant that if it is an actual plant, exists necessarily in a definite location in space and at a definite point in time. Under given conditions, reason, *of itself*, can know quite well the *nature* of this plant, but never its actual, present existence.” SW XIII: 172, Schelling, *The Grounding*, 210.

142-143)<sup>56</sup>: this is the God of revelation, and not the abstract, concept-God of Scotist metaphysics who can be known at the end of a logical inquiry on the level of transcendental being. Schelling's God is therefore "outside the Absolute Idea, in which he was as lost" (SW XI: 562). McGrath accordingly asserts that Schelling and Aquinas similarly argue "for the closest possible interpenetration of philosophy and theology while preserving both the autonomy of philosophy and the sovereignty of revelation."<sup>57</sup>

The difference between essences (which can be ascertained through reason) and existence is therefore the beginning of the historical alternative to 'ontotheological' metaphysics. The essence/existence distinction is not only shared by Aquinas and Schelling, but is also maintained by Kant. Schelling and Tengelyi accordingly praise the relation of Kant's differentiation between essence and existence to his establishment of the limits of reason.<sup>58</sup> These

56 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 189.

57 Whether Schelling breaks with the Scotist tradition of *univocatio entis*—the root of ontotheology—is debatable. While Tengelyi and Saitya Brata Das argue that the late Schelling successfully defects from this tradition, McGrath argues otherwise. Although he draws the above cited between the acting God of Aquinas and Schelling, McGrath also argues that Schelling is *not* a thinker of analogy in the Thomist sense. This is because, explains McGrath, the principles of reason (the "potencies") are also the "names" of God. In other words, Schelling applies the principles of reason *directly* to the explication of the revealed God, despite asserting the contingency of God's existence. On the existence of God as a "contingent necessity," see Tritten, *The Contingency of Necessity* (Tritten, 2018: 160). Therefore, according to McGrath, Schelling does *not* follow Aquinas's thesis of *analogia entis*, i.e., that the principles of reason apply to God only analogously, even though he maintains that the question of whether God truly *exists* is not a question which can be answered absolutely through the principles of reason. McGrath thus qualifies his comparison between Aquinas and Schelling in the following way: "Schelling holds that reason indeed possesses an adequate idea of God, which Aquinas denies, and second, and even more disturbing for Thomism, Schelling maintains that the *distinctio realis* between essence and existence also applies to God. This means that (1) for Schelling, God exists contingently even if he exists as necessary being ... and (2) Scotus was right about the *univocatio entis*: the concept of being which we deploy in understanding finite being is the same concept which we legitimately deploy in understanding the nature of God." McGrath, "Still Doing Nature-Philosophy?" 138. As stated, Das, on the other hand, argues that Schelling is *not* a thinker of *univocatio entis*. He explains that Schelling's eschatology "introduces a rupture ... into the univocity of being," and that the actuality of being in Schelling's positive philosophy is "that which can no longer be grasped, categorically, on the metaphysical basis of being as potentiality." Saitya Brata Das, *The Political Theology of Schelling* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016: 8, 26). Finally, in order to claim that Schelling's metaphysics of contingency is a distinctive break from the ontotheological tradition, Tengelyi seems to broadly interpret Schelling as a thinker of analogy positioned in opposition to Scotus' univocity. Tengelyi describes the idea of directly grasping the world as a whole through the properties of God as a "transcendental illusion"—a position with which phenomenology breaks. However, in taking this position to the extreme, Tengelyi is also critical of the Thomist claim that God sees all in one at the same time. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, q. 14. We can thus question, from this point of view, the extent to which the post-Husserlian, phenomenological project would be able to truly coexist with the late Schelling's *theology*. See Tengelyi, "Experience and Infinity in Kant and Husserl," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 67st Jaarg. 3 (2005): 479-500, here 497.

58 McGrath additionally draws a comparison between Schelling and Aquinas on the claim that the "possibility of evil is necessary to the existence of love. God has allowed evil to actualize

epistemological boundaries determine the system of reason specifically as a philosophy of essence (*quidditas*), and not of existence (*quodditas*). This implies that a deductive, *a priori* philosophy of essence is incommensurable (but not incompatible!) with a philosophy of existence.

Furthermore, Kant crucially emphasizes the problem of *experience* for epistemology and metaphysics, which adds a new dimension to Schelling's challenge to the ontotheological application of general concepts and principles to being. The ontotheological medieval metaphysics of which Schelling is critical thus commits a logical fallacy on a meta-level: it applies rational, "general principles" to material from experience, and from this point, makes inferences about that which is *beyond* both being and experience (SW XIII: 38, 108).<sup>59</sup> The demoting of experience in the old metaphysics to merely that which can only reveal the "particular, contingent, and transitory" consequently seems to ignore the fact that it is on the basis of the "particular and contingent" that the "*production* of knowledge and science" occurs (SW XIII 37).<sup>60</sup> As we will see in the next section, *experience* is the important middle term between *a priori* reason and *a posteriori facts of existence* (the latter which compose the metaphysics of contingency). Recognition of the necessity to further examine the role of experience in the history and future of metaphysics also opens new paths for the critique of ontotheology in phenomenology, as will be clarified in what follows.

### Schelling, Kant and the Abyss of Reason

Kant's emphasis on experience and his analysis of the limits of reason ended the so-called "ontotheological" era. As Schelling states, "After Kant, the Germans

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itself (the fall) for the sake of creation/revelation." On this point, McGrath points to Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, 1a, q. 2, a. 3, ad. 1. Sean J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 2012), 169. It would be an interesting project for future research to investigate the existent to which Schelling and Aquinas together could be linked to Kant on this topic (notably the latter's position on the facticity of evil in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason*), and furthermore, whether this facticity of evil could be a basic metaphysical fact in the framework developed by Tengelyi and explained below.

59 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 116, 165. Schelling writes further, "When I incorporate the phenomena given in experience into the world of concepts and determine these phenomena as *contingent* (which could also not be), yet existing, and when I then apply the general laws of the understanding to what exists contingently—namely, everything that comports itself as just an effect, that is, as something that could also not be (for this is the proper concept of an effect), that cannot be determined to exist without a *cause*, but only through a determinate cause—I elevate myself, on the one hand, to the *concept* of an absolute cause through which the world, that is, the complex of all special and merely relative causes and effects, is determined to be, and on the other hand, to the insight into the existence of this absolute cause, which to know was considered to be the ultimate and highest goal of all metaphysics." SW XIII: 38, Schelling, *The Grounding*, 115-116.

60 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 115.

held onto metaphysics, but interwoven with experience.”<sup>61</sup> Schelling frequently notes Kant’s importance for his thinking, and sees own his late metaphysical project as consistent with Kant’s epistemology. One could even say that Schelling “considered his own life’s work as an attempt to more fully develop the central insights of Kant’s critical program.”<sup>62</sup> As a post-Kantian thinker, Schelling remains sceptical of any rational theory which purports to have access to the whole or totality, and is thereby critical of many forms of religious philosophy (SW XIII: 32).<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Schelling had one single recommended course reading for the audience of his *Berlin Lectures*—Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (SW XIII: 33).<sup>64</sup>

As noted above, Kant articulates the limits of reason and identifies reason’s object, not as existence or even as *experience*, but rather as reason itself (or *a priori* essences).<sup>65</sup> Yet experience is evidently the minimum condition for the general laws and concepts of reason to have any relevance or application at all. But how exactly, then, does reason relate to experience? The main challenge in answering this question lies in the complexity of ascertaining whether and how experience can be a source of knowledge—a task which brings us to an examination of Schelling’s conception of the groundless ground, inherited from Kant.

After Kant, reason is no longer assumed to have the power to deduce the fact of existence or the *existence* of God. In relation to Schelling, the result of this conclusion is that God cannot be reduced to the *concept* of God. Schelling clearly relates this to Kant’s use of the essence/existence distinction and reason’s limits:

Kant leaves to reason only the concept of God, and because he rejects the so-called ontological argument, which wanted to infer God’s existence from his concept, he makes for the concept of God no exception to the rule that the concept of a thing contains only the pure whatness [*Was*] of the concept, but nothing of its thatness [*Daß*], of its existence. Kant shows in general how futile it is for reason to attempt through inferences

61 F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42: Paulus Nachschrift*, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 128.

62 Matthews, “Translator’s Introduction,” 32. For both Schelling and Kant, reason cannot attain existence through its own methods—it thus restricts itself, inhibiting “the *cogito*’s seemingly instinctual drive ‘to progress’ into the positive world of experience.” Matthews, “Translator’s Introduction,” 29.

63 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 110. Schelling suggests that a proper philosophical examination must be embarked upon before declaring whether any philosophy is “religious” or “irreligious.” It is interesting that although Schelling has already exposed himself as an ostensibly Christian thinker by this point (1841), he never ceased to be critical of the relation of religion, especially rational religion, to philosophy.

64 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 111.

65 See Matthews, “Translator’s Introduction,” 28.

to reach beyond itself to existence (in this effort, however, reason is not dogmatic, since it does not reach its goal, but, rather, is simply dogmatizing) (SW XIII: 83).<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, Kant's infamous things in themselves are a reminder of reason's blind spots and its areas of "nonknowledge" (to use Gabriel's term). I will explain the complex role of Kant's things in themselves for Schelling's positive philosophy later in this section. For now, let us note that "Schelling," writes Gabriel, "reconstructs the path of metaphysical knowledge as the discovery of nonknowledge by and through the breakdown of all dogmatic determinations of the whole."<sup>67</sup>

At issue here is not what we know *a priori*, but the identification of that to which no *a priori* access is possible, and which therefore requires a different method of knowing. On this point, experience has a humbling role to play, for in experience we come to be aware of that which we do not or cannot absolutely know. Thus, although Schelling calls experience "the only other source of knowledge of equal birth with reason" (SW XIII: 57),<sup>68</sup> it is also paradoxically *not* a source of knowledge on its own *per se*. More accurately, it is a source of the *awareness* of "nonknowledge." Schelling therefore calls experience the "escort" of reason (SW XIII: 61)<sup>69</sup>; in accompanying reason, it thereby also exceeds reason.

As a source of both knowledge and the awareness of "nonknowledge," the question of experience in Schelling is inherently paradoxical. Experience is both that to which reason applies, and that which exceeds reason. Reason constantly aims to be completely adequate to experience, to "describe its entire sphere"—but falls short. Schelling correspondingly explains that reason eventually arrives at "an ultimate [*ein Letztes*] beyond which it can no longer continue and because of which it cannot also refer to experience in the same way as with everything which has preceded it" (SW XIII: 148).<sup>70</sup> Experience can therefore also provide a sense for that which the concept fails to grasp. In experience, reason is provoked to admit that it "cannot demonstrate its final idea in experience, [and] must now turn to the being [*Seyn*] that is itself outside and above experience, to the being that relates to reason as the pure faculty of knowing" (SW XIII: 171).<sup>71</sup>

66 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 147.

67 Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 7.

68 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 128.

69 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 131.

70 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 194. Schelling calls this ultimate [*Letztes*] "being itself [*das Seyende selbst*]" that "which is most worthy of knowing" as the "entirely *actus*, pure actuality." Schelling, *The Grounding*, 194, SW XIII: 149.

71 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 210. Schelling's description of the relationship between reason and experience is challenging due to the possible *a priori* and *a posteriori* methods of *applying* and *using* reason. Schelling suggests that reason can encompass everything except that which *simply is*, including the *feeling* for that which *simply is*, neither of which can be deduced *a priori*.

Although this being is outside of all thought and conceptualized experience,<sup>72</sup> experience is also the only possible domain in which the senses can be stimulated and thus in which a thinker can be instigated to posit such a being. Schelling accordingly describes that we come to know *existence* of things outside of us exclusively through the senses (SW XIII: 172).<sup>73</sup> More precisely, he maintains that reason in itself “cannot realize or prove any actual real being even in the sensible world,” and that the desire for real being entails a submission to “the authority of the senses” (SW XIII: 170).<sup>74</sup> Through the senses, “we know the present existence, the plant that exists here, which cannot be realized from the mere nature of things, and thus from reason” (SW 171).<sup>75</sup>

From such a realization or provocation, Schelling is prompted to posit the idea of a groundless ground, which was denoted the non-ground (*Ungrund*) in the Freedom Essay (SW VII: 406),<sup>76</sup> and which transforms into the “unprethinkable being” (*unvordenkliches Sein*) in his later work.<sup>77</sup> This is the principle upon which the philosophy of reason (the philosophy of essences) is dependent—for both its own existence and the existence of that which fulfils its concepts. This is because reason cannot ground itself, or in other words, possibility cannot ground actuality. Again, true to its Thomist heritage, this principle of groundless ground is pure *act*.

Kant’s abyss (*Abgrund*) of reason, explicitly discussed by Schelling, is an “unconditional necessity” and the “*supporter of all things*” (SW XIII: 163),<sup>78</sup> which is “not comprehensible *a priori*” (SW XIII: 165).<sup>79</sup> Although this abyss (*Abgrund*) shares characteristics with the non-ground (*Ungrund*)<sup>80</sup> and

72 Schelling thus states, “Of this being the Hegelian philosophy knows nothing—it has no place for this concept” (SW XIII: 164), Schelling, *The Grounding*, 204.

73 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 210. Interestingly, on the nature of this point, Schelling draws a comparison with Aquinas’ distinction between “what allows itself to be known from the mere nature of things and what does not. To the latter, of course, he ascribes only *ea quae divina auctoritate traduntur* [the things bequeathed by divine authority]” (SW XIII: 172) Schelling, *The Grounding*, 210. In short, existence always indicates more than what reason can provide.

74 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 210.

75 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 210.

76 F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 68-69. Henceforth referred to as *Freedom Essay*.

77 Philipp Schwab has demonstrated the affinity between Schelling’s non-ground and unprethinkable being: “The central concept of Schelling’s late philosophy ... is ... unprethinkable Being [*unvordenkliches Sein*]. And there is no doubt as well, that this very concept is a term that follows up on the nonground of the Freedom Essay.” Philipp Schwab, “Nonground and the Metaphysics of Evil: From Heidegger’s First Schelling Seminar to Derrida’s Last Reading of Schelling (1927-2002),” *Analecta Hermeneutica* 5 (2013), 25.

78 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 204.

79 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 205.

80 In the Freedom Essay, Schelling distinguishes between a ‘dark’ ground and existing being. This is further dependent on another type of ground—a non-ground or an *Ungrund*—which is other to them. The fact and drama of existing at all is dependent or contingent upon this originary ground, according to Schelling, whose only predicates are primordial will and drive



the “unprethinkable being” (the absolute *prius* which undergirds the philosophy of reason)—its *function* differs. All three concepts, however, show that reason is contingent, i.e., dependent on an outside other than itself. Nevertheless, as Wolfram Högerebe demonstrates, Kant’s abyss (*Abgrund*) is still only a “regulative principle from a distance.” Högerebe suggests that this abyss (*Abgrund*) is unattainable and inscrutable, and thus that Kant avoids any “speculative interpretation of such abysses,” thereby adopting a principle of “speculative abstinence.”<sup>81</sup> In brief, while Kant expresses the incomprehensibility of the abyss [*Abgrund*], insofar as it is “not comprehensible *a priori*” (SW XIII: 164-165),<sup>82</sup> he does not move to an *a posteriori* investigation about what the groundless ground or abyss (*Abgrund*) could be.

Schelling, on the other hand, will not remain abstinent when it comes to speculating about the groundless ground. Instead, he explains that reason can effectuate a dispossession of itself as its object, the most necessary being, and then come to make assertions (*Behauptungen*)<sup>83</sup> about what this groundless ground could be. In the domain of operating concepts, a coherent demand can be made for “that which is beyond being,” which signifies the performative *completion* of reason, the point after which reason can go no further. Schelling thus exclaims: “I want that which is above being!” (SW XI: 564). This longing is for the transcendent “Lord of Being” (SW XI: 564): the God of revelation. As we will see, this God is desired by a will which cannot be reduced to its concept. From this point, the positive philosophy begins, and reason can factually explain what the groundless ground could be.

Schelling’s describes the process of identifying the groundless ground with God as a reversal of the traditional, “immanent,” approach to the knowledge of God that ends in the transcendent. Schelling accordingly claims that the “great misunderstanding of our time” is the misconception that God is “the transcendent.” Rather, Schelling writes, “he is the immanent (that is, what is to become the content of reason) made transcendent” (SW XIII: 170).<sup>84</sup> By this, Schelling means that after reason (through an immanent mode of proceeding) has reached its limits, we can set out from a posited, incomprehensible being

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(*Trieb*). Creation and existence are contingent on this primordial *Ungrund*, and therefore existence *need not have been, or could have been otherwise*.

81 Wolfram Högerebe, “Wie kommt das Böse in die Welt?,” in *Die Ausnahme denken: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Klaus-Michael Kodalle in zwei Bänden*, vol. 2, ed. Claus Dierksmeier (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 311.

82 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 205.

83 McGrath explains that the transition from the philosophy of reason to the philosophy of revelation (the philosophy which can speculate on whether the groundless ground is God) “happens by means of assertions (*Behauptungen*), which are not as such deductions or concepts but acts of the will positing concepts as true. Thus, the one who asserts something is already outside the purely conceptual and so does not need to pass from concept or essence to actuality and existence. The thinker is already in the real.” McGrath, “Still Doing Nature-Philosophy?” 125.

84 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 209.

and re-appropriate it through reason (immanently). Schelling explains, “What is *a priori* incomprehensible, because it is conveyed through no anterior concept, will become a comprehensible being in God, or it arrives at its concept in God. That which infinitely exists, that which reason cannot hide within itself becomes immanent for reason in God” (SW XIII: 170).<sup>85</sup>

The groundless ground—which Schelling also calls the absolute *prius* of that which infinitely exists—is therefore not an opaque substratum precluding all speculation. It is rather an “unmediated concept of reason,” which reason attains by means other than the syllogism and logical inferences (SW XIII: 165).<sup>86</sup> As noted above, the groundless ground is associated with an absolutely free act<sup>87</sup> and is “that being in which no thought can discover a ground or beginning” (SW XIII: 166)<sup>88</sup>—hence it is “unprethinkable,” or “that before which nothing can be thought.” Indeed, the only positive predicates we can associate with it are in the register of willing, acting and drive.

To be clear, Schelling begins with a groundless ground—a posited principle of pure actuality outside of reason—which is not itself *directly* experienced and which can be, as that which necessarily exists, subsequently re-appropriated as reason’s content. This principle, from which all reason and potency are excluded, thereby *becomes* “the first proper *object* of thought” before which “reason bows down” (SW XIII: 162).<sup>89</sup> In short, Schelling maintains that after reason posits this concept of being “absolutely *outside itself*,” it acquires it once again later, *a posteriori*, as its own content (SW XIII: 163).<sup>90</sup> This is the moment in which reason is “set outside itself, absolutely ecstatic” (SW XIII: 163).<sup>91</sup>

Despite the “inscrutability” of Kant’s abyss (*Abgrund*) as identified by Högrefe, Schelling concurs with Kant regarding the claim that “that which necessarily exists is precisely that which ... exists *of itself* ... without antecedent ground” (SW XIII: 168).<sup>92</sup> According to Schelling, Kant both indicates “the impossibility of denying that which necessarily exists as an immediate concept of reason” (Kant’s abyss or *Abgrund*), and also acknowledges “the concept of the most supreme being [*Wesens*] as the final, lasting content of reason” (SW

85 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 209.

86 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 206.

87 Schelling also calls the groundless ground the absolute *prius*, and describes it as having “no necessity to move itself into being. If it passes over into being, then this can only be the consequence of a free act, of an act that can only be something purely empirical, that can be fully apprehended only *a posteriori*, just as every act is incapable of being comprehended *a priori* and is only capable of being known *a posteriori*.” SW XIII: 127, Schelling, *The Grounding*, 179. Schelling frequently describes this act as the act before all possibility and prior to the principles of reason (potencies). See SW XIII, 160.

88 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 205.

89 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 203.

90 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 203.

91 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 203.

92 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 207.

XIII: 168).<sup>93</sup> However, the problem for Schelling is that Kant does not connect these two concepts. Schelling—almost paradoxically, and in a method which appears to be backwards—claims that the *first* concept, that which necessarily exists before all other concepts, must be first posited as *transcendent*, so it can then be possessed once again immanently. This marks the transition between negative and positive philosophy. While Kant acknowledges the requirement to posit an unconditional necessity outside reason as the “*supporter of all things*” (SW XIII: 163),<sup>94</sup> and himself even has a “sublime feeling” for this being, he fails to make this being itself transcendent in such a way that it would later become a possible object for reason.

For Schelling, the concept of the supreme being, immanent to reason marks the end of the philosophy of reason (the negative philosophy). On the other hand, that which necessarily exists *qua* transcendent principle signifies the beginning of the philosophy of revelation and history (the positive philosophy). The philosophy of reason can indeed reach that which necessarily exists, but only as a principle of reason, not in *its existence* (SW XIII: 168).<sup>95</sup> This is the point beyond which Kant advances no further. According to Schelling, however, that which necessarily exists, understood as *the transcendent* principle, can subsequently be conceptualized *factually* and proven *a posteriori* in experience, and is therefore not deduced necessarily (SW XIII: 169).<sup>96</sup>

As explained above, Schelling is critical of the presupposition of the ontological argument that the true existence of God could be inferred in and through the *concept* of God. But if one begins with that which exists as completely *anterior* to all concepts, then the fallacy of the ontological argument, i.e., the move from the immanent (concepts deduced through reason) to the transcendent, is avoided. Schelling can therefore posit a transcendent principle with no presuppositions or concepts, and then re-appropriate it through the “immanent” philosophy of reason, without thereby violating the limits of reason established by Kant.<sup>97</sup> “The transcendence of the positive philosophy is an absolute transcendence, and for precisely this reason *not* transcendent in the sense in which Kant had forbidden it” (SW XIII: 169).<sup>98</sup>

Both Kant and Schelling refuse to conclude on the basis of a proof of the concept of God as the necessary being that God *exists*. Schelling accordingly lauds Kant for forbidding the move which *dogmatized* reason—i.e., his objection to the role of reason in traditional metaphysics to seek “by means of inferences, to reach existence.” Furthermore, Kant *did not*, writes Schelling, “forbid reason to proceed conversely from that which simply and

93 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 207.

94 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 204.

95 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 208.

96 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 208.

97 In this immanent sphere of pure thought, Schelling states, “transcendence is hardly possible.” SW XIII: 169. Schelling, *The Grounding*, 209.

98 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 209.

thus, infinitely *exists* to the concept of the most supreme *being as posterius* (he had not thought of it, for this possibility had not even presented itself to him)” (SW XIII: 170).<sup>99</sup> In this sense, although Schelling sees Kant as neglecting to work with the transcendent principle of that which necessarily exists, he also claims Kant’s critical philosophy does not preclude the possibility of doing so. Schelling simply claims that reason’s re-possession of that which necessarily exists (as pre-conceptual, transcendent being) *per posterius* as God is allegedly something which simply did not occur to Kant.

Kant’s insights on the dependence of our experience on that which is external to reason is nevertheless appreciated by Schelling. Firstly, Schelling appreciates Kant’s argument that reason requires an outside (in Kant—eternity) for finite experience in time to be possible. Schelling thus explains that Kant differentiates the necessity *within God* from “absolute eternity, eternity insofar as it is not yet *opposed* to time, but is rather before and above all time” (SW XIII: 164).<sup>100</sup> In this sense, Schelling suggests that this absolute eternity, which is the “existence, of which we know no *prius* and no beginning” (SW XIII: 164),<sup>101</sup> is the outside of reason necessary in order for a finite experience of time and freedom to be possible.

Secondly, Kant’s thing in itself suggests a rejection of subjective idealism and appears to indicate the postulating of a real being (which is also, for Schelling, a transcendent being) persisting independently to all rational concepts of things or objects.<sup>102</sup> Schelling thereby states that “the things that occur in real experience” include two elements: their general determinations object and “something real (this it must be even independent of the categories) ... that which remains in the object *independent of the faculty of knowledge*” (SW XIII: 48-49).<sup>103</sup> In short, when all external properties and determinations are stripped from an object, this unknown, thing in itself still remains. (SW XIII: 49).<sup>104</sup> A structural comparison can therefore be drawn between Kant’s positing of the thing in itself and Schelling’s postulation of that which necessarily exists as the antecedent ground to all concepts. But Schelling nevertheless criticizes Kant’s “thing in itself” as the “point of departure beyond which Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* could never move, and because of which it had to fail as an independent science” (SW XIII: 50).<sup>105</sup> He also accuses Kant of completely extracting from (*a priori*) knowledge “that which is precisely the most important thing, namely, that which exists [*Existirende*], the ‘in itself’ [*An sich*], the being [*Wesen*] of the the thing, that which *really is* in it” (SW

99 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 208-209.

100 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 205.

101 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 205.

102 Schelling uses the language of the in and of itself, “as one used to express it, *a se*, that is, *sponte ultra*, and which exists without an antecedent ground.” SW XIII: 168, Schelling, *The Grounding*, 207.

103 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 122-123.

104 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 123.

105 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 123.

XIII: 50).<sup>106</sup> In short, although Schelling sees Kant as successfully arriving at the end of rational philosophy, and even positing an independent, necessary being, devoid of all concepts, as the condition of the existence of reason and that which fills its concepts, Kant does not take the final step to make the “transcendent principle” immanent, or in other words, to interpret the meaning of the abyss (*Abgrund*) through reason *a posteriori* as a new science.

### The Ecstasy of Reason and Experience

Schelling states it would be an “embarrassing situation” to have to explain “that which infinitely exists” (the groundless ground as absolute beginning) as if it were an idea or concept (SW XIII: 162). Alternatively, Schelling describes a process of reason’s self-emptying or *kenosis* which begins reason’s subsequent free relation to the groundless ground. In this process, reason dispossesses itself of its object, and thus frees itself for a new philosophical beginning, as described above. Schelling names this process the “ecstasy of reason.”

In the ecstasy of reason, reason becomes “paralyzed by that being which overpowers everything,” and thus enters into a relationship of subordination to all of being. From this humbled moment, reason can “reach its true and eternal content,” i.e., existence, which it could not recover through the *a priori* deductive work of concepts (SW XIII: 166).<sup>107</sup> It rather “allocates everything to a foreign knowledge, namely, that of experience, until it arrives at that which no longer has the capacity to be external to thought, to that which remains abiding within thought.” Note that Schelling here gestures to experience as a *different source of knowledge*, through which reason can escape its own “necessary movement” (SW XIII: 102)<sup>108</sup> and arrive at something “absolutely *outside* itself” (SW XIII: 170).<sup>109</sup> Schelling therefore states that in this process, reason is “set outside of itself, absolutely ecstatic” (SW XIII: 162-163).<sup>110</sup> It then becomes apparent that “the fact *that*” reason’s own content exists is “something purely contingent” (SW 60, p. 130).<sup>111</sup> That is, to know “things” is not qualitatively the same as to know that they exist: “that they exist I do not know in this way [through reason] and must convince myself of this from somewhere else, namely from experience” (SW XIII: 61).<sup>112</sup> Experience thus

106 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 124.

107 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 206.

108 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 160-161.

109 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 209.

110 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 203.

111 To say God is contingent is not to say that his manner of existence is contingent or that he exists “*per transitum a potential ad actum* [in transition from potency to *actus*].” This is because, Schelling states, God must himself be “the *existing* potency, the upright capacity to be.” This is the God who “precedes his concept, and, thus, all concepts.” SW XIII: 158, Schelling, *The Grounding*, 200.

112 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 131.

serves as the source of facts, which cannot all be verified by *a priori* methods, and it is *into* this domain of experience itself that reason releases the content of its grip, and in so doing, acknowledges something other than itself. This is the inauguration of a new method of knowing.<sup>113</sup>

Once it has reached its limits, reason stops seeking “its object within itself” and instead posits an “infinite being” outside of itself. In this moment, reason is rendered “motionless, paralyzed, *quasi attonita*” (SW XIII: 165).<sup>114</sup> But how does this movement of the self-dispossession of reason happen?

The answer to this question, on my reading, lies in human experience. *A priori* reason, which is indifferent to its own content, is confronted by a pushback from within human experience, in which a human being, who is free to will and to hope, accuses it of inadequacy. Simply stated, the human being who cries out for that which is beyond being is the human being who does not find the resources within the syllogism to sufficiently grasp her experience in the world in which she lives—an experience of freedom, love, suffering, hope and history.

Nevertheless, we must equally heed Schelling’s words that the positive philosophy (the philosophy dealing with revelation, history, existence and the event, in juxtaposition to the philosophy of reason) “does not start out from experience.” This is because it neither “presumes to possess its object in an immediate experience (as in mysticism), nor ... attempts to attain to its object through inferences drawn from something given in experience.” Instead, Schelling states, the positive philosophy goes “toward experience, and thereby proving *a posteriori* what it has to prove, that its *prius* is God, that is, that which is above being” (SW XIII: 127).<sup>115</sup> Schelling is here explaining that experience cannot be the unmediated *object* of the concepts of positive philosophy. But he is not precluding that particular instances in experience could *incite* a demand—an outcry, even—for that which is beyond conceptualized being. Experience is rather impotent as a *source of direct, absolute knowledge*. In other words, the application of reason to experience *a posteriori* in Schelling is neither an immediate, mystical union with God, nor is it an external, syllogistic, logical pursuit of God from conceptualized experience. However, this does not rule out allotting a role to experience in *stimulating* a transition between the methods of knowledge (i.e., between a “negative” or *a priori* rational method and a “positive” or abductive method).

Once desired, the positive philosophy then sets out, *a posteriori*, to prove God “factually” as a “*res facti*.” or matter of fact” (SW XIII: 128).<sup>116</sup>

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113 The new method of knowing is *per posterius* and abductive, and it does not violate the methods of purely rational philosophy, but rather co-exists with it. The point here is not that experience is the *other* of the concept. It certainly is not. Rather, experience exceeds the concept that always tries to grasp it. It is both a source of the new and a locus of purge.

114 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 205-206.

115 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 179.

116 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 179.

Thus, although on the one hand, the interpretation of history is an ongoing *a posteriori* proof that the groundless ground is God, this process is also always-present (and thus “*per posterius*”<sup>117</sup>), for we are constantly directly engaged in this proof *through* experience. This places experience in the middle ground between the philosophy of reason and the positive philosophy.

When harkening back to Kant as the source of the “abyss” [*Abgrund*] of reason, Schelling includes a lengthy passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A613/B641), in which Kant expresses his “profound feeling for the sublime nature of the being that precedes all thought” (SW XIII: 163).<sup>118</sup> In other words, to be motivated to posit the groundless ground of reason, Kant required a stimulus from lived experience in the world. This is the sublime experience and realization that a system of reason which proceeds via concepts is not adequate to all that exists. Therefore, without experience, there can be no “encounter with the sublime as an overpowering shock [*Erschütterung*]” in the Kantian sense, and equally no “ecstatic moment of reason becoming free of itself” in the Schellingian sense.<sup>119</sup>

Experience, as the above-mentioned source of nonknowledge, is the only possible location of an encounter with the sublime, the realm of longing for that which is beyond being. It is the domain of Plato’s awe—that of phenomenologist Eugen Fink’s astonishment (*Erstaunen*) in the face of the world—the locus of the beginning of philosophy for so many thinkers. Schelling’s ecstasy of reason and the drive to inaugurate a new beginning for positive philosophy—i.e., to posit the beginning of pure actuality—thus occurs in experience.<sup>120</sup> Matthews therefore explains that Schelling “grounds positive philosophy in an experience that is not mediated by thought.”<sup>121</sup> The thinker recognizes that which she cannot achieve by means of “logical knowledge” and *wills* more, i.e., “that which is above being!”

It is in experience that the human being also confesses an “ignorance caused by the exuberant nature [*Ueberschwenglichkeit*] of what is to be known” (SW XIII: 99).<sup>122</sup> Thus, the sublime feeling described above comes with a

117 McGrath, “Still Doing Nature-Philosophy?” 122.

118 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 204.

119 Matthews, “Translator’s Introduction,” 51.

120 Here, the *impetus* to posit the absolutely free beginning of being, and the very being of this *prius* itself must be qualitatively differentiated. Schelling thus cautions us *not* to say that the positive philosophy *begins* from “some being that is present in *experience*,” and instead claims it begins from “that which is before and external to all thought, consequently from being.” SW 126-127, *Grounding* 178-179. It should be noted that while the *ecstasy* and *impetus* are experienced, the pure that itself is not.

121 Matthews, “Translator’s Introduction,” 51: “Thought and existence can only be accounted for if we begin before reflexivity divides and conquers our awareness of this unity of experience.” If we try to proceed in the opposite direction and extract the foundational principle from unified experience, the result will be “the impossible task of demonstrating their correspondence.” The postulation of the grounding principle of experience is therefore itself an event in experience in retrospect.

122 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 158

humbling recognition of that very “exuberance” which concepts constantly fail to fully grasp.<sup>123</sup>

Therefore, according to Courtine, the ecstasy of reason itself is also an experience—he calls it the “inaugural experience of the positive philosophy.”<sup>124</sup> Gabriel similarly describes the ecstasy of reason as a “stimulus” (*Anlaß*) for “initiating a new movement, that presents Being [*Sein*] itself in the process of its coming-to-selfhood [*Verselbstung*].”<sup>125</sup> Hence, the ecstasy of reason, as a recognition of reason’s “estrangement and motionlessness,”<sup>126</sup> is not a logical transition between the negative and positive philosophy. It is rather a particular *experience* that induces the positing of a qualitatively different principle of beginning, which can only occur if reason sets itself outside of itself.<sup>127</sup>

Furthermore, the will introduces an additional element into Schelling’s portrayal of experience that is not reducible to rational philosophy. In Schelling’s words: “The will is in fact not only a *potentia passiva*, but is also that which introduces into the realm of experience the most decisive *potentia activa* that is intimately related to the pure capacity to be” (SW XIII: 67).<sup>128</sup> When the will is in the state of a *potentia passiva*, Schelling notes, it may require “stimulation to become active” (SW XIII: 69)<sup>129</sup> (which, of course, would also occur in experience, not merely in thought). However, Schelling states that the will is “*potentia activa*” in those “who are capable of freely deciding and are able to start something on their own accord, to become the originator of a course of action” (SW XIII: 68).<sup>130</sup> The will accordingly introduces the possibility to act and decide in a way that is not merely calculative. Moreover, this primordial position of the will is not only to be found at the depths of individuality. For Schelling, it also marks the ultimate primordial act (the “actu acting being” (XI, 562)) of everything that is. As we will see, this ultimate act can be compared to Tengelyi’s positing of the foundational metaphysical fact

123 Matthews claims that the “exuberant nature” of the object of knowledge is a “force which serves as the attractive power that draws thought ‘outside itself,’ thereby liberating thought ‘from its necessary movement’ in the *a priori* sciences ... only this philosophy of ‘free thinking’ ... is creative and powerful enough to meet the challenge of actually making meaning within our individual lives.” Matthews, “Translator’s Introduction,” 28.

124 Courtine, *Extase de la Raison*, 308.

125 Markus Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos: Untersuchungen über Ontotheologie, Anthropologie und Selbstbewusstseinsgeschichte in Schellings Philosophie der Mythologie* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 14.

126 Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos*, 14.

127 The challenge at the jointure of the ecstasy of reason is to describe the relationship between the *individual* who exists and experiences the world and his or her *use* of reason. The ecstasy of reason is often described as a largely impersonal, almost mechanized process, but at its base there must be an individual who experiences and, within that experience, *wills* something more or other to that which *is* in *thought*. However, although this experience must be of an individual, the *articulation* of the moment of longing—this desiring—indeed, this *willing*, still requires systematic language, or the external concepts of reason.

128 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 135.

129 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 135.

130 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 135.



of the act of appearing in experience.

The common challenge to Kant which bridges Schelling and phenomenology concerns the problems with the former's exposition of possible experience.<sup>131</sup> As we have seen, the object of the philosophy of reason is reason itself, or the *essences* (not the existence) of things. The "environment" of these essences is Kant's "virtual world of possible experience."<sup>132</sup> Matthews clearly articulates that:

Possible experience, however, is not real experience, and while reason proves quite successful in differentiating itself within its own sphere of thinking, it is incapable of grounding that sphere, and worse, it is rendered catatonic when faced with articulating the dynamic facticity of real existence.<sup>133</sup>

Neither Schelling nor Tengelyi are satisfied with Kant's attempt to equate possible experience with real experience. Although Kant posits an abyss (*Abgrund*) of reason, Schelling implicitly criticizes that he does not articulate how this groundless ground could be the subject of a different type of knowledge. By reducing experience to the possibility of experience, Kant does not have a method (besides regulative ideals) to philosophically speculate on that which evades mere possibility. As shown above, he halts before the incomprehensibility of the abyss (*Abgrund*). Schelling's positive philosophy, on the other hand, has the resources to deal "with what is not capable of being comprehended *a priori*," for it turns the incomprehensible into the "comprehensible in God" (SW XIII: 165).

### Tengelyi's use of Richir to Critique Kant

Tengelyi, like Schelling, praises Kant's critique of the "old" metaphysics,<sup>134</sup> but takes issue with his notion of possible experience. For the latter task, Tengelyi

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131 Despite Schelling's appreciation of and reliance on Kant, there are numerous points of discordance between the two philosophers, the full exposition of which is beyond the scope of this essay. Firstly, as we have seen, in addition to the aforementioned critique of Kant's thing in itself, Schelling criticizes Kant's failure to pursue any sort of philosophy of the abyss (*Abgrund*) (or of that which necessarily exists as transcendent being), which would be other to his philosophy of reason. Secondly, Schelling's understanding of experience as the domain of the historical, a *posteriori* proof that the groundless ground could be God, is a position foreign to Kant. Furthermore, we should remember here that the identification between the "unprethinkable being" and God in Schelling is something that is "never conclusive but must remain open to falsification until the end of history." McGrath, "Still Doing Nature-Philosophy?" 124.

132 Matthews, "Translator's Introduction," 28.

133 Matthews, "Translator's Introduction," 28.

134 Tengelyi states that with Kant, metaphysics first truly becomes an "ongoing, unsettling *Problem*" ("ein anhaltend beunruhigendes *Problem*"). Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 13.

heavily relies on Marc Richir's critique of the "possibility of the possibilities" of experience in Kant.

Generally stated, Schelling prompts Richir to introduce something unsurmountable and irreconcilable into his genetic account of the structure of the phenomenological field.<sup>135</sup> He also inspires Richir's related claim that *experience* exceeds the restrictions of the ego and of conscious thought. This leads Richir to reconceptualize the phenomenon, and ultimately, to develop a genesis of the "structures" and "laws" of the domain of the unconditional and the unthinkable.<sup>136</sup> Florian Forestier explains that "Richir qualifies the 'original non-adherence' of existence to itself as the 'metaphysical fact' par excellence, which is also the condition of the possibility for any phenomenological undertaking."<sup>137</sup> Despite his analyses of structures, Richir refuses "any *a priori* stability of the phenomenological field," and thus is critical of Kant's conceptualization of the possibility of possibilities.<sup>138</sup>

The crux of Richir's Kant critique is that any context for the possibilities of experience "would always already be a holistic version of what Richir calls a 'symbolic institution.'"<sup>139</sup> Tengelyi appropriates this critique from Richir, for he is interested in "precisely that what *disturbs* such an institutionalized context, that what appears with a surplus of spontaneous sense, transcending the already inquired symbolic institutions."<sup>140</sup> Tengelyi's metaphysics, like Schelling's, provides room for the event, spontaneity, interruption and the unexpected in experience. He thus finds Kant's *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience too restricted, and is critical of Kant's reduction of experience to the subjective conditions of knowledge.<sup>141</sup> The critique of the "possibility of the

135 See Marc Richir, "Inconscient, nature et mythologie chez Schelling," in *Schelling et l'élan du Système de l'idéalisme transcendantal*, ed. Alexandra Roux and Miklos Vető (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 187.

136 Florian Forestier, "The phenomenon and the transcendental: Jean-Luc Marion, Marc Richir, and the issue of phenomenization," *Continental Philosophy Review* 45 (2012): 381-402, here 381-383.

137 Forestier, "The phenomenon and the transcendental," 394. The so-called "ground" of non-coherence of the world's phenomenologization is, like the "unprethinkable being," posited *a posteriori*. Forestier articulates that "Richir seeks to take nothing as originally given," and that his phenomenology is genetic "in the sense that it begins from the transcendental fiction of a field where almost nothing has been formed." Forestier, "The phenomenon and the transcendental," 396.

138 Furthermore, Richir's portrayal of phenomenological experience as an "experience of freedom" that entices us to go beyond the constraints of the concept in the "metaphysics of presence" links him to Schelling. See Marc Richir, *Phénoménologie et institution symbolique* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Million, 1988). Forestier initiates an analysis of the comparison of Richir and Schelling on this point in his *La phénoménologie génétique de Marc Richir* (Heidelberg, Berlin and New York: Springer, 2004), 197.

139 Römer, "From Kant," 130.

140 Römer, "From Kant," 130.

141 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 142: "Vom Gesichtspunkt der Phänomenologie aus bleibt bei Kant vor allem der Begriff einer 'Möglichkeit der Erfahrung' oder einer 'möglichen Erfahrung' zweideutig .... Sowohl Richir als auch Marion .... bestehen darauf, dass jeder Wandel in der

possibilities” of experience relies on a radicalization of the hitherto discussed distinction between existing reality and reason in the context of *experience*.

In the pre-critical period, Kant “tries to show that a necessary being must exist in order for there to be anything to think about.”<sup>142</sup> But, Tengelyi claims, the turn which occurs in the critical period is not because Kant wanted to show that *knowledge* depends on being. His goal was rather to show that the existence of a necessary being and the existence of God can only be equated with one another if being is unified in one idea, which Kant calls the idea of “the most real being.”<sup>143</sup> However, In *The Experience of Thought*, Richir shows that there is an error in transforming the distributive unity of the experience of reality into the unity of this “most real being.”<sup>144</sup> Following Richir, Tengelyi demonstrates that on the one side, Kant is critical of the metaphysical desire to make absolute claims about experience in a way that is helpful, but on the other side, he reduces experience to its cognitive *a priori* conditions.<sup>145</sup> Richir argues that for the “realization” of the total possibility of the possibilities of experience in Kant to actually occur, the whole of this possibility (as an *a priori* foundation) would have to first of all be objectified, and second of all be equated with reality.<sup>146</sup> But it is not a given that the totality of possibilities and reality are the same thing (hence the need for positive philosophy—a split between *a priori* possibility and the positing of the principle of acting being). Tengelyi reiterates the problematic sleight of hand behind this “realization” in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the “transformation of the possibilities of all things into the real conditions of their universal [*durchgängig*] determination”<sup>147</sup>

As should now be clear, Schelling, Richir and Tengelyi all refuse to reduce real being to *a priori* conditions, or to the total possibility of the

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Wirklichkeit neue Möglichkeiten erschließen kann, die über die Grenzen des Vorweggenommenen und überhaupt Vorhersehbareren hinausgehen. Auf den ersten Blick scheint Kants Vorstellung von der möglichen Erfahrung als einem ‘Vorrat des Stoffes,’ aus dem alle sachhaltigen Prädikate genommen werden, gerade diese Einsicht zu untermauern. Aber diese Vorstellung erweist sich am Ende doch als zweideutig, weil die Grenzen möglicher Erfahrung bei Kant durch subjektive Bedingungen der Erkenntnis bestimmt werden.”

142 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 160: “[Kant] versucht zu zeigen, dass ein notwendiges Wesen existieren muss, damit es überhaupt etwas zu denken gibt.”

143 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 160. “[Kant kommt] zur weiteren Einsicht .... dass die Existenz eines notwendigen Seienden nur dann mit der Existenz Gottes gleichgesetzt werden kann, wenn dieses Seiende nicht—distributiv—in der Erfahrung gesucht, sondern—kollektiv—in der Idee eines ‘allerrealsten Wesens’ zusammengefasst wird.”

144 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 137.

145 Römer, “From Kant,” 122.

146 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 136. “Richir [hebt] hervor, dass mit der Gesamtheit aller Möglichkeiten nichts mehr als eine bloße ‘Möglichkeit der Möglichkeiten’ gemeint sein kann.

Die Realisierung der gesamten Möglichkeit erfolgt dann, wenn diese Möglichkeit der Möglichkeiten—sozusagen eine Möglichkeit zweiter Ordnung—ihrerseits ‘zum Objekt gemacht’ und als eine eigenständige Wirklichkeit gesetzt wird.”

147 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 136. “Die ‘Erdichtung’ ergibt sich demnach aus der ‘Verwandlung der Möglichkeiten aller Dinge in reelle Bedingungen [...] ihrer durchgängigen Bestimmung.’ Das ist der genaue Sinn von ‘Realisierung’ in der Kritik der reinen Vernunft.”

possibilities of experience. Richir critiques the status of the “one all-encompassing experience” (*einige allbefassende Erfahrung*) in Kant, which is also the “context of a possible experience,” particularly in its position as the “epitome [*Inbegriff*] of all empirical reality.”<sup>148</sup> This “one all-encompassing experience” reduces experience to the predicates of the restricted “collection of all possible predicates.”<sup>149</sup> Tengelyi furthermore explains that by making the “pure I with its self-consciousness” into “most real being” (“*das allerrealste Wesen*”), Kant reduces real being to the conditions of thought of the finite human being. Tengelyi’s conclusion therefrom is that Kant’s own thought suffers from a certain “travestied” ontotheology.<sup>150</sup> In critical response to Kant, and under a significant influence of the works of Schelling, Heidegger and Husserl, Richir develops his unique approach to phenomenology in which he strives to give “phenomenological status to the ‘beyond meaning within meaning’”<sup>151</sup> The spirit of such a project can be compared with Schelling’s inauguration of an *a posteriori* method of philosophizing about the “indivisible remainder” or the groundless—(almost) predicateless—ground of being and existence.

### Tengelyi on Schelling’s Metaphysics of Contingency

Tengelyi dedicates an important subsection of *World and Infinity* specifically to Schelling, situating him as the crucial intermediary figure in the historical transition from the configuration of metaphysics as ontotheology and the beginning of phenomenological metaphysics (which has its origins in Husserl<sup>152</sup>). It should now be clear Schelling is a thinker of that which exceeds thought. Tengelyi thus praises Schelling’s late metaphysics (particularly the positive philosophy) in its task to grasp “reality that surpasses all thinking.”<sup>153</sup>

148 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 137. The key issue here is whether this “one all-encompassing reality” is ever really realized at all, or whether it remains on the level of possibility. Tengelyi further discusses that Kant wants a unity where there is only factual, scattered multiplicity. See Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 138

149 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 138: “Die Erfahrung kann uns mit keinem Prädikat bekanntmachen, das nicht immer schon in dieser Sammlung aller möglichen Prädikate enthalten wäre.”

150 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 142. “Aus diesen Überlegungen müssen wir folgern, dass in Kants transzendentelem Ansatz eine Spur travestierter Ontotheologie zurückbleibt.”

151 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 138 and Forestier, “The phenomenon and the transcendental,” 400. Tengelyi specifically highlights Richir’s interpretation of Schelling in *L’expérience du penser* to underscore the sharpness of Schelling’s critique of Kantian “transcendental ideals” and the problematic remnants of traditional ontotheology in post-Kantian thought in Germany. See Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 142-143.

152 Rudolf Boehm has as argued that it is unlikely that Husserl read Schelling. See Rudolf Boehm, *Vom Gesichtspunkt der Phänomenologie: Husserl-Studien* (The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 50, note 1.

153 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 144: “Der positiven Philosophie wird Schelling demgegenüber gerade die Aufgabe stellen, die ‘alles Denken übertreffende Wirklichkeit’ zu erfassen.”

As we have seen, Richir and Tengelyi seek to effectuate something quite similar, particularly in reference to experience, in their phenomenological approaches to metaphysics.

Tengelyi's subsection on Schelling in *World and Infinity* begins with a discussion of the shared notion of the abyss (*Abgrund*) as a necessary being Schelling and Kant,<sup>154</sup> and a discussion of Schelling's departure from Kant on the relation between reason and that which is beyond reason (which, as we have seen, in the end, results in the capability of reason to speculate about the groundless ground). Tengelyi also demonstrates how Schelling's late philosophy, unlike Hegel's, takes "into account the proper role of contingency as an essential element of what there is."<sup>155</sup> Schelling thus represents the gateway from the old, dogmatic metaphysical tradition towards a new critical "non-traditional metaphysics of contingent facticity," which Tengelyi develops.<sup>156</sup>

Tengelyi's interest in Schelling and Kant on the abyss (*Abgrund*) of reason is rooted in the thesis deep contingency implies. This abyss (*Abgrund*) presents the inescapable, "greatest trial [*Erprobung*] of reason—a true *épreuve de la contingence*"<sup>157</sup>; it presents the question of to what extent reason can or cannot ground itself. While Kant first posits the principle of the abyss (*Abgrund*), it is Schelling who highlights its relation to experience in a manner important for Tengelyi. As explained above, the groundless ground also presents a "fundamental—or rather abysmal—*experience* of contingency, an *experience* with the ultimate contingency of the world."<sup>158</sup> Such a dizzying, sublime experience in the face of reason's paralysis can prompt the will to will something external to reason itself.<sup>159</sup> This point in Schelling marks the beginning of a post-Kantian project, largely paralleled in Tengelyi's own work, which, on the

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154 Tengelyi's interest in the complex relationship between Schelling and Kant began very early in the former's philosophical career. Tengelyi began his "philosophical path" with two Hungarian books on Kant, and turned to Schelling when he did not find an adequate answer to the problem of evil in Kant. Römer suggests that the "insurmountable abyss between the finite and the infinite," which "also accounts for the historicity of thinking and a facticity that can never fully be mastered by thinking" is consistent thread throughout all of Tengelyi's philosophy, linking those early Kant-Schelling works to *World and Infinity*. Tengelyi thus wrote a book in Hungarian on Kant and Schelling called *Guilt as an Event of Destiny*. Römer, "From Kant," 120.

155 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 154.

156 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 154.

157 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 155: "In dieser Zusammengehörigkeit des notwendig Seienden—und das heißt zugleich: des grundlos Existierenden—mit der Zufälligkeit der Welt sieht [Schelling], genauso wie Kant, die größte Erprobung der Vernunft—eine wahre *épreuve de la contingence*."

158 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 155. "In der Besinnung auf das notwendige Wesen als den Träger aller Dinge drückt sich aber zugleich eine grundlegende—oder vielmehr abgründige—Kontingenzerfahrung, eine Erfahrung mit der letzthinnigen Zufälligkeit der Welt aus. Das ist der Grundzug der angeführten Zeilen, auf den Schelling in erster Linie achtet."

159 Tengelyi thus emphasizes Schelling's claim that that which merely exists "crushes everything that may derive from thought ... for thought is only concerned with possibility and potency" (SW XIII: 161), Schelling, *Grounding*, 202, Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 156.

one hand, continues “the legacy of Kant’s critique of reason,”<sup>160</sup> but on the other, entails a critical analysis of Kant’s treatment of that which is outside of reason’s possibilities. This prompts new, integrated analyses of experience, reality and existence, which reopens paths towards a non-ontotheological metaphysics.

Specifically, as an alternative to the prohibition on metaphysics, Tengelyi positively evaluates Schelling’s “unprethinkable being” as a new beginning to thought which *cannot* be identified with God *a priori*, and which therefore represents an alternative to Hegel.<sup>161</sup> For Schelling, *if* God exists, he exists necessarily (God is essentially characterized by his necessity). However just because God is a necessary being does not mean that God actually necessarily exists. The proof of God’s existence can rather only be gradually testified to by the human experience of history. Schelling’s “unprethinkable being,” as the late form of the groundless ground, is retrospectively posited as prior to logical being and existence, and thus itself maintains no relations of opposition or exclusion. While the “unprethinkable being” is necessary for the birth of all existing being, experience and thought, we can never achieve an adequate, non-falsifiable understanding of it, because thinking is always already founded within being.<sup>162</sup> The best we can say is that “unprethinkable being” is actuality or reality (*Wirklichkeit*) that precedes all possibility, and is thus necessary in order for there to be anything real at all. “What shall reach [actuality] [*Wirklichkeit*] must then also proceed directly from reality and, indeed, from *pure* actuality, thus, from the actuality that precedes all possibility” (SW XIII: 162).<sup>163</sup> All possibilities and their formal conditions thus depend contingently upon this “unprethinkable being.”

The “unprethinkable being” is the core of Schelling’s metaphysics of contingency, in which God is “free against being” (SW XI: 260).<sup>164</sup> The refusal to

160 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 156: Tengelyi here follows Axel Hutter’s claim in *Geschichtliche Vernunft: Die Weiterführung der Kantischen Vernunftkritik in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), that “Selbst in seiner Spätphilosophie führt er vielmehr das Erbe von Kants Vernunftkritik weiter.” Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 156.

161 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 164.

162 See Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 89.

163 Schelling, *The Grounding*, 203.

164 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 166: “Denn es geht Schelling in seiner positiven Philosophie keineswegs darum, Gott als dem nothwendige Existierenden« doch eine notwendige Existenz im Sinne des ontologischen Gottesbeweises zukommen zu lassen, sondern vielmehr darum, ihn als den ‘Herrn des Seyns’ zu begreifen, der ‘überseyend,’ ‘über jede Art des Seyns hinaus’ und ‘frei gegen das Seyn’ ist.” Although most of the Schelling referenced up to this point of the essay has been from Schelling’s Berlin period, which began in 1841, the true roots of his metaphysics of contingency can be located in his 1809 Freedom Essay. Here, Schelling exposes two different types of contingency: contingency in the everyday sense of accidental contingency, and also the deep metaphysical contingency of the system of reason. In explaining accidental contingency on the level of being, Schelling writes, “Contingency is impossible; it contests reason as well as the necessary unity of the whole; and, if freedom is to be saved by nothing other than the complete contingency of actions, then it is not to be saved at all.” Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 48-49. Schelling thus refuses that human actions would be themselves totally accidental or contingent (*zufällig*),

identify God with his concept *a priori* supports a radical notion of freedom<sup>165</sup>—freedom of God as the creator to reveal himself to being, and freedom for the individual to choose to will God and to engage in the construction of his *a posteriori* proof. Furthermore, there is “no *a priori* guarantee” that even God’s will will “reach its goal.”<sup>166</sup> This question is an open matter for history, and its answer cannot be deduced. Thus, the free relationship of God to being, and the individual to God, provides the conditions for the individual to make a true decision about whether God is “living” or “dead.”<sup>167</sup> Tengelyi explains that this introduces a dimension of facticity and of contingency in our consciousness of God and questions about him.<sup>168</sup>

In Schelling’s metaphysics of contingency, Tengelyi therefore finds a support for his own refusal to reduce the concept of reality to the *a priori* possibility of the possibilities of experience. Schelling, according to Tengelyi, rightfully acknowledges that the concept of the *totality* of reality has only the “status of a possibility of possibilities.” Thus, to view the possible as determining the actual is to concern oneself only with a *possible* being (*Seiendes*), which provides no “access to the real [*zum Wirklichen*].”<sup>169</sup> As we have seen, Richir develops this insight in a phenomenological key, focusing particularly on the problems of the restriction of experience to the possibility of possibilities in Kant.

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for the resulting conclusion would be that human beings are not responsible for themselves. The necessity of the decision and of action in the Freedom Essay represents a defence of moral responsibility in Schelling, which is consistent with the deep metaphysical contingency described in this essay.

165 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 167: “Die positive Philosophie ... ist von einem ‘Willen’ getragen. Aus einer anderen Stelle wird klar, worauf sich dieser Wille richtet: ‘Freiheit ist unser Höchstes, unsere Gottheit, diese wollen wir als letzte Ursache aller Dinge.’”

166 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 167: “Es besteht keine apriorische Garantie dafür, dass dieser Wille seinen Zweck erreicht. Der Beweis, dass der Herr des Seins dem unvordenklich Existierenden den Charakter blinder Zufälligkeit nehmen kann, muss *a posteriori* erbracht werden.”

167 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 168.

168 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 167-168: “Selbst wenn er da ist und selbst wenn sogar der aposteriorische Beweis, den die positive Philosophie zu erbringen hat, tatsächlich gelingt (was ja nach Schelling letztlich von der Geschichte selbst abhängt), bleibt unser Bewusstsein von Gott als dem Herrn des Seins an ‘Faktizität’ und ‘Kontingenz’ gebunden.” Furthermore, when we discern and explain historical processes, we are describing the relationships of the consciousness’s of peoples with God or the gods over time. Thus, Tengelyi claims that this historical project of the late Schelling is a “phenomenology of religious consciousness.” Schelling, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 167: “Schreibt [Schelling] doch keine bloße Religionsgeschichte, so deshalb, weil er die Erörterung des Geschichtsprozesses auf eine Phänomenologie des religiösen Bewusstseins und des erscheinenden Gottes gründet.”

169 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 159: “In seiner Spätphilosophie gelangt Schelling zur Einsicht, dass dem All der Realität notwendig nur der Status einer Möglichkeit der Möglichkeiten zukommt, und er zieht aus dieser Einsicht den Schluss, dass die *a priori* erfassten, im Gedanken vorweggenommenen, deshalb aber eben nur rein gedanklich umrissenen Möglichkeiten auch in ihrer Gesamtheit nur ein mögliches Seiendes bestimmen, ohne uns einen tatsächlichen Zugang zum Wirklichen zu verschaffen.”

### Tengelyi's Metaphysics of Contingent Originary Facts

Tengelyi's development of a phenomenological metaphysics of "originary contingent facts" (*zufällige Urtatsache*) in *World and Infinity* follows Schelling's method of ascertaining that which exists through a *posteriori* metaphysical claims that are open to revision. Furthermore, I have shown that Schelling's complex considerations of experience and its epistemological role on the positive philosophy serve as a forerunner to the critique of the limitations of Kant's treatment of experience by phenomenologists (notably Richir and Tengelyi) who aim to speculate about the nature and structures of the largely inaccessible, unconditioned condition of the phenomenological field. Such a project requires an understanding of experience as exceeding the limitations of thought or of the conscious experience of the I. Tengelyi's metaphysics thus takes the multifaceted "lifeworld experience," as the basis of phenomenology, to be a new guide and resource for metaphysics.<sup>170</sup>

It was explained above that for Schelling, *experience* is the source of the affirmation of "the fact *that*" reason's content exists (SW XIII: 61). Moreover, the goal set for the positive philosophy was to prove God as a "*res facti*," or matter of fact" (SW XIII: 128). Following Schelling, Tyler Tritten argues that the contingency of being "is a *factum brutum*, the fact that there is something rather than nothing."<sup>171</sup> In his 2017 *The Contingency of Necessity*, which is "Schellingian at heart," Tritten accordingly seeks to affirm God "as a matter of fact."<sup>172</sup> Schelling has thus instigated a methodology of the metaphysical fact in contemporary philosophy, which, along with Husserl's phenomenological metaphysics, plays in the background of Tengelyi's metaphysics, which proposes contingent facts that are at the basis of all experience. This project proceeds from Tengelyi's development of Husserl's insight<sup>173</sup> that a phenomenological metaphysics "does not search for the first causes and causes of beings as beings. Rather, it relies on certain basic facts from the outset."<sup>174</sup>

170 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 14: "Ich wende mich dem Problem der Metaphysik mit der Frage zu, ob nicht etwa die phänomenologische Tradition mit ihrem Rückgang auf die lebensweltliche Erfahrung eher in der Lage sei, hier Richtung zu weisen, als die analytische Philosophie."

171 Tritten, *The Contingency of Necessity*, 2.

172 Tritten, *The Contingency of Necessity*, 5.

173 Husserl, Tengelyi clarifies, never really developed his idea of phenomenological metaphysics. Rather, he merely sketches it out in published works, and in the unpublished texts works with the idea in a fragmentary fashion. See Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 15-16: "[Husserl] beschränkte sich darauf, sie in veröffentlichten Werken programmatisch zu entwerfen und in unveröffentlichten Forchungstexten fragmentarisch auszuarbeiten." It is noteworthy that Tengelyi here draws a parallel between Husserl's phenomenological metaphysics and Heidegger's proposition of a "metaontology" at the end of the 1920's, and its appropriation by Sartre in the 1940's.

174 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 14: "Zum nicht-traditionellen Charakter dieser Metaphysik gehört, dass sie nicht nach ersten Gründen und Ursachen des Seienden als Seienden forscht. Vielmehr stützt sie sich von vornherein auf gewisse *Urtatsachen*."



Tengelyi explains that Husserl first derives the necessity of a fact from the Cartesian *cogito*,<sup>175</sup> but then moves away from Cartesian subjectivism towards metaphysics. He transfers the significance of the necessity of the fact of the *cogito* to other originary facts (*Urtatsachen*), and acknowledges that this necessity *does not* exclude the supernatural or God. These facts, which are slotted into a framework of a metaphysics of “accidental facticity,” offer a primordial ground to eidetic consciousness. This point may be contentious to some phenomenologists, due to the aforementioned paradoxes in attempting to speculate on such a ground. However, the result of Husserl’s insight is the ability speak from the standpoint of experience about that which precedes the very structures *through which* we experience the lifeworld. Like Schelling’s “positive philosophy,” Tengelyi’s metaphysics is thus not an *a priori* science, but a science of the factual.<sup>176</sup> Instead of looking for the first causes of beings, it proposes *a posteriori* originary facts, which, like Schelling’s God as a *res facti*, are at once necessary in essence, but, *qua* their status as facts proposed from the standpoint of experience, contingent.<sup>177</sup>

It is important to note that the object of Tengelyi’s metaphysics is not being itself, but the *world*. The world has a uniqueness and antecedence (*Vorgängigkeit*), according to Tengelyi, and thus, that the I has a world becomes itself one of his four primordial, metaphysical “originary facts” (outlined below).<sup>178</sup> Even if it is contingent in its facticity, no experience or theory—including Gabriel’s<sup>179</sup>—can take the world we experience away from us. Furthermore, at the core of Tengelyi’s thesis of a phenomenological

175 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 15.

176 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 15: Phenomenological metaphysics can “keineswegs als eine apriorische Wissenschaft aufgefasst werden. Im Gegenteil, sie wird als eine Wissenschaft des Faktischen bestimmt.” Tengelyi describes the *necessity* of the fact, in the sense that that Husserl describes the *cogito* as necessary, but he transfers it this insight to other originary facts. Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 15.

177 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 15: “Allerdings schließt die ‘Notwendigkeit eines Faktums’ einen ‘Kern des Urzufälligen’ keineswegs aus. Aus der Analyse der Urtatsachen erwächst vielmehr eine Metaphysik ‘zufälliger Faktizität.’”

178 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 16.

179 Although Gabriel famously argues that the world does not exist, his restriction of existence to the possible, or to “fields of sense,” cannot extinguish our lived experience of and testament to the world. It has therefore been suggested that in spite of Gabriel’s reverence for Schelling, in the end, Gabriel is more of an idealist than he would care to admit under his brand of realism. McGrath, who argues that Gabriel substitutes human thinking in the place of God, accordingly writes that “Gabriel will not permit any speculation on the possibility of a real other to reflection—call it God, the good infinite or the Good beyond being. And it is Gabriel, not Schelling, who forbids this restitution of transcendence.” McGrath continues, “Gabriel never tells us by virtue of what privileged insight he is able to pronounce that there is no positively existing other to thought.” Sean J. McGrath, “On the Difference Between Schelling and Hegel,” in *Rethinking German Idealism*, ed. Sean J. McGrath and Joseph Carew (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 255. This leads McGrath to judge Gabriel as “another deflationary Hegelian, another advocate of a cynical foreclosure to the range of questioning, in short, a modern cynic.” McGrath, “Schelling and Hegel,” 256.

metaphysics is the idea that the “actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] of world is determined as a total expression of various unanimity tendencies.”<sup>180</sup> For Tengelyi, unifying tendencies are at the basis of all the categories of experience.<sup>181</sup>

Tengelyi’s originary facts are thus originary, necessary facts of our *experience* in a world. However, as stated, they must always remain open to the possibility of revision. Tengelyi claims that the most fundamental “contingent necessity” or originary fact on which all others depend is therefore experience itself, or more specifically, the event of the appearing in experience. The *event* of appearing in experience is a kind of groundless ground of all subsequent metaphysical facts, and can be compared with the originary pure act which proceeds all existing beings in Schelling. Experience (*Erfahrung*) for Tengelyi is therefore itself an unexpected event (*Widerfahrnis*)—“something in which we are engaged and that happens to us, often in surprising ways.”<sup>182</sup>

On top of the very primordial, most fundamental fact of experience, Tengelyi subsequently identifies four other contingent facts of experience. These facts “replace the idea of first causes from traditional metaphysics,” but cannot be deduced from any other origins or principles.<sup>183</sup> Tengelyi’s four originary, contingent-but-necessary, metaphysical facts (which have been formulated in English by Thomas Nenon) and are: (1) the *I* or ego of mineness “as a point of intersection with the world, but not as a traditional subject”<sup>184</sup> (2) that the *I* has a world which is a “horizon of all horizons that contains entities that transcend consciousness but are nonetheless accessible to experience,” (3) *intersubjectivity* (otherwise described as “intentional interweavement”<sup>185</sup>) and (4) *history*.

The ego considered in the first fact is not the Cartesian ego, or an *I* that is completely, consciously self-transparent to itself. Rather than placing the *I* in the controlling, driver’s seat of its own destiny, Tengelyi’s *I*, we are to remember, is the *I* of experience and action. He thus describes this *I* as having things that it *can* and things that it *does* (*Vermöglichkeiten*).<sup>186</sup> This *I* is a fact of experience, and it allows for the *I* to be responsible and embodied. It can therefore be linked to studies of Schelling as the first thinker of the unconscious *I*,<sup>187</sup> and Schelling’s portrayal of the relation between the freedom of the *I*, its character and responsibility in the Freedom Essay.

The second fact, or the fact of “having a world” (*Welthabe*), emphasizes that the *I* experiences the world as having certain “transcendent elements” that can be accessed but not exhausted by experience. In explaining that our

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180 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 16: “Die Wirklichkeit der Welt bestimmt sich als ein Gesamtausdruck verschiedener Einstimmigkeitstendenzen.”

181 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 16.

182 Thomas Nenon, “László Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*: Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik,” *Husserl Studies* 31 (2014): 143-149, at 146.

183 Römer, “From Kant,” 123.

184 Nenon, “László Tengelyi,” 145.

185 Römer, “From Kant,” 123.

186 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 184.

187 See McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit*.

experiences of objects occurs within the “open horizon” of infinite experiences,<sup>188</sup> Tengelyi picks up metontological insights from Heidegger.<sup>189</sup> Through this thesis of the I having a world, Tengelyi seems to suggest that we do not operate in a self-enclosed, systematic whole of nature, but rather live in a world of infinite transcendent possibilities which we can never “realize” completely.

The third fact describes the fact that we live and experience the world with others. From Husserl, Tengelyi explains the facticity that every self ‘intentionally’ bears the other, and thus describes it as an “inwardness of being-for-each-other as an intentional being-in-each-other” (*Innerlichkeit des Füreinanderseins als eines intentionalen Ineinandersein*). This fact could have far-reaching ethical and political consequences, particularly in relation to Schelling.<sup>190</sup>

Tengelyi’s fourth contingent fact of experience, namely history, might be the most important for further developing his metaphysical resonances with Schelling. Tengelyi’s fact of history entails a “historical teleology” which tends towards unity (*Einstimmigkeit*).<sup>191</sup> For Tengelyi, unifying tendencies teleologically work within experience. The first “tendency towards unity” (*Einstimmigkeitstendenz*) of experience (*Erfahrung*) is “the existence [*Wirklichkeit*] of the world as a global view of all the unifying tendencies, among which are space, time and causality.”<sup>192</sup> This tendency towards unity is the element of the world which allows us to make sense of it over time.

The late Schelling offers an intricate understanding of mythology and history as the unfolding of a narrative with specific turning points of change. This historical narrative develops towards a final unity of all beings. Tengelyi describes this aspect of Schelling’s project, as noted above, as the development of a “phenomenology of religious consciousness.”<sup>193</sup> Specifically, the late Schelling describes the end of history as the unification of the inner and outer lives of all human beings on earth in a single community.

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188 Nenon, “László Tengelyi,” 148.

189 This position is that metontological metaphysics is a metaphysics that “transcends beings in favor of the world.” Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 415.

190 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 185. It is worth noting here that the late Schelling emphasizes the distinction between the community and the state, the former of which describes beings who associate freely and righteously, whereas the latter ought to pass away. See SW XI: 516-572. A topic for further inquiry here is whether Tengelyi’s emphasis on intersubjectivity could have political resonances in Schelling’s preference for the community over the state.

191 Nenon, “László Tengelyi,” 145.

192 Römer, “From Kant,” 123.

193 Tengelyi, *Welt und Unendlichkeit*, 167.

### Ontology or Metaphysics?

This essay began with the goal of critically responding to contemporary realism’s claim that metaphysics is dead and phenomenology is naïve. Let us now revisit this challenge in view of Schelling and Tengelyi’s approaches to metaphysics.

Gabriel defines ontology as “the systematic investigation into the meaning of ‘existence,’”<sup>194</sup> and metaphysics as “a combination of (a) an account of reality versus appearance, and (b) a theory of totality ... [as] the investigation of the world as world.”<sup>195</sup> According to these definitions, a metaphysical project could still theoretically include an ontology (as an account of the possible meanings of existence).<sup>196</sup> Metaphysics, according to Gabriel, originates “in the desire to uncover reality as it is in itself, where this means reality independently of what we add to it by thinking about it.”<sup>197</sup> Metaphysics with ontology would thus be a description of the inaccessible foundations of reality beyond experience, but which would still provide an examination of the possible meaning of existence. This is exactly what Marc Richir sets out to do in reference to the phenomena, and Tengelyi in the development of a distinctly *phenomenological* metaphysics. If the premise of Schelling and Tengelyi’s metaphysical enterprises is the conditional statement that reality *could* be more than its appearance, and if so, we can speculate on that which exceeds appearances, then perhaps both could be described as doing an ontologically-inspired sceptical metaphysics. Specifically, the move from a critical appraisal of Kant’s analyses of experience and existence—which refuses to limit these to the structures and concepts through which it appears—to the *a posteriori* positing first principles, seems to be a shift from the critical examination of the meaning of existing (rational) being, i.e., ontology, to speculation concerning the reality beyond this being, i.e., metaphysics. The postulation of Schelling’s “unprethinkable being” and Tengelyi’s originary facts therefore represents a metaphysical, not an ontological, gesture.

Thus, insofar as both Schelling and Tengelyi’s projects systematically consider the relation of experience to both the question of existence and

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194 Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 5. It is noteworthy that in Gabriel’s definition of ontology, he focuses on the *meaning* of existence, rather than existence itself. As should be now evident, Schelling is interested in existence itself, as the meaning of existence is constantly being re-evaluated and reinterpreted from the perspective of the futural, i.e. revelation. Its full meaning has not yet been disclosed.

195 Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 6.

196 The close relation between metaphysics and ontology is partially exemplified in Gabriel’s own description of his ontological position as “*meta-metaphysical nihilism*.” This is perhaps best exemplified in his famous claim that the world does not exist. Based on this premise, he holds that “metaphysics” itself “literally talks about nothing, that there is no object or domain it refers to.” Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 7. However, one could question whether this claim itself *about* metaphysics is metaphysical in virtue of what it denies (i.e., the existence of the world).

197 Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 6.

contingent but necessary first principles, their work can be considered *metaphysical*. By working through the history of philosophy to demonstrate that metaphysics cannot be reduced to ontotheology, they both methodologically separate the philosophy of reason from the philosophy of existence. This allows them to propose facts based on experience which remain open to revision based on *a posteriori* occurrences, events or discoveries.

Tengelyi, relying on Schelling, Husserl and Richir, has furthered the case for the contemporary relevance of phenomenology<sup>198</sup> by reconsidering how experience in the “lifeworld” can produce a new methodology of establishing the foundations of a metaphysical system. This presents a strong opposition to the mischaracterization of phenomenology as a highly relativist investigation of consciousness experience, as described at the outset of this piece.

In the end, questions of epistemology, or what we can know, draw the lines between ontology and metaphysics. The complicated relationship between epistemology and metaphysics, mediated by experience, is why Kant was such an important figure for the investigation of this essay. Schelling, as we have seen, distinguishes two types of knowledge attainable through contrasting methodologies: the knowledge of “negative” philosophy (the philosophy of reason), which logically deduces, and the knowledge of “positive” philosophy (the philosophy of revelation and history) which abductively explains. This distinction implies that no *a priori*, rational, philosophical system (including Schelling’s own *Nature-Philosophy* and *System of Identity*) can encapsulate the whole of existence within its concepts. But it is the decision of the individual thinker—who lives, experiences and wills—whether they want to engage in the second type of knowing, which is not ontotheological or dogmatic, but rather free and abductive. While we cannot attain *certainty* of the claims we make about existence beyond the concept, we can nevertheless present proofs, hypothetical explanations, competing *rational* arguments and contingent facts, which compose the dynamic foundation of our experience of the world. These then provide a different type of knowledge than that which is deduced by rational philosophy—a knowledge which is metaphysical and historical, but not absolute. Thus, the paralysis and silence of reason when it reaches its limits in

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198 Gabriel hints at an affinity between his own ontological project (constructing the fields of sense in which we have access to the world) and phenomenology. He writes, “Even if we are somehow struck by a deep illusion ... we are nevertheless confronted with a world to which we have immediate access.” Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 16. Gabriel shares with phenomenology an acknowledgment of “epistemic intermediaries” between our perceptions and how things themselves are, and that these interfaces both truly exist and contribute to the meaning of the existence of that which they mediate. Thus, Gabriel maintains that our experience of the world in appearances is a real confrontation, but that world itself which is confronting us does not itself exist. Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 14. Gabriel’s issue with approaches like Schelling’s is, he maintains, that they are “more interested in believing that everything deep down completely differs from the way it appears to us (including ourselves)” than in “how things appear to us.” Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 126. For Gabriel, the world is all there is, but at the same time, for him, this world *itself* is not real (even if the structures and fields in which we describe them are).

fact opens the possibility of making a free decision to speak about metaphysics once again in a new key.