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Schelling's Autogenetic Absolute and the Transformative Power of Love: Questioning the Sources of a Moving System

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*—It is the spirit that works and weaves in us,
until every fight has been fought through by love¹*

Among the philosophies of German Idealism, none is more often described as marked by internal tensions than Schelling's, which nevertheless retained, throughout his life, the ambition to be a system. This claim (and its discussed "failure")² may be considered one of the most striking controversies, not only particular to Schelling's reception but to his own thinking. The tensions that the present article aims to interrogate concern the form and the essential content that the Schellingian system had taken on by 1809.

Few problems express the tensions of the Schellingian system in such a multifaceted yet systematic and continuous manner as the problem of *identity and difference*, which addresses the *transition* (*Übergang*) from the unconditional to the conditional, the infinite to the finite—a transition that the early Schelling

¹ "Es ist der Geist, der in uns wirkt und webet, bis alle Kämpfe durchgekämpft die Liebe." August Graf von Platen-Hallermünde, "Prolog," in *Lyrische Blätter*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1821), viii.

² For the highly influential narrative that shaped the renewed reception of Schelling at the beginning of the twentieth century, see in particular Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), ed. Ingrid Schüßler (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), 279.

already identifies as *the* “problem of *all* philosophy” (SW I: 314).³ By thematizing Schelling’s *concept of love* in what follows, I break down this problem, which is the problem of the beginning in a threefold sense: the origin of the world, the foundation of the system, and the *beginning* as the very essence of freedom (the philosopher’s included).

And since this article primarily deals with the *foundation of the Schellingian system* between 1801 and 1810 and its transformation in terms of the theory of first principles and the logic of identity, one might ask, “What does love have to do with it?”

Love constitutes Schelling’s understanding of longing (*Sehnsucht*) as well as of the all-transcending purity (*Lauterkeit*) and accompanies Schelling’s remarks wherever he speaks of becoming—first and foremost, of the becoming of God through God’s birth. In Schelling, love constitutes an entire phenomenology of divine eros and human desire. Love is indissolubly linked to the understanding of the magic chain of *Kabiri* and to the voice of the Law of the World (*Weltgesetz*) that wants to bring everything to a decision.⁴ For Schelling, love is the essence of the soul and finds itself at the heart of his understanding of philosophy. As Schelling shows in the *Ages of the World*, love structures, even *gives*, time—to ourselves no less than to the divine—since only love befriends time and future.⁵ That said, love is undoubtedly the core concept for Schellingian eschatology—extending all the way to the *Johannine Church* and the community of spirit—and one should not be suspicious about this “overloaded” concept if one considers that, when it comes to the highest (and lowest and middle) terms of Schellingian thinking, a whole “vocabulary” of love is Schelling’s preferred language.

This is a language that, like every language, is more than mere language, yet one whose philosophical seriousness and scope—especially in Schelling’s most famous writings—are still too often underestimated. More specifically, it is frequently reduced to a legacy of Romanticism, a theological accessory, religious dogmatism, or merely poetic and personal sentimentality. Instead, this article argues, love should be grasped as by far the *most outstanding* philosophical

³ F.W.J. Schelling, “Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism,” in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794–1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Associated University Presses, 1980), 177.

⁴ For the reference to the *Kabiri*, see *Die Gottheiten von Samothrake* (SW VIII: 345–423), SW VIII: 352–359, 365–369. For the germ of the motif of the *Weltgesetz* in the Freedom Essay, see SW VII: 374. For its further development, see, for instance, F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie* (SW XII: 1–674), SW XII: 142–143, and F.W.J. Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, ed. Walter E. Erhardt (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992), 622.

⁵ See F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World: Book One—the Past (Original Version, 1811) Plus Supplementary Fragments (1811–1813), Including a Fragment from Book Two (the Present) along with a Fleeting Glimpse into the Future*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 145 (WA: 85).

matter (*Gegenstand*) of the Freedom Essay of 1809—a *matter* that is the treatise’s systematic and hermeneutic knot, and thereby transformative for Schelling’s subsequent trajectory. It is a trajectory characterized by a thinking where love enters, from 1809 onward, into inseparable synonymy with the *processuality of freedom*, becoming both its object and ethos—in short, the *meaning* of Schellingian philosophy.

Love thus appears as the hermeneutic glue of Schellingian thinking, connecting different parts of his work and revealing the systematic unity that undergirds it. However, love is also, as this article seeks to outline, the very problematic—viewed from a systematic and genetic perspective—that first *raises* and *intensifies* the aforementioned tension of identity and difference and thus brings the problem of *transition* into *heightened focus*. And this is insofar as *love*—designating, from 1809 onward (in an omnipresent and recurring Pauline reminiscence), Schelling’s own system—denotes the all-unifying, all-recovering Absolute *as well as* precisely the moment of irreducible *difference* and the explicit *limit* of philosophy, marking moments of irrecoverableness and withdrawal. In 1809, love *literally* becomes the highest point of the “*via negativa* [*negative way*]” of Schelling’s classical *philosophy of identity*, and a subversive source in his thinking, placing itself at the center of a *second beginning* from within.

To elaborate on this, I will concentrate on the period between 1801 and 1810, which spans a conceptual horizon from the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (Schelling’s first, far more hermetic system) to the system presented in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, which I take as a perfectly compatible iteration of the Freedom Essay. Taking this background into account, I will argue that the widely-recognized hinge function⁶ of the Freedom Essay in Schelling’s work is to be seen in a *transformation* of Schelling’s concept of identity, marking the last major shift in the problem axis of his philosophy. The main thesis of this text is that the systematic and hermeneutic core of this transformation is to be understood in terms of Schelling’s notion of love.

This article will proceed in four steps or sections. First, I will focus on Schelling’s classical philosophy of identity and its *transformation*, which Jean-François Marquet aptly describes, very concisely, by stating that Schelling “detached himself from identity, broke his concept of identity precisely with this identity itself, and could henceforth reengage with it in a new totality”⁷: This is a transformation that I in turn wish to outline by showing how it not only culminates in Schelling’s notion of love in 1809, but is fundamentally driven by it. It is this crucial shift that reaches its peak in the synonymity between identity and love, *systematically* developed for the first time in the

⁶ See Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 37.

⁷ See Jean-François Marquet, *Liberté et Existence. Étude sur la formation de la philosophie de Schelling* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 363.

Freedom Essay and radiating outward into his late philosophy (section 1). I will then focus on the Freedom Essay by showing how the “motility of love” (SW VII: 373)⁸—far from being merely a theological ornamentation of this treatise *and* far from being a leitmotif found only in the Freedom Essay—becomes the epitome of Schelling’s autogenetic Absolute in 1809, the very essence of the *processuality* of freedom (section 2), and thus provides the *framework* for grasping the essence and the reality of human freedom (section 3). The final two sections illuminate how this crucial transformation is, in the direct transition to the *Ages of the World*, already clearly inscribed in the *Stuttgart Seminars* of 1810. I will focus systematically on two essential aspects that I see as part of the direct heritage of Schelling’s 1809 understanding of love. The first is the intertwining of epistemological and anthropological inquiry that comes with the transformation of the notion of identity and is schematized in the doctrine of potencies of the human spirit, i.e., the anthropology of 1810. The second aspect is the Pauline Pantheism that becomes the name of Schelling’s “new” system—hence, a *system of love*—one that Schelling will reclaim and continuously develop until his late philosophy (section 4).

I use the term *autogenetic Absolute* because it highlights the legacy of the philosophy of identity within Schelling’s later work and best captures the transition between the *Presentation* and the *Stuttgart Seminars*.

Absolute Identity and Divine Difference—Shifting Indifference

In the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801), Schelling’s philosophy of identity emerges through his attempt to reconcile transcendental philosophy and philosophy of nature, starting from their “indifference-point” (SW IV: 108).⁹ While Schelling’s earlier efforts attempt to assert the autonomy of his philosophy of nature over the transcendental philosophy of Fichtean imprint, the *Presentation* is intended to demonstrate the *absolute unity-point* of both sciences and to provide philosophy as such with a higher *foundational principle*

⁸ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 41. Henceforth referred to as Freedom Essay. *Motility of love* is Schmidt’s and Love’s translation of “Beweglichkeit der Liebe” (*beweglich* literally denotes that which can move). While this motif undoubtedly belongs at the center of the Freedom Essay’s theodicy, the present article argues that the *Beweglichkeit der Liebe* should be understood much more broadly as the very quintessence of the processuality that, with the Freedom Essay, comes to occupy the core of Schelling’s thought and must be grasped explicitly against the background of the transformation of his notion of *absolute identity*.

⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, in: *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 142.

than the one found in Fichte. Following earlier efforts to find a basis for the system in *one absolute principle*, it is here in the *Presentation* that reason (*Vernunft*), understood as the total indifference of the subjective and objective, and with it, *absolute identity itself*, fulfills the function of a unifying principle. It becomes the absolute principle of Schelling's "own" system.

I recall this briefly to point out, on the one hand, that this absolute identity will remain the system's principle, at least explicitly, up to the Stuttgart system; and, on the other hand, that Schelling will defend this notion of absolute identity throughout large parts of his philosophy of identity: *as absolute indifference*—that is, identity without opposition or qualitative difference—whose status as the very essence of the Absolute is expressed in his effort to conceive all difference as inherently *quantitative*.¹⁰

Though the *Bruno* text already presents a more dynamic understanding of identity—the "identity of identity and opposition [*Einheit der Einheit und des Gegensatzes*]" (SW IV: 239)¹¹—that, *on paper*, does not differ greatly from subsequent formulations—one could ask if Schelling's classical philosophy of identity does not finally fail to answer *how* absolute identity *itself* is supposed to be the principle *and origin* of movement. Schelling, however, insists on defining absolute identity as an indifference that ultimately excludes (*qualitative*)

¹⁰ For the quantitative difference, or the "*differencia formalis*" (SW IV: 127, addition [*Zusatz*]), see, in particular: SW IV: 120–140, 170, 182. See also § 29 of the Würzburg System from 1804 (SW VI: 179). On the problem of the conception of absolute identity itself, see Bernhard Rang, *Identität und Indifferenz. Eine Untersuchung zu Schellings Identitätsphilosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000), 141–151. Rang, however, does not find any noticeable difference in the conception of absolute identity between 1801 and 1806. For a much more systematic problematization of the relationship between identity and difference, especially for the selected period, see, above all, Philipp Schwab, "Uebergang von Identität zu Differenz: Die Bestimmung des Systemprinzips in den Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen vor dem Hintergrund von Schellings Denkentwicklung seit 1801," in *System, Natur und Anthropologie: Zum 200. Jubiläum von Schellings Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, ed. Lore Hühn and Philipp Schwab (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber, 2014), 35–70. Schwab clearly emphasizes the importance of difference and the dynamization of Schelling's conception of identity, but he pays little to no attention to Schelling's concept of love. See also Philipp Schwab, "A = A: Zur identitätslogischen Systemgrundlegung bei Fichte, Schelling und Hegel," in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 12 (2017), 261–289.

¹¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno, or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things* (1802), ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 139. For the multilayered exchange of blows within German Idealism, and its philosophical-historical and systematic significance for Schelling's conception of identity, see again Philipp Schwab, "Uebergang von Identität zu Differenz"; Philipp Schwab, "A = A: Zur identitätslogischen Systemgrundlegung bei Fichte, Schelling und Hegel." On the significance of the engagement with the *Timaens* for Schelling's philosophy of identity, and thus on the "tradition" in Schelling's work of thinking identity as an organic concept, see, above all, Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011) and Manfred Frank, *Reduplikative Identität: Der Schlüssel zu Schellings reifer Philosophie*, *Schellingiana* 28 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2018).

difference. Passages such as the following from the *Further Presentations* of 1802, which still define the Absolute as “pure and unclouded [*ungetrübte*] identity” (SW IV: 374), and as entailing “the *absolute* exclusion of *all* difference from its essence” (SW IV: 375),¹² should thus be striking for any reader of the Freedom Essay (1809), since *difference* becomes therein not marginal, but rather constitutive of the determination of the Absolute itself. And even in *Philosophy and Religion* (1804)—considered by Schelling himself as the forerunner to the Freedom Essay¹³—where undoubtedly everything is already quite different, far more tense and indeed quite anticipatory, this definition remains predominant: even freedom’s significance, radicalized by the theorem of the falling-away (*Abfall*), is still relatively far from *challenging* the understanding of the *processuality* of absolute freedom *itself* and hence of the ultimate definition of the Absolute as indifference. Although finitude is indicated as its “own author,”¹⁴ the will to this authorship as the will of the counter-Absolute (*Gegen-Absolutes*) to seize itself in its independence still has no place at all in the system. The question of how derived absoluteness *and* immanence of the creature—and thus of the *relation* itself between God and the World¹⁵—are to be conceived, and which will become the focus of the Freedom Essay under the heading of pantheism, remains here still unresolved.

It is this predominant notion of the Absolute that Tilliette strikingly calls a “clear, pure, *uncontaminated* indifference”¹⁶ that I wanted to highlight as a crucial contrast and the breaking point through which we must understand the universally recognized crisis,¹⁷ but above all, the *transformation* of Schelling’s philosophy of identity: a crisis that makes the significance and radiance of love in Schelling’s work particularly visible.

Schelling’s model of indifference can explain formal, ideal difference with respect to a formalistic sequence of stages. However, the question of *why there is something at all rather than nothing*, a question that accompanied Schelling throughout his life, the origin of real difference, and of the world we live in,

¹² F.W.J. Schelling, *Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie* (SW IV: 333–510). Emphasis by the author.

¹³ See SW VII: 334. For a general analysis of Schelling’s self-interpretation, see Jean-François Marquet, *Liberté et Existence*, 393; Xavier Tilliette, *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir. Tome 1: Le système vivant, 1794–1821* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 476–479.

¹⁴ Tilliette, *Schelling, Tome 1: Le système vivant*, 494.

¹⁵ Over the course of the present article, it will hopefully become clear to what extent Schelling’s reference to the Platonic motif of the divine freedom from envy (see SW VI: 39), as well as Schelling’s Spinozist affirmation of God’s infinite self-love—to which he turns at the end of the 1804 treatise (see SW VI: 62)—are incongruent with his understanding of love in the Freedom Essay.

¹⁶ Xavier Tilliette, *Schelling, Tome 1: Le système vivant*, 520.

¹⁷ For an overview of this crisis and its key moments, see Tilliette, *Schelling, Tome 1: Le système vivant*; in particular, on the aporia of the finite, see 313, 475–481. See also Jean-François Marquet, *Liberté et Existence*, 207–310, 363.

may only be given formally, if it is given at all. In other words, the “riddle of the world” (SW I: 310)¹⁸—one could formulate somewhat strikingly—is not *solved* by the classical philosophy of identity, but is rather *sharpened* to the point that, as Wittgenstein put it, what is mystical is not how the world is, but *that* it is.¹⁹ Schelling’s classical philosophy of identity ultimately fails to achieve what his *Bruno* summarizes: the “genuine and deepest secret” (SW IV: 328)²⁰ would not only lie in showing the unity point of opposites but in *developing* from itself its opposite, a diversity, and in explaining true becoming out of the Absolute itself. In other words, Schelling does not show how *absolute identity*—as the system’s foundational principle—unfolds a development from itself, and could explain real beginning, and whence and *why* there is more than formal difference.

It thus seems quite distorted when the Stuttgart-Schelling says that he has “always made it clear” (SW VII: 445) that the absolute principle of his system would not be “a mere identity but the identity of unity and oppositionality” (SW VII: 445),²¹ and when he presents a monism and dualism of the absolute principle, but places this, like the 1810 *Stuttgart Seminars* in general, in continuity with earlier endeavors of his philosophy of identity, all the while speaking explicitly of a *qualitative* difference and of identity and duality *itself* as the last, no longer resolvable opposition.²²

One year after the Freedom Essay, a notion of identity is at the center of Schelling’s explicitly new attempt at a system—a notion of identity that not only acknowledges difference but can no longer be conceived without it. This sharpening of the system criteria in 1810, I argue, must not be understood “somehow” through Schelling’s notion of love; rather, it quite simply pertains to no other concept in his philosophy so precisely and stands in direct systematic continuity with the highest point of his investigations in 1809.²³

However, before Schelling’s Freedom Essay links the *secret*—or mystery—*of love* (*Geheimnis der Liebe*) inseparably with the unground (*Ungrund*)—and thereby explicitly with the question of the *foundation* of the system itself—the dynamization of his understanding of identity is already expressed within love: In the *Statement* of 1806, a text wherein we could find passages that could indicate its descending from a much later period of Schellingian work (as well as passages that prove that it could not have done so), Schelling still defends

¹⁸ F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, 173/74.

¹⁹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 6.44.

²⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno*, 222.

²¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 225.

²² See SW VII: 445. Especially for the role of love, see also SW VII: 453.

²³ See SW VII: 406.

an *identity without difference and opposition* as the well-known “indifference of essence and form” (SW VII: 54).²⁴ However, in 1806 it is specified that this indifference would “not yet contain” (SW VII: 54)²⁵ opposition, but that opposition would only come with plurality, to which we could only come “through the necessary result of self-revelation,” which revelation is, as Schelling states, “itself being,” and which could not happen in the revealing Being nor the transition to something entirely other, i.e., “when it is not actually the living bond between itself and another” (SW VII: 54).²⁶

Whereas the *Statement* initially had mocked Fichte’s elevation of love as an unsuccessful attempt to escape a philosophy of reflection,²⁷ Schelling himself presents an *affirmative* understanding of love that contrasts with the pure indifference of the previous years and, in the Freedom Essay, already designates the *living* aspect of identity that cannot be captured by a negative philosophy of reflection:²⁸ Understood as the unification of the One with the many, the *eternal bond* has become Schelling’s explanation of real opposition—and love the synonym of divine identity. This is also evident in the *Aphorisms*, often taken to be the first occurrence of the motif of the *secret of love*, to which Schelling explicitly refers three years later:

This is the secret of eternal love, that which wants to be absolute for itself does not consider it as theft to be it for itself, but is only in and with the others. If each were not a whole, but only part of the whole, then there would be no love: but there is love because each is a whole and yet is not, and cannot be without the other. (SW VII: 174)²⁹

²⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine: An Elucidation of the Former, 1806*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Dale E. Snow (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), 49.

²⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, 49.

²⁶ F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, 50.

²⁷ See in particular SW VII: 26 (F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, 25).

²⁸ See in particular SW VII: 25–27, 65–79 (F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, 24–26, 58–70).

²⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Aphorismen zur Einleitung in die Naturphilosophie* (SW VII: 140–189). See also aphorism 162 (SW VII: 174). For Schelling’s explicit reference to the *secret of love* in the Freedom Essay, see SW VII: 408. The first occurrence of the *secret of love* in Schelling’s work, as far as I am aware, is in 1804 in the Würzburg system (see SW VI: 407), in connection with the difference of sexes as the highest expression of absolute identity in nature. Here, however, this secret is of *secondary significance*, whereas it accompanies the dynamization up to the Freedom Essay, through which it first, as the present article argues, acquires *systematic* relevance.

I am recalling this to underline two things: First, that there is a gradual *abandonment of indifference* that goes hand in hand with the growing significance of love in Schelling's work, representing a major revision of Schelling's understanding of identity in 1806³⁰ and marking the background for the peculiar tension whereby *Schelling surpasses his concept of identity through his concept of identity*.³¹ And second, that this is, however, still far from amounting to a full restructuring of *the systematic approach itself*. So even if a few things in Schelling cannot, in retrospect, be traced back to anticipations already present in his earlier works, I argue that while love, as sketched above, appears before 1809 as a synonym for divine identity and for the mystery of existence (and is, admittedly, never far from German Idealism's triune speculations), thus designating the *living* aspect of divine identity, it is only in the Freedom Essay that love becomes the *systematic* point of readjustment and transformation in Schelling's philosophy.

In what follows, I will focus on the significance of love in terms of the theory of principles and the logic of identity, in order to indicate how the secret of love—in being placed at the very heart of Schelling's system in 1809—confronts precisely those moments that have been the *aporias* of the philosophy of identity, and thereby renders *processuality*, *relationality*, and *personal existence* the new protagonists of Schellingian thinking.

The *motility of love* is far more than a marginal ornament—neither in the Freedom Essay nor in Schellingian thinking—but, on the contrary, becomes the very synonym of eternal freedom and divine life, the epitome of a “new,” autogenetic Absolute, in 1809. It is at this point that love, for the first time in Schelling's work, becomes a theogonic and cosmogonic force, while also defining the genome of human freedom, speculatively marking its origin and thereby depicting the approach to the human being's capacity (*Vermögen*) for good and evil.

³⁰ Schelling appends the *Treatise on the Relationship of the Real and the Ideal in Nature* to the second edition of the *Worldsoul* (1806). Here, as in the *Statement*, the bond (*Band*) is explicitly referred to as love, which underlines two things. First, although the bond is anything but a new figure for Schellingian thought (to whose introduction and importance Schelling, however, explicitly refers in the short preface to the second edition), love has gained the significance sketched above. Second, regarding the relationship between the Absolute and the world, this significance is still more oriented toward the classical motif of infinite self-affirmation and closer to Spinoza's *amor dei intellectualis* (see SW II: 362), especially with respect to the problem of finitude and real difference (see SW II: 362). For a significant difference in the understanding of love—namely, in contrast to the Freedom Essay—see also SW II: 376.

³¹ See Jean-François Marquet, *Liberté et Existence*, 363.

The Motility of Love

In the above, I focused on the dynamization of Schelling's absolute identity up to the *overture* and the underlying *framework*—still the logic of absolute identity—of the Freedom Essay, to show how, when Schelling here decisively turns against an understanding of identity as “seamless sameness (*Einerleiheit*)” (SW VII: 345),³² this can be grasped precisely as a pointed engagement both with external criticism³³ and with the *internal crisis* of his philosophy of identity.

In the course of this rejection of *seamless sameness*, Schelling here, at the very beginning of the Freedom Essay, immediately returns to the determination of the *copula* and the *bond* from 1806—and thus, without explicitly mentioning it, to the determination of absolute identity *as love*.

The misinterpretation of pantheism, he argues, would lie “in the general misunderstanding of the law of identity or the meaning of the copula in judgment” (SW VII: 341).³⁴ Identity would not express a unity, “which, turning itself in the circle of seamless sameness, would not be progressive and, thus, insensate or lifeless,” but must *itself* be understood as the “immediately creative” (SW VII: 345)³⁵—something that, in being identical to itself, *immediately* creates. This, however, has always been the demand placed on the one absolute principle, on the Absolute itself, and thus on the construction of an absolute system of philosophy—a demand that is fulfilled systematically for the first time in the Freedom Essay through love; within a creation-theological framework, and nonetheless in terms of the logic of identity.

Schelling's concrete form of this *immediately creative unity* is, as is well known, the determination of (primarily the divine) essence (*Wesen*) “in so far as it exists and being (*Wesen*)[,] in so far as it is merely the ground of existence,” (SW VII:

³² F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 17.

³³ On the catalytic significance of Hegel's famous polemic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* for the Freedom Essay and the development of the Schellingian concept of identity, see again Philipp Schwab, “Uebergang von Identität zu Differenz,” 37–52. See also Philipp Schwab, “Von der Negativität zum Ungrund: Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes und Schellings Freiheitsschrift,” in *Systembegriffe um 1800–1809: System in Bewegung*, ed. Christian Danz, Jürgen Stolzenberg, and Violetta Waibel (Hamburg: Meiner, 2018), 131–157.

³⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 13.

³⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 17. Regarding Schelling's so-called middle and late philosophy, one could, albeit very schematically, say that what will change in the following years is only the “immediacy” of this *creation*—and thus Schelling's understanding of the original divine deed—not the fact that Schelling will consistently define the essence of this free act as love. In 1809, however, creation is both necessary *and* free (in a very particular sense, see SW VII: 397). Precisely the *immediate* character of creation thus marks a contrast, i.e., a shift still to come. In emphasizing that God had no need for creation in any sense (to become himself, to become conscious, etc.)—and in thus abandoning the theogonic orientation of the middle philosophy—I see a deepening of Schelling's notion of divine love in the years that follow.

357)³⁶ about which so much could be and has been said that I refer only to what sharpens the sketched contrast and thus focuses on the considered transformation: By this *ground in God*, difference is now clearly named as *divine difference* and the question about a last duality, as well as the transition from identity to difference, addresses the essence of God or, in the more identity-logical language, the *Absolute* itself. Whereas difference had been an unsolved difficulty of the system of absolute identity in earlier years, now it *intensifies* the questions that underpin the entire Freedom Essay: *how real* difference and yet identity; *how* dependence *and* independence of the creature (are possible); and *how* two equally primordial principles—how dualism *and yet* a monism of the principle³⁷—can be asserted in such a way that this principle is now explicitly supposed to be the foundation of a *system of freedom*.

Schelling's answer, as I will try to illuminate in what follows, seems as simple as it is revolutionary: among all the divine attributes that thinking—all the more an absolute philosophy of absolute principles—had and has to offer, it is only *love* that is the actual, and philosophical, guarantee of our freedom. Only love can guarantee a “pantheism” that is no fatalism; and only love enables a dynamic conception of *absolute identity*.

While defining God as love seems to be Schelling's final major systematic tie to Platonic-Christian tradition (*which is indeed the case*), we should not forget that this transformation within the conception of Schelling's absolute identity is a fundamentally philosophical one. Schelling situates and *grounds* a complete phenomenology of love in the divine essence, understanding love from here on as the multilayered processuality of freedom and life. In doing so, he makes not only life the schema of freedom,³⁸ but also personal identity and existence the “schema” of the life of the spirit. It is only in 1809 that love becomes synonymous with freedom and genuine existence—to an extent that it shapes an understanding of *emancipation* that we will encounter again in the *Ages of the World*, just as love will serve as a hermeneutic key to Schelling's philosophy of history. Moreover, Christianity would not be surprised (nor would be psychoanalysis) at the idea that our capacity to love is deeply intertwined with our freedom, and vice versa.

One can, therefore, only critically wonder about the assumption that Schelling, as (most famously) Heidegger pointed out, would not only “fall back into a rigid tradition,”³⁹ but that Schelling's notion of love would ultimately hide a well-disguised will to power that fails, even suppresses, the individual

³⁶ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 27.

³⁷ See in particular SW VII: 354, 406.

³⁸ See Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy*.

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), 279.

and her freedom.⁴⁰ I only briefly bring up this deep misunderstanding of *Schellingian love*, because it seems plausible to me that it may be responsible for a reading of the Freedom Essay that not only misses a *genealogy* inherent to the notion of love up to 1809, but—to keep it short (and polemic)—is responsible for a misunderstanding of the rest of Schellingian philosophy still to come thereafter. Such is a misreading that, already with a focus only on the Freedom Essay, misses not only the diverse phenomenology of love, but the logical problem related to it that confronts nothing less than the theory of potencies itself as it was reformulated in 1809 through love. Longing (*Sehnsucht*), as the willing of the *Grund*, is no less a will of love than “the will of love”; spirit no less a potency of love than is the *Ungrund*; evil no less a “revelation,” *albeit an inverted one*, of the truth *that God is love* (or, if you wish, of the *positivity* of love). And even if evil attempts precisely to hijack and annihilate this positivity, love nevertheless remains constitutive of the fact that the “hunger of selfishness (*Selbstsucht*)” (SW VII: 380)⁴¹ is intensified, not satisfied, in evil.

When thinking of *Schellingian love*, we must therefore overcome an often-suggested and far too simplistic opposition that assumes that Schelling’s understanding of love is limited to thinking of “love” on the one hand and “what opposes it” on the other. Love (like every form of *systematic* unity of earlier works), for Schelling, is not a merely summarizing unity; even less is it a synonym for a redemption that would show human freedom as—somewhere between comical and tragic—an illusion in a divine masterplan, i.e., redemption that would come about without human participation.

Love is, rather, *constitutive* of the unity in its entirety, and conditions each of its parts from the very beginning; love unconditionally conditions, it *is* the indissoluble interweaving of questing, longing, and word-giving understanding; of *priority* and *superiority*; *subject* and *predicate*; *antecedens* and *consequens*; *ground* and *cause*; *contraction* and *expansion*; *Father* and *Son* (...) and constitutes as such the co-originality of the principles: a co-originality that designates, above all, a *logical* problem—one that arises for Schelling no less than for the Pythagoreans or for Plato.

Schelling himself furthermore (precisely by positioning himself somehow against the tradition)⁴² does not tire of emphasizing that the divine essence, *understood as love*, does not exhaust itself in the understanding of communicative or pure love, as he generally emphasizes—and will still emphasize in any

⁴⁰ See in particular Martin Heidegger, *Die Metaphysik des deutschen Idealismus: Zur erneuten Auslegung von Schelling: Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* (1809), ed. Günter Seubold (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991), 101, 121, 128.

⁴¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 55.

⁴² See F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World: Book One – the Past (Original Version, 1811) plus Supplementary Fragments (1811–1813)*, 77 (WA: 19).

potency-theoretical approach in subsequent years—the respective inability of the principles or forces to create something by themselves.⁴³ Therefore, their opposition must be *first of all* understood as a *mutually constitutive relationality*, an *indissoluble togetherness*, of which we can only ask wherein it grounds: Since the Freedom Essay thinks divine spirit as a triple-structured unity in which the principles and their relation—as the predominance of the universal principle in God—are founded, the famous passage of the 1809 unground (*Ungrund*) is thus to be understood (which should surprise us neither regarding the Freedom Essay nor concerning Schelling’s later speculative figures of *Geist*) as the question of the origin of spirit and freedom.

For even the spirit is not yet the highest thing; it is but spirit or the breath of love. Yet love is the highest. It is what was there [*was da war*], then, *before* the ground and *before* that which exists (as separate), but was not yet as love [*noch nicht war als Liebe*], rather—how should we describe [*bezeichnen*] it?— (SW VII: 405/6)⁴⁴

That this unground (*Ungrund*) is so impossible to predicate that only predicatelessness can be spoken of it should, however, not obscure the fact that Schelling actually does not abandon the word,⁴⁵ but should on the contrary let us recognize that *love* is the only word that Schelling finds, and does not find—discards and retakes—at this highest point of his Freedom Essay, and thus at the foundation of his system. What Schelling presents as the philosophical interpretation of the Prologue of St. John (and Genesis), thinking love as the *essence of the divine spirit* and as the *motive* for creation,⁴⁶ is thereby drawing on his earlier philosophy of identity:

But the non-ground [*Ungrund*] divides itself into the two exactly equally eternal beginnings, *only for that* the two, which could not exist simultaneously or be one in it as the non-ground, become one through love, that is, it divides itself only so that there *may be life and love and personal existence*. For love is neither in *indifference* nor where opposites are linked which require linkage for [their] Being, but rather (to repeat a phrase which has already been said) this is the secret of love, that it

⁴³ See SW VII: 360. See also SW VII: 438. Cf. F.W.J. Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 45.

⁴⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 69. Modification and emphasis by the author.

⁴⁵ See Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, 222.

⁴⁶ See SW VII: 361. F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 30: “(...) impelled [*bewogen*] by the love that it [the divine spirit] itself is.”

links such things of which each could be for itself, yet does not and cannot be without the other. (SW VII: 408)⁴⁷

Both quotations, I argue, contain the sketched transformation of the philosophy of identity in a nutshell. In this regard, they most clearly foreshadow the positive philosophy. It is not only that Schelling, even linguistically, identifies philosophy's "innermost centerpoint" (SW VII: 333)⁴⁸—which had accompanied him from his *Timaean* commentary onward (*the necessary and the divine cause*)—with the *secret of love*. Rather, this opposition finds its final point—its actual origin—in love—and thereby, I argue, at the very center of the reorganization of Schellingian philosophy and his doctrine of potencies.

Recalling the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, it is now *literally* love that has replaced reason, and that stands at the highest point of his philosophical system. What in 1809 thus undoubtedly recalls Schelling's earlier determination of *indifference*, has now, therein, obviously undergone a decisive rearticulation: Indifference is not only no longer accessible through intellectual intuition, but is withdrawn from reason in a far more extensive sense: The Schelling of 1809 is still far from a method of positive philosophy, yet not too far from *enacting* it.⁴⁹ When the highest principle is withdrawn from reason, it is because it is not reason that makes it over the "abyss of infinity" (SW VII: 174),⁵⁰ but *love*. When at this highest point of the Freedom Essay, love *refutes* and *replaces* a system of absolute reason, it is because truth is not (only) a question of reason, but of existence: a fact that is undoubtedly not only "somehow" reflected in human freedom, but which *is* the impossibility of its indifference.

⁴⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 70. Translation slightly modified and emphasized by the author. The German precisely does not say "exist" (as translated by Love and Schmidt) but *sein könnte* and *doch nicht ist* and *nicht sein kann*. One rarely pays attention to the simple fact that the formulation of the *secret of love* is itself potency-doctrinal, and therein—i.e., in Schelling's understanding of love in 1809—we find the most significant foreshadowing "prototype" for Schelling's subsequent work. I argue that already the *secret of love*, as presented in the Freedom Essay, contains in substance what Schelling will later elaborate as *Seinkönnen*, *Seinmüssen*, and *Seinsollen*, and is, not only in this regard, to be seen as the germ cell of all later figurations of the *doctrine of potencies* whose actual "content"—to formulate it as strongly as possible—is love. Despite the shifts of emphasis still to come, which the present article sets aside, it can nonetheless be stated that what remains common to all of Schelling's potency-theoretical approaches is that it is always *love* that addresses the dynamics of freedom and the processuality of consciousness.

⁴⁸ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 4.

⁴⁹ On this purpose, see Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling*, 152. However, there is, I would argue, a certain need to emphasize that the "realization" that love is the "meaning of being" belongs both at the end of negative philosophy and at the beginning of the project of positive philosophy.

⁵⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Aphorismen zur Einleitung in die Naturphilosophie* (SW VII: 140–189), see in general aphorism number 159.

The newly accentuated, paradoxical formulation cited above (*it is love but is not love*), which indicates *and* refutes identity, abandons the classical philosophy of identity in a few words and carries in concentrated form the explicit rejection of the equation of indifference and divine identity: a rejection that *must lie in love itself*. It is love that establishes a new rapport between indifference and identity, that only with 1809 becomes so decisive for Schelling's subsequent projects: Because—and I argue that we should hear this explicitly against the background of the classical philosophy of identity—love cannot be realized in indifference—because *love can only be love* insofar as it binds what is different and free, it is fitting to speak of “one magic stroke” (SW VII: 387),⁵¹ which is the essence and effect of love and marks the Freedom Essay's much-circled boundary, i.e., the paradoxical confluence *and* separation of indifference and identity: “*noch nicht war als Liebe* [not yet *as* love].” This *as* (*als*)—the little word, as Marquet states, that bears the whole foundation of Schelling's philosophy,⁵² the “critical breaking point” (*Sollbruchstelle*)⁵³ of the earlier notion of Schellingian identity, how Frank puts it—releases the whole *in-between*—the Schellingian *metaxy*—in which revelation takes place, and which is our life.

This autogenesis, that is a (self-)becoming of love, this *ought to be of love*, implies, strictly speaking, from the outset, the abandonment of indifference as a divergence into the two equally eternal beginnings, and still marks love as an all-transcending, unprethinkable reality: Only because love “was there,”⁵⁴ only because the unground (*Ungrund*) is also to be understood through love and love cannot yet *exist* in indifference, love itself is to be seen as the *movement-releasing* principle and the break with indifference. It is a break that, in the years that follow the Freedom Essay, undoubtedly becomes itself the object of Schelling's thinking. Indifference is not simply discarded, for it frames love as an all-encompassing reality and leaves its traces in remaining constitutive of willing, longing, and loving. Yet, Schelling himself, in 1809, breaks with what has been the longtime-defended fundament to his “absolute System of Identity” (SW IV: 113).⁵⁵ Indifference is no longer the final and sufficient vanishing point of reason, but the *eternally abandoned* and the *eternally future*.

One is tempted to sum up one of Schelling's most striking renewals of this period by simply saying *that love needs time*. If we understand in what sense we would never say that a newborn truly loves his mother (without, of course, claiming that this relation has nothing to do with love) or why in every longing for unity there are merging-fantasies, “paradisiacal traces” of Adam and Eve; while we would also not say that they truly love each other (nor that they ever

⁵¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 52.

⁵² See Jean-François Marquet, *Liberté et Existence*, 404.

⁵³ Manfred Frank, *Reduplikative Identität*, 143.

⁵⁴ See SW VII: 405–406. I retain my modification of the translation above.

⁵⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, 145. Translation slightly modified.

could love God), so then do we not only understand Schelling's profound and anti-canonical notion of *perfection* in 1809,⁵⁶ but so too would we grasp a driving concern of Schellingian thought from 1809 onward and a major insight into the circulated rejection of indifference—and thus of what had once been the absolute and *sufficient* principle of Schelling's system.

Although Schelling will later be much more decisive concerning the idea that God did not need the world in order to recognize, to accomplish, or “to be himself,” one cannot deny that love, in 1809, has a *transformative power* precisely in terms of the theory of absolute principles—particularly because love not only hints and refers to that which lies beyond logic, but because it does so based on the logic of Schelling's classical philosophy of identity. Juggling with the equations of the philosophy of identity—even of a most “geometric order”—only love is that something that, only by *being itself*, brings something into the equation that is not itself, if love is precisely to love and to *bind* what is different and free. In other words, love is the only *One* that demands—other than the absolute principle of the *Presentation*—by itself a difference that cannot be merely formal or quantitative, and *nevertheless* can be thought of as rising from one first principle: a thought that works without any confession, especially in the wake of absolute philosophy of principles, and that is, moreover, not positive philosophy,⁵⁷ but the negative side of the Schellingian love story.

The *abandonment of indifference* becomes, quite in a double sense, Schelling's breakthrough to a philosophy of time and historicity and has now brought a “new” Absolute that stands with one foot in the identity system of the previous and with the other in the development of the following years: an autogenic Absolute, whose core is the “all-unification” of love that is no less the systematic thought of the *Stuttgart Seminars* than it will remain a motif for Schelling's monotheism-treatise. A leitmotif that renders the *motility of love* no less the key concept to the theogony from the Freedom Essay and the *Ages of the World* than it will still be to the Philosophy of Revelation.

Despite all the shifts and deepening to come, the one insight pervades the Freedom Essay that there lies something in love, like in freedom, which makes us understand why the classical system of identity could not explain to us the real world, and before what background love in 1809 becomes a *philosophical* solution to the *aporias* of classical philosophy of identity. A “solution” that contains the *most transformative power* for Schelling's further thinking and bequeaths to his itinerary a synonymy between freedom and love that allows us to speak of freedom as the letter and of love as the spirit of Schellingian freedom—and thinking. A synonymy that, as argued in what follows, pervades

⁵⁶ See in particular SW VII: 403.

⁵⁷ See Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling*, 152.

and animates the entire Freedom Essay, and in which divine and human personhood become *mutual* interpretative keys to each other: *Love* in 1809 not only indicates the origin of human freedom and the ultimate justification of a system of freedom, but provides the framework for understanding the *essence* and *reality* of human freedom and self-becoming.

Human Love as the *Hermeneuticum* of the Freedom Essay's Metaphysics of Love

In Schelling's 1809 defense of God as life and a personal being lies, as is well known, a criticism of negative philosophy that serves no less as his fundamental reproach to Spinoza than as the basis for his later criticism of his early system. Amid the aporias of the philosophy of identity and the erstwhile *gap* located in Schelling's definition of the very essence of the Absolute—and thus in his understanding of absolute identity itself—the sketched transformation has *systematically* caught up with precisely those moments of *processuality*, *relationality*, and *existence*. It may seem like a sleight of hand to attribute to Schelling an understanding of love according to which Christianity only becomes philosophically more profoundly relevant to him from 1809 onward against the background of this transformation, rather than motivating the transformation in the first place. It may likewise seem acrobatic to claim that it is thus not Christianity's template of personhood, but that *freedom and love* are moved to the center of Schelling's philosophy in 1809 in such a way that Schelling sought to understand Christianity from there as a distinct and exceptional religion (even if not the highest or the ultimate one).

In any case, it becomes clear how this shift, i.e., to speak decidedly of *personal* identity and self-becoming, transforms an entire language and cosmos of the philosophy of nature and identity into one of self-becoming and personhood, which undoubtedly becomes the new axis of Schellingian philosophy, which reorganizes itself around 1809. It is this "personalization" of absolute identity that makes Schelling speak of egoism as the "material (*Stoff*) from which everything is being created" (SW VII: 439),⁵⁸ carries gravity and light toward a new totality of thinking, and allows the potencies already present in the commentary on the *Timaeus* (which is not suspected of proclaiming a philosophy of revelation), as well as a terminology of a text like the *Presentation* to be approached by a language and a *metaphysics of love*.

That the systematic and hermeneutic significance of love for Schelling's philosophy remains, in general and even concerning the Freedom Essay, highly underrated in Schelling scholarship, could also be because of a certain hype

⁵⁸ F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 211.

around the “metaphysics of evil”⁵⁹ that somehow concealed that evil also belongs in the dynamics and the phenomenology of love. In other words, Schelling’s “metaphysics of love” is not solely a “second pole”⁶⁰ of the Freedom Essay. A meaningful addition to the *metaphysics of love* of 1809 would rather be that it is *only* Schelling’s *first* metaphysical and systematic foundation of a philosophy of love.

With the previously mentioned personalization comes a general existential reemphasis of the concept of identity, which reveals an entanglement of anthropological and epistemological inquiry—fundamentally constitutive of Schelling’s subsequent works—and undoubtedly forms the framework of the Freedom Essay: If the *law of identity* is the highest to which, in a pointed formulation (*and in 1809*), even God must submit himself, then it becomes clear from here how the Freedom Essay delineates human self-becoming and the enactment of her freedom *between* a sort of perverted Self-love, selfishness (*Selbstsucht*), and self-abandonment. That everything strives to be, to become *one* with itself and to connect to the World and Others, this *longing for Unity*—a widely recognized synonym for love in mysticism as well as in Hölderlin or every second pop song—is not less *active* in “Good” than it is in “Evil.” Yet, what is tried in any evil, as a reactualization of the *Grund*, Schelling suggests to us, is the *suspension of relation*, is the attempt to get behind *relationality* as such, to place itself at “the place where God should be” (SW VII: 390).⁶¹

In 1809, love is the hermeneutic background both for understanding the “boundness” (*Gebundenheit*) that Schelling associates with the word “religiosity” (SW VII: 392)⁶² and for understanding the general *un-boundness*, the “severability” (SW VII: 364)⁶³ that appears not only as the *possibility* of evil but is actualized in every concrete evil. Good and evil, for Schelling, even semantically, converge in the notion of the *bond* that love is.⁶⁴

On Schelling’s account, spirit, as such, is to be understood fundamentally as relation. If we cling to a purely oppositional reading of Schelling’s notion of love, we miss how love—beyond, evidently, describing the concrete content of actions *and* their maxims—fundamentally designates this relationality itself and the essence of human freedom. For Schelling, at least, love also expresses

⁵⁹ See Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), 168–172, 181–192.

⁶⁰ See Courtine’s criticism of Heidegger’s Schelling interpretation. Jean-François Courtine, “Schelling: Das System der Freiheit. Von der absoluten Freiheit zur Metaphysik des Bösen,” in *Schellings Philosophie der Freiheit*, ed. Diogo Ferrer and Theresa Pedro (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012), 42.

⁶¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 54.

⁶² F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 56. Love and Schmidt translate *Gebundenheit* as “relation.”

⁶³ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 33.

⁶⁴ No less linked to each other in the text from which Schelling originally took his “*desmology*.” See Plato, *Timaeus*, 41a–b.

the general condition that the human spirit originates in the divine one and remains rooted in it. The relation to God grounds both self-relation and relation to others, and all these relations are therefore mirrors of one another.⁶⁵ God is relation and “nothing but relation, pure relation [*nichts als Beziehung und lauter Beziehung*]” (SW X: 260),⁶⁶ as Schelling will formulate, and the Freedom Essay articulates this relation with respect to the human spirit, as the basis for relating toward ourselves, toward the world, toward nature, and toward others, in ways that we can call evil or good, or likewise, destructive or loving.

The Freedom Essay shows—in Kierkegaardian resonance⁶⁷—how freedom’s enactment in evil or good is fundamentally described through an *inescapable belonging* in either case. This inescapability could be misunderstood as a teleological one, but it simply means that our freedom does not extend to choosing whether we want to be human or a cockatoo. Hence, love denotes a belonging that, on the one hand, appears in evil’s attempt to break away from relationality, i.e., is inscribed in the tearing loose that inhabits every concrete evil, and, on the other hand, fundamentally demands its positive *affirmation*, which nevertheless remains a personal decision that engenders every concrete good.

This is why “the spirit of love” designates both God’s spirit—expressing the *indissoluble* relation of forces within God—and, explicitly, the human disposition of good.⁶⁸ Love—as the sense of being, as the epitome of identity—thus also names the highest *potency* of the spirit.

Love is systematically and hermeneutically constitutive of the (self-) destructive rebellion of evil—that is most precisely to be named and understood as *perverted love*—as it is for the “true freedom [which] is in harmony with a holy necessity” (SW VII: 391),⁶⁹ i.e., the “highest resoluteness [*Entschiedenheit*] in favor of what is right without any choice” (SW VII: 392).⁷⁰ Schelling thus brings this human decisiveness into closest proximity to the divine deed of creation, which can be repeated only in freedom and can be proven only to those who love.

Before Schelling writes a single line on the *Johannine Church*—a unity of the human *community* that would indeed be the *time* and the *life* of the “spirit of love”—this *spirit of love*, in 1809, becomes synonymous with the *individual* actualization of human freedom, relevant to Schelling’s ethics no less than to

⁶⁵ See in particular SW VII: 365.

⁶⁶ F.W.J. Schelling, *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus* (SW X: 225–286).

⁶⁷ All the more by placing—above all other matters—the concept of love in the very heart of Schelling’s Freedom Essay, one is tempted to read Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death* as an existential-philosophical unfolding of the Schellingian potencies of self-becoming, precisely as presented in 1809.

⁶⁸ SW VII: 365. See also SW VII: 361, 377, 409.

⁶⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 56.

⁷⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 57.

his epistemology, naming the open space in creation and history, that is, the human will and consciousness.

Certainly, the Freedom Essay depicts God as the *victory of love* (decided in God), which is synonymous with the act of creation itself, yet not identical with that victory of love that would be the *fulfillment of creation* and would come without human complicity. The divine victory of love, which grounds creation and which Schelling will also address in the *Ages of the World*, is not the tyranny of love (*for no such thing exists*) but its possibility: “so that there may be life and love and personal existence” (SW VII: 408).⁷¹ The Freedom Essay shows—as the project of the Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation will all the more suggest—that the *actual* “protagonist” of history is not (if it is permissible to separate this somewhat schematically and artificially) simply revelation, nor a mechanically unfolding history of consciousness, but the *relation* between the Divine and the Human: *the bond itself*. The fact that one part of a relation, even if it is God, has decided to love does not mean that this also applies to its counterpart or to the object of its love. Not even God can force love—a thought that is among the most beautiful in Schellingian philosophy and that shows the absurdity of the merely teleological, i.e., even totalitarian, reading of *Schellingian love*, since no other notion in Schelling *but love* shows how highly he values human freedom.

Already the Freedom Essay is carried by an understanding of love and freedom that sees the human being as responsible not “to break the word, touch the ground of creation, and profane the mystery” (SW VII: 391),⁷² but, as Schelling puts it in the *Ages of the World*, to “keep alive the power of love” (WA: 218).⁷³ Whoever wants to read Christian bigotry or dogmatism into this should likewise take Socrates for an ideologically clouded Christian—when Socrates says that the one who makes egoism the principle of his life, who exploits and instrumentalizes others, *would not care about geometry*,⁷⁴ and thus mistakes himself as the *measure* of all things and does not know his *place on earth* in wanting to usurp the place where God should be. This *hubris*, which so essentially characterizes evil and that concerns the *philosophical* fall of man just as much as it does any degree of human self-exaltation, in all its well-known forms of perversion may indicate the extent to which love in 1809 becomes Schelling’s *most intimate synonym* for existence as it constitutes true knowledge—which, as the one of good and evil, coincides with the emergence of our

⁷¹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 70.

⁷² F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 55.

⁷³ F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World: Book One – the Past (original version, 1811) plus supplementary fragments (1811–1813)*, 200.

⁷⁴ See Plato, *Gorgias*, 508a.

consciousness and our freedom that is the possibility and the condition of (every) love.⁷⁵

The *Stuttgart Seminars* as the First Draft of a System of Love

Addressing the Stuttgart system, for which the tension between *principle and life* is rightly noted,⁷⁶ I hope to have shown love's *systematic* relevance to an extent that it becomes clear how it belongs on both sides, i.e., how it informs both principle and life.

In 1810, it is still absolute identity—the cardinal determination of the Absolute and thus the foundation of his system—with which the *Stuttgart Seminars* begins no less than the *Presentation* once did. However, the definition of the absolute identity itself is now linked to a strong determination of a qualitative, *divine difference*, tied to the essence of the absolute principle, “that supports itself, a principle that consists in and through itself” (SW VII: 421),⁷⁷ and with which movement itself coincides. These criteria⁷⁸ and the *monistic-dualistic* conception of absolute identity, as presented in 1810, would not be comprehensible without Schelling's understanding of love, which finds itself in the heart of the new processuality and the reorganized totality of Schellingian thinking, and, apparently, still allows Schelling, at least in 1810, to underline the continuity with his earlier work.

The Stuttgart system occupies a peculiarly special position insofar as it is no less the *last shape* of his philosophy of identity than it is the *prototype* of what will still be the late Schelling's system: In a renewed recourse to the Pauline “All in All” (SW VII: 484),⁷⁹ love is explicitly naming the *world system* to be

⁷⁵ Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling*, points out the supreme sense of the Freedom Essay's “transitive” interpretation of 1. John 4: 8: “God is the *antecedens*, love is the *consequens*. God loves. God divides Godself from being, decides to exist as God, creates the world as God's other, and lets it fall so that it might freely rise again, all for one superb purpose, which is the stroke of the divine genius: that love might be.”

⁷⁶ See in particular: Philipp Schwab, “Uebergang von Identität zu Differenz,” 52–67, especially 61. See also Sylvaine Gourdain, “Das Leben der Identität: Zur Wandlung des Systems in Schellings *Freiheitsschrift* und den *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*,” in *System, Natur und Anthropologie: Zum 200. Jubiläum von Schellings Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, ed. Lore Hühn and Philipp Schwab (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber, 2014), 81–101 and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, “Die Theologie der *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*,” in *System, Natur und Anthropologie: Zum 200. Jubiläum von Schellings Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, ed. Lore Hühn and Philipp Schwab (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber, 2014), 159.

⁷⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 198.

⁷⁸ See in general SW VII: 421.

⁷⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 243; here translated as “in all actuality everything.” For the explicit reference in the Freedom Essay, see SW VII: 408. For a deep insight into this

found, which is, though far from later approaches, the historic life of the trinity.⁸⁰ When the Freedom Essay had presented love as Schelling's answer to theodicy no less than, as sketched above, the key element for rethinking pantheism (*nota bene in 1809*) as a system of freedom, he now, in 1810, reemphasizes this affirmative concept of pantheism as an *All-Unity of Love*, which thus traces an arc not only from the Freedom Essay into the *system of times* that undergirds Schelling's project of the *Ages of the World* but also into the "Christian panentheism" that he will henceforth refine as the only possible free system of philosophy,⁸¹ systematically developed in his monotheism-treatise.

The significance of the transformation of Schelling's conception of absolute identity—and the *system-architectural relevance of love* that accompanies it—is expressed in nothing less than the fact that love, in 1809 and then immediately and decisively taken up again in Stuttgart, becomes the *name* of Schelling's system. A name that, in my view, remains valid despite the versatility of the subsequent decades of his work. That some are still discussing the failure of Schelling's system—presumably many influenced by Heidegger's narrative⁸² and by the comparison with Hegel's neighboring system, which is usually taken to be articulated in a more encompassing and exhaustive manner—is arguably misguided, given that a "system of love" is, *by definition and in various ways*, an unclosed system.⁸³ Not least in the fundamental sense that the human must inscribe itself into this system, into the divine life, and participate in the revelation of the absolute Existent as personality. However, the *spirit of love* is not only a complex synonym for life, for the future, and thus for an eschatological figure, but it is also, as noted above, a key term in Schellingian epistemology.

The Freedom Essay belongs so essentially to the "end" of a philosophical development, as well as to the *second beginning* in and with Schelling's philosophy, not only because love—through the outlined transformation—becomes the highest *object* of Schellingian metaphysics in 1809, but because it therein stands for a decisive *reformulation* of the system like no other concept, and contributes like no other notion—or rather like no other Schellingian *move* around 1809—to the recognition of the limits of philosophy and thus to the

Pauline Pantheism in Schelling's philosophy from 1809 onward, see Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling*, 36–37, 64–67, 169–170, in particular 65.

⁸⁰ Already in the *On University Studies* (published in 1803), Schelling criticizes Lessing for not grasping the Trinity historically (see SW V: 294). To be clear on this point, the thesis is that Schelling *himself* will achieve this only through the sketched transformation of his philosophy of identity.

⁸¹ See F.W.J. Schelling, *Der Monotheismus*, (SW XII: 3–131), and SW XII: 33.

⁸² See in particular Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, 279.

⁸³ See Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling*, 25, 156–158, who concisely clarifies this tension.

adjustment of the tasks and methods of his thought. This is inscribed immediately to the *Stuttgart Seminars*, since love is essential for the therein unfolded anthropology, i.e., for the theory of the potencies of the human spirit: A “pneumatology” that is, not only, but above all, a theory of cognition that—especially when we recognize the meaning of love in 1809 and love’s potency-doctrinal significance that undergirds the whole Freedom Essay—brings nothing substantially new, but is rather the schematization of what is implicit in 1809.⁸⁴

The Freedom Essay had not only presented the human likeness to God (*Ebenbildlichkeit*) as the ultimate foundation of his freedom and his *mediating* role—deepened in 1810 in terms of the history of salvation—but had also articulated a *critique* of the human spirit. This critique is reflected and unfolded in the 1810 theory of potencies and is essentially rooted in the recognition of the spirit’s *corruptibility* and *corruption* that the Freedom Essay had outlined by presenting the human spirit not only as a *supernatural* principle but precisely as the *contra-natural* and *contra-divine*.⁸⁵

The human’s separation from (and thus its potential reconciliation with) nature and God—and with the human’s own place as one who stands between both—is first imbued in the *Stuttgart Seminars*. This reconciliation for which we can hope in history, marks, in 1810, no less a pending *goal* and *form* of philosophy.

Schelling, already in 1809, presented evil not primarily as a moral-philosophical problem but as an *epistemological* one (even if this classification reflects our division of philosophy, not Schelling’s). This entanglement can be understood as the fundamentally newly emerging question of the *true organon* of philosophy: “The nature (*Wesen*) of the soul, too, is love” (SW VII: 473),⁸⁶ it is said about the third, highest potency of the spirit, *the soul*, which alone—as the *Ages of the World* begins—has a participatory knowledge (*Mitwissenschaft*) of creation.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, in “Die Theologie der *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*,” 177, argues that “evil” in the *Stuttgart Seminars* would show “no relation to the doctrine of evil” of 1809. I argue that the opposite is the case, and this to an extent that there is not only no single statement about evil in one of the texts that we could not recognize in the other, but that the *Stuttgart Seminars* are a decisive answer to “evil in 1809,” and therein a bridge, also on a methodological level, to the project of the *Ages of the World*.

⁸⁵ For the resumption of this point in 1810, see in particular SW VII: 468–469.

⁸⁶ F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 236. In this sense, see also *Clara* (SW IX: 1–110), SW IX: 19, 45–49. I will not give the numerous references for the *bond* in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, but I want to underline that this *third potency*, as the soul, is a synonym and an immediate resumption of what the Freedom Essay had developed as the “spirit of love.”

⁸⁷ *Weltalter* (1811), 4. F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World: Book One – the Past (Original Version, 1811) Plus Supplementary Fragments (1811–1813)*, 57.

Love in 1809, in other words, becomes not only the highest *object* of Schelling's metaphysics but also its *shaping force* and *ethos*, contributing to Schelling's *reformulation* of the essence and task of philosophy. In "melting together (*verschmelzen*) the entire universe into one vast work (*Werk*) of love" (SW VII: 474),⁸⁸ Schelling ultimately formulates not simply the goal and content of the system inherent "in the divine understanding (*Verstand*)" (SW VII: 421),⁸⁹ but precisely philosophy's only possible system and the philosopher's task.⁹⁰

I have attempted to outline to what extent this *work of love*, this "melting together"—a *system of love* that seems no less an oxymoron than the system of freedom—cannot be understood as *seamless sameness*. Rather, I have argued that Schelling, on the contrary, sets out toward the concrete and the singular and develops, in the sense of both the objective and the subjective genitive, a *philosophy of existence* that becomes a *philosophy of love*.

⁸⁸ F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 236. Translation slightly modified by the author. Pfau's translation renders "realign" as "verschmelzen"; it is a choice that excludes many associations that are linked with the German term and, I would argue, intended by Schelling.

⁸⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 197.

⁹⁰ See again F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 236 (SW VII: 474).