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The Divine Stakes of Human Freedom: Jonas in Dialogue with Schelling

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Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.

—Etty Hillesum, Amsterdam under German occupation, July 1942[1]

In a recent article, Lore Hühn calls for a comprehensive study of the parallels between Schelling's critique of the will, on the one hand, and the philosophies of nature and technology developed in the twentieth century by students of Heidegger such as Hannah Arendt, Günther Anders, and Hans Jonas, on the other. Hühn notes, in particular, that

> essential moments of Jonas's ethics of responsibility, with its critique of classical metaphysics' neglect of the body and nature, cannot be understood without the background of Schelling; this holds as well for Jonas's speculative figure of the self-retraction of God and for his

[1] Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries, 1941–1943 and Letters from Westerbork*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 178.

theory of responsibility for the totality of beings.[2]

In this article, I intend to contribute a small piece to that larger study by bringing Jonas's speculative theology into dialogue with Schelling's theodicy as outlined in the latter's 1809 Freedom Essay. While there have been other studies on the Jonas–Schelling connection,[3] they have mainly centered on points of convergence in their philosophies of life and have largely neglected the Freedom Essay, which is the only text by Schelling that Jonas demonstrably knew well. There is, nevertheless, a connection between Jonas's philosophical biology, his theory of human freedom, and his theology that warrants methodological comparison with Schelling but that I can at the outset only mention here. Whereas Schelling attempts to understand how God and the world must be constituted if human freedom, as the ability to do good and evil, is to be real, Jonas attempts to understand how God and the world must be constituted if the phenomenon of life, broadly speaking, is to be saved as purposive and as, to various degrees, free. My focus will be on the theological significance of the advent of human freedom in the cosmos.

For Jonas, if human freedom is really to be free—indeed so free that it does not implicate God in the Holocaust—the traditional attributes of the Judeo-Christian God must be rethought. "[W]e allow," writes Jonas in his much-discussed essay "The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice,"

> the force of a unique and shattering [*ungeheuerlicher*] experience [to have] a voice in the question of what "is the matter" with God [*was es mit Gott auf sich habe*]. And there, right away, arises the question, what did Auschwitz add to that which one could always have known about the extent of the terrible and horrendous things that humans can do to humans and from times immemorial have done? And what has it added in particular to what is familiar to us Jews from a millennial history of

[2] Lore Hühn, "Ekstase und Gelassenheit: Schelling und Heidegger im Gespräch," *JTLA (Journal of the Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo, Aesthetics)* 42-43 (2017–2018): 17–33, 32. Here and below, all translations for which I do not supply an English edition are mine.
[3] Michael Hackl, "Ein Appell an die Freiheit: Existenz, Mythos und Freiheit bei H. Jonas und F.W.J. Schelling," in *Die Klassische Deutsche Philosophie und ihre Folgen*, ed. Michael Hackl and Christian Danz (Göttingen: V and R unipress and Vienna University Press, 2017), 131–54; Jesper L. Rasmussen, "Freedom as Ariadne's Thread through the Interpretation of Life: Schelling and Jonas on Philosophy of Nature as the Art of Interpretation," *Kabiri* 1 (2018): 69–91; Jesper L. Rasmussen, "Hans Jonas' philosophische Biologie und Friedrich W. J. Schellings Naturphilosophie: Einleitende Bemerkungen zu einer Affinität," *Res Cogitans* 11 (2016): 63–93.

suffering and forms so essential a part of our collective memory?[4]

These questions lead Jonas to espouse, admittedly with some hesitation, the following three theses: (1) divine omnipotence must be relinquished, (2) God must be "passible," i.e., able to suffer at the hands of humans, and (3) eschatology must allow for different ends.

In what follows I will discuss these theses in Jonas and compare them with Schelling's philosophy in the Freedom Essay. My aim is not merely to show Jonas's debt to Schelling, who has been almost entirely overlooked in major studies of Jonas's theology,[5] but also to raise considerations in speculative theology today. I would like, in other words, this brief essay to be not only historical but also systematic, a matter not only of Schelling's *Nachleben* or "afterlife" in twentieth-century philosophy and theology but also of the *Sachen* or "matters" themselves.

First, a few words on Jonas's acquaintance with Schelling are in order. Jonas, to all appearances, first engaged seriously with Schelling in Heidegger's Winter Semester 1927–1928 advanced seminar on the Freedom Essay, which was held right after Heidegger had published *Being and Time* but shortly before he would move from Marburg to Freiburg to take over Husserl's chair of philosophy. Judging from the copy that has survived in his literary remains, Jonas did not discuss Schelling in the presentation he gave to the seminar on January 21, 1928. He seems, instead, to have followed Heidegger's directive to several of the participants to focus on the problem of freedom in Schelling's predecessors. Jonas wrote and delivered a presentation titled "Das Freiheitsproblem bei Augustin" ("The Problem of Freedom in Augustine"), thereby laying the foundation for what would become his first book: a "demythologizing" approach to the biblical Fall and the doctrine of original

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[4] Hans Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz: Eine jüdische Stimme* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), 10; in English, Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," in *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, ed. Lawrence Vogel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 131–43 (132). I have emended the second sentence to match the original publication of Jonas's own English version in *The Journal of Religion* 67, no. 1 (January 1987): 1–13 (2). As it appears in *Mortality and Morality*, the sentence does not contain the words "the extent of the terrible and horrendous things that humans can do to"; they were presumably omitted by accident during transcription.

[5] For example, Schelling is not mentioned in Raphael Döhn, *Der Mensch in der Verantwortung: Die Theodizeefrage bei Hans Jonas, Dorothee Sölle und Abraham Joshua Heschel* (Berlin: Logos, 2020); Udo Lenzig, *Das Wagnis der Freiheit: Der Freiheitsbegriff im philosophischen Werk von Hans Jonas aus theologischer Perspektive* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006); or Christian Wiese, *The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas: Jewish Dimensions*, trans. Jeffrey Grossman and Christian Wiese (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2007). Schelling appears just once in a footnote in Thomas Schieder, *Weltabenteuer Gottes: Die Gottesfrage bei Hans Jonas* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988), and together with Hegel as general historical background in Wolfgang Baum, *Gott nach Auschwitz: Reflexionen zum Theodizeeproblem im Anschluß an Hans Jonas* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004).

sin by way of a critical analysis of chapter 7 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans and Augustine's various interpretations thereof.[6] (Incidentally, the word *demythologisieren* makes an early appearance in the 1930 book version of Jonas's study of Augustine, prior to its famous use by Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann, who was Jonas's lifelong friend and one of his most important teachers.[7] Only later in life, as we will see, did Jonas recognize the contemporary theological exigency of myth, i.e., "that vehicle of imaginative but credible conjecture that Plato allowed for the sphere beyond the knowable."[8]) The fact that Schelling was nevertheless important for the early Jonas, and again on his mind late in his life, can be gleaned from a letter Jonas wrote in 1972 to Heidegger, who had just sent him a copy of the book version of his 1936 lecture course on Schelling. "I am," writes Jonas, "eagerly looking forward to studying [your book] during my vacation, which has just begun. In my youth, Schelling's treatise once made a deep impression on me, but over the years it has gradually slipped away from me. So now I will reread it under your guidance."[9]

That Jonas might have reread Schelling in the 1970s is not especially relevant for the two texts I will be discussing in order to develop Jonas's position on the three matters mentioned above (namely, power, suffering, and

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[6] Heidegger's notes and protocols of the seminar are available in *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar (1927/28): Die Protokolle von Martin Heideggers Seminar zu Schellings 'Freiheitsschrift' (1927/28) und die Akten des Internationalen Schelling-Tags 2006*, ed. Lore Hühn and Jörg Jantzen in collaboration with Philipp Schwab and Sebastian Schwenzfeuer (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2010). Jonas's presentation is available on pages 373–402; 439–458. See also page 308; and Martin Heidegger, *Seminare: Hegel – Schelling*, ed. Peter Trawny, Gesamtausgabe 86 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2011). Jonas's book was published under the title *Augustin und das paulinische Freiheitsproblem: Ein philosophischer Beitrag zur Genesis der christlich-abendländischen Freiheitsidee* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1930; 2nd, expanded ed., 1965).

[7] Jonas, *Augustin und das paulinische Freiheitsproblem*, 2nd ed., 82. For more on Jonas's early work on demythologization and the scope of its applicability, see Ian Alexander Moore, "Jonas's Augustine-Book: An Early Application of Hermeneutic-Phenomenological *Destruktion*," in *Hans Jonas und die Marburger Hermeneutik*, ed. Malte Dominik Krüger and Andreas Großmann (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2023), 131–54.

[8] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 15; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," 134. For Jonas's correspondence with his erstwhile teacher on his myth—the only such exchange Jonas saw fit to publish during his lifetime—see Hans Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1963), 63–72; in English, Rudolf Bultmann and Hans Jonas, "Exchange on Hans Jonas' Essay on Immortality," trans. Ian Alexander Moore, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 40, no. 2 (2020): 491–506. I draw, with emendations, on my introduction to the latter in my discussion of Jonas's Immortality Essay below.

[9] "Jonas' Korrespondenz mit Martin Heidegger," in *Rudolf Bultmann and Hans Jonas, Briefwechsel 1928–1976*, ed. Andreas Großmann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 123; Martin Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971).

eschatology). These two texts, initially given as popular lectures, are titled "Immortality and the Modern Temper" (1961)[10] and "The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice" (first published in German in 1984 and then in Jonas's own English translation in 1987, but based on a text from 1965).[11] Jonas's letter to Heidegger nevertheless attests that Schelling had been important for Jonas and gives some, albeit limited, biographical-historical warrant for the comparisons and contrasts I would like to draw with the Freedom Essay. More could, of course, be said about how Schelling's positions in his 1809 treatise are complicated by later writings such as *Ages of the World* or the *Philosophy of Revelation*, but I will not do so here.

Jonas's speculative theology, which has "made him a minor star in the Jewish theological firmament,"[12] began to take shape in the early 1960s. His pioneering work on Gnosticism[13] led to an invitation to give the 1961 Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard University. In accordance with the standing stipulation that the speaker address the topic of "the Immortality of Man,"[14] Jonas chose to reflect on what sense, if any, immortality could have in the current age, given the prevailing skepticism about such matters. He titled his talk "Immortality and the Modern Temper," dedicating it to "H.A." (Hannah Arendt), who, it might be remembered, predicted in 1945 that "[t]he problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe."[15]

Today, Jonas contends, we are all too aware of the vicissitudes of

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[10] Jonas first published this text in *Harvard Theological Review* 55, no. 1 (January 1962): 1–20, and then in a slightly different German version under the title "Unsterblichkeit und heutige Existenz," in Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit*, 44–62. Later, he republished the English version as his final essay in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966; republished in Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001). It also appears in Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, chapter 5.

[11] See note 4, above. The 1965 version is titled "Theology of the Suffering God," a draft of which can be found in the *Sammlung Hans Jonas*, HJ 1-8-29, Philosophisches Archiv der Universität Konstanz. It served as the basis for an intermediate version in 1968, now titled "The Concept of God after Auschwitz" and published alongside works by Elie Wiesel and Emil Fackenheim, among others, in *Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature*, ed. Albert H. Friedlander (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 465–76.

[12] Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 10.

[13] Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Erster Teil: Die mythologische Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1934); *Teil 2,1: Von der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1954); *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1958).

[14] This quotation and information about the Ingersoll Lectures, which have featured such intellectuals as William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Tillich, and Toni Morrison, can be found here: https://guides.library.harvard.edu/c.php?g=469643&p=3210581 (accessed March 18, 2023).

[15] Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 134.

history and the fickleness of public opinion to put much stock in the immortality of fame or influence. Personal immortality has little hold on the minds of modern existence. And most intellectuals would balk at claims of mystical union with the eternal. Jonas therefore turns to moments of decision—those times, however seldom, when we feel as though our deeds had indelible cosmic import, as though we had some share in shaping the world, even if no trace should remain of our agency. We cannot, to be sure, know whether our deeds are immortal, just as we cannot know whether they are not. But we can endeavor to make sense of such feelings by means of speculation on how the universe and its foundations would have to be if these feelings should be more than mere illusions.

To this end, and despite the demythologizing approach of his early work, Jonas invents a creation myth with an open-ended conclusion. "Radicalizing," as he says, the idea of the self-withdrawal of God (*tzimtzum*) in the Lurianic Kabbalah, Jonas imagines that, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth by divesting himself of his power and giving himself *wholly* over to the evolution of the cosmos.[16] God starts to win himself back as inorganic matter and prerational life develop, but it is only with the arrival of human knowledge and freedom in the world that God can come into his own. God's success is not guaranteed, however. The human being can just as well act for evil as act for good, and that means just as well scar the face of God as adorn it. Our deeds do not merely impact the cosmos. Our deeds shape the very image of the deathless, albeit violable God. Herein lies our immortality. And even if God cannot respond directly, we can perhaps catch wind of his sighs of anguish in our dispirited age and learn to take responsibility for one another, for the world, and indeed for God himself.

This, at any rate, is the tale Jonas would like to believe true. And it is a tale he believes he cannot avoid telling, though he is careful to stress its revocability, its merely speculative character, and even its status as a "very *personal* stopgap [*Notbehelf*]":[17]

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[16] Only later does Jonas refer explicitly to the Lurianic Kabbalah. See Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Out of the Whirlwind*, 473; and Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 45; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 142.

[17] "Religionsphilosophischer Diskurs mit Hans Jonas: Hans Jonas im Dialog mit Dietrich Braun, Walter Jaeschke, Michael Theunissen, Albrecht Wellmer (Juni 1992)," in *Fatalismus wäre Todsünde: Gespräche über Ethik und Mitverantwortung im dritten Jahrtausend*, ed. Dietrich Böhler (Münster: Lit, 2005), 153–85; 168. Emphasis added.

This late dialogue shows Jonas's ongoing commitment to his myth and its theological implications, even if he is little interested in debating subtleties, let alone in defending the myth to the letter. See also the 1989 interviews with Jonas published in *Erinnerungen*, ed. Christian Wiese (Frankfurt: Insel, 2003); in English, "'All this is mere stammering': Auschwitz and God's Impotence," in *Memoirs*, trans. Krishna Winston (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 214–219.

> where, in a seriously non-dualist fashion, the authentic reality [*eigentliche Wirklichkeit*] of the human points back to the authentic reality of the universe […] and where it is necessary to speak also of this—of the totality of being and its ground [*vom All des Seins und seinem Grunde*]—without there being an identifiable terminology for it, we are directed to the path of the symbol that hints in an objectifying way [*des objektivierend andeutenden Symbols*], and perhaps a momentary, as it were experimental mythologization, holding itself in suspense, can come closer to the mystery again. And here the revocability of the anthropomorphic symbol would have to wait to be replaced by other, for their part equally revocable symbols, but not for a subsequent demythologization, which would have to reveal [*preisgeben*] what was to be signified only in the symbol.[18]

Jonas did not leave it at that, however. Just a few years after presenting his myth (which "as a matter of biographical fact [...] really came first"), he offered something of a "theological or conceptual translation" of it to a group of rabbis in New York, thereby attempting "to connect what must seem a strange and rather willful personal fantasy with the more responsible tradition of Jewish religious thought." "By this means," Jonas explained, "I try to redeem the irresponsibility of my tentative, groping speculation."[19]

The guiding question in this text, initially titled "Theology of the Suffering God," is what sense the concept of God can have "after Auschwitz," which is Jonas's synecdoche for the Shoah as *the* trauma of human history. This question is even more poignant in the 1984 version of his text, now bearing the title "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," as Jonas comes to view his work on the concept of God less in terms of conceptual vindication than as a response to the unanswered lamentations of the murdered at Auschwitz, including those of his own mother:

> When, with the honor of this award [i.e., the Dr. Leopold Lucas Prize], I also accepted the burden of delivering the oration that goes with it, and when I read in the biography of Rabbi Leopold Lucas, in whose memory the prize is named, that he died in Theresienstadt, but that his wife Dorothea, mother of the donor, was then shipped to Auschwitz, there to suffer the fate that my mother suffered there, too, there was no resisting the force with which the theme of this lecture urged itself

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[18] Letter from Jonas to Bultmann, January 7, 1962, in *Briefwechsel 1928–1976*, 52.
[19] Jonas, "Theology of the Suffering God," 1. Cf. "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Out of the Whirlwind*, 468; *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 24; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 136.

> on my choice. I chose it with fear and trembling. But I believed I owed it to those shadows that something like an answer to their long-gone cry to a silent God be not denied to them.[20]

The answer Jonas gives is novel, and novel it must be. For it is not enough, indeed it is "of no use," according to Jonas, to speak any longer of faithlessness, witnessing, or trial when wrestling with God over what happened in the camps. No, "'Auschwitz'" is "a theological event" that "calls, even for the believer, the whole traditional concept of God into question. It has, indeed, […] added to the Jewish historical experience something unprecedented and of a nature no longer assimilable [*nicht zu meistern*] by the old theological categories."[21]

§1. Omnipotence

One of these categories—and this brings me to the first of the three issues I would like to discuss—is omnipotence. Jonas tackles this issue in two conflicting ways in his lecture. On the one hand, he gives up on the idea of divine omnipotence. On the other hand, he contends that God himself gave up his omnipotence in the act of creation. In the first approach, which I take to be more plausible based on Jonas's premises, Jonas develops a trilemma according to which only two of the following three favorable options can be simultaneously chosen: 1. God's omnipotence, 2. his complete goodness, and 3. his intelligibility. If 1. (omnipotence) and 2. (complete goodness), then, as I suggested earlier in view of Auschwitz, we cannot have 3. (intelligibility), for "[o]nly a completely unintelligible God can be said to be absolutely good and absolutely powerful, yet tolerate the world as it is."[22] Further, Jonas stresses that Judaism depends on being able to understand at least some things about God and his ways, which, after all, he has communicated through the mouths of his prophets. (One might, however, wonder how he could do so if, as we

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[20] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 7; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 131. That this question was also motivating "Immortality and the Modern Temper" can be seen in a retrospective explanation in *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 15; *Mortality and Morality*, 134 ("the specter of Auschwitz already played its part"); and already in the earlier "Immortality" essay, *Mortality and Morality*, 129.

[21] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 12, 14; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 133. The quotation about Auschwitz as "a theological event [*ein theologisches Ereignis*]" can be found in Hans Jonas, *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung: Kosmologischer Befund und kosmogonische Vermutung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 55; in English, "Matter, Mind, and Creation: Cosmological Evidence and Cosmogonic Speculation," trans. Paul Schuchman and Lawrence Vogel, in *Mortality and Morality*, 189.

[22] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 37; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 139.

will see, he is in fact powerless or at best can only make himself felt in the world). Let us not forget that Jonas is also a philosopher, who, even if he recognizes the limitations of reason, is not willing to give up on the reasonableness of the God in whom he believes, nor on the reasonableness of that very belief. On occasion, he speaks of his endeavors in "The Concept of God after Auschwitz" as "rational 'theology.'"[23] Yet, however far human rationality may reach, Jonas is at least committed to the idea that God must make sense, and God would not make sense, for Jonas, if he were both good and omnipotent during Auschwitz.

If, however, 1. (omnipotence) and 3. (intelligibility) hold for God, then we cannot have 2. (complete goodness). Without argument, Jonas rejects the abandonment of God's absolute goodness. Presumably, Jonas would also reject the position of the medieval Franciscan voluntarists who maintained that something is good only because God declares or makes it so and not the other way around.

Jonas opts, then, for 2. (complete goodness) and 3. (intelligibility), declaring that the God of his myth "is not an omnipotent God."[24] (Jonas also develops a logical argument that I will only mention here; this argument views power as relational and so deems omnipotence an empty concept, like force without resistance.) In abandoning divine omnipotence, Jonas does not, however, fall prey to the dualist temptation, which Schelling, for his part, calls "a system of the self-destruction and despair of reason" (SW VII: 354)[25] and which Jonas had spent much of his career trying to combat at several levels (soul/body, mind/matter, subject/object, freedom/necessity), although without thereby espousing an undifferentiated monism. Jonas instead connects his account with that of God's self-contraction or self-withdrawal in the Lurianic Kabbalah. This is his second approach to the problem of omnipotence. However, unlike in the Kabbalah, Jonas adds that God's divestment of self (which sounds more like Christian *kenōsis* or self-emptying) must be total (which—"patripassianism" aside—nonetheless cannot be said of God the Father in Trinitarian theology, however much it can be said of the Son).[26] After creation, Jonas's God is not *somewhat* powerful. He is not

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[23] Jonas, "Is Faith Still Possible? Memories of Rudolf Bultmann and Reflections on the Philosophical Aspects of His Work," in *Mortality and Morality*, 209–210n9. See also Jonas, *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung*, 35; "Matter, Mind, and Creation," 179. Cf., however, "Religionsphilosophischer Diskurs," 168.

[24] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 33; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 138.

[25] *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 24.

[26] Jonas recognizes this parallel, but distances himself from it: "There is, of course, a Christian connotation of the term 'suffering God' with which my myth must not be confounded; it does not speak, as does the former, of a special act by which the deity at one

powerful *at all* (except, Jonas maintains, to the extent that God can make himself felt in creation, which suggests that a partially potent, transcendent aspect of his self-divestiture into immanence remains).

It should be asked whether this makes sense from the Kabbalistic perspective, i.e., whether Jonas's attempt to "radicalize the concept of *tzimtzum* to a point never imagined before"[27] really "pushes [it] further,"[28] or whether he does not instead depart from the tradition altogether. Michael Theunissen raised this issue indirectly in a conversation he had with Jonas in 1989, when Jonas was almost ninety years old. Interestingly, Theunissen did so by distinguishing Jonas's position from the later Schelling's use of the concept of *tzimtzum* (which begins with the 1810 *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, composed right after the Freedom Essay).[29] It is worth translating and citing from the transcript of the exchange at length, not merely because it provides further evidence of Jonas's awareness of Schelling, but because it highlights their differing positions on omnipotence:

> The late Schelling took up the, as you [Jonas] call it, "cosmogonic centerconcept"[30] of the Lurianic Kabbalah in such a way that he deployed it in his struggle against Hegel's Philosophical Theology. Hegelian theology stands or falls with the assertion that God has

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time, and for the special purpose of saving man, sends part of itself into a particular situation of suffering (the incarnation [*Fleischwerdung*] and crucifixion)." *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz,* 25; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 136. Or as he puts in a letter to Bultmann: "My myth is therefore a non-Trinitarian myth of incarnation [*Inkarnationsmythus*], as several Christians with whom I have been in correspondence here [in the U.S.] have remarked. Immediately after my lecture at the Divinity School at Harvard, it was brought to my attention that, in the old church, there was once something similar under the name of 'patripassianism': it is not the Son, but the Father himself who is the subject of the Passion. I do not know anything more about this. But, for me, it is, of course, a matter not of doctrine, but of a symbolic attempt that most readily expresses what to me seems to bring some sense to the enigma of being and existence." Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit*, 71–72; "Exchange on Hans Jonas' Essay on Immortality," 503. Cf. Marcel Sarot, "Patripassianism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God: Some Historical and Systematic Considerations," *Religious Studies* 26, no. 3 (1990): 363–75.

[27] Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Out of the Whirlwind*, 473.

[28] Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Out of the Whirlwind*, 473; Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 45 (where Jonas uses the word *radikalisiert*); "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 142.

[29] On Schelling's indirect use of Kabbalistic sources, as mediated above all by Friedrich Oetinger, see Christoph Schulte, "Ẓimẓum in the Works of Schelling," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (January 1992): 21–40. For the relevant passage in the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, see SW VII: 428–30.

[30] See Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 46; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 142.

> emptied and externalized himself into the world [*sich in die Welt entäußert*] and has, to a certain extent, been prompted to do so for his own sake, because it is only through the world that he can transform his poor, abstract being [*Sein*] into a rich, concrete one. Schelling's conception of *Contractio Dei* is a counter project to this concept of an emptying/externalization [*Entäußerung*] to which God is always already driven. For you, in contrast, "contraction" means at the same time that God "gave himself whole to the becoming world" [*"sich ganz in die werdende Welt hineinbegab"*].[31] Is this not a contradiction, which hands contraction over to its opposite, expansion? A contracting God makes room for another; he does not pass into the other. To give oneself to the becoming world—that means for you, of course: to renounce oneself [*sich seiner selbst entschlagen*]. But contrary to your intention, you thereby radicalize not the thought of *Zimzum* but that of emptying/externalization; and you do this so much that you can actually no longer think what is essential in Schelling's alternative to the model of emptying/externalization: that God, precisely thanks to his restraint vis-à-vis the world, remains its lord. Not only do you let go of the "Lord of history,"[32] as you expressly profess to do; moreover, you rid yourself of the idea that God is in every respect, as Schelling expresses it, the Lord of being [*Herr des Seins*].[33] The elimination of the predicate of omnipotence from the concept of God follows from this necessarily.[34]

Unfortunately, Jonas did not reply to this portion of Theunissen's intervention. However, whatever he might have said about Schelling and *tzimtzum*, Jonas no doubt would have resisted alignment with Hegel's notion of *Entäußerung* (a term that Luther used to render *kenōsis* in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians and that Jonas also uses when writing in German).[35] Even if God has something to gain in creation, success, on Jonas's account, is far from guaranteed, and the cunning of reason can only be anathema after the Holocaust. Hegel's "doctrine," he contends, "we must deny, being, as we are, more sober onlookers of the large and small theaters of the world, of nature and history.

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[31] *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 46–47; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 142. Jonas writes *hineingab*.
[32] *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 14; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 133.
[33] For discussion and references, see Grzegorz Kozdra, *"Herr des Seins": Eine Untersuchung zur philosophischen Gottesfrage in F.W.J. Schellings Münchener Vorlesungen* (Munich: Herbert Utz, 2016).
[34] "Religionsphilosophischer Diskurs," 178–79.
[35] Philippians 2:8; Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 17, 45, 46; Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit*, 70. See also the following footnote.

The counterevidence is too overwhelming."[36]

Still, by positing "limitless power"[37] at the origin—which is then renounced to make room for creation—and by chalking creation up to "either inscrutable wisdom or love or whatever else the divine motive may have been,"[38] Jonas displaces, but does not resolve, the problem of God's scrutability. Unintelligibility returns at the inception, and we are compelled to ask: Why, if God had been all-powerful in the beginning, would he have given up that power? If he had really been *all*-powerful, could he not have brought about what he wanted differently, such that the Shoah would not have happened? Despite the importance of the contemporary redeployment of *tzimtzum* (or perhaps better of *kenōsis*), I am thus less persuaded by this aspect of Jonas's argument. According to his own logic, he would have done better to leave unqualified his statement "that, for the sake of our image of God and our whole relation to the divine, for the sake of any viable theology, we cannot uphold the time-honored (medieval) doctrine of absolute, unlimited divine power."[39] Later in life, Jonas did express himself more clearly: "It must somehow be supposed as the reason for why the world was created at all that the world, i.e., finitude, offers possibilities that God at the beginning [*der anfängliche Gott*] would not at all have on his own."[40] God was thus not, *stricto*

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[36] Jonas offers this critique of Hegel in his 1988 text *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung*, 51–53; "Matter, Mind, and Creation," 187–88. Herein he revisits themes from his speculative theology, understanding God now as "self-emptying/externalizing of *mind* [*Selbstentäußerung des Geistes*]" (56/189; translation modified. Emphasis added.

[37] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 36; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 139.

[38] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 32; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 138.

[39] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 33; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 138.

[40] "Religionsphilosophischer Diskurs," 181. Although Jonas does not raise the issue of God's *omniscience* directly, it too would seem to have to fall by the wayside if we are, with Jonas, to preserve God's goodness. God must, to be sure, have seen that he had something to gain from human freedom or at least from the creation that eventually results in it. But if God had foreseen how that freedom would in fact play out, he would appear to be less a gambler (as Jonas's language suggests) than someone who is willing to use others—and their suffering—for his own ends. If omnipotence and omniscience are abandoned, however, nothing prevents us from saying that God did not foresee the Holocaust, perhaps not even as a possibility. Jonas may not want to go this far. In a letter to Bultmann he writes that "the complete wager of incarnation had to include the possibility of evil [but, we should ask, does inclusion mean foreknowledge?], because only in this way—in the presence of fallibility, in the presence of the ability to be otherwise, and as a continually renewed decision—does the good attain concreteness in a temporal realization." Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit*, 69; "Exchange on Hans Jonas' Essay on Immortality," 501. Rejecting divine omniscience would, however, be one way for Jonas to defend himself against the following critique, which also, incidentally, brings up Schelling as a point of contrast:

sensu, omnipotent.

A similar tension is present in the Freedom Essay, where Schelling wants simultaneously to retain God's omnipotence and make divine self-revelation dependent on the actions of human beings, at least at the pre-temporal level of the intelligible deed. Although he contends that "God is a life," and that "[a]ll life [...] is subject to suffering and becoming," such suffering would not seem to infringe upon his "omnipotence [*Allmacht*]," which he is to "*prove* [*erweisen*]" through creation (SW VII: 403, 373–74; emphasis added).[41] This leads me to the second issue I would like to discuss, which concerns the extent to which God can thus really be said to suffer. What, in other words, are the divine stakes of creation, and in particular of human freedom? Is it merely a matter of revelation, as Schelling repeatedly suggests, or might the very being of God be on the line? What would this even mean, though?

§2. Passibility

On this question, too—and this is perhaps partly a result of the imprecision of mythological presentation—Jonas vacillates. On the one hand, in his attempt to elucidate his myth, Jonas speaks of a "*becoming* God" who is "affected," and that "means altered, made different [*alteriert, im Zustand verändert*]," in his relation to the world.[42] Humans evolve not so much "in" the image of God as

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The whole thing may be justifiable in Schelling, where God's sovereignty and his revelation in history figured as central items on the agenda, but this is hardly the case in the context of an ethics of responsibility (à la Jonas). As the condition for the possibility of the world, God's contraction is one thing (and it is thoroughly comprehensible); as total self-abandonment without any institution of meaning (*Sinnstiftung*) in the world that has been made possible, it is quite another thing (and rather ludicrous at that). "He is therefore also an endangered God, a God who runs a risk." This God is, furthermore, dangerous, an intolerable risk. Comfort, however, is gained by his powerlessness—the danger of further irresponsible action on his part is at least held in check—otherwise one would have to give up. With the creation of the world and the genesis of the human being that is derived from it, this God has accomplished a deed that Jonas would never less pass as ethically justifiable for the same human.

Andreas Urs Sommer, "Gott als Knecht der Geschichte: Hans Jonas' 'Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz'; Eine Widerrede," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 51, no. 4 (1995): 340–56 (349–50; see also 346–47); citing Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 32.

[41] *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 66, 41. See also SW VII: 375; *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 42: "The will of the ground admittedly also cannot break love nor does it demand this, although it often seems to; for it must be particular and a will of its own, one turned away from love, so that love, when it nonetheless breaks through the will of the ground, as light through darkness, *may now appear* in its omnipotence." Emphasis added.

[42] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 28; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 137.

"for" the image of God.[43] We must repair not only the world (*tikkun olam*) but also God himself (*tikkun jhwh*). God has not only a self-revelatory stake in human creation (as we find in the Freedom Essay), but an ontological one. What it means to *be* God can change depending on our actions. God is thus "an endangered God, a God who runs a risk," even if this risk should lie in the *way* God could turn out (i.e., as "transfigured or possibly even disfigured") rather than *whether* God will continue to be.[44] The stakes of our freedom could hardly be higher, indeed not only within the immediate theological framework, but more broadly to the extent that "God" for Jonas overlaps with the "primordial mind" (*Urgeist*) or "ground of being," i.e., with "the question of all questions" in which the human mind has a supreme interest.[45] On the other hand, Jonas's language in his myth largely accords the primacy Schelling accords to God's self-revelation in creation. For example, Jonas writes that "the deity comes to *experience* itself" with creation, "trying out [its] hidden essence and *discovering* [itself] through the surprises of the world-adventure."[46] In his Immortality Essay, Jonas also speaks of the "suffering" yet "*immortal* God."[47]

One way in which to reconcile this tension in Jonas would be to relegate the motivation of self-revelation to pre-human creation and that of an essential ontological gain to the creation of humans. Useful in this context might be the distinction in Schelling between God's timeless being and God's existence as revealed (which would attain partial realization with pre-human creation but needs the free deed of the human being to come fully into its own)—a "two-tiered ontology of revelation," in other words, which Mark Thomas has recently developed.[48] "Existence" here should be understood as the development or "unfolding" of what is already contained implicitly in the Godhead, thereby enabling the latter to become a living, personal God. As Schelling would write a few years after the Freedom Essay, in reaction to Jacobi:

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[43] Jonas, "Immortality and the Modern Temper," *Mortality and Morality*, 128.
[44] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 17, 32; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 125, 138.
[45] Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, 128, 134, 179, 189, 191; *Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 15; *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung*, 35, 55–56, 58. I thus wonder whether the atheist option can in fact be legitimately chosen, as Jonas allows in *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 14; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 133; and more explicitly in "Religionsphilosophischer Diskurs," 167–88.
[46] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 19–20; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 135, emphases added. See also Jonas, *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung*, 56; "Matter, Mind, and Creation," 190.
[47] Jonas, "Immortality and the Modern Temper," *Mortality and Morality*, 130. Emphasis added.
[48] Mark J. Thomas, *Freedom and Ground: A Study of Schelling's Treatise on Freedom* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2023), 256–57, 288n90.

> I posit God as First and Last, as A and Ω, but as A he is not what he is as Ω, and insofar as he is only as *the latter*—God *sensu eminenti* [in the highest sense]—he cannot also be God as the former, in the specified sense; nor, strictly speaking, can he be called God, unless one were to expressly say the *undeveloped* God [*der* unentfaltete *Gott*], *Deus implicitus*, since he is *Deus explicitus* as Ω. (SW VIII: 81)

Nonetheless, from a Jonasian perspective, it is not enough for just God's self-revelation or his "existence" (in Schelling's sense) to hang in the balance. God must have more to lose ontologically—i.e., we must be able not only to resist or prevent the development of his primal "folds" but to rend them irreparably asunder—if our actions are to be sufficiently meaningful to account for both the horrors of the Holocaust in the choice of evil and the hope of recompense in the choice of the good. Jonas, having abandoned personal immortality, does not find this *possibility* of recompense at the individual level but rather, as we have seen, at the level of the deity.

§3. Eschatology

The modality of this recompense brings me to the final issue I want to take up, which marks the greatest point of disagreement between Schelling and Jonas on the status of human freedom. This is the issue of eschatology. Summarizing some of the attributes of God that Auschwitz has compelled him to rethink, Jonas writes: "Several of Maimonides's Thirteen Articles of Faith, which we solemnly chant in our services, fall away with the 'mighty hand' [i.e., God's intervention in human affairs]: the assertions about God ruling the universe, his rewarding the good and punishing the wicked, even about the coming of the promised Messiah."[49] It is on this last point, regarding the promise of a messianic end, that I will now focus.

In his "Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Freedom," Schelling famously distinguishes between two non-dualistic principles: "being in so far as it exists [*Wesen, sofern es existiert*]" (also referred to as light) and "being in so far as it is merely the ground of existence [*Wesen, sofern es bloß Grund von Existenz*]" (also referred to as darkness) (SW VII: 357).[50] Both principles are necessarily in God. Although God cannot eliminate the ground (to this extent, his power is restricted), God does, within himself, keep the principle of darkness inextricably subordinate to the principle of light. For the

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[49] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 42; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 141.
[50] *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 27.

sake of his self-revelation, God nevertheless allows for the possibility of their inversion through the free act of the human being. This inversion is what constitutes evil, properly speaking. Evil comes about when humans choose to deny God's order and put the ground, which should be below, on top.

Yet this insurrection, however catastrophic, is also transient, as Paul prophesies in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

> The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. [. . .] And when all things shall be subdued unto him [namely, Jesus], then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him [namely, God] that put all things under him, that God may be all in all [*ta panta en pasin*]. (1 Corinthians 15:26–28, KJV)

Near the end of the Freedom Essay, Schelling alludes to this passage from the Bible and provides the following gloss:

> scripture also distinguishes periods of revelation and posits as a distant future the time when God will be all in all things [*Alles in Allem*], that is, when he will be fully actualized [*verwirklicht*]. [...] [S]pirit is the first being which unified the world of darkness with that of the light and subordinates both principles to its actualization and personality. Yet, the ground reacts against this unity and asserts the initial duality, but only toward ever greater increase and toward the final separation of good from evil. The will of the ground must remain in its freedom until all this may be fulfilled and become actual [*bis daß alles erfült, alles wirklich geworden sey*]. [...] [E]vil is only evil to the extent that it exceeds potentiality, but, reduced to non-Being [*Nichtseyn*] or the state of potency, it is what it always should be, basis, subordinate and, as such, no longer in contradiction with God's holiness or love. Hence the end of revelation is [*ist*] casting out evil from the good, the explanation of evil as complete unreality [*Unrealität*]. (SW VII: 403–405)[51]

On the basis of this and other passages, it seems reasonable to claim that Schelling does not doubt the final outcome of creation and human freedom, nor, would it seem, did God, with the possible exception of humans' having chosen the good rather than evil in their pre-temporal condition.

Interestingly, when Jonas uses the Christian trope of the all-in-all, it is for a state *prior* to creation: God "has first, by the act of creation itself, foregone

[51] *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 66–67. Translation modified.

being 'all-in-all' [*alles in allem*]."[52] Although Jonas is not always as clear about this as he is in the passage about the Maimonidean articles of faith I cited above, such as when he "entertains the idea of God who *for a time* [*für eine Zeit*]—the time of the ongoing world process—has divested himself of any power to interfere with the physical course of things,"[53] Jonas cannot follow Schelling in espousing eschatological certainty. For this would, he claims, make "a sorcerer" out of God: "this caring God is not a sorcerer who in the act of caring also provides the fulfillment of his concern: he has left something for other agents to do and thereby has made his care dependent on them."[54] In Jonas's eyes, our freedom depends on admitting different outcomes, including that of catastrophic failure. We need not, but can and very well may, fail not only one another, but God himself, whose existence stands on the line. Only with this possibility can we say, with Schelling but also beyond him, that freedom is "not simply a subordinate or subsidiary concept, but one of the systems' ruling centerpoints" (SW VII: 336).[55]

Conclusion

I have tried to bring Jonas and Schelling into dialogue over the questions of divine omnipotence and passibility, as well as of eschatology. Although Jonas is indebted to Schelling in his attempt to reconcile freedom with divine intelligibility and (although this would be a matter for a different study) in his recognition of the necessity of narrative, Jonas finds it necessary to push Schellingian positions in the Freedom Essay to their limits or even to their breaking points. That is, he finds it necessary to view God as weak or lacking power altogether, as suffering in his being, and as uncertain about the end times. For Jonas, this is not simply a matter of Judaism vs. Christianity. It is a matter of making sense of God and human freedom in the wake of the Shoah. It is often claimed that the death of Caroline had a major impact on Schelling's later philosophy. One can only wonder what he would have made of traumas of the twentieth century.[56]

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[52] Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 32–33; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 138.
[53] *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 42; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 141.
[54] *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 31–32; "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," *Mortality and Morality*, 138.
[55] *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 9.
[56] My thanks to Marcela García-Romero, Francesco Guercio, Tobias Keiling, Luca Settimo, Mark Thomas, and the participants of the 2022 North American Schelling Society conference.