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The Method and Structure of Schelling's Late Philosophy

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The period of Schelling's final mature philosophy started with his appointment to Berlin (1840), where he undertook a profound revision of his *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation* (which he still considered to be purely "positive" during his time in Munich). The chief concern of the later Schelling is a philosophically legitimate knowledge, that is, a knowledge established under the conditions of the Kantian critique, of the *actuality* of a first principle of things, a principle the tradition referred to as "God" and recent philosophies up until that time as "the absolute."

Before Schelling's latest period, philosophy—including Schelling's own philosophy—proceeded in *three paths* towards one goal of metaphysical knowledge, none of which, however, fully overcame the Kantian critique or led to possible knowledge of the real:

1. As a practical postulate of classic but now critically obsolete metaphysical certainties;
2. As speculative ways for mobilizing internal structures of reason itself (e.g., Schelling's intellectual intuition of absolute identity or Hegel's theory of the speculative proposition);
3. As (pace Kant) a critically purified way to legitimately connect the upshot of the cosmological argument, i.e., the proof of an *ens necessarium* of a completely unknown kind, with the goal of the ontological argument, that is, a rich concept of God (*ens realissimum*).

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Schelling's new and different path can be described as a strategy of "*divide et impera*" of philosophical thinking itself. As long as philosophical thinking undertakes to bring the principle to knowledge as a factual actuality in *one* go, it *must* fail according to the standards of the critique. However, if philosophy splits itself in two consistently different movements of thought, which are not connected by *inner* coherency or logic, but only through the *external* circumstances of those who entertain these lines of thought, philosophy can win back a rational claim to knowledge regarding the factual actuality of the principle in question and can defend itself in every aspect against the Kantian critique. These essentially different movements of thought are Schelling's "negative philosophy" on the one hand and his "positive philosophy" on the other.

Schelling's Fundamental Idea

The fundamental idea in Schelling's late period is that, although our reason is not equipped to capture in conceptual knowledge that which we assume in religious worship (which would correspond to the second path mentioned above), there is, rather, another way, a certain kind of thinking that is, in principle, not averse to the intentions of religion. This approach would be capable of integrating the achievements and demands of pure reason in such a way that first, there would be no obvious incompatibility between knowledge that is gained through pure rationality and the intention of religion, and, second, the results of pure rational thinking could be applied, in a methodological and target-oriented way, for the promising endeavor of collecting positive knowledge about the focal point of all religious worshipping. In its entirety, the late Schelling describes this turned about procedure (similar to a glove turned inside out) by which reason and the intention of religion can act in concert in the project of "philosophical religion."²

"Philosophical religion," which might initially appear as a willful oxymoron, is based upon factually unifying two different sorts of operations or movements of thought. These movements, i.e., the negative or purely rational philosophy on the one hand, and the positive philosophy of mythology and revelation on the other, are distinct from each other in terms of their internal, that is, conceptual or inferential consequences. The philosophy of mythology and revelation comprises all former and current variations of human religion and reveals their shared orientation towards *one and the same* divine source of actuality to which they all supposedly have a real relation. Negative philosophy systematically isolated a conceivable principle of all actuality

2 Cf. SW XI: 247; 250; SW XI: 255; 258; 267; 386; 568f.; SW XIII: 193; Schelling's Literary Testament from February 1853, published by Horst Fuhrmans under the title "Dokumente zur Schellingforschung IV: Schellings Verfügung über seinen literarischen Nachlass," *Kant-Studien* 51 (1959/60, 14-26, hereafter *Nachlassverfügung*), 16. I attempt to explain this key concept from Schelling's late philosophy through eight theses in my paper "Was heißt 'philosophische Religion'?", in *Religion und Religionen im Deutschen Idealismus*, ed. Friedrich Hermanni, Burkhard Nonnenmacher, and Friedrike Schick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 425-445.

from everything else that is possible to conceptualize through purely rational thought, while, at the same time and necessarily, *excluding* conceptual, factual knowledge of such a principle from the realm of reason. Hence, this unification takes place, *if* at all, not in the form of a philosophy, that is, a rational and conceptual development and consistent merging of thoughts, but in the form of a particular *religion*, namely, philosophical *religion*. All religion, however, including its inherent turn towards its focal point, is an *external* life praxis of thinking human beings (a Wittgensteinian ‘form of life’ so to speak), not the conceptualization of an idea that is merely the *inner content* of the thoughts humans nurture.

The relation to God or to the so-called absolute in the unification of both movements of thought will no longer be an ideal relation or one that is mediated by a consistent thought process, and therefore no longer a relation of consciousness constituted by its conceptual content, but a *real relation* that God or the sought-after principle of actuality has to all actually existing religions to which humans profess or have professed.³ For this reason, it is possible to specify the question about a problematic *factuality* of God or the absolute as a question that is, at least in principle, open to rational knowledge, without having to conceptually demonstrate the completeness of this knowledge. This approach is similar to the way we may consider positive objects of physics or any other empirical science to be, in principle, rationally knowable, without requiring a comprehensive and complete physical science. The question is then not one about the current status of our rational knowledge of these matters, but rather a question of how the being of the objects of our knowledge relates to our own existence. In physics, we ourselves belong to the same sphere of entities of which we have physical knowledge.⁴ That is why, for instance, ancient “physics”—say Aristotelian or Platonic—could be about *strictly* the *same* realities (water, fire, air, and so on) as our contemporary physics of elementary particles. Similarly, as Schelling attempts to demonstrate in his positive philosophy, we belong, in a way that is consistent with the application of rational and coherent concepts, to the same sphere of entities that can stand in a real relation to what the religions of humanity *as well* as all philosophical thinking have always meant to describe by the notion of “God” or “the absolute.”

3 See my above-mentioned paper “Was heißt ‘*philosophische Religion*?’” (at 429-432) for a detailed explanation of how this supposed “real relation” between God and human consciousness, as Schelling describes it, is to be understood.

4 Obviously, this “real relation” need not be manifest as what we commonly refer to as “empirical.” A comparable example would be the “real relation” between us and extra-terrestrial intelligent living beings, if such beings exist. This relation would hold whether we have empirical evidence of their existence or not.



In modern expression, “God” or the “absolute” are *rigid designators*⁵ of that actuality which is claimed to have a real relation to us.⁶ This actuality has been understood or characterized differently by all religions and the respective concepts of rational philosophy. That this is actually the case (and not rather *not* the case) is a philosophical *hypothesis* of the late Schelling, one which he examined and successively demonstrated through the procedural unification of negative and positive philosophy.

The project of a “philosophical religion,” then, is *philosophical* because it applies a purely rational approach to show that first, reason, based on its internal logical consistency (that is, *qua* negative philosophy) allows for isolating a principle as a limiting concept, whose content and factual givenness cannot be grasped or known by reason itself; and, second, that a reason that prohibits the isolation of such a concept would be an artificially constricted reason, a reason that falls short of reason’s potential.

The same project (i.e., that of ‘philosophical religion’) is *also* specifically oriented towards *religion* because a rationally adequate positive philosophy shows, *firstly*, that behind *all* religions and mythologies of humanity there can be, if at all, only *one* God, and if this God existed, these religions and mythologies (or rather, their followers) would all have a *real* relation with it. *Secondly*, these religions stand in a historical order, which is vectorially oriented towards an ever more adequate revelation or self-explication of this one God to human consciousness. *Thirdly*, in view of a rational examination and evaluation of all evidence that can be extracted from the historically available material and the standard of pure rationality already achieved, the hypothesis concerning the factual existence of the one self-revealing God is to be deemed more probable and in agreement with reason than the opposite

5 Saul Kripke coined this term in his essay *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). For my purposes, I refer to a more recent paper by Kripke, entitled “Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities,” in his *Philosophical Troubles: Collected Papers*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52-74. In this paper, Kripke challenges the claim (often based on his own notion of a rigid designator) that a given name, i.e., a rigid designator, actually designates an existing individual. The basis for this challenge is what Kripke calls the “pretense principle” (p. 58). Namely, that for any condition names must fulfil to constitute a reference to a real individual, one could simply pretend these conditions to be fulfilled. Therefore, according to Kripke, the question is not *how* can there be empty names? “On the contrary, one has virtually *got* to have empty names because given any theory of reference—given any theory of how the conditions of reference are fulfilled—one can surely *pretend* that these conditions are fulfilled when in fact they are not.” Kripke, “Vacuous Names,” 60.

6 There is, of course, the ineradicable possibility that such claims might be false or empty. A person who is a parent to only daughters could name their never begotten son ‘Peter’ and say things like ‘I’m playing with Peter’ or ‘Peter is keeping goal’ etc. These propositions would be the same as propositions uttered by ancient scientists about ether, e.g., ‘ether evenly fills the space between the spheres of the stars’, and so on.

hypothesis of the non-existence of God or the absolute.⁷

Obviously, an exhaustively enlightened thinking which would hold these three positions would not itself be a religion only by asserting them. It is only a religion insofar as each person who takes on these positions turns towards the one God of all religions in religious worship as well. Reason, in the negative as well as in the positive form, can therefore never incorporate that which religion makes accessible to the human person. In its fullest extent, however, reason can very well be imbedded in what religion makes accessible to the human person.

The Structure of Schelling's Last System

The systematic parts that belong to Schelling's last system and their proper arrangement are specified beyond any suspicion of falsification or faulty compilation in two independent sources.⁸ First, we have Schelling's dictation of the order of the parts of his last philosophy that Schelling's son, Paul, took down from his father in 1852. K.F.A., Schelling's son responsible for the edition of the complete works, enclosed this dictation as a system *program* in a letter to Waitz from January 12th 1855. Second, there is Schelling's written will from February 1853 (*Nachlassverfügung*). According to both sources, the last system consists of five parts:

1. The *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (SW XI: 1-252);
2. *The Philosophical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, that is, the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy* (SW XI: 253-572);
3. The lectures on *Monothetism* (SW XII: 1-131);

⁷ Traditionally, philosophies of the absolute (as we find them in Spinoza, Hegel, or even in the early Schelling) have been conceptualized in such a way that the concepts employed for describing non-absolute reality already imply the concept of the absolute. Since we assume these concepts to be valid for non-absolute reality, we are inclined to assume that, based on the inferentially necessary connection between these concepts, we can ascribe the same status of reality or existence to the concept of the absolute. In other words, such philosophies tacitly import, as it were, the absolute in their use of concepts for describing non-absolute reality. They are inflated conceptual tautologies and describe reality by merely unfolding the internal relation between these concepts. In this sense, they are under an illusion: the absolute in such philosophies is merely a conceptual strategy of immunization against the suspicion that what religion calls "God" might not exist.

⁸ The systematic structure of Schelling's late philosophy is one of the most intricate problems of research in this field, since Schelling's son K.F.A., in his role as editor, has fallen under suspicion of deviating from the instructions specified by Schelling in his will and compiled and/or inserted additional text in individual passages at his own discretion (see e.g., Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, SW XI: 553n.). See the discussion of this problem in Anna-Lena Müller-Bergen, "Karl Friedrich August Schelling und die 'Feder des seligen Vaters.' Editions-geschichte und Systemarchitektur der zweiten Abteilung von F.W.J. Schellings Sämtlichen Werken," *Internationales Jahrbuch für Editions-wissenschaft* 21 (2007): 110-132.



4. The “actual development” of the *Philosophy of Mythology* (SW XII: 133-674);
5. The two parts of the *Philosophy of Revelation* (SW XIII: 175-530; SW 14: 1-334) without the *Berlin Introduction* (*The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, SW XIII: 1-174).

Taken together, these five parts should make possible the systematic goal of a previously nonexistent “philosophical religion.”¹⁰ In his will, Schelling characterizes the second part explicitly as “negative philosophy,” distinguishing it from a positive philosophy that begins with the actual development of *The Philosophy of Mythology* (that is, the fourth part). The *Monotheism* treatise constitutes a transition between negative and positive philosophy, and, in terms of its methodology, clearly follows the *Historical-Critical Introduction*. Both are not *philosophical* conceptual analyses in the strict sense, but rather trace certain historical concepts (that of mythology or of monotheism respectively) in their internal presuppositions, and thereby explicate “analytically,” but not synthetically or in the form of a theory, a gradual philosophical systematization of the relevant facts.

In the late systematic context, these lectures on *Monotheism*, which had previously been an introductory part within the positive Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation,¹¹ become a relatively independent treatise which represents the “transition” to the “actual development” of positive philosophy; this “transition” was not needed in the Munich versions of the Philosophy of Mythology, since these versions did not possess a self-contained negative or purely rational philosophy as the philosophical justification for the undertaking of a positive philosophy. Without the particular kind of antipodal philosophy there can be no “transition” to a movement of thought that in turn is of a different kind than its antipode.

Considered closely, it is precisely the analysis of “monotheism” that is suited to bridge the gap between negative and positive philosophy because, according to Schelling, “monotheism” is a defining concept from a *philosophical* perspective referring to pure reason *as well as* for all *religions* and mythologies (at least for those that are divine hierarchies), but whose true meaning is often left obscure (see *Monotheism*, SW XII: 8). To accept this concept as an ubiquitous fact, that is, as subsisting in all human thinking concerning religion, and to carve out its true meaning through “analysis”¹² of the concept, would be to pursue the kind of thought procedure that starts out from a purely *factual finding* which characterizes Schelling’s positive philosophy in general. Only the apparently irrefutable implications of a factum that

9 See Schelling, *Nachlassverfügung*, 16, and cf. SW XII: 131.

10 Schelling, *Nachlassverfügung*, 16.

11 Cf. Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992), 95, and the following lectures 16 to 21.

12 Cf. SW XII: 8: “We now come back to our previous (analytic) method of investigation.”

has been positively diagnosed in its meaning and is then further analyzed enable us to arrive at and perhaps verify plausible hypotheses concerning the background of the development and the true structures of the actuality to which we ourselves belong.

According to Schelling, when it comes to the “actual development” of such a background structure of our own existence in positive philosophy, it is necessary to systematically locate the developmental stage of a philosophy of mythology and thus of the “natural” religion of humans (as Schelling calls it) *before* the stage of a philosophy of revelation (this is precisely what Schelling’s son K.F.A. found so confusing during the edition of his father’s late works). Consequently, even Christian revealed religion, for example, which defines itself in viewing mythology as irreligion, must be far from delivering, in philosophical terms, the true unification point of the religious development of humanity and of reason independent from God together with religion as a real relation to God.

There are two additional important details that Schelling emphasizes in the same context. First, a philosophical introduction to the Philosophy of Revelation such as Schelling presented several times in Berlin *does not* belong to the scope of his latest system as it was intended to be published. Rather, as Schelling emphasizes in his will, the method by which the “principles (-A, +A, ±A) are *deduced from God*” that he lays out in his Berlin lectures of 1841/42 no longer corresponds to “the more correct” procedure he proposes and demonstrates in detail in the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*, and for which the short treatise “On the Source of the Eternal Truths” (SW XI: 575-590)¹³ contains an “excellent” justification.¹⁴

This means nothing more and nothing less than that Schelling himself excluded the most consulted text in his late philosophy, the one considered the most helpful to obtain a better understanding of his thought system—the so called *Berlin Introduction*¹⁵—from the system of his latest philosophy since he no longer considered the philosophical method it recommended to be correct. As long as this method of positive philosophy that had now come under criticism remained valid in Schelling’s system, it was possible and mandatory to *tie* the train of thought of positive philosophy to the end of negative philosophy or the *Presentation of the Purely*

13 Schelling, *Nachlassverfügung*, 17. This methodological remark refers directly to the first Berlin lecture of the entire series of lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation in 1841/42 which was illegitimately published by H.E.G. Paulus (F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 146; 156; 162-168. However, it also pertains to the 7th and 8th lectures of the later Berlin Introduction or *The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), (cf. esp. 199-208; SW XIII: 157-170) and consequently to the manner in which Schelling sought to demonstrate that the pure *necessario existens* also possesses three potencies, which conceptually represent all possible things. This specific conception of the *necessario existens* was the main hypothesis to be developed and made evident in the Philosophy of Revelation. Giving up this methodological approach right at the beginning means to forfeit what has been described by Schelling in earlier versions of his work as a pivotal procedure.

14 Schelling, *Nachlassverfügung*, 17.

15 Schelling, *The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy*, SW XIII: 3-174.

Rational Philosophy.¹⁶ With the abandonment of this method, i.e., the deduction of potencies or “principles ($-A$, $+A$, $\pm A$)” from the *unprethinkable* actuality of God, the necessity for directly connecting both trains of thought lapses as well.

Secondly, according to the new arrangement of the five parts specified in the very late original sources mentioned above, a direct connection of the positive to the negative philosophy is no longer needed or intended. Instead, the treatise on Monotheism (and, still before that, the 1850 “On the Source of the Eternal Truths,” which, although systematically detached from the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*, belongs according to Schelling, to negative philosophy¹⁷) must serve as the transition to the actual development of the positive philosophy. This new transition has a completely different configuration in terms of conceptual possibilities than the previous deduction of “principles” from the necessary and unprethinkable existent.

Clearly, making room for the *possibility* of obtaining cognitive access to anything at all is, as in all negative philosophy, not a “derivation” of any sort that begins a new development of thought from a presupposed starting point, or one that has been accepted as justified by other reasons. Rather, everything that might be predicated truthfully of the one God emerges from the analysis of a diagnosed and *factual* finding, which is precisely what the concept of “monotheism” is. This new method indicates a much more indirect and cautious way of transition to positive philosophy, which is, without doubt, “demanded” by the end of the negative philosophy. In this way, the radical difference between both movements of thought is no longer undermined by a direct connection of the second philosophy to the end of the first.

On the Systematic Connection Between the Five Parts: The Outer Brackets

On the basis of the previous explanations, one might assume that the newly established five parts lack any systematic connection and that they rather constitute a mere sequence of unconnected texts. However, one remark in Schelling’s will, and a related one in the opening of the *Monotheism* treatise, explicitly contradict such an assumption. In his will Schelling states the following:

In the last Lecture (X) of the previous part [i.e. of the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*] religion is divided into (1) natural (i.e. mythological) religion; (2) revealed religion, and (3) philosophical religion, which should comprehend the other two, but does *not exist*, because the philosophy does not exist that would be able to comprehend these (the positive one). This is taken as the occasion to present the whole, merely

16 Cf. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, SW XIII: 159-162.

17 Cf. the editor’s preface to *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, SW XIII, p. viii f.

rational or negative philosophy, in order to show how it ultimately results in the demand for the positive philosophy.¹⁸

This is precisely what has been affirmed from the outset without any further proof, namely, that it is *religion*, in its manifold manifestations, and *not* philosophy or a conceptual context, which provides the bracket and thus the connection between the parts of the system. Indeed, the three different kinds of religion are such that one of them “really comprises” the other two, that is, in its own real quality it includes the others *realiter*. Such inclusion or real comprehension is always given where an order of a higher level presupposes a hierarchical incorporation of lower levels as a basis for its own elevation. For example, ordinal numbers are arranged in such a way that each higher number “really comprises in itself” any previous numbers. Thus provided such a religion of a clearly “higher” level of development really existed, it could be stated that it comprehended, at least potentially, in itself, in a real way, the previous levels, i.e., comprised them hierarchically. So far it has become clear *how*, in such a case, a bracketing and unification of the individual parts of the system would come about.

However, as Schelling emphasizes, at this point (at the end of the *Historical-Critical Introduction*), philosophical religion does “not exist” and can therefore not function as the bracket of the whole. Its existence as a higher level religion is required if we are to understand or comprehend in what sense it is at all possible for one religion to be of a higher level than another. To understand what this could mean and why there are higher levels of religion at all, we would require, as Schelling further stresses, a kind of philosophy that is different from all existing philosophy, namely, a kind of philosophy that is able to clarify once and for all, in what sense God, or the principle of all actuality, is disclosed to consciousness more clearly and adequately in one particular religion than in another, which could therefore be considered of a lower level. However, *this* kind of philosophy, that does not only consider itself capable of such a claim but also answers and justifies it in a comprehensible way, this kind of philosophy not only does *not* exist but is also exposed to severe objections on behalf of an enlightened and critically instructed reason from the outset.

In any case, we can see now how Schelling places within the overall bracket of religion an inner bracket of philosophical conceptual thinking: a higher level religion could only be practiced if one could understand and recognize as justified its superiority over previous stages of religion. And this in turn requires a *positive* philosophy. A new kind of religion could only *really* comprehend all the others under the condition that a new kind of philosophy comprehends the existing religions *ideally*. Yet a convincingly justified higher ranking of a religion vis-à-vis any other requires a religiously neutral benchmark according to which one religion is deemed to be superior or more advanced than the another. One central task of Schelling’s positive philosophy is therefore to uncover this benchmark hidden in the collected historical materials of mythology

18 Schelling, *Nachlassverfügung*, 16.



and revelation. Schelling does indeed find and dissects this benchmark (at least that is what he affirms). He characterizes it as the unavoidable and historically objective “theogonic process in human consciousness.”¹⁹ This benchmark is not only neutral against any particular religion because it is diagnosed objectively and coherently in the historical material. It is also neutral because it objectively pertains to that which is shared by different existing religions, even though this commonality as well as the development of the process is, and can only be, in human consciousness (and not in God himself).²⁰ This means that each religion adequately *understands* itself only when it can correctly determine its own place within the objective theogonic process in human consciousness. This is not to say, however, that a religion is only a *religion* in the complete sense if it sufficiently *understands* itself. Every religious praxis and form of addressing oneself towards divinity is independent of conceptual understanding.

The Inner Bracket

The fulfillment of the unifying condition for the five parts of the system stated above (namely, the existence of a positive philosophy able to ideally comprehend existing religions) faces great obstacles, as I said before. Not only because religion always had to guard itself from philosophy’s ambition to comprehend it; and because, conversely, philosophy believes, as several examples show, that it can replace what religion offers in a naïve way to human life through enlightened concepts; or because each and every religion defends itself with the same reason against being seen as a more rudimentary level of religion than another; but also and finally because reason, which recognizes itself as autonomous, does not bow down to any external authority. For these reasons, Schelling must again insert an even smaller bracket as the philosophical condition for the possible bracketing of his systematic parts by religion itself. All that to which reason refers in its justified claims remains unaffected in its autonomy and leads a purely rational philosophy to the point of recognizing its own insufficiency regarding that which is the focal point of religion and which must remain opaque to reason as long as there is no positive philosophy to explain it. This line of reasoning, taken this far, definitely represents a *threat* to autonomous reason. It finds itself inevitably compelled to bring something into the scope of its attention that is of a kind that is nonidentical to any of its ideas and whose problematic actuality cannot be decided through any epistemological efforts available to reason. In this sense, according to Schelling, it must be first shown that the “demand of positive philosophy” emerges

19 See, e.g., Schelling, *Der Monotheismus*, SW XII: 10; 108; 128 ff.

20 This shared focus of all the real religions is meant to be the “unique” God, i.e., “der eine Gott, der seines Gleichen nicht hat.” Schelling, *Der Monotheismus*, SW XII: 98; cf. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 115; 132; SW XI: 164; 190. This focal point is captured in the historical concept of monotheism (cf. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 173; SW XI: 197; 249ff.).

from the exhausted negative philosophical development of autonomous reason itself.²¹

Where this inner bracket of a purely rational philosophy in relation to a positive philosophy would apply, the positive philosophy would make it comprehensible to rank one religion higher than the other, without having to fear any of the still valid rational objections. In this way, it would be possible for *philosophical* religion to really comprehend all other religions, which would allow for the parts of the system to be bracketed together into one system, at least in one direction, based on their own and specifically different knowledge and contextualizing capacities.

In the opposite direction, however, the question remains: whence originate these claims, raised by pure reason, which is aware of its autonomy, and which can only be legitimately appeased through the exhaustion of a purely rational philosophy? It seems that, from this other direction, ultimately, it is not *religion* that realizes the bracketing of both sides of the system, but rather reason with its inherent critical impetus. Schelling's will is silent on this point. However, the *Philosophical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* makes it sufficiently clear that it was the second type of existing religions, the religion of revelation in its Christian and especially in its reformed version, that had most "contributed" to the liberation of reason from all religious authorities.²² Schelling writes:

Through an unstoppable progress, to which Christianity itself contributed, after consciousness had become independent from the church, it also had to become independent from revelation itself, and brought out of an unfree knowledge in which it still remained regarding revelation, enabled to a thinking that is completely free against revelation and of course initially free of knowledge (SW XI: 260).²³

This state of freed reason stripped of knowledge brings to mind Descartes' aim to break free from the chains of so called "natural" knowledge and metaphysics and lead reason out of itself to a kind of fully universally valid science in virtue of its own autonomy (SW XI: 267).²⁴ Schelling affirms this step of discovering an autonomous and fully universally valid knowledge of reason, which is liberated from all religion, be it mythological or revealed, as "a new step in the realization of free religion, a religion that we have previously called the philosophical one" (SWXI, 267).²⁵ A reason that obtains knowledge completely freed from all concerns with religion or God is thus ultimately an *offspring* of religious consciousness as well as the

21 Schelling, *Nachlassverfügung*, 16.

22 See Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, SW XI: 260; 266.

23 Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, SW XI: 260.

24 Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, SW XI: 267.

25 Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, SW XI: 267.

root of a free and therefore philosophical religion. So it is also from the other direction that religion—not philosophy—brackets the whole five-part system.

The Method of Positive Philosophy

It has already been stressed that the procedure of positive philosophy ceased to be one of a *deduction* from an initial (if only hypothetical) presupposition²⁶ (as was still the case in the Munich lectures and in the beginning of the Berlin period) and became one of *ascertaining* a close to undeniable *finding* which then serves as the starting point for constructing structural and explanatory *hypotheses* concerning the investigated field of actuality.²⁷ These hypotheses must be shown to be adequate through further testing of the material.²⁸

It could be said that this procedure is precisely the one of positive science, as it was in vogue in Berlin at the time. The examined “material” are the historical documents of all mythology and actual revealed religions of humanity; the “real relation” between human consciousness as such and the being referred to by the religiously used name, or rigid designator, “God” (or “deity” or “the absolute”), is the field of actuality considered in a scientifically positive way. As already stated, this does not exclude the possibility that, *ontologically* speaking, this comes to nothing in the end. Otherwise Schelling could not assert that he wants to carry out an empirical examination, which does not lead to a definitive conclusion, just as empirical positive sciences such as physics do not reach a definitive conclusion. Admittedly, there is less doubt about the truth of physics capturing and explaining physical actuality than in the field of investigation to which Schelling’s positive philosophy applies. The decisive change of thought that is required if philosophy is to proceed “positively” in this manner consists in refraining from presupposing a concept or certain ideas *in advance*, working out their implications and asking whether they can assumed to be

26 This not only applies to the “derivation of the principles” or potencies from God as the unprethinkable *necessario existens* explained above, but also to the derivation of all the main historical phases and formations in which mythology and revelation emerge from a hypothetical starting point in an assumed *urkundlicher Folge*. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, SW XIII: 129; 249.

27 See Schelling, *Der Monotheismus*, SW XII: 8: “The next investigation must therefore focus on this concept (that of monotheism), and not in such a manner, that we attempt to derive it from the beginning, i.e., the most general principles, but as in the Mythology earlier, we will treat this concept as a fact, and we will only ask, what it meant, what its actual content was, whereby nothing will be assumed in advance, except this, that this content has meaning.”

28 Cf. e.g., Schelling, *Der Monotheismus*, SW XII: 10: “Assuming then ... we found in the comprehended concept (of monotheism) those elements that enabled us to comprehend a theogonic process as such, we will dispose of the means to understand a theogonic process of consciousness as possible, and under certain prerequisites necessary, as well, and only then, when there is the possibility of a theogonic process in consciousness, we will (3) be allowed to think about proving the reality of such (theogonic) movement of the consciousness in the Mythology itself. Only the latter will be the immediate explanation, the philosophy of mythology itself.”

factually actual. Such an approach is, generally speaking, the procedure of negative philosophy. In contrast, the approach of positive philosophy acknowledges certain findings such as materials or phenomena in a given (or deemed to be given) domain of actuality. The analysis and evaluation of these findings allow for the construction of a *theory* that *explains* these findings and the whole field of actuality, which is considered valid as it is in accordance with universal points of view of rationality.

Usually, we permit such a field of actuality for empirical objects and their scientific examination only. We are, however, not obliged to follow such a stipulation whose rationality is itself dubious. In any case, what we definitely need in order to do this meaningfully are certain somewhat robust phenomena with which we are confronted in general, as well as the possibility to refer to elements of the field of actuality in question through rigid designators.²⁹ This last point shows that we perceive ourselves in a “real relation” with that to which we refer with these designators. After close scrutiny, however, it becomes clear, that it has not been decided yet what that which we are referring to actually is. It can turn out to be completely different from what we initially thought it was, or it can become evident that there is nothing to it, that it is a hallucination shared by many people, for instance. The investigation procedure would nevertheless be completely different and precisely the reverse of the negative philosophy. The actuality in relation to us, which is presumed through the rigid designator, comes first. Any concepts or ideas obtained from the relevant phenomena would be applied in a second step only, in order to achieve a theoretical understanding of that to which we believe we refer. And precisely this specific turn from the negative to the positive is also described in Schelling’s will.

To facilitate this transition, I want to add the following, which will be understood by those who read the previous lectures (from XI on).—In the negative philosophy, that is, the one that is a rational science, being is the *prius*, and that which is being (God) the *posterius*. The end of the negative philosophy is that the I demands the reversal, which is at first a mere willing (analogous to Kant’s Postulate of practical reason, but with the difference that it is not reason, but the I, turned practical, which itself as personal demands personhood and says: *I am willing* that which is above being). However, this willing is but the *beginning*. For that which is above being to turn out as existent, such that there was a science of it, that is, a positive philosophy, there must be something on which it proves itself as existent, and this is again being, but only now as posterior and consequent of that one.³⁰

29 Cf., Schelling, *Der Monotheismus*, SW XII: 4-5: “Philosophy has never made real progress (which is to be well distinguished from formal improvements, prompted mostly by philosophy itself), other than as a result of an expanded experience; not always in terms of new facts presenting themselves, but rather one was forced to see something in the familiar which is different than what one was used to see in it.”

30 Schelling, *Nachlassverfügung*, 16-17.



While in negative philosophy we tried to direct ourselves towards a principle whose actuality we could never bring to knowledge through the concept of general being, in positive philosophy, we *demand* such a principle as a rigidly designated actuality that, altogether, would have priority with respect to what we already know as the real being (in relation to us). This real being in relation to us is being *a posteriori*, that is, a being we cannot apprehend a priori from pure reason, a being that we rather encounter insofar as we are ourselves real existing beings. In the light of this encountered being, which we generally regard and refer to as factual actuality, it should become “evident” (through analysis of all relevant phenomena), that the rigidly designated being, “God” or “principle, creator of all actuality” belongs to actuality as well, and therefore stands in a real relation with us.