# After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion

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# CHAPTER THREE

# PANTHEISM AND ATHEISM IN SCHELLING'S *FREIHEITSSCHRIFT*

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## I. Introduction

In this essay I argue that Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) constitutes his response to F.H. Jacobi's critique of philosophy during the *Pantheismusstreit*, but that while his response effectively undermined the presuppositions of that critique, he inadvertently confirmed Jacobi's conclusions.

Although the *Pantheismusstreit* largely took place during the mid-1780s, its effects were felt throughout the rest of that century and into the beginning of the next. Jacobi crudely claimed that philosophy's commitment to demonstrative reason undermined its capacity to comprehend freedom and, consequently, morality. In its most famous articulation, Jacobi claimed that in its systematic pretensions all philosophy is ultimately pantheism, and that pantheism is atheism. In short, pantheism's systematicity contradicts freedom and morality.

Though Jacobi's argument was perhaps simplistic, this did not mute its persuasive force within the intellectual and philosophical community. Various figures felt the need to respond to this polemic. Even Kant, who belittled the dispute in correspondence,[1] engaged with it both explicitly in his essay "What is Called Orientation in Thinking?" (1786) and implicitly in the purpose behind the *Critique of Judgment* (1790). Schelling's early

[1] In his April 7th, 1786 letter to Marcus Herz, Kant writes, "The Jacobi [-Mendelssohn] controversy is nothing serious; it is only an affection of inspired fanatics trying to make a names for themselves and is hardly worthy of a serious refutation. It is possible that I shall publish something in the *Berliner Monatsschrift* to expose this fraud." Immanuel Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 123.



work makes reference to Jacobi at various points,[2] but only the *Freiheitsschrift* engages substantially with the latter's intellectual legacy. In the introductory remarks to the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling interrogates the concept of pantheism. Brashly contradicting conventional intellectual wisdom, he argues that pantheism not only *does not* quash human freedom, but that in fact *only* pantheism can rescue the concept of human freedom.[3]

Schelling thinks freedom as the capacity for good and evil, the possibilities for human character that are rooted in (but not reducible to) a unique, two-fold metaphysical pantheism. That is, Schellingian pantheism conceives a distinction between the co-constitutive principles or powers of God's existence and of the ground for God's existence. The principles provide evil with a positive, real basis. However, as a consequence of the centrality accorded to human freedom, God becomes subject to the vicissitudes of human history. That is, if human freedom forms the most complex and complete development of God's revelation in nature, God suffers human history.

In conclusion, Schelling's response to the Jacobian polemic presents a dramatic dialectical movement in the philosophico-historical transformation of the concept of pantheism *vis-à-vis* morality: pantheism initially opposes freedom, negating its possibility and that of morality; pantheism is then reconceived to centralize freedom, such that thinking either concept is impossible without the other; but this revision of pantheism and freedom, although giving morality a metaphysical basis for both good *and* evil, reduces God to a hapless observer. Ironically, in showing that freedom and pantheism do not contradict one another, contra Jacobi, Schelling leads metaphysics towards a certain form of atheism.

[2] In the "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" (1795), Schelling refers to Jacobi's account of Spinoza as "*a nihilo nihi fit*" and then claims "I believe that the very problem of the transition of the nonfinite to the finite is the problem of *all* philosophy." F.W.J. Schelling, "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, ed. And trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 177. F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsberg: J.G. Cotta, 1856-61), 1: 313.

[3] F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 12; *Werke*, 7:340.

## II. Jacobi's Critique of Pantheism, "and Matters Connected Therewith"

Histories of the *Pantheismusstreit* frequently mention F.H. Jacobi's opportunism in publishing *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (1785).[4] Pretending to the unique confidence of G.E. Lessing's latent Spinozism, Jacobi appeared as the heir to a powerful cultural figure. But the force of the argument he made in those pages cannot be limited to the trifling question of intellectual lineages. Jacobi's critique, though hyperbolic and crude, troubled German thinkers for at least the next 25 years.

The debate was precipitated by Jacobi's claim that Lessing had admitted to him, shortly before his death, that he was a Spinozist, but ultimately this revelation was the stage for a broad critique of philosophy and the *Aufklärung*. Although Jacobi had drawn Moses Mendelssohn into the debate, as the erstwhile defender of the *Aufklärung* in the absence of Lessing, in fact, it was largely a one-man show. Jacobi perceived Lessing's Spinozism as a symptom of the impotence of philosophical cognition and as a certain reckless disregard for its metaphysical consequences. Lessing's Spinozism was not a regrettable, merely individual (as it appeared at the time) intellectual orientation, but characteristic of the eminence of demonstrative reason. In one part of the conversation with Lessing that Jacobi retells, Lessing says, supposedly: "There is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza. I [Jacobi]: That might be true. For the determinist, if he wants to be consistent, must become a fatalist: the rest then follows by itself."[5] In this passage we observe the key concerns motivating Jacobi: that philosophy is inseparable from Spinoza's system, and that Spinoza's system is a "consistent" determinism that ends in the abolition of freedom. That is, Spinoza employs demonstrative logic to its final necessary conclusions. Philosophy at large fails to be as consistent as Spinoza, but if it were, it too would deny human freedom and affirm fatalism.

Absent from the above passage is the metaphysical valence of this critique. Spinozism (and philosophy's epistemological systematicity)

[4] Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 65.

[5] F.H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel* Allwill, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 187. Beiser and Henry Allison doubt the authenticity of this confession. Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, 65. Henry Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 73.



demands, on Jacobi's account, a metaphysics of immanence, or pantheism:

> This immanent infinite cause has, as such, *explicite*, neither understanding nor will. For because of its transcendental *unity* and thorough-going absolute infinity, it can have no object of thought and will; and a faculty to produce a concept before *the concept*, or a concept that would be prior to its object and *the complete cause of itself*, or so too a will causing the willing and thus determining itself entirely, are nothing but absurdities.[6]

Substance cannot bear either thought or volition, as Jacobi sees it. Thought is denied because it requires objects and the capacity to form concepts—neither of which obtains. Volition is impossible for the same reasons. The infinity of substance obliterates any possible finite being. This is effectively the acosmist critique, namely, that God's actuality does not allow for the self-subsistence of any finite being. To put this differently, finite being is dependent on God for its actuality, but that dependency prioritises and actualises God, making the finite being unreal. Pantheism cannot abide the existence of finite beings, as much as it cannot allow for the possibility of intellection or will.

The next step in Jacobi's series of propositions seems not to follow: pantheism is atheism.[7] That is, how can one deny the existence of God if God is so real, on this account, that He cannot suffer finitude? This is a question that Jacobi does not answer. At least two reasonable explanations exist, although on my view the latter is more so. First, in the seventeenth century atheism had been primarily an indictment implying the departure from the orthodox conception of God. Some of Spinoza's first critics attacked him for attributing extension to God's essence.[8] In the same way, when Jacobi calls Spinoza an atheist, he could be drawing on that sense of the term, insofar as Spinoza's views dispossess God of thought and will. But against this explanation, Jacobi does not defend the traditional views of God whatsoever, and this sense of the word "atheism" belonged more properly to the end of 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. As George di Giovanni claims, "Jacobi's religiosity was thoroughly secular in nature", and this would correspond to his disinterest in defending orthodox revelation (or revelation whatsoever).[9]

Second, the opposition between pantheism and religion slowly lost its

[6] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 188.

[7] Ibid, 233.

[8] In his article on Spinoza, Pierre Bayle's first target is the materiality of God. Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1965), 302.

[9] George di Giovanni, "Introduction" to Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 43.

meaning during the eighteenth century, in part because of the repeated gestures of philosophers—like Lessing and Mendelssohn—to separate religion from revelation. Lessing was famous for his quite heterodox views of Christianity. He once stated that revealed doctrine corresponds only to the "state's natural and fortuitous condition" whereas natural religion was religion's "inner truth."[10] Thus, the charge of atheism gains traction insofar as it was addressed to natural religion and to its condition, human freedom. Although Jacobi doesn't speak of natural religion explicitly, it seems safe to assume that freedom is as vital—and certainly not wholly separate from—as faith (*Glaube*) to such natural religion. What is more, freedom and faith are both expressed by a kind of immediate, non-discursive intuition of existence: "I must assume a source of thought and action that remains inexplicable to me."[11] Thus, for Jacobi the fatalism of pantheism leads to atheism, not by undermining the doctrines of Christian revelation, but by its abolition of human freedom, which was the means by which our morality and knowledge of God was assured.

Because of its resonance in the *Freiheitsschrift*, it is worth saying a few words about Jacobi's notion of belief, or *Glaube*. Jacobi did not think of belief in the contemporary sense of "justified belief." Instead he conceived this belief as the unacknowledged, unconditional ground for the interminable syllogistic propositions of demonstrative reason. Jacobi thought that reason's logic pursued an infinite path. As Terry Pinkard explains: "The basic idea is that if one believes something, then one must be able to justify that belief, and one can justify it only if one can show that it follows logically from some other true belief or proposition."[12] Ironically, despite his critique of Spinoza, Jacobi intimates that the latter inspired this notion of belief. When referring to third-order knowing in Spinoza, he calls it "insight" and refers directly to a passage from the *Ethics*.[13] The source for the idea of belief—which is Jacobi's solution to

[10] G.E. Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 36.

[11] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 193.

[12] Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy: 1760-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 94.

[13] Jacobi claims that he clings to "the light, of which Spinoza says that it illuminates itself and the darkness as well." Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 193. The source for this quotation comes from the end of part two, "Of Mind", in which Spinoza describes third-order knowing: "What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false." Spinoza, *Ethics* (in *The Collected Works of Spinoza* vol. 1, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), IIP43S.



the problems of philosophy—is such a form of knowing, even though Spinoza's system is also supposedly the paradigm of demonstrative rationality gone amok.

Despite the crudity and ostensible internal contradiction of Jacobi's critique, it was incredibly persuasive. Although Moses Mendelssohn was Jacobi's primary interlocutor in the *Pantheismusstreit*, several others felt the need to respond to Jacobi, including both Herder and Kant. Later Jacobi engaged Fichte in debate in an exchange of letters, and finally Jacobi even argued with Schelling, after the publication of the *Freiheitsschrift*. Some scholars even believe that figures as late as Kierkegaard were influenced by Jacobi.[14] It is difficult to determine why Jacobi could be such a vital figure, especially since Jacobi was writing as the same time as the epoch-making appearance of the Kantian critical philosophy, which was both sympathetic to certain elements, but ultimately critical, of his critique. How, in proximity to an eclipsing figure like Kant, could Jacobi's polemic have left its mark? In neither its account of demonstration nor its insistence on belief had Jacobi anything to offer the Kantian critique. Yet, there is a vague resemblance between the opposition that Jacobi establishes between philosophy and morality and the separation in Kant between theoretical and practical philosophy. If Jacobi's argument is glossed as the failure of demonstrative logic to account for moral principles, then the "immense gulf" between theoretical and practical philosophy, which Kant addresses in his introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* and then tries to overcome,[15] appears as an example of that failure. Of course, Kant would bristle at the idea that the critical philosophy is a form of *pantheism*, but for Jacobi, pantheism was merely the model of consistent philosophical reason.

Hegel breathed new life into Jacobi's critique of pantheism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). The target of this critique was Schelling and his philosophy of identity, not philosophy *tout court*. The philosophy of identity included texts such as the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801) and the *System der gesammten Philosophie* (1804). In those texts, Schelling describes a pantheistic system in which self-identical reason takes the place of Spinozist substance. In the following passage, Hegel describes the limitations of the "divine life" of self-identical reason.

[14] See Anders Moe Rasmussen, "The Legacy of Jacobi in Schelling and Kierkegaard", in Joachim Hennigfeld ed, *Kierkegaard und Schelling: Freiheit, Angst und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin: DEU, 2002).

[15] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 14.

> That life is indeed one of untroubled equality and unity with itself for which otherness and alienation, and the overcoming of alienation, are not serious matters. But this in itself is abstract universality, in which the nature of the divine life to be for itself, and so too the self-movement of the form, are altogether left out of account.[16]

Such "equality and unity" betrays an incapacity of "divine life" to achieve the "alienation" of finite life. Schelling's system lacks the negativity necessary to overcome alienation and for the "divine life to be for itself." God does not create himself in finite life, and, without the action of creation, God's own essence remains merely formal and unactualised. Hegel's critique actually has two parts. The first part is the acosmist critique, or the failure of non-derivative finite life to emerge from the infinite. This part of the critique is consistent with what we observed in Jacobi's critique of Spinoza. Finite beings lack actuality because they are merely modifications of the infinite essence. The second part of the critique follows dialectically from the first. An account of God that cannot bring finite life into being, namely, acosmism, is ultimately not even God, and is therefore atheism. Jacobi skipped the second step of this critique and merely claimed that the failure to account for belief was atheism. But for Hegel not all philosophical reason is stigmatised by an abstract inner life. Thus, for Hegel, philosophy is not cursed by this abstract inner life—only the "monochromatic formalism" of Schelling's philosophy of identity.

Now it is true that Hegel is not criticizing pantheism *per se*. But it is clear that the same indictment of pantheism by Jacobi is now being directed towards Schelling. The fact that this critique is renewed by Schelling's former friend and colleague only sharpens its sting.[17] Schelling

[16] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 10-11.

[17] Alan White denies that Schelling was concerned with Hegel's critique, citing the continuity of the concerns of the *Freiheitsschrift* with earlier work as evidence. Alan White, *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 104-106. In his last letter to Hegel, Schelling even says that he could not have assumed himself the target of this critique—that it was meant for his disciples. Yet Schelling also says that he wishes Hegel would have made that distinction. F.W.J. Schelling, *Aus Schellings Leben in Briefen*, ed. G.L. Plitt (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1869-70), 2:124. Tilliette thinks, however—and I follow him on this issue—that Schelling couldn't have failed to have noticed that he was intended as the target of this critique and that in the *Freiheitsschrift* Schelling attempts to show that Hegel is mistaken. Xavier Tilliette, *Schelling: Une Philosophie en Devenir* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 1:513.



does not refer directly to Hegel in the *Freiheitsschrift*, but he does refer explicitly to a contemporary critique of pantheism made by Friedrich Schlegel in *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808). In correspondence Schelling expresses a desire to engage Schlegel in debate. Although there are personal reasons for this state of affairs,[18] Schlegel had condemned the *hen kai pan* of pantheism as reducible to all is nothing, and claimed that pantheism could not account for evil.[19] Thus, Schlegel also continues the acosmist critique of pantheism, but adds something new to these charges.

In summary, we may say that there is a certain intellectual momentum to the critique of pantheism, and it is this generalized critique that Schelling seeks to overturn. First, Schelling sees the *Freiheitsschrift* as overturning the platitude that system and freedom are mutually contradictory concepts, and as such responding to Jacobi. Second, Schelling wants to show that human freedom is not merely a moment of the "system" of the *Freiheitsschrift*, but precisely what makes the "system" what it is. In such fashion, Schelling emphasizes the finite life of the divine, overcoming Hegel's critique. Third, human freedom is conceived as the capacity for good and evil, and as such, this pantheistic system responds to Schlegel's comments. These are the intentions of the *Freiheitsschrift*.

## III. Human Freedom Suspends the Divine Will

From the opening pages of the *Freiheitsschrift* onwards, the explicit task is to show not merely that system and freedom do not contradict one another, but that freedom and system can only be thought insofar as they are thought together. Yet Schelling begins by asserting the fact of freedom, "the feeling of which is imprinted in every individual", and the givenness of its existence within the whole of creation: "Individual freedom is surely connected in some way with the world as a whole… [and thus] some kind of system must be present, at least in the divine understanding, with which freedom coexists."[20] The task for Schelling is *not* to prove that freedom and system do not contradict one another—for the fact of created existence is the proof—but merely to explain how that is the case.

[18] Schlegel claimed that Schelling had plagiarized his work. Tilliette, *Schelling*, 1:499.

[19] Joachim Henningfeld, *F.W.J. Schellings* Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 38.

[20] Schelling, *Inquiries*, 9; *Werke*, 7:336-337.

Nonetheless, the introduction to the text is devoted to examining the platitude that pantheism cannot sustain human freedom and that this is because the concepts of system and freedom contradict one another.[21] Schelling considers three interpretations of pantheism. The first contends that pantheism means the "complete identification of God with things."[22] God is nothing more than the aggregate of all finite things and the unity of the infinite could not obtain. As such, pantheism is atheism. In response, Schelling claims that this interpretation fails to even approach Spinoza's system, the paradigm for it, because the latter insists upon the most "total differentiation of things from God." This distinction appears in the generic difference between substance and modes, namely that the former exists in itself and that the latter exist through another. Rather than effecting ontological indistinction, Schelling here seems to think that Spinozism protects the infinity of God by separating Him from the realm of singular things.[23] The second interpretation is that "in Spinoza [or pantheism] the individual thing is equivalent to God."[24] Pantheism implies the unmediated sameness of the finite and infinite beings. Schelling responds: this is merely a failure of basic propositional logic. Even the most fundamental logical proposition, that of identity, never implies that both the subject and predicate are identical in precisely the same sense.

In the third interpretation Schelling finally broaches pantheism's supposed acosmism, namely, "that things are nothing, that this system abolished all individuality."[25] Nothing other than God exists, because the existence of all finite beings is derived from God's existence. As derivative

[21] Ibid, 9-25/7:333-355. Buchheim introduces these textual distinctions in the Meiner edition of the *Freiheitsschrift*. F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, ed. Thomas Buchheim (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1997), v-vii.

[22] Schelling, *Inquiries*, 12; *Werke*, 7:340.

[23] On this point, Bracken comments that for Schelling, Spinoza is only "apparently pantheistic", but not really. Joseph Bracken, *Freiheit und Kausalität* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 1972), 37. That being said, Schelling's dismissal of this interpretation is premature. Even if Spinozism is the model for this interpretation and this resemblance is misleading, that does not justify moving on. The fact remains that this interpretation of pantheism is provisionally valid: pantheism may result in atheism insofar as divine unity is displaced by the plurality of finite beings. To this Schelling might reply that the notion of a plurality of finite beings is incoherent except on the presupposition of an infinite, unified being, against which their plurality and differentiation is possible. Nevertheless, as we will see in our conclusion, Schelling's pantheism errs—if it errs—in this direction.

[24] Schelling, *Inquiries*, 13; *Werke*, 7:341.

[25] Ibid, 15/7:343.



beings, they lack actuality. Here Schelling abandons Spinoza to acosmism, yet he notes that it applies as much to Leibniz as to Spinoza.[26] On my view, Schelling's reaction to this interpretation is his acknowledgement of the problem he must address in his essay. Acosmism is *the* critique of pantheism that sticks. To be clear, however, acosmism does not posit the insufferable contradiction of system and freedom *per se*, but that of ontological infinity and actualised, non-derivative finitude. As we saw above, this is implied by Hegel's critique in the *Phenomenology*. Here we see that Schelling is quite conscious of the challenge posed.

At the end of the introduction, Schelling introduces the principle that will allow for the possibility of human freedom in God, without reducing human freedom to an expression of God's will. That "principle" is the "dark ground," which is equally the condition for human freedom as it is the condition for creation altogether. By the dark ground Schelling thinks of something like the Platonic *khora*; the ground is a mass of dynamic forces that are bound by no rules yet are perpetually in motion. Schelling will say of the ground that it is what is *in* God, which is not God. The dark ground will be the "material" of creation, which the "light" of the divine understanding shall successfully bring into a fragile equilibrium as a "bond of forces," giving birth to corporeal nature.[27] This is the "first creation." This creation is repeated, as we shall see, in the act by which each individual "decides" his essence. In other words, it might be said that there are two creations.

The "first creation" is the production of corporeal nature, which is directed by a "universal productive will" that teleologically organizes nature's development. The "will of the understanding," which Schelling will also call a "universal productive will" also divides this "bond of forces" and informs the body with a soul. Primitive organic natural forms develop vegetable souls in plant life, and then irritable, sensible souls in animal life. All throughout corporeal nature and in each of its created beings, however, the will of the understanding dominates the will of the ground. But the process of division and evolution continues until the soul of the human being is created and both the will of the understanding and the will of the ground coexist in equal parts in this soul.[28]

The wills of the understanding and of the ground, as they appear in the soul of the human being, are the basis for human freedom. Whereas the

[26] Ibid, 16/7:345. One cannot help but wonder how, if the generic difference between substance and modes is so great, acosmism stigmatizes Spinozism (if the first interpretation of pantheism does not). Schelling does not think this is an issue.

[27] Ibid, 30-31/7:361-362.

[28] Ibid, 31/7:362.

life of all non-human life is always directed by the teleological principle of the will of the understanding, in the human being it is equalled by the will of the ground. The will of the ground had been necessary for the life of all creatures, but it had always been subordinated to the will of the understanding. At the rare moments in natural history when the will of the ground surpassed the limits of the will of the understanding, disease struck natural life.[29] In the human being the wills of the ground and of the understanding are called the self and universal wills, respectively. Human freedom, in its eternal aspect, concerns the decision that makes one of these wills into a leading principle. If the universal will assumes domination, this will is ordered according to the teleological ends that the divine understanding established within nature, and it therefore exists in harmony with the whole of nature. This is a good will. But human freedom also consists in the possible affirmation of the self will. The latter would be evil and would pervert the natural order of forces. "Self-will can strive to be as a particular will that which it is only through identity with the universal will; to be that which it only is, insofar as it remains in the *centrum* (just as the calm will in the quiet ground of nature is universal will precisely because it remains in the ground), also on the periphery".[30] Whichever will is chosen, the other will is made subordinate to it in a "bond of forces," which he refers to as an "identity" in the passage above.

The "decision" between these two wills constitutes what Schelling calls the "second creation." The likeness of these two creations consists in the fact that in both creations—in the creation of corporeal nature and in the decision producing the human soul—both wills stand at equal power. Moreover, in both creations a bond of forces is established. In the first creation, the bond of forces is the equilibrium obtaining between the will of the understanding and the will of the ground in corporeal nature. In the second creation, the bond of forces is the identity of the universal and self wills as "spirit," when one of these two wills has been selected as the dominant principle.

A second respect in which these two creations resemble one another appears in their temporal modality. Both creations occur eternally. Strictly speaking, of course, the first creation, the creation of corporeal nature, must be an eternal act insofar as creation brings temporality into being. The second creation is also an eternal act, because this is the decision that determines the moral character of the person throughout his life.[31] "This

[29] Ibid, 38/7:371.
[30] Ibid, 33/7:365.
[31] "First" and "second" do not, it should be clear, indicate temporal demarcations, since both creations are eternal.



sort of free act, which becomes necessary, admittedly cannot appear in consciousness to the degree that the latter is merely self-awareness and only ideal, since it precedes consciousness just as it precedes essence, indeed, first produces it."[32] If the decision occurred in human life, it would be overdetermined by a plurality of forces. In order to be free it occurs in eternity, although this is a strange eternity that "precedes" both consciousness and essence. This decision is essentially one of self-actualisation. The individual determines his own essence and the decision that he makes is his own act, although the individual is produced by this decision.

The last and most vital respect in which these two creations repeat one another comes in the function of the dark ground. We must remember that the ground is the condition for God's existence in creation. The ground is what is *in* God, which is not God. It is only because there is something that is *in* God which is not God that it is possible for independent, non-derivative finite beings to emerge. All created beings share in the dark ground as a co-constitutive principle of their existence. But only in human being is the will of the ground brought forward and given potential autonomy. The equality of the will of the ground in human being is what truly makes human being free. All created beings are independent in part, but the freedom of the human being is its own act. To put this a different way, if throughout non-human nature, a teleological principle directs the evolution of those created beings, only in human being does that teleology reach its suspension. This means that human freedom expresses the possibility by which that "universal productive will" can be affirmed or perverted. The dominance of that will is by no means assured.

And yet.

This teleology reaches its suspension, in part, because human freedom is the final end of God's creation, and it is through human freedom that God is finally and completely revealed. But human freedom, as we have presented it so far, has been conceived solely in its eternal dimension, whereas human freedom would be nothing without a moral life by which the essence each person has chosen is affirmed in their life. That is, human freedom is not merely the eternal, non-conscious decision of self-actualisation; it is also the life that affirms the will of the individual human being. Similarly, Schelling says of God, "God is a life, not merely a Being."[33] This passage expresses the fact that the eternal essence of God must experience its revelation in the history of creation in order to become what it is. Created nature achieves its finest production in the freedom of

[32] Ibid, 51-52/7:386.
[33] Ibid, 66/7:403.

the human being, and the self-actualisation of the human being repeats the act whereby God gave birth to himself in creation. Just as God must be revealed and live this life, human freedom is revealed in the moral life of the individual.

"All life has a destiny, however, and is subject to suffering and becoming."[34] But not all life is the same. The revelation of God, the life of God, occurs through creation and in particular through the gift of freedom in human being, whereby creation reaches its apotheosis. Thus, God suffers human freedom and the vicissitudes of human history. All of the evil and glory that human life produces is a spectacle for God. Human life suffers and becomes only the individual essence that it selected and it must affirm only that essence. For the human being, the moral life he lives is his action. God, by contrast, suffers the life of another. There is still another difference between divine and human suffering. The human life is an end in itself[35] and thus human becoming is an irreducible aspect of human being. The end of divine suffering is not that suffering itself, but the completion, the exhaustion of that suffering, "when God will be in all things, that is, when he will be finally realized."[36] And this means that God may never affirm the suffering and evil of human history, unlike the human being whose life is a celebration of the moral character for which he has decided. Human life is affirmation; the divine life is the suffering of what cannot be affirmed, but at best can be distinguished from the ends of the will of the understanding[37]—the principle that the divine understanding attempted to realize in nature. To put this differently, in his zeal to give non-derivative life to human being, to overcome the acosmist critique of pantheism, Schelling has inadvertently submitted God to a fate that cannot be affirmed. Schelling has directed his pantheistic account of God and the freedom of human life to certain atheism.

## IV. The Meaning of this Atheism

In the preceding I argued that the account of human freedom in the *Freiheitsschrift* and its consequences for God amounts to a form of atheism. In my concluding remarks I want to consider what precisely this

[34] Ibid.

[35] By "end in itself" I am referring to the fact that human freedom for good *and* for evil may affirm its own action as *not* being instrumental to another purpose.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "For this is the final purpose of creation, that, whatever could not be for itself, should be for itself insofar as it is raised out of the darkness into existence as a ground that is independent of God." Ibid, 67/7:404.



may mean. By making this judgment I clearly do not mean to intimate that Schelling "does not believe in God", according to the facile understanding of this term. As it was in Spinoza's time, so it is today: atheism is a term that marks violence done to a traditional concept of God. Spinoza's critics denounced the *Deus, sive Natura* because it attributed materiality to the divine essence, which clearly contradicted the traditional identification of God with the immaterial, non-perishable transcendent being. This constituted the first meaning of Spinoza's atheism, as his earliest readers saw it. Only later did readers thematise and condemn his fatalism.

The question about atheism needs to be framed in terms of Jacobi's critique and its extension by Hegel. For Jacobi, the atheism of Spinozism was the elimination of will and thought within the system of immanence. Atheism meant the failure of Spinozism to account for the two fundamental characteristics of human being, as well as of the divine being. On these terms, Schelling has masterfully overcome the principles of the critique. Human and divine being find a common basis for their will in the dark ground, and the *Freiheitsschrift* describes the genesis of the divine understanding. While the *Freiheitsschrift* does not detail the state of human knowing, it certainly does not eliminate human knowing.

In fact, if the key component of Jacobi's alternative, belief (*Glaube*), denotes an immediate "knowing" of existence, then Schelling has in fact integrated this into his account. One of the four forms of moral character he describes is the individual possessed by "religiosity": "For God is the clear cognition in us or the spiritual light itself in which everything else first becomes clear… it is conscientiousness or that one act in accordance with what one knows and [does] not contradict the light of cognition in one's conduct."[38] Religiosity signifies the most "clear" form of knowing, and this knowing is inseparable from the most resolute moral action. This inspired person is blessed by a radical clarity. We cannot help but notice the resonance of this passage with Jacobi's description of Spinozist insight—the inspiration for his notion of belief—as the light that illuminates itself and the darkness. Not only does Schelling manage to account for Jacobi's notion of belief, but also he refines it.

These are the reasons why Schelling explicitly concludes, at the end of the *Freiheitsschrift*, that system and freedom do not contradict one another:

> A system that contradicts the most holy feelings, character and moral consciousness, can never be called, at least in this respect, a system of reason, but rather only one of non-reason. To the contrary, a system in

[38] Ibid, 56-57/7:392.

> which reason really recognized itself would have to unify all demands of the spirit as well as those of the heart and those of the moral feeling as well as those of the most rigorous understanding.[39]

By the "most holy feelings [*Gefühlen*]", perhaps Schelling means the character of "religiosity" that we encountered above. In this respect, as the divine understanding constitutes the universal will towards which the religious person is wholly oriented, these "holy feelings" coincide with the "system of reason." As Schelling writes elsewhere, God is not merely a system, but a life.[40] The divine understanding represents God *qua* system.

However, in my lead to the passage excerpted above, I slipped in the word "freedom", so as to present the connection with Schelling's brief treatment of three interpretations of pantheism in the introduction to the *Freiheitsschrift*. Schelling actually writes "moral feeling", not freedom. This slippage is not accidental. For freedom is the capacity for good *and* for evil. Could the sinner, could the evil individual, be said to possess "moral feelings"? Is the conduct of the sinner in concert with the "system of reason"? Let us suspend this question for the time being and turn to Hegel's renovation and extension of Jacobi's critique. Schelling has dispatched the general charge of the latter.

Hegel, by contrast, emphasizes the acosmist failure of the philosophy of identity, and moves from this acosmism to the conclusion that any divine life, for which created beings are dependent and un-actual, cannot be a divine life. Here too we find that Schelling has successfully overcome this critique. Human freedom in its eternal dimension, as the self-actualisation of the individual, constitutes an account of finite life that is not merely derivative in relation to the divine understanding. Only through the notion of the ground is this individuated, "alienated" finite life possible. Thus, Schelling reveals an alternative to the function of negativity that dominates the unfolding of the *Phenomenology*.

Now we may return to question of evil and system, and we cannot help but recall Schlegel's critique of pantheism, that it cannot account for evil. Schelling addressed this critique too by making human freedom the capacity for good and for evil. Yet as we have seen above, the "destiny" of the divine life requires that evil be cast out and that the tragedy of human history be left unaffirmed. Evil cannot be integrated into the "system of reason." As such, God never wholly overcomes the alienation that Hegel recommends for an actual, authentic divine life. While Schlegel's complaint about pantheism may have been addressed in the design of this

[39] Ibid, 74-75/7:413.
[40] Ibid, 62/7:399.



system, it was ultimately left unanswered in the execution of the final purpose of creation.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

# A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE: BERGSON'S *CREATIVE EVOLUTION*

MICHAEL KOLKMAN

## I. Life and Death

*Creative Evolution* [*CE*] (1907) is Henri Bergson's third major and probably best-known work. It is here that he applies his philosophy of duration to the problem of life. This philosophy he had developed in his second work, *Matter and Memory* [*MM*] (1896). In that work, Bergson unequivocally affirmed the reality of duration, and with it the productivity of time itself. The opposition of matter and spirit is demonstrated to be, not an extrinsic difference, but the result of an intrinsic differentiation within duration itself. Existence consists of various degrees of a temporal form of organisation named duration, ranging from the almost completely closed and predictable circuits of action-reaction found in brute matter, to the integrative and adaptive action-reaction circuits found in the spiritual. That is to say, reality tends in two directions: towards matter and towards spirit, and everything consists of varying degrees of these two tendencies.

The philosophy of duration allowed Bergson to demonstrate a monism of substance. All of existence, be it matter or spirit, is made of the same stuff; the difference now lies between action-reaction circuits that are more closed, repetitive and predictable and those that are more inclusive, adaptive and novel. But having thus demonstrated the continuity of matter and spirit, it is the question of *life* that forces him to rethink this unity. The problem with the account given in *MM* is that, although allowing us to understand the fundamental continuity of existence, from the perspective of life, there is a vital and irreducible difference between the living and the non-living. The account of degrees of contraction and of rhythms of duration as an explanation of the continuity of body and soul cannot, at least *prima facie*, account for the very real difference there is between the organic and the anorganic or between a body with a soul and a body