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Schelling's Later Philosophy of Religion as a Philosophy of Life

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One of the most characteristic themes of Schelling's later philosophy is, in the famous words of the *Essay on Human Freedom*, that "God is a life, not merely a Being" (SW VII: 403).¹ Despite the prominence of this idea in Schelling's later work, it is far from obvious what it means for God to be a living God. What is at stake in this claim? How do we know that God is a living being? What are the form and content of the divine life? And if life, as Schelling insists, implies movement, toward what end does the divine being move? This paper addresses these questions through a reading of Schelling's treatise titled *Monotheism*. In conjunction with the *Historical-Critical Introduction*, to which it is "formally and immediately" connected (SW XII: vi), *Monotheism* serves as a "foundation" to the *Philosophy of Mythology* and, by extension, the entire positive philosophy of religion. In the *Historical-Critical Introduction*, Schelling demonstrated that mythology was "something *lived* and *experienced*," and argued that historical polytheism stems from an original monotheism in human consciousness (SW XI: 89). Picking up the thread of the *Historical-Critical Introduction*, *Monotheism* aims to demonstrate the universal possibility of

¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY, 2006), 66.



polytheism by explaining monotheism as a “living fact” (SW XII: 7–8). If monotheism does not negate the possibility of polytheism, then the one true God affirmed in it must be conceived as “the living God, that is, the uni-total God” (SW XII: 70). Since God is absolutely free, He must be both immanent and transcendent in relation to His creation. Therefore, Schelling interprets the creation of the world and human consciousness as moments in the realization of the divine life.

My paper focuses on three aspects of *Monotheism* that illustrate the function of life in Schelling’s understanding of God and religion. (1) Schelling argues that monotheism presupposes multiple principles in God. Although these principles define the immutable form of the divine life, God is not under any one of them taken separately, but only as their indissoluble unity; they are only the “passages points” of the divine being. Thus, equally rejecting the “dead, motionless, lifeless” pantheism of Spinoza and the “empty” and “impotent” theism of Jacobi, Schelling affirms a “living monotheism” in which “the *living* unity is that which at the same time is a *totality*, it is the totality that fills up and vivifies unity” (SW XII: 105). (2) Assuming that monotheism is not only a concept, but something real, Schelling explains how God can posit an actual being separate from His essence. Since God is necessarily the “All-One,” the only way to represent a being outside of God is to admit the hypothesis of a “theogonic process,” in which God temporarily negates His being. This process constitutes what Schelling calls the passage from the “form of the divine life ... [to] actual life, the living God himself” (SW XII: 59). (3) To show that the theogonic process is not merely a hypothesis, but represents the actual creation of the world, Schelling argues that the divine potencies that constitute the theogonic process also create human consciousness: humanity is the product of the monotheism expressed in creation. Although the human being is innately God-positing, his knowledge of this fact is initially unfree, merely potential. By stepping out of his original quiescence, the human being triggers a new theogonic process. The theogonic process in human consciousness underpins the history of religions, which aims toward the realization of human freedom in the not-yet-existing philosophical religion. The paper concludes by considering how Schelling’s later philosophy of religion might also be said to be one of life, and by indicating possible limits of this philosophy.

1. The Form of the Divine Life: The Freedom of God and the Doctrine of Uni-Totality

In keeping with the “analytical” method of the *Historical-Critical Introduction* (SW XII: 6–7), *Monotheism* does not derive the concept of monotheism from universal principles. It does not proceed from an *a priori* investigation of the principles of reason to establish a rational concept of monotheism. Rather, it

presupposes monotheism as a “fact” (*Thatsache*), something already existing (*vorhanden*), and proceeds to investigate its meaning, its actual content, with no presupposition other than that it has content and meaning. It is a question, for Schelling, of “becoming aware of what can be thought and what cannot be thought in an already given and universally accepted concept” (SW XII: 10). In the *Historical-Critical Introduction*, Schelling shows that historical polytheism presupposes a “potential monotheism” that is connatural with human consciousness, in the sense that consciousness “carries [this monotheism] within itself and cannot move or detach itself from it—it is unified with it, one with it” (SW XII: 8). Because human consciousness is that which posits God naturally, it cannot emerge from this relation without being led back into it through a process. This process produces God and is therefore a theogonic one (SW XI: 198).² Although the *Historical-Critical Introduction* shows that the process by which mythology emerges into being has an irreducibly religious meaning for human consciousness, it does not demonstrate the objective meaning of this process, i.e., its meaning independent of human consciousness (SW XI: 215).³ In order for this result to be verified “independent of an individual mode of thinking,” that is, to be established on universal principles, one must “succeed in leading mythology back to presuppositions of a universal nature and in deriving it as a necessary consequence from out of such presuppositions” (SW XI: 227).⁴ This is what Schelling aims to achieve in *Monotheism*.

Schelling presents this work as the first to uncover the actual meaning of monotheism, this “first and, as it were, simplest of all concepts” (SW XII: 12). In his reading, monotheism can only be adequately understood in relation to polytheism: “both concepts stand and fall together” (SW XII: 15). If these are usually seen as mutually exclusive, Schelling argues, it is because the unicity (*Einzigkeit*) of God affirmed in monotheism is erroneously understood as excluding the very possibility of polytheism. If polytheism is impossible, it would be redundant to affirm God’s unicity: it would suffice merely to posit God, *tout court*. Monotheism—the positive affirmation that there is only one true God—would lose its justification. Consequently, Schelling stresses the need to distinguish between two separate meanings of unicity with respect to God: the unicity of God, and the unicity of God as such. Any analysis of God’s unicity must start with the simple concept of unicity, “absolute unicity.” The concept of God already presupposes unicity: it implicitly excludes there being another like Him. If another God could be thought alongside God, then God would not be God. “Whoever says the name of God,” Schelling writes, “does

² F.W.J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: SUNY, 2007), 138.

³ Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 150.

⁴ Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 157–58.

not feel that, by doing so, one has declared a unicity, but rather that one has presupposed it. One must, in fact, think this unicity in order to think God (and not: a god), therefore before even truly thinking God as such” (SW XII: 24). God, therefore, is not simply that which has no equal, but rather that which *can* have no equal. This means that God cannot be a mere being alongside other beings. Rather, God can only be conceived as Being itself (*das Seyende selbst*). Further, God can never be conceived as not being—existence is not something added to His being, but rather constitutes His essence. In this sense, He is the necessary being. Being itself, however, is not what constitutes the divinity of God—what makes God God—but rather it is only the “necessary pre-concept of God,” the “material” of His divinity (SW XII: 25).

Although Being itself is not a being, it is not nothing. Rather, it is that which will be (SW XII: 32). The statement “God is Being itself” should therefore be understood in the sense that God, in Himself and before Himself, viewed in His pure essence, is what will be. This definition corresponds to the oldest attested document in which the one true God is mentioned, or rather, where He speaks and gives Himself a name: “I will be” (*JAHWEH*), which Schelling further interprets: “I will be who I will be” (SW XII: 33). This is the “supreme concept of God,” insofar as it expresses the idea that God is “outside of being, above being ... [He is] a lucid freedom to be or not to be, to assume or not to assume a being” (SW XII: 33). Therefore, God is not the necessary being, but rather the “Lord of Being” (*Herr des Seyns*). Since Being itself is the universal subject, of which all being (*Seyn*) is predicated, it is the *prius* of being—it has an *a priori* relation to it. Thus, to determine the modalities of Being itself is to determine the modalities of all being, including that of God (SW XII: 33–34).

In and of itself, absolute unicity does not designate a real, existing being, but merely the possibility of such a being. To arrive at the concept of a real being who is God, and not merely the concept of His possibility, one has to move from the possibility of God to the actual being. To be able to conceive an immediate relation between Being itself and actual being, the former must be posited as that which can be—the immediate and intrinsic ability to be (*das seyn Könnende*). This determination refers to the universal principle of being, *potentia existendi*, without which nothing can come into being. It can be identified as the general power (*Macht*) of being in God, the “principle of pantheism.” To admit this principle, however, does not immediately and necessarily lead to a system of pantheism. Pantheism, Schelling argues, is not simply the notion that all being is the being of God, but rather the idea that God is a “blind, and in *this* sense, necessary being, a being in which He remains *against his will*, and where He is deprived of all freedom” (SW XII: 35). If God were merely the power of being, if He were nothing but the immediate *potentia existendi*, He would lose all freedom the moment He stepped into being, which

would result in a “system of blind being” (SW XII: 36). By coming out of itself and becoming active, the *potentia existendi* would cease to be what is free from being and become “afflicted” (*behaftete*) and “entangled” (*befangene*) in being (SW XII: 37). Schelling finds an illustration of this system in Spinoza’s pantheism, which he describes as “motionless, lifeless” (SW XII: 72).

If restricting God to the universal *potentia existendi* results in a lifeless system, to reject this principle in the name of theism results in an equally lifeless system. Indeed, God’s determination as *potentia existendi* ensures and expresses His capacity to generate. As *potentia existendi*, God is able to emerge into being—to cease to be a will at rest so as to become an active will. Thus, God is capable of movement, of “coming out of himself.” Without this capacity, we are left with an “impotent theism” (SW XII: 42). The power of immediate being—this divine power of ecstasy (*Ekstasis*)—is the “true procreative force [*Zeugungskraft*] in God” (SW XII: 41). To deprive God of this vital power is to deprive Him of the capacity to create. Thus, if God is not God by virtue of this potency, neither is He God without it: it is the “foundation, the beginning, the ‘position’ of the divine being” (SW XII: 42).

[The idea that God’s being underlies all being] cannot be denied to either reason or feeling. It alone is the idea that makes all hearts beat. Even Spinoza’s rigid and lifeless philosophy owes the power which it has always exerted over hearts—and not the most superficial among them, but especially the religious ones—it owes this entire power only to [this] fundamental idea ... By rejecting the *principle* of pantheism ... theologians deprive themselves of the means to achieve true monotheism. For true monotheism is perhaps nothing other than the overcoming of pantheism. (SW XII: 39–40)

How to conceive the transition from Being itself, insofar as it is only the capacity to be God, to an actual being who is God? “That which is” (*das Seyende*), in its transition to being, is in the first place merely a power that can be (*Seynkönnende*), and in a second moment, that which simply is. In the first moment, or in the first potency of its being, “that which is” is pure potentiality, *potentia pura*; in its second moment, it is pure being, *actus purus*. There is perfect compatibility between the two. “Although 1 is the first, the antecedent [*Vorausgehende*], 2 the second or the consequent [*Folgende*], there is no real before or after here, but we must imagine both of them posited at the same time” (SW XI: 50). The second is to the first as the object is to the subject. They are indissolubly linked together. God contains both determinations as logically distinct moments of His being. He is neither the first, negated being as such, nor the second, positive being. As God, He is neither of these two in particular, but rather 1 + 2. This is not to posit many Gods, but rather two

“figures” of one God. Although God contains both terms, there is a progression from the first to the second. The first, as *potentia pura*, can be defined as a beginning, which Schelling conceives as the capacity of attraction (*anziehen*) (SW XII: 52). The first potency is thus capable of attracting the second, to clothe itself with being, thus rendering it visible. The original potency, however, as *subjectum*, “remains deeply hidden ... [as] the real mystery of the divine being, which, lacking all being in *itself*, covers itself externally with infinite being, and because it is nothing for *itself*, is therefore another (namely, the infinite being)” (SW XII: 53). Similarly, in the judgment “A is B,” A is the subject of B; it is not itself and by nature B (which would make the proposition tautological), but is also what can be *not* B. In this sense, infinite possibility can be said to be infinite being, that which infinitely is.

So far what has been defined is only the concept of the divine being *a priori*, i.e., the concept of God’s being before His real being. If God is that which has being (A), then this being is in the first moment or first potency of being –A (that which lacks all being—pure subject), in the second moment +A (infinite being—pure object). These determinations, however, immediately exclude one other (SW XII: 56). “What we really want,” Schelling contends, is a subject that is able to determine itself in a real being, or (what is the same) an object that retains the capacity for self-negation. This “need” is resolved in a third potency ($\pm A$), as the fulfilment and balance of the first two potencies, which mediates between and integrates them while remaining free from them. This third principle is “spirit,” the capacity “to remain and abide in the being-*outside-of-oneself* in *oneself* (in one’s essence), to not lose, in the being-*outside-of-oneself*, one’s in-oneself [*An-sich*], one’s essence, one’s self” (SW XII: 57). The progression from one form of being to another (–A, +A, $\pm A$) defines the *a priori* concept of the divine being and divine life. This concept alone establishes the “true, unique content of the *concept* of monotheism” (SW XII: 61). Although God is plural, He is not many Gods, but one God. As the unity of the three determinations of being, He is the “All-One” (*All-Eine*). These forms exist in God as a “self-determined plurality.” He is not God in these forms taken separately, but only as their indissoluble unity. This is the sense in which God’s unicity as such is to be understood.

There is no better attested word concerning God’s unity than the capital and classic address to Israel: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Jehovah] your God [Elohim] is one [*einzig*] LORD – יהוה אחד” [Deut. 6,4]—; it does not mean: “he is single”; “he is יהוה” or One [*Einer*], purely and simply, but rather: “He is a single *Jehovah*,” i.e. that he is only single as Jehovah, as the *true* [*wahre*] God or according to his divinity, and it is therefore permitted to say that, excluding his being-Jehovah, he can be *plural*. (SW XII: 47)

2. The Realization of the Divine Life: From Monotheism as a Concept to Monotheism as a Dogma

If God is not just a concept, but a real being, this being must be associated with an act. In the mere concept of God, there is no need to factor in any act: the modalities of being constitute a set of logical determinations; they are true regardless of whether or not they are attributed to a real being. As ideal determinations, the three forms of being are posited simultaneously. Although a necessary sequence has been posited in the determination of these forms, there has been no demonstration of actual movement. For there to be movement, there needs to be an act that separates beginning, middle, and end (SW XII: 80). As long as the forms of being are considered in the divine concept, there is perfect equality and mutual acceptance between them. The first potency, as long as it is only an ability to be selfed (*selbstisch*)—that is, as long as it remains only that which is potentially selfed—is like that which is inherently non-selfed, the second potency. Similarly, the second potency, *actus purus*, precisely because it is *actus purus*, is not an actual being. Consequently, the second potency, in a sense, is nothing, since it is not an actual being-in-action. The two figures—1 and 2—are identical insofar as each lacks the selfedness that would allow a real opposition to emerge between them. Since the first two are not mutually exclusive, then the exclusion of the third is not real, but merely logical. The three potencies thus occupy the same place; their difference is merely one of nature (SW XII: 81–82).

For there to be a real separation between the potencies, for a real antithesis to take place, one has to factor in selfhood (*Selbstheit*). The only way to obtain a real being is if the necessary presupposition of being, namely, that which is non-being by nature, would become non-being in act. To be realized as non-being, however, it has to be posited as being—a transition impossible by virtue of its mere nature. This leaves us with one hypothesis, namely, to consider this transition as posited by a divine will (SW XII: 84). This idea might seem counter-intuitive, because it involves God negating His own being, positing Himself as non-being. Since God, however, is the being who, by nature, is $-A + A \pm A$, and therefore necessarily and irrevocably All-One, he can be *actu*, the opposite (SW XII: 84–85). The act by which the potencies are posited in being, i.e., as potencies in tension, involves the temporary reversal or suspension of their nature. Thus, since $-A$ is by nature that which is not, its actualization makes it operate as its opposite, as that which is. This is only effected so that it can be negated again, posited once more as $-A$. The initial reversal of $-A$, the first and necessary position through which God is posited as a real being, simultaneously entails the exclusion of $+A$, which finds itself at the beginning of this process posited as negated, as non-being. In turn, however, $+A$ is only

negated so that it can be posited again through this process as that which is (SW XII: 86–87).

In their transition into being, the potencies acquire new designations. A, as the general potency to be (*Seynkönnende*), which can transition directly from potency to actuality, is determined in the first potency as A1. The second potency, that which purely is, is posited as A2, because it cannot be actualized by itself, but only through another. As soon as it emerges into being, however, A ceases to be a potency, the source and subject of being, and becomes unequal to itself: A becomes B, which is the first potency in its intensification (*Steigerung*), its “becoming-other” (*Andersgewordenseyn*). Meanwhile, A2 ceases in the process to be that which is, and becomes that which can be. Since the mutually exclusive potencies cannot be separated, but are ordained by nature to exist in the same place, the result is a process by which what was negated (A2) seeks to negate that which negates it (B) and restore it to its original position as non-being. The second potency, however, seeks to displace that which should not be (*was nicht Seyn Sollende*)—that is, the first potency in act—not in order to assume being for itself, but, on the contrary, in conformity with its original nature as pure object, lacking all selfhood, to divest itself of selfhood and be restored as *actus purus*. Thus, the process consists in the gradual overcoming of that which should not be (B) by that which should be (*das Seyn Sollende*). The latter, however, cannot be posited immediately, but only after the first has been overcome by the second. As that which should be, it presupposes the struggle between the first two potencies; it is the potentiality of being *tertio loco*, A3, the spirit as such, the inseparable subject-object (SW XII: 88–89).

Although this third potency must be posited as spirit, it is not God. God is more than spirit, He is the exuberant being itself (*Ueberschwengliche*), free from all necessity of being. He treats spirit merely as one of His potencies. He is in all the potencies—not in any one taken separately, but as “the one operating all in all,” and as such differentiates Himself from the potencies by His indissociable unity (SW XII: 89). As the All-One, God can only be different in appearance, externally: internally, He remains the same. Consequently, the potencies in their mutual exclusion and inverted position are “God only insofar as [He is] externally disguised (*verstellte*) by divine irony.” They are the inverted (*verkehrte*), overturned (*umgekehrte*) One, literally “*uni-versio*” (SW XII: 90). In their extroversion, the potencies are the means by which God realizes all the possibilities of being and becoming. Therefore, the act by which God negates Himself is necessarily the same act by which God posits a universe. Thus, Schelling achieves a conjunction between the living, personal God and a naturalistic explanation of the world.⁵

⁵ Already in the *Denkmal an Jacobi* (1812), Schelling described his project of a “scientific theism,” as the “living conjunction” between naturalism (“the system that posits a nature in God”) and theism (the system that “affirms a consciousness, an intelligence, and a free-

[T]he mystery of the divine being and divine life is explained by this *miracle* [*Wunder*] of the *permutation* or *reversal* of the potencies. And a universal law of the divine mode of action is thereby at the same time applied to the highest problem of all science, to the explanation of the world The existence of a world different from God (because the potencies in their tension are no longer God) is based on a divine art of disguise, which affirms in appearance what it intends to negate, and vice versa, negates in appearance what it intends to affirm. What explains the world in general explains also the course of the world, the many great and difficult riddles that human life offers as a whole and in its details (SW XII: 91–92).

The question remains to know if this theogonic process justifies monotheism as a dogma. A dogma has a positive content, and therefore only has meaning as the expression of an actual antithesis. Therefore, monotheism only acquires significance as a dogma to the extent that polytheism is something objectively possible and real. Schelling has already admitted a plurality of principles in the divine being, but he has not yet shown any actual opposition between them. With the hypothesis of the theogonic process, however, the dogmatic significance of monotheism becomes possible: only after the objective possibility of polytheism has been established does it make sense to affirm that there is only one true God. With the determination of the potencies in the theogonic process as the external face of God, polytheism becomes conceivable. Considered outside the divine unity, the potencies are not God, nor are they concrete things, but spiritual essences, which Schelling describes as “pseudo-Gods,” the biblical Elohim (SW XII: 98). Consequently, monotheism does not imply the absolute impossibility of polytheism. In the theogonic process, God is at every level in becoming. He appears, at separate moments, as a different figure of this divine becoming, as a series of gods. To this extent, polytheism is something natural, something the possibility of which is not excluded *a priori* (SW XII: 107).

3. The Aim of the Divine Life as the Aim of the Human Life

After defining the concept of monotheism, and deriving from the hypothesis of a theogonic process in general the possibility of monotheism as a dogma, Schelling returns to the question raised at the beginning of the treatise: “Does

willing in God”) (SW VIII: 69). Since God is a living being who encompasses all things, then “real theology cannot come into conflict with Nature, nor suppress any system whatsoever” (SW VIII: 55).

monotheism have an *original* relation to *human consciousness*?" (SW XII: 108). In the *Historical-Critical Introduction*, Schelling shows that the potencies by which human consciousness is moved in the mythological process are the same potencies by which consciousness is "originally and essentially that which posits God." Further, he argues that the potencies at work in human consciousness must be the same through which nature is created, stating that "human consciousness [is] something that has become, and nothing *outside* of creation, but rather its end" (SW XI: 215).⁶ On this basis, he speculates that the theogonic process in human consciousness must have an objective significance; that is, the religious process in human consciousness must be originally related to God.

It is not in itself thinkable that the principles of a process that proves to be a theogonic one can be something other than the principles of *all* Being and *all* Becoming. Thus the mythological process does not have merely religious meaning—it has *universal* [*allgemeine*] meaning. For it is the universal [*allgemeine*] process that repeats itself in it; accordingly, the truth that mythology has in the process is also a universal [*universelle*] one, one excluding nothing. (SW XI: 216)⁷

How to conceive an original relation between the monotheism expressed in creation and human consciousness? Up until this point, Schelling has only explained the concept of a theogonic process in general, outside of human consciousness. We have seen how God in this process achieves His goal *per contrarium*, since the process is initiated by a temporary negation of the divine being. At the end of the process, the three potencies (which had become extroverted during creation) are restored to their natural introverted state. Given that the potencies at work in creation derive from God, and that it is He who, through the potencies, operates in this process, it might seem as if God needs creation in order to realize Himself. This view is incompatible with God's absolute freedom and life. If this process is not necessary for God, however, the question remains to know for whom or what creation is intended. This is a delicate question in Schelling, one that has always attracted suspicions of monism and pantheism. That Schelling here affirms God's absolute sovereignty is evidenced by a decisive passage at the beginning of Lecture 6:

[God's] realization [in this process] is not necessary for *himself*. Even without it he knows himself [to be] the insurmountable All-One. For him, this movement, this process would be without result. What could

⁶ Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 150.

⁷ Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 150.

then lead him to the free decision of manifesting [*hervorzutreten*] in this process? The reason for this decision cannot be an aim that he wanted to achieve in relation to himself. There must be something outside of him (*praeter ipsum*), something that He wants to achieve by means of this process, something that does not yet exist ... but which this process makes possible ... a creature that God sees as future, as possible. (SW XII: 108–109)

For something that did not previously exist to emerge into being, the potencies must operate as *causes*. In the process, that which ought not to be (B) operates as the *causa materialis*, that from which all things emerge. It is that which is changed and modified in the process that progressively seeks to convert it back into non-being. The second potency (A2) is *causa efficiens*, through which everything comes to be; it is what transforms, what acts on and alters B. The third potency (A3), *causa finalis*, is the goal or end toward which everything becomes. These three causes, insofar as they are ordained to joint action (being indissociable even while in tension), presuppose a fourth one, *causa causarum*, the cause of causes. It is the will of the divinity itself, and to the extent that it acts through the three causes, all products are the work of the divine will. Thus, the naturalistic explanation of things (through the three causes) does not exclude the religious one, and vice versa (SW XII: 112–113). As creative causes, the potencies bridge concrete, material reality and abstract concepts, the region of true universals. Since the theogonic process is not merely an abstract sequence of logical determinations, but also constitutes the process of creation, it does not just result in being in general, but in “concrete being in all the variety of its gradations and ramifications” (SW XII: 116). Therefore, the process unfolds in stages: the potency that underlies the process (B) is overcome through a succession of moments, the product of an explicit divine will affirming a variety of things distinct from God. If there were no distinguishable moments, no middle terms, then the unity that was negated at the beginning of the process would be immediately restored: there would be nothing new, nothing that did not previously exist (SW XII: 116).

If creation begins with the emergence of non-being into being, it ends with the potencies restored to their original nature in a new and independent being, namely, the human being. Human consciousness is nothing but “the end and goal of all the process of nature” (SW XII: 118)—it is the “product of monotheism expressed in creation” (SW XII: 120). The elements that are at work in creation—i.e., the potencies in tension—also create human consciousness. The latter represents the point in which all the potencies are restored to their unity, where the God-negating principle (B) is again turned into the God-positing principle (*Gott Setzende*)—that is, it becomes subject. As the pure substance of human consciousness, this principle is that which, in

consciousness, naturally posits God. Because of it, the human being is originally, i.e., by nature, a God-positing essence, before any notion of God can be externally communicated to it. Original human consciousness is nothing but this positing of God, “before all invention and all science, and also before all revelation and the possibility of all revelation ... not *actu* nor knowingly and voluntarily—there is no room here for any of these things—but rather in non-act, in non-will, and in non-knowledge” (SW XII: 119).

If the potencies in creation are those of God, how are human beings separate from God? The essence of human consciousness is not equal to B, but to B that has been overcome by A and brought back into its original latency. It is a new essence, separate from B. Neither is it merely A, but rather, it is A that has B as its foundation, A that has overcome B. Thus, with the creation of human consciousness, something that did not exist before has been posited. Since human consciousness is neither A nor B, it is an intermediary, a third vis-à-vis the two. This centrality with respect to both potencies makes it free in relation to them: it is a distinct, independent being (*Wesen*). Insofar as it is A containing B, human consciousness is able to raise B and put it in motion again, as independent of God (SW XII: 121–22). Since nothing can be absolutely outside of God, Schelling’s claim that human beings are independent of God has to be understood in a relative sense. Human beings are independent of God in the sense that they are, by nature, endowed with freedom. At the same time, since human consciousness is constituted by the same potencies through which God providentially operates in creation, when consciousness moves, these potencies move with it. “The essence of the human being is so connatural with that of God that it cannot move itself without God himself moving toward it” (SW XII: 125).

To what end does the human being trigger a new theogonic process? Schelling argues that while human consciousness is God-positing by essence, it has no knowledge of this fact at the beginning. In order for the human being to come to know himself as God-positing, he has to come out of his original position. Thus, he triggers a new process that repeats the process of nature, only now in human consciousness. Having become a principle of human consciousness, the principle at the foundation of the first process “goes through the same path toward the human [being], toward the positing of God, as that which it had gone through in creation at an earlier stage” (SW XII: 127). By stepping out of his original position, the human being dislocates the unity of the potencies. The ensuing struggle between the potencies constitutes the natural development of religious consciousness. Mythology is nothing but the record of this struggle in human consciousness. Mythological representations, Schelling argues, were not originally imparted to consciousness from outside: they are not artificial allegories, but “pure, internal emanations” or “modifications” of human consciousness (SW XII: 128). As the expression of

consciousness under the irresistible influence of the potencies, “[m]ythology as the history of the gods, thus the actual mythology, was only able to be produced in life itself; it *had* to be something *lived* and *experienced*” (SW XI: 126).⁸

If monotheism is the foundation of mythology, it defines, by extension, the actual content of all religion. Monotheism is not only a variety of religious belief among others. Since it constitutes the essence of human consciousness, and undergirds the latter’s development through the religious process, all religions ultimately derive from it: it is “tree of all religions” (SW XII: 79). Therefore, it is inaccurate to say that Christianity—or any single religion, for that matter—invented this idea. Rather, it is Christianity that actually derives from it: monotheism is “all of Christianity in the bud, in design (*Anlage*).” Christianity is only the “highest appearance of monotheism.” The Christian doctrine of the Trinity expresses the same principles in the concept of monotheism, only it contains them “at a superior level” (SW XII: 79). In mythology, human consciousness was under the influence of the potencies as if driven by a force it did not fully understand, leading Schelling to characterize mythology as the “blind, unfree religion.” By contrast, Christianity represents the process through which consciousness is liberated from paganism, and through which “the true religion, the spiritual religion—the religion of free contemplation, of free knowledge—is first mediated and made possible” (SW XIII: 194). This not-yet-existing philosophical religion emerges through a “scientific” understanding of the content of the mythological and revealed religions. Since monotheism, however, is the ultimate root of all religions, the future philosophical religion is necessarily also monotheistic. Consequently, Schelling characterizes the religious history of humanity as a “passage from a monotheism that is purely essential and connatural to the *essence* of the human being, to the freely recognized monotheism” (SW XII: 126).

Conclusion

This essay has offered a reading of Schelling’s *Monotheism* highlighting the role of life in his doctrine of God and religion. In the first place, I showed how Schelling defines the concept of monotheism as including a plurality of principles that constitute the necessary form of the divine being. God’s life is expressed both in His freedom vis-à-vis the potencies, and in that He is their “living unity.” In the second place, I explained Schelling’s doctrine of creation as reflecting what he described as the passage from the “form of the divine life ... [to] actual life, the living God himself” (SW XII: 59). In the third place, I showed how Schelling interprets the original human consciousness as the

⁸ Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 89

product of the actual life of God, and further, how God underpins the religious life and history of humanity.

The philosophy of religion thus outlined can be understood as a philosophy of life in a double sense. For one, God's life, in its various moments, is the main subject of this philosophy. A central point in *Monotheism* is that God is not only the necessary being, but also the "Lord of Being." This is the supreme concept of Schelling's later philosophy.

A philosophy that goes back to that which is in itself and starts with it, already leads us directly and by itself to a system of freedom, and has liberated itself from the necessity that weighs like a nightmare on all systems that stop at pure being, without rising to *that which is in itself* . . . To go beyond being, and to stand in a free relation to it, [that is] is the real aim of philosophy. (SW XII: 33–34)

If Schelling's later philosophy is a system of freedom, it is by the same token a system of life. Indeed, as I have shown, life and freedom as applied to God are closely interdependent concepts in Schelling's thought. God is a living God only insofar as He is free. Both life and freedom are expressed in God's ability to generate Himself in an external being while remaining free in relation to all being.

There is another, complementary sense in which Schelling's later philosophy of religion is also of one life. This second sense is not about Schelling's philosophy possessing and affirming the free, living God as its highest concept. Rather, it refers to the idea that this philosophy is itself somehow an extension of the divine life. Indeed, in Schelling's view, his philosophy of religion is not only an abstract theory of religion, but itself represents a movement in the actual development of human consciousness toward the realization of the not-yet-existing philosophical religion. This religion, as noted above, understands the content of all historical religions in freedom, that is, independent of all compulsion, whether internal (as in the mythological process) or external (i.e., the dogmatic authority of the Church): it is the religion of "free philosophical knowledge" (SW XIII: 192–93). That being said, under Schelling's own terms, it is not only his philosophy, but the entirety of human experience that is implicated in the movement of the divine life. To quote *Monotheism* again: "The essence of the human being is so connatural with that of God that it cannot move itself without God himself moving toward it" (SW XII: 125).

If this passage, however, can be cited to support a reading of Schelling's later philosophy of religion as a philosophy of life, it might also be cited to argue the opposite. Indeed, by funnelling life—both divine and human—through the dialectical determinism of the potencies, *Monotheism* arguably

meets the demands of systematicity and reason, but at the cost of ignoring the demands of the actual religious life, namely, not those of an impersonal human consciousness evolving in history, but rather those of the human person *hic et nunc*. Schelling offers a system of conceptual formulations that is rich with intuitions, yet for all its insistence on movement and life, the only thing that really appears to move in it is reason. No doubt, Schelling felt this when he later distinguished the “negative philosophy,” which is rational and dialectical, from the “positive philosophy,” which bases itself on experience.⁹ His awareness of the need to transcend the limits of discursive thought is most forcefully and clearly expressed in the unfinished Lecture 24 of the *Purely Rational Philosophy*, which offers a phenomenology of the consciousness dissatisfied with mere reason and demanding a God “outside the idea.”¹⁰

⁹ The distinction between the negative and positive philosophies belongs to “last” period of Schelling’s thought, beginning with his move to Berlin in 1841 until his death in 1854. *Monotheism* remained essentially unchanged since 1827; it precedes the positive–negative distinction.

¹⁰ See, e.g., this characteristic passage: “The I feels naturally alienated under the Law This is because, as something universal and impersonal, the Law can only be harsh as a power of reason that ignores personality (*Persönlichkeit*) to the point of not letting it off by a single iota in the name of the person The I wants to be for itself, but facing the Law finds itself subjected to the universal The human being can never find peace through the Law” (SW XI: 554–55).