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# Life versus Being: Schelling's Conceptualization of God

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*—God is a life, not merely a Being.*
(SW VII: 403)

The quote in the epigraph makes it clear that, starting from the Freedom Essay, Schelling considers the category of life to be the most appropriate for describing God. Opposed in the quoted passage to the notion of being, this category replaces that of absolute identity, which had informed his earlier system. Deeply influenced by Spinoza, in the system of identity, Schelling had conceived God or the Absolute as the absolute identity of the real and the ideal, as an eternal and non-becoming essence (*Wesen*), absolutely simple and indivisible—as that which is entirely devoid of potencies.[1] Absolute identity is itself conceived as an all-encompassing womb within which particular beings are differentiated—beings that do not exist in and of themselves, but only insofar as they participate in absolute identity. The characterization of God as absolute identity therefore implies a fundamentally ontological and onto-

[1] According to §59 of the Würzburg *System of Philosophy*, "The Absolute is beyond all potency, or it is absolutely devoid of potency (*schlechthin potenzlos)*" (SW VI: 212; F.W.J. Schelling, "System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular," *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 139–194, here 192).

theological conception: God is "*Being* itself (*das Seyn selbst*) … necessarily eternal and immutable" (SW VI: 178).[2]

As is well known, the investigation of certain specific themes—freedom, evil, radical finitude, history—prompted by various polemical exchanges during the pivotal period from 1804 to 1809, urged Schelling to rethink a new concept of God. This concept would avoid the stillness and fixity of Spinoza's substance and of *being* as it was elaborated within the metaphysical tradition.[3] The main goal of Schelling's inquiry between 1809 and 1815 is the development of his living concept of God, one capable of responding to the concerns that had motivated the move beyond the identity-philosophy. This coincides with the attempt to grant God a form of freedom with respect to being (*Seyn*)—the latter term burdened by a heavy idealist legacy according to which being would no longer denote fullness and positivity, but rather necessity, objectification, and stasis: "To begin philosophy with being (*Seyn*) is to turn it upside down, to condemn oneself, and never to penetrate to the heart of freedom" (SW XII: 34).[4]

The search for a living God accompanies Schelling to the very end of his philosophical journey. Toward the end, however, especially through a substantial engagement with Aristotle, he eventually returns to traditional metaphysical conceptuality, finding in the notion of act—and more specifically of individual actuality—the most suitable tool, within the limits of a purely rational philosophy, to express the coexistence of being and life in God.

The following discussion is divided into five sections, each devoted to a key moment in the development of Schelling's thought concerning the concept of God. The first explores the departure from the system of absolute identity and the dynamization of the concept of God in the works from 1809 to 1815. The second retraces the central terms of the dispute with Jacobi, which represents Schelling's most explicit confrontation with the traditional metaphysical-religious conception of God. The third focuses on the evolution of Schelling's conception of God during the Erlangen and especially Munich years, in which he emphasizes God's absoluteness and freedom from being. The fourth section is dedicated to the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*, in which Schelling, drawing on the Aristotelian notions of individuality and ἐνέργεια (enérgeia; activity), offers a new conceptualization of life and of God.

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[2] Schelling, "System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular," 168.

[3] In particular, here Schelling is referring to the scholastic tradition and modern theism. Although the latter sought to dynamize the concept of God as "actus purus" (pure act) through the notions of "actuositas" (activeness) or "ens actuosissimum," (the most actual being) Schelling holds that this attempt failed (see F. W. J. Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," trans. Hadi Fakhoury, *Kabiri* 4 (2024): 167–198, here 192).

[4] F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie. Erstes Buch. Der Monotheismus*, SW XII: 1–132.

Finally, the last section situates the results Schelling reaches in the *Presentation* within the broader framework of his late philosophy, including positive philosophy.

As is already clear from this brief overview, the methodology I adopt in this paper is not that of a close analysis of Schelling's argumentation in a single text, but rather of the several approaches of a *longue durée* inquiry aimed at identifying a specific trend within Schelling's late philosophical theology. This does not mean, however, that each of Schelling's works considered here lacks internal complexity: on the contrary, each occupies a precise place within the philosophical systematics of that period and responds to specific challenges and provocations, which, however, cannot be addressed in detail here.[5]

## The Living Concept of God

The Freedom Essay opens with a clear accusation against Spinoza, targeting "the lifelessness of his system, the sterility of its form, the poverty of concepts and expressions, … his mechanistic view of nature" (SW VII: 350).[6] Schelling's strategy for dynamizing the Spinozian system consists in applying the concept of life—as theorized in his earlier nature-philosophy—to the Absolute itself. The identity-philosophy, largely drawing on the results of the nature-philosophy, made extensive use of the category of life, which Schelling had described in the *On the World Soul* as "free play of forces" (SW II: 566).[7] This category, however, was applied to individual natural beings, or at most to the Absolute considered as nature. The Absolute as such, as we have seen, was not conceived as life, but rather as absolute and eternal identity.

To vivify the system, then, Schelling decides to apply to the Absolute itself a distinction already theorized in the *Presentation of my System of Philosophy*—that between "being [*Wesen*] insofar as it exists and being [*Wesen*] insofar as it is merely the ground of existence" (SW VII: 357).[8] By distinguishing between God insofar as He exists and God insofar as He is the ground of existence, Schelling believes he can achieve an internal dynamization of the concept of God, thereby allowing Him to be conceived as living. In fact, already in the

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[5] See Thomas Buchheim, "The Method and Structure of Schelling's Late Philosophy," *Kabiri*, 2 (2020): 1–14.

[6] F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 20. For various interpretations of Schelling's critique of Spinoza, see Benjamin Norris, "Life and Parallelism in Schelling's Critique of Spinoza," *Kabiri*, 4 (2024): 78–99.

[7] F.W.J. Schelling, *Von der Weltseele*, SW II: 345–583. Where no published translation is indicated, the English translation is mine.

[8] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 27.

identity-philosophy, Schelling had conceived the Absolute as the absolute identity of the real principle (which, in the Freedom Essay, becomes the ground of existence) and the ideal principle (corresponding to that-which-exists). However, in terms for which Schelling would later reproach Spinoza's system (SW VII: 443)[9], the two principles remained entirely inactive in relation to one another, not acting upon each other in a living opposition. The new conceptualization of the relationship between the real and the ideal principles—as ground of existence and that-which-exists—allows Schelling to think of them as reciprocally determining one another, just as occurred in the description of life in his earlier nature-philosophy. Indeed, a careful reading of the texts reveals that the characterization of the relationship between God insofar as He exists and His ground closely mirrors the account of life provided in *On the World Soul*. Consider the following two passages: the first from the *On the World Soul*, the second from the Freedom Essay:

> The object of our investigation is *the origin of life*. *Life*, however, consists in a *cycle*, in a *succession of processes* which *continuously return into themselves*, so that it is impossible to indicate which process actually *kindles* life, which is the *earlier*, which the *later*. Every organization is a self-contained whole in which everything is *at the same time* [*zugleich*], and where the mechanical way of explanation abandons us altogether, because in such a whole there is no *before* and no *after*. We can therefore do no better than assert that *neither of those opposing processes determines the other*, but *that both mutually determine each other*, both maintain a reciprocal equilibrium. (SW II: 549)[10]

> In the circle out of which everything becomes, it is no contradiction that that through which the One is generated may itself be in turn begotten by it. Here there is no first and last because all things mutually presuppose each other, nothing is another thing and yet it is not without another thing. God has in Himself an inner ground of His existence that in this respect precedes Him in existence; but, precisely in this way, God is again the *prius* of the ground in so far as the ground, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist *actu*. (SW VII: 358)[11]

The comparison between these two passages clearly shows how Schelling applies to the Absolute the very same category of life that he had developed in his studies on nature. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the ground of existence

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[9] F.W.J. Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 195–243, here 214.
[10] Schelling, *Von der Weltseele*.
[11] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 28.

is also defined as "nature in God" (SW VII: 358).[12] As Mark Thomas has aptly pointed out, the fundamental feature of this characterization of life (and thus of God) is the notion of equiprimordiality (*Gleichursprünglichkeit*): Schelling moves away from an all-from-one model of grounding—that is, the idea that everything that exists has its sufficient reason in a single ultimate ground. *God as the ground of existence* and *God insofar as He exists* are equally original, and it would be misguiding to attempt to derive one from the other.[13]

Equiprimordiality alone, however, is not sufficient to capture Schelling's notion of life. It also includes two further features: struggle and development. In the writings of this period, Schelling repeatedly and insistently affirms that "where there is no struggle, there is no life" (SW VII: 400).[14] This means that the real principle—the dark ground, the nature in God—does not peacefully submit to the clarity of the ideal claims its own persistence. The presence of this dark ground breaks the unclouded clarity of absolute identity, which is self-transparent and eternally fully unfolded intellection, and makes possible the historicity of the Absolute. Anticipating what Gadamer would articulate a century and a half later, Schelling recognizes that there is no life without history, and that "to be historical means never to be completely absorbed in self-knowledge."[15] The ground, in fact, remains opaque and inscrutable until the end of time, when, the division of the two principles having been completed, they will be reunited in the eternal mystery of love, and pantheism will be fulfilled. Until then, it will remain as "the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground" (SW VII: 359–360).[16]

However, life, as a struggle between the two principles, is not exhausted in a mere, incessant reshuffling of forces. Life is not simply the continuous appearance and dissolution of different forms in a zero-sum game. On the contrary, it entails a productive and ontologically creative becoming, that is, a free development. God's life is the gradual ascent from darkness to clarity, from unconsciousness to awareness, from ground to personality. Clarity, awareness, and personality are ontologically superior (although not prior) to darkness, unconsciousness, and ground. Life, therefore, implies an

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[12] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 27.
[13] Mark J. Thomas, *Freedom and Ground: A Study of Schelling's Treatise on Freedom* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2023), 7–8.
[14] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 63. See also Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 208.
[15] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London–New York: Continuum, 2004), 301 (translation slightly modified).
[16] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 29.

ascending development, an ontological increase: what comes later is ontologically superior to what is before.

In the diaries from those years, Schelling pushes this conception to its limits, overturning the classical understanding of the relationship between acting and being in favor of a dynamic and living characterization of God. Life is not a movement grafted onto a preexisting being; rather, it coincides with the movement itself, with the immanent force through which it comes to light:

> What is God, then? God is a consuming fire, an eternal act of production of that being (*Wesen*), thus that being is not apart from this act.—It [that being] only occurs in it [the eternal act]—only as a product. It does not exist at all without this *actus*. The *actus* does not come from that being; we cannot even think of that being without this *actus*, it does not exist at all without it—it exists only as actualized being (*verwirklichtes Wesen*). …. God Himself is only the eternal movement towards the actualization of God's being (*Wesen*). Goes through stages. We cannot think of God apart from this movement, as if He were first for Himself and then entered into this movement.[17]

What is here expressed in classical terms—movement, *agere*, and *esse*—is then conceptualized within the lexicon of life:

> God is living; thus, He lives or has a life, and cannot be separated from this life in any way. … All life is the life of something, the life of a being (*Wesen*), and the actualization of this being. In this actualization of the being lies the being itself; "life builds itself up."[18]

Here, Schelling employs the categories of life, act, and movement as antithetical to being, which is downgraded to the point of being treated as a synonym for thing (*Ding*)—a static, objective, dead notion, inadequate for describing the unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*), which by definition cannot be made a thing.

The living concept of God, then, entails the equiprimordiality of the ground of existence and that-which-exists, a ceaseless struggle between these two principles, and an ascending development toward ever greater perfection. This characterization of God is antithetical not only to Spinoza's substance but, indeed—and perhaps even more so—to the classical and traditional conception of rational theology and the metaphysical principles underlying it.

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[17] F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophische Entwürfe und Tagebücher 1814–1816. Die Weltalter II – Über die Gottheiten von Samothrake*, ed. L. Knatz, H.J. Sandkühler, and M. Schraven (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2002), 7.

[18] Schelling, *Philosophische Entwürfe und Tagebücher 1814–1816*, 29–30.

In fact, the living concept of God dismantles some of the fundamental metaphysical axioms of scholastic rational theology, particularly: 1) *ex nihilo nihil* (nothing comes from nothing), 2) *agere sequitur esse* ("to act" follows "to be"), and 3) *quod est in potentia non reducitur ad actum nisi per ens actu* (what is in potency is not reduced to act except by something actual). The dynamic autopoiesis of life contradicts the rigid and essentialist consequentiality of the ontological order upheld by scholastic metaphysics. In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling is fully aware of the reversal he is effecting with respect to the metaphysical tradition and of the incompatibility between the two perspectives, and he clearly advocates the rejection of the traditional concept of God:

> If we are to form an idea of the primordial being (*Urwesen*), its being (*Seyn*) and life, we only have the choice between two conceptions. (a) Either the primordial being is for us something complete all at once and immutably present. This is the usual concept of God in the so-called rational religion and in all abstract systems. But the more we elevate this concept of God, the more God loses for us in vitality, the less He can be understood as an actual, personal, and properly living being like us. [(b)] If we demand a God whom we can regard as a completely living, personal being, then we must also regard Him as completely human, we must assume that His life has the greatest analogy with human life, that in Him, alongside the eternal being, there is also an eternal becoming; in short, that He has everything in common with man except dependency. (SW VII: 432)[19]

Schelling is aware that this conception stands in contrast to the traditional notion of God as *ens realissimum* (the most real being) (SW VII: 435).[20] However, contrary to what one might expect, in the *Stuttgart Seminars* he does not even attempt to reconcile the two positions, but simply rejects the traditionally metaphysical conception of God in favor of a God understood anthropomorphically—one more closely aligned with religious consciousness than with philosophical abstraction. His speculation, deeply imbued with a religious impulse particularly strong in those years due in part to tragic family events, was guided by the conviction that "a metaphysically elevated God will benefit neither our minds nor our hearts" (SW VII: 429).[21]

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[19] Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 206 (translation slightly modified).
[20] Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 208.
[21] Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 204.

## Life versus Being: The Controversy with Jacobi

Life and being, as is now clear, are not merely conceptual categories concerning philosophical theology; rather, they imply two radically different metaphysical visions. A confrontation between these opposing views takes place between November 1811—when Schelling receives Jacobi's *On Divine Things and their Revelation*—and January 1812—when Schelling publishes the *Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things*. In his text, Jacobi makes it clear that there are only two classes of philosophers, fundamentally opposed to one another:

> Those who have emerged and gradually developed the more perfect from the imperfect; and those who assert that the most perfect is the first, and that all starts with it and from it. … The doctrine of the former category is opposed to the doctrine of the latter, so that no approach is possible in between, and even less possible is a unification of them through a third doctrine where they reconcile and become undifferentiated.[22]

Jacobi calls the first category "naturalists" and the second "theists." Naturally, in keeping with the metaphysical tradition, as well as with a worldview aligned with Christianity, he counts himself among the theists: the principle of reality is the creator God, that is, a moral and personal principle, an intelligence that knows and wills. God is perfect from the beginning and creates the world freely as its cause. By contrast, for the naturalists, God is not the cause but merely the ground of the universe and becomes together with it. The living God of the naturalists, according to Jacobi, would be nothing other than the absolute productivity of nature. For this reason, the choice between these two modes of philosophizing is absolutely exclusive: "Man has only one alternative: either he derives from one, or he derives from nothing. We put the one before the nothing, and we name him God because this one (*Ein*) must necessarily be a personal one (*Einer*), otherwise it would be the same universal nothing but differently named."[23]

Schelling, by contrast, considers it necessary to find a living connection between naturalism—"the system that asserts a nature in God"—and theism—the system "that asserts consciousness, intelligence, and free will in God" (SW VIII: 69).[24] He believes that naturalism must constitute "*the*

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[22] Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "Von den Göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung," *Schriften zum Streit um die göttlichen Dinge und ihre Offenbarung* (Werke, Bd. 3), ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000), 3–136, here 94–95.
[23] Jacobi, "Von den Göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung," 26.
[24] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 189.

*foundation*, *the necessary antecedent* of theism" (SW VIII: 69);[25] otherwise, theism, which indeed forms the higher part of the system, would "hover completely in the void" (SW VIII: 69).[26] Ultimately, Schelling expresses the concern that conceiving the relationship between naturalism and theism as an either/or alternative leads to "posit[ing] at the same time *an unnatural God and a godless nature*" (SW VIII: 70).[27]

Schelling's strategy for reconciling naturalists and theists consists in subdividing each of these two classes of philosophers into two further subclasses, in order to show that a particular version of naturalism is not incompatible with a particular version of theism. Naturalists are divided into what we might call "external naturalists"—namely, "those who allow the more perfect to rise from a less perfect [being] *that is independent of it and different from it*" (SW VIII: 63)[28]—and "internal naturalists," that is, those "who allow the more perfect to rise *from what is less perfect in it*" (SW VIII: 63).[29] Theists, in turn, are divided—so to speak—between "classical theists," who hold that the most perfect is already *actu* (in act) as such before all things, and "explicatory theists," who maintain that it is rather only *potentia* (in potency) before all things. For the former, the most perfect is already complete in itself from the very beginning and undergoes no change; for the latter, it undergoes development and ontological growth.

Schelling considers the position of the external naturalists to be the weakest and most untenable on a general level, while he believes that classical theists face a problem in justifying the existence of what is less perfect, that is, a problem with the issue of creation. Classical theists insist on the necessity of a transcendent and creating God, yet they fail to offer convincing reasons that God should create something other than Himself, given that He is already perfect in Himself.

Schelling regards these first two positions to be incompatible with each of the others, while he considers the views of internal naturalists and explicatory theists to be deeply compatible and to contribute to an evolutionary account of God capable of offering a more adequate understanding of creation and of the relationship between God and nature. Internal naturalism is the position presented in the Freedom Essay: the more perfect—that is, God insofar as He exists—arises from what is less perfect in Him, namely the ground of His existence. Schelling considers this view compatible with explicatory theism, that is, with the idea that the ground of

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[25] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 189.
[26] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 189.
[27] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 190.
[28] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 185.
[29] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 185.

existence is God *potentia*, who undergoes a development that leads Him, at a later stage, to become God *actu*.

Once again, the key category in the characterization of God is life: "My real opinion, which I affirm openly, is that all life, without distinction, starts from a state of envelopment, because in relation to the subsequent stage of its development and unfolding, it is like a dead and dark seed before it is lowered into the earth" (SW VIII: 78).[30] This applies all the more to God:

> I posit God as first and as last, as alpha and as omega. As alpha, however, He is not what He is as omega; and insofar as He is God *sensu eminenti* [in an eminent sense] only as omega, He cannot also, as alpha, be God in the same sense, nor, strictly speaking, can He be called God, unless it were explicitly said that He is the *still undeveloped* God, *Deus implicitus* [implicit God], while, as omega, He is *Deus explicitus* [explicit God]. (SW VIII: 81)[31]

In the transition from internal naturalism to explicatory theism, however, the category of life undergoes a subtle but fundamental reconfiguration. While in the Freedom Essay Schelling had spoken of a circle of reciprocal grounding, in which "all things mutually presuppose each other" and in which "there is no first and last," it now becomes clear that one can distinguish between a before (*Deus implicitus*) and an after (*Deus explicitus*), and that what comes before does not require what comes after in order to exist. In other words, the shift in emphasis from internal naturalism (Freedom Essay) to explicatory theism (*Monument*), which coincides with the reformulation of the relationship between the ground of existence and that-which-exists in terms of *Deus implicitus* and *Deus explicitus*, moves somewhat closer to Jacobi's perspective and to traditional metaphysics. *Deus implicitus*, in fact—unlike the ground of existence, "which, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist *actu*"—possesses its own ontological autonomy. Just as the seed is not yet the plant *actu*, but only *potentia*, and yet is something *actu* (i.e., the seed itself), so too *Deus implicitus* is not yet God *actu*, but is nonetheless something *actu*.

Certainly, interpreting in this way the shift from the dialectic between the ground of existence and that-which-exists to that between *Deus implicitus* and *Deus explicitus* raises some problems. One might ask: where does the actual existence of *Deus implicitus* as such come from? Does it not also require its own ground of existence? Abandoning the reciprocal grounding and the equiprimordiality of *Deus implicitus* and *Deus explicitus* demands the formulation of a new model for the relationship between the two terms and for the

[30] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 196.
[31] Schelling, "Monument to Jacobi's Work on the Divine Things," 198.

grounding of the first. In the *Monument to Jacobi*, these issues remain open and are not addressed explicitly, but it is clear that Schelling is setting out on a new path—one that seeks to reconceptualize God's being and life without recourse to the notion of equiprimordiality, which, increasingly, Schelling sees as a threat to God's absoluteness.

It would be mistaken, however, to read the *Monument to Jacobi* through an overly irenic hermeneutic. While the articulation of explicatory theism certainly moves a step beyond simple naturalism—the target of Jacobi's critique—it remains true that it still constitutes an evolutionary account of God, one that radically contrasts with the claims advanced by Jacobi in defense of classical theism. The entire speculative endeavor of the *Ages of the World* makes it clear that Schelling has not abandoned his evolutionary monotheism; on the contrary, Schelling holds that the eternal becoming within God constitutes the archetype of the entire cosmotheogonic history: "the very forces whose simultaneous combination constitutes the inner life are the same forces that step forth externally, one after the other, as the principles of life developing through consecutive ages. The same stages that in their simultaneity can be regarded as potencies of being appear, in their succession, as periods of becoming and development" (WA I: 25).[32]

## God's Life as Freedom from Being

Already in the *Ages of the World*, but even more markedly in Erlangen and Munich, a further concern emerges in Schelling's characterization of God—namely, the need to secure God's freedom with respect to the world and to being in general. For life is not divine life unless it is free. Already in Stuttgart, through his reconceptualization of the distinction between the real and the ideal principles as a distinction between *Seyn* and *Seyende*, Schelling had begun to move in this direction. Over time, however, even the very notion of *Seyende* came to seem to him too static to express the overflowing exuberance of divine life.

In Erlangen, Schelling initially renounces the concept of God understood as a mere being (*ein Seyendes*), and instead he describes the absolute subject as eternal freedom (*ewige Freiheit*). Freedom, Schelling emphasizes, is not a mere property of the absolute subject, but its very essence: "But I do not want to express it like this: it is that which is free to take on form. As then, this freedom would appear as a *property*, which presupposes a still distinct and independent subject—rather, freedom is the *essence* of the subject, or it is itself

[32] F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. by Joseph P. Lawrence (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 84. The abbreviation "WA" refers to the following German edition: F.W.J. Schelling, *Die Weltalter. Fragmente. In den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813*, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1946).

*nothing other than eternal freedom*" (SW IX: 220).[33] The same pattern found in the 1814–1816 diaries referring to act, movement, and life is repeated here: there is no such thing as a living or free *being*; life and freedom have a meta-ontological character insofar as they aim to replace the very category of being. It is not possible here to go into the details of this phase of Schelling's philosophy.[34] It will suffice to note, however, that in Erlangen this paradoxical enterprise is more asserted than truly realized. The self-revelation and self-knowledge of eternal freedom, in fact, become entangled in the laws of a dialectical process that recalls Hegel's cunning of reason.[35]

A further shift toward a more resolute affirmation of divine freedom occurs in Munich. Here, the dialectic between ground and existence related to the autopoiesis and inner life of God is transformed into a dialectic between God and being related to the doctrine of creation. This change is accompanied by two others of fundamental importance: (1) the move from a predominantly bipolar dialectic (B and A, real and ideal principle, ground of existence and that-which-exists) to a triadic dialectic (*Seynkönnendes–Seynmüssendes–Seynsollendes*, subject–object–subject/object, $-A +A \pm A$, $B\ A^2\ A^3$); and (2) the fact that this triadic dialectic of potencies, which encompasses the fundamental real *versus* ideal opposition, becomes a "local" or "regional" opposition, subordinated to a new fundamental opposition—namely, that between the organism of the potencies as the figure of being ($-A +A \pm A$) and that which *is* the potencies, i.e., that which *is* being ($A^0$).[36] Neither of these shifts occurs abruptly, but already in Munich the direction taken by Schelling is clear—and one that will reach full clarity in the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*. Before turning to Schelling's final major work, however, I will offer a brief sketch of how this shift takes shape in Munich, and of the innovations it brings to his earlier characterization of divine life.

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[33] F.W.J. Schelling, *Über die Natur der Philosophie als Wissenschaft*.

[34] See Manfred Durner, *Wissen und Geschichte bei Schelling: Eine Interpretation der ersten Erlanger Vorlesung* (Munich: Berchmans, 1999).

[35] Several interpreters, with whom we agree, have identified the *Erlangen Lectures* as the moment of greatest affinity with Hegel's thought. See Walter Kasper, "The Absolute in History: The Philosophy and Theology of History in Schelling's Late Philosophy," trans. by Sr. Katherine Wolff, *The Collected Works of Walter Kasper* (New York: Paulist Press, 2018), 107–111; Francesco Tomatis, *Kenosis del logos. Ragione e rivelazione nell'ultimo Schelling* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1994), 83–116. A more radical attempt to replace being with freedom as the original principle was made in twentieth-century Italy by Luigi Pareyson in *Ontologia della libertà* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995). For a comparative analysis of the two thinkers, see the recent volume by Silvia Pogliano, *Der andersartige Anfang. Grund und Freiheit bei Schelling und Pareyson. Mit der deutschen Übersetzung eines Aufsatzes aus Pareysons "Ontologia della libertà" (1991)*, (Baden-Baden: Karl Alber Verlag, 2022).

[36] See Giusi Strummiello, *L'idea rovesciata: Schelling e l'ontoteologia* (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2004), 32.

In Munich, Schelling seeks to affirm a certain "beyondness" of God with respect to being, i.e., to the potencies, and this leads to at least a partial rethinking of his earlier conception. In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling had conceived divine life as a progressive ascent from darkness to clarity, from unconsciousness to awareness, from ground to personality. In this account, God's awareness, thus His capacity to relate to Himself freely, develops simultaneously with His very life. The previously cited diary passage made it clear that "we cannot think of God apart from this movement, as if He were first for Himself and then entered into this movement."[37] In other words, God coincides with the movement of the potencies; He is not something separate that happens to enter into this movement, but is flattened onto the movement itself.

In Munich, by contrast—particularly in the *Presentation of Philosophical Empiricism*—Schelling aims to introduce a breach between God as such and the movement of the potencies in which He manifests Himself. Once the conception of God as "the Lord of being + *being itself*" is established, Schelling's new move—one that defines the entire speculative trajectory of the *Presentation*—is the attempt to liberate God as Lord of being (i.e., Lord of the potencies) from being as His eternal and necessary correlate (i.e., from the potencies).

Schelling begins by observing that God's life does not consist in the movement of the potencies as such, but rather in the act that passes through the three potencies, in the indivisible unity of the process that sets them in motion:

> Thus we have here three forms of divine being (des göttlichen Seyns). God is 1) B or the blind being (Seyn), 2) the one who negates this blind being, 3) the one posited as spirit. Now, God is not one of these forms *in particular* or exclusively or apart from the others—but God is only the actus passing through these three forms, the indissoluble unity of the process passing through these three forms. From this it follows, conversely, that B or the cosmic principle is not to be called God, for God is only the unity that operates in the three forms and subsists as indissoluble; neither B, nor that which negates it, nor that which is now posited as spirit is therefore God, but the indissoluble life in these three forms. (SW X, 276)[38]

But this is still not sufficient to guarantee a genuine beyondness of God with respect to the potencies, since the act that passes through the potencies

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[37] Schelling, *Philosophische Entwürfe und Tagebücher 1814–1816*, 7.
[38] F.W.J. Schelling, *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus,* SW 10: 225–286.

remains indissolubly bound to the potencies themselves. If the attempt to free God from being were to stop here, then the same equiprimordiality that, in the Freedom Essay, held between the ground of existence and that-which-exists would hold between God in Himself and the three forms of divine being. On the final page of the *Presentation of Philosophical Empiricism*, however, Schelling takes a step further and clarifies that "the potencies cannot be consequences of the divine *concept*, but only of the divine will" (SW X, 286).[39] The concept of God, then, appears to be posited as independent of the potencies themselves, and His will as absolutely prior to them.

In the Munich writings—including the various *Nachschriften* (transcripts) and the treatise on *Monotheism*, which was at least partially composed during those years—Schelling often oscillates and does not reach a clear position on this issue. What matters for our purposes, however, is that the earlier emphasis on life and on its three defining features (equiprimordiality, struggle, development) gradually fades in favor of a conception of God as spirit, free from being and towards being. Equiprimordiality, struggle, and development remain fundamental features for describing the dynamics of the potencies, but Schelling's effort is now directed toward a conception of God as independent from and ontologically prior to the potencies themselves. This trajectory finds its completion in the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*, to which we now turn our attention.

## Life as Individuality and ἐνέργεια (enérgeia)

The major innovation of the *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy* is Schelling's engagement with Kant's doctrine of the transcendental ideal of pure reason. Positioned at the culmination of the Transcendental Dialectic, this doctrine marks the point at which Kant addresses the traditional concept of God in rational theology, i.e., the *ens realissimum* (the most real being). It is not possible here to dwell in detail on this doctrine or on the systematic role it assumes within the *Presentation*.[40] It is clear, however, that Schelling's decision to begin from this doctrine implies a deliberate return—nearly forty years after

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[39] Schelling, *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus.*

[40] See Wolfram Hogrebe, *Predication and Genesis: Metaphysics as Fundamental Heuristic after Schelling's* The Ages of the World, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant and Jason M. Wirth (Edinburgh University Press, 2024), 52–63; Daniel Sollberger, *Metaphysik und Invention: Die Wirklichkeit in den Suchbewegungen negativen und positiven Denkens in Schellings Spätphilosophie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1996), 177–183; Markus Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos: Untersuchungen über Ontotheologie, Anthropologie und Selbstbewußtseinsgeschichte in Schellings* Philosophie der Mythologie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 105–116; Thomas Buchheim and Friedrich Hermanni, "Werkkomplex Berlin: Die Gestalt und Schwierigkeiten des späten Systems," *Schelling Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Paul Ziche (Stuttgart: Metzler, forthcoming).

the *Monument to Jacobi*—to a confrontation with the metaphysics of classical theism. Now, however, unlike in the earlier controversy with Jacobi, Schelling can rely on a powerful ally: Aristotle. Let us now briefly examine how Schelling draws on Kant's doctrine and the role Aristotle plays in his development of a new concept of life.

In discussing the ideal of pure reason, Kant distinguishes between the idea of *omnitudo realitatis*, i.e., the totality of all possibility (*Inbegriffe aller Möglichkeit*), and the ideal, namely "the idea not merely *in concreto*, but *in individuo*, i.e., as an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone."[41] The ideal of pure reason—that individual being which is fully determined with respect to all possible opposed predicates, such that only those predicates that absolutely belong to being are encountered in its determination—coincides, according to Kant, with the *ens realissimum* (the most real being) of the metaphysical tradition.

The distinction between the idea as the sum of all possible universal predicates and the ideal as an individual being constitutes the starting point from which, as Marcela García puts it, Schelling develops a dual concept of God.[42] A first concept of God, corresponding to Kant's idea, is God as being (*das Seyende*), that is, as the totality of possible contents of thought (*omnitudo realitatis*; the totality of all possibilities); a second concept, corresponding to Kant's ideal, is God as that which is being (*das, was das Seyende ist*), that is, an individual actuality that actualizes the o*mnitudo realitatis* (the totality of all possibilities), but also possesses an individual being of its own. God as being coincides with the organism of the potencies (–A +A ±A), whereas God as individual actuality is that which actualizes them ($A^0$), even though His being is not exhausted in simply being-being.[43]

The entire *Presentation* consists in the attempt to separate these two concepts of God from one another. Starting from God as universal concept (–A +A ±A), Schelling aims to ascend to God as individual actuality ($A^0$). What is particularly relevant to our discussion of the dichotomy between life and

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[41] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 551: A568/B596.

[42] Marcela García, *The Significance of Aristotle in Schelling's Last Philosophy*, (München-Pamplona: Diss., 2008), 25–99.

[43] A detailed reconstruction of the doctrine of the potencies cannot be undertaken here; excellent accounts are provided by Hermann Schrödter, "Die Grundlagen der Lehre Schellings von den Potenzen in seiner Reinrationalen Philosophie," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 40 (1986): 562–585; Hogrebe, *Predication and Genesis*, 63–69; Thomas Buchheim, *Eins von Allem. Die Selbstbescheidung des Idealismus in Schellings Spätphilosophie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992), 116–135; Edward A. Beach, *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 111–146; Anna L. Müller-Bergen, "Schellings Potenzenlehre der negativen Philosophie oder die zur Wissenschaft erhobene Kritik der reinen Vernunft," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 113 (2006): 271–295.

being in the characterization of God is that, in addressing the relation between these two concepts of God, Schelling assigns to individual actuality a certain ontological priority and beyondness with respect to the organism of the potencies, i.e., to the rational structure intrinsic to being: "For the totality of possibilities (the figure of being), as the absolutely universal, cannot be itself; it needs one (*Eines*) in which, as something selfless, it has its self, one which for it, as something not self-being, is the cause of being, αἰτία τοῦ εἶναι, as Aristotle puts it" (SW XI: 313).[44] But the being of $A^0$ is not exhausted in being the cause of the being of –A +A ±A; on the contrary, "it itself (in itself) is nothing universal (no *what*), but an actuality surpassing all thought, so much so that, against this, its being-being [*sein das-Seyende-seyn*] appears only as something subsequent, something that merely happens to it (συμβεβηκός; symbebēkós; accident, something added to it" (SW XI: 314).[45] $A^0$ thus possesses a being of its own, in relation to which its being-being is something that simply comes afterward. However, one must avoid thinking of $A^0$ as an indeterminate *actus essendi*, which—if the metaphor may be allowed—is like a torrent of pure actuality ready to actualize any essence or potency whatsoever. Following Aristotle, rather, Schelling is adamant that that which is being is something purely individual; it "cannot even be *the One* (*das Eine*) [Spinoza's and Lessing's ἓν καὶ πᾶν; hèn kaì pân; one and all], but just *one* (*Eines*), Ἕν τι [hén ti; a one], which for Aristotle means the same as that which is a *this* (a τὸδε τι ὅν; tóde ti ón; this determinate being) and that which is able to be-for-itself, the χωριστόν (chōristón; the separate)" (SW XI: 314).[46]

The Aristotelian category of individuality thus constitutes the tool through which Schelling removes God from the necessitating web of being and of reason understood as *omnitudo realitatis* (the totality of possibilities). It is a necessary precondition for conceiving God's life as freedom from being. It is true, on the other hand, that already in the *Stuttgart Seminars* Schelling had expressed this conviction when addressing the distinction between the dogmatic view, according to which "God is conceived of as a particular, isolated, individual being (*Wesen*) that subsists entirely for itself," and the pantheist view, which "dissolves Him in a universal substance that is merely the vehicle of things" (SW VII: 438).[47] In 1810, Schelling believed he could resolve this contradiction through his theory of the two principles: just as the real principle is the ground of the ideal principle, so the dogmatic conception, which grants God an individual and separate existence, must necessarily be posited as the ground of the pantheistic conception: "God in His highest dignity is the universal being (*Wesen*) of all things, yet this universal being does

[44] F.W.J. Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*.
[45] Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, SW XI: 253–572.
[46] Schelling, *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*.
[47] Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 210.

not float in the air but rather is grounded in, as it were supported by, God as an *individual* being—*the individual in God is thus the basis or foundation of the universal*" (SW VII: 438).[48] In a certain sense, then, the dialectic between $A^0$ and –A +A ±A appears to reprise, at a higher level, the middle Schelling's dialectic between the ground of existence and that-which-exists. However, the terms of this new dialectic are quite different: $A^0$ is not a mere ground, tool, or *conditio sine qua non* of what exists, but is in every respect the cause of being (αἰτία τοῦ εἶναι) of the potencies—thus ontologically autonomous and prior to the potencies themselves.[49]

The second fundamental category for characterizing $A^0$ is that of actuality. Here too, Schelling draws heavily on Aristotle, whom he interprets and employs in an explicitly anti-Hegelian direction. The key notion Schelling recovers from Aristotle is that of ἐνέργεια (enérgeia; activity), that is, actuality as activity. As Marcela García has perceptively shown, the Aristotelian notion of ἐνέργεια (enérgeia) is not assimilable either to Kant's category of existence or to the ἐντελέχεια (entelécheia; actualization of something potential) that interests Hegel, since both of those notions imply a relation to potentiality and universality.[50] In Book Θ of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle clearly distinguishes between movement (κίνησις; kínēsis; motion) and activity (ἐνέργεια, enérgeia).[51] Movement is an action teleologically directed toward an external end, and it involves a transition from potentiality to actuality. Movement has a beginning, a duration, and an end, which is reached when the τέλος of the movement is fulfilled. Aristotle gives the example of losing weight: slimming down is not a process complete in itself, since it ends once one has actually become thin. By contrast, activity is an action that contains its own end, and is therefore complete in every moment it occurs; it is perfect in its very exercise. What is crucial for our discussion is that Aristotle includes living among the activities, not among the movements. In other words, for Aristotle, life is not a development from an imperfect to a perfect form—as Schelling had theorized in the 1809–1815 period—but is an activity already perfect in itself. In light of this conception of life, Aristotle could affirm, in Book Λ of the *Metaphysics*: "life belongs to God. For the actuality of thought is life, and God is that

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[48] Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 210.

[49] In this shift, one cannot help but notice a movement toward the position advocated by Jacobi at the time of the *Theismusstreit*: God is not merely a ground, but a cause. Jacobi's criticisms—despite Schelling's immediate and vehement reply—had a long-term influence on Schelling's speculative journey. See Sean McGrath, "The Jacobi-Schelling Debate," *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the Ends of Enlightenment: Religion, Philosophy, and Reason at the Crux of Modernity*, ed. Alexander J.B. Hampton (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 104–123.

[50] Marcela García, "Energeia vs. Entelecheia: Schelling on Metaphysics Lambda and the Problem of the Pure Daß," *Tópicos. Revista de Filosofía* 51:2 (2016): 113–137.

[51] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Θ 6, 1048b, 18–34. See García, *The Significance of Aristotle in Schelling's Last Philosophy*, 287–290.

actuality; and the essential actuality of God is life most good and eternal. We hold, then, that God is a living being, eternal, most good; and therefore life and a continuous eternal existence belong to God; for that is what God is."[52]

Schelling, by explicitly stating that he conceives of $A^0$ as ἐνέργεια (enérgeia; activity) and not as ἐντελέχεια (entelécheia; actualization of something potential) (see SW IX: 412), appears to fully embrace the Aristotelian perspective on this point. The notion of ἐνέργεια (enérgeia) indeed proves to be a powerful tool for revisiting the controversy with Jacobi and for conceiving a living God who, as pure actuality devoid of any potentiality, is from the very beginning complete in Himself.

## Asymmetrical Coalition and Positive Philosophy

With the Aristotelian turn of the *Presentation*, then, Schelling appears to abandon the evolutionary account of God characteristic of his middle speculation and to return to positions more aligned with classical theism. But is this really the case? To answer this question, it is necessary to broaden the scope of our inquiry in two successive steps. First, after following the path by which, in the *Presentation*, Schelling radically separates God's individual actuality from the organism of the potencies, we must examine the essay *On the Source of Eternal Truths*, in which Schelling acknowledges that he cannot avoid reestablishing a connection between the two. Second, it is essential to recognize that the philosophical endeavor of the late Schelling is not limited to purely rational philosophy; it is accompanied by positive philosophy, in which Schelling, by inquiring into the relationship between God and history and into the manner in which God reveals Himself within it, reintroduces his evolutionary account of God.

Let us begin with the first point. In *On the Source of Eternal Truths*, Schelling seeks to answer the question he posed in the final pages of the *Presentation*: "how is it possible that –A +A ±A could be the consequence of $A^0$?" (SW XI: 570).[53] In other words, Schelling is asking how it is possible that the intrinsic rational structure of universal being stems from God understood as individual actuality. The solution Schelling proposes must meet a twofold requirement. On the one hand, $A^0$ must remain free with respect to –A +A ±A; otherwise, this would mean abandoning God's beyondness with respect to the potencies and thus contradicting His characterization as pure ἐνέργεια (enérgeia; activity). On the other hand, however, the necessity of the

[52] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ 7, 1072b, 27–30; trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harvard University Press, 1996).
[53] F.W.J. Schelling, "Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy," trans. Kyla Bruff, *Kabiri* 2 (2020): 93–135, here 134.

connection between $A^0$ and –A +A ±A must also be preserved, because—as Aristotle teaches—*de singularibus non est scientia* (there is no science of singulars). To sever the link between God and being, between God and reason, would be to condemn ourselves to the impossibility of knowing God and thus to collapse (this time entirely!) into Jacobi's position, according to which "God cannot be known, but only believed."[54]

The strategy adopted by Schelling to resolve this dilemma once again draws from Aristotelian ontology. Being-being, being the cause of the being of –A +A ±A, is not an essential predicate of $A^0$, but a necessary accident—"a συμβεβηκός [symbebēkós; accident] in the Aristotelian sense, though a necessary one" (SW XI: 588). More precisely, the Aristotelian notion to which Schelling implicitly seems to refer is that of ἴδιον (ídion; property; *proprium*): just as laughter is a *proprium* of the human being, being-being is a *proprium* of God. As Thomas Buchheim and Friedrich Hermanni put it, Schelling theorizes an "asymmetrical coalition"[55] between $A^0$ and –A +A ±A. As two members of a coalition, $A^0$ and –A +A ±A are neither reducible to nor deducible from one another. Nevertheless, insofar as this coalition is asymmetrical, $A^0$ holds a priority over –A +A ±A:

> The path does not go from the universal to the individual …. What one should say, rather, is that the individual (*das Individuelle*)—and indeed, especially what is the individual in the highest sense— realizes itself, i.e., makes itself intelligible, or enters the sphere of reason and knowledge, inasmuch as it generalizes itself, or makes the universal, *all*-comprehending essence its own, clothes itself with it. (SW XI: 587–588)[56]

What is most relevant to our discussion, however, is that Schelling affirms the necessity of the connection between the two members of the coalition. As we have seen, this connection does not arise from any feature of the two members themselves, which taken individually would be entirely unrelated, but from the overarching necessity "of the being-one (*Eins-seyn*) of thought and being," from the supreme law which asserts that "whatever *Is* must also have a relation to the *concept*" (SW XI: 587).[57] $A^0$, too, to realize itself, must therefore enter into a relation with –A +A ±A, and must submit to the dialectic of the

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[54] Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "Jacobi to Fichte," *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 497–536, here 500.
[55] Buchheim and Hermanni, "Werkkomplex Berlin".
[56] F.W.J. Schelling, "On the Source of the Eternal Truths," trans. Edward A. Beach, *The Owl of Minerva*, 22:1 (1990): 55–67, here 65–66.
[57] Schelling, "On the Source of the Eternal Truths," 65.

potencies that articulates the inner life of God as a development. The asymmetrical coalition between $A^0$ and $-A +A \pm A$, replacing the earlier model of equiprimordiality between the ground of existence and that-which-exists, allows—at least in principle—for a reconciliation between the theistic conception of God as an absolutely separate individual, pure act, and complete in Himself, and the evolutionary account of God shaped by the potencies. Unlike what we find in the Freedom Essay, where the life of God controversially begins from "the yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself" (SW VII: 359),[58] here it is individual actuality—already self-subsisting—that undergoes the movement of the potencies. The life of God unfolds within something that is already eternally in act: namely, $A^0$.

Purely rational philosophy has reached the conclusion that God, in order to be the principle, must be an individual actuality. However, it stops there, without inquiring into what it truly means to exist as individual actuality.[59] This task is entrusted to positive philosophy, the systematic domain in which Schelling most fully recovers his deeply Christian, though seemingly anti-metaphysical (at least in the classical sense), idea of a God whose life has the greatest analogy with human life. As Walter Kasper argues, positive philosophy is guided by the conviction that "true history is possible only when it also means something for God";[60] a history that left God untouched and unaffected would be nothing more than an eternal circle, in which nothing new or meaningful ever occurs. Here, unfortunately, we cannot even sketch the contours of Schelling's positive philosophy. However, it is enough to recall the emphasis he places on the historicity of the event of the Incarnation, and on the necessity of historical temporality for the unfolding of the Christian Trinity and the full personalization of the divine persons, as well as for the entire historical ecclesiology developed at the end of the *Philosophy of Revelation*, to realize that Schelling did not entirely abandon some of the core theses of his middle philosophy. History is not merely the site of the revelation of God, but the stage of an authentic trinitarian theo-drama, whose outcome is not guaranteed from the beginning, but hinges upon the freedom of human beings and of the divine persons themselves.

Schelling, then, did not abandon the purpose that had guided his middle philosophy—namely, the attempt to reconcile the metaphysical and the religious conceptions of God by developing a living system of narrative philosophy. However, the increasingly critical vocation of his philosophy made it clear to him that the philosophical enterprise had to be divided into two distinct movements. In his late philosophy, Schelling comes to see that only by, so to speak, loosening the structure of the system can its collapse be

[58] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 28.
[59] See García, *The Significance of Aristotle in Schelling's Last Philosophy*, 321–323.
[60] Kasper, *The Absolute in History*, 345.

avoided. Only by distinguishing between negative and positive philosophy, and by entrusting the transition from the former to the latter—not to an internal logical coherence but to a decision of freedom—can a theoretically sustainable reconciliation between the metaphysical and religious conceptions of God be achieved, one that allows both to subsist in their irreducible distinctiveness, like the two foci of a single ellipse.