

Malte Dominik Krüger

## Rationality and Freedom

### Schelling's later Philosophy

**Abstract:** With Schelling's later philosophy the rationality in German idealism bids farewell to its fantasy of almightiness. The rationality fails in the attempt of its ultimate justification. In the reality of an absolute ground it cannot assure itself of its own reality. The rationality realises that it is being related to an absolute, but its reality as creative freedom withdraws itself from the conceptualising striving of the rationality (negative philosophy). However, the possibility of this rationally ungraspable reality, as understood by the rationality, liberates to create theoretically a not enforceable change of perspective (religion), which is nonetheless not to be denounced as irrational. Afterwards, the "unlocked" rationality is able to diagnose the world in the horizon of the creative freedom of the absolute (positive philosophy).

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## 1 Introduction

Schelling's later philosophy consists of two components: the “negative” and the “positive philosophy”. The negative philosophy is the science of pure rationality. The positive philosophy is a revelation theology that is based on experience. These two components are being combined in the way, as Schelling has specified it in his last will.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Schelling himself was not able to accomplish this combination of the two components during his lifetime. But even afterwards could this not be done since the “Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung”<sup>2</sup>, which is authoritative for the positive philosophy, could not be located. It was not until a spectacular discovery in 1992 that it became accessible. However, as described in Schelling's last will, it is this work only that comes into his consideration as a source for the positive philosophy.<sup>3</sup> In principle, it is the same with the “Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie”<sup>4</sup> (Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy) for the negative philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

## 2 Schelling's negative philosophy<sup>6</sup>

The insights of the negative philosophy are purely rational. But they are also historical at the same time. That is to say, they are being discussed at a certain moment in history. According to Schelling, there climaxes a historico-intellectual development in Kant's philosophy. It leads from a pagan mythology to the ancient philosophy, and finally to the Christianity. It distinguishes modern philosophy positively to free itself from the guardianship of the latter. This philosophical self-enlightenment of rationality is not directed against religion in the end. This clarification is rather a precondition for the self-fulfilment of the true religion of freedom. The modern emancipation of rationality can be characterised by means of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fuhrmans 1959/60, 14-26.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schelling 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Franz 2002, 273; Schmied-Korwazik 1994, 164; Mende 1993, 411.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Schelling SW XI 253-572.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Meier 2004, 67. Up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Schelling's later philosophy was classified as irrational. It was not until Walter Schulz's thorough analysis that freed Schelling's later philosophy from these charges. The new Schelling research begins with the publication of his study “Die Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings“ (The perfection of German Idealism in Schelling's later philosophy) in 1955. Numerous continuations and variations emerged subsequent to the classic controversy between Walter Schulz's idealistic interpretation and Horst Fuhrman's theistic interpretation of Schelling's later philosophy (cf. Meier 2004, 28-56). Today six types of interpretation of Schelling's later philosophy can be distinguished (cf. Krüger 2008, 30-96): The theistic interpretation (e.g. by Walter Kasper), the idealistic interpretation (e.g. by Manfred Frank), the Marxist interpretation (e.g. by Ernst Bloch), the existentialist interpretation (e.g. by Paul Tillich), the evolutionary interpretation (e.g. by Xavier Tilliette) and the Kantianising interpretation (e.g. by Axel Hutter).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Schelling SW XI 253-572; Korsch 1980, 256-280; Buchheim 2001, 125-145.

keyword: self-determination. In that way, the intention of rationality, to assure itself rationally in the idea of the absolute, can be illustrated. According to Schelling, this takes place in Kant's theoretical philosophy: Rationality realises that it needs the idea of God as integrated concluding idea. In the following, it is Schelling's intention to deduce no longer this insight from a historical point of view but to develop it merely rationally.

The negative philosophy as pure science of rationality is based on the following precondition: Human beings possess rationality. As beings of rationality, they are able to articulate their ideas about themselves and the world in a form which is generally capable of accountability. Thus, a communication about the possibility of this articulation is made possible since the question of its own possibility is irrefutable for rationality. Otherwise, rationality fails its ability of general reflexivity. Hence, rationality tries to enlighten itself about what it means to be able to discuss all possible contents, thus plainly "something".

This leads to the next idea. If something is supposed to become thematic as something, then it has got to be possible. If something is possible, this leads to the idea of the absolute subject, because from this nothing can be predicated. The absolute subject is what can plainly be and what is not nothing. In this way the absolute subject refers to what precedes the idea of possible predication. As underlying notion ("hypo-keimenon" or "sub-jectum"), it is the first momentum, which is followed by the idea of the absolute object ("ob-jectum") as the second momentum. Both moments are not real but refer to moments of possibility.

In doing so, the subject precedes the object and thus marks a difference. This necessitates the distinction between subject and object. However, since these two moments are only making their reference to each other as a third entity, which is different from both, needs to be considered if the identity of this reference is supposed to be grasped. This third entity arises from the mutual reference of subject and object. It can therefore be referred to as absolute subject-object or Spirit and reiterates the structure from which it arises: Differently from Hegel the third momentum of the dialectic is no new reality but remains in the area of what is possible. With these three moments the structure of "something" is fully grasped: The rationality is the ability ("potentia") that understands every "something" according to its possibility ("potentia"). These three moments of Schelling's rationality can therefore be referred to as "potencies". Thus, the rationality grasps the paradigmatic possibility with the help of the dialectic of the potencies. And in the perception of its potencies the rationality realises that it is based on a reality which does not merge into it.

This reality is the principle of rationality. Due to its nature of not merging into rationality this principle needs to specify its moments in such a way that it is actually once more being

distinguished from this function. As reality the principle needs to include and exceed the paradigmatic possibility. In order to achieve this principle by selection the rationality begins to differentiate this paradigmatic possibility. This leads to the deduction of the world of ideas and the world of appearances, whose categories are being derived from the complex interplay of the potencies. In the end of this derivation rationality understands the idea of God as its principle. However, as this principle God is merely understood ideally.

After exhaustion of all theoretical possibilities this induces the rationality to perform a practical act: Firstly, the rationality emerges out of itself and trusts secondly in the fact that God is real as principle. The possibility of this transition is based on the understanding that the principle in itself possesses its moments and potencies: The principle is the reality which distinguishes itself from its potencies and which can begin something as this reality, namely through the realisation of the potencies. This freedom of God, which is only noticeable in retrospect (“a posteriori”), corresponds on the part of the human, to the immediacy of the individual will in which the freedom can be seen. The transition from negative to positive philosophy corresponds to the transition from “law” to “gospel” and from “nature” to “grace” respectively, as Schelling notes in theological language. Schelling wants it to be explicitly understood in such a way: The negative and positive philosophy are what the Catholic theology refers to as nature and grace and the reformed theology as law and gospel.

### 3 Schelling's positive philosophy<sup>7</sup>

In positive philosophy, God is supposed to be truly comprehended. But this failed because the reality was on the reservation of rationality. Now, rationality emanates from the actual reality and asks for its conditions. Within those conditions rationality rediscovers itself: The conditions of the being are the three potencies. They may altogether be characterised as the essence which stands for the unity of the potencies. An important insight is associated with that: The essence as such is not located on the same level as the three potencies. The essence itself would be potency as well as the unity of the potencies: Immediately, it would be the question: what constitutes this unity? The idea of the essence would not have fulfilled its function of explaining the global unity.

Hence, it comes to a change of perspective. The reconstruction of being turns into the understanding of essence, which incorporates the three potencies. Due to its freedom from the potencies the essence appears as freedom *from* the being: The essence is absolute because it

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Schelling 1992; Krüger 2008, 163-183. 191-218. 231-264.

can free itself from its being (“absolutum” from “ab-solvere”). Due to its freedom *towards* the being the essence proves to be God. Accordingly, in God the three potencies need to be distinguished from his essence. This essence of God can be identified with the tetragrammaton of the Hebrew name for God (“JHWH”). Formally this name is a proper name which, different from the term, refers to an identity that cannot be utilised – thus Schelling is in accordance with the Saul A. Kripke’s later theory of the proper name. And, materially, the proper name of the Hebrew God is the singular and original freedom (Exodus 3,14) that begins something creatively. In such a way, the essence of God justifies why the world exists: Since God does not need the world he is free to create it.

The insight into the being of God (“JHWH”) leads to a monotheistic understanding of God. This monotheistic understanding of God establishes itself in history with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Compared to the previous train of thought, it is a new insight that can now be applied to the history of religion; and that the world becomes comprehensible in its genesis: In religion, the world history becomes aware of itself; the interpretation of religion may explain the origin of the world.

With that the crucial step is taken: If the world is supposed to be contemplated as a free act of a free God, as in creation, this task is being realised by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Creation then is the procreation of the Son in the Spirit, which is unnecessary for God the Father. The first potency represents the substratum of creation and the paternal procreative capacity (“causa materialis”) respectively, the second potency the Son (“causa formalis”), and the third potency the Spirit (“causa finalis”). This Spirit is the primordial human insofar as nature opens the eyes in its awareness. Thus, the basic character of Schelling’s later philosophy is being substantiated: In strict self-fulfilment (as the absolute reality of the Father), the absolute encloses the possibility of otherness in itself. (The substratum of creation and the possible persons of the Son and the Spirit).

Consequentially, Schelling’s doctrine of the Trinity begins with the consubstantiality of the Father. This unity of God is not real without the potencies and thus not without the possible persons of the Son and the God. Since the (real) Father as such is not without the (possible) Son and the (possible) Spirit the doctrine of the Father takes over the function of the “immanent” doctrine of the Trinity: It expresses the freedom of God towards the world. Previously, the appearance of the “economic” Trinity, God the Father is so real that he is free to be differentiated in the sense of the “economic” Trinity and thereby for the creation. And during the “economic” separation of God during the creation, the Father warrants the indissolubility of God because he does not enter the world. The Father is free from becoming

the world. Thus, the Father does not come into being along with creation. Rather, only through the Son and the Spirit does the Father manifest himself with creation in the world.

At this the absolute reality of the free Father manifests itself as love in the world: The Father fully releases his three potencies for the genesis of the world, even though he himself in his absolute reality does not profit from it. Thus, the Father manifests himself as absolute freedom in the world through the realisation of his potencies in the love and as Spirit in the mind of the human: In the world the divine freedom manifests itself as love in the mind of the human.

This freedom-theoretical identification of the human explains why the human being may originally abandon God: As image of the free God the human is originally free – and can turn away from God. However, human beings lose their freedom with this avoidance. Unlike God, whose essence (“JHWH“) as Father is located above the potencies, humans are linked to the dialectic of the potentials within the Spirit as third potency. Since the Fall of Man includes the human wants to be like God, the human being sets free the first potency, thus the paternal procreation capacity in the sense of the substratum of creation (“causa materialis“): The human is subordinating himself as third potency to the first. This entails a repetition of the creation process within the human consciousness – the history of religion. This second potency successively overcomes the first potency so that at the end, the community with the Father comes back with the third potency of the Spirit.

The incomplete structure of the potencies interprets the freedom of God as creation and the freedom of the human as the Fall of Man. It explains how the obedience of Christ restores the community with God. Thus, by renouncing its power, which it has acquired in the non-divine darkness of the pagan mythology, the second potency of the Son returns the first potency to God the Father. With the self-renunciation of the second potency the first potency, which is being set free in the Fall of Man, loses its support and perishes as such.

Thus, the restored third potency comes into focus. The Spirit appears with the obedience of the Son towards the Father. And the obedience of the Son takes place within the Spirit, which restores the unity with the Father. The reality of the Spirit finally breaks through with the performed obedience of the Son in the self-sacrifice at the cross: God's freedom thus presents itself anew in the freedom of human. The right of the first potency, which is being set free in the Fall of Man, is overcome in the person of the Son according to the possibility and in the works of the Son according to the reality. These works of the Son are still continuing to last and take place in the church: With the departure of the Son the Spirit moves into the outer history. Ultimately, this is going to be the case in the Johannine Spirit Church of the future (as

manifestation of the third potency). The Petrine Catholicism (as manifestation of the first potency) and the Pauline Protestantism (as manifestation of the second potency) are leading to this church.

## 4 The positional designation of Schelling's later Philosophy

Schelling's insights can be contextualised. Schelling's later philosophy can be understood theologically as orthodox patricentrism and philosophically as internal realism. These classifications do simply serve the purpose of getting a better picture of Schelling's later philosophy.

Schelling's doctrine of the Trinity explains: God the Father is the free origin in which the Son and the Spirit and thus also the world of the human are justified. The Father is aware of his freedom because of the Son and the Spirit who are inside of him. The Father rules over the persons of the Son and the Spirit, which are established within him and which do not rule over the Father even though they entail him. In doing so, Schelling's doctrine of the Trinity makes perfectly clear that the persons of the Son and the Spirit are based on the person of the Father. However, it has been said that this is not right because the Nicene dogmata of the consubstantiality of Father and Son and of the consubstantiality of Father, Son and Spirit do not seem compatible with such a "subordinatianism"<sup>8</sup>. However, this impression changes considerably when subsequently considering a remark by Walter Kasper<sup>9</sup>: There is a legitimate orthodox patricentrism. This orthodox patricentrism has nothing in common with Arius and the subordinatianism. Not only Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian support this patricentrism. Athanasius and the opponents of the arianism support this direction as well. The Cappadocian theology and the affiliated tradition of the Greek East are patrocentric until today. For this tradition the doctrine of the genetic relations of origin cannot come into conflict with the insight of the sameness of the Trinitarian persons, as Athanasius, Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus remark. Because, according to their belief, it characterises the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity that the Son and the Spirit are being attributed to the one Father. Hence, it can be talked about the one essence of God. The reason for the basic unity of God is thus not an absolute equality of the Trinitarian persons but the Son and the Spirit owe

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Wendebourg 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kasper 1965, 273f. Anm. 57.

themselves to the Father. Besides, in patricentrism the procreation of the Son is being connected to the creation of the world.<sup>10</sup>

When sharing this view of orthodox patricentrism, the relationship with Schelling's doctrine of the Trinity becomes apparent. Thus, Schelling supports the patricentric main idea: The creation of the world is justified in God, who is not a community of three coequal persons. Rather, God the Father is the essence of the deity from which the Son and the Spirit emanate and create the world. Schelling thus realises a doctrine of the Trinity based on German idealism which renews central insights of the orthodox patricentrism.<sup>11</sup>

In order to locate Schelling's later philosophy philosophically within the horizon of the present, it can be related to the current realism-antirealism-debate of the analytical philosophy. Because the contemporary philosophy is being shaped by this debate. With the relative right of one-sidedness four positions can be distinguished within it.<sup>12</sup>

The first position is the metaphysical realism. Metaphysical realism is based on the fact that the everyday judgement implies: Statements differ from the things they are referring to. Thus, statements are not as such infallible but are true or false depending on the state of affairs. The reality does not depend on being made the subject of discussion. Moreover, a statement is true if, and only if, the reality and this discussion of it concur. Metaphysical realism formulates this insight with the so-called correspondence theory of truth: True is a judgment which corresponds with reality. However, given this fundamental assumption, metaphysical realism turns into a problem for itself. Because if the reality and its discussion are being differentiated in principle, this means that the reality is fundamentally independent from its discussion. Consequently, also the best discussion of reality may go wrong.

This explains the attractiveness of the second position, which is contrary to the first one. This is the antirealism, which may also be referred to as idealism. For antirealism reality is a question of the cognitive process. Thus, a statement about reality is true or wrong if it is justified or not justified, respectively. Thus, according to the coherence theory something is regarded as true if it is consistently coherent. According to the consensus theory that is regarded as true what is being agreed upon under the conditions of an ideal discourse. Or the limiting value counts as true at which the academic theory formation aims. Accordingly, it appears to be problematic in antirealism that the statements do not refer to things from which they differ. It is rather the case that the things can no longer be distinguished from the statements about them: The reality becomes one with its discussion. However, in doing so it

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Marcus 1963.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Holz 1970, 405-412. 425-441; Krüger 2008, 287-296.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sollberger 1996, 76-80; Koch 2006, 11-25.



becomes unclear how something particular can be made a subject of discussion at all. Because if the form of the discussion specifies the content of what is being discussed in such a way that the content consists of the form alone, then no content can be specified as such: If something is supposed to have its reality only in and how it is being said, that what is being said can no longer be distinguished from the general form of its statement.

The third position is the relativism. Relativism wants to settle the dispute between realism and antirealism by dismissing the theoretical efforts of justification. Relativism claims: The truth of statements can not be clarified in the end. Because statements are relative they depend on circumstances which can not be justified any further. However, this relativistic position in the sense of a theory is difficult in principle: If all statements are merely relatively valid, this is also true for the statement "All statements are merely relatively valid". However, apparently this is a performative self-contradiction. It does not get any better if relativism wants to evade it by remarking that it does not require any universally valid statements. In such a way it turns out to be incomprehensible with which right relativism is supposed to be more than a mere opinion which can be imposed on others.

The fourth position is the internal realism. Internal realism needs to be distinguished from metaphysical realism. It is common to both realistic theories that reality is not only classified as a deed of the human and his power of cognition. However, internal realism, on the contrary to metaphysical realism, knows that, in its appearance, this reality is constitutively related to human opinions. In doing so, internal realism wants to avoid that – like in metaphysical realism – reality volatilises itself into an unintelligible beyond. Internal realism states: The statement about something real refers to something real which is different from this statement. However, something real can not be understood independently of its statement. Thus, it needs to be distinguished between the articulated reality and the statement about something real within the statement.

The theoretical question for internal realism deals with the following: Is it about a maintainable position? If this reality presents itself within the discussion of the reality without merging into its discussion, then this reality is being concealed in its emergence: The reality is concealed in its revelation. However, what allows it to estimate is actually reality revealing itself within the discussion which is supposed to go beyond the discussion? Differently formulated: Internal realism is not just the answer to the questions which are brought up by the other three positions rather, it reiterates and intensifies the problem of how the reality and its discussion are entwined in each other. Here, theoretically apparent, rationality comes close to its limit. This is the moment in which Schelling's later philosophy becomes interesting.

## 5 The systematic cogency of Schelling's later Philosophy

Basically, Schelling's later philosophy implies: A last, absolute ground of the being can be extinguished. This ground is a creative and original freedom whose creativity can not be reached by the human in the end. The human can not fully take hold of the freedom which has generated the cosmos and continues to generate. Accordingly, an absolute ground can be specified: It does not merge into the world of the human and is thus preserved as source of original freedom. However, this freedom is nothing irrational but reveals itself precisely in the activity of the human rationality. That is to say, if rationality tries to get a grip on itself, it realises that itself is set: If rationality reflects on itself, it has always been thinking. Its own realisation virtually anticipates the rationality. Thus, as part of the self-reflection rationality is able to recognise its own mediation in the sense of facticity.

However, this insight is by no means just a deficit of the human rationality. Rather, in this way rationality realises that there is something underlying it which enables it to persistent activity: The rationality realises that it is based on a creative ground. This ground is free - and can be referred to as creative freedom - insofar as the rationality is not able to take hold of this ground. In other words: The absolute, or God respectively, is a free and creative reality – a reality in which possibilities are being preserved through whose realisation the absolute can operate the world (not: has to). The absolute would not be free otherwise. Vice-versa, the creative possibilities also need to be inherent in the reality of the absolute. The absolute would otherwise not come into consideration as ground of the world because it would in principle be incapable of creating the Other of itself.

In accordance with Schelling this is directly linked to another idea: The absolute, which is original and creative freedom, manifests itself as love with the creation of the world. Because, even though the absolute does not depend on the Other of itself in the sense of a real counterpart, the absolute does create a free counterpart as original freedom. This counterpart is the human being, in whose awareness nature opens its eyes and experiences itself as free. The freedom of the absolute manifests itself in the human freedom through the realisation of its possibilities, thus the creation of the world. However, the absolute is not itself being constituted by that. In my opinion this position can be addressed as internal realism: The (absolute) reality does not merge into the human through the realisation of its possibilities and thereby through the creation of the world. However, within the human this (absolute) reality is being recognised constitutively.

In doing so, Schelling's later philosophy moves within the limits of what, when considering Dieter Henrich, can be called "Metaphysik des Abschlusses" (metaphysics of closure). This is the project which actually wants to display a last, absolute ground of differences. In the sense of the metaphysics of closure the discourse of the absolute ground includes four insights. First of all, this ground must not be a certain momentum of difference. Because if a momentum of difference, which is supposed to be explained, is inscribed into the ground as explanation, then this is circular: At once, in reference to the ground, the question could be posed which has led to its introduction as ground. Secondly, the ground of difference can not be understood as difference of the moments of difference. In this case the questionable facts are already being assumed unquestionably. Thirdly, the difference as such is ruled out if the ground is supposed to be understood. That is to say, if relations are being described as original, one has to admit that the existence of the difference of the elements of relation is no longer open to any justification. Fourthly, it needs to be demanded in principle that the formulation of the term of an absolute ground must not utilise the differences which are supposed to become plausible with reference to it. Otherwise, a circle would begin which could not be regarded as justification. Thus, arises the following problem for the metaphysics of closure: If the ground is already differentiated, it can not be the ground of difference. However, if the difference is by no means justified in the ground, the ground can not be the ground of difference. Thus, it is impossible to assume an internal differentiation of the absolute ground. And it is impossible to deny this differentiation at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

Considering this problem Schelling's theoretical proposal is the following: The absolute ground needs to be specified in such a way that the moments of difference are included as possibilities within the reality of the ground. The absolute ground is distinguished from the differences which may emerge from it and which are being stored within it as possibilities. If this absolute ground is supposed to be comprehended positively, then it is the freedom opposite to the realisation of its inherent differences. Because the ground itself does not depend on it within its reality the entry of the ground into the realisation of the inherent difference of its possible moments can only be understood in retrospect. The metaphysics of closure are replaced by a theory which distinguishes freedom as ground of the world, whose occurrence can be diagnosed simply because of its factual entry: The ultimate justification is replaced by a diagnostic rationality which is linked to the factual practice.

These two insights are linked with the diagnostic rationality. First of all, in doing so the freedom of God is being taken account of, which in the end explains the freedom of the world

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Cramer 1988, 297-322.

of the human all by itself. Independence can only be attributed to the human freedom if God's freedom can still be distinguished from the latter in its manifestation within the human freedom. And secondly, the practice-oriented diagnosis can not be separated from the living of the rational beings: Rationality is always the rationality of someone and for someone. The following diagnostic character is not a sign of an irrationalism which stays behind the rational security of the metaphysics of closure. Rather, the diagnostic character indicates the real world reference of rationality. The theoretically not feasible justification shows that the rationality refers to something else than itself and that it is thus virtually justified.

These two insights are closely related. Because if God realises himself within the theoretical self-awareness of the human being, then the human becomes the momentum of God. In doing so, God and the human become the means of self-assurance for one another. Neither God nor the human are thus interesting because of themselves. There is the risk of the reduction to a functionalism which in the end nullifies every personal independence and which thus contradicts the experience of freedom: The human is being degraded to the momentum of divine becoming – and the continuance of the human doings only permits the conclusion that God's attempt of mastering his own identity has been unsuccessful so far. However, if the human is not a means which God needs for himself, then God does not create himself with the human but the human being for its own benefit. The putative devaluation of the human thus proves to be a true revaluation: The purpose of the world is not a self-therapy of God but the freedom of the human being.

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