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God-Beyond me

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Publication date:
2010

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal

Citation for published version (APA):
van Woezik, C. (2010). *God-Beyond me: From the connection of the I to an absolute ground in Hölderlin and Schelling to a contemporary model of God as unitary and personal ground*. Brill.

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God – Beyond Me

From the Connection of the I to an Absolute Ground in Hölderlin and Schelling to a Contemporary Model of God as Unitary and Personal Ground

Proefschrift ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Tilburg,
op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof. dr. Ph. Eijlander,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties aangewezen
commissie in de aula van de Universiteit
op donderdag 22 april 2010 om 10:15 uur

door

Cecilia Gerarda Maria van Woezik

geboren op 17 januari 1958 te Oss.

Promotor: prof. dr. Saskia Wendel

For my children,
Bani, Jiva, and Armel

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INTRODUCTION

This study is about God, but it starts with 'me.' This self-centeredness seems to reflect the perspective of modern Western thinking quite accurately; it all starts with me. Modern autonomy and individualism have created an atmosphere in which all our thinking not only automatically starts with our own self but also seems to be forced to do so. Not only *can* I think for myself; I *have to*. As Fichte put it at the end of the 18th century, "At every moment, throughout our whole life, we are always thinking I, I, I, and never anything else but I."[1] What used to be true only for the intellectual elite has been democratized. The I has become the accepted point of departure for every human being. Nonetheless, I-hood, or the ordinary, daily state of being that I am most familiar with, is a philosophical enigma. My ability to say 'I' comes with the capacity to lead my own life, to experience a measure of control over my actions. At the same time I am aware of what I do, and aware of my awareness, and the awareness of the awareness, *ad infinitum*. What is it about me that I can feel a sense of infinity and know about my own mortality at the same time? *Who am I?*

There are quite severe limitations in phrasing the question about human existence in terms of 'Who am I?' but we have no idea how to escape this paradigm. Being an I, an individual, having a life of our own, seems to be our only sense of certainty from Descartes up until the present day. At the same time, however, it is a source of existential insecurity. If this I is all I have to rely upon to make my life worthwhile and if all my interactions are based upon my own free choice, I have become very vulnerable and isolated indeed. Vulnerable because the moment I lose control there seems to be nothing left. After all, it is me who is in charge of making my life and giving it meaning, is it not? Isolated because I lack all natural togetherness. I meet other I's in whom I recognize the same drive to shape their lives in meaningful ways. To some of them I am related, in blood or in friendship, but I am not at all sure where in my I-hood I can find the grounds for

[1] Fichte, SW 1, 501. For this and the other references, see the bibliography and the specific chapters. Unless stated otherwise, translations are mine.

that relation. Even less clear is my togetherness with humankind as a whole. We are no longer connected in any fundamental way. *Who are we?*

The emphasis on individual choice, life, and feelings also has a huge impact on present-day Western religiosity. It is no longer obvious that we remain in the tradition in which we were born and raised. We are overwhelmed by a vast range of alternatives in the general confusion of the 'reli market.' Religiosity has become a personal choice and is thus progressively more closely associated with private experience. Even though the search for personal experience of the Divine is of all ages and cultures, one can suspect that the great importance that is ascribed to it in contemporary Western religiosity is linked with the development in modernity that places the I on the foreground. As Karl Rahner puts it about half a century ago, "The devout Christian of the future will either be a mystic, one who has 'experienced something,' or he will cease to be anything at all."[2] Modern religiosity is about the personal experiences of the I; it is about me and God, in that order. It has become rephrased as, *Who am I to God?*

In the overwhelming offer of publications oriented towards the enigma of I-hood and its possible reference to something beyond (*meta*) the physical two general groups can be distinguished. Firstly, there is the naturalistic literature, such as Owen Flanagan's, *The Problem of the Soul*, that views the I's metaphysical questions as remnants of old-fashioned, but familiar pre-scientific worldviews that it cannot seem to let go off.[3] It is merely a lack of understanding of the intricacies of the human brain that brings forth *Such Nonsense!*, as is another title in a long line of books that want to educate us about the roots of our religious misconceptions.[4] The idea that people think 'God' when the complexities of life overwhelm them, which was formerly explained with concepts like 'projection' or 'father complexes,' has been remolded in the terminology of genes and neurons nowadays. The big, bad Unconscious that ruled our lives has now become the hegemony of dendrites, synapses, and neurotransmitters. Both influences are beyond our grasp, but dictate who we are and how we conceive of life. The message is surprising parallel: this I that feels

[2] Rahner, Schr 7, 15. See 6.2.
[3] See Flanagan 2002.
[4] De Regt, Dooremalen 2008. The original Dutch title is: *Wat een onzin!*

pressured to control the whole world on the one hand is really at a loss when it comes to its own self-conscious I-hood on the other.

Secondly, the contemporary seeker of metaphysical answers is confronted with a range of semi-scientific literature and trainings directed at personal growth, or 'finding oneself' in whatever form, based on often irrationalistic and haphazard types of spirituality with self-made healers, mediums, and rituals. Surprisingly, quite a large number of medical doctors and natural scientists is active in this range, responsible for a vast production of books with titles such as *Why God Won't Go Away, Born to Believe* (Andrew Newberg, MD), *The God Gene* (*Dean Hamer*, geneticist), *Eindeloos bewustzijn* (Pim Van Lommel, MD).[5] Their medical jargon and scientific credentials apparently qualify as a sound basis for metaphysical speculations. We must face the fact that nowadays the most popular theology is practiced by medical doctors and (neuro)scientists with a predilection for metaphysics, not by theologians.

The question about the relation of the I to anyone or anything beyond the physical is no longer dealt with within the domain of theology exclusively, or even predominantly. Theology seems to have neglected or missed this religious 'turn to the I.' There are, of course, intelligent theological anthropologies, Karl Rahner's for example, which will be studied in the course of this project.[6] However, the theological argument concerning the human subject in relation to the Divine in often difficult and dogmatic jargon has failed to inspire those outside the theological community. The vocabulary and the themes of theology are no longer self-explanatory to non-theologians, or even to new generations of theology students. The result is that the average intelligent, interested, but theologically uneducated reader turns away from Christendom as it has been shaped by church and theology in his or her search for meaning. It seems as if the hunger for spirituality has become equaled by the aversion for institutionalized religion *and* terminology. At the start of the third millennium, theology is threatening to lose its status of knowledgeable participant in the discussion about God, or what a human I can know or experience about an all-encompassing Divine in which it can understand life to

[5] The last title is *Endless Consciousness* in English. See Bibliography for all titles mentioned.

[6] See Chapter 6.

be lived. People are searching elsewhere for answers to the question, *Who is God to me?*

The often oversimplified 'theology' that is thus generally available forms a very fragile protection against those philosophies that try to convince the modern I to stop finding the meaning of its life beyond the physical. Given enough time and research grants, the neurosciences will succeed in solving the enigma of I-hood and there will cease to be a need for metaphysical inquiries, they appear to reassure us. This study, on the contrary, challenges the hubris of the natural sciences and its belief that a further unraveling of the laws of nature will make metaphysics superfluous in the human quest for the fundamental questions about the ground of its I-hood. It also refuses to go along with the often-irrational discourse of quasi-spiritual theories of I-hood. This project constitutes a search for a viable, rational metaphysics for the 21st century that takes the question concerning the human I and its aspect of something more than the merely physical as its point of departure. It attempts to be sparing in its use of dogmatic, 'standard,' theological jargon while at the same time being led by an intuition for the merits of a long tradition of metaphysics as developed within the broad horizon of a Christian worldview. It insists on asking about I-hood, its ground, and the meaning of conscious life in the broader setting of the question, *Who is God?*

The Route of the Project

The previous five questions concerning the I and its possible relation to something or someone beyond the purely physical form the focus of this project. In the search for an antidote to the seeming hegemony of naturalistic explanations of I-hood, the subject philosophy of Dieter Henrich (1927) stands out. In contemporary philosophical language, he provides a sharp analysis of the ambiguity of what it means to be a self-conscious being in the world. He claims that contemporary metaphysics should start from 'conscious life' [*bewusstes Leben*] with its daily experiences of ambivalence and anxiety that provoke the self-aware subject to philosophize. In his view, self-conscious I-hood is a philosophical enigma that leads beyond the physical.

Henrich's metaphysics finds its basis in the type of thinking that is described as German idealism, which seems an odd choice for a theory of subjectivity two centuries later. Is not a philosophy of the I

that leads to metaphysical musings passé? Has the road from the I to what was referred to in those days as the Absolute not turned out to be a dead-end street in the history of philosophy? Has it not been a philosophical enterprise that has not only exhausted its own possibilities but also yielded results that have proven downright dangerous to humankind? Has the foundationalism of German idealistic philosophies with its propagated metaphysics of identity not proved to be a dangerous excess that served to justify the destruction of all otherness? These common arguments for its rejection that have dominated the second half of the 20th century notwithstanding, Henrich sticks to the conviction that the type of speculative thinking that takes a flight towards the end of the 18th century can still constitute a valuable point of departure in our times. Provided that certain philosophical conclusions be modified and that the arguments of the modern criticism of metaphysics be taken into account. Henrich's major modification of the metaphysics of idealism is the assumption of a unitary ground of self-consciousness that is unavailable for human cognition; it is darkness or obscurity [*Dunkelheit*].

The merits and the shortcomings of Henrich's analysis of I-hood and his metaphysics will be discussed at length in the relevant sections of this text. The discontent with the conclusion that this ground is totally beyond knowing, devoid of all content, however, has been my incentive to turn to the thinkers of this era itself and their original questions. Two young authors, both graduates from the famous *Tübinger Stift*, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854) and Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), stand out. In a brief but essential period in the history of philosophy, from approximately 1795 to 1810, they lay the foundations for an entirely new and daring metaphysics. Besides the required courses in traditional theology and philosophy both young men study the writings of Immanuel Kant (considered dangerous for young ministers to be) and become enamored with Baruch de Spinoza (a downright heretic, a pantheist). Both refuse to become Lutheran ministers against the wishes and expectations of their parents and professors. The former turns to philosophy, the latter does so for a short while (and writes an intriguing text about the ground of the human I) before he decides that poetry is a superior medium for expressing the metaphysical.

This excursion into the land of German idealism itself has turned out to be enlightening, in particular the discovery that the issues are still surprisingly up-to-date. So is the attempt to break away from

standard, solidified terminology. Of the two young thinkers, Schelling's early work forms a beautiful illustration of the problems and the aporias associated with thinking the link between the I and the Divine. He is a brilliant and creative thinker who is convinced of his ability to build one grand philosophical system in which God, nature, and I-hood will neatly fit. After Kant has tried to convince his students that knowledge of the Divine is impossible, Schelling sets out to build a system that will prove him wrong. He plans to integrate Kantian freedom, Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*, and Fichte's absolute I in one great sweep of philosophical genius and prove that all that is emerges from a unitary Absolute that is within the grasp of human reflection.

Hölderlin, on the contrary, never supports the foundationalism of his fellow *Stiftler*. He maintains that the Absolute, or God, cannot be known but merely be intuited, not thought, but 'divined.' Absolute, divine unity expresses itself in beauty, in nature, in love. Hölderlin gives up on a career in philosophy and throws himself into poetry, "which alone will survive all other sciences and arts." Instead of mastering the Divine in thought, he wants to "wrap it in song."[7] With this move, he takes yet a different side in the heated debate about the metaphysical. Is it the exclusive domain of knowledge, that of faith, or is there an intermediate realm called (intellectual) intuition?

The debate around the term intellectual intuition [*intellektuelle Anschauung*] that rages in philosophy during the brief but crucial period that forms the focus of this project illustrates the turn-about that takes place in philosophy after and because of Kant. A distinct split occurs between the possible ways to ponder the metaphysical question of the I and its possible openness to its absolute ground. Whereas Hölderlin tries to find his solutions in the border regions of the human mind where the I and divine unity tend to merge, in the land where the artist and the mystic dwell, Kant disdainfully rejects the term intellectual intuition as a human faculty and thereby erects a fence between philosophy and theology. One that can only be scaled, it is said, by what Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) calls a *salto mortale* into faith. Knowledge belongs to the domain of the physical. For knowledge, we need a human mind that categorizes what is offered to it by the senses. Where perception is impossible, so is knowledge. Therefore, the metaphysical can never be the object of philosophy.

[7] Hölderlin, StA IV, 298; StA II, 119. See Chapter 4 and 5.3 for the references.

Beyond the physical not the land of reason is to be found, but that of faith. The only escape left to Hölderlin is the art of poetry.

The 'Kantian fence' still stands, and those with (intellectual) intuitions and negligible artistic talents are forced to choose between philosophy and theology. The rare contemporary philosopher who still ventures beyond can only speak of the obscurity or the darkness of the metaphysical ground of self-consciousness. Within the boundaries of philosophy, it can only be maintained that a unitary ground needs to be assumed in all its obscurity, in Henrich's view. It is this darkness of its ground that explains the fact that self-conscious I-hood is a source of existential insecurity. With the refusal to elaborate on the nature of this unitary ground of self-consciousness, he escapes the idealistic foundationalism and he chooses to stay within the clear limits of philosophical reason. And yes, perhaps Henrich has gone as far as philosophy will allow. It seems indeed the prerogative of the philosopher to be allowed to stop there. To quote Rahner, the philosopher can "abstain from speech about this mystery, speech which the theologian must utter."[8] In Rahner's view and my own, theologians need to utter what philosophy (and the natural sciences) can either deny or avoid. They are the ones who venture *meta* physics because they do not thrive within the boundaries of a rationality that seems restrictive. Somehow, they cannot ignore their intuitions of a larger whole in which a human life is embedded that Christendom refers to with the term 'God.' On the other hand, also the average theologian of the 21st century cannot live by blind faith and accept what sounds irrational. Hence, there appears to be a need for a new language about I-hood, God, and the intuited connection.

This study hopes to take a first step towards meeting this challenge with the help of Hölderlin's metaphysics. To Hölderlin the precarious balance between all-encompassing unity and individuality was the core of his experience of the human way of being, summarized in one of his poems as, "Well men can see, that they will not follow the way of death and maintain the measure, that man shall be something in himself."[9] How can a person be an individual ("something in himself") without disappearing in the masses, wasting away in the anonymity of

[8] Schr. 3, 40. Rahner makes this statement about Heidegger. See 6.3.
[9] The poem is *The Only One*. See 4.6.

unity with family, friends, and even with the entire human race ("the way of death")? How can we be an I in the all-unity of the world? How can we hold on to singularity in a context of unity? This is not just a dilemma of a sociological or psychological nature for Hölderlin; it is the very foundation of his metaphysics. The unitary ground of all that is can only be realized, come alive, in a new unity of singular I's.

This view of the I and its unitary ground might still form a valuable correction of contemporary, western thinking that seems based on views concerning the I that concentrate on its rights, its singularity, and its free choice. We have learned to view the I as an independent entity that decides when and where to relate, or refrain from relating. We are that, but we are not only that. We are born into a pre-existing unity for which we feel responsible, in which we think to have a say and to which we believe we can contribute in a meaningful way. Therefore, mature I-hood always seems to be searching for a balance between individual needs and the well-being of the whole.

Moreover, there seems to be a surprising parallel between this metaphysical dilemma of mature I-hood between unity and individuality as posed by Hölderlin and a Christian concept of God. After all, a unitary, divine ground in every human being is not alien to Christian thinking. However, it is only one aspect of the way the connection between God and human being is thought. Besides a God who is (in) all, hence immanent, the basic Christian experience of God also recognizes a God who is vis-à-vis people, Another, transcendent. Christendom wants to hold on to the God who is *interior intimo meo*, as well as to the God who is *superior summo meo*, in Saint Augustine's more experiential language. The latter transcends all that is and appeals to all who are to work towards the realization of a peaceful unity in the world. These two sides of God as both unitary ground and personal appeal seem difficult to combine in thought. Nonetheless, I agree with Peter Strasser that the challenge of theology today is to think God as "simultaneously personal and all."[10]

The all-ness of God receives ample attention in the metaphysics of a unitary ground. However, the emphasis on God as ground appears to overshadow God's personhood. Hence, the challenge is to integrate this essential aspect. The mystery of this God, who is the one, most interior ground of every I in the world as well as the One who tran-

[10] Strasser 2002, 191.

scends all who are, is the driving force behind this project. Who is this unitary God in whom we are embedded but who addresses us at the same time? This unitary God challenges the all of distinct I's to realize divine presence here and now in a peaceful unity of singular I's. How can we think this God of our deepest intuition in a metaphysical language that is new but does justice to an age-old monotheistic tradition at the same time?

The Choices Made

Every study is limited and has to make a selection from the possible approaches and a wide range of literature, a veritable *mer à boire*, and no choice is absolute. Hence, particular decisions require explanation and substantiation.

Chapter 1: I-hood

The subject philosophy of Dieter Henrich has been chosen because it is unique of its sort. It is the result of the thorough study of metaphysical and linguistic models of self-consciousness. It concentrates on the question what it means to be a thinking subject in the world, an I. It is not concerned with the physical aspects of the human way of being. This is barely a limitation since nowadays 'Who am I?' seems to have become a question about the complex human mind, or the brain, but not as much about the body as a whole. The dominant partners in the dialogue concerning the ground of I-hood – if partnership and dialogue are the correct terms for the present situation of segregation – are the cognitive and the neurological sciences. Henrich's model of I-hood will be introduced in connection with two metaphysical theories of self-consciousness that were the center of the debate in the late 18th century: the reflection model and the production model. In an excursus the naturalistic view of I-hood will be provided for comparison because Henrich's monistic metaphysics of the one, unitary, unknowable ground of self-consciousness is opposed to the naturalistic model of matter as the sole ground of all that is and its resulting rejection of anything beyond matter. This discussion will serve to underline the need for a metaphysics instead of a physics of self-consciousness in order to do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon. It will not give an overall view of naturalistic theories available nowadays; it merely sketches some lines of thinking and general shortcomings.

Moreover, this chapter will deal with the issue of subjectivity and not yet discuss Henrich's view of the ground of I-hood. The latter will have to wait until the sixth chapter after we have looked at the two 18th century views of the I's ground.

Chapter 2: From the I to the Absolute

The development of metaphysics in the period from 1795 to 1810 that will constitute the focus of this project is deeply influenced by two people, namely Kant and Spinoza. This chapter will offer brief examinations of the Kantian epistemology and his metaphysics of freedom and Spinoza's metaphysics in order to appreciate the problems associated with dualism (Kant) as well as substance monism (Spinoza). German idealism can be viewed as the attempt to rescue metaphysics from the dualism of Kantian epistemology with elements of Spinoza's philosophy. However, Spinoza's view of unity, his Substance, his *Deus sive Natura*, turns out to be insufficient for safeguarding (Kantian) freedom. This is unacceptable at a time when the echoes of *liberté, égalité*, and *fraternité* are heard far beyond the French borders. The philosophical revolution that comes about in German idealism is considered the intellectual equivalent of the French Revolution. The I comes to be viewed as the imperial gateway to the metaphysical, a realm about to be conquered by the human intellect. This chapter forms a historical overview of the heated debate about the philosophical puzzles to be solved.

Chapter 3: Schelling: The I and its Ground

Once the philosophical landscape has been laid out, we will turn to Schelling, the child genius. He is only fourteen years old when the French Revolution takes place, but he is just about ready to enter the *Tübinger Stift* to start his college education. He is the perfect illustration of the intellectual enthusiasm and confusion that grips Germany during that time. He philosophizes as if his life depends on it in a desire to build a philosophical system in which the subjective and the objective, the I and Nature, are not only proven to be reconciled in one Absolute ground but to arise from it as well. It is a beautiful example of what comes to be called absolute idealism. His often frantic writing results in a number of publications that approach the problem from a seemingly endless number of angles. When all fail, the terminology of the I and the Absolute is abandoned in favor of

that of freedom and God in his famous essay *On Human Freedom*. Even though none of his philosophical attempts succeed in overcoming Kantian dualism, these efforts form an excellent illustration of the difficulties involved in developing a modern, rational metaphysics. Only Schelling's early writings are included in this study. Hence, the chapter will not provide an overview of Schelling's entire philosophical oeuvre. Not because Schelling would have said nothing worth studying afterwards, but because of the fact that we are concerned with the philosophical attempts to think the Absolute, and these are the focus of his early work.

Chapter 4: Hölderlin: The I and its Ground

A greater contrast than that between Schelling and Hölderlin cannot be found in those crucial years of German idealism. He chooses an entirely different path to accomplish the same task of shedding light on the issue of the connection between the I and its ground with an entirely different outcome. Both the path and the outcome are interesting. To start with the latter. Hölderlin concludes that the one ground of self-consciousness, which he calls Being [*Seyn*], is unavailable to human thinking powers. Being can never be the object of science because it is pure unity, hence not objectifiable. And the self-conscious I can never reach this unity with its powers of thought because it has been torn apart by its own self-consciousness. Pure unity and consciousness are mutually exclusive to Hölderlin. However, since they are also mutually dependent, there must be ways from the pure unity of Being to the conscious I and vice versa. Here is where the entirely different path comes in; Hölderlin finds the solution in poetry as the gateway to and from the metaphysical. Therefore, his metaphysics would be incomplete, if his poems were ignored. That makes for methodological complications that a theologian, even when not entirely unfamiliar with (biblical) verse, has to consider. The decision to treat Hölderlin's poetry purely as an extension of his metaphysics is allowed, in my opinion, because Hölderlin himself uses his verse as a medium to unfold his metaphysics. His turn to poetry is never meant as an abandonment of his metaphysical project.

At this point another comment needs to be made. It might seem an odd choice to discuss the metaphysics of German idealism and ignore Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. After all, the term has become so closely associated with this man that one could easily forget that he

was only one of the thinkers involved. One reason to favor his fellow students at the *Stift* is that Hegel's thinking seems to have matured later than Schelling's and Hölderlin's. Toward the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, the focus of this study, Hegel is still following the philosophical debate rather than steering it. Both Schelling and Hölderlin are the more creative and innovative participants at that point in time. Later in life, however, Hegel and Schelling become great competitors. Hegel is rightfully remembered as the German idealist par excellence since he has the better career and produces more well-known works of German idealism. Nonetheless, his metaphysics leans heavily on foundations laid by Schelling and Hölderlin, their decisions, successes, and failures. Since it is not my objective to defend the outcome of German idealism but to show the difficulties involved in a narrowly rational metaphysics, I believe that Schelling is the better choice for this project.

Chapter 5: Intellectual Intuition and Metaphysics

The possibility or impossibility of a 'narrowly rational metaphysics' is the subject of the fifth chapter on intellectual intuition. Even though it can be debated whether this English term is the best possible translation of the German *intellektuelle Anschauung*, it does convey its use by the generation that forms the focus of this research quite well. Intuition is, as it still is in contemporary speech, a term for the grey area between knowledge and insights that can be labeled as inspired or mere fantasy, between what is considered real and (perhaps) imagined. It is a term that has not endured in philosophy, or in theology for that matter. In the Christian tradition it has survived as mysticism, and in line with Rahner's prediction, it thrives in contemporary spirituality. Intellectual intuition as it plays a role in metaphysics in the late 18th and early 19th century is a difficult subject of which relatively little thorough study has been made, with Xavier Tilliette as perhaps the sole exception.[11] In the short time span of our focus, the concept undergoes a dramatic transformation. From Kant's meaning of intellectual intuition as God's understanding of the essence of all things-in-themselves, it changes to a human ability. In a sarcastic essay, *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, Kant

[11] See Tilliette 1995.

calls it a "mystical inspiration" that is "the death of all philosophy."[12] It is Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) who first links the term to the human I. For Fichte intellectual intuition reveals the 'I am.' It is the capacity of the I to come in touch with its own absoluteness, the absolute I.[13] Both Schelling and Hölderlin reinterpret it as a human faculty of immediately experiencing absolute unity. The former (briefly) treats it as a philosophical tool to master the Absolute, whereas for the latter it comes closer to the mystical experience of religious traditions. They are, however, united in their use of the term to attempt to bridge the divide between reason and faith, thinking and believing. It forms a prelude to the divide that is still generally accepted between the domains of philosophy and theology. Intellectual intuition thus appears to herald the death of rational metaphysics.

Chapter 6: The Absolute Ground versus God

The failure of the concept of intellectual intuition also explains why two authors share this sixth chapter: a philosopher and a theologian, a representative of the land of reason and an ambassador of the land of faith. We will return to Dieter Henrich once again and study his 'philosophical metaphysics' of the unitary ground of consciousness in order to see how a contemporary philosophy of subjectivity leads to a metaphysics of an unknowable, unitary ground that is obscurity, devoid of all positive content. It is this obscurity of the ground that leads to religion, Henrich maintains. He does not approve of the term Absolute for this one ground; he prefers All-Unity [*All-Einheit*] because it allows for individuality and the I's experience of freedom in a context of unity, in his opinion.

Subsequently, the metaphysics of a theologian, Karl Rahner (1904–1984) will be studied. There are several reasons for this particular choice. First, Rahner agrees with Henrich that a contemporary metaphysics has to start with the human ability to say 'I' and the I's inherent capacity to have an awareness of the infinite horizon of its thinking powers. Secondly, his metaphysics can be separated from his more

[12] Kant 1928, 398.

[13] This issue forms the core of the so-called *anthropologische Wende*, the anthropological turn, both in philosophy and theology with the consequence that in contemporary "spirituality" the questions "Who am I?" and "Who is God?" tend to merge.

dogmatic theological elaborations.[14] It is his early work, *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word*, in which he is concerned with laying a metaphysical foundation for the I. The third reason for choosing Rahner as Henrich's theological counterpart is that also Rahner is convinced that the ground of human I-hood is a mystery, beyond the grasp of the human intellect. However, in contrast to Henrich he does not view this ground as entirely obscure since the I is *Hearer of the Word*; it has the capacity to hear words from the other side of the Kantian fence.

Hence, this chapter will compare the similarities and the difference between two types of metaphysics from the 20th century: one from a philosopher and one from a theologian. Therefore, this chapter can explicitly deal with what are considered to be the differences between the unitary ground of a philosophical monism and the one God of theology. What is the difference between the Absolute and God?

Chapter 7: God – Beyond Me

The final chapter will discuss the five central questions of this project. All authors of this study will help to formulate a possible answer to three of them: Who am I?, Who am I to God?, Who is God to me? With respect to the other two – Who are we? and Who is God? – Hölderlin will have the dominant voice. In his view, a metaphysics of conscious life that connects I-hood with a unitary ground can only succeed if it takes unity as the essence of the human way of being. Grounded in the unity of Being, human I's strive for peaceful unity, to have the oneness of the ground reflected in the harmonious togetherness of I's in the world. On the other hand, unity should not imply loss of I-hood. Hence, a metaphysics of conscious life should search for a balance between the recognition of the singularity of each individual I and the I's longing for unity. Life on earth should be the unity of Being realized, come alive. From Hölderlin it can be learned that the major question concerning conscious life should rather be phrased as, Who are we? In we-hood, both the togetherness of I's and the individual's independence and singularity are fundamental.

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[14] Later in life, his writings become more concerned with an explanation of Christian faith based on his early metaphysical anthropology. Some have commented that Rahner's dogmatics is too explicitly linked to this metaphysical foundation.

This view is reflected in the title of this study, which brings us to the final question of this project, Who is God? 'God – Beyond Me' constitutes a criticism of the idealistic attempt to find God through pure I-hood that can find its ground and ideal in life separate from a world of other I's. God is not to be reached solely in the interior of I-hood. Furthermore, the title questions the I's ability to grasp God or the absolute ground in thought. God is beyond me; God exceeds my intellectual faculties. Nonetheless, the intuition of God as the unitary ground and the ideal of conscious life lived in peace and harmony can and should be the object of metaphysics. This results in a metaphysics of We-hood. A concept of God as We-hood respects the two lines in the Christian tradition of God's personhood and all-ness. It corrects the oversimplification of a concept of God as merely immanent ground of I-hood with its inherent danger of self-absolutization. God as 'We' is the ground of every I of the world and thus endows I-hood with the capacity for both individuality and unity. God as the ideal of We-hood forms a challenge to every I of the world to contribute to a unity in which each individual and his or her singularity is respected and enhanced, to realize We-on-earth.

CHAPTER ONE

I-HOOD

The question 'Who am I?' comes to be an urgent one towards the end of the Middle Ages. When the existence of God is doubted more and more, the subject, the self, the I, the 'Me' of the title, or whatever term is used, is dealt the part of trustworthy foundation: *subiectum*. René Descartes is the first to find the starting point of epistemology in the *cogito*, the indubitable certitude of the I that is capable of thought. According to Nancey Murphy, two sets of epistemic vocabulary are available to Descartes and his contemporaries. The first set is "related to '*scientia*' and [has] to do with demonstrative reasoning and certainty." The second set of terms is "related to '*opinio*', which [refers] to all that falls short of demonstrative reasoning." The trouble with *scientia* arises with voluntarism and its elevation of divine omnipotence and freedom: "What could be deduced about the natural order if God could intervene to change it any time?"[1] With the increasing doubt about *scientia* a greater burden was placed on *opinio*, but opinions must be judged by probability, which depends upon approbation of the proposition by authorities. How to trust authority in the time of Reformation where multiple authorities claimed truth for conflicting opinions? When the trusted epistemic basis came to reel, Descartes felt the need to fight the resulting skepticism and look for a new indisputable and rock-solid foundation for all knowledge. This foundationalism has dominated modern epistemology for centuries.

Self-consciousness is the certainty that I have of my own existence. Even if my senses are deceived and if all that I experience is false, there must still be something that *is* deceived and that *has* experiences. Self-consciousness ensures that I have absolutely no doubt that I am the real owner of my perceptions, feelings and thoughts. This phenomenon that is very familiar to most of us on a daily basis remains one of the major challenges of modern philosophy.

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1 Murphy 1990, 4.

> The key is this: in so far as it merely encounters the world, the 'I' is not itself encounterable…And if it cannot be encountered, it rather obviously cannot be encountered falsely. The source of Descartes's certainty, then, lies in the unencounterability of the self in experience.[2]

The *fundamentum inconcussum* of epistemology is indubitable because it is unobservable. This has caused some philosophers and neuroscientist to declare it a fiction; for others it is an entirely biological phenomenon that is not observable *yet* but will be fully clarified as the neurosciences progress; and still others view it as the puzzle that provokes us to philosophize and theologize, our gateway to the Great Beyond.

The connection between the soul, as a most intimate self, and God is well-known theme in religious traditions. It is not until the period of German idealism, however, that an explicit philosophical link between subjectivity and metaphysics, between the I and the Absolute is made. This not only changes the perception of subjectivity; it also transforms the concept of God. The I is the gateway to the eternal, the boundless, the Absolute, and somehow this certainty of my own existence, this familiarity with myself, is thought to be extendable towards this Absolute. It becomes within my grasp, it can be thought, it can be known. It is no longer an almighty and ominous Thou: it is within reach in and through me. The I becomes omniscient and omnipotent: the Absolute. The consequence is a hubris that has strayed so far from Christian humility that it is (rightfully?) branded pantheistic. But before we take a closer look at this development in the next chapter, let us start where modern thinking usually starts: with Me.

After a brief phenomenology of I-hood to get an initial feel for the philosophical complexities associated with the familiar term I in 1.1., two models of self-consciousness from the 18th century will be looked into (1.2.). These constitute the basis for Dieter Henrich's contemporary, metaphysical model of I-hood that will be studied in 1.3. In an excursus, another popular model of I-hood that claims it to be a physical rather than a metaphysical challenge will be discussed.

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[2] Powell 1990, 1f.

1.1. A Brief Phenomenology of I-hood

All people, with the possible exception of the very youngest and the most mentally impaired, seem to be able to think of themselves as a 'me,' and this ability to say 'I' seems to separate us radically from other species. *Homo sapiens* is not a chunk of nature with a little human icing on top. It seems impossible to isolate an animal remainder from a purely human existence. "All that is natural changes when introduced into the human domain," Ludwig Heyde asserts. If we were to describe all of the characteristics and the complete biography of a person in minute detail, "something would still be left out."

> This something is referred to in terms of the I, the self, subjectivity, etc. It points at something that transcends, that is metaphysical in the original sense of the word: beyond the realm of time and space. Its value is infinite: it transcends all objectification, all determination. *Ecce homo*: see the one who can never be presented adequately.[3]

There is an unmistakable and mysterious grandeur in human I-hood. It is inextricably one with its biology and its chemistry and surpasses it at the same time. It is based in brain tissue and neurotransmitters without being fully determined by these. It can think heaven while planted in the earth.

Let us first take a closer look at some different aspects of this amazing phenomenon of I-hood.

1. *Familiarity*
   This I that I refer to as my self I experience as unique. It distinguishes me from the things and the people that surround me, all that is not-I. It is the natural point of departure of my (modern) thinking; it is my starting-point for interacting with the world; it offers me the one perspective that only I with my unique physique, psychological make up, my biography, and my hopes and dreams can take. This I is more familiar to me than anything or anyone else in the world. Even my children and others for whom I would give my life (sacrifice this I-hood!) are outside this indisputable and fundamental familiarity of my I-hood.

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[3] Heyde 2000, 16; 71.

2. *Body*
   The realization 'I am' is not entirely separate from my corporality. My physical self is easily distinguished from the people whom I encounter: I do not feel their pain, I do not have the same images on my retina, and when I talk I do not really hear what I sound like to them. Nonetheless, my body is but a small portion of what I spontaneously call 'me.' Even if I surprise or disappoint myself with my behavior, if large portions of my body get paralyzed or amputated, if my face gets mutilated beyond recognition, if one morning I wake up deaf and blind, I am still 'me.' I may mourn what has been lost, I may stammer that I am no longer who I used to be, but I am still an I. There is a TV-commercial for a probiotic that answers the question 'Who takes care of you all your life?' with 'Your body! Why not do something back?' There apparently *is* an I that *has* a body. The two: the I and its body do not fully overlap.
3. *Personality*
   My I-ness also has something to do with my psychological make-up. I have certain character traits, and there is a measure of continuity in my reactions to people and situations. I am quite patient or rather short-tempered; I am usually cheerful or rather the moody type; I am impulsive or I tend to wait which way the wind blows. I also have preferences: I love chocolate or I prefer tuna salad; I like hymns or I prefer jazz; I love dogs or I prefer cats. I also have my specific talents and shortcomings: I can sing well or I am a good soccer player; I have no sense of direction or I cannot remember faces. I have my own typical fears and doubts: I am scared of spiders or I cannot stand mice; I worry that I will never be able to stop smoking or I fear making a fool of myself when speaking German.
4. *Synchronic identity*
   At any moment of the day I get bombarded with all sorts of stimuli. I hear traffic in the street; I hear a person laugh in the hallway; I see the letters appear on my computer screen; I feel my fingers touch the keys; I realize that I am thirsty; I wonder how my sister's important meeting is going; and I feel that my shoulder muscles are cramped from typing. Nonetheless, I do not doubt for even a single moment that it is me who is experiencing all this. This aspect of my selfhood is referred to as synchronic identity. This is the unity of my consciousness at any moment in time; I recognize all different mental states that take place simultaneously as my own.

5. *Diachronic identity*
   Even after a good night's sleep, I wake up in the morning as the same me. I remember what happened the day before, and I know what I had planned to do today. Memory is an important aspect of my sense of self. For John Locke (1632–1704) this 'sameness of consciousness' was even the main aspect of I-hood. Sidney Shoemaker has modified Locke's theory and speaks of person-stages.

   > Two stages belong to the same person if and only if they are the end-points of a series of stages such that each member of the series is memory-connected with the preceding member.[4]

   My sense of I-ness accompanies me through time.

All these aspects are part of that what we call subjectivity, the self, the I, or self-consciousness.

Me versus the Rest of the World

The sense of being an I arises at a very young age and seemingly spontaneously. Those of us who are lucky enough to escape the horrors of severe psychiatric disorders, such as multiple personality syndrome, schizophrenia, and other serious mental dysfunction, develop a sense of familiarity with ourselves that accompanies us throughout the course of our life. The awareness of being a unique and individual I first arises as the emphatic need to distinguish ourselves from those who surround us in early childhood. As soon as we start to discover this domain that we call 'I,' we seem to spend a great deal of energy in confirming its boundaries. This is my territory and all who enter are loudly made aware of their trespassing. The constant and often tiresome 'no' of two-year-olds with the intermittent but equally emphatic 'I do it' seems to be an early expression of the awakening of self-consciousness. All parents who have struggled with their toddlers' terrible two's know this all too well. This need to view the I as fully independent individuality seems to come to a climax during adolescence. We need to detach from the unity with parents and realize that we have a life to live that is ours and ours alone. Self-consciousness is accompanied by a sense of separation from the world and the other I's that

[4] Shoemaker 1984, 81.

surround me. Being an I means being over and against an entire world of not-I's.

Where our own I stops and the rest of the world starts, seems demarcated by clear boundaries. The most basic limitations of our own self we have become acquainted with at a very young age: a cookie jar on a kitchen counter is beyond our grasp and definitely a not-I. Gradually we learn to distinguish between the not-I that is subject to the strict laws of nature (an ice cream cone dropped onto the pavement will be lost forever) and a not-I that is an I of its own. Sometimes these latter not-I's can be called in as a very useful way to overcome certain less flexible laws of nature. Mothers might just turn out to be providers of a brand new ice-cream cone when we loudly express our deep despair with the one lost. Then again, sometimes we get confronted with human boundaries that seem even more rigid than our own. All parents have seen the bewilderment in the eyes of the young child who encounters another forceful I in the shape of another little emperor pulling at the same toy. Somewhere in the process of growing up we learn to distinguish between the not-I that is not itself an I and other I's. We gradually start to realize that all these other I's have this same sense of being an I. This relativizes the uniqueness of our own perspective. It forces us to stop viewing our surroundings as territory that is still beyond our reach but that can be annexed whenever we feel the need. We cannot expand our I indefinitely; and it is the encounter with other I's that makes this clear to us.

My Interrelatedness with Others

However, what only seems to serve to distinguish me from the rest of the world also becomes the foundation for connection. This similar consciousness, this comparable sense of selfhood that we recognize in others entices us to get into relationships. We can relate, and we feel invited to explore the overlap with others. We hurt when we witness the suffering of others, and the laughter of a child in the street can brighten our day. I-hood not only distinguishes me from others; it also forms a basis for connection, for intimacy. I can meet you, get to know you, and love you. You can comfort me, make me see the world from a different perspective, and call me your friend. We live in a community of I's. However, the connection goes further. I do not always relate to the rest of the world as other.

Surprisingly enough, it is neuroscientific research that seems to indicate a certain degree of flexibility in the boundaries between what we experience as I and the outside world. Johan den Boer, a professor of Biological Psychiatry at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, reports about research that was done with a patient suffering from what is called hemineglect. After a stroke in a certain area in the right hemisphere "these patients ignore information that is offered to them in the left visual field."[5] This effect, however, is dependent upon the distance between the object and the body. When objects within arms' reach are presented to the left visual field, hemineglect occurs. However, objects that are at a distance further than the length of an arm (in the so-called extrapersonal space) can be pointed at by means of a projection lightpen. However, when the patient is given a stick that is long enough to reach the object in the extrapersonal space, hemineglect again occurs. It turns out that an artificial extension of the patient's body causes a remapping in the brain of far space as near space.

> When the patient used the stick to reach for the object of interest in far space, the tool was coded as part of the patient's hand…causing an expansion of the representation of the body schema.[6]

My physical boundaries can expand; my I changes when I am handling tools.

Moreover, my brain's sense of my boundaries not only changes when an object is placed in my hands. A neurological phenomenon exists that might support the possibility of real connections between individuals called mirror neurons. These are nerve cells in specific areas of the brain that not only fire when someone performs certain actions herself, but also when she observes the same action performed by another individual. These neurons have been directly observed in primates and appear to exist in the human brain as well. Watching someone else ride a bicycle activates my own 'bicycle-riding experience.' Mirror neurons are believed to mediate understanding of other people's goals and intentions, and our ability to predict and explain the mental states of others. Some studies suggest a link between mirror neuron deficiency and autism.[7] If we posses a system in our brain

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[5] Den Boer 2003, 210.
[6] Berti and Frassinetti 2000, 418.
[7] See, for example, L.M. Oberman et al. 2005, "EEG evidence for mirror neuron dysfunction in autism spectrum disorders", In: *Cognitive Brain Research*, 24, 190–198.

that is able to fire in synchrony with other brains, our association with those who surround us can no longer be considered as something merely external. We relate internally. You and I sympathize and synchronize. These findings challenge us to speculate about the fluidity of the boundaries between the I and the rest of the world. If a stick in my hand manages to change the boundaries of what the brain considers to be me, and if watching another dance activates 'dancing' in myself, it is no longer clear-cut where I stop and the rest of the world begins.

This type of research might be confusing since we have learned to think of ourselves as separate from others. If my neighbor decides to go for a bike ride, it is his choice and none of my concern. Then again, there are relationships in which we seem to accept a connection that is more intimate and demarcation lines that are less strict. This is particularly the case in love relationships where we occasionally experience momentary loss of me-you boundaries. A love song by George Moustaki talks of lovers suffering each other's pains and sleepless nights. He sings: "I do not know where you begin; you do not know where I finish."[8] We may simply call this the poetical stammering of a fool in love. However, we do seem to accept the existence of close connections between people that go way beyond the interaction of physically well-defined bodies. We seem to honor things like premonitions about calamities about to happen to loved ones. We can hardly ignore the reports of people who feel the impending death of a geographically distant family member, of mothers who 'know' the moment their emigrated daughters go into labor.

Especially in the parent-child relationship, we accept an intimacy that defies the strictness of the I-not-I separation. Antjie Krog describes her experiences as a radio journalist reporting the hearings of the victims of apartheid in front of the South-African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She reports about the mother of the murdered Phila Ndwandwe who bursts into tears when she receives proof of the death of her daughter who disappeared many years before saying:

> I cannot bear the fact that for all these years she has been in a grave less than ten kilometers away from me and that I did not know it. I did not *feel* it. My initial grief seems such a luxury all of a sudden.[9]

J.H.G. Williams et al. (2001), "Imitation, mirror neurons and autism", In: *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 25, 287–295.

[8] "Je ne sais pas où tu commences, tu ne sais pas où je finis" (George Moustaki).

[9] Krog 2004, 15.

In this statement, we hear echoes of a connection that defies the regular I-not-I opposition. A mother apparently has to be aware of the whereabouts of her child, even in death.

Apparently, we can participate in a unity with other people that goes way beyond the interactions between independent individuals. We can sympathize to a degree that surpasses all ethical duties. Maybe the time is ripe to change our views concerning our subjectivity. Maybe we should put the emphasis more on the aspect of connection, of unity, and less on isolated and autonomous I-hood that lives for itself, develops itself, and merely reaches out to others occasionally.

This sketch of I-hood lays out some of the fundamental aspects involved. The major aim of this chapter is to present the ins and outs of a contemporary and authoritative model of self-consciousness developed by Dieter Henrich in the second half of the 20th century. Since Henrich's theory is influenced by the two older models that dominate the philosophy of the 18th and the 19th century, the so-called reflection model and the production model, these will be discussed beforehand. They form a good illustration of some of the aspects that make self-consciousness such a philosophical enigma. Immanuel Kant, among others, uses the reflection model. Even though Kant is aware of some of the difficulties associated with this model, it is Johann Gottlieb Fichte who first fully realizes its shortcomings and spends most of his philosophical career trying to come up with a solution: the production model. Both the two older and Henrich's contemporary model assume a metaphysical aspect to our subjectivity. They claim that I-hood cannot be explained within the constraints of physical models. It points beyond (*meta*)physics.

1.2. Two Models of Self-Consciousness in German Idealism

A quick look at the empiricist tradition provides the background for the Kantian model of self-consciousness. For empiricism, the single perception is the only source of knowledge. David Hume (1711–1776) maintains that he is unable to think self-consciousness apart from a concrete perception.

> For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at

> any time without a perception, and never observe any thing but the perception.[10]

This observation seems true enough. When we turn our attention to our own mind, we are unable to observe an I over and above the whole of perceptions, impressions and sensations. I can perceive my body parts and my behavior, but no direct observation of my I-hood seems possible. Even though the neurosciences have made progress in locating different areas in the brain responsible for different types of functions, up until now the I cannot be located nor observed in or outside the brain or the body in general. However, non-observability in this narrow sense of the word cannot be proof of non-existence.

Furthermore, Hume's theory runs into problems when he tries to think the connection between the separate sensations. For Hume the I is a construction of more basic entities; it is a bundle of perceptions. Nonetheless, we experience a continuity of consciousness and one single self who has all these diverse experiences. The question is how these concrete singular sensations, perceptions, and impressions can all belong to one singular consciousness and can be connected over time. When Hume states that he never encounters himself without concrete experiences, he overlooks the fact that things like sensations, impressions, and perceptions already have to contain some property that connects it to an I in order to be able to distinguish the person with the specific experiences from that what she is experiencing. If it were not for an accompanying sense of self, a person would not recognize her experiences as her own.

1.2.1. *The Reflection Model of Self-Consciousness*

In the chapter on paralogisms in the *Critique of Pure Reason* [*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*] Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) agrees with Hume that the I is unobservable. It is "a condition that precedes all experience and makes the latter itself possible."[11] Even though this I as the common root of the two stems of human cognition, namely sensibility and understanding, is vital for all knowledge, it cannot be perceived

[10] Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Sect. 6. Of personal identity, SB 252.

[11] KrV, A107. The translations are based upon the 1998 Cambridge Edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood. See Bibliography.

and is "to us unknown."[12] Contrary to Hume's bundle theory, however, Kant argues that the subject must be a unity.

> Now no cognitions can occur in us, no connection and unity among them, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions, and in relation to which all representation of objects is alone possible. This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name *transcendental apperception.*[13]

Hence transcendental apperception refers to the unitary, experiencing subject that makes possible the necessary synthesis of experiential contents.

> Given Descartes's view of the self as simple, substantial, and unitary, and Hume's view that the self which experiences is no more than the set of those experiences, Kant argues [with Hume; CvW] that we cannot know the I to be substantial... At the same time, the I does exist [in agreement with Descartes; CvW], but as a necessary form of representation, a logical operator within the domain of our cognition.[14]

Kant distinguishes between two aspects of this unitary I:[15]

1. *The synthetic unity of apperception (Identity)*
   This property of the I enables it to connect its representations. Experience requires the capacity to "synthetically bring about a determinate combination of the given manifold;" the representations need to be unified and related to an object in a determinate way.[16] In order to yield intelligible experience all my representations must be brought together as mine: "all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them."[17]

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[12] KrV, A15.
[13] KrV, A107.
[14] Powell 1990, 7f.
[15] In English translations of the German *das Ich* several alternatives are used such as the I, the self, the Self, and the ego. The latter I find undesirable since it is too closely associated with the negative aspect of being an I, such as egotism, having a large ego, ego-tripping, etc. Sometimes I will use 'the self.' However, since the German language also knows the term *das Selbst*, I do not usually prefer it. In any case, I do not see any justification for capitalizing 'the Self' since the German language, in contrast to English, capitalizes all its nouns. Overall, I will mostly stick with the plain and simple 'the I,' which is exactly what *das Ich* means in German.
[16] KrV, B138.
[17] KrV, B137.

2. *The analytic unity of apperception*

> The *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or at least would be nothing for me.[18]

The thought 'I think' can accompany all of my representations. This does not mean that the 'I think' must actually accompany each of my representations as long as the possibility exists for me to recognize the representation as mine in an act of reflection.

Transcendental apperception is consciousness of thinking. It is purely intellectual, independent of experience, and we do not even have a concept of it. "I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor *as* I am in myself, but only *that* I am."[19] Of self-consciousness, "that which I must presuppose in order to cognize an object at all," I know nothing other than *that* it is.[20]

> Thus the subject of the categories cannot, by thinking them, obtain a concept of itself as an object of the categories; for in order to think them, it must take its pure self-consciousness, which is just what is to be explained, as its ground.[21]

Self-consciousness itself is empty. In order for anything to be thought by this self-consciousness, all predicates pertaining to what is being thought must refer to something given to self-consciousness for thinking. Self-consciousness is a

> for itself wholly empty representation,... a mere consciousness that accompanies every concept... recognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and about which, in abstraction, we can never have even the least concept; because of which we therefore turn in a constant circle, since we must always already avail ourselves of the representation of it at all times in order to judge anything about it.[22]

The model that Kant uses for self-consciousness has been named the reflection model of self-consciousness. It is based on a tradition called the representation model of consciousness. It assumes that consciousness

[18] KrV, B131f.
[19] KrV, B157.
[20] KrV, A402.
[21] KrV, B422.
[22] KrV, A346.

is always consciousness of something, which implies a division in a subject of consciousness (the one who has consciousness) and an object (that of which consciousness is had). If self-consciousness is conceived according to this model, a subject-I directs its attention at something and recognizes this object as itself (object-I). Hence the subject has consciousness of itself: self-consciousness.

Dieter Henrich has pointed out the difficulties that are associated with this model. First, the reflection theory is circular. Reflection is performed by a subject. This subject must be conscious of what it does while it is initiating this reflection. Therefore, that which is brought to "*explicit* consciousness through reflection must be present, at least implicitly, so that it can call forth the act of reflection which is directed to it." Consequently, the self that appears explicitly has to be presupposed. "The reflection theory can at most explain explicit experience of self, but no self-consciousness as such." Furthermore and regardless of whether the I meets itself through an act of reflection or otherwise, it must be able to distinguish itself from anything that is other than, different from itself. In order to arrive at an identification of itself, the I must already know under what conditions it can attribute that which it encounters, or that with which it becomes acquainted, to itself. The I must have some notion of itself beforehand.[23]

Therefore, the reflection model turns out to be a dead-end street. How could the subject-I possibly recognize this object-I as itself? Either the I that initiates the reflection is already conscious of itself in which case the theory is circular. That what is to be proven, has to be presupposed: self-consciousness. Or the I has no awareness of itself in which case it is incomprehensible how it would ever come to recognize itself as itself.

> The theory starts from the assumption that entities which have self-consciousness can execute acts of reflection which enable them to isolate their own states and activities thematically and to bring them to explicit consciousness.[24]

However, there must be an immediate awareness that the self has of itself preceding all possible self-objectification. Reflections can elevate self-consciousness to the status of self-knowledge, but they cannot bring it into existence. Self-consciousness is *not* self-knowledge.

[23] Henrich 1970, 265.
[24] Ibid., 10.

Self-conscious beings have a pre-reflective familiarity with themselves that precedes all reflection. Hence, we must conclude that the reflection model cannot give an adequate description of self-consciousness. We will return to these difficulties in 1.3.4.

1.2.2. *Fichte's Attempts to Escape the Reflection Model*

For Kant the transcendental apperception is the 'highest point' of his *Critique of Pure Reason* in that it combines the two roots of knowledge: the categories of understanding and the raw material concerning the outside world that the senses provide. It is the foundation of all knowledge but unknowable in itself. He writes:

> [Of this I] we cannot have any concept whatsoever, but can only revolve in a perpetual circle, since any judgment upon it has always already made use of its representation.[25]

Kant does not seem too uncomfortable with this conclusion and is surprised to find that a young generation of enthusiastic followers are intrigued by exactly this enigmatic I.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) is the first to fathom the full complexity of the I. An inexplicable self as it is represented by Kant is unsuitable as the foundation of knowledge in Fichte's opinion, and the different versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre* [*Science of Knowledge*] are subsequent attempts to solve the problem of self-consciousness. Fichte eloquently expresses his objections to the reflection model in the next quote. The basis of the errors of other philosophical systems, even the Kantian, he writes, is that

> They view the I as a mirror in which an image is reflected; but their mirror does not see itself, for that mirror it takes a second mirror and so forth. As a result, what they see is not an explanation but merely reflection. The I in the *Wissenschaftslehre* on the contrary is no mirror but an eye; it is a mirror that reflects itself, an image of itself; through its own seeing the eye (the intellect) becomes its own image.[26]

The reflection model originates in optics. A beam of light is sent from a light source, hits something, and is reflected. The reflection model sees the I as a mirror, Fichte argues, and in this mirror an image is visible. However, for the mirror (the I) to be able to see itself, another

[25] KrV, A345; B403f.
[26] GA IV, 2, 49.

mirror (I) has to be presupposed, *ad infinitum*. Hence, the reflection model has to presuppose what it wants to make visible. Because of the philosophical difficulties associated with the reflection model of self-consciousness, Fichte develops the production model.

In response to the shortcomings of the reflection model, Fichte poses the following formula for self-consciousness in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, "The I posits itself absolutely as positing."[27] Karen Gloy analyzes this formula as follows:

1. To *posit* is the usual translation in this definition of the German *setzen*.[28] The German *setzen* has two connotations: a practical one that means to produce, create, or effect and a theoretical one that means to determine. The two are not as far apart as one might think, and Fichte combines both in his formula.
   a. In the practical sense the I brings itself into being, it causes its own existence [*Dasein*]; its being there.
   b. To produce its own being in the theoretical sense means to cause it as a specific, determined way of being [*Sosein*]; its being such. When something is, it always has specific properties. Hence when the I poses itself, it brings itself into being as a specific, determined being.
2. *As positing*. 'As' refers to a given that is not only intuited but also known, hence grasped conceptually. It denotes something in philosophy that can be specified in a term. Term comes from *terminus* in Latin and means border. To be able to grasp something in a term means to demarcate it in a field of possibilities. This self-positing is activity and knowing about the activity at the same time.[29]
3. *Absolutely* is opposed to relatively or relationally. Absolute comes from the Latin *absolvere* which means to detach, to isolate. As opposed to the relative and relational, the Absolute is without necessary relations. Hence, it is also beyond the cause-effect relation. It has no cause, no presupposition, no ground. Therefore, the act

[27] GA I, 2, 409.

[28] Unfortunately, much is lost in the translation. As Peter Heath and John Lachs point out in the Preface to their English translation of Fichte's work, "'Posit' falls short because it is a colorless word that has little value in philosophy and none in ordinary language, and completely lacks the rich suggestiveness of the German original" (Heath and Lachs 1982, xiv).

[29] This element of both activity and knowing about the activity will play a central role in Henrich's analysis of the inner structure of self-consciousness. See 1.3.5.

of positing is without all further ground. This implies that there is nothing that precedes or grounds the I. The I produces itself.

4. *Itself*. Just positing is not enough to guarantee that the self is not positing something that is totally different from itself. The reflexive pronoun demands the identity of the product and the producer and of the activity and the awareness of the activity: the I that posits itself is self-production and self-consciousness combined. It is the triumphant positing 'I am!'[30]

Hence, there are three differences between the reflection and the production theory of self-consciousness:

1. The reflection model departs from an I that is pre-existent, whereas the production model does not yield an I until the end of a process; the I is produced by this process.
2. The direction differs. In the reflection model the direction of the subject is reflected, turned back upon itself. The production model works with a one-sided relation of dependence; there is a cause and an effect.
3. The reflection model is indifferent towards the role of the I in the relation; it can be an active and dynamic I or a static one. The production model on the contrary has an I that plays an active and spontaneous role in the relation.[31]

Fichte has gone through different stages in the development of his model of self-consciousness. Henrich distinguishes three; Gloy argues that there are just two.[32] Both agree that there is a late stage that differs significantly from the first. This is the stage in which Fichte makes use of the image of the eye, as in the quote at the beginning of this section. Here he defines the I as "an activity in which an eye has been inserted."[33] This obscure definition is difficult to interpret. For Gloy it expresses the relationship between self-consciousness and the Absolute. The eye is the symbol for consciousness that is directed at itself, self-consciousness as a whole, and the activity signifies the Absolute. Hence, the question arises whether self-consciousness is the Absolute

[30] See Gloy 2004, 209–215.
[31] Ibid., 210.
[32] Ibid., 223f. and Henrich 1982c.
[33] GA II, 6, 150.

or whether it is inserted in the Absolute. In Gloy's opinion, it is obvious in the formulation that for Fichte self-consciousness itself is not the Absolute. Both are called absolute, but a gap remains between absolute self-consciousness and the Absolute.

These two models of self-consciousness are important for this research for several reasons. They form the philosophical background for both Schelling's and Hölderlin's theory of the relation between the I and the Absolute, as discussed in Chapter 3 and 4 respectively. Moreover, they are the starting-point for Dieter Henrich's contemporary model of self-consciousness. Henrich will show in the following section why he rejects the reflection theory as philosophically inconsistent. Fichte's production model is of great importance for all three authors. The very young Schelling will follow it for a number of years at the beginning of his career. But both Henrich and Hölderlin are critical because it might represent an unhealthy subjectivism. For Fichte the I *is* its own ground; it makes itself, so to say. The I is a powerful entity that produces itself and all that is. This dangerous lack of modesty is already corrected in his time by Hölderlin and has been made explicit in the 20th century by Henrich. Both Henrich and Hölderlin argue that the I *has* a ground to which it owes its existence. This ground is unknown and the I cannot control it. For Henrich this implies that the I feels powerless and grateful for its existence, whereas for Hölderlin the I longs for the (lost) unity of its ground all its life. These differences will become clear in the course of this project.

1.3. Henrich's Metaphysical Model of Self-Consciousness

In the course of the 19th century, the philosophy of subjectivity becomes associated with a search for certainty and a foundationalist program that has failed deplorably. It is consensus that the outcome of German idealism has proven to be disappointing, and Hegel's claims that human knowledge of the Absolute can be achieved are unmasked as hubris. Subjectivity is replaced by a focus on external forces that shape and control the human mind such as the unconscious, language, and a variety of social and economic forces. Jürgen Habermas argues that philosophy has progressed through three major paradigms. After the ontological and the subjectivist (mentalist) paradigm philosophy has now reached a third and superior one: the linguistic paradigm. Other examples of a philosophical turn away from

subjectivity are the hermeneutic theories of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

In short, by the time Dieter Henrich[34] starts his career as a philosopher during the middle of the 20th century the subject has already been declared dead. Nonetheless, he makes self-consciousness the starting-point of his philosophy contrary to all 20th century hostility towards any attempt to restore the role of subjectivity at the center of contemporary thinking. He develops and defends his controversial philosophy of subjectivity and attempts to prove that the link between a philosophy of subjectivity and philosophical foundationalism can be avoided.[35] Other than an allegedly outdated focus on subjectivity, Henrich's philosophy has been criticized for what Habermas has called a "return to metaphysics."[36] Nonetheless, Henrich asserts that

[34] Dieter Henrich was born in 1927 in Marburg. He wrote his dissertation in 1950 with Hans-Georg Gadamer about the unity of the *Wissenschaftlehre* of Max Weber. This is followed in 1956 by a thesis required for postdoctoral lecturing qualification [*Habilitationsschrift*] called *Selbstbewusstsein und Sittlichkeit*. Until 1960 he was the head of the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg. From 1960 to 1965, he taught at the University of Berlin after which he returned to Heidelberg until 1981. From 1981 until his retirement in 1994, he lectured at the university of Munich. Between 1968 and 1986, he has held visiting professorships at Columbia University (1968–1973) and Harvard (1973–1986). Since 1997 he is a honorary professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin. In the more than two hundred works that he has published so far, the focus is on the historical reconstruction of the constellation of students and teachers who populated the Tübinger Stift from 1790 to 1793 (the time of Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling), the University of Jena in the period from 1794 to 1795, and the Homburg Circle around Hölderlin and Hegel from 1797 to 1800. In his oeuvre, he combines a historical interest with a systematic approach and is considered an authority on the philosophy of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Hölderlin. His conviction that the enigmatic nature of self-consciousness forces philosophy to step beyond empirical boundaries into metaphysics is inspired by the German Idealists. Especially the influence of Hölderlin is obvious in Henrich's assumption of a unitary ground of (self-)consciousness that is impenetrable to our powers of cognition. In contrast to the opinion that prevails in philosophy nowadays, Henrich believes that self-consciousness should be the central focus of philosophy. In his work, he has attempted to bridge the gap between continental philosophy and Anglo-American analytic philosophy. The philosophy of subjectivity of Henrich and his students (Pothast, Cramer, and Tugendhat, a.o.) is often referred to as the Heidelberg School.

[35] The concept of self-consciousness is experiencing renewed attention in our day and age from an unexpected source. Neuroscientific research has led to an increased philosophical focus on self-consciousness once again. See, for example, Searle (2002), den Boer (2003), d'Aquili and Newberg (1999), Carruthers (2000). In addition, the analytic philosophy of mind has discovered the uniqueness and the epistemic primacy of the 'first-person perspective' (see, for example, Frank 1994). It seems as if the subject has been declared dead prematurely. It was merely in a deep coma and seems to be regaining consciousness.

[36] Habermas 1988, 267ff.

any philosophy that is unwilling to consider the questions that people ask in the course of a lifetime about their own being and the meaning of their existence is necessarily reductive. A theory that goes beyond empiricism might not be able to prove its arguments in the way that the natural sciences require, but it may nonetheless shed some light on questions that people cannot seem to avoid asking.

Henrich's metaphysics of the ground of self-consciousness and his defense of a type of speculative thinking that is considered outdated by many, will be discussed in Chapter 6. Let us now turn to his justification of a philosophy of subjectivity for the 20th century.

1.3.1. *Henrich's Defense of a Philosophy of Subjectivity*

The philosophical emphasis on self-consciousness originates in modernity. Whereas Descartes introduces the *cogito* for its certitude immune to all skepticism, no one prior to Kant derives the formal constitution of knowledge as such from self-consciousness. Kant uses the 'transcendental unity of apperception,' the 'I think,' as a starting point for the justification of objective knowledge. However, it is not until German idealism that the internal structure of self-consciousness itself became the subject of philosophy, as has been mentioned earlier. Even though "they all believed themselves to be true Kantians," the German idealists refuse to accept Kant's conclusion that we can have no conceptual knowledge of this self that is the epistemic foundation of what makes objective knowledge possible.[37] Self-consciousness is a disputed philosophical principle from the very start; the idealists meet with opposition even in their own time. The empiricist tradition, with Locke and Hume as its most famous proponents, is marked by a general skepticism about subjectivity culminating in Hume's assertion that the I is nothing but a bundle of perceptions and cannot be observed still stands firm. However, even Hume admits that the I poses a riddle he cannot fathom.[38]

Also 20th century philosophers like Heidegger and Levinas criticize the concept of self-consciousness as a philosophical principle for several reasons. Firstly, it is said to represent a search for an absolute

[37] Henrich 2003, 31. Whenever good translations are available, the text will be based on these. In all other cases, they are mine.

[38] Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, in: Gloy 2004, 269.

principle that could be regarded as an ontological and epistemological foundation of all that is. This 'forced identity' annihilates all difference and otherness. Secondly, it is an attempt of the I to seize control of itself in self-reflection and subsequently of the other as well. Thirdly, in a search for a *fundamentum inconcussum* it identifies truth with absolute certitude. Fourthly and finally, it is allegedly connected to a metaphysics of presence representing an idea of transcendence that makes it fully available and manipulable. Critics of philosophy of subjectivity are convinced that it would be better to leave the failure of German idealism behind and to concentrate on pragmatism, phenomenology, or intersubjectivity.

However, attempts to reject consciousness and self-consciousness as meaningful philosophical concepts have "not succeeded in depriving the term 'self-consciousness' of its currency," Henrich asserts.[39] He points out three factors that contribute to this tenacity: subjectivity is fascinating in its philosophical stubbornness; it is still considered the basis of cognition; it seems to be the best, if not only, starting-point for a metaphysical theory. Philosophical anti-subjectivism is based on a faulty idea of subjectivity, in his opinion. He proposes a new philosophy of subjectivity that corresponds with the starting-point of German idealism for which self-consciousness forms the point of access to an absolute unitary ground. This does not imply, however, that his conclusions should or will be the same as those of German idealistic philosophy. Instead of treating self-consciousness as self-explanatory and fully transparent self-presence, the experiences of ambivalence and anxiety that provoke the self-aware subject to philosophize should be emphasized. Conscious life is experienced as grounded in something that is unavailable for human cognition and that we have no control over. Experiences of darkness or obscurity [*Dunkelheit*] and of gratitude for what has been given to us (by whom or what?) dominate Henrich's metaphysics of self-consciousness.[40]

It will become clear that Henrich remains skeptical about the possibility of a theoretical explanation of self-consciousness: scientific proof according to the standards of the natural sciences cannot be provided. However, that should not prevent philosophers from taking

[39] Henrich 1970, 258.

[40] In this, Henrich follows Hölderlin's philosophy rather than Schelling's absolute idealism, as we will see in the course of this research.

subjectivity seriously and attempting to provide intelligent answers with respect to its structure and its foundations, he believes. Even when his conclusions can be criticized, his analysis of the different aspects and the problems associated with our mysterious ability to know about ourselves is elucidating. Moreover, his insistence on the indispensability and the irreducibility of subjectivity, even if it might resist all theoretical analysis, is an important antidote for the negativity that impregnates (post)modern philosophy where the ultimate of human existence is supposedly expressed in the sentence "I prefer not to."[41] Henrich's thinking reflects a concern with the everyday questions and anxieties of human life and its search for meaning. He considers it the responsibility of philosophy as a scientific discipline to make sure that the highest that human beings can posses, self-consciousness of their being, does not dissolve or perish.[42]

Since philosophy should be a reflection of the way people experience their lives and try to make sense of their earthly existence, it should not be mere sterile intellectualism, "the kind of theoretically important but otherwise irrelevant activity whose motivation is demonstrating brilliant and analytical ability." Philosophy should not be a game or a contest for intellectuals, but an interpretation of the questions that confront human beings as they live their lives. Philosophical reflection should arise from the fundamental questions about reality as a whole and our place within it. As a self-explication of conscious life [*Selbstverständigung des bewussten Lebens*] philosophy should "be consonant with the way in which life already understands itself before it turns to philosophy."[43] Philosophy should take its starting-point from everyday life as people experience it and offer theories of this conscious life that are able to transform it.

This concern for the existential relevance of philosophy creates a certain tension in Henrich's philosophy that it shares with the theories of German idealism. He states, "the Idealists' program promised to bridge the gulf between philosophical theory and the internal experience of human life." On the one hand, philosophy is expected to

[41] This is a statement of the character Bartleby, the scrivener in a short story of Herman Melville. Bartleby tells his perplexed boss "I would prefer not to" whenever asked to perform any kind of task. Giorgio Agamben refers to it in his book *Homo sacer* and makes this attitude appear as the ultimate of conscious life in a society corrupted by power and betrayal.

[42] See Henrich 1999, 73.

[43] Henrich 2003, 6.

provide a profound analysis of the way we experience our life, which is often marked by obscurity, turmoil, and unrest about its true direction, and to provide cues for its orientation. On the other hand, philosophy is supposed to be a scientific discipline capable of analyzing and systematizing these elusive and even contradictory tendencies. Therefore, all contemporary criticism notwithstanding, Henrich is convinced that the philosophical topics that fascinated the German Idealists, such as human reason, freedom, and self-consciousness continue to be of major importance to any philosophy that wishes to take into account the full complexity of the way normal people live and ask questions about the why and the whereto of their lives. Furthermore, philosophy should not only be "a reflection on the way that human existence is experienced, but it should also present the conceptual articulation of a possible ultimate life form."[44] It is this concern for the questions and the possible improvement of daily human life that provokes Dieter Freundlieb's claim that Henrich "regards philosophy as not just a theoretical enterprise but as a potential source of existential guidance" and thereby restores philosophy's role as "care of the soul" in a Platonic sense.[45]

'Conscious life' [*bewusstes Leben*] is a key term in Henrich's philosophy, but what is conscious life in his terms? The word 'conscious' neither refers to a range of extraordinary states of awareness, which people can generate with meditation or psychedelic drugs, nor does it amount to a purely rational or studied self-discipline, he asserts. However, it is not a life that is focused on natural urges and mere fulfillment of daily needs. A conscious life is more than self-preservation in the biological sense of securing certain vital functions. Having a conscious life means to know about this life and about what affects it, and to use this knowledge to determine the course of this life or at least intervene in it.[46] Conscious life is a life that we *lead* and that we have to endow with meaning.

A modern theory of conscious life has to meet the following conditions:

[44] Ibid., 29f.
[45] Freundlieb 2003, vii.
[46] See Henrich 1999, 13.

1. It should do justice to the contradictory alternative starting-points of self-insights that are possible.[47] Theories that do justice to the complicated phenomenology of life are necessarily multidimensional. They correspond with the experiences of a conscious life that knows itself to be caught up in and oriented towards a complex of conflicting tendencies and states of mind.
2. It should permit conscious life to understand itself as a unitary structure. Philosophy should provide a critical appraisal of all sorts of everyday convictions and integrate well-founded insights into a whole that can accommodate new questions and convictions. Even though in our times any kind of systematization is looked upon with great suspicion, Henrich is an advocate of a philosophical design that, as an integrated system, aims at being more than a collection of unconnected facts and insights.
3. It should be open to the scrutiny of radical inquiry and the prospect of scientific theory without making itself dependent upon either one.[48]

Hence as an interpretation of conscious life, philosophy should not shy away from the results of other scientific disciplines but attempt to incorporate those insights instead. As a result, Henrich has engaged in a discussion with naturalistic interpretations of the research results of the neurosciences on quite a few occasions. Naturalism is highly reductive and insufficient as a philosophy in Henrich's opinion since it is unable to integrate subjectivity. However, it is not only from a philosophical perspective but also from an everyday point of view that it is not acceptable to think about our life in terms of a mere biological phenomenon. If we are no more than natural beings with special attire, subject to natural laws, whose existence and death are coincidental, then we are deaf to any kind of appeal to provide for a future for humanity or to any sort of heroism. The only ethics that comply with such a self-description are those of resignation, or perhaps of solidarity with everything else that suffers from the smothering of its hope and spirit.[49]

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[47] The contradictory self-perceptions of conscious life lie in the inevitable tension that is inherent in what Henrich calls the basic relation [*Grundverhältnis*] that we have to ourselves and the world. This will be discussed at length in 1.3.3.

[48] See Henrich 1982a, 133f.

[49] See Henrich 1999, 17.

This latter statement is another illustration of Henrich's tendency to view philosophy as "care of the soul," as Freundlieb calls it. This places him in a long and renowned tradition that has almost been forgotten in our universities today. To quote Freundlieb once again:

> Henrich's conception of philosophy is one that was taken for granted by most major philosophers from Greek antiquity to German idealism. . . . This is the view that philosophy is not just a theoretical endeavor but also a kind of 'life form' or a spiritual and intellectual practice that transforms, or has the potential to transform, the subject that engages with philosophy.[50]

After this plea for a theory of subjectivity even for today, Henrich's theory of self-consciousness will be unfolded in the remainder of this chapter, starting with the three philosophies on which his theory of self-consciousness is based.

1.3.2. *Three Classical Approaches to Self-Consciousness*

Henrich's theory of self-consciousness is based on three classical philosophies:

1. The Cartesian-Kantian use of self-consciousness as agency of indubitable certitude that legitimizes all knowledge. Kant's 'I think' as the cornerstone of his epistemology *opposes* the subject *to* the world as a whole.
2. The Hegelian dialectic that enables him to place the self-conscious subject *within* the world.
3. The Stoic philosophy of the primordial familiarity of the I with itself from which the concern for its preservation results.

1.3.2.1. *The I Opposed to the World – The Kantian Angle*[51]

Kant's transcendental deduction aims to determine the scope and the limitations of what people are able to know. He takes the transcendental unity of apperception [*transzendentale Einheit der Apperzeption*] as the principle of all knowledge and calls this the "highest point"

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[50] Freundlieb 2003, 154.

[51] This section unfolds Henrich's interpretation of Kant's concept of self-consciousness as the *ursprünglich-synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption*. This is not undisputed. However, since it forms one of the three cornerstones of Henrich's theory and it is his theory that I am presenting, I will convey his view without elaborating on possible alternative interpretations.

[*höchste Punkt*] of theoretical philosophy. This unity of apperception finds expression in the 'I think.' Kant's main interest, however, is not the internal structure of self-consciousness itself.

> He does not offer, or aim at, a theory of the nature of self-consciousness. He presupposes its unity and identity. Its nature was not a problem for him; it was his starting point.[52]

Kant believes that it is actually impossible to substantially elucidate the structure of this 'I think.' Even though he provides us with certain clues about its nature, "the highest degree of interpretation is needed to clarify Kant's foundational thoughts," Henrich admits.[53] In short, Kant's 'I think' is certitude independent of all experience in the Cartesian sense; it is a certainty of one's own being [*Dasein*] without individual features or any kind of differentiation. It lacks any kind of knowledge about the type of existence, yet it is produced by an act.

According to Henrich, Kant distinguishes three aspects of self-consciousness:

1. Self-consciousness has an aspect of *subjectivity*: the 'mine-ness' of all my thoughts. A thought is *not* mine because of its content; it is mine based on the accompanying thought 'I think.'
2. Self-consciousness is a *unity*: all my thoughts form one single whole. Somehow, I must be able to connect all types of elementary thoughts into one complex structure.
3. Self-consciousness has an aspect of *identity*: the subject becomes aware of itself as one and the same in all its possible thoughts and states of consciousness. The 'I think' is identical "insofar as one can speak of the same 'I' in different *instances* of thinking." Kant also acknowledges this by speaking of "the identity of myself 'in all the manifold of which I am conscious' (B408)."[54]

Even though Kant has made attempts at developing his transcendental deduction from the aspects of subjectivity and unity, it is the aspect of the identity of self-consciousness that enables him to think the I as dependent upon *a priori* categories.

52 Henrich 2003, 43.
53 Henrich 1989, 251.
54 Henrich 1989, 267.

Firstly, identity indicates that the subject 'recognizes' itself as itself in the transition from one thought to the next. To attribute identity to the subject means "to attribute a great many different states to it, in which it becomes conscious of itself as the same subject each time."[55] This is only possible when self-consciousness is a consciousness of transition [*Übergangsbewusstsein*]. The subject has to know what it means to progress from one representational state to the next. Kant, according to Henrich, has not given a clear answer to the question of how this consciousness of transition can be possible without reference to specific transitions. However, when transitions in consciousness are only detectable in actual cases, it is impossible to understand how the transitions can be regulated by strictly general rules. It is meaningless to think of transition as something unspecific and preceding all experience. That is why it should be thought of as certain modes of transition. These modes of transition have to be constant in order to make knowledge of the identity of the subject independent from all experience and therefore *a priori*.

Secondly, the I of an actual 'I think'-thought can also be the subject of other 'I think'-thoughts. The identity of self-consciousness does not imply that all possible thoughts have to occur as the content of one single, actual 'I think'-thought, but that such an 'I think'-thought can accompany all thoughts of the subject. Henrich calls this inclusive unity [*inbegriffliche Einheit*].

> A totality of possible 'I think'-instances must be thought in such a way that from each of the instances the reference to all other instances is possible; that is, the reference both to the system as a whole, whose content cannot be defined as that of a single 'I think'-thought, and to every other individual instance. And consequently all these individual 'I think'-instances in the totality, and not just the currently actual one, must be thought in such a way that precisely the same reference from them to the system as a whole, and every other individual 'I think'-instance in it, is thought as possible. For without the possibility of such a universal relation of all 'I think'-instances to one another which is independent of every actual transition and every actual reference, the identity of the 'I' for all 'I think'-instances would have no fixed *a priori* meaning.[56]

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[55] Henrich 1976a, 72.
[56] Henrich 1989, 273.

The apriority of this knowledge is based in the fact that the 'I think'-thought does not arise separate from experience, but is not connected to any concrete thought content either.

The aspect of identity of self-consciousness thus refers to two *a priori* categories of self-consciousness. The awareness of the subject as one and the same in all possible 'I think'-thoughts [*Inbegriffliche Einheit*] and the familiarity with the transition from one separate 'I think'-thought to the next in such a way that both thoughts are recognizable as incidences of one and the same subject [*Übergangsbewusstsein*].

1.3.2.2. *The I within the World – The Hegelian Angle*
Kant's 'I think' is a solid point of departure for all the I can know about the things of the world. There are, however, certain shortcomings that Henrich points out. Kant works with a natural ontology of individual objects [*Einzeldingen*] in a causal (or other) configuration [*Ordnung*] to one another. Even though this coincides with our familiar conception of the world, it poses a problem: individuality and configuration are mutually dependent. Objects are just things that appear in a certain configuration; and configuration is constituted by objects. Hence, one cannot say that the ontology of individual things gives an adequate description of the world.[57] Another shortcoming of Kant's philosophy is that the world of objects is merely a phenomenological world. We never penetrate into the world of the *Ding-an-sich*. This is in conflict with our deep-seated conviction that the objects we encounter in the world are real. This conviction seems to arise from our subjectivity, in which we experience our own worldly existence as real. Therefore, self-consciousness is not adequately expressed in the 'I think'; it is rather the realization 'I am.' This 'I am' is not just a thought; it is an expression of the certainty that I have about the reality of my own existence. This subjective certainty of my own reality is superior in its epistemic status to any other type of knowledge. Hence, in the 'I am' I seem to overcome Kantian dualism and find a unitary ground of my existence as both *phenomenon* and *noumenon*. This forms a challenge to search for a philosophy that supports the experience of being a *real* subject in

[57] See Henrich 1982a, 161.

a *real* world. It is Hegel who provides Henrich with a complementary model.[58]

Hegel's dialectics pose such an alternative ontology in which the mutual opposition of objects and the opposition between object and configuration are made to disappear. The ontology of individual things is substituted by a monistic ontology of the unity of self-relation [*Selbstbeziehung*] and differential relation [*Differenzbeziehung*]. The thought of the independence of the different individual things is given up in favor of the thought of the "difference with respect to itself."[59] All reality is thought as the "other of itself" [*das Andere seiner selbst*]. "The positive relation is in itself negative; everything is only itself insofar as it is also not identical to itself; all unmediated is essentially mediated; everything is one only insofar as it is also the other of itself."[60]

In a Hegelian monistic ontology, in as far as something is the other of itself, it is a process to stay identical to itself despite all kinds of changing states based on its self-referential negativity [*selbstbezügliche Negation*]. Therefore, something is an individual thing, if it is capable of developing differences without getting lost in them or disappearing altogether. Also knowledge and in particular self-knowledge comply with this structure of self-referential otherness [*selbstbezügliche Andersheit*]. Self-knowledge is "the re-appropriation of the self through its otherness," and self-consciousness becomes "knowing itself in the other of itself as itself."[61] This monistic conception makes it possible to overcome the natural antagonism between individual things and configuration, circumvent the Kantian opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, and thereby situate self-consciousness in the world. Self-consciousness is simultaneously divided within itself as subject versus object and identical to itself. Hegel also argues that the I is both general (everyone is an I) and particular (everyone is unique in this I-ness). This simultaneous presence of the general and the particular, of identity and difference within subjectivity, allows Hegel to think the Absolute as subjectivity.

> Substance must be thought of as subject because the One that is the ground of everything is an activity that is essentially cognition, specifically cognition of itself. The One is not just knowable and the ground of

[58] Again, it is not Hegel's metaphysics that is discussed here, but a brief review of Henrich's integration of Hegelian ontology in his own system.

[59] "Differenz gegen sich selbst" (Henrich 1982a,174).

[60] Henrich 1982b, 199.

[61] Ibid., 203; 175.

> all cognition, but it is the one Reality that is constituted by its epistemic self-relation. It is subject in this sense. But it is not just subject. It is the totality of what is real – as subject and thus also as substance.[62]

Hence, Hegel's dynamic monism (thus named because it is characterized by internal countermovements) overcomes Kantian dualism by incorporating all differences in the unity of a preceding ground, the Absolute, the One. Hegel believes that the Absolute, the One, and the way in which the differentiated world emerges from this unity can be known. This is where Henrich no longer agrees. No ontology, not even a monistic one that radically differs from our natural ontology, must ever lose sight of its origin in the subject with its only finite and limited faculty of reason, he believes.

We will not study the Hegelian model here. In Chapter 3, we will see a similar type of reasoning when taking a closer look at the absolute idealism of the young Schelling who was also convinced that the Absolute could be grasped by the human mind. In Chapter 6, we will see how Henrich's metaphysics is closer to Hölderlin's philosophy that is discussed in Chapter 4 since both believe that indeed a unitary ground must be postulated, but this ground is and remains beyond human powers of cognition.

1.3.2.3. *Self-Preservation – The Stoic Angle*

In addition to the basic categories of self-consciousness mentioned above – being opposed to the world and being in the world – Henrich recognizes a third essential aspect of self-consciousness, namely self-preservation. For his ideas concerning this element, he refers to the philosophy of the Stoa.

Stoicism maintains that something of a primordial fire works in the world and in all beings. The participation in this fire results in a sense of familiarity of a being with itself that precedes its relation to the world. In this self-familiarity (pre-reflective self-consciousness) the drive for self-preservation originates and the human being experiences its reality. Modern philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes have picked up the Stoic theory of self-preservation. In contrast to traditional views, his anthropology asserts that the essence of life is to move from

[62] Henrich 1978, 205. The translation is Freundlieb's. See Freundlieb 2003, 83.

goal to goal; hence life is desire. The fear of destruction is linked to the fear to be stopped in the desire for the next goal. "It is the essence of people to resist the danger of destruction – it is self-preservation."[63] Thus self-preservation becomes the foundation of modern anthropology, ontology, and ethics.

In Henrich's interpretation self-preservation is the result of the experience of self-consciousness that it is not its own master. Self-consciousness originates from and depends on a ground over which it has no control whatsoever.

> Self-consciousness comes into being in a context that cannot be understood from its own powers or activity. And it arises in such a way that it is fundamentally aware of this dependency. Therefore it must understand itself from the necessity to preserve itself.[64]

As a result, Henrich does not view the modern striving for progress with its unrestrained drive for technology and manipulation of the natural environment as arrogance or self-confidence but rather as the fearful response of a being that is aware of the fact that it cannot guarantee its own existence and activity. Our subjectivity is aware of its own finitude and dependence. It knows that it has not brought itself into being and that it cannot prevent its own death. Therefore in Henrich's philosophy subjectivity is almost the opposite of the manifestation of the unstoppable drive towards self-assertion and self-empowerment.

This raises the question of what the ground or origin may be of this self-consciousness subject that is not capable of providing its own foundation. Two parameters play a role in the answer:

1. Since self-preservation is thought as radically opposed to preservation by an 'Other,' the ground of self-consciousness can never exist outside the self.
2. This ground is not to be encountered as any kind of object.

Hence the task is to think self-consciousness, which is concerned with its own self-preservation, in such a way that it is not its own cause, but that its ground can be understood as its very own essence. Henrich is not against a possible religious consequence of this thinking. Rather

63 Henrich 1982b, 84.
64 Ibid., 100.

than Christianity, however, he sees Eastern religions as a philosophically consistent next step.

Henrich's thoughts on the ground of consciousness and on religion will be pursued in Chapter 6 after we have looked at the metaphysics of Schelling and Hölderlin first. Now we will try to understand how these classical insights into self-consciousness return in Henrich's concept of the basic relation [*Grundverhältnis*].

1.3.3. *The Basic Relation* [Grundverhältnis]

In everyday life, there are a number of things that we take for granted in our relationship with the world. Henrich refers to this basic relation with the world as *Grundverhältnis*; a series of unquestioned convictions about ourselves and the world.[65] This *Grundverhältnis* can be divided into three aspects:

1. *Self-consciousness*
   We know the world as a set of individual things [*Einzelnen*] in a certain causal (or other) configuration [*Ordnung*]. Of these things we know certain properties and states. Even though a thing can change and can sometimes be hard to distinguish from another, we have ways to find it back, to know it as the thing we were looking for, to 're-cognize' it. But in this process we are known to make mistakes. This makes us realize that there is a difference between these things and ourselves. Consider, for example, the following situation: we see a person walking on the other side of the street, we take her for a family member, but upon closer inspection we realize we were mistaken. In contrast, when a person in a 'normal' state of mind walks down the street, she is never in any doubt that it is really she who is doing the walking there and then. This knowledge is immediate, i.e. not mediated by anything whatsoever. It is not the result of reasoning or deduction, it cannot be learned from other people, nor proven with hard evidence. It is a pre-reflective familiarity with myself as me. This is the aspect of self-consciousness in the *Grundverhältnis*.

[65] See Henrich 1982a, 104.

2. *Subject*
   We can be wrong about ourselves in the sense that we can attribute characteristics and moods that are incorrect. I can consider myself more intelligent, courageous, tactless, or clumsy than I really am. Nevertheless, I have absolutely no doubt about the fact *that* I am and that it is *me* that I contribute all these (possibly faulty) characteristics to. This certainty is my starting-point in all my dealings with the objects that I encounter in the world. In this sense I have my unique perspective from which I view the world. I am *opposed to* the world as a whole. This is the subject-aspect of the *Grundverhältnis*.
3. *Person*
   However, we also find ourselves *in* the world. We know that we are only one among the many individual people and objects in this world, and we can describe ourselves just as we can describe all the other things that we come across. On the one hand, this enables us to enter into relationships with the other 'things' in the world. On the other hand, it makes us aware of our situation as a mere 'world-thing' in the world order. We are one among many and this forces us the put our unicity into perspective. This is the person-aspect of the *Grundverhältnis*.

None of these three aspects can exist independently from the others. They are interwoven into "an inextricable unity," and none of them can explain or cause the other two.[66] I have an awareness of the fact that I am that does not result from perceptions or deductions. It cannot be learned or copied from others: I have self-consciousness. I have no doubt whatsoever about the fact that I really am, and this certitude is the basis of my encounter with and knowledge of everything in the world: I am aware of myself as subject. From this familiarity with myself, I am able to describe myself, to think about myself, and to make the distinction between myself and other self-conscious subjects. I can relate to myself and to those that I share this world with: I am aware of myself as person. To follow the sequence backwards: whenever I am aware of myself as a person, I "understand [myself] as a person with subjective life."[67]

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[66] Ibid., 107.

[67] Ibid., 114. Both the self-consciousness aspect and the subject aspect of the *Grundverhältnis* distinguish between the way that I know of myself in a pre-reflective familiarity and that I know of the rest of the world. Henrich is not consistent in his

This *Grundverhältnis* as the natural, everyday starting-point of our relation with ourselves, other people, and the world as a whole is thus characterized by internal contrast. From one point of view we are the centre of the world and from another we are a fragile and passing 'world-thing.' The way in which we experience our lives has an aspect of self-centeredness, of self-sufficiency. There is nothing that is more familiar to us than our own existence, and we simply cannot think the world without our own unique perspective. We know of our uniqueness and consider ourselves valuable. At the same time, however, we realize that all the people around us know themselves to be equipped with a similar uniqueness. This awareness of being only one among many puts our life into perspective. The world can and will continue without us. Our unique point-of-view is not indispensable at all, and we have no control over its origination or its continuation. We are one among many and at the same time capable of a self-sufficient existence. "We are originally both of these, person and subject, and we are the one only insofar as we are the other."[68]

To Henrich the *Grundverhältnis* is not only an indivisible whole from the point of view of its functioning. The three aspects of being-subject, being-person, and self-consciousness also arise simultaneously. They can only come into being as a whole; whether and when they do is beyond our control. The *Grundverhältnis* cannot be copied from or taught by others. It simply appears at a certain moment in our development or perhaps during a more prolonged period in our lives. Unnoticed we enter into it, and we have no idea of the how, when, or why: the *Grundverhältnis* has unthinkable origins. However, as soon as we have taken this step, there is no way back. We can only think those things that can be thought within the limits of and departing from the *Grundverhältnis*. In all our thoughts, acts, speech, and interactions we are the self-conscious, unique, and self-sufficient starting-point but at the same time undisputedly dependent upon each other and on the world as a whole. We have no idea of what lies before or beyond. Henrich recognizes the possibility of partial or fragmentary access to certain preliminary stages of the *Grundverhältnis* by way of early childhood experiences and experiences of pure awareness.

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descriptions of the *Grundverhältnis*; sometimes he distinguishes three aspects and at other times just two whereby the first two are collapsed and merely referred to as subject. We will return to this problem later in this section.

[68] Ibid., 137.

However, he does not think that these constitute a true way back to the origins of our world experience. The *Grundverhältnis* irreversibly replaces such preliminary stages.[69]

In order to clarify the coherence and the ambiguity of the *Grundverhältnis* from a different perspective, Henrich turns to the analytic philosophy of mind and language. His starting-point is the use of propositions that take the subject-predicate form.[70] He comes to the following analysis of the *Grundverhältnis*:

1. *Self-consciousness*
   a. Indexicals (such as 'here, this, now') enable us to distinguish between similar things in the world: *this* pen is red and *that* pen is blue. Indicating functions, however, refer to a speaker with a specific point of view. Someone who can say I and employ language at a certain time and place while being aware of this personal perspective (Someone who knows herself in closer proximity to the red than to the blue pen). Without this self-conscious I the use of these indicators would be pointless.
   b. When elementary propositions of the subject-predicate form are about more abstract states of affairs, self-consciousness becomes evident in a different way. A statement can prove to be right or wrong. Propositions of the form 'it seems' or 'it appears' realize the possibility of relating to one's own states of belief in an affirmative or negative way. (It appeared to be a nice day for a long walk until I got caught in the rain. The dog seemed friendly enough until it bit me.) This 'it appears' implies a 'me,' someone to whom things appear in a certain way. A speaker exists who knows how to distinguish herself from the matters she voices opinions about. She is someone with self-consciousness.
2. *Person*
   So who is this being with self-consciousness? Looking at the indexicals the most obvious answer is: She who makes use of language at a specific place in time. Indexicals fix the position in place and time.

[69] Ibid., 110. Hence, according to Henrich we are always aware of the duality in our most basic perspective. In Chapter 5, we will see where this viewpoint differs from Hölderlin's, Fichte's, and the early Schelling's.

[70] By attributing predicates to a subject, we are able to distinguish one individual thing from another: a DVD is round and a computer screen is rectangular; my eyes are green and yours are blue.

Thus, it seems to follow that only a being that is located in space and time can be possessor of self-consciousness. In short, a person as a world-thing, one among the many other world-things.

3. *Subject*
   However, the above explanation becomes problematic, when we take a closer look at proposition of the 'it appears' or 'it seems' form. He or she to whom something seems to be the case is defined by "the entire context of the history of his or her beliefs and his or her successful or failed justifications," Henrich asserts. This context distinguishes this particular person unequivocally from all other persons. This person who preserves her sense of self across the stages of her history of beliefs has a peculiar form of identity independent of all spatiotemporal identification; she is a subject.[71]

Or worded differently:

> As regards the linguistic expression for self-consciousness, the I, the twofold meaning of identity associated with it can be marked thus: the first person singular singles out its user according to his or her identity in a twofold way. In the case that the I is directly correlated to a 'he,' 'she,' or 'you,' it is person among persons. However, if the I is correlated to the 'it' of the third person neuter, it is subject. We understand ourselves equi-primordially as one among others and as one over and against the entire world.[72]

As a user of indexical functions, I am able to localize myself in the world, to see myself as one among others. Nonetheless, if there is not a pre-existent familiarity with myself, how would I be able to distinguish myself from pens, dogs, and the weather? In order to be able to trust my own indicating, it is impossible to rely on my powers of perception since this would make my use of 'I' dependent upon self-perception resulting in the circularities of the reflection model.[73] Whenever I am able to localize myself in the world, I already have to know what it means to be an I. Such self-consciousness is obviously more than the ability to recognize myself in an image or a set of properties. Knowing about me as myself means being aware of myself in a way that is far more basic, 'predicate-less' even. Being able to attribute properties to myself – no matter how unrealistic – and to have opinions – no matter

[71] Henrich 1982a, 137.
[72] Ibid., 138.
[73] See 1.2.1.

how unfounded – arises from the ability to create a distance between myself and my self-knowledge. It is the I as a subject who can do that.

It could be argued that subjectivity precedes intersubjective control, that the unity of the world is initially and fundamentally perceived as the totality of what lies outside this indubitable certainty of the subject. From this, the unity of the world would arise as everything that does not participate in the immediacy of the subject. However, Henrich is opposed to the Cartesian-Kantian viewpoint that takes the subject-aspect as the sole point of departure for our understanding of the world. He reason as follows: I can be wrong in my opinions about the world. I can be wrong in my perceptions, but the certainty that I have about my own subjectivity does not depend on any perception or intersubjective affirmation. My subjectivity is not the result of the experience of contrast to other subjects.[74] Nonetheless, he disagrees with the claim that subjectivity brings the world as such into existence since the opposite is equally true: self-consciousness can only set in with the emergence of the world as such.[75] We need the world and the interaction with objects and other people in order to realize that we are on the one hand inevitably in this world and on the other hand inescapably opposed to it. Therefore, we have to say that the world that we encounter, even though we also find ourselves part of it, does not truly enclose us. Neither does it clarify who or what we are.[76] Moreover, subjectivity is not simply a property of a person. All our properties such as name and physical characteristics we could imagine differently. We can step back, as it were, and look at ourselves with a different set of properties. However, we cannot step back from our subjectivity; it *is* what does the stepping back.

A few comments might be in order at this point. All Henrich's explanations of the *Grundverhältnis* clearly distinguish between the subject- and the person-aspect. Whenever he describes the circumstances of conscious life, he always points out the duality of being a subject on the one hand and being a person on the other. However, self-consciousness as the last element of a triangular structure as described in this section does not become evident in many of his texts.

[74] See Henrich 2007, 61.
[75] See Henrich 1982a, 140.
[76] See Henrich 1999, 25.

Sometimes it either appears to arise at a different level, and at other times it merges with the subject-aspect. It seems as if self-consciousness as the pre-reflective certainty of my own existence is, contrary to Henrich's explicit claims, the implicit basis of both the subject- and the person-aspect. I need to be an I, a self-aware being, before I can oppose myself (!) to the rest of the world as a whole and relate to other individuals as others (not-I's). I can agree with Henrich that experiences of the duality of my 'me-ness' confirm my basic self-awareness. However, whereas the subject-aspect and the person-aspect seem to complement and define one another and become more explicit in the course of a conscious life, self-consciousness as basic self-awareness seems to be their constant prerequisite. Dieter Freundlieb seems similarly disoriented by *Der Grund im Bewusstsein* where he encounters what he calls a "superordinate subject in Henrich's theory" for which there is "no systematic place."[77] Without getting into Freundlieb's argumentation or agreeing with his rather off-hand suggestion that "perhaps the idea of the subject-object split within the subject must be abandoned altogether," it illustrates the confusion that Henrich seems to create by sometimes claiming a triangular structure for the *Grundverhältnis* and usually just mentioning a person-subject duality.

Furthermore, being a world-thing seems an inadequate description of personhood. Being one among many as a relativization of our uniqueness is but one side of what Henrich calls the person-aspect of the Grundverhältnis. We are not isolated entities that happen to bump into one another from time to time. Knowing that the familiarity with ourselves is shared by all those who surround us, forms a strong bond between individuals. It is the foundation of our interactions. Those of us who have been caught talking to the cactus in the windowsill or, even more embarrassingly, to the printer or the coffeemaker know that thinking of the 'things' that surround us as subjects comes naturally. Henrich's theory is an enlightening *analysis*, in the Greek sense of the word, a laying apart, a dividing up of what it means to say 'I,' but it overemphasizes the duality of I-hood: the subject is over and against the rest of the world, and the person is desperate to prevent itself from drowning in a stream of 'world-things.' In 1.3.6. we will see how Henrich has tried to correct this oversight in his latest work *Denken*

[77] See Freundlieb 2003, 79f. For *Der Grund im Bewusstsein*, see Henrich 1992a.

und Selbstsein without entirely succeeding.[78] Henrich is much better at thinking individuality than togetherness. As a result, his metaphysics, which is supposedly monistic, is afflicted by inherent dualism nonetheless, as we will see in Chapter 6.

This criticism notwithstanding, Henrich's theory offers valuable insights into the contradictory tendencies in which conscious life is lived. Self-consciousness, being a subject, and being a person are inextricably connected, but no element can be deduced from the other(s). As soon as philosophy tries to reconstruct instead of take the complex as its starting-point, it will be forced into circularities. Therefore, one should understand these circles as a symptom of a false methodical orientation, Henrich rightfully claims. The elements of this complex arise simultaneously and without our influence. There might be preliminary stages, and it is definitely true that in the course of a lifetime basic self-awareness develops into a truly conscious life that can be clearly articulated, but we have absolutely no control over the fact *that* our I-hood arises and whatever it is that it arises from. Furthermore, even though the development of a fully mature self-consciousness obviously depends on the right external stimuli, Henrich points out that its true ground is totally and completely endogenous. In this respect, his philosophy of subjectivity agrees with the neurosciences (ignoring the huge methodical and factual differences).[79]

Does all this mean that we simply have to be satisfied with the conclusion that our conscious life is determined by something that is fully beyond our powers of understanding, or is there something more to be said about (self-)consciousness? Is it possible to point out something like an inner structure? Henrich thinks so. In the next section Henrich's attempts to clarify the pre-reflective sense of being an I will be elaborated upon.

1.3.4. *Towards a Theory of Self-Consciousness*

The characteristics that a person contributes to herself can be true or false. Every statement about a person can provoke the legitimate question whether such a person actually exists in the real world. Even when a specific person with certain features truly exists, a subject could question whether she actually *is* that specific person. As a simple example

[78] Henrich 2007.
[79] See Henrich 1999, 62f.

of this possibility, Henrich reminds us of the condition of a person struck with amnesia. Such a person is truly subject, she has a real sense of being an I, of an existence that is hers and hers only. Nevertheless, she has no idea of the characteristics and relationships that would 'normally' identify her such as name, address, occupation, family members, and friends. She is unable to connect the two aspects of conscious life: being a person and being a subject. She knows without a doubt, however, *that* she is. The awareness 'I am' cannot be mediated by anyone or anything, it does not result from deductions or indications, and it cannot be learned or copied from others. Self-consciousness as a pre-reflective familiarity with oneself is not caused by any thoughts or perceptions. It precedes self-knowledge and all knowledge in general. In the 'I am' the I's thinking and its being coincide. The reality of the 'I am' seems to be the source of our sense of what is real in the world.

The pre-reflective awareness 'I am' is what Henrich refers to as self-consciousness. It is very familiar to us and accompanies our everyday dealings with ourselves, the people around us, and the world as a whole. We wake up to it every morning; and when we go to sleep, we never fear to wake up alienated from it. When contemplating self-consciousness, however, even the simplest thoughts seem to lead to circularities. In order to think 'I am,' I have to already be. Nevertheless, I cannot be an I without the ability to think 'I am.' Wherever there is self-consciousness, something is described as self-consciousness. However, if this description is available in the first place, then actual self-consciousness is already present since what the concept indicates can only be understood from the state of affairs to which it applies. "Thus self-consciousness is again presupposed, if it is to be possible in the first place."[80] Furthermore, if self-consciousness exists, it is because consciousness somehow knows about itself. But insofar as consciousness knows itself, it can only be thought of as self-consciousness.

All this seems to make a philosophical description of self-consciousness a hopeless task. Henrich has attempted to approach this enigma from several different angles. His endeavors to develop a philosophy of self-consciousness have led him to the conclusion that any theory of self-consciousness must meet at least three conditions.

[80] Henrich 1982a, 172.

First, any theory of self-consciousness should avoid the pitfalls of the reflection theory that

> starts from the assumption that beings that have self-consciousness can execute acts of reflection which enable them to isolate their own states and activities thematically and to bring them to explicit consciousness.[81]

Reflection is indeed a possibility of beings capable of self-consciousness, but that does not prove that reflection is the *basic* structure of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness can never be defined or proven by means of reflection. The 'I think' must be preceded by an 'I am' that cannot be grasped by our powers of reflection. Henrich's insights concerning the shortcomings of the reflection theory of self-consciousness have become known as the first and the second Henrich-difficulties in the philosophy of subjectivity that were already mentioned briefly in 1.2.1.

If self-consciousness is the result of an act of reflection, a subject of this reflection has to be presupposed. If I am able to reflect on myself, some kind of 'me' has to be already available.

> If we assume that reflection is an activity performed by the subject – and this assumption is hard to avoid – it is clear that reflections presuppose an 'I' which is capable of self-initiating activity since the 'I' as a kind of quasi-act cannot become aware of its reflection only *after* the fact. It must perform the reflection and be conscious of what it does at the same time as it does it... Consequently; in reflection, a consciousness of the subject is presupposed. Therefore, the reflection theory can at most explain *explicit* experience of self, but not self-consciousness as such.[82]

In order to be able to know that my self-consciousness concerns me and not someone or something else, I somehow need to be aware of myself as me beforehand. I will only be able to identify myself among all kinds of representations that I am capable of, if I already know of me.

> The 'I' must have some notion that it is itself of which it becomes aware in self-consciousness. To this end, it is not requisite that it have any sort of conceptual knowledge of itself or that it be able to give a *description* of itself. But, in any case, it must be able to assert with certainty that in self-consciousness it is familiar with itself.[83]

[81] Henrich 1970, 265.
[82] Ibid., 265f.
[83] Ibid., 266.

In short, *either* the I is *already* conscious of itself; then the theory is circular and one presupposes *a priori* what one wants to explicate. *Or* the I is *not* conscious of itself and has no acquaintance with itself; then it cannot be understood how it could ever come to be able to recognize itself, to predicate anything to itself, or distinguish itself from its surroundings. Therefore the reflection model of self-consciousness is inadequate.

A *second* condition for a theory of self-consciousness is that it should start from a pre-reflective familiarity with the phenomenon 'consciousness' that seems to arise simultaneously with consciousness itself. In the article *Self-consciousness. A Critical Introduction to a Theory* [*Selbstbewusstsein: Kritische Einleitung in eine Theorie*], Henrich tries to solve the riddle of self-consciousness through an analysis of consciousness.[84] Although he later admits that this model is unable to avoid circularities not unlike the ones the reflection model gets caught up in, it is still an interesting analysis of the phenomenon self-consciousness.

Henrich asserts that "self-consciousness cannot be understood without an analysis of consciousness," but he notes that the term 'consciousness' is often used rather ambiguously.[85] Some consider it to be limited to that (learning) state where attention and discrimination of objects is evident, whereas others speak freely of consciousness in connection with states that are a lot more difficult to describe, such as dream-consciousness. For Henrich consciousness is our 'normal' waking state that has a certain level of attention associated with it. Hence, something that we encounter on a daily basis. Since the transition from sleeping to waking and the difference between these states are familiar to us, we barely pay attention to this actually very odd phenomenon of "a world arising from nothingness, connected with the past only through memory and recognition."[86]

Nonetheless, its daily occurrence from a very young age does not suffice as an explanation of our familiarity with the phenomenon. We seem to have a certain direct familiarity with consciousness that goes beyond our experience with the difference between waking, dreaming, or dreamless sleep. Neither is it the result of learning; it is a prerequisite for learning. Henrich speculates,

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[84] Henrich 1970.
[85] Henrich 1970, 258; 259f.
[86] Ibid., 260.

> One is tempted to say that it is more likely that consciousness has access from itself to us, than that we have a method by which we make it accessible to us.[87]

It is not something that we can bring about or control in any way. The appearance of consciousness does not seem to be the result of our actions, since it takes consciousness to act. Our lack of initiative notwithstanding, the moment we *are* conscious, we have an inexplicable familiarity with this state of being. Consciousness accompanies our waking thoughts, images, experiences, and movements. "In consciousness there is no appearance of anything without something like an appearance of consciousness itself."[88]

For any type of observation, consciousness has to be presupposed. Nevertheless, the state that we call consciousness itself cannot be observed. Consciousness as a condition for the ability to observe, cannot itself belong to the class of entities that can be observed or known directly. Neither can consciousness be made accessible to investigation through something called 'introspection.' Henrich maintains that introspection is restricted to the domain of mental states that can be localized relative to the body such as feelings and emotions. Since many cognitive operations like thoughts and imagination have no direct association with the body, consciousness can never be observed, neither through the senses that are directed outwards nor through introspection, according to Henrich.

The familiarity of the phenomenon of consciousness and Daniel Dennett's bold book title *Consciousness Explained* notwithstanding, it turns out to be extremely difficult to philosophically explain consciousness.[89] In order to avoid the type of circularities of the reflection model consciousness should not be described as a performance, a conscious act of any kind. A term is needed that creates the arena in which reflection can play its role. If reflection is a performance, consciousness that is its prerequisite "must be described, in contrast to it, as an *event*." Consciousness is an event of a special sort. It is utterly singular and has no connection to anything else. It is impossible to have two cases of consciousness that overlap. The familiarity of consciousness with itself does not include other consciousnesses. Nevertheless, it is

[87] Ibid., 271.
[88] Henrich 1970, 260.
[89] See Dennett 1993.

an event that enables other events like perceptions and feelings, which obviously can be related. Consciousness itself, however, does not take place within a system and has no relation to any state that is without consciousness. Since it is actually only the condition for the possibility of a certain type of relation, dimension or medium might be a better word, Henrich concludes.[90]

Consciousness of anything without consciousness itself being known at the same time, and *vice versa*, is impossible. We are conscious of a state of affairs only in the context of conscious life in which (implicit) familiarity with consciousness is always present. This coexistence of consciousness and familiarity with consciousness is *not* self-identification. Once again, Henrich is eager to avoid the circularity of the reflection theory: consciousness cannot be its own object. "Consciousness is not its own master: it does not bring itself into existence through self-objectification."[91] Here Henrich's struggle with the difference and the link between consciousness and self-consciousness becomes quite clear. At times he seems to equate the two, for example when he writes, "Thus the task is to describe consciousness so that it is neither knowing self-reference nor identification with itself."[92] On the other hand, he makes a distinction and this brings us to the third and final condition for a theory of self-consciousness.

Thirdly, such a theory of self-consciousness should be concerned with the relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness. Consciousness as we know it is always associated with an I. This does not mean, however, that the I controls the occurrence of consciousness or determines its structure. On the contrary, "upon awakening a horizon of the world spreads itself out in which we then find ourselves again as the one awakening." Moreover, when falling asleep consciousness does not end with some kind of "rudimentary experience of self, as one would expect to be the case if it was essentially dependent upon or related to a self," Henrich remarks.[93] As a consequence of this type of deliberations and in an attempt to avoid any type of circularity inherent in reflection models, Henrich prefers the assumption of an I-less field of consciousness that precedes the self-conscious I and all intentional acts. Within this selfless field of consciousness, an

[90] Henrich 1970, 277.
[91] Ibid., 278.
[92] Ibid., 275.
[93] Ibid., 260f.

I can establish itself and become the active principle of organization within. Thanks to the fact that it belongs to this field the I is aware of itself and aware of itself as real. Because the I is an element of the dimension consciousness that is familiar with itself from the start, self-consciousness is also pre-reflective familiarity of the I with itself.

Hence, the I belongs to the field of consciousness, but it is not its fundamental phenomenon, only a mode of its organization. Self-consciousness is clearly grounded in something that is not its own product and that it cannot control. However, this cannot imply that there is no room for an active part for the I. Whatever this I might be, it is at least an active principle of organization in the field of consciousness. Hence, in an originally I-less field of consciousness an I becomes active.

The three conditions discussed in this section have illustrated some important properties of self-consciousness and requirements for a philosophy of subjectivity. To summarize: Firstly, assuming any kind of reflectivity as part of self-consciousness will result in circularities that should be avoided. Secondly, a theory of self-consciousness must be closely linked to a theory of consciousness. Thirdly and finally, in such a theory self-consciousness should not be interpreted as its own cause but nonetheless be accredited with an active role. This is important information, but it still says very little about a possible inner structure of self-consciousness. It is however to be expected that such a complex structure exists. The fact that we are able to make a distinction within self-consciousness between an I to which we attribute all kinds of properties and an I that does the attributing might be a first indication. Even though Henrich does not claim a definitive theory of the nature of self-consciousness, he thinks to be able to raise a corner of the veil with the assistance of Fichte. In the various versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte progresses through several stages of clarifying the complexity of self-consciousness. In an article called *Fichte's Original Insight*, Henrich comes to a description of four elements that constitute the inner structure of self-consciousness in which he tries to combine the aspects of activity and pre-reflective familiarity.[94]

[94] Henrich 1982c. Chapter 5 on intellectual intuition will provide a more elaborate discussion of Fichte's views on the prereflectivity of the I.

1.3.5. *Analysis of Self-Consciousness Based on Fichte*

Henrich argues that Fichte was the first Kantian to realize that self-consciousness must be an immediate (unmediated) awareness of the self. On the basis of Fichte's analysis, Henrich comes to the following four elements constituting self-consciousness:

1. Self-consciousness must be conceived as an *activity*. It is my self-consciousness that enables me to experience my thoughts as a unity, that I can recognize myself in a variety of situations, that I have a sense of my (future) possibilities, and that I try to protect my life from all sorts of threats. I can relate to myself, and it is inconceivable that this can be the outcome of any activity other than my own. That I am capable of all this seems to be the result of the simple fact that 'I am.'
2. However, this aspect of activity in itself does not explain the way in which I achieve *awareness* of my own activity. This leads to the second aspect of the basic structure of the I. The activity of the I is at the same time self-awareness of this activity. When I put myself in relation to myself, this activity is always accompanied by the awareness of this activity. There is a unity of the activity and the awareness of the activity that is *a priori* rather than outcome. It is exactly in the unity that both aspects become possible.

These two elements (the activity in the self-relation and the awareness thereof) form the basic structure of the I, but it takes two more aspects to understand the nature of self-consciousness in its entirety. Henrich calls these secondary but equally necessary.

3. The I needs a *concept* of itself as this unity of activity and awareness that it cannot bring about by itself. "It must rather presuppose that it can utilize it" before it can come to know of its own self-producing activity. This third element enables the I to distinguish between what is real and what is possible. Without it we would not be able to understand how we always know of our self-consciousness in a double perspective – namely of what we really are and of an open horizon of what can become real in and through us at the same time.[95]

[95] Henrich 1982b, 67f.

4. The fourth element complements the third. The I recognizes this unity as real; it is the capacity of the I to see itself as the reality of the unity of activity and knowing of the activity. Henrich refers to what Fichte calls the "intuitive presence of the totality of the 'I'" [*die anschauliche Gegenwart des Ganzen Ich*]. The I cannot know itself solely on the basis of a concept; it has to have an *intuition* that guarantees its reality. It is this element of intuition that expresses the certainty that I have of my own existence.[96]

Together these four aspects form the unity of self-consciousness and they cannot exist separately. Even though the first and the second element form the basic structure of the I, the third and the fourth are indispensable: "the I has no knowledge of itself unless the intuition and the concept of the I are inextricably bound together with one another."[97] Only in the unity of all four elements self-consciousness is a reality, 'I know that I am.' In this formula Henrich sees the possibility of combining the pre-reflective familiarity of the I with itself with an active role for it. This unity constitutes the essential reality of the I, but the four elements are the modes of its reality and also the aspects that any theory of self-consciousness has to take into account.[98]

Three comments about the inexplicability of self-consciousness may be in order here. First of all: For his analysis of the structure of self-consciousness, Henrich is indebted to Fichte to a large extent. However, he deviates at the point where Fichte talks of the 'being-for-itself' [*Für-sich-Sein*] of the subject in an anonymous, abstract sense in which individual I's are no more than manifestations of their ground. Even when Henrich's earlier attempts struggle with a similar tendency to connect an I to a pre-existing field of consciousness (an it), he believes that an analysis of self-consciousness should not start from an anonymous being-for-itself, but from a being-for-myself [*Für-mich-Sein*]. Awareness of the I can only arise out of the I itself. Thus, it becomes

[96] In Chapter 5, we will see how Fichte develops a theory of intellectual intuition, which he tries to link to Kant's transcendental unit of apperception. This intuition of the (absolute) I is transformed by Schelling and Hölderlin into an intuition of something beyond the mere "I am." It becomes an intuition of the unitary ground of all that is. Henrich obviously refuses to take this step. He maintains that we cannot go beyond the *Grundverhältnis* in order to experience the oneness that precedes it.

[97] Henrich 1982c, 29f.

[98] See Henrich 1982b, 69.

necessary to think from within the I, beyond it, into a transcendent ground as a real possibility of the existence of this I. This metaphysical move will be discussed in Chapter 6 after we have looked more closely at the original German idealistic attempts that it is based on.

This brings us to the second comment: Self-consciousness is completely at a loss when it comes to cause of or reason for its genesis. Henrich uses the term obscurity [*Dunkelheit*] to indicate the enigma of this I that is on the one hand activity and on the other hand unable to control its own occurrence.[99] With Hölderlin, as will be shown in Chapter 4, Henrich claims that the ground of self-consciousness is beyond human powers of cognition. He asserts that it is

> not to be brought to any kind of presence that would then make it available for some sort of demonstration or proof. To present this ground would mean that the knowing self-relation could be surpassed which in turn presupposes that it could first be explained adequately.[100]

The unknowability of self-consciousness can function as a reminder of the transcendence of the ground from which it arises. It is precisely this aspect where Henrich's and Hölderlin's philosophy of subjectivity merge that enables them to ward off the criticism of hubris and self-absolutization of which German idealism in general has been accused. The spirit of modernity is not seized by the fever of subjectivism that ends in the pure will to power, Henrich asserts. The fact that modern man is aware of his freedom to make decisions about the way he leads his life means something other than repression of the fact that it is not he himself who gives this power to realize himself. What has to preserve itself but has no control over its origins and continuation does not feel lord and master over its life but rather insecure and grateful for its existence instead.[101]

Thirdly and finally, in Henrich's opinion there is no causal relation in the Cartesian sense that my thinking (*cogito*) is the cause of my sense of reality (*ergo sum*). Even though Henrich is never explicit about this, he admits to an intuitive aspect in I-hood that might be a unique kind of knowledge that cannot be described within a Kantian framework.

[99] He speaks of the "Unverfüglichkeit des Auftretens von Selbstbewusstsein für sich selbst" (Henrich 1982b, 81).

[100] Henrich 2001, 56.

[101] See Henrich 1982b, 81. The obscure ground of consciousness and Henrich's views on freedom will be discussed in 6.1.1. and 6.1.2.

Kant's dualism never succeeded in integrating the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds that seem to merge in the self-conscious subject. It is the conviction of German idealism in general that somewhere within the I dualism can be transcended and that at least the beginning of this step across the Kantian divide into unity can be experienced by and in this self. Intellectual intuition [*intellektuelle* or *intellektuale Anschauung*] is the term used. Henrich does not want to make that step explicitly. He rather thinks in terms of the *Grundverhältnis* in which self-consciousness is always linked with an awareness of my torn existence as a subject with a unique position opposed to the world as a whole and as a person who is just a passing thing in the world. The term intellectual intuition as it functions in the late 18th and early 19th century will be discussed extensively in Chapter 5. We will now turn to one last topic in Henrich's view on I-hood. As was said, in 1.3.3. he tends to overemphasize duality at the detriment of the I's ability to experience unity. Being an I is prior to being-with, in Henrich's view. He maintains that self-consciousness does not arise as a result of the experience of contrast to other I-sayers who surround me.[102] Nonetheless, relationality belongs, like the self-relation, to the elementary facts of our lives. Let us therefore turn to some of Henrich's thoughts on the subject's co-existence with other subjects.

1.3.6. *The Subject's Being-With* [Mitsein]

In his early work, Henrich depicts the person-aspect of being an I primarily as an isolated individual, a 'world-thing.' In the course of his career, he seems to have become aware of the shortcomings of this view and tries to develop a more relational concept of the person. Important aspects in the subject's being with other subjects, *Mitsein*, are body, language, and social configurations.

All being-with [*Mitsein*] of subjects is mediated through the body [*Leib*], Henrich asserts.[103] Even if our bodies are objects [*Körper*] in this world, we do not relate to them as to all other objects. As *Leib* the body mediates the subject's position in the world, it must be permeated with a kind of sensing awareness of itself. This is called proprioception and

[102] See Henrich 2007, 61.

[103] He makes the distinction between the German *Leib*, as the experienced body and the *Körper* as the object in the world. Since "body" is ambiguous, I will be using the German terms.

could be viewed as the counterpart of self-consciousness. Even when proprioception, sense of being-in-my-body, is not the same as my subjectivity, being-me, there are striking parallels. Neither the awareness that we are nor this relationship with our bodies, we can bring about by ourselves. My *Leib* is also the medium in which the dynamics of my subjectivity find expression in a way that can never be fully steered by my intentions. The *Leib* is closely connected to and expresses subjectivity. This is the reason that interaction between people does not require constant explanation. We do not detect the *Körper* of others that we subsequently interpret as their *Leib*. We immediately perceive the *Leib* of another. This is only possible when two complementary processes that precede consciousness take place instantaneously: the conversion of the self-perception in a bodily expression and the perception of the expression as such through others. The extremely complex processes that somehow surpass the difference between self-perception and the perception of another are the core of our being-with. Even when Henrich thus attempts to overcome the total isolation of the I and create at least the possibility of openness, he is in a hurry to assert that this mechanism can never undo the distinctiveness of different subjects.[104] In general, he still seems unwilling to allow for any type of fundamental togetherness for individual persons.

Nonetheless, when young children come to (self-)consciousness, they always do this in a context of intersubjectivity, and more specifically in a cultural and linguistic setting, he agrees. If raised in a setting in which language is absent, no language will ever be acquired. It is therefore not inconceivable that subjectivity should be grounded in the linguistic interaction system of a community. After all, 'I' is only meaningfully used in connection with 'you' and 'we,' and language is much more than a medium to inform others of what has already been articulated soundlessly. It offers unique opportunities to the intellect that it would never possess without it. Nonetheless, neither intelligence nor subjectivity can be explained by the use of language, Henrich argues. We are not born with a language but only with the ability to learn a language, and we communicate before we acquire a language. We only meaningfully use 'I' and 'you' after we have reached a more than rudimentary self-consciousness. Even if we start from a primitive ability to utter sounds, just hearing sounds will not lead to

[104] See Henrich 2007, 181–186.

an awareness of myself as their initiator. It takes a degree of self-consciousness in order to be aware that it is me producing the sounds. An adult who is talking will normally not hear the sound of herself talking. And if she does, it results from a stepping back from herself speaking. This stepping back does not generate self-consciousness; the ability to step back is caused by it.[105]

In Henrich's view, language reflects the duality of the *Grundverhältnis*. Language is not only the medium for one-on-one contact. Even though human beings are born with the ability to learn languages, these themselves are pre-given to theirs users. Languages belong to large groups of people and by acquiring a language, the child grows into a specific culture. In that sense, we are determined by our culture and the social configurations in which we grow up and live our adult lives. The awareness of living in a social context makes us realize that we are not our own ground. We often experience the hegemony of these social structures, but the fact that they are imposed upon us does not imply that these configurations are independent of our subjectivity. They remain the product of subjects. Even if we are profoundly changed because of our position within, they do not affect our subjectivity as such, according to Henrich.[106]

Each social interaction is characterized by dependence, if only because of the necessary mutuality. The situation and the spectrum of our actions have been brought about by others, and in our actions we are limited by the other people involved. Knowing that one stands in a social configuration makes us more aware of the fact that we are not grounded in ourselves but subject to external limitations. Even though it is clear that people can be radically changed by the fact that they belong to social structures, these changes do not affect their subjectivity as such. Henrich is convinced, the importance of being-with notwithstanding, that our ability to be an I precedes our relationality. Our subjectivity is not the result of intersubjectivity; it is the condition for its possibility. Even if Henrich seems aware of the fact that his concept of the self-conscious I results in isolated individuals [*Einzelnen*] without any essential interconnection, these later attempts do not succeed in overcoming this limitation, in my opinion. Since being-with is obviously not the major concern of Henrich's

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105 Ibid., 155–160.
106 Ibid., 188–193.

philosophy, I will not elaborate here. The theme will be picked up again in Chapter 6 where Henrich's views of the ground of consciousness and freedom will be discussed.

Henrich's major opponent in contemporary philosophy appears to be naturalism as the types of philosophies that deny (the need for) the metaphysical to explain I-hood. In advance of elaboration in Chapter 6, I will provide a description of naturalism in the following excursus. Henrich's interest in naturalism is not just a private preoccupation. There are several reasons to discuss naturalism in the context of a metaphysical project. First, naturalism, or philosophical materialism, says that matter is all there is and that everything should somehow be explainable according to the laws of the natural sciences. It has its roots in the empiricist tradition, one of the philosophical positions that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* intended to correct. Apparently, arguments of the empirical tradition have challenged the more metaphysically inclined philosopher for several centuries at least. In addition to that, both naturalism on the one hand and Henrich's theory of the unknowable ground of (self-)consciousness on the other are said to be representatives of a form of philosophical monism. In the case of naturalism, matter is the one and only ground of all that is, and this ground is ultimately within reach of knowledge since it obeys natural laws. In Henrich's philosophy, as will become clear in Chapter 6, the unitary ground of consciousness is beyond the empirical and therefore ultimately beyond human cognition.

Excursus: A Naturalistic Model of I-hood

Naturalism is a generic term for a broad field of philosophical theories that have only one thing in common: the assertion that life in its full complexity can be explained by natural laws alone. The mind, consciousness, and self-consciousness are considered material events; processes that can be localized in and explained by the workings of the human brain. According to Peter Carruthers

> Naturalism is the belief that all of the events which occur in the world are natural ones, happening in accordance with causal law. So there are no miracles, and everything which happens can in principle be provided with a causal explanation, or is subsumable under laws.[107]

[107] Carruthers 2000, 4.

For naturalism, there is no such thing as an I-hood that reaches beyond the realm of physics, something that would require the necessity of metaphysical musings. The human brain has been formed as the result of natural selection and is programmed for survival according to the same Darwinian laws that guide the origins and the adaptation of other organs and species. As the biologist and professor of systematic theology, Ulrich Lüke characterizes this reductionistic type of thinking with Julian Huxley's words: the "nothing else buttery." We are nothing else but a mammal from the order of the primates.[108] Our incapacity to fully understand all the biochemical, physiological, and other natural processes in the brain causes us to think beyond the physical and invent terms like transcendence, self, and God, according to Steven Pinker.

> We can well imagine creatures with fewer cognitive faculties than we have... So why should there not be creatures with more... or different ones?... [They] would be amused by the religious and philosophical headstands we do to make up for our blankness when facing these problems.[109]

Human I-hood is not an enigma that calls for metaphysics; it is a phenomenon that results from the natural workings of brain tissue. Most naturalists also reject the concept of freedom. Our decisions are determined by basic neurological processes; they are the result of biochemical reactions and biological structure. How could a non-material free will influence these? In short, the entire world with its multiplicity of creepy crawlers including *homo sapiens* is the result of and subject to natural laws. Metaphysics is a leftover from times that human beings were too primitive to know about these laws. Even theologians will come to realize this in the (near) future.

The following sections will give a general overview of naturalistic thinking. There is of course no such thing as 'the average naturalist.' This means that the following will not do justice to both the intricacies *and* the simplicities of individual naturalistic philosophies. First of all, three forms can be distinguished:

1. Metaphysical naturalism. It denies the existence of anything beyond the domain of the natural sciences.

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[108] See Lüke 2004. The title of the book, *Das Säugetier von Gottes Gnaden*, means *The Mammal of God's Grace*.

[109] Pinker 1997, 562.

2. Semantic naturalism. This is the conviction that (philosophical) explanations of phenomena should not be independent from the domain of the vocabulary of the natural sciences.
3. Methodological naturalism. This is the certitude that the domain and the method of philosophy is the same as that of the natural sciences.[110]

We will mostly occupy ourselves with the naturalism of three authors: Owen Flanagan, Daniel Dennett, and Andrew Newberg.[111]

Self-Consciousness

Flanagan asserts that the problem is that we are caught between two conflicting grand images of who we are: "the humanistic and the scientific." The humanistic says that

> we are spiritual beings endowed with free will – a capacity that no ordinary animal possesses and that permits us to circumvent ordinary laws of cause and effect. . . . The scientific image says that we are animals that evolved according to the principles of natural selection.[112]

Even though many details in the scientific image are still lacking, he thinks to be able to conceive of an anthropology that is more "robust and authentic" than the truths of perennial philosophy and classic literature, and that shows "how to conceive of mind, morals, and the meaning of life from the perspective of the scientific image."[113]

The first step consists of what he calls "desouling persons," which means that we need to "demythologize" them.[114] Human beings are intelligent animals looking for meaning but this does not justify the conclusion that this intelligence is a gift from a higher intelligent being and their lives can only be meaningful if meaning "is imposed by an

[110] See Perler 2003, 18–21.
[111] Flanagan is James B. Duke Professor of Philosophy at Duke University in North Carolina. Dennett is Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences and Director of the Center of Cognitive Studies at Tufts University in Massachusetts. Newberg is Associate professor in the Departments of Radiology and Psychiatry at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies, and Director of the Centre for Spirituality and the Mind at the University of Pennsylvania.
[112] Flanagan 2002, ix.
[113] Ibid., 18.
[114] Ibid., 3.

inexplicable and undefinable alien being."[115] He asserts that the reason why it is so difficult to adopt the scientific image is

> the story in which our life is embedded and from whose perspective it is shaped. Once we reach an age where we do have some control, we work from the image, from the story that is already deeply absorbed, a story line that is already part of our self-image.[116]

Even though there might be other, more convincing stories "conservatism reigns. You will be, as we say, messed up if you try to remake yourself with wholly new cloth."[117] He himself was raised a Roman Catholic but admits a "more than passing interest in Tibetan Buddhism" since it "provides a way of thinking about human nature that is more congenial than our own to the view suggested by contemporary mind science."[118]

Dennett also asserts, "the Self – or the Soul – is really just an abstraction."[119] Nevertheless, he believes that a person is more than a mere physical entity: "A person is not just a body; a person *has* a body."[120] He even seems to contradict himself when he admits, "People have selves."[121] However, for Dennett this self is a "fundamental biological principle" that we need in order to distinguish "self from world, inside from outside," which again is necessary for our survival.[122] Animals also protect their outer boundaries with things like shells or with complicated architectural constructions like the dams of beavers and the castles of termites. However, the most amazing and intricate constructions are made by *Homo sapiens*.

> Each normal individual of this species makes a self. Out of its brain it spins a web of words and deeds, and, like the other creatures, it doesn't have to know what it is doing; it just does it. This web protects it, just like the snail's shell, and provides it a livelihood, just like the spider's web.... This 'web of discourses'... is as much a biological product as any of the other constructions found in the animal world.[123]

115 Ibid., 12.
116 Ibid., 30.
117 Ibid., 32.
118 Ibid., 24f.
119 Dennett 1993, 368.
120 Ibid., 452.
121 Ibid., 413.
122 Ibid., 414.
123 Ibid., 416.

"Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is…telling stories." However, we do not consciously and deliberately design our narratives. "Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source."[124] This self Dennett calls the "center of narrative gravity." It is the inevitable consequence of a brain that tries to survive. The human tactic of survival is so magnificent that it can even yield immortality, in Dennett's view.

> Your existence depends on the persistence of that narrative…, which could theoretically survive indefinitely many switches of medium, be teleported as readily (in principle) as the evening news, and stored indefinitely as sheer information.…you could in principle survive the death of your body as intact as a program can survive the destruction of the computer on which it was created and first run.[125]

In sum, we do not have to let go of concepts like I-hood and immortality even if we accept nothing beyond the physical: all it takes is a mortal body with a human brain that can tell a decent story!

Religion

It would seem that naturalistic theories stop here. Matter is all there is; anything that cannot be explained from natural laws does not exist. Our subjectivity is a biological construct or a figment of our imagination, and metaphysical inclinations are the leftover of our upbringing. Moreover, the texts produced in the naturalistic field known to me have a strong tendency to ridicule any type of metaphysical thinking. The emotional content of the debate seems enormous on the side of those who do as well as those who do not assume anything beyond the physical. Those who claim their view to be scientifically more robust often seem to feel the need to make a caricature of metaphysical ideas. They speak of it in terms of miracles and simplify dogmatics to a point where it is no longer taking seriously by most modern theologians either. Furthermore, some authors tend to be quite inaccurate in their use of philosophical and theological terms: the self is equated with the soul; immortality is the equivalent of teleportation of the autobiography to another medium. Their theological language and thought

[124] Ibid., 418.
[125] Ibid., 430.

content might be carved into their brain tissue during the childhood stage, but is does not seem to have developed since.

Nonetheless, proponents of naturalistic theories turn out to be quite attached to certain values beyond the physical such as love, beauty, self-consciousness, and free will. Dennett even reassures his readers that were the concept of consciousness "to fall to science" we do not have to fear the loss of the things that we value. When we "understand consciousness – when there is no more mystery – consciousness will be different, but there will still be beauty, and more room than ever for awe." He reminds us what has happened "in the wake of earlier demystifications." After all,

> fiery gods driving golden chariots across the skies are simpleminded comic-book fare compared to the ravishing strangeness of contemporary cosmology, and the recursive intricacies of the reproductive machinery of DNA make *élan vital* about as interesting as Superman's dread kryptonite.[126]

Flanagan hopes to be able to show that we can preserve much of what we mean when we speak of "'mind', 'soul', 'the self', and 'free will' without continuing to endow them with that part of their meaning that comes from their religious or theological roots."[127] That is all we can and may ask of life, he asserts.

> If this is not enough, if you feel that you really *need* the concepts of the soul and its mates to refer to real things, then you want more than any philosophically respectable theory can provide.[128]

A respectable philosopher does not meddle with metaphysics![129]

The rejection of the metaphysical notwithstanding, there is a good deal of interest in religiosity among naturalists. Some attribute the phenomenon to our penchant for mystery. Carruthers, for example, complains,

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[126] Ibid., 25.

[127] Flanagan 2002, xv.

[128] Ibid., xiv.

[129] Apart from the fact that ridicule is hardly convincing, academic argumentation, I believe that it is counterproductive to oppose the natural sciences to philosophy and theology, Darwinian laws to the concept of creation, and neurological research to philosophy. Metaphysics is not opposed to physics; it merely recognizes that there is more than natural laws are and will be able to explain.

> It is a somewhat depressing fact about human beings, indeed, that claims which are cloaked in an aura of mystery have natural and powerful attraction for us.[130]

Others consider religion beneficial in the sense that it diminishes fear of death and hence reduces stress and enables us to handle the insecurities of a life that is constantly threatened by disease and war. Religion becomes the ultimate strategy of survival for the fearful *animal rationale*.[131] Still others believe that religiosity is part of reality and that the existence of God might even be proven scientifically. It is the latter group that we will turn to briefly.

Andrew Newberg and the late Eugene d'Aquili, a radiologist and a psychiatrist respectively, researched mystical experiences recorded by meditating Zen Buddhists and Franciscan nuns. They recorded their neurological findings and theological musings in two books: *The Mystical Mind* and *Why God Won't Go Away*.[132] On the basis of the "huge database of studies" they state that

> no matter what happens to us or what we do, there is a part of the brain that becomes activated.... the brain appears not only to react to everything that happens to us, but is eminently responsible for everything that we do or experience.[133]

The mystical experience, which they refer to as Absolute Unitary Being (AUB), is "likely 'caused' by the total deafferentation of the orientation association areas on both the left and right side."[134] It is not necessary to elaborate on the road that led to this assertion here.[135] Essential is their argument that the mystical experience is "likely 'caused'" by the isolation of certain areas of the brain. Sometimes their text allows us to interpret this ambiguous statement as if the brain is the *cause* of an experience of some sense of unity that we associate with God. At other times they seem to suggest that there is indeed a God who has provided us with an antenna for divine reception, in which case God

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[130] Carruthers 2000, xiv.
[131] See, for example, Voland and Söling 2004.
[132] See Bibliography.
[133] D'Aquili and Newberg 1999, 45.
[134] Ibid., 199f.
[135] In my master thesis, I have done an extensive study of their research and its philosophical conclusions and found neither particularly convincing. See Van Woezik 2005.

would be hard-wired into the human brain and therefore "won't go away," as the title of the book indicates.

> In any case they assure us that the mystical experience is "real," since they have solid evidence that the mystical experience of our subjects – the altered states of the mind they described as the absorption of the self into something larger – were not the result of emotional mistakes or simple wishful thinking, but were associated instead with a series of observable neurological events, which, while unusual, are not outside the range of normal brain function. In other words, mystical experience is biologically, observably, and scientifically real.[136]

According to Perler, all three forms of naturalism can be found in this approach: The claim that mystical experiences are real because they can be observed by neurological means (metaphysical naturalism); the mystical experiences is considered "not outside the range of normal brain function" (semantic naturalism); and the neurobiological method is taken as starting-point and reference for the interpretation of the mystical experience (methodological naturalism). Newberg likes to call this area of research "neurotheology."

Naturalism claims to be scientific since it departs from material laws. It is indeed interesting to see how a bunch of empirical data will lull people into thinking that the meta-empirical conclusions fall in the scientific category. We should not forget, however, that also naturalism does not provide *knowledge* about the existence of the world and about human consciousness but only an *interpretation*. These material or natural laws can predict how matter will behave under certain circumstances, but it can never explain why matter exists without stepping beyond its own domain. As a result the programs of naturalistic self-explication transcend their own domain in which things can be proven, just like metaphysical concepts do. Therefore, they are unable to falsify the latter.[137]

Freedom

Freedom is a philosophical topic that is traditionally closely related to subjectivity and the metaphysical. In its ungraspability, it turns out to be equally problematic within the naturalistic model. An immaterial free will is an illusion according to naturalism. Even though nuances

136 Newberg and d'Aquili 2001, 7.
137 See Müller 2001, 51.

exist, the naturalist attitude towards freedom seems characterized well by Dick Swaab, a Dutch neuroscientist. He writes,

> The brain remains a machine of which we could theoretically predict, if we knew the input and the workings in detail, with a reasonable degree of certainty what would be the output under specific circumstances... The fact that this is (still?) impossible... does not prove free will.[138]

Free will cannot be proven within the domain of the natural sciences; hence, it does not exist. This is the implicit or the explicit conclusion of naturalism. The alternative is determinism, the view in which we have absolutely no control over our lives and are the puppets of a bunch of firing neurons.

Neurological research aimed at proving or disproving freedom, determinism against free will, or at least the naturalist's conception thereof, is not new. Already in 1963, Grey Walter, a British neurologist, designs a laboratory setting in which he presents slides to experimental subjects. They are told to push a button whenever they are ready to switch from one slide to the next. However, instead of connecting the projector to the pushbutton, it has been wired to an electrode in the relevant motor area of their brain. The subjects become thoroughly confused because the next slide will appear whenever they are about to push the button but right before the conscious decision is taken. Ulrich Lüke, both biologist and theologian, summarizes the naturalistic conclusion as follows:

> Neurobiology proves that we don't do what we want, but we want what we do. Only afterwards does our brain find the reasonable motives for things we have long since done.[139]

This is in line with Flanagan's description of so-called epiphenomenalism.

> Epiphenomenalism says that the existence of conscious deliberation is not evidence that this deliberation is important in the causation of action. Roughly, the idea is that conscious deliberation or choice is itself a side effect, or aftereffect, of the relevant causal processes, in the way sizzling is a side effect of frying eggs or, if you accept the James-Lange theory of emotion, fearing the bear comes after you run. The fear doesn't cause you to run.[140]

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[138] Swaab 2001, 83.
[139] See Lüke 2003, 64.
[140] Flanagan 2002, 116f. Flanagan himself comes with a less extreme point of view.

Wolf Singer, head of the Max-Planck-Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt, maintains that free decisions are non-existent as well. Someone does what he does because he could not have acted otherwise at a given point in time, if so he would have. Cold-blooded murderers just have the bad luck of having a very low killing-threshold. Of course, we should protect society from these individuals, but instead of speaking of accountability and sending them to jail by way of punishment, we should rather consider it a measure of protection and safekeeping. His justification for this point of view runs as follows: Since the same basic neurological processes are involved in unconscious and conscious decisions and since the former are deterministic, so must the latter be.[141] The faulty conclusion that we have a free will might be the result of early childhood experiences, Singer asserts. Babies do not distinguish between self and the outer world, but they are embedded in a social environment from which they get the message time and again: "Don't do that, otherwise I will do this." *Nolens volens* the child has to draw the faulty conclusion that it is free to do things.[142]

Gerhard Roth, physiologist of behavior at Bremen University, has another explanation that circles around the difference between grounds versus causes. He maintains that the impression that people's actions have grounds (motives) instead of causes comes from the fact that the real drives, or rather the stimuli that make us act, are not accessible. Grounds are causes that appear meaningful to us, hence in line with our intentions, because the causal origins remain hidden from us. Therefore, we ascribe them to ourselves and have a sense of freedom.

Much could be put forward as criticism. Let me just make four points. Firstly, there is (still?) no proof that the same and only the same neural processes are involved in conscious and unconscious decisions. Secondly, if this should be the case and the result should be such different processes as both conscious and unconscious decisions, then why not assume them giving rise to both free and unfree decisions? Thirdly, Singer's easy acceptation of cultural influences on the child's neural system (thinking that it is a free individual), makes you wonder how this "mental causation" of matter came about. Fourthly, Roth seems to forget that if these stimuli, which determine our actions,

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141 See Lüke 2006, 211.
142 Ibid., 212.

are inaccessible, it is impossible to decide whether to call them causes or grounds, to speak of caused actions or free decisions.

The rejection of free will might sound scientifically bold and interesting, but it is not in line with the way we live our daily life. We feel free to decide (within limits), we feel accountable (within limits). We are impressed by the heroism of some and despise the cowardice of others. Even among naturalists, a large degree of reserve towards the assumption of total determinism and the tendency to rescue at least a measure of freedom for the human way of being can be observed. Dennett writes, "I am confident that these fears [of seeing values like morality, free will, and love 'fall to science'] are misguided." Flanagan states,

> Even if human agency cannot be explained in terms of a miraculous, otherworldly faculty of unconstrained will, we humans might…by virtue of our complex nature, abilities, and staying power, be major contributors to both our own lives and that of the world around us.[143]

Moreover, brain researchers themselves question the conclusion of Walter's original research and many of its more recent and more sophisticated versions of which Benjamin Libet's is the most popular.[144] Johan den Boer of the Department of Biological Psychiatry, School for Behavioral and Cognitive Neurosciences of the University of Groningen, argues that according to almost all critics the problem remains that conscious decisions are not localized somewhere but spread over the entire brain. It is therefore hardly possible to pick one particular point in time as the moment that the conscious decision is taken.[145] The whole discussion is counterproductive, he asserts. The danger of the way in which the topic of free will is often brought under discussion is that there should be an absolute distinction between determinism and freedom. However, all our actions show gradations of accountability and determinism. Moreover, because of the way we experience free will subjectively, we cannot escape the idea that we are free to choose from a set of alternatives. Finally, it is likely that the range of alternatives is not only limited, but that certain alternatives will appear more attractive as a result of the complex interaction of genetic, biological,

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[143] Dennett 1993, 25; Flanagan 2002, 68.

[144] For a description, see Lüke 2006, 213. What all these experiments have in common is that they believe to prove that the decision comes after the act.

[145] See Den Boer 2003, 248.

and social variables.[146] A complex of determined, determinable, freeing, and free variables seems to be what constitutes human behavior.

The Dutch legal system appears to reflect this modern understanding of freedom. In the past, people were usually either convicted as criminals and sent to prison – hence, as mentally healthy individuals they were punished for the wrongness of their actions. Or they were judged to be of unsound mind – hence sick people – and confined to mental institutions to protect society and in the hope that psychiatric treatment would cure them. It seemed to suggest a clear demarcation between the healthy who were considered free to act otherwise and thus to be blamed for their mistakes and the insane who could not help themselves. Nowadays, convictions are more often a mix of punishment in prison combined with psychiatric treatment, as if most judges are of the opinion that most criminal behavior is partly determined (a wrongly programmed brain) and partly the result of free choice (and therefore punishable). This seems to be in line with current knowledge of the brain.

Assuming an immaterial freedom beyond the physical brain that would enable us to choose how to act in absolute freedom is unrealistic, but so is the alternative of picturing us as pre-programmed machines. Thanks to the cleverness of high-tech research apparatus, science has made impressive progress in unfolding the vulnerable complexity of our brains. As a result, the philosophical limitation of this type of research no longer comes to mind; namely, if the natural sciences declare the physical to be their object, how can they ever prove or disprove the reality of anything beyond the physical?

This brief sketch of naturalism was just meant to show the lack of neuroscientific basis and philosophical solidity of at least some of its conclusions. As even Andrew Newberg asserts, "At present, neuroscience is more of an art than a science, particularly in the way it evaluates complex mental processes. It is filled with assumptions, conjectures, postulates, and rationalizations." How come then that natural scientists claim expertise in the field of art, philosophy, and theology alike? "A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a single brain scan can generate a dozen hypotheses and an equal number of doubts."[147] How

[146] Ibid., 255.
[147] Newberg and Waldman 2007, 26f.

come then that only naturalistic answers are considered scientifically sound? What we have are small physical pieces of the puzzle of the human ability to think and act. The scientific experiments no doubt display great intellectual ability and technical skill, but these do not guarantee great philosophy. These experiments may, indeed, serve to warn the philosopher and the theologian against an all too easy 'spirituality' in the literal sense of positing human capacities apart from or above our physical way of being. The enigma of human (self-)consciousness, our being an I, an individual with a sense of freedom and conscious of being an I, clearly has a physical component. However, conclusions of the 'nothing else buttery' kind are unfounded, both in a spiritual and in a material sense.

Having progressed a decade into the 21st century, we must conclude that there is no reason for positing a 'nothing else but' material basis of I-hood. A recent and well-sold book from a Dutch cardiologist, Pim van Lommel, who attempts to prove that there is an infinite consciousness apart from the functioning of our individual brains and that we "tune" into is merely another and touching attempt of a physician to philosophize.[148] Let us not be too impressed with physicians and physicists alike: metaphysics is an entirely different discipline. As long as we do not expect successful brain surgery from a philosopher or a theologian, let us please not overestimate the philosophical or the theological talents of the brain surgeon or the cardiologist. I agree that in the former case the consequences are much more disastrous in the short-term, nonetheless the latter are no success either and can set the stage for a way of thinking that is also quite unhealthy.

1.4. From Here Onwards

The puzzle of what constitutes I-hood has not been solved in this chapter, but valuable insights into its philosophical complexity have been obtained. The obvious inadequacies of all too simplistic naturalistic theories have been unfolded. Even though we must concede that our ability to say 'I' in a meaningful way is dependent upon normal functioning of the brain, our neurophysiology does not explain the emergence of (self-)consciousness. Illness or accidents can destroy

[148] Van Lommel 2007.

our sense of being an I, and normal brain functioning is therefore a *conditio sine qua non* for (self-)consciousness as it is encountered in human beings. Nevertheless, no neuroscientific research has been able to explain why the particular brain physiology and anatomy of human beings enable a meaningful use of the word 'I' or pinpoint the biochemical processes or neurological structures that are responsible for this ability.

Henrich appears to be right when he maintains that naturalism rather seems the result of those explanations of the human mind that believe to be able to avoid or surpass the natural and that have thus remained (and will always remain) successful.[149] Theories that claim that human consciousness is a *res cogitans* that need not and does not interact with the *res extensa* of grey and white matter are no longer viable. Who we are and what we think is most intimately connected with our physical way of being an I. Scientific facts about our body, our brains, must be taken seriously in any theory of subjectivity. Nonetheless, the fact that my life as an individual is dependent upon bafflingly complex organs does not make my physiology the cause of my existence. Nor does it offer a philosophical explanation of what it means to be an I in the world.

Self-consciousness, without which life as we know it would be unthinkable, remains an enigma. It arises in some early stage of our life, and we do not know why, when, and how this happens. It cannot result from certain skills or a particular ability to understand. It is as fundamental to the sort of life that we think peculiar to humans, as it is difficult to understand. The human I is, as Ludwig Wittgenstein once put it "the boundary – not a part – of the world."[150] Joyce Carol Oates gives a beautiful description of the paradoxical aspect of I-hood when writing,

> My body is a tall column of light and heat…The 'I' doesn't exist! – but it behaves as if it does, as if it were one and not many. In any case, without the 'I' the tall column of light and heat would die…The 'I,' which doesn't exist, is everything.[151]

The I may exist, be everything, or not exist. However, it is not really dead as long as it still feels the need and the ability to confront itself

[149] See Henrich 2007, 173.
[150] Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921), *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* 5.641.
[151] The quote is from Schneider 2008, 158.

with questions about itself and its origins. These questions challenge us to look beyond the empirical, *meta physics*.

For a better insight into the ability to say 'I,' we have turned to one of the more successful metaphysical models of I-hood developed by Dieter Henrich on the foundations of two major theories of self-consciousness from the 18th century, namely Fichte's attempts to overcome the shortcomings of the reflection theory in his own production model. Henrich gives a thorough account of the philosophical complexity of our ability to say 'I.' A philosophical theory that considers itself to be a self-explanation of conscious life has to depart from our everyday relationship to reality, in his opinion. Conscious life presupposes self-consciousness in its most elementary form of knowing-about-oneself, an awareness of me as myself. It is this knowing about the mine-ness of all my thoughts, feelings, acts, needs, desires, etc. that is a prerequisite for conscious life. Somehow the I knows about itself, but this is no regular knowledge. The I is capable of reflection, which results in an explicit consciousness of itself. However, the activity of the I that we refer to as reflection should not be confused with a primary and pre-reflective awareness called self-consciousness. Interpreting this self-awareness as reflection leads to circularities.

Henrich has tried to clarify the complex phenomenon by approaching it from different philosophical viewpoints in the course of his career. He makes use of the analytic philosophy of language on several occasions. In another attempt, he assumes a field, or a dimension, of consciousness in which an I becomes active as its principle of organization. All these studies have contributed greatly in demonstrating the inevitable duality in our knowing about ourselves. What characterizes the everyday reality of our self-conscious life is that it is caught in the unsolvable tension of self-centeredness on the one hand and self-relativization on the other, that Henrich calls the *Grundverhältnis*. We are simultaneously aware of our unique perspective on reality and of our position of being one amongst many, a mere world-thing. Since the conditions of being a person can never explain subjectivity and since subjectivity cannot grasp the reality of being a person in this world, conscious life remains in the dark where its own nature and origins are concerned. Moreover, we have no control over the existence of our I. This generates a sense of insecurity and worry about its preservation. In the course of this project, we will see how Henrich's approach results in a theory of the unitary ground of self-consciousness that is

characterized by darkness or obscurity [*Dunkelheit*]. This is a reaction to the outcome of German idealistic philosophies that have been philosophically disqualified on more than one occasion as dangerous foundationalism propagating a metaphysics destructive of all otherness in its search for a *fundamentum inconcussum*. Henrich attempts to circumvent its mistakes and aporias by making the ungraspability of the ground the focus of his metaphysics, as we will see in Chapter 6.

Before proceeding in Henrich's metaphysical line of thinking, however, we will take a few steps back in time in order to let two representatives of the era called German idealism speak for themselves. The first name that comes to mind when mentioning this phase in the history of philosophy is, of course, Georg Wilhelm Hegel. His metaphysics has become so closely associated with the term German idealism, that most of its critics have concentrated on his philosophy. Nonetheless, not he, but his fellow students of the *Tübinger Stift*, the two Friedrichs, Schelling and Hölderlin, will be discussed in this study. Without disqualifying Hegel's accomplishments in the least, both Schelling and Hölderlin laid the groundwork for the epoch and for large portions of Hegel's work. In my opinion, they are better representatives of the struggle, the aporias, and the creativity of German idealism. Since I am not interested in defending the outcome of idealistic philosophy but merely in the type of questions and complications that led it along its path, I have chosen these two brilliant young men. They constitute a beautiful illustration of the philosophical struggles of a metaphysics that takes I-hood as its point of departure and they come to very different solutions as we will see in the course of this study.

German idealism is a reaction to the philosophy of Kant, the "all-destructor" [*Alleszermalmer*] who has done away with classical metaphysics as knowledge of God. However, with this "Copernican Revolution" he has created an unbridgeable distance between the physical and the metaphysical, between the human and the divine. God has become the great Unknown, a mere postulate of reason. A whole generation of young philosophers/theologians revolts, not only against an old theology that continues to hold on to truths that have become philosophically untenable after Kant, but also against a philosophy that does away with their deepest religious experiences as unreasonable. They refuse to live their lives cut off from what they experience as its very Source; present even when ungraspable, intuited even when unthinkable. They feel confirmed in their quest for a more immanent concept of God by the historical events taking place before their very eyes: the French Revolution.

To them it is an announcement of new times. It shows that everything in the world can and will become different.

"Kingdom of God" [*Reich Gottes*] is their slogan. But what kingdom are they raving about? Where and when will it come? Will it be located in this world or in some Great Beyond? Will it come in history or is it beyond time? Who or what is this God who will reign? The idealistic concept of God has been called pantheistic, and those defending it have even been called atheists. Whether it is truly Christian in nature or (slightly) heterodox is not their major concern. These are truly religious, young people trying to find a new language that was to reunite God and world. It is a theology full of reasoning, a philosophy full of religion, vibrant with life, longing for the deification of self-conscious beings, struggling to reinstate the beggars fallen from grace, to raise the I to its position of the proud image of God.

The term 'Absolute' comes to be the keyword. It is the one ground from which all that is has originated. It is God, but then again it is not. It is the God of the philosophers (of German idealism). It is to be proof of my ability to transcend me. It is to connect the I with God, self-consciousness with infinity. The term Absolute comes from the Latin *absolvere*, which means to detach and to isolate. As opposed to relative and relational, the Absolute is without relations. Hence, it is also beyond the cause-effect relation. It has no cause, no presupposition, no ground. It is *in se*, *a se*, and *per se*. The Absolute is a unity that is characterized by the exclusion of any kind of plurality, difference, or relation. In this unity, the parts merge indistinguishably. It is what remains when all plurality is eliminated. It is not identity, and it cannot even be called absolute unity since these terms are contrasted to plurality. The Absolute is the unthinkable, the Absolute is totally transcendent. As Fichte writes in 1802 in a letter to Schelling:

> The Absolute itself is neither Being nor is it Knowing, nor is it the identity or the non-distinction of the two: rather, it is just that – Absolute – and everything else that might be said about it would make things worse.[152]

The project of idealism could be described as the attempt to understand the Absolute as subjectivity, expressed in Lessing's motto, "I am it: *Hen kai Pan*."[153] Or as Novalis puts it, "One succeeded – he lifted

[152] In Gloy 2004, 234.

[153] There are different Greek formulas for Lessing's *Hen kai Pan*. Other than the one that will be discussed in 2.4., there is an epigram of 1780 in Lessing's own handwriting that says: *Hen Ego kai Panta*. See Yasukata 2002.

the veil of the goddess in Sais – But what did he see? He saw – miracle of miracles – himself."[154] The secret of metaphysics is considered to be related to self-consciousness. German idealism has been interpreted as the expansion of the Kantian transcendental subject into full-blown subjectivism. Hence the Kantian transcendental self that is essentially only a construct to explain the possibility of a single objective experience gradually becomes converted into a metaphysical principle. Frederick Beiser, however, argues that not subjectivism but the

> critique of subjectivism, the attempt to establish a satisfactory form of realism, was indeed the driving impulse behind the development of German idealism…Rather than making nature the product of the transcendental subject, the absolute idealist did the very opposite, deriving the transcendental subject from its place within nature.[155]

He maintains that Schelling, and especially the early romantics such as Hölderlin, "disputed the thesis that the Absolute can be described as something subjective… [Rather, it] must be interpreted as something impersonal, neutral, or indifferent."[156]

Whether Beiser is right and to what degree Schelling and Hölderlin fail or succeed might become clear after they have stated their own case. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed discussion of the philosophy of the early Schelling, the child genius who is ready for university at the age of fifteen and who is convinced that his superior mind can think subjectivity, objectivity, the Absolute, and even God into one all-encompassing system. In Chapter 4 Hölderlin, the poet and the melancholic, the one who is by very nature the transitional figure between German idealism and Early German romanticism, will be allowed to make a contribution. However, in order to really appreciate the difficulties that they are up against and that they attempt to solve in different ways, we must first give a sketch of the philosophical landscape that is theirs at the very start of their careers. Therefore, we will now turn to what could be called the overall project of German idealism: the question of how to philosophically penetrate into the Absolute through the gateway of self-consciousness.

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[154] In *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* [*The pupil in Sais*]. The quote is from Müller 2006, 206.
[155] Beiser 2002, 3f.
[156] Ibid., 5.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM THE I TO THE ABSOLUTE

The term 'German idealism' is not univocal, but it is possible to point out some general characteristics of the type of philosophy originating in the late 18th century in Germany. The German idealists have an enormous confidence in the power of human reason and speculative philosophy enjoys a period of uninhibited and luxuriant growth. History is thought to have progressed to the point where the nature of reality is to be grasped by human consciousness at last. Andrew Bowie asserts

> The common aim of the German idealists from Fichte onwards, is nothing less than the completion of metaphysics, the understanding of the 'Absolute'…in the light of Kant's critiques of dogmatic metaphysics.[1]

The Absolute is claimed to be knowable, hence the proper object of the science of philosophy. After Kant has clearly stated the exact opposite – beyond the physical we *know* nothing – 'metaphysical knowledge' sounds like a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, German idealists think themselves true Kantians and at the same time endeavor to know the Absolute. The key to knowledge of the Absolute is thought to be found in our subjectivity, in the immediate consciousness of our own existence. The awareness 'I am' is to be the first step towards understanding 'all that is.' Let us start with a short overview of the Kantian 'Copernican Revolution.'

2.1. Connecting Kant and Spinoza

In the second half of the 18th century, the philosophical climate changes radically due to the *Critiques* of Immanuel Kant. Fundamentally new in Kant's thinking is the insight that how the world is encountered by us is the result of how our mind functions. We obtain knowledge by applying the categories of our rationality to the raw material that the senses provide us with. Hence, Kant denies that knowledge is passive

[1] Bowie 1993, 2.

reception. What we know about the objective world is at least in part product of the knowing, subjective, mind: knowledge demands a synthesis of understanding and sensibility. In his own famous words:

> Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concept are blind…Furthermore, these two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only from their unification can cognition occur.[2]

Knowledge arises from two roots that each have separate functions and that do not overlap but depend upon "unification."

The first consequence of this statement is clear-cut: the empirical root of knowledge cannot be ignored. With the exception of logical and mathematical truths, knowledge is only possible with respect to things that can be perceived. Hence, we can never have any knowledge of God, Kant maintains.

> Thus the highest being remains for the merely speculative use of reason a mere but nevertheless *faultless ideal*, a concept which concludes and crowns the whole of human cognition, whose objective reality cannot of course be proven on this path, but also cannot be refuted.[3]

No knowledge is possible of God, not even of God's existence or non-existence, is a conclusion of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787). As a first and earthshaking result, traditional metaphysics is disqualified since it grounds its theory in principles that are beyond the scope of the human intellect.

But there is more. The Kantian duality can also be explained in favor of the other root: the enigmatic human mind with its categories of understanding is dealt the part of active contributor in this process. Somehow, this I that is aware of itself and its ability to know about the world is the key to all there is to know. It is this I that unifies the two roots. The followers of Kant are convinced that if they can find out more about this puzzling subjectivity, they will have a means of access to the metaphysical. All it takes is some further exploration of the I. Kant is not wrong; he has just stopped too soon. It is all a matter of exploring Kant's blind spot. Philosophy and theology are in an uproar. Kant has brought about a major shift from theocentrism to

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[2] KrV A51/B75.
[3] KrV A641/B669.

egocentrism. The philosophical universe is turned upside down in such a way that the human subject has become its very center.

Nonetheless, not all has been solved. Despite Kant's 'Copernican Revolution,' his philosophy is unable to tie all of its own loose ends. First, the split between the noumenal and the phenomenal world raises a fundamental problem: How does the subject know the object when they appear to be in separate worlds? Some underlying unity has to be assumed in order to solve this fundamental question of epistemology. Knowledge only becomes possible, if we can somehow connect subject and object, mind and matter, the ideal and the real. This can only be done by means of metaphysics, as is the conviction of the new generation. After all, our entire life is based on the assumption that we really know 'what's going on around us,' that there is a real interaction between subject and object.

Furthermore, Kant is unable to connect his epistemology and his ethics. He agrees that the idea of God is very persistent in people. Reason seems impelled to form three transcendental ideas even though they cannot be proven to correspond to objective reality. They remain as 'regulative' ideas or ideal limits of our thinking. These are the ideas of: 1. the sum-total of all appearances – the world; 2. all contents of consciousness – the soul; 3. all perfection – God. The idea of God is perfectly conceivable; one can coherently think *of* God. Nevertheless, any kind of knowledge claim with respect to God, even regarding God's mere existence, is impossible. This God of whom we can know nothing, not even if He/She/It exists, turns out to be indispensable for Kantian ethics. In order for morality to be reasonable, there must be an authority that ultimately matches real happiness with the worthiness to be happy proven by a moral life style. Hence, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of a supreme moral ruler who will ensure this, according to Kant. God is indispensable for justifying morality.

In addition to that, Kant makes matters even more confusing for his students in maintaining that in our morality we are in fact in touch with something metaphysical, absolute, or unconditioned. What "for theoretical purposes would be *transcendent*, is for practical purposes *immanent*," he asserts. As John Macquarrie puts it, freedom "is a breach in the phenomenal order, giving access to the noumenal realm."[4] Although speculative reason cannot establish the reality of

[4] *Critique of Practical Reason*, in: Macquarrie 1984, 8.

freedom, it is a postulate of moral life. Kant calls freedom the fact of reason [*Faktum der Vernunft*] and Klaus Müller elaborates, "The tie of all our actions to an unconditional norm is so directly and fundamentally inscribed in our reason that it neither needs nor allows further agreement."[5] Kant provides his followers with an I that has a sense of freedom mysteriously connecting it with the metaphysical. Hence, the I may not have knowledge beyond the physical, but it knows about its freedom. We may not know, if God exists; but if he does not, every attempt at being a good person becomes total nonsense. Apparently, even Kant agrees that the I knows more than what the senses provide it with. It seems as if unraveling a few philosophical knots will bring God within reach of the I. The door to the Beyond is unlocked; who will dare to open it?

This becomes the challenge of the new generation of thinkers. Kant has sentenced traditional metaphysics to death, but the price is a radical dualism. The noumenal world has been severed from the world of the phenomena. Faith has become opposed to reason, theology to philosophy. Religion has been reduced to ethics. A whole generation of young metaphysicists, who are well educated in classical philosophy *and* theology, is caught in the controversy of the dogmatism of their theology teachers and the critical idealism of their idol Kant. Their terrific minds revolt against the theological 'truths' that they are forced to absorb in the classrooms; but their religiosity rejects a philosophy that turns God into a mere divine bookkeeper.

The concept of God, however, is not the only thing affected by the Kantian 'Copernican Revolution.' The human I has become stuck between two worlds. If the subject is transcendental, it is necessarily beyond knowing since knowledge can only arise through a synthesis of understanding and sensibility. If the subject is empirical, however, then our knowledge will never penetrate into the reality of the subject, the thing-in-itself. Hence, the corner stone of Kant's epistemology remains an enigma that needs to be presupposed without our being able to found it or know it. A principle that is no more than a regulative idea is philosophically unsatisfactory, to say the least, but it is even more disturbing from an existential point of view. What is most familiar to me and forms my starting-point in all my dealings with the world on an everyday basis, my sense of being an I, would be declared

[5] Müller 2006, 54.

either non-existent (materialism or naturalism) or unreachable for my intellect (dualism).

It is exactly the striking parallel between the unknowability of a God who keeps coming to mind and the enigmatic character of an I that is transcendental but seems to dictate my everyday point of view in the world that forms an irresistible invitation to the thinkers of the late 18th century. It suggests that solving one mystery might also provide the solution to the other problem. The transcendental subject is beyond (*meta*) physics, as is God. A radically different metaphysics is called for; one that does not betray Kant but supplements him; one that brings the unknowable God within reach of this transcendental I.

Baruch de Spinoza's philosophy appears to hold the key to the solution for the young admirers of Kant. His refusal to consider the rational and the material as ultimately separable domains promises a way out of Kantian dualism. When Spinoza writes, "mind and body – are one and the same individual thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought and now under the attribute of Extension," he suggests that a unity underlying all multiplicity can be thought and has to be thought.[6] The earthly contradictions of thinking versus being, of mind versus body, the I as noumenon versus the I as phenomenon can be resolved in a unitary Absolute. It is a realm in which all that is can ultimately be united, one unitary ground that somehow gives rise to the multiplicity of all the phenomena. This Oneness forms the source from which our separate individualities proceed, the ultimate context in which our interactions with each other should take place, and the backdrop for our dealings with the Divine. Our alienation from this unity is a fact of life, but not the *ultimate* fact. In that respect Spinoza's philosophy comes closer to the truth than Kant's in the eyes of the young generation.

The influence of Spinoza for thinkers of the late 18th century can hardly be overestimated. To quote two: Hegel writes,

> When one enters the field of philosophy, one must first be Spinozist. The soul must bathe in this ether of the one Substance in which everything that one has held for true is absorbed.[7]

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[6] E. II, 21, Sch. (CW 259). The English translations are from Samuel Shirley. See bibliography Spinoza 2002.

[7] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, 373.

And Schleiermacher exclaims,

> the holy rejected Spinoza! The high world spirit permeated him, the Infinite was his beginning and end, the universe his only and eternal love. In holy innocence and deep humility he was reflected in the eternal world and saw how he too was its most lovable mirror; he was full of religion and full of holy Spirit; for this reason, he also stands there alone and unequaled, master in his art but elevated above the profane guild, without disciples and without rights of citizenship.[8]

Many more texts could be quoted to demonstrate how the philosopher who once was a "dead dog" has been revived to become everyone's favorite pet.[9]

In order to understand the philosophies of German idealism, it is necessary to learn more about the major concepts of Spinoza's philosophy. Let us therefore make an effort to get acquainted with the very basics of Spinozism.

2.2. Baruch de Spinoza

In our day and age, the term pantheism has become firmly linked with the Jewish philosopher Baruch de Spinoza.[10] This, however, is not the term that accompanies him during his lifetime. His orthodox Jewish upbringing notwithstanding, he goes astray and is branded an atheist and excommunicated from his synagogue at the early age of twenty-three. The *cherem* document of this expulsion has been preserved and

[8] Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 245. Both are translated from Müller 2006, 139, and 115.

[9] Lessing makes this characterization in the 1780's. See 2.3.

[10] Baruch, Benedict, or Bento de Spinoza (1632–1677) is born as the son of a prominent merchant of the Portuguese-Jewish community of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. He belongs to a family of Sephardic Jews with a history of exile first from Spain, later from Portugal, and in the case of Spinoza's father maybe even from France. The majority of European countries of the time bar Jews or impose severe restrictions on them. Therefore, most have outwardly converted to Christianity in order to escape persecution but continue to observe some form of Judaism in secret. These are called *conversos* or *marranos*, which literally means swine. As a community, they suffer many internal conflicts as a result of the betrayal of their own religion and the pressure of having to practice one in which they do not believe. Moreover, they have to live under the constant scrutiny of the Inquisition, always suspicious of the sincerity of their conversion. Many emigrate and wind up in the Netherlands with its tradition of relative tolerance concerning religion. In Amsterdam, the Jewish community is allowed, at least informally, to practice its religion openly during the 17th century. Official permission for public worship is given in 1619 and full citizenship in 1657.

is remarkable for the harshness of its wording. In addition to forbidding the members of the Jewish community to have anything to do with him, it speaks of his "evil opinions and acts; abominable heresies; monstrous deeds" and orders his excommunication.

> By decree of the angels and by the command of the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of God...Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down and cursed be he when he rises up. Cursed be he when he goes out and cursed be he when he comes in....the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.[11]

What could a young man who describes himself in a letter as one "who utterly dread[s] brawling" possibly have said or done to bring this upon himself? Maybe the answer is in the same letter in which he writes, "I do not differentiate between God and Nature in the way all those known to me have done."[12] Richard Mason suggests that the Jewish community may have attempted to rebuild a damaged orthodoxy after centuries of secret and private religious practice in most European countries.

> One reason for Spinoza's expulsion from his synagogue may have come from a wish by its members to show to themselves – and their Christian neighbours – that they had drawn clear limits to what they could stand. Spinoza may have exceeded those limits.[13]

In any case, Spinoza must have provoked fierce emotions; an attempt on his life is made. If his philosophy is indeed the reason for this dramatic turn of events, it is a vivid illustration of the value attached to the absolute void between the monotheistic God and a created world. An all too worldly God is not the God of Jews and Christians but an idol at best. Worshippers of such a God are called heretics or atheists in the 17th century, and they still risk to be labeled as pantheist in the 21st.[14]

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[11] In: Nadler 1999, 120.

[12] L. 6 (CW 776).

[13] Mason 1997, 4.

[14] After his excommunication Spinoza dissociates himself from the Jewish community and changes his name to the non-Jewish Bento of his native language or the Latin Benedictus. He never again joins any religious community or group. However, his friends and contacts are mostly protestant among whom several Collegiants, a Christian group without any hierarchical structure and known for its flexibility on confessional matters and the free character of its services. The perception that he is an atheist is widespread and prevents him from publishing most of his work during

The term 'atheist' might strike a present-day student of Spinoza as very odd since the word 'God' abounds in the *Ethics*, and its first part even has the title "Concerning God." According to David Bell,

> Spinoza's discussion of God was held to be pure show, and Johannes Colerus, Lutheran minister at The Hague and a reliable biographer of Spinoza, despite his hostility, answers that 'the God of Spinosa is a mere Phantom, an imaginary God.'[15]

Nevertheless, even if Spinoza's God seems incompatible with the personal and transcendent God of late 17th century Jewish and Christian theology, God's existence is beyond doubt for Spinoza. He does not even seem to feel the need to convince those who think otherwise. Without further argument he states,

> Note that, although many may say that they doubt the existence of God, they have in mind nothing but a word, or some fictitious idea they call God. This does not accord with the nature of God.[16]

It is not the existence or non-existence of God that is the problem; the image of God is really at stake. His opponents' God is a legislator and a judge who proclaims laws, rewards those who obey in servitude, and punishes those who trespass. In contrast, the laws of Spinoza's God follow "by an inevitable necessity from [his] nature."[17] This is not the personal, free God of monotheism; and to deny the existence of such a God makes him an atheist as far as his opponents are concerned. He does in fact fiercely reject an anthropomorphic image of God.

> Some imagine God in the likeness of man, consisting of mind and body, and subject to passions. But it is clear…how far they stray from the true knowledge of God.…by body we understand some quantity having length, breadth and depth, bounded by a definite shape; and nothing more absurd than this can be attributed to God…[18]

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his lifetime. As he writes in a letter, "I am naturally afraid that the theologians of our time may take offence, and, with their customary spleen, may attack me" (L. 6 = CW 776). Shortly after his death in 1677, his works are indeed prohibited as blasphemous. His philosophy is considered atheistic, perverted, and dangerous for the minds of good monotheists. This opinion is to prevail for at least another century following his death.

[15] Bell 1984, 4.

[16] TEI. 54, note s (CW 14).

[17] L. 43 (CW 879).

[18] E. I, 15, Sch. (CW 224f.).

This rejection of a personal deity makes Spinoza an atheist, indeed. However, he is not an atheist in the common sense of non-believer but in the sense in which it has also been used by Dorothee Sölle.[19] Spinoza was an a-theist; he did not agree with the prevalent theistic image of God as "omniscient, merciful, wise, and so forth."[20] So who or what is this God of Spinoza on which the Absolute of German idealism becomes modeled? Is he really "everywhere, could not be spoken to, did not respond if prayed to, was very much in every particle of the universe, without beginning and without end," as Antonio Damasio puts it?[21] In any case, his concept of God is apparently stretched too far to still be called (mono)theistic.

An extensive study of Spinozism is not within the scope of this research. Based on selected passages from Spinoza's work and some esteemed contemporary experts, an interpretation will be provided of Spinoza's concept of Divinity, his views on the relationship between the God and world, on free will, and on the difference between philosophy and religion.[22]

2.2.1. *Substance or* Deus sive Natura

Just as his atheism is considered an open-and-shut case during his lifetime and in the century after, Spinoza's famous "God, or Nature" [*Deus sive Natura*] is supposed to immediately classify him as a pantheist in contemporary theology.[23] But is it as simple as that? In a letter he writes,

> As to the view of certain people that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rests on the identification of God with Nature (by the latter of which they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter) they are quite mistaken.[24]

Apparently, Spinoza agrees that God cannot be identified with the simple sum-total of the world. So who is this God whom he calls not

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[19] See Sölle 1968.
[20] ST. I, VII (CW 57).
[21] Damasio 2004, 22.
[22] Namely: David Bell, Jonathan Bennett, Frederick Copleston, Edwin Curley, Don Garrett, Brad Gregory, Richard Mason, Klaus Müller, Arne Naess, and Harry Austryn Wolfson. See bibliography.
[23] E. IV, Pref. (CW 321). Certain translations capitalize Nature and others don't. Since Spinoza uses it as a synonym for God, I will use a capital "N." For the same reason Substance will be capitalized.
[24] L. 73 (CW 942).

"corporeal" on the one hand and "Nature" and "an extended thing [*res extensa*]" on the other?[25]

Spinoza distinguishes two ways to view Nature: *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. *Natura naturans* is "that which in itself and conceived through itself" and "God insofar as he is considered a free cause," it says in the *Ethics*. Or *Natura naturans* is "a being that we conceive clearly and distinctly through itself, and without needing anything beside itself," as he words it in the *Short Treatise*.[26] *Natura naturata*, in contrast, is "all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God."[27] What he means by "modes" and "attributes" will be discussed in 2.2.2.; for now it suffices to say that modes are the multitude of things, and even thoughts, of the world. Spinoza does not simply identify God and Nature as in the most trivial conception of pantheism. *Natura naturans* is God and *Natura naturata* is *in* God. Whatever this distinction might mean; Nature and God are not simply the same thing.

On the one hand, Spinoza, like every person, is confronted with a world full of seemingly independent entities. On the other hand, he is unwilling to accept this fragmentation as the ultimate truth. *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* are two sides of the same coin. *Deus sive Natura* is all there is and all that can be conceived. Viewed from the perspective of unity, God is *Natura naturans*; and viewed with respect to multiplicity, God is *Natura naturata*. However, Spinoza *does* seem to want to make a distinction between his own philosophy and traditions that tend to place God over and against nature. On the same page of the *Short Treatise* he adds, "The Thomists likewise understand God by it, but their *Natura naturans* was a being (so they called it) beyond all substances."[28] There *is* a difference with the accepted theology: Spinoza's God is not the transcendent, perfect Being that is high above the world. God is right here, in the middle of all worldly differentiation as the image of its unification.

The term "Substance" is another word that Spinoza often employs to emphasize the unitary aspect of *Deus sive Natura*. "There can be,

[25] E. I, 15, Sch. (CW 225); E. II, 2 (CW 245).
[26] E. I, 29, Sch. (CW 234); ST. I, VIII (CW 58).
[27] E. I, 29, Sch. (CW 234).
[28] ST. I, VIII (CW 58).

or be conceived, no other Substance but God."[29] Whereas "for everything a cause or reason must be assigned either for its existence or for its non-existence," Substance is "self-caused." Its nature "can be conceived only as existing" and it "is in itself and is conceived through itself."[30] For its existence Substance depends upon nothing or no one but itself. Spinoza's Substance is self-caused and it always remains the same through change. Moreover, its essence involves existence, it is unique, and it is infinite. These terms echo longstanding ideas about the plenitude of divine perfection. Let us see how Spinoza interprets them.

The conclusion that this one single Substance, God, "necessarily exists" might strike the modern reader as just another version of the ontological argument.[31] Don Garrett gives a very clear overview of Spinoza's proofs of the necessary existence of God, its implications, and its relation to traditional ontological and cosmological arguments.[32] It is not the objective of this study to go into details and take position in the debate about the validity of Spinoza's proofs. Garrett concludes that Spinoza "believes he has succeeded in showing that the essence of God *must* involve his existence – a truth which could be *directly* discovered," "in much the same way that one sees immediately what is involved in the essence of a triangle."[33] In addition, Iris Murdoch's translation of "necessary existence" seems to do justice to Spinoza's God-Nature. She writes, "The definition of God as having *necessary* not contingent existence" implies that "God cannot be particular, a contingent thing, one thing among others;...God's necessary existence is connected with his not being an object."[34]

Besides necessity, unicity is another characteristic of Substance. There can be only one single Substance with nothing outside of it. It is all-embracing totality. "In the universe there cannot be two or more Substances," neither two "of the same nature or attribute" nor "one produced by the other."[35] According to Edwin Curley, Spinoza's arguments in this respect rely on Cartesian assumptions.

[29] E. I, 14. (CW 224).
[30] E. I, 11, Pr. 2 (CW 222); E. I, Def. 1 and Def. 3 (CW 217).
[31] E. I, 11 (CW 222).
[32] See Garrett 2001a.
[33] Garrett 2001a, 22;20.
[34] Murdoch 1992, 395.
[35] E. I, 5; E. I, 6 (CW 218f.).

> Suppose we have two entities with the same attribute.... What is it which makes them distinct from one another? Not their attribute, since that, by hypothesis, is the same. Not their modes, since modes, by definition, are inessential, transitory states of the substance to which they belong, which cannot be used to distinguish one substance from another.[36]

Ergo, only one Substance can exist. Spinoza's thorough study of Descartes' dualism has shown him where this system fails to connect the *res extensa* with the *res cogitans*. The use of the pineal gland as the necessary link of the physical and the mental in one single person is a last resort that is hardly convincing, even to Descartes himself. Spinoza's solution is to start with the assumption of an underlying, ultimate unity in which the complexity of the world is founded, ultimate unity of mind and body, of God and Nature; one unitary Substance. From this unitary starting-point, he tries to think multiplicity and division, both real but not ultimate reality.[37]

In addition to necessary and unique, ultimate reality, Substance can only be infinite otherwise "it would have to be limited by another Substance of the same nature."[38] Only one Substance can exist that is "absolutely infinite."[39] When explaining the infinity of Substance, Spinoza notes how difficult it is for people *not* to think of infinity as some sort of superlative of time, measure, or number; hence divisible. However, notions of this kind "are nothing more than aids to the imagination." The infinity of Substance implies that it cannot be conceived as "composed of parts or bodies really distinct from one another." Moreover, infinity has to do with eternity, "that is, the infinite enjoyment of existence."[40] In the sense of eternity, infinity is not divisible either; we cannot distinguish portions of duration in it. In this infinity of Substance or God the whole of nature is necessarily included. As Richard Mason puts it simply but quite adequately, "If you take seriously the claim that God is infinite, how can you then say that anything in nature can be excluded from God?"[41] Nevertheless, the claim

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[36] Curley 1994, xxiif.
[37] Many have debated about possible circularities, inconsistencies, and contradictions in Spinoza's theory. These are interesting and important in their own right, but for the present purpose it suffices to just accept Spinoza's own conclusion that there is only one Substance.
[38] E. I, 8, Pr. (CW 219).
[39] E. I, 15, Sch. (CW 225).
[40] L. 12 (CW 788f.).
[41] Mason 1997, 38.

that nature is a part of God is also mistaken in Spinoza's view for then God would be divisible and unity would not be the basis of all that is. Therefore, Nature *is* God. Then we are precisely where we started: Does Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* plainly identify God with nature in the sense of the world, as we know it? Spinoza answers in the negative, but how does this one, infinite, and necessary God-Substance-Nature relate to the multitude of things and people encountered in the world? "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."[42] Nothing can exist outside God or be understood apart from God. How does this sense of unity comply with our daily experience of independent entities? How can unity be thought in the midst of the separation and contradiction of our reality? Are those who ridicule Spinoza right that positing one Substance as the ultimate reality only leads to incoherence? Quoting one of Spinoza's early critics, David Bell writes,

> We are quite wrong, argues Bayle, to say 'The Germans killed ten thousand Turks'; following Spinoza we should say, 'God modified into Germans killed God modified into ten thousand Turks', and it means that 'God hates himself, asks favours of himself and refuses them; eats himself, slanders himself, and executes himself.'[43]

In order to do more than caricaturize Spinoza's theory concerning the relationship between the unity of Substance and the multiplicity of the world, the terms 'attribute' and 'mode' should be looked into.

2.2.2. *Attributes and Modes of the One Substance*

According to Spinoza, there is one "Substance consisting of infinite attributes."[44] What could it mean? In a certain way, attributes *are* Substance; they do not exist independently from this Substance. As Spinoza puts it,

> By Substance I understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that whose conception does not involve the conception of another thing. I understand the same by attribute, except that attribute is so called in respect to the intellect, which attributes to Substance a certain specific kind of nature.[45]

[42] E. I, 15. (CW 224).
[43] Bell 1984, 5.
[44] E. I, Def. 6 (CW 217).
[45] L. 9 (CW 782).

An attribute is the "specific kind of nature" that the intellect attributes to Substance, and reversely, attributes are ways in which Substance expresses itself to our intellect. According to Curley, we should "identify Substance with its attributes, or rather, with the totality of its attributes." Attributes are "those most general structural features of the universe which are captured by the most general laws of nature."[46]

Curley's definition may be correct, but it is awkward. "Laws of nature" is an ambiguous choice of words and ignores the fact that of the infinity of attributes only a minimal portion can actually be "captured" by the intellect. Spinoza states explicitly that of the infinity of attributes of this one Substance only two are accessible to us: thought [*cogitatio*] and extension [*extensio*]. In modern language "laws of nature" are associated with physical laws, hence those laws applicable to the attribute of extension. Even including something like the "laws of thought" would not do justice to the fact that Substance is much more than extension and thought, in Spinoza's view. Substance consists of infinite attributes, only two of which we can grasp to a certain degree. Hence, people can understand only a fraction of the infinity of the attributes of Substance. The relation between Substance and its attributes is probably best understood as analogous to that between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. They are two sides of the same coin; God is simple as one Substance, but understood as complex by way of infinite attributes.

Substance is the unity of infinite attributes, but the individual attributes are distinct from one another, according to Spinoza. "Each attribute of the one Substance must be conceived through itself." This does not imply that attributes are fundamentally separate.

> Although two attributes [should] be conceived as really distinct, that is, one without the help of the other, still we cannot deduce therefrom that they constitute two entities, or two different substances.[47]

Hence, we could describe Nature as a physical system and as a system of thought. Both descriptions would be right but neither would exhaust the complete and true being of God. First, we only know two of the manifold; and secondly, our limited intellect could never conceive of them as merged into the one single unity of Substance. Once again, Spinoza's 'pantheism' turns out to be more than a plain identification of God and world.

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[46] Curley 1969, 16; Curley 1991, 49.
[47] E. I, 10; E. I, 10, Sch. (CW 221).

Moreover, in this construction of one Substance with two knowable attributes, we easily recognize the student of Descartes. The *res extensa* and the *res cogitans* more or less return as the two sides of reality as perceived by people. However, in Descartes' philosophy mind and matter could not really make contact. This put the human being in an impossibly dualistic position; mind and body, spirit and matter, were pulled apart in a way that belied our everyday experience. What is seemingly distinct nonetheless feels intimately connected. The 'solution' of the pineal gland as the go-between or the antenna was just a desperate attempt to make it work; 'it' being both the human organism *and* Cartesian dualism. With Spinoza's philosophical solution the distinction remains real but not ultimate reality. Unity is. Looked at from the human point of view at least one distinction can be made within this unity: mind and body. That is Spinoza's first step.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to describe the diversity that we are confronted with on an everyday basis. So far we have one infinite Substance that the intellect can understand in terms of two attributes: *cogitatio* and *extensio*. But how can we conceive of all that surrounds us, the multitude of finite things, all the contingent things of the world, all the bodies, and all the minds? In order to achieve this, another term is necessary, namely 'mode.' It is "as though God were the ocean and God's finite modes, the existential duration of which is transitory, the waves and ripples on the ocean's surface," Copleston writes poetically.[48] Spinoza's language is far less lyrical: "Nothing exists but Substance and its modes," he states in the *Ethics*.[49] Hence, the question arises, What is a mode?

In the *Short Treatise*, a clear link is made between mode and attribute. What a particular individual "has of Thought... is a mode of that attribute we call Thought," and similarly his body is "nothing else than a mode of the other attribute which we call Extension." These modes are finite, but the attributes of which they are manifestations are infinite and remain "unchanged."[50] Modes are individual things through which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determined way. Harry Austryn Wolfson calls the universe "the sum of the modes."[51] This may be true in a certain respect. Nonetheless, *Deus sive Natura*, as

[48] Copleston 1946, 43.
[49] E. I, 28, Pr. (CW 233).
[50] ST. App. II (CW 104).
[51] Wolfson 1983, 75.

Spinoza understands it, is more than a simple addition of all its modes. It is more than a mere collection; it is an expression of the all-pervasive divine Unity. It is all the faces of eternity. It is infinity itself.

Only Substance and its modes exist, it was said. But if there exists only one Substance, how do all its modes exist? Spinoza's answer to this is, "All things that are, are either in themselves or in something else." Substance is "in itself" and modes are "in something else."[52] Modes exist "in" Substance. What this could mean has been debated extensively by Spinoza scholars. Some, like Wolfson, describe Spinoza's conception of the relation between mode and Substance as the Aristotelian "species *in* genus."[53] Others, such as Harold Henry Joachim, deny the reality of finite particulars in Spinoza's system.[54] Joachim identifies the distinction between Substance and modes with that between things and properties, or subjects and predicates, but Curley disagrees. He asserts that even though Spinoza uses traditional terms, his "use of these terms is highly idiosyncratic." Substance is not the substratum in which modes inhere as Lockean qualities.[55] He maintains that Spinoza's philosophy does not make much sense, if we simply interpret him "along the lines of some one or another of his predecessors." He calls it "one of Spinoza's principal novelties that he breaks with this long tradition." Modes, or individual things, really exist. The relation of individual things with God is not the relation of a predicate to its subject. The relationship is "one of causal dependence, not one of inherence."[56] Every existing thing has a cause. While modes rely upon an external cause for their existence, Substance is *causa sui*.

Now another question arises. If there is only one Substance "in" which a multitude of modes exist, it may be asked how this Substance can be necessary and immutable whereas its modes strike us as obviously

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[52] E. I, Ax. 1; Def. 3; Def. 5 (CW 217).

[53] Wolfson 1983, 75.

[54] See Joachim 1901.

[55] Curley 1991, 36; Curley 1969, 18; Curley summarizes a common 17th century account of the relation between substance and its qualities based on John Locke's theory as follows:

1. A substance is the substratum in which qualities are said to inhere, exist, or subsist.
2. A substance *of a particular kind* is a collection or combination of qualities plus the substratum in which they inhere.
3. The substratum does not inhere in anything else, hence exists or subsists by itself.
4. The substratum supports and unites the qualities.
5. The substratum itself is not perceptible to the senses. Its existence must be inferred from the qualities that can be perceived (Curley 1969, 4f.).

[56] Curley 1969, 36; 21; 37.

contingent and ever-changing. Individual beings come and go, and in contrast to God-Substance they do not seem to exist by necessity.

> Even when they exist, we can conceive them as not existing... Hence it is clear that we conceive the existence of Substance as of an entirely different kind from the existence of modes.[57]

The answer to this is also related to causal dependence.

It can be observed that "each particular thing is determined by another particular thing to exist in a particular manner," for a particular period of time.[58] Individual things exist as the result of an infinite number of causes spreading out through the whole of Nature.

> Because the chain of causes is hidden from us, then that thing cannot appear to us either as necessary or as impossible. So we term it either 'contingent' or 'possible.'[59]

"For practical purposes it is better, indeed, it is essential, to consider things as contingent" since "we plainly have no knowledge as to the actual co-ordination and interconnection of things – that is, the way in which things are in actual fact ordered and connected," Spinoza concludes in the *Theological-Political Treatise*.[60] Things in nature come and go. Plants and animals are eaten, things decompose, people get sick, age, and die. All things in nature change all the time, and eventually all disappear. This endless process of change seems inevitable, but pointless and random nonetheless. However, since we are stuck in the middle, we are unable to see the totality of causes that spread through this infinite, eternal *Deus sive Natura*. In truth, "a thing is termed 'contingent' for no other reason than the deficiency of our knowledge."[61] If we could look at the universe from the outside, we would understand that in reality "nothing in Nature is contingent" since "God is the immanent... cause of all things."[62]

Spinoza struggles to do justice to a world of seemingly independent entities without giving up on the concept of an underlying unity. A unitary ground is what the German idealists are after, and they find it

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[57] E. II, 45, Sch. (CW 271).
[58] Ibid.
[59] E. I, 33, Sch. 1 (CW 236).
[60] TPT. 4, 2 (CW 427).
[61] E. I, 33, Sch. (CW 236).
[62] E. I, 29 (CW 234); E. I, 18 (CW 229).

in Spinoza's Substance. With Spinoza, Kantian dualism can be overcome and the way opened for a rational metaphysics. God might just be graspable in and through Nature. Nevertheless, it is still a long stretch from connecting the subject, as it is understood in the late 18th century, with the Absolute. The main obstacle is Spinoza's notion of freedom. He starts the Appendix of the first part of the *Ethics* with these words:

> I have now explained the nature and properties of God: that he necessarily exists, that he is one alone, that he is and acts solely from the necessity of his own nature, that he is the free cause of all things and how so, that all things are in God and are so dependent on him that they can neither be nor be conceived without him, and lastly, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from his free will or absolute pleasure, but from the absolute nature of God.[63]

It is the final topic that appears to be the stumbling block. A book with *Ethics* as its title has to deal with freedom, and freedom in the Kantian sense in order to be acceptable to the generation of German idealism. Hence, an important aspect of the "nature and properties of God" remains to be discussed. What does Spinoza mean when he calls God the "free cause" that "predetermines" all things not from his "free will" but from his "absolute nature"? What is freedom in the Spinozistic sense of the word? How free a mode am I?

2.2.3. *Free Will and Intention*

Spinoza asserts, "I place freedom, not in free decision, but in free necessity."[64] God does not act from freedom of will; "God acts solely from the laws of his own nature, constrained by none."[65] This implies that freedom, as freedom of choice, does not exist in God. God's laws are God's laws; and God's strength is in the necessity of these laws, not in the freedom to ignore them or suspend them. The ability to change them owing to whatever urge or choice would only weaken God's freedom. God's free necessity is the inevitability of these laws. Freedom is the ability to follow nothing other than one's own nature. "That thing is free which exists and acts solely from the necessity of its own nature" and "that thing is constrained [*coactus*] which is determined by something else to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate

[63] E. I, App. (CW 238).
[64] L. 58 (CW 909).
[65] E. I, 17 (CW 227).

way." God's freedom exists in the fact that there is no external power or entity that makes him act in a certain way. "Although God exists necessarily, he nevertheless exists freely because he exists solely from the necessity of his own nature."[66] God is not constrained by anything outside of him since there is no such thing. His freedom is the necessity of the laws that proceed from his very own nature.

Spinoza is well aware of the novelty and the strangeness of this point of view. He writes,

> Many will ridicule this view…for this reason alone, that they are in the habit of attributing to God another kind of freedom very different from that which we…have assigned to him; that is an absolute will.[67]

However, because of the inadequacy of their knowledge people think in terms of the will of God, according to Spinoza. "There is no end to questions…And so they will go on and on asking the causes of causes," until they take refuge in "the will of God – that is, the sanctuary of ignorance."[68] The idea of divine free agency is pointless. God as an anthropomorphic, free decision maker is just a figment of the limited human imagination. In reality, God cannot act or choose with a particular goal in mind. God does not want anything because that would imply that he desires something that is lacking. However, lack means imperfection and God is perfect. Spinoza therefore concludes,

> It is only in concession to the understanding of the multitude and the defectiveness of their thought that God is described as a lawgiver or ruler, and is called just, merciful, and so on. [However], in reality God acts and governs all things solely from the necessity of his own nature and perfection, and his decrees and volitions are eternal truths, always involving necessity.[69]

God acts by the necessity of his own nature and all things are predetermined, it was said. Things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case.

> All things depend on the power of God. For things to be able to be otherwise than as they are, God's will, too, would necessarily have to be different. But God's will cannot be different (as we have just shown most

66 L. 58 (CW 908).
67 E. I, 33, Sch. 2 (CW 236).
68 E. I, App. (CW 241).
69 TPT. 4 (CW 432).

> clearly from the consideration of God's perfection). Therefore neither can things be different.[70]

Since individual things are ultimately manifestations of God, all manifestations are determined. "Particular things are nothing but…modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determined way."[71]

Hence, also human free will is a misconception. "Human freedom which all men boast of possessing" consists solely in this, "that men are conscious of their desire and unaware of the causes by which they are determined." However, "every single thing is necessarily determined by an external cause to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way." Because we are ignorant of the causes but aware of our desires, we tend to see ourselves as free agents acting according to our own intentions. Spinoza considers this absolute nonsense; all things proceed with the greatest perfection by "a certain eternal necessity of nature."[72] In Mason's words,

> I may believe that the reason for my action is a 'final cause' in the form of an intention referring to the future, but my belief has to be understood in terms of my inability to see backwards to the beginning of the chain of causes which makes me act as I do, including the causes which make me believe that my action is explained by an intention.[73]

Spinoza claims that how we are and what we do is predetermined. We have no freedom to act differently; we only *think* we do. Only because we do not have a clue about all the things and circumstances that cause us to act in a certain way and because we have certain desires, we tend to interpret our behavior as the result of our freedom of choice. This seems to be the conclusion; and *prima facie* quite a few naturalists would heartily agree, as we have seen in the previous chapter.[74] However, Spinoza's view is more complex. How, for example, would we have to interpret what he writes in the Preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*?

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[70] E. I, 33, Sch. 2 (CW 237).

[71] L. 58 (CW 908).

[72] Ibid.

[73] Mason 1997, 126.

[74] See the explanation of epiphenomenalism that is characterized by Flanagan as, "fearing the bear comes after you run. The fear doesn't cause you to run" (Flanagan 2002, 117). We act as we do because our brain "makes" us act. The thoughts that we take to be the cause of our actions are no more than an epiphenomenon.

> Everyone should be allowed freedom of judgment and the right to interpret the basic tenets of his faith as he thinks fit, and…the moral value of a man's creed should be judged only from his works.[75]

How can there be freedom of judgment in beings that are predetermined? And how can they be judged from their works, if they are not free agents? Does Spinoza simply contradict himself?

Arne Naess argues that Spinoza assumes degrees of freedom. People act from a mixture of causes; some of these are external and some follow necessarily from their own nature. Of the external causes they tend to be unaware. He gives the following example. If it rains, we can decide to put up an umbrella; and we have good grounds for taking the freedom to do so at its face value. Even so, upon close inspection, several determinants for this behavior could be listed including external ones, such as the rain, bad health, our clothing, vanity, the joy of using the new umbrella, etc.[76] People are not absolutely free. For Spinoza, to be absolutely free means to exist "solely from the necessity of [one's] own nature" and to be "determined to action by [one]self alone" and only God is free in that sense.[77] People are free to a certain degree only, and more free is the person who lives "by the guidance of reason."[78]

Apparently, there is a way out of predeterminism. People can increase their degree of freedom by progressing on the road to perfect knowledge. Reasoning is "like a staircase by which we can climb up to the desired place…to become united with [the highest good]; which union is our supreme happiness and bliss," Spinoza asserts in the *Short Treatise*.[79] "The more, therefore, we consider man to be free, the less we can say, that he can neglect to use reason," he maintains in the *Political Treatise*. Hence, "the free man *cannot* neglect reason, he is not *forced* to use reason, but he necessarily uses it, this belonging to his very nature or essence as a free man," Naess asserts.[80] Reason belongs to the essence of human nature, and its use leads to greater freedom even when human freedom will never be absolute. Reason can free people to a certain extent from the dependency on the emotional needs that

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[75] TPT. Pref. (CW 393).
[76] See Naess 1974, 20.
[77] E. I, Def. 7 (CW 217).
[78] E. IV, 37, Pr. (CW 339).
[79] ST. II, XXVI (CW 100).
[80] Naess 1974, 17.

can enslave a person; and reason can prevent us from being "guided by fear."[81] The training of reason enables people to reach a higher step on the staircase to knowledge. The more we act from the necessity of our reasonable nature, the closer we get to the true freedom of God. True virtue is "nothing other than to live by the guidance of reason."[82]

Therefore, when Spinoza asserts that all should be free to choose their faith, this does not refer to the simple freedom to choose as we please, whatever and whenever. That is not freedom but unreasonable, unfree unpredictability, in Spinoza's view. True freedom requires knowledge of our true nature, and this can only be acquired by careful training of reason. Hence, when Spinoza asserts that it is important to the safety of the state to grant "to the individual citizen the right to have his own opinions and to say what he thinks," he does not simply express the modern belief in the democratic freedom of opinion where anyone gets to express whatever comes to mind, no matter how uninformed or hurtful to others.[83] The type of freedom that Spinoza demands is for those who have learned to take true freedom for what it really is: the necessity of their true, reasonable nature. If this important condition is met, he not only considers it safe for society to grant this free use of reason; he even makes it a condition for peace and religiosity.

> Not only can this freedom be granted without endangering piety and the peace of the commonwealth, but also the peace of the commonwealth and piety depend on this freedom.[84]

We are not simply nature and unfree, but neither are we in the possession of absolute freedom. Spinozism calls for the training of reason in order to increase our freedom. But how can we train reason? Is philosophy the way? How come, then that it leads to union with the highest good? "Spinoza is concerned with separating religion and philosophy and show how both can coexist in a tolerant civil state,"

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[81] E. IV, 63, Pr. (CW 353).
[82] E. IV, 37, Sch. 1. (CW 340).
[83] TPT. Pref. (CW 393). This type of "freedom" seems to have become a specialty of Western societies. In the Netherlands, at least, certain politicians embrace it as a means to attract voters. Perhaps I may recommend some careful training of reason in the Spinozistic sense in order to rise above the urge to make the most outrageous accusations concerning non-Western cultures and religions.
[84] TPT. Pref. (CW 390).

Gregory asserts.[85] Is het right, or are religion and philosophy closer connected than this statement suggests?

2.2.4. *The Role of Philosophy and Religion*

The *Theological-Political Treatise* unfolds Spinoza's ideas about religion but hardly mentions the nature of God, whereas in the *Ethics* the emphasis is reversed. Knowledge about the nature of God is philosophy, and this knowledge is to be provided by reason. Philosophy and reason seem to have very little to do with religion for Spinoza.

> The aim of philosophy is, quite simply, truth, while the aim of faith… is nothing other than obedience and piety.… [Philosophy] must be constructed by studying Nature alone, whereas faith… must be derived only from Scripture and revelation.[86]

Spinoza views religion as a human ethical, social, and ritual activity that hardly enhances knowledge.

> I do not go so far as to maintain that nothing whatsoever of a purely philosophic nature is to be found in Scripture's teaching… But this much I will say, that such affirmations are very few, and of a very simple nature.[87]

These simple affirmations are listed on two occasions in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. In Chapter 5 it says that according to the Bible "there is a God, or Being who made all the things and who directs and sustains the world with supreme wisdom." It also states that "he takes the utmost care of men, that is, those of them who live moral and righteous lives." Finally, it says that "he severely punishes the others and cuts them off from the good."[88] In Chapter 14 these biblical affirmations are extended as follows:

> [1] God… exists, supremely just and merciful…;
> [2] God is one alone…;
> [3] God is omnipresent, and all things are open to him,… [with justice] he directs everything;
> [4] God has supreme right and dominion over all things. He… acts by his absolute decree and singular grace. All are required to obey him absolutely, while he obeys none;

[85] Gregory 1989, 37.
[86] TPT. 14 (CW 519).
[87] TPT. 13 (CW 510f.).
[88] See TPT. 5 (CW 441).

[5] Worship of God and obedience to him consists solely in justice and charity, or love towards one's neighbor;
[6] [Only those] who obey God…are saved;
[7] God forgives repentant sinners.[89]

These simple assertions barely qualify as philosophical in Spinoza's opinion. In a letter he writes that high speculative thought has nothing to do with Scripture, in his view. "For my part I have never learned, nor could I have learned any of God's eternal attributes from Holy Scripture."[90]

However, he has "found nothing expressly taught in Scripture that was not in agreement with the intellect or that contradicted it," and he is "completely convinced that Scripture does not in any way inhibit reason and has nothing to do with philosophy, each standing on its own footing."[91] Scripture neither assists nor obstructs the attainment of knowledge about God. It can even be of value for the education of humankind, because philosophy as

> the process of deduction solely from intellectual axioms usually demands the apprehension of a long series of connected propositions, as well as the greatest caution, acuteness of intelligence, and restraint, all of which qualities are rarely to be found among men. So men prefer to be taught by experience rather than engage in the logical process of deduction from a few axioms. Hence it follows that if anyone sets out to teach some doctrine to an entire nation – not to say the whole of mankind – and wants to be intelligible to all in every detail, he must rely entirely on an appeal to experience, and he must above all adapt his arguments and the definitions relevant to his doctrine to the understanding of the common people, who form the greatest part of mankind.[92]

Not all people are philosophers. Actually, in Spinoza's opinion most lack the intelligence and the discipline to follow "a long series of connected propositions."[93] That is where religion is a useful instrument. The role of Scripture is to teach a few basic concepts to common people. However, true knowledge of God is neither taught nor commanded in the Bible.

[89] TPT. 14 (CW 517f.).
[90] L. 21 (CW 827).
[91] TPT. Pref. (CW 392).
[92] TPT. 5 (CW 441).
[93] Those who have studied the *Ethics* know exactly what he means!

> God has asked no other knowledge from men but knowledge of his divine justice and charity, this knowledge being necessary not for philosophical understanding, but for obedience to the moral law.[94]

The true task of religion is to effectuate morality.

Nevertheless, religious traditions are a severe disappointment to Spinoza. They not only fail to teach simple concepts and basic morality to common people; they also have been corrupted. They have become immoral institutions that impose their own inventions on others as divine doctrine and that suppress those who demand the freedom to philosophize.

> God's religion degenerated into base avarice and ambition. The very temple became a theatre [in which] the light of reason is not only despised but is condemned by many as a source of impiety, merely human suppositions are regarded as divine doctrine and credulity is looked upon as faith; and…other ills too numerous to recount here.[95]

Religion no longer teaches the pure and simple doctrines of Scripture but has become an instrument of domination. Hence, Spinoza is unwilling to accept the authority of religious traditions unquestioningly. He wishes to test Scripture with his own critical reason "conscientiously and freely, and to admit nothing as its teaching which I did not most clearly derive from it."[96]

All this must have formed a solid basis for the outrage his philosophy provokes in the religious leaders and theologians of his time. Maybe even more than the rejection of an anthropomorphic, transcendent God, it is this insubordination that stigmatizes him as an atheist and precipitates his expulsion from the Portuguese-Jewish community. Nevertheless, it strikes a modern reader as an extremely harsh measure for a young man who also writes that the ultimate goal of both religion and philosophy is human blessedness [*beatitudo*] and that "all our activities and likewise our thoughts must be directed to this end."[97] However, since "men's ways of thinking vary considerably and different beliefs are better suited to different men," society should be organized in such a manner that as many as possible may attain it

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[94] TPT. 13 (CW 514).
[95] TPT. Pref. (CW 390f.).
[96] Ibid.
[97] TEI. 16 (CW 6).

as easily and surely as possible.[98] The road to beatitude for the rational person is through philosophy and for the common person through a purified form of religion without superstitions. Ultimately, it does not matter where a person gets her wisdom; what matters are the results.

> We cannot know anyone except by his works. He who abounds in these fruits – charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control…he, whether he be taught by reason alone or by Scripture alone, is in truth taught by God, and is altogether blessed.[99]

It turns out that Spinoza's philosophy is not cold rationality; it is what (also) leads to beatitude, and that is not the same as knowledge. We will see the same 'religious drive' in the philosophy of Hölderlin in Chapter 4. Both religion and philosophy have the same goal: to be "taught by God" and become "blessed." Nonetheless, Spinoza is condemned for his alleged atheism, an accusation that is to stick for at least another century before it changes seemingly abruptly. In order to understand this turn of events, a closer look at the fate of Spinozism in the century following the death of its unfortunate originator is needed.

2.3. The Early Reception of Spinoza's Philosophy

A few decades after Spinoza's death the anonymous author of *Fürstellung Vier Neuer Welt-Weisen* (1702) summarizes his philosophy viciously and coarsely as follows, "These are the abominable doctrines and hideous errors which this shallow Jewish philosopher has (if I may say so) shit into the world." The tone is set! Spinoza is one of those "fools who justly deserve to be put in the madhouse" (Dippel, 1709); "a threat to Christianity" (Leibniz, 1670); the author of "pestilent" books (Morhof, 1688); "a mocker of religion"; and "an enemy of the human race" (one of the characters in Herder's *Gott*, 1787); still spoken of as a "dead dog" (according to Lessing) in the 1780s.[100] Most of his critics never reach a more than superficial knowledge of Spinoza's philosophy. David Bell writes,

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[98] TPT. Pref. (CW 391).
[99] TPT. 5 (CW 444).
[100] In: Bell 1984, 1–11.

> The attitude to Spinoza that was prevalent in Germany prior to the 1780s was determined by the flood of refutations and denunciations, and was certainly not the product of a widespread knowledge of his work.[101]

A German translation of the *Ethics* only becomes available in 1744, and the *Theological-Political Treatise* does not appear until 1787. No matter how misconceived, the cumulative effect of the refutations is "that Spinoza's system [is] presented as paradoxical, nonsensical, pernicious, and blasphemous."[102]

The ignorance of many critics notwithstanding, several aspects can be summarized in Spinoza's philosophy that might have struck his contemporaries as outrageous and dangerous.

1. Probably the most disturbing element is his doctrine of necessity. Human freedom as an absolute free will is non-existent and free decision is limited at best, according to Spinoza. All that is, is the result of God's necessary nature which is the highest possible form of freedom since it depends on absolutely nothing external. The denial of absolute freedom was taken to be "equivalent to a doctrine of 'blind necessity' or fatalism which rendered vice and virtue, as well as human effort, meaningless."[103] Hence lack of freedom is considered a threat to morality and society.
2. Spinoza's distinction between the intellectual elite and the masses in matters of moral autonomy and the rationality of religion is not in keeping with the democratic spirit that is awakening in the 18th century.
3. Most theology departs from the point of view that Scripture is true and divine, whereas Spinoza claims that it should be the other way around: truth and divinity should spring from understanding and testing Scripture. His conclusion that he has found nothing in the Bible that contradicts reason does little to appease his opponents. He is not only convinced that it offers very little in terms of knowledge of God, but he also maintains that it cannot offer anything that goes beyond reason.
4. Spinoza's God cannot be thought as personal, as a being equipped with consciousness and freedom.

[101] Bell 1984, 1.
[102] Ibid., 5.
[103] Ibid., 4.

5. Spinozism does not satisfy the desire of classical theism to keep a perfect God and a corrupt world strictly separate. Referring to one of Spinoza's major critics, Pierre Bayle, Bell writes, "The attribution of extension to God does violence to the principle of divine immutability, for extension or matter is the theatre of change and corruption."[104] Even though Spinoza explicitly denies that he identifies God with the natural world, he is accused of confusing the two. These accusations seem to be based largely on hearsay. Johann Georg Wachter concedes in 1706, that readers of Spinoza confuse God and nature; "but from which of Spinoza's works do we have it that he is himself the originator and teacher of this confusion?"[105]
6. Spinoza is accused of atheism by many of his contemporaries and of pantheism by ours. Some might argue that it is indeed only a very fine line separating the two. "The charge that pantheism is atheistic is as old as pantheism itself," Levine asserts.[106] When theistic predicates are excluded, the only judgments that are left are those about nature. Jonathan Bennett writes,

   > Spinoza was a pantheist, in that he identified God with the whole of reality. Thus he agreed with the atheist that reality cannot be divided into a portion which is God and one which is not. Although pantheism and atheism may seem to be poles apart, with one saying that everything is God and the other that nothing is, in the absence of an effective contrast between God and not-God we should not be quickly confident that there is any substantive disagreement at all.[107]

   Bennett's argument is far too simplistic, of course. The distinction God-not God is not in a supernatural versus a worldly realm; it is rather the difference between the ideal and the (imperfect) reality of the world.[108]

From a classical theistic point of view, the bitter antagonism that Spinoza evokes among theologians during his lifetime and in the century following his death is perhaps not really surprising. All the more intriguing is the question, What changes to make him interesting to a later generation of philosophers? How does a philosopher who

[104] Bell 1984, 5.
[105] In: Bell 1984, 16.
[106] Levine 1994, 3.
[107] Bennett 1984, 32.
[108] See Chapter 7.

denounces free will ever become appealing to a generation of thinkers whose ethics is dominated by Kantian freedom and whose only connection with God is this freedom? How can someone who asserts that "the proper order of philosophical enquiry" has to begin with "divine nature" ever catch the attention of thinkers whose perspective has taken a 180–degree turn and see human I-hood as the starting-point of all philosophy?[109] Let me name a few possibilities.

It could be his "hunger for the infinite," the fact that he seeks "something whose discovery and acquisition would afford [him] a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity," that makes him irresistible to German idealists.[110] Moreover, the drive to find a system of thought in which contradictions are reconciled in a peaceful unity must have been enormous in the turbulent times of the French Revolution of which German idealism has been called the theoretical equivalent. Philosophy has become a struggle to think unity in the midst of mental and social chaos. Furthermore, the end of the 18th century is a time in which history seems to reach a point of no return. In the spirit of liberty, fraternity, and equality, every human individual becomes significant. As the time of the monarchs *versus* the anonymous masses is disappearing in the West, also God can no longer 'afford to' reign from high above. Spinoza's renunciation of all religious authority may have appealed in an age where autonomy is the password. Schmidt-Biggeman's remark that Spinoza's conception of participation in the one divine Substance enabling knowledge "through consubstantiality" coincides with this tendency. Since all participate in the Divine as its modes and all can have knowledge of the divine truth through the divine attribute of *cogitatio*, the private, individual experience of truth during moments of enlightenment or through the enhancement of the intellect can be universalized without necessary mediation of religious laws and an institution like the Church.[111] Finally, the renewed interest in ancient Greek literature and philosophy with its divinization of natural phenomena

[109] E. II, 10 Sch. = S 70.

[110] Copleston 1946, 43; TEI. 1 = S 233.

[111] See Schmidt-Biggemann 1989, 155–161. Many of the great thinkers of German idealism have a pietistic background that propagates private "mystical" experiences, hence direct and momentary insights into the divine mystery. Schmidt-Biggemann also adds that Christology loses its function as a consequence. As will be shown in Chapter 4 this need not be true. For Hölderlin, among others, Christ remains a central figure.

reawakens an appreciation of the religious quality to nature. *Deus sive Natura*: it sounds like an echo from revered Antiquity.

The time spirit of the second half of the 18th century is ready for a new image of God and man.[112] Spinoza's system opens possibilities for a new conception that bridges the divide and brings God and world closer together. The arena in which this 'German Revolution' is fought is called the pantheism controversy.

2.4. Pantheism Controversy

Towards the end of the 18th century, a heated correspondence takes place between Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786). The topic of this dispute is Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781). Shortly before his death, the latter has allegedly admitted to Jacobi in a personal conversation to no longer believe in a personal God, and he has declared himself a Spinozist. He is reported to have said,

> The orthodox concepts of the divinity are no longer for me; I cannot stand them. *Hen kai Pan*! I know naught else…; and I must admit, I like it very much." Upon Jacobi's response that he would then be in agreement with Spinoza, he answers, "If I am to call myself by anybody's name, then I know none better.[113]

This is the spark that ignites the so-called pantheism controversy [*Pantheismusstreit*] and the turning point in the reception of Spinoza's philosophy. A respected philosopher has admitted at least a measure of affinity with the theory of one who has been largely dismissed as a blasphemous fool.

> In the history of the reception of Spinoza this is perhaps its prime significance: it meant that Spinoza could no longer be dismissed with rhetoric and hyperbole, but had to be reckoned with as a serious philosopher.[114]

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[112] Woman is yet to wait another century or two to be granted similar rights. In large parts of the world and in many religions she is still waiting for her rightful share.

[113] Jacobi 1988a, 85. All translations of the relevant publications are from Gerard Vallée. For the German text see Jacobi 2000.

[114] Bell 1984, 71.

The central issue of these conversations is the concept of God and the question of the relationship between God and the world. According to Gerard Vallée,

> When Lessing said to Jacobi: 'The orthodox concepts of the divinity are no longer for me,'...he seems to dismiss the questionable representation of a God separated from the world...He seems to reject all anthropomorphic thought that not only ascribes to God 'our wretched way' of thinking, but also throws an unbridgeable gulf between us and a God 'out there.'[115]

To Jacobi this makes Lessing an atheist because Spinoza does not acknowledge the absolute transcendence of God. Jacobi is convinced that "even the best of minds will concoct absurdities when it attempts to explain everything." One must simply "know the line of demarcation where the inexplicable begins," otherwise "we shut the eyes of the soul, with which it contemplates God and itself."[116] Nevertheless, Lessing asserts with Spinoza that such a line cannot be drawn. He rejects a Christian theism that places God outside the world and opposes faith to reason.

Jacobi is convinced that this is a pantheistic misconception and the "natural" consequence of human reason left to its own devices. He writes, "I, for my part, asserted that there can be no natural philosophy of the supranatural and yet the two (the natural and the supranatural) are obviously givens."[117] The conviction that everything is explainable constitutes a rationalism that can only lead to determinism and atheism, in Jacobi's opinion. Speculative reasoning can never prove the existence of a transcendent and personal God. It can only conceive of an immanent infinite (*Hen kai Pan*) and identify God with

> an inherent cause of the world...devoid of both reason [*Verstand*] and will" is to eliminate God as a distinct personal being. All metaphysical systems that rely upon reason alone are necessarily atheistic. Therefore, Jacobi declares that he believes "in an *intelligent* personal first cause of the world.[118]

To Jacobi, Spinoza is a prime example of the errors that ensue from a rationalist epistemology. He is appalled by the pretensions to rational

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[115] Vallée 1988, 13.
[116] Jacobi 1988a, 95; 96.
[117] Ibid., 97.
[118] Ibid., 88; 87.

knowledge about the Divine. "The prime element of all human knowledge and action is faith." It takes what he calls a "*salto mortale*," a leap from speculative knowledge into faith, from the head to the heart.[119] As the rationalist Mendelssohn puts it,

> [Jacobi] tries to persuade us that, once someone has reached the precipitous peaks of metaphysics, there is no recourse but to turn one's back on all philosophy and plunge head first into the depths of faith.[120]

According to Jacobi, "we are all of us born within faith, and in faith we perforce continue, just as we are all born within society and in society we must continue." We possess

> an immediate certainty which not only needs no proof but even totally excludes all proofs...Conviction through proofs is second-hand certainty and rests on comparison; it can never be altogether certain and total. Now every taking-to-be-true [*Fürwahrhalten*], which does not have its origins in rational grounds, is faith, then conviction based on rational grounds must itself come from faith and from faith alone must draw its strength.[121]

All reasoning is ultimately grounded in faith. Everything else is second-hand and second-rate, is Jacobi's passionate conviction.

In contrast, Mendelssohn is a firm believer in rational arguments and rejects Jacobi's plunge into faith. He recognizes no conviction save that grounded in reason. "The existence and authority of the Supreme Law-giver must be recognized by reason, and there is no room here for revelation or faith."[122] Mendelssohn has become acquainted with Spinoza's philosophy at a considerably younger age (in the 1750s). In his *Philosophische Gespräche* [*Philosophical Dialogues*], he achieves an objective tone in his approach of Spinoza in contrast to all the emotional refutations that have been published before. He insists on Spinoza's errors, but he does not attack him. He even praises him to a certain degree, and he believes that Spinoza need not be dangerous to morality. After this early occupation with Spinoza, however, he has given him little subsequent thought. Hence, at the time of his

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119 Ibid., 123; 88.

120 Mendelssohn 1988b, 140.

121 Jacobi 1988a, 120. This "immediate certainty" will be at the basis of a term that is to become very important in German idealism: intellectual intuition. It will then serve as an immediate access to the Divine. See Chapter 5.

122 Mendelssohn 1988b, 139.

dispute with Jacobi he is forced to draw on his interpretation of 1755. His understanding of Spinoza has become rigid, and he is "well aware that the proofs and the species of reasoning that satisfied him [are] no longer fashionable, or acceptable, but he [clings] with tenacity" to his enlightened belief in speculative reason.[123]

In addition to defending his own familiar theories that have been satisfactory for most of his professional life, Mendelssohn has another reason for his dispute with Jacobi. He attempts to rescue Lessing, who has been an intimate friend for more than thirty years, from the implied accusation of atheism.[124] To this end, he makes a distinction between two kinds of pantheism: a full-fledged pantheism versus a "purified" [*geläutert*] or "refined" [*verfeint*] form. The first type (Spinoza's) does not make any difference between the finite and the Infinite. Spinoza confuses intensive and extensive infinite: his God is constituted by an infinite number of finite entities." Hence, its unavoidable consequence is atheism. The second kind "postulates a world that does not exist outside God and [in which] the world is the product of God's thought ... 'Conceiving, willing, and creating are one with God.'"[125] This type he attributes to Lessing. This refined pantheism is "totally compatible with the truths of religion and morality."[126]

Vallée maintains that this is really panentheism, which

> postulates a dipolar nature of the divinity according to which God, through his relative aspect, includes the world and, through his absolute aspect, is distinct from the world. In its perfect form it consists of five factors found simultaneously: God is eternal, he is capable of change, he is self-aware, he knows the world, he includes the world [not in his essence but in his actuality].[127]

However, Mendelssohn would probably have rejected this label of panentheism. He says, "We live, move, and are as effects of God but not in him," which in turn sounds a whole lot more Spinozistic than he would probably care to admit.[128] In his defense of Lessing,

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[123] See Bell 1984, 76.

[124] As he writes accusingly to Jacobi, "A friend entrusts a confession to his ear, and he betrays it to the public; a friend, as his life is drawing to a close, makes him the confidant of his frailty, and this he uses to stain the man's memory for all posterity" (Mendelssohn 1988b, 133).

[125] Bell 1984, 29.

[126] Mendelssohn 1988a, 73.

[127] Vallée 1988, 47. Note the differences with Spinoza's God.

[128] Mendelssohn 1988a, 36.

> Mendelssohn was trying to have things both ways: fundamentally Lessing was [pictured as] a defender of rational religion, a theist, but if he did have an inclination towards Spinozism, it was of the harmless, purified variety.[129]

From what starts out as a private correspondence between two scholars four publications result.[130] As the dispute advances, the tone of the publications becomes less scholarly and more truculent. The authors accuse each other of hypocrisy, vanity, vindictiveness, indiscretion, and betrayal. Both men are convinced to be the one who has understood Lessing best. And both are interested in using his name for their own cause: Mendelssohn's rationalism and Jacobi's defense of faith and his desire "to overturn the epistemological principles of rationalism itself." Neither gentleman seems to have gained the desired personal victory. Jacobi on the one hand feels misunderstood and ridiculed by his colleagues while on a fully respectable mission to defend Christian faith. Mendelssohn becomes even more thoroughly confused and never manages to understand what Jacobi's exact position is with respect to Spinoza. His parting words about Jacobi are,

> I can make as little sense of his practical principles as I can of his theoretical ones. Circumstances being what they are, little can be accomplished by discussion, I believe, and the best course to follow is to part company. Let him return to the faith of his fathers, submit restive reason to the triumphant mighty dicta.[131]

By then the dispute between Mendelssohn and Jacobi has created a storm involving all the major intellectual figures in Germany. Even when Spinoza's name becomes the immediate center of the heated

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[129] Bell 1984, 76.

[130] 1. Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes* [*Morning Hours or Lectures on the Existence of God*] in 1785 intended as a *laudatio*, but it turned into an apology of his friend Lessing; 2. Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza, in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* [*Letters to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn on the Doctrine of Spinoza*] also published in 1785, in which Jacobi reveals Lessing's "Spinozism." It is meant to be a refutation of what he fears will be a characterization of Lessing in favor of Mendelssohn's rational theism; 3. Mendelssohn's reaction to Jacobi in *An die Freunde Lessings. Ein Anhang zu Herrn Jacobi's Briefwechsel über die Lehre des Spinoza* [*To the Friends of Lessing. Appendix to Mr. Jacobi's Correspondence on the Doctrine of Spinoza*] in 1786; 4. Jacobi's *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen in dessen Schreiben an die Freunde Lessings* [*Against Mendelssohn's Accusations in his Writing to the Friends of Lessing*] also from 1786.

[131] Vallée 1988, 148.

debate, the controversy itself is a reflection of the philosophical tensions of the late 18th century, not an investigative analysis of Spinoza's thought. The ensuing debate revolves around two central issues:

1. Whether a Spinozistic philosophy necessarily leads to atheism, or if a different type of pantheistic thinking can be envisioned.
2. How Spinozism can be combined with freedom in the Kantian sense since Spinoza's determinism is unacceptable to these modern thinkers.

Ironically, it is this *Über die Lehre des Spinoza, in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* of Jacobi, a fierce opponent of Spinozism, that re-introduces Spinoza in 1785. Contrary to his intentions, it gives an interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy that arouses the interest of his contemporaries. Since Jacobi supports his arguments by quoting from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, also Kant unwillingly becomes involved in the debate. Kant, of course, agrees with Jacobi on the inadequacy of rational knowledge where God is concerned and rejects Mendelssohn's reliance on rational common sense. Nevertheless, he emphatically disagrees with Jacobi's advocating faith and revelation as "a supposed secret sense for perceiving the truth."[132] Owing to Jacobi's booklet, Spinozism is introduced as an acceptable metaphysical position provided that Kantian thoughts on freedom can be integrated. About a century after his death Spinoza is revived by a man determined to achieve the exact opposite: the disqualification of all rational metaphysics! From an "abominable heresy" Spinozism becomes a defendable philosophical position. The hostility towards Spinoza with accusations of atheism, fatalism, and pantheism give way to an attitude of adoration towards the end of the eighteenth century. And Spinoza undergoes a metamorphosis from "dead dog" to "felled oak tree" (Schiller), one who "still strengthens the heart" (Zweig) and even "the brother of Jesus" (Hauser), a "God-intoxicated man" (Novalis), and a "saint" (Ausländer) whose ascetic lifestyle is praised.[133]

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[132] See Kant's *Was heist: Sich im Denken orientieren?* [*What Does it Mean: To Orientate Oneself in Thinking?*] of 1786.

[133] In: Müller 2006, 148–158.

2.5. Merging the Absolute with the God of the Bible

Once Spinoza's philosophy is accepted as a serious philosophical position, attempts are made by the thinkers of the late 18th through the early 19th century to merge the Absolute, the monistic *Hen kai Pan* as the Greek version of *Deus sive Natura*, with the God of the Bible. One of the catalysts is the German philosopher Carl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1825), a Jesuit priest converted to freemasonry and an enthusiastic student of Kant. He writes a booklet called *Die Hebräischen Mysterien oder die älteste religiöse Freymaurerey* [*The Hebraic Mysteries or the Oldest Religious Freemasonry*].[134]

In it, he argues that Moses, raised as an Egyptian prince, has been fully initiated in the Egyptian mysteries of which the two foundations are the unity of God and the rejection of polytheism. The religion of the common Egyptian, however, is polytheism. In this society, the Hebrews form the lowest class; they are slaves. The hatred between the Hebrews and the Egyptians is undisputed. Nevertheless, after four hundred years of being forced to live under Egyptian law, it could hardly be prevented that the Hebrews are influenced by Egyptian morals, customs, and religion. They have become polytheists like most Egyptians. Reinhold finds support for this thesis in the book Joshua where it says, "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD."[135] Moses has the difficult task to make these uneducated slaves, who worship a multitude of gods and continue to make their idols even in the desert, accept the idea of one God. However, the true nature of this God he could not reveal to his people for two reasons. First, this all-unitary [*All-Eine*] God of the Egyptian mysteries is beyond the understanding of regular people. It takes a long period of study, preparation, and gradual initiation into His secrets in order to be able to meet this God face-to-face [*epopteuein*]. Only a few are chosen. Secondly, this God, as the all-encompassing One, is unfit as the foundation of a society.

Hence, Reinhold maintains that the God of the Old Testament is an interpretation of the God of the Egyptian mystery religion that takes the limited intellectual and religious capabilities of his simple followers

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[134] See Reinhold 2001.
[135] Joshua 24,14; See Reinhold 2001, 30–37.

into account. The way Moses introduces his God to them is through the idea of a tutelary god [*Schutzgott*], a national protective deity. He names him JHWH.[136] This name, meaning I am who is or I am who I am, is reminiscent of the J-ha-ho or Jao, the highest deity of the mystery religion of Isis. And, according to Reinhold, this is the only time in the Bible that Moses' real God surfaces, namely in Ex. 3, 14 where he introduces himself with the following words, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Reinhold, who departs from the Septuagint, reads this as: I am the essential being; I am all that is.[137] This he interprets as *Hen kai Pan*. Reinhold does not take this "I am all that is" for a real name but for true namelessness. The nameless God of the Hebrews is the God of the Egyptian mysteries. This God can have no name since he is the only one, all that is. A name is only necessary to single out one individual in a multitude; and naming gods only makes sense in a polytheistic setting. If God is the only one, there is no need to distinguish him by naming him.[138]

Thus the Jewish tetragram, the foundation of the new mosaic religion, is equated to the secret object of the Egyptian mystery religion of whom it is said: 1. "He is one, of himself alone. And to this One all things owe their existence," in a verse from a hymn by Clemens of Alexandria;[139] and 2. "I am all that is, was, and will be. No mortal has lifted my veil," in an inscription on a statue representing the veiled goddess Isis in the temple of Sais in Egypt. It was passed down by Plutarch around the turn of the first century. The God in All and the God of (mono-)theism are conceived as one and the same by Reinhold. Assmann asserts that Reinhold is eager to demonstrate that biblical revelation leads to the Egyptian quote, since it would break down the walls between Christians, Jews, Muslims, and pagans and lay the foundation for the reconciliation of the religions.[140] This inscription of Sais comes to play an important role in the metaphysics of German idealism. The poet Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) is thrilled by Reinhold's thesis and publishes an essay called *Die Sendung*

[136] Reinhold calls him Jehovah.
[137] Ἐγώ ειμι ὁ ὤν.
[138] This thought also occurs in a passage from the *Corpus Hermeticum*: God is one, but the one does not need a name. He is the nameless Being.
[139] Reinhold 2001, 41.
[140] See Assmann 1998, 183f.

Moses [*The Mission of Moses*] in the *Thalia* and also uses the inscription in a ballad.[141] Thanks to Schiller's enthusiasm, Reinhold's thesis is spread outside the world of freemasonry.

As we have seen in the preceding, Reinhold's view does not come unexpectedly. He and his contemporaries have rediscovered the philosophy of Spinoza and recognize echoes of the *Hen kai Pan* of both ancient Greek and Egyptian philosophy.[142] Reinhold has studied William Warburton who in turn rests his theory on Ralph Cudworth, the 17th century Platonist, who has reconstructed the Egyptian mystery doctrine as pantheism in his *The True intellectual System of the Universe* of 1678. When Warburton asserts,

> The doctrines delivered in the Greater Mysteries concern the universe. Here all instruction ends. Things are seen as they are; and Nature, and the workings of Nature are to be seen and comprehended,[143]

Reinhold must have seen an unmistakable link with Spinoza. God and world can no longer be thought as divided by an immense void; there cannot be two realities but only one. The problem with Moses' primitive people is, according to Reinhold, that reason is still undeveloped. Moses attempts to introduce an entire people of uneducated slaves to the divine mysteries that are normally only revealed to a chosen few after a long period of preparation. In order to translate the true divine mystery to a level of truth that his people can grasp, an important transformation takes place: what becomes knowledge to the initiates has to remain blind faith for the Hebrews. It takes violent force and miracles to force this blind faith upon them. The German idealists feel that the time is ready for the next step in history. They see it as their task to carry this faith into the dimension of reason once again. The time has come that God can be known! Spinoza and Kant are to bring the *Deus* who is also *Natura* within reach of the transcendental subject.

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[141] See Schiller 2001. For the relevant verse in Schiller's ballad *Über das Erhabene* of 1793, see Assmann 2001, 188.

[142] Reinhold has even worked on a dissertation on Spinoza. It is never finished because in 1787 he accepts a professorship in Jena.

[143] In: Assmann 2001, 179.

2.6. The I and the Absolute

German idealism can be viewed as the various attempts to combine the philosophies of Kant and Spinoza. On the one hand, they wish to overcome Kantian dualism while retaining major roles for the subject and its modern sense of freedom, and to bring the ground of all reality within reach of the I. On the other hand, the enthusiastic followers of Kant find two aspects lacking in Spinozism that they think vital for any philosophy: the Kantian views on freedom as an imperative experience and the role of the subject. Spinoza mistakenly posited the Absolute as an object. It is Fichte, an overwhelming personality and defender of his (absolute) I, who wants to make sure that the subject finally gets the philosophical status it deserves. In his opinion the error of pre-Kantian metaphysical systems in general is the fact that they present the I, the subject, as determined by the object, hence as passive dependence. Fichte is convinced that the exact opposite is true: it is the activity of the subject that determines the world of objects, nature. From this, he draws the conclusion that the Absolute must be subjective. It is through our own subjectivity that we are in touch with it. In Fichte's view, we become aware of the Absolute, the Unconditioned, in the 'I am.' Within our subjectivity is an infinite aspect that Kant largely ignores. In fact, he silently presupposes the 'I' as absolute ground even though he is not aware of it. Fichte's objective is to expand the Kantian critical system with an active role for the human subject. He calls his system critical idealism. It is idealistic in the sense of taking the subjective as the Absolute rather than the objective. It is critical in the sense that it departs from the assumption that the Absolute must be immanent to humans: it is in the I.

Frederick Beiser distinguishes between two fundamental forms of idealism that prevail towards the end of the 18th century: the subjective idealism of Kant and Fichte, "according to which the transcendental subject is the source of the form but not the matter of experience," and the absolute idealism of Hegel and Schelling "according to which the forms of experience are self-subsistent and transcend both subject and object."[144] Beiser describes absolute idealism as the result of four steps beyond Fichte's subjective idealism:

[144] Beiser 2002, 11.

1. Subject-object identity is not something of self-consciousness, as Fichte maintains, but it exists only in the one universal Substance, the Absolute.
2. This Absolute does not have a purely regulative status, it is not just an ethical ideal; it has a constitutive role, it is an existing reality.
3. This Absolute is knowable.
4. Nature is not a projection of consciousness but an independent reality with inherent rationality.[145]

Absolute idealism involves a much greater degree of realism than subjective idealism. The Absolute is all that is, somehow including the whole of nature. It does not have a merely regulative status; it really is. Therefore, it cannot be reduced to the realm of subjectivity. Subjectivity may be considered the highest manifestation of the Absolute, but it is not the only one. Nature, or the domain of objectivity, is an equally real aspect of the Absolute. Besides, subjectivity and objectivity are only valid distinctions within the realm of experience and consciousness. The very possibility of (self-)consciousness requires a ground that transcends it. The Absolute as this ground and as the condition of the possibility of all conscious experience cannot be caught in such terms. Absolute idealism is 'metaphysical' in the very sense that Kant has rejected: it is speculative and provides theories about the Absolute or the Unconditioned [*das Unbedingte*], which are beyond the Kantian realm of the theoretical. For Kant, the fundamental problem with the metaphysics of idealism "is not that it is false but that it is speculative, going beyond the limits of our cognitive powers."[146] Nevertheless, for a new generation it forms the only way out of the dead-end of dualism, the only chance to ever think what forms the core of everyday experience: that we really interact with the real things (in themselves) of the world.

2.7. From Here Onwards

In the philosophical context as pictured in this chapter, three young men start their studies and meet at the *Tübinger Stift*, the prestigious Lutheran seminary: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854);

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[145] See ibid., 375.
[146] Beiser 2002, 35.

Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). The first two will form the subject of the subsequent chapters. Schelling is often called the last metaphysician. White describes his work as the last "classical attempt to understand all that exists in terms of the transcendent Absolute in which it is grounded."[147] His persistent attempts and ultimate failure to solve the philosophical problems of his time form an excellent illustration of a line of thinking that has inspired generations of philosophers, sometimes only as proof of the philosophical unfeasibility of the idealistic project. In the course of the 19th century, metaphysics becomes "the bogeyman of positivists, pragmatists, neo-Kantians, and postmodernists alike," as Beiser puts it.[148] It is declared dead, and Schelling plays a major role in digging its grave. As a result of the efficacy of his attack on Hegel and his own inability to provide a more viable system, he inadvertently contributes to the "radical rejection of the tradition stretching from Plato to Hegel."[149]

It has been said about Schelling that he returns to his Lutheran roots later in life. The *Freiheitschift* (1809) might be the first step away from philosophy as the science that the young Schelling wants it to be and back towards the career that the father has in mind when he enrolls his son in the Tübinger *Stift*, the Lutheran seminary.[150] Schelling's shift of attention towards theology that first stirs in 1809 and becomes his definite line from the 1820's onwards, can also be, and has been, viewed as proof of his inability to outdo Hegel. Indeed, he never achieves a higher synthesis than Hegel. When Schelling obtains Hegel's chair in Berlin a few years after the latter's death, he sets out to present his alternative positive philosophy and sentences Hegel's (and his own) prior negative philosophy to the role of mere preliminary. It has been argued that the later Schelling's positive philosophy shows his conviction that it is impossible for a system of reason to ground itself. Whether Schelling's rejection of positive philosophy is wisdom or intellectual inability is not important in this investigation. I do not think that Schelling ever solves the problem of the relationship between the human being and

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[147] White 1983a, 2.

[148] Beiser 2002, 466.

[149] White 1983a, 2.

[150] *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* [*Philosophical Investigations Concerning the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Subjects*]. For the reference, see the next chapter.

God philosophically. I want to use his different attempts to illustrate the philosophical difficulties associated with such a project. I believe that in the time called German idealism reason is stretched as far as it will go without yielding the results that are hoped for.

So why bother with a philosophy that has dug its own grave? Beiser gives the following justification for his fascination with German idealism.

> The German idealists not only foresaw but lived through and responded to the collapse of foundationalism; their subtle and sophisticated response to this crisis makes them of abiding relevance today.[151]

This might be a good reason to study a philosophical system whose content is apparently passé. Another incentive is the theological disqualification of Schelling and his fellow *Stiftler*. They have been categorized and rejected as pantheists and are therefore supposed to be irrelevant for any theology that is to be Christian. Fuhrmans' assertion that what has been called pantheistic tendencies in German idealism are better characterized, in case of Schelling at least, as a theistically structured theology with typical modern characteristics has found minimal reception in Christian theology. Nevertheless, already more than half a century ago he believes that Schelling's tendency to see the Absolute as giving worth to the worldly instead of treating it as a mere shadow of the Divine is of considerable value for any modern Christian theology.[152] That might be the major impulse to study his various systems two centuries later.

Another relevant question is, Why study Schelling and not the German idealist par excellence: Hegel? Indeed, an occasional defense of Schelling's work in its own right notwithstanding, the history of philosophy has had the "tendency to treat Schelling as a foot stool" instead of taking him as a figure in his own right, Beiser maintains. This he finds undeserved. Even when Hegel portrays him as such, it is a caricature of Schelling's contribution to the development of German idealism. It is Schelling who fathers the absolute idealism that Hegel defends and systematizes, according to Beiser.[153] In addition, Emil Fackenheim asserts that even though Schelling is "indisputably the originator" of both absolute idealism and existentialism, "it has

[151] Beiser 2002, 9.
[152] See Fuhrmans 1954, 13–18.
[153] Beiser 2002, 465.

come to pass that the credit for absolute idealism has gone to Hegel, and that for existentialism to Kierkegaard. Schelling is widely forgotten."[154] Two arguments for studying the German idealist Schelling instead of Hegel. What makes (the early) Schelling most interesting, however, is the speed or perhaps even the impulsiveness of his writing. Before the ink has dried on one publication, another set of thoughts is underway. His philosophical musings are published before Schelling has a chance to really fathom them himself. He never admits to mistakes or gaps in his reasoning; he either claims to be misunderstood by his critics and accuses his opponents of lack of intelligence and their criticism unworthy of an answer, or he promises another book that will put all of its predecessors in the right perspective. It makes for a vivid illustration of the philosophical obstacles on the road form the I to the Absolute.

Nonetheless, once again Schelling will serve as a "foot stool" to a degree. The next chapter will illustrate the struggles of a representative of a generation of brilliant and ultimately religious thinkers. It will reveal the hubris of human reason taken to the utmost and the persistency of trying ever new avenues to reach the ultimate goal of the metaphysician: thinking the Great Beyond. The focus will be on the first two decades of Schelling's philosophical career where he is fighting the dawning realization of his ultimate inability to discursively know the Divine. Hence, the following chapter does not claim to do justice to Schelling's entire philosophical career, nor to his later turn towards theology. It focuses on the period between 1795 and 1810, with an occasional excursus into *Die Weltalter* of 1813.[155] It merely wants to give an account of the struggle of discursive reason with and its ultimate capitulation before the Divine. It serves to uncover the complex of philosophical problems that was 'in the air' at the turn of Schelling's century. Schelling is a perfect example of the persistency of the brilliant philosopher who believes that his intellect should be capable of thinking anything, if only he sets his mind to it. What makes Schelling of interest is the type of questions he dares to raise; the persistency of his attempts to reveal why there is something rather than

[154] Fackenheim 1996, 51.

[155] *The Ages of the World*. Several versions of this work have been conceived from 1811 onward. Schelling remains preoccupied with it throughout the rest of his life. He never considers it good enough to be published, and it isn't until after his death by his son Karl.

nothing; his profound desire to know the ground of human individual existence as we experience it. None of these questions has ceased to fascinate in the twenty-first century.

Schelling's metaphysics is indeed interesting in itself, but it will acquire more depth when offset against the thinking of his fellow *Stiftler* Hölderlin in Chapter 4. We will then see how within the same philosophical context entirely different choices are possible. The major difference is in Hölderlin's claim that the absolute ground of (self-) consciousness is not knowable. Where Schelling sticks to philosophy in the period of time that forms the focus of this research, Hölderlin turns away from the ratio towards to poetry as another means to explore the metaphysical domain.

CHAPTER THREE

SCHELLING: THE I AND ITS GROUND

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling has been called an absolute idealist.[1] According to Frederick Beiser,

> Absolute idealism is the doctrine that everything is a part of the single universal organism, or that everything conforms to, or is an appearance of, its purpose, design, or idea.[2]

The idealistic conception of the Absolute can be understood as the synthesis of three theses: 1. monism, "the universe consists in not a

[1] Schelling is born in Leonberg, a small town near Stuttgart, on January 27 in 1775. He is the son of a Lutheran parson who is also a well-known orientalist and becomes professor at the higher seminary of Bebenhausen (near Tübingen) when Schelling is two years old. Young Friedrich receives a traditional, pietistically oriented education. Being a brilliant student, he is admitted to the Tübinger *Stift* at the age of fifteen where also Hegel and Hölderlin, his senior by five years, are enrolled. The *Stift* knows a strict regime with prescribed clothing (a monk-like uniform), obligatory religious services, set visiting hours, and curfew. Although the authorities try to isolate the young students, the smoldering dissatisfaction is augmented by the spirit of freedom of the French Revolution that blows over into Germany. Schelling is one of its most outspoken proponents. Since the duke Karl Eugen (1737–1793) from whom the *Stiftler* receive stipends does not permit any form of insubordination, this nearly causes his expulsion in 1793. Another source of turbulence in the *Stift* is Kant's philosophy of freedom. The attempts of seminary professors to domesticate it by making the postulates of practical reason into theological dogmas do not succeed (see Henrich 1997b, 31–54). After graduation in 1795 the twenty-year old takes a position as tutor (as do Hegel and Hölderlin, and many other graduates from the *Stift* who are unwilling to become Lutheran ministers). He is in charge of the education of the sons of the rich Leipziger family Riedesel, his junior by only a few years. He uses his stay in Leipzig to study law and the natural sciences and conceive the foundation of his philosophy of nature. In 1798 this yields him a professorship at the University of Jena thanks to the influence of Goethe. Here he comes in close contact with Early Romantic circles (the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Tieck a.o.) and meets his future wife Caroline, then married to the oldest Schlegel, August Wilhelm. Due to his confidence in his own ability to achieve a grand philosophical system that will surpass Kant, Spinoza, and all of the great names of philosophy, Schelling is not easy to get along with. He likes to outdo his colleagues. He cannot handle criticism very well, and many friendships suffer from his arrogance. Even his own son, and biographer, writes about his "deeply rooted…tendency to take pleasure in exposing the ridiculous or castigating what was mediocre" (Letters I, 22. Plitt *Aus Schelling's Leben. In Briefen*). Even though Schelling enjoys a long and successful career, his last major work is published in 1809 when he is only in his mid thirties. Schelling survives both of the other *Stiftler*; he dies in 1854.

[2] Beiser 2002, 352.

plurality of substances but a single substance;" 2. vitalism, "the single universal substance is an organism, which is in a constant process of growth and development;" 3. rationalism, "this process of development has a purpose, or conforms to some form, archetype, or idea."[3] Let us see how Schelling's idealism matches this characterization.

3.1. Philosophical Stages and Teachers

Several stages have been distinguished in Schelling's philosophical development.[4] A rather detailed subdivision is the following:

1. In the mid 1790's, the young Schelling is an eager admirer of Fichte whose studies of Spinoza have convinced him that a viable philosophy can only begin with the Absolute as the singular ground of all that is. At this point he calls it the absolute I, in line with Fichte. This preoccupation with an all-encompassing unitary Absolute as the ground of all that is will last his entire life.
2. Philosophy of nature [*Naturphilosophie*] (1797–1800) in which all of nature is regarded as productivity. This is a radical turn away from the mechanistic conception of nature that prevails at the time. Beiser summarizes its objective,

   > Rightly, Schelling saw that the problem of dualism would be surmountable only if philosophers rethought the nature of matter itself. If matter is only bare extension, and if mechanism is the paradigm of explanation, then the only options are dualism and materialism. But neither is satisfactory. If the former makes mental-physical interaction mysterious, the latter fails to recognize the *sui generis* status of mental life.[5]

3. Transcendental idealism (1800) forms an attempt to explain the activity of the thinking subject (consciousness) and the "unconscious" productivity of nature as parallel movements that can be mediated by art.

[3] Ibid.

[4] The number of stages or even different philosophies attributed to Schelling varies wildly. Some – such as Hartmann in *Geschichte der Metaphysik II* of 1899–1900; Drews in *Die Philosophie im ersten Drittel des 19ten Jahrhunderts* of 1912; and Fuhrmans in *Schellings Philosophie der Weltalter* of 1954 – divide his philosophy in two periods, while others (such as Windelband in *Geschichte der Philosophie* of 1880) distinguish as many as five.

[5] Beiser 2002, 466.

4. Philosophy of identity (1801–1804) in which apparent opposites such as mind-matter and ideal-real are viewed as only different aspects of the same One.
5. Philosophy of Religion (1804–1854)
   a. Philosophy of Freedom (–1815)
   b. Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation (1827–).

   This stage is often referred to as Schelling's positive philosophy or theology. Schelling himself opposes it to the negative philosophy of his earlier stages, which he compares to Hegel's Logic.

No matter how many stages are distinguished, Schelling's philosophy has known many turning points, contradictions even, and he has produced a number of distinct systems. In his young years, he tends to either ignore the discrepancies, blame his critics for a lack of insight into the coherence of the whole, or claim that the earlier texts are mere preliminaries to the real system that is to be explained next. At a more mature age, he seems to admit the lack of cohesion when he writes that different philosophical systems "should exist in conjunction as do the different systems in an organism."[6] As Emil Fackenheim puts it,

> Schelling does lack system and thoroughness ... If Schelling never worked out any of his systems, this is in part because his systematic tendency was forever at war with his aporematic.[7]

The blindness to this aporematic element causes critics to view his systems as disconnected. However, the newer systems spring from the problems created by the older ones. In his later years, absolute idealism becomes mere negative philosophy, no more than a necessary preface to a metaphysics proper, or positive philosophy. His student Heinrich Lisco writes,

[6] SW 9, 213. The first part of the reference refers to the volume of the *Sämmtliche Werke* edited by his son Karl F.A. Schelling and published by J.G. Cotta in Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1856–1861. This edition has two divisions: the first has ten volumes and the second has four. I will number from 1–14. The second part of the reference provides the page number. The translation of the early works of Schelling is based on the work of Fritz Marti (See Schelling 1980a through 1980d in the bibliography). However, I have taken the liberty of making slight adaptations in order to harmonize the translation with my own terminology and that of other authors I will be citing. Sometimes a more literal and perhaps less literary translation is chosen in order to more closely express the German meaning of a word.

[7] Fackenheim 1996, 110.

> Schelling was more consistent in his development than the usual view assumes, but . . . this consistency is more in persistent problems than in adherence to (the same) solutions.[8]

Xavier Tilliette, one of the best known Schelling interpreters, speaks of *une philosophie en devenir* [a philosophy in the making].[9]

Whatever the explanation or the justification, it is easy to point at the tensions between statements in subsequent works of Schelling or even within the same publication. I will not attempt to solve apparent contradictions. Sometimes, at least, they are what they seem: contradictory. Nevertheless, it would be unjust to discard all that Schelling has said as incoherent, and therefore failed, attempts at building a system. All these twists and turns notwithstanding, it could be said that Schelling's focus circles around one persistent problem: the relation of the empirical (I) to the Absolute or God. In the opinion of Schelling and many of his contemporaries, Spinoza's philosophy offers the solution for the connection between the Absolute and nature. However, it does not account for two focal points of modern philosophy: subjectivity and freedom. Schelling seeks to integrate a free Kantian subject and an Absolute with Spinozistic qualities. Gutmann asserts,

> It is the constancy of the concern to adjust, harmonize, reconcile by discovering a basis of unity, identity in difference in which apparent contradictions are eliminated, that marks . . . all Schelling's works.[10]

Alan White writes,

> One gets the feeling that Schelling saw in the teachings of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Fichte all the pieces he would need to construct his account of the whole. In each work . . . he tries to fit the pieces together; when one attempt fails, he attempts a rearrangement.[11]

The result is a certain amount of "jumpiness" in his thinking. Schelling is "relatively easy to influence in his philosophizing," and this causes a lack of continuity.[12] His youthful contribution to German idealism definitely never becomes the desired, all-encompassing system that explains it all.

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[8] Gutmann 1936, xxviii.
[9] See Tilliette 1970.
[10] Gutmann 1936, xxixf.
[11] White 1983a, 28.
[12] Fuhrmans 1954, 80.

A brief sketch of the most important contributors to Schelling's philosophy will provide the lines of thinking that Schelling thinks worthy of integration into one large system. At the same time, it forms an overview of the renowned competition that the child genius wishes to outdo. These names have already been discussed extensively in the previous chapter.

1. *Kant*
   Schelling's project is characterized by the refusal to accept the Kantian split between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. The basic problem of epistemology, how we know our concepts to correspond to real things in the world, remains unsolvable, if there is no interaction between the two realms. The awareness of the limits of knowledge indicates a sort of knowledge distinguishable from logical, mathematical, and empirical knowledge. Kant names it transcendental. Even though he uses it to prove the reliability of the other types of knowledge, Kant never grounds it itself. In a letter to Hegel Schelling writes, "Kant has given the results: the presuppositions are still missing. And who can understand the results without the presuppositions?" He "proposes to establish the principles [on which Kant's thought rests]."[13] The true philosopher dares to venture beyond Kant's solid ground, even if thereby he "risks everything, either to achieve complete truth in all its greatness, or no truth at all."[14] This statement by a twenty-year-old sets the tone not only for his own career, but for half a century of philosophy to come: to go beyond the Kantian limits into the forbidden territory of metaphysics and to risk everything.
2. *Reinhold*
   "Never, with one exception, has a book been so wondered about, admired, hated, criticized, hounded, and – misunderstood," Karl Leonhard Reinhold writes in the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* published in 1786–87 in response to Kant's first *Critique*.[15] It is Reinhold who contributes the insight to Schelling's thinking that philosophy needs a first principle in order to be scientific. Reinhold, a respected Kantian, wants to provide Kant's philosophy with the

[13] Letter of 6 January 1795. In: Plitt 2003, I, 73f.
[14] SW 1, 155; 152.
[15] In: Snow 1996, 12.

systematic foundation that he as well considers lacking. A single principle located in consciousness has to be found. For Reinhold this is the representation [*Vorstellung*]. The young Schelling supports Reinhold's foundationalism, but he disagrees with his choice of a principle that resides in consciousness. He writes,

> To be sure, the act that appears to the philosopher first (as far as time is concerned) is the act of consciousness, but the condition of the possibility of this act must be a superior act of the human mind itself.[16]

Consciousness involves a subject and an object, one who has consciousness and something to be conscious of. However, in order for the act of consciousness to really refer to the things of the world, there must be something to connect the subject and the object. This unity, as the condition of the possibility of consciousness, must be beyond all consciousness.[17]

3. *Spinoza*
   The influence of Spinoza on Schelling is no less than that of Kant. In agreement with Spinoza, Schelling understands philosophy as the study of all reality. Hence, it must begin with the whole, the Absolute, which is "from itself and through itself" [*von sich selbst und durch sich selbst*], a distinctly Spinozistic way of characterizing it.[18] Also in line with Spinoza, he refuses to consider the ground of matter and of thought as ultimately separable. It is necessary to presume a preceding unitary ground in order to enable real knowledge of real things-in-themselves. True to his competitive personality, Schelling's high esteem for Spinoza is expressed in his desire to produce "a counterpart to Spinoza's *Ethics*" that will topple this system by means of its own principles.[19]
4. *Fichte*
   It is the idea of the primacy of the subject that the early Schelling owes to Fichte. For Kant the world we know is at least *in part* product of our own mind, but for Fichte the world simply *is* the product of the I. What we experience as the distinction I versus world is just the distinction between the conscious versus the unconscious

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[16] SW 1, 100 note *.

[17] We will see this theme surface all through Schelling's (and Hölderlin's) metaphysics. How can an Absolute that encompasses both subject and object become an object of knowledge (of a subject)?

[18] SW 6,148.

[19] SW 1, 159.

products of the I. Because the world is the unconscious product, the I experiences it as alien, as not-I. With this, Fichte firmly objects to Spinozism since such a system "is obligated to understand all of the features of consciousness as effects of the action of external things upon the subject," which is a totally unacceptable conclusion to any student of Kant.[20] Therefore, Spinoza's system is an exact reversal of the truth, in Fichte's view. Subjectivity can never be understood in terms of objects. Hence, Fichte searches for an Absolute that is immanent to the human I rather than opposed to it. The only object of unmediated, immediate, knowledge is the I. Therefore, the only possible metaphysics must start with our own subjectivity, and, reversely, within the subject there is an aspect of infinity. For Fichte it is "the ground of explanation of all facts of empirical consciousness that before all positing in the I the I must itself previously be posited."[21] In Fichte's system, both practice and theory are relations between the conscious and the unconscious self. Since the I does not recognize its own unconscious product as itself, it is in eternal conflict with itself.

5. *Jacobi*

It is Jacobi who inadvertently reawakens the interest of his contemporaries in Spinoza with his Spinoza-booklet of 1785, as we have seen in 2.4. His attack on all forms of rationalism results in the notion that all philosophical systems can be classified as either realistic or idealistic. In Jacobi's idiosyncratic conception, those systems are idealistic that depend on abstraction, rather than intuition, whereas the intuited is the undeniably real. What Fichte and Spinoza have in common, according to Jacobi, is the desire to explain everything in terms of a single principle. Hence, both systems are founded on abstraction and conceptuality. Idealism is no more than "Spinozism in reverse." However, real knowledge of objects can never be attained, if immediate intuitive knowledge of objects is denied. Jacobi shares Schelling's conviction that Kant's philosophy must have presupposed certain things. But for Jacobi this is the reality of objects. He finds this conclusion very confusing because "*without* this presupposition I could not get into the system, and *with* this presupposition could not remain within it." Discursive

[20] Neuhouser 1990, 56.
[21] GA I, 2, 258.

understanding only produces representations. Since representations of God and freedom are impossible, these become inevitably inaccessible to us within idealistic systems. This is a consequence that Jacobi is unwilling to accept. His realism dictates that knowledge of the real is based on intuition: "True being…is recognized in feeling alone."[22] Such an intuition for God Jacobi calls faith [*Glaube*].

3.2. The Absolute as I in the Early Schelling

In 1795, a barely twenty-year-old Schelling is wholly submerged in the ongoing philosophical controversy when he writes to Hegel:

> Philosophy must take its start from the Unconditioned [*das Unbedingte*]. The question is simply where this Unconditioned lies, in the I or in the not-I. If this question is answered, everything is decided. For me the highest principle of all philosophy is the pure, absolute I, that is, the I insofar as it is nothing but I, not yet conditioned by any objects, but posited by freedom. The A and O of all philosophy is freedom.[23]

In this short fragment the core of his lifelong philosophical program is summarized: the search for the Unconditioned, the Absolute, for the "ultimate point of reality on which everything depends, from which all firmness and all form of our knowledge springs";[24] the question how it relates to subjectivity and to the objects of the world; and a vague intuition that the key to all these problems is to be found in the concept of freedom. This latter intuition is to lie dormant for over a decade and will be discussed in 3.4. Whether the Absolute should be viewed as an I or a not-I forms the focus of this section.

"If there is any genuine knowledge at all, there must be knowledge which I do not reach by way of some other knowledge," Schelling states in *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* [*Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy or On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge*] of 1795.[25] In daily life, we experience that the regular chain of knowing goes from one conditional piece of knowledge to another. This being the case, we are left with three options: 1. the whole has no stability; 2.

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[22] In: Snow 1996, 35; 36.
[23] Letter to Hegel February 4, 1795, in: Plitt 2003, I, 76.
[24] SW 1, 162.
[25] SW 1, 149–244. Here SW 1, 162. See Schelling 1980b for the English translation.

one must be able to believe that this can go on *ad infinitum*; 3. there must be some ultimate point on which the whole depends. Schelling obviously chooses the third. He sets out to search for this ultimate principle of all that is, the "ultimate point of reality on which everything depends,... the original ground [*Urgrund*]." This principle cannot be understood in terms of its relation to anything else. It must be "independent of anything superior;" and "it must be not only unconditioned but altogether unconditionable."[26] It is the Absolute.

The next question in the ongoing discussion would be whether this principle belongs to the class of objects or to the class of subjects. In the aforementioned letter Schelling writes, "For Spinoza the world (the object in simple contrast to the subject) was everything, for me it is the I."[27] Qualifying this principle as belonging to either the class of objects or of subjects determines whether a philosophy is classified as dogmatic or critical, respectively. This distinction is a major topic of philosophical debate in Schelling's time even though the definitions are often far from clear. According to Kant, dogmatism is

> the presumption that it is possible to make progress from concepts alone without having first investigated in what way and by what right reason has come into possession of these concepts,[28]

whereas criticism starts with this very investigation. Kant's *Critiques* are directed at those dogmatists who base their theories upon an Absolute that is beyond our senses, beyond the scope of the human intellect. Hence, Kant views dogmatism as a theory that is founded on faith rather than reason. Fichte changes this distinction when he writes in the *Grundlage*,

> The essence of *critical* philosophy consists in this, that an absolute I is set forth as wholly unconditioned and not determined by any higher entity ... In contrast, a philosophy is *dogmatic* when it equates or opposes anything to the I as such; and this occurs owing to the ostensibly higher concept of a *thing* (Ens) which is set up, quite arbitrarily, as the highest conception. Insofar dogmatism can be consistent, Spinozism is its most consistent product.[29]

[26] SW 1, 164f.; 162; 163f.
[27] Letter to Hegel February 4, 1795, in: Plitt 2003, I, 73f.
[28] KrV Bxxxv.
[29] GA I, 2, 279f.

Dogmatism starts from an object, something given, hence something conditional. Criticism, in contrast, tries to start from an unconditional certainty. And for Fichte this Unconditioned, this Absolute, is ultimately expressed in the 'I am.' As Marti puts it, "In the plainest possible terms, criticism is philosophy that starts from the I, whereas dogmatism starts from some presupposed It, be it mind or matter."[30]

The early Schelling takes part in this debate when he asserts that the Unconditioned cannot be an object, for something is object "only inasmuch as it is determined by something else… [An object] presupposes… a subject."[31] The Absolute cannot be an object since an object relies upon a subject to act on it. An object therefore is always relative to something, hence not unconditioned, not absolute. Playing on the etymology of the German term *Unbedingt*, which is often translated as unconditional or unconditioned,[32] Schelling writes,

> *Bedingen* means the action by which anything becomes a thing [*Ding*]. *Bedingt* [conditioned] is what has been turned into a thing. Thus, it is clear at once that nothing can posit itself as a thing, and that an unconditioned thing is a contradiction in terms. *Unbedingt* [unconditioned] is what has not been turned into a thing, and what cannot at all become a thing.[33]

An object [*Ding*] can never qualify as the Absolute, the Unconditioned [*das Unbedingte*] since a thing cannot be "unbethinged" or "unthingified." With this, Schelling feels he has firmly placed himself outside the circle of dogmatists and points at what he sees as one of the serious flaws of the Spinozistic system. Spinoza's error is not in the assumption of the Absolute "but in the fact that Spinoza posited it outside the I." Then again, even Spinoza never really described his One Substance as an object, Schelling argues, because he uses predicates like self-identical, pure being, and unity, none of which apply to objects. Spinoza's

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[30] Marti 1980, 154.

[31] SW 1, 165.

[32] I have chosen the latter and will continue to do so. However, either choice is artificial and unsatisfactory since the English language is unable to grasp the fullness of the German expression. The English Unconditioned is not a word of common speech, and unconditional, meaning something like 'without conditions,' has a fairly limited use such as in the expression 'unconditional love,' a love that does not depend on any particular aspect or characteristic of the beloved. In German, on the contrary, *unbedingt* is also part of everyday vocabulary and has connotations like definitely, without doubt, directly, and immediately.

[33] SW 1, 166.

Substance was not really an object because "Spinoza did not truly posit the Unconditioned in the not-I; rather he turned the not-I into the I by elevating it to the Absolute." The result is a complete reversal: He made "the I not-I and the not-I I."[34]

Now that he has demonstrated that the Absolute cannot belong to the class of objects, it would be obvious to view it as subject. And in line with Fichte, the early Schelling calls the ultimate principle of all reality the absolute I. However, the existence of such an absolute I can never be proven objectively. For proof, it would have to be objectified, hence belong to the sphere of the conditioned, but the I "is determined as unconditioned only through itself." An I is not thinkable, unless it is. And it is not thinkable unless it thinks itself. "The principle of its being and the principle of its being known must coincide." This Absolute must be immanent to the human I and can only be revealed by an insight that grabs you instantaneously, in the immediate awareness 'I am!' And this is a proposition that is self-validating.

> My I contains a being that precedes all thinking and imagining. It *is* by being thought, and it is being thought because it *is*... It produces itself by its own thinking.[35]

Apparently the Absolute is a subject, and it is closely connected with our individual subjectivity. However, the two must not be confused; the absolute I is not the same as my individual self-consciousness. Schelling makes it very clear that he is not talking about the empirical I of which a plurality exist, "each of which is I for itself and not-I for the others." The finite empirical I is always contrasting itself to the not-I and "is nothing at all without it."

> [Self-consciousness] is not a free act of the immutable but an unfree urge that induces the mutable I, conditioned by the not-I, to strive to maintain its identity and to reassert itself in the undertow of endless change.[36]

The empirical I manifests itself by the 'I think,' hence by the objects it opposes to itself in consciousness. Human subjects are determined by objects just as much as the other way around. And "the I is no longer the pure, absolute I once it occurs in consciousness." The 'I think' as an

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[34] SW 1, 172; 185; 171.
[35] SW 1, 168; 163; 167.
[36] SW 1, 183.

act of reflection, hence a conscious act, is unable to explain the unity of the absolute I. On the contrary, self-consciousness even implies the danger of losing the I.[37] In its striving for self-preservation, the empirical I's main occupation is to isolate itself from and to oppose itself to all the not-I's that threaten its individual existence. Hence, the absolute I, the unity that grounds all that is, is not and cannot be the same as the I of the self-conscious individual.

Ergo, the Absolute may not be an object, but it is not simply a subject either. It must be a unity that "precedes all thinking and presentation" and thus underlies the subject-object difference since it takes such a unity to be able to grasp the difference. The Unconditioned "can lie neither in a thing as such, nor in anything that can become a thing, that is not in the subject."[38] Subject is thinkable only in regard to object. It is limited to the domain of knowing, where the knower is opposed to the known and also to other knowers. The Absolute is neither subject nor object. Very early in his career it becomes clear to Schelling that to place the Absolute in any category, be it of subjects or of objects, is to limit it. Unlimitedness and (self-)consciousness do not go together. Since the Absolute must be beyond all limitation, it must be beyond the realm of consciousness altogether. With this conclusion it is obvious that Schelling is not only dissatisfied with Spinoza's solutions, but the Fichtean terminology notwithstanding he is also not convinced that the solution lies with an absolute I. Especially in Chapter 5 on intellectual intuition it will become clear how Schelling struggles to integrate an Absolute with Spinozistic properties and an (absolute) I that is related to a human individual. It results in an individual I that is absolutized to dangerous proportions.

In the *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus [Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism]*, Schelling seems to conclude that criticism and dogmatism both have equal theoretical and practical validity and cannot refute each other.[39] They are both indemonstrable in that the Absolute transcends the limits of knowledge. Furthermore, they both provide equally viable solutions to the problems of practical reason. Criticism demands a totally active

[37] SW 1, 180. Here we see how Schelling, like Hölderlin as will become clear in the next chapter, thinks self-consciousness in terms of the reflection model and finds his own method of refuting it.
[38] SW 1, 167; 166.
[39] SW 1, 281–342. See Schelling 1980c for the English translation.

subject that asserts itself in order to make the world conform to its reason. And dogmatism calls for a subject that is completely passive and denies itself to the point of conformity with the world. The problem of the nature of the Absolute seems unsolvable.[40]

At this point Schelling could have given up on metaphysics altogether, but he does not. At first, he suggests something like intellectual intuition to provide a means of contact with this Absolute that leaves opportunities for further development of his metaphysics. Subsequently he decides that if starting from the unity of the Absolute as either subject or object does not provide a system, perhaps starting from the multiplicity of the world will be a first step towards a solution. This seems to be the path that Schelling takes for the next decade in his philosophy of nature. He becomes less preoccupied with subjectivity and the relation between the individual I and the Absolute and more interested in the physical world. How does its diversity relate to a unitary Absolute? How can this world as a whole emerge from the Absolute? In 1796 he writes,

> The main task of all philosophy consists of solving the problem of the existence of the world... The notion of anything emerging within the nonfinite posits *something from nothing*.[41]

The derivation of the finite (the empirical I and the natural world) from the Infinite (the absolute I or Spinoza's God/Substance) is the Gordian knot of all philosophy, and Schelling will try his utmost to cut it, as we will see next.

The following does not claim to be an exhaustive account of Schelling's philosophy at the turn of the 18th century. It merely tries to expose some of the problems that Schelling faces and tackles before he is led to a radically different approach in 1809 with his *Freiheitschrift* that will be discussed in 3.4.[42] It is mainly meant to illustrate what even a brilliant and ambitious young philosopher cannot achieve: thinking

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[40] The *Letters* have been conceived under the influence of Hölderlin with whom Schelling meets several times during the period they are written. In Chapter 4 we will see how Hölderlin firmly sticks to the unknowability of the ground of all consciousness.

[41] SW 1, 314.

[42] *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, [*Philosophical Investigations Concerning the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Subjects*], SW 7, 331–484.

the Absolute and explaining why and how it gives rise to a world of I-sayers. No matter whether he starts his endeavors with an Absolute as I or It, with the empirical world of things, with the human ability to say I, or with the identity of the two, there always remain holes in his system. Something always defeats explanation somewhere. Schelling's contribution to German idealism is not the overall system that he has in mind at the beginning of his career; it is rather the exploration of all the dead-ends and the sometimes brilliant connections between these. In his efforts Schelling has exposed the utter limits of human thinking, it appears.

3.3. Attempts at Cutting the Gordian Knot of Philosophy

The period from 1797 through 1804 constitutes the time of Schelling's attempts to construct an all-inclusive philosophical system that is to be the antithesis to Spinozism. His ambition is to outdo what he considers the only rational system of philosophy. In his philosophy of nature he starts with the objective; and in his transcendental philosophy he starts with the subject. When it turns out that neither approach alone can account for the entire system, he tries to combine them into the system of identity. According to Beiser,

> Although *Naturphilosophie* underwent important changes since its original conception in 1797, Schelling always held that its main goal is identical to that of transcendental philosophy: to provide a demonstration of the principle of subject-object identity, which is the fundamental presupposition of all knowledge.[43]

We will first look at the real side of Schelling's attempted system of philosophy: the philosophy of nature. Subsequent sections (3.3.2. and 3.3.3.) will elaborate on transcendental philosophy and the system of identity, respectively.

3.3.1. *Philosophy of Nature*

The philosophy of nature starts with the objective world. Rather than beginning from the subject and investigating the realm of consciousness, the goal is to reveal the one principle underlying the multiplicity of the things of the world and study the nature of matter itself. This

[43] Beiser 2002, 510.

induction should not be based on abstractions, an "artificial [*erkünstelte*] unity of principles," but rather on the concrete observations and theories of empirical science. These lead Schelling to conclude that energy is "the one and the same principle [that] connects inorganic and organic matter." Rather than taking dead matter as such as the basis of the objective world, he views matter as consisting of an equilibrium of attractive and repulsive forces. "The greatest diversity of matter is nothing other than a diversity in the relationship of these forces."[44] In nature are two basic tendencies that mutually limit one another: the centrifugal, expanding to Infinity; and the centripetal, contracting into a single point. Each object in nature must therefore be seen as the result of these two forces. It comes into existence at the zero-point where their opposite directions cancel each other.[45]

The two basic activities of the mind, to reach outward into Infinity and to turn inward toward a single point, echo these attractive and repulsive forces. Once this parallel is drawn, the challenge is to prove that basic natural phenomena as magnetism and electricity necessarily develop up to the level of organisms and even self-conscious intellects:

> that it is one and the same universal dualism that from magnetic polarity through electrical appearances finally loses itself in chemical heterogeneity, and eventually resurfaces again in organic nature.[46]

If both object and subject are the product of these contradicting forces, if "the system of nature is at one and the same time the system of our mind [*Geist*]," then the inaccessibility of the *Dinge an sich* and the resulting dualism could be overcome. Understanding nature would ultimately result in understanding the I, and vice versa. "As long as I myself am identical with nature, I understand what living nature is as well as I understand my own life."[47]

In Schelling's view, part of the program succeeds; his philosophy of nature can construct a world from an underlying natural principle. This approach results in a radically different view of nature. Nature is not a mechanism. It must be viewed as dynamic and active instead of as mechanical and passive. It arises from forces that "are in them-

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[44] SW 2, 347; 350; 275f.
[45] See SW 3, 288.
[46] SW 3, 258.
[47] SW 2, 39; 47.

selves already infinite." Nature consists of one vast hierarchy of various stages of organization and development of one living force, that Schelling now calls the "world soul." It passes through ever more complex forms of matter from minerals, to plants, to animals, and finally ends with the self-consciousness of the transcendental philosopher and the creativity of the artistic genius, as representative of the highest form of life.[48] With this, Schelling believes to have taken a major step in overcoming dualism, the "highest task of the philosophy of nature."[49] The only distinction between mind and body is that of levels of organization and not of kind: mind is highly organized matter, and matter is less organized mind.

Schelling's organic view of nature is not new at the time. Kant has also suggested that nature is self-causing and self-generating, with some internal sense of direction or purpose, rather than a Cartesian mechanism produced by external causes alone. However, for Kant the metaphor of nature as an organism only has regulative status (we can investigate nature as if it were an organism), whereas Schelling gives it constitutive status (it is not a matter of scientific method: nature *is* a living organism). Schelling criticizes both dualists and materialists for being unable to explain the unity of form and content in an organism. We cannot separate the two as if the form were imposed on the content from the outside, be it by God or some material cause. Form or purpose is inherent in the object; the condition for its existence even. Now if the form is necessary for the very existence of the object, then why not give the idea of life constitutive status?[50] Two aspects can be distinguished in nature: nature as living activity or productivity and nature as product of its own activity. Nature is both.

Here we see how Schelling, the systembuilder, tries to integrate Spinoza's two aspects of nature: productivity (*Natura naturans*) and product (*Natura naturata*) with a Kantian view of nature as an organism. Productivity constitutes the "subjective" aspect of nature and product the "objective." Nature as absolute productivity is completely infinite, but this productivity also results in definite products, real objects that are distinct from one another. These principles of nature extend into reason that proves to be nothing more than "a play of

[48] SW 2, 275; 381. Modesty has never been a limiting factor in Schelling's view of the, his, I. More about the (artistic) genius can be found in 3.3.2. and in Chapter 5.

[49] SW 3, 102.

[50] See SW 2, 41–47.

higher and necessarily unknown natural powers." Since nature is absolute productivity, this means that the conflict between the antagonistic forces of attraction and repulsion is eternal. The equilibrium cannot be anything permanent. That is why the products of nature are constantly destroyed and recreated. The reason that there is something like a momentary balance of forces in nature at all is the result of its striving to return to its original state of pure self-identity.[51] This ultimate goal is unattainable. However, by unifying opposites within the more fundamental opposition, a synthesis is reached on a higher level. This is followed by new opposites to be synthesized, etc. What results is a hierarchy of syntheses on an ever higher level where each stage is more inclusive than the previous one. Schelling calls these potencies.[52]

Schelling's 1799 philosophy of nature forms the break with Fichte.[53] According to Beiser, two of its assumptions are completely at odds with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*:

1. Its transcendental realism, "the thesis that nature exists independently of all consciousness, even that of the transcendental subject."[54] Schelling claims that nature is something in itself, rather than an unconscious product of the I and therefore to be interpreted as not-I. Nature is not, as Fichte sees it, "the object and sphere of my moral duties and absolutely nothing else."[55] Schelling rejects Fichte's all too utilitarian view of nature as the mere instrument and medium of moral action allows it to be dominated and manipulated in the interest of human morality. Nature is not just a not-I, alienated: it is another, if less developed or perhaps less eloquent, expression of the same Absolute.

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[51] SW 3, 17f.; 273f.; 289; 309.

[52] We will see this term return a decade later in a rather different meaning (see 3.4.2.).

[53] In his two early works, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* [*Ideas towards a Philosophy of Nature*] of 1797, SW 2, 1–344; and *Von der Weltseele* [*Of the World-soul*] of 1798, SW 2, 345–583 on the philosophy of nature, he still provides a Fichtean foundation. In his 1799 *Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* [*First Outline of a Philosophy of Nature*], SW 3, 1–268, Schelling virtually abandons this. Idealism and realism have equal status as explanations of the Absolute, now becomes his conviction. He starts calling the philosophy of nature the "Spinozism of physics" because it posits nature as the Absolute (SW 3, 273).

[54] Beiser 2002, 483.

[55] GA I, 6, 263.

2. Its transcendental naturalism, "the doctrine that everything is explicable according to the laws of nature, *including* the rationality of the transcendental subject."[56]

According to Schelling, Fichte has been unable to rid his philosophy of all dualism. There is still an enormous gap between the I and nature. The only bridge between the two realms is a moral one that sees nature (not-I) as the material of moral duty of the I. This I imposes its will on nature, and it will only be completely realized in performing its duty on this not-I. Since the completion of this task is an ideal one, the I/not-I dualism will never be completely overcome. If it were, in ideal infinity, nature would lose its independence. To make matters worse, even though Schelling has started his philosophy of nature as an independent science *next to* Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, by the time it reaches completion he sees Fichte's work as a mere part of his own overall system. Fichte, however, remains convinced that there is no need to postulate an independent source of activity outside the I. Real activity, the activity of the world on the I, is the result of the self-limitation of the I's spontaneity, the ideal activity.

> Away with those pre-given influences and effects of outer things on me by means of which they supposedly infuse me with a knowledge concerning them that is not in them and that cannot flow from them. The ground for supposing something outside of me is not outside but inside of me, in the limitation of my own person. Through this limitation thinking nature goes in me – out of itself.[57]

After several attempts by Schelling to find common ground, the break becomes irreversible in the summer of 1801. Not all thoughts that sound right can apparently be integrated!

Not only does the philosophy of nature cause a break with his former mentor and friend, it also proves to be unable to solve the "highest

[56] Beiser 2002, 483.

[57] GA I, 6, 204. Klaus Müller comments, "Positing difference from the limitation of the subject, so that without it difference would not exist – much more elegantly the problem of identity and difference, of Spinoza and Kant, of monism and freedom cannot in fact be solved" (Müller 2006, 99). I tend to disagree with Müller. The solipsism that Fichte's statement expresses seems to me a dangerous interpretation of both monism and freedom. If the world, full of other I's, merely exists as a result of the I's limitation, I's can never truly relate, but only swallow each other. The persistent inability to integrate relationality in idealistic metaphysics and a possible correction thereof will be discussed in Chapter 7.

task" of philosophy: namely, the question about the cause of "the first dynamic separation [*Ausseinander*]" resulting in nature.

> It is impossible that this (externally) Unlimited transforms itself into something finite for intuition except by becoming object for itself, that is, becoming finite in its infinitude (turned against itself – separated [*entzweit*]).[58]

Only a reflective structure can explain difference arising in the absolute unity, in Schelling's opinion. All of nature must originate from the primal self-reflection of the Absolute: its "primordial involution." But this act, as the "turning point of transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature," is beyond the scope of the philosophy of nature.[59]

Whenever Schelling reaches the ultimate point of the line of the objective, he inadvertently meets the subjective, and vice versa. Spinoza leads to Fichte as persistently as Fichte points at Spinoza. The philosophy of nature needs transcendental idealism, the "other science." With the project of solving the Kantian dualism as the background for all this hard work this must be a frustrating conclusion. However, Schelling's persistence is as unlimited as the Absolute. He starts all over again from the subjective end. Let us see where this leads.

3.3.2. *Transcendental Philosophy*

If the finite originates in a primordial act of self-reflection of the Absolute, the correct method might be "to start with the subjective, as the first and absolute, and to let the objective arise from it." The complementary philosophy of transcendental idealism moves in the direction opposed to the philosophy of nature. It starts with the subject and seeks to prove that consciousness of external objects necessarily arises. After approaching the problem of mental-physical interaction from the question 'What is matter?', Schelling now starts with its complement 'What is mind?' The ordinary experience of the finite subject is grounded in one fundamental prejudice: "There exist things outside of us." This again is based on two primordial convictions: 1. We know objects as they really are; 2. We can change the world through

[58] SW 3, 220.
[59] SW 3, 250; 268.

our action in it. These essential but rather precarious convictions are vulnerable to doubt. The only protection from skepticism lies in the immediate and indubitable certainty of my own existence: the absolute prejudice "I am." Hence, the task is to derive consciousness of objects from self-consciousness, the fundamental prejudice "there exist things outside of me" from the absolute prejudice "I am."[60]

In order to start with the subjective, the philosopher's first task is to become pure subject, by positing himself as such through an act of reflection. He isolates himself from all objects by absolutely interrupting normal consciousness, which is a constant series of representations. In order to make the pure subjective visible, the objective is allowed to disappear. Hence, the transcendental philosopher intentionally objectifies that which only enters consciousness in the reflective act. Such pure self-consciousness, free of all traces of objectivity and free of any connections with the objective world, is an abstraction from real-life individuality.[61] By positing himself as pure subject, the philosopher repeats or imitates the act of the primordial ground through which all that is has come about. Thus he can observe, consciously, the development of this second process. "If there is no more and no less in the second process than in the first, then the imitation is perfect, and a true and complete philosophy results."[62] As White puts it, "The task of the transcendental philosopher, bluntly expressed, is to postulate a primal act of self-consciousness and then to see what happens."[63] If the transcendental philosopher can think a whole world emanating from this (pure) subjectivity, he has derived the objective from the pure (absolute) subjective. Schelling describes this path of becoming pure subject and its subsequent assignment as follows:

> Everyone can regard himself as the object of these investigations. However, to explain himself, he must first have suspended all individuality in himself since it is precisely this that is to be explained. If all bounds of individuality are removed, nothing remains behind except the absolute intelligence. If the bounds of intelligence are also suspended in turn, nothing remains but the absolute I. The task now is simply this: how the absolute intelligence is to be accounted for by an act of the absolute I,

[60] See SW 3, 342–347.
[61] See SW 3, 345.
[62] SW 3, 397.
[63] White 1983a, 60.

> and how, in turn, by an act of the absolute intelligence, the whole system of restrictedness which constitutes my individuality is to be explained.[64]

If this approach is successful, self-consciousness could reveal the origin of the finite world in the Absolute. Moreover,

> there could be no one who could still find necessary a world independent of the subject after having seen how the objective world, with all its determinations, develops out of pure self-consciousness, without any external affection whatsoever.[65]

Fichte is back?! To the objection that self-consciousness is not an absolute but only derivative starting point Schelling answers,

> Since I want to ground my knowledge only in itself, I do not ask further concerning the ultimate ground of that first knowledge (that is, of self-consciousness), a ground that, if it exists, would necessarily lie outside of knowledge. Self-consciousness is the source of light for the entire system of knowledge, but it shines only forward, not backward.[66]

There might be a unitary ground for self-consciousness. If so, we cannot know it anyway. Hence, we might as well start with what we *can* know. With this, Schelling seems willing to ignore that it is exactly Kant's comparable nonchalance towards the enigmatic character of self-consciousness that provokes Fichte's line of thought. Furthermore, those of us with a more modest self-image might object to the crucial step of accessing our I before and beyond the origination of the world.

Modesty is definitely not what leads Schelling's thinking, but he *does* see a problem. This pure subjectivity as the absolute ground must be unlimited activity (the Absolute must be without limitations). But in order for the Absolute to be an I, it must be conscious of itself. This means that it must intuit itself and necessarily limit itself. "Being conscious and being limited are one and the same" for an I. Here we encounter a paradox that also Hölderlin is aware of, as will be shown in Chapter 4. In limiting itself, the I comes to be. However, "the limiting activity [itself] falls outside of all consciousness." Hence, the Absolute acts, but it only sees the results of its acts. It is conscious of something that it does not (yet) recognize as itself. It knows its prod-

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[64] SW 3, 483.
[65] SW 3, 378.
[66] SW 3, 357.

ucts; not itself. Through this primordial act of limitation two sorts of opposing activity result: the original and continuing productivity, and the attempts to know itself as productive. These provide the basis for the derivation of content from the Absolute, for "the whole manifoldness of the objective world, its products and its appearances."[67]

It might seem that the process ends here. However, the problem is not yet solved. It is only pushed back a little. It is not the occurrence of a limitation that is inexplicable; "it is rather the manner of this limitation itself." It can be concluded that I necessarily live, in general, in a system of necessary principles and categories, "but not that it is precisely this one."[68] Schelling might be able to explain that a singular Absolute can give rise to a multitude of finite things. Nevertheless, it still does not clarify how this particular world came to be, or how I came to be the specific individual that I am. Schelling has not really cut the Gordian knot. He has not really derived the finite from the Infinite; he has not really explained how the Absolute, which cannot have consciousness, can result in consciousness as we experience it here and now.

Schelling's transcendental idealism culminates in art as the ultimate solution to the philosopher's problem. Art differs from both philosophy and morality in one important respect: in both theory and moral action the conscious I experiences itself as opposed to the world, even if this experience can be proven to be untrue by the philosopher. In art, on the contrary, this opposition is correctly experienced as an internal rather than an external conflict. The artist has conscious aims and has consciously mastered certain techniques by hard work. But over and above this conscious activity, "something else [*ein Anderes*] is experienced as acting through us." This "other, as it were" is creative genius, an unconscious and infinite element that the artist has no control over. Through the artist the unconscious productivity of the Absolute is at work.

> The basic character of the work of art is unconscious Infinity…In addition to what he has placed into it on purpose, the artist seems to have

[67] SW 3, 383; 390; 455.
[68] SW 3, 410.

> represented in it by instinct an Infinity that no finite understanding can totally explain.[69]

Somehow in art the conscious and the unconscious, the finite and the Infinite, I and Absolute merge. Art is wholly distinct from truth (theory) and goodness (morality) because beauty, contrary to truth and goodness, is not merely an ideal that we can strive for but never fully achieve. Beauty is indeed present in the work of art. Art is actual presence of the Infinite in the finite. Therefore it produces infinite satisfaction and absolute harmony. Hence art turns out to be not only superior to philosophy; art "achieves the impossible, namely to resolve an infinite opposition in a finite product." Philosophy may raise us to oneness in thought, but "art carries the whole man, as he is, to the knowledge of the Highest, and in this lies the eternal difference and miracle of art." The determinate, finite, work of art directly presents the Absolute. Therefore, "art is the only eternal revelation there is, and the miracle that, even if it had existed only once, had to convince us of the absolute reality of this Highest."[70]

This theme, to which we will return in relation to intellectual intuition, is rather short-lived in Schelling's philosophy. It can be seen as the result of the influence of his intimate associations with Early Romantic circles in Jena. Schelling is a philosopher, definitely not an artist, and he cannot be satisfied with a solution besides or beyond philosophy.[71] He soon maintains that ultimately the philosopher's comprehension of the work of art transcends that of the artist himself. Moreover, two apparently independent approaches, the philosophy of nature and transcendental idealism, cannot exist alongside each other for very long, if they originate in the mind of one who is after one grand system. This becomes his next project; after all there is still Spinoza to contend with. How can he prove that all that he has asserted so far links up perfectly into one single system? The system of identity is to be the ultimate philosophical system and Beiser calls it "the first system of absolute idealism."[72]

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[69] SW 3, 605.

[70] SW 3, 619; 626; 630; 618.

[71] Hölderlin, however, who is never directly involved with the group in Jena, will indeed turn to art. His poetry seems to do what it promises; present glimpses of the Absolute. I will use his verse to elaborate on the relation of the Absolute and the work of art in 5.3.

[72] Beiser 2002, 554.

3.3.3. *System of Identity*

The two directions of investigation, one starting from the object (philosophy of nature) and the other beginning with the subject (transcendental idealism) culminate in Schelling's system of absolute identity between 1801 and 1804. Years of struggle with the two systems have gone by. After giving priority to the subject in line with Fichte, conceiving the subjective and the objective as each other's complement, in the course of time, he tends towards the conclusion that it is entirely artificial to reverse the order of nature by treating self-consciousness as eternal and given, when it is only the product of natural powers. The self-consciousness of the transcendental I is derived from the laws of nature and forms "the physical proof of idealism."[73] He returns to the objective as the correct starting-point and maintains that idealism is no more than one aspect of the real science of knowledge. The circle is now closed. In other words,

> that there is a single universal substance, of which the subjective and objective are only manifestations, is the fundamental proposition of *Naturphilosophie*; but it is also the sum and substance of Schelling's absolute idealism around 1800.[74]

Schelling finds himself in "the indifference point" that each approach has constructed from opposing directions.[75] He has come to the insight that the Absolute is neutral, neither subject nor object, but the pure identity of the two. Once again, he attempts to start from the Absolute, as if it could be somehow "shot from a pistol," as Hegel will complain in 1807.[76] Subsequently, he tries to show its relation to finite entities. Thereby he not only risks relapsing into dogmatism, but he also asserts unashamedly that the present system is the result of a consistent and continuous development that he has "always before his eyes."[77] The *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* [*Exhibition of My System of Philosophy*] of 1801 is a deliberate imitation of the format of Spinoza's *Ethics*, deducing the finite from the Absolute.[78] It is an important work for German idealism in that it claims that

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73 Ibid., 556.
74 Ibid., 506f.
75 SW 4, 108.
76 In the Preface to his *Phänomenologie*. Hegel 1987, 28.
77 SW 4, 107f.
78 SW 4, 105–212.

insight into the Absolute cannot be left on the level of (intellectual or esthetic) intuition. It also needs to find an objective, scientific form. Intuition is a necessary beginning of philosophy, but it should never replace conceptualization. This is where German idealism and Early Romanticism part company. The former maintains that the Absolute can somehow be accessed by reason, whereas the latter asserts that the Absolute is beyond knowing. It might be accessible within some twilight zone of rationality such as intellectual or esthetic intuition, but not within human knowledge as such.[79]

Schelling's system of identity revolves around three fundamental propositions:

1. There is one single, indivisible substance identical with the universe itself.
2. This substance is identical with the principle of identity.
3. The principle of identity expresses the complete unity of the ideal and the real, the subjective and the objective.

The difference between Fichte's subjective idealism and objective idealism is that for Fichte the I is everything [*das Ich sey Alles*], whereas in the objective form everything is the I [*Alles sey = Ich*], as Schelling puts it.[80] Both are forms of idealism because they equate the I with everything. Their difference lies in the reversal of subject and predicate. In subjective idealism the I is the subject and the all, or the universe, its predicate, whereas in the objective form the universe is the subject and the I its predicate. Since in the logic of Schelling's time the subject is the ground for its predicate, the difference lies in the logical priority: the I for Fichte and nature, the all, for Schelling. The subjective idealism of Fichte views reason as the product of the transcendental subject, and it limits subject-object identity to transcendental self-consciousness. Objective idealism, on the other hand, maintains that reason is inherent in the purposive activity of nature itself. It makes the universe the fundamental term and the I derived, and it sees subject-object identity only in the structure of the Absolute itself. Another distinction is that

[79] In Chapter 5 this theme of intellectual intuition that runs all through German idealism will be discussed as it has been interpreted by Fichte, Schelling, and Hölderlin.

[80] SW 4, 109.

the idealism of Fichte is relative in that it attempts to derive the objective from the subjective, but absolute idealism asserts that both the subjective and the objective are different, independent aspects of the Absolute. The Absolute is the indifference point of the two. Absolute identity is sheer indifference to subjectivity and objectivity.

The Absolute, as Schelling now sees it, is pure self-identity that cannot go outside itself without self-destructing. That leaves him with a severe problem where finite objects are concerned. On the one hand, if the Absolute, the Infinite, excludes the objects of the world or if its unity opposes their difference, then the infinite unity cannot, by definition, be the Absolute because it can be limited; namely by the finite and by opposition. The Absolute is a unity that excludes all difference. On the other hand, if the Absolute is the unity of the Infinite and the finite, and the identity of identity and opposition that contains all the different finite things within itself, then it is no longer a true unity. Therefore, the Absolute must somehow include finite things, but only insofar as they share the same essential nature and not insofar as they are distinct.[81]

In 1799, Schelling maintains that the "highest task of philosophy" is to explain how absolute identity becomes duplicity.[82] In 1801, he asserts that it is "the basic error of all philosophy" to assume that the Absolute has differentiated itself in the finite world since this would imply the self-destruction of the Absolute.[83] Difference cannot emerge from unity. In 1802 he writes,

> Only within the things that belong to appearance are they distinguishable and in fact distinguished; the finite and the Infinite are completely identical in reality, even though they are conceptually different.[84]

And since "the world of appearances is simply nothing in the sight of the Absolute," he seems to assert that the realm of difference is no more than the figment of our imagination.

> Hence you should not believe that particular things or the manifold shapes of living substance you usually distinguish are actually contained in the real essential universe in the divided manner that you perceive.[85]

[81] See SW 4, 235f.; 247; 394.
[82] SW 3, 220.
[83] SW 4, 119f.
[84] SW 4, 258.
[85] SW 4, 298; 259.

Such an Absolute is indeed threatening to become what Hegel ridicules as "the night in which all cows are black." Schelling seems unable to accomplish what he considers the highest task of philosophy: explaining a world of differentiation, which strikes us as awfully real, as emerging from absolute identity.

A decade of struggle with the Absolute and attempts to approach it from the standpoint of either the objective or the subjective or the indifference point where the two converge, has generated some philosophical results. Moreover, it has brought Schelling financial security, a career, and the much-desired fame. However, it has not provided the desired philosophical system, and it has not cut the Gordian knot: he cannot truly derive the finite from the infinite.[86] If he made the absolute the cause of the finite, he divided it; and if he made the finite its own cause, he gave it a reality that limited the absolute," Beiser succinctly summarizes the problem.[87]

We will skip several, more Platonic, attempts and move on to 1809 when he tries a different approach altogether.[88] No longer does the subject-object pair dominate his work; it is freedom that becomes the center of his philosophy. This is not an entirely new theme as we have seen in the quote of 1795 at the beginning of 3.2. Nonetheless, studying Schelling, one gets overcome by a feeling a futility from time to time. Asserting apodictic philosophical truths with arrogance only to abandon them again a few months and several hundred complacent pages later seems to be his style. However, Schelling's contribution to metaphysics seems not so much in the outcome as in his persistency in dealing with the same philosophical problem: How can we explain (knowledge of) the things of the world including our own selves out of a unitary ground? And how can we relate to this ground? The simple answer: 'we can't' might be the only correct one, but it was definitely not Schelling's attitude to take no for an answer. Anyone who feels the same need for answers to fundamental existential problems can only marvel at his intellectual stamina and endless creativity. It is almost as if he believed that sooner or later he would sneak up on the Absolute unseen and catch it in the act of producing the finite.

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[86] SW 6, 35ff.

[87] Beiser 2002, 576.

[88] This seems to be the only turning-point that all Schelling-experts agree upon. It forms the break between his negative and his positive philosophy.

At our point in history, it seems safe to conclude that Schelling does not provide us with a convincing metaphysics for the 21st century. Nevertheless, in fully exploring also the apparent dead ends, he offers interesting insights in the difficulties, the aporias, the paradoxes, and the contradictions associated with a rational metaphysics. Furthermore, he seems to have gone the road of naturalism that is so popular in contemporary philosophy by placing both the subject and object of knowledge within nature as a whole…and rejecting it as philosophically unsatisfactory. Finally, he shows us how the creativity of the metaphysicist can be as endless as eternal Life itself. He simply never gives up. However, Schelling's real contribution to philosophy might be in the work that will be discussed next. In 1795 he has already made the claim that, "the essence [*Wesen*] of the I is freedom," and because only a free being can philosophize, "the beginning and end of all philosophy is freedom." Even the most basic thought presupposes the independence of the subject from the object and thus manifests the primordial freedom of the subject.[89] After almost a decade and a half of near-dormancy, he again picks it up in 1809 in his last major published work *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, in which he designs a theory that combines a unitary ground of all that is with freedom.[90]

3.4. Philosophy as the System of Freedom

Schelling starts his *Freiheitschrift* by stating that his earlier systematic writings have only been preliminary. In overcoming the nature-spirit/object-subject opposition, the road has been cleared to address the true problem of philosophy: "the contrast between necessity and freedom," and the related problems of good versus evil, the will, and personality.[91] With this assertion Schelling seems to view his prior problems as either overcome or as no longer relevant. In addition, he resurrects one of his oldest intuitions: a successful philosophical system must

[89] SW 1, 180; SW 1, 177.

[90] *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* [*Philosophical Investigations Concerning the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Subjects*], SW 7, 331–484. I will be using the English translation by James Gutmann as a basis and adapt it whenever necessary to match the terms used previously. See Schelling (1936) in the bibliography.

[91] SW 7, 333.

account for human subjectivity, hence for freedom. Thereby he takes the single gateway to transcendence left by Kant: freedom. Since building an overall rational system is still his ultimate goal, he now takes up the challenge of fitting freedom into a philosophical system.[92]

According to Schelling, the general opinion is that system and freedom are inherently opposed because "every philosophy that makes claim to unity and completeness is said to end in denying freedom." Spinoza's was the only rational system, but it could not account for freedom. For many of his contemporaries, a system based on one single, all-encompassing Absolute simply has to lead to fatalism and pantheism. However, the denial or affirmation of freedom in general is based "on something quite other than the acceptance or non-acceptance of pantheism, the immanence of things in God," Schelling claims.[93] If Spinoza's system is not able to account for freedom, and Schelling agrees that it is not, this is not a consequence of its positing one single all-encompassing Substance. It is not the fact that an absolute unitary ground is posited that makes for its fatalism, but a faulty interpretation of groundedness. Things are dependent on their ground, but groundedness or dependence does not entail complete determination.

One of the examples Schelling comes up with is the dependence of offspring on their parents. The fact that a human being depends upon parents for existence does not determine who a particular person is or is not, and it does not exclude this person's autonomy. The same is true for the way in which the world is grounded in the Absolute:

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[92] SW 1, 315. Dale Snow argues that the *Freiheitschrift* is not an attempt at a *system* of freedom, but an abdication from idealism itself (Snow 1996, 141f.). I do not agree. I believe that Schelling hopes to achieve a system of absolute idealism for a much longer time, if not until the end of his life. At the end of the *Freiheitschrift* he writes, "We...are of the opinion that a clear, reasonable insight must be possible particularly into the supreme conceptions, since only thereby can they become truly ours, enter into us and be eternally founded. Yes, we go still further and with Lessing regard even the development of the truths of revelation into truths of reason as utterly necessary if the human race is to be helped thereby" (SW 7, 412). This leaves little room for doubt with respect to Schelling's philosophical ambitions. In any case, when he writes the *Freiheitschrift*, his confidence in the power of reason has not lessened. He introduces it as containing "deeper disclosures" of his system (SW 7, 334). He is either very reluctant to admit previous failure or he remains under the impression that he is still in the process of gathering pieces of what will once amount to an overall system.

[93] SW 7, 336; 345.

> That for which the Eternal is by its nature the ground, is, to this extent, dependent and, from the point of view of immanence, is also conceived in the Eternal. But dependence does not determine the nature of the dependent…; it does not declare what this dependent entity is or is not.[94]

That this example is not altogether successful is obvious. Of course a person is not fully determined by her parents. Personality, physique, and choices may all be quite different. But, thank God, human parents can be fairly sure of the (human) nature of their offspring.

Hence, Schelling not only claims that things can be grounded in the Absolute without being determined by it; he goes even further. Having a free Absolute for its ground implies absolute freedom for the grounded entity. "God can only reveal himself in creatures who resemble him, in free, self-activating beings."[95] The fact that humans are immanent in the Absolute does not prevent their freedom but rather affirms it.

> Immanence in God is so little a contradiction of freedom that freedom alone, and insofar as it is free, exists in God, whereas all that lacks freedom, and insofar as it lacks freedom, is necessarily outside God.[96]

The essence of God is freedom. And, as Schelling claims, free is only what "acts according to the laws of its own inner being and is not determined by anything else either within it or outside it."[97] Hence, free beings can be grounded in the Absolute, depend on it but, as free, "take on a life of their own."[98]

According to Schelling, Spinozism fails to account for freedom not "because it lets things be conceived *in*" the Absolute but due to the fact that in this worldview only *things* are posited. Even the eternal Substance is viewed as a thing. Consequently it is a lifeless, soulless system with a mechanistic view of nature. It is "a one-sidedly realistic system" that needs to be "completed by an ideal part wherein freedom is sovereign." All existence must have a real and an ideal side:

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[94] SW 7, 346.

[95] Schelling tends to use "God" rather than "the Absolute" in the *Freiheitschrift*. At this point in the argumentation the difference between the two is not crucial. In 3.4.1., it will be explained how he sees the difference.

[96] SW 7, 347.

[97] SW 7, 384.

[98] This is Snow's striking translation of *für sich fortwirkend*. See Snow 1996, 155.

> Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is its body; only the two together constitute a living whole. Realism can never furnish the first principles, but it must be the basis and the instrument by which idealism realizes itself and takes on flesh and blood.[99]

Spinoza's realism needs to be complemented by idealism to constitute a philosophical system that describes real life. Fichtean idealism, however, will not do, in Schelling's view, since it provides for theoretical freedom only, not for its reality.

It is obvious that, the different approach and vocabulary notwithstanding, the old opponents have not ceased to challenge. What Schelling hopes to achieve is an overall system that does justice to both aspects of life: subjectivity and objectivity; the ideal and the real; mind and matter; *Geist* and *Natur*. Only a philosophy that represents the Absolute as the foundation of both the material and the spiritual aspects of the life deserves to be called a system. This system has to account for real freedom as the power for good and evil. Let us now look at the role of God and/or the Absolute in this proposed system. Our first task will be to get a clearer view of the difference between the Absolute and God from Schelling's perspective. How an entire world can be derived from this new understanding of the Absolute, and how evil can be a reality in this world will be discussed in subsequent sections. The following is based on the *Freiheitschrift* (1809) and the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* (1810) with brief detours into *Die Weltalter. Erstes Buch* (1813).[100]

3.4.1. *The Absolute and God*

One of the questions that Schelling tackles in 1809 is: How can worldly beings that are free to commit evil proceed from a unitary and perfect ground that has no evil in it whatsoever?

> Either real evil is admitted, in which case it is unavoidable to include evil itself in infinite Substance…and thus totally disrupt the conception

[99] SW 7, 349f.; 356.

[100] *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* [*Philosophical Investigations Concerning the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Subjects*], SW 7, 331–484; [*Stuttgart Private Lectures*], SW 7, 417–484; [*The Ages of the World. First Book*], SW 8, 195–344. The translations are based on J. Gutmann (see Schelling 1936 of the bibliography) and F. De Wolfe Bolman (see Schelling 1942).

> of an all-perfect Being; or the reality of evil must in some way or other be denied, in which case the real conception of freedom disappears at the same time.[101]

If everything proceeds from one source, then evil has to be part of this One. But this would imply either a contradiction of its absolute goodness or a trivialization of evil, which in turn would eliminate the reality of freedom. This seems to be the major problem of monism in a nutshell. However, Schelling asserts, this is not a difficulty that only the monistic or pantheistic system is faced with; it is true for every system that assumes any type of intimate connection between a powerful God and the world order. Alan White summarizes, that God must be both omnipotent and benevolent, "but if he cannot overcome evil he is not the former and if he does not choose to overcome evil he is not the latter."[102] At first sight, an easy solution would be to posit a second, evil, root next to and separate from (the goodness of) God. "If freedom is a power for evil it must have a root independent of God," Schelling agrees. "Compelled by this argument one may be tempted to throw oneself into the arms of dualism."[103] But since he believes that monism is the only worldview that can explain real knowledge of real things, he has to introduce duality in the one and only Absolute in a way that does not annihilate its unity. Therefore, a reconsideration of the Absolute is called for.

The first thing that strikes the reader of the three works mentioned above is that the word 'God' has become prominent and that terms like the 'Absolute' and the 'Unconditioned' have just about disappeared. It would be wrong to assume that Schelling has simply substituted the term Absolute for God. The Absolute, qua Absolute, is not God. So how does he define the difference between the Absolute and God after 1809? At this point in his career, Schelling no longer seems to feel pressured to choose between idealism and realism. It might be said that the scale has tipped towards idealism since he gives priority to freedom, but apparently, his focus changes altogether. The struggle with the subject versus the object no longer seems to fascinate him. He stops trying to creep up on the Absolute from either the subject-side or the object-side. He simply poses an Absolute that is beyond all

[101] SW 7, 353.
[102] White 1983a, 116.
[103] SW 7, 354.

opposition, "that is, before any duality at all." The Absolute is "apart from all antitheses," and it is that "in which all distinctions break up." It is "absolute indifference," total absence of all difference. This indifference is the primordial ground [*Urgrund*], or the Nonground [*Ungrund*].[104] And it is *Urgrund*, primordial ground, only because it is also *Ungrund*: its indeterminacy is essential to its absoluteness. If it were in any way determined or determinable, it would be objectifiable and conditioned.

This line of reasoning is not new for Schelling.[105] However, the emphasis on the ineffability, the 'beyond'-character, of the *Urgrund* is. It is absolute indifference, and as indifference it is not accessible to human understanding. It can be articulated only through the consequents that proceed from it. From 1809 onwards, Schelling seems to have doubts about the feasibility of a rational system without, however, being able to completely abandon the dream of a system that has accompanied him ever since his early start at the *Stift*.

Since there can be nothing outside or before the *Urgrund*, it must be the ground of its own existence. From this, Schelling draws a rather surprising conclusion. Since the Nonground is indifference, also these two principles, ground and existence, cannot be differentiated or opposed in it. They can only be "posited in disjunction and each for itself." Consequently a duality is posited. Out of this indifference, instead of undoing the primary distinction between ground and existence, the Nonground "rather posits and confirms it." Thus, Schelling asserts that "the only correct dualism, namely a dualism which at the same time admits a unity," is this distinction between the ground and the existence of God. Here we see how he is still struggling with these new concepts and terms. This *Urgrund* is God. But it is not God proper, God's actual existence, because God as ground, or as foundation of his

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[104] SW 7, 406; Some translate the German *Ungrund* with groundless (e.g. Gutmann), others (e.g. White) prefer Nonground. I will use Nonground since groundless means having no ground, and the Absolute does: it is its own ground. Furthermore, in the German language a perfectly usable synonym exists for groundless that Schelling does not use; namely *grundlos*. Hence, it is Nonground in the sense that this self-ground in its ineffability, its indifference, and its inaccessibility to reason barely qualifies to be named the ground.

[105] Already in 1795 he writes, "The pity is that, in theoretical philosophy, God is not determined as identical with my I but, in relation to my I, is determined as an object, and an ontological proof for the existence of an object is a contradictory concept" (SW 1, 168, note).

realized existence, is to be distinguished from God as existing. There is God and "that within God which is not *God himself*."[106]

In an attempt to explain this rather obscure claim he writes, "If we wish to bring this Being nearer to us from a human standpoint, we may say: It is longing that the eternal One feels to give birth to itself."[107] There is a primordial longing in this ground to be born, i.e. to exist. It is only a will with a presentiment or intuition [*Ahndung*] of understanding or reason [*Verstand*], pure blind will, darkness.[108] It now becomes clear how profoundly Schelling's language has changed compared to his earlier works. The concepts of reason make place for non-rational terms, such as: will, longing, desire, and birth.[109] This longing elicits a response:

> there is born in God himself an inward, imaginative response, corresponding to this longing, which is the first stirring of divine Being in its still dark depths. Through this response, God sees himself in his own image, since his imagination can have no other object than himself. This image…is the God-begotten God himself.[110]

God distinguishes himself from the longing (darkness) by objectifying it, and God comes to be. God comes into existence, comes to light, by separating from his own dark ground that is contained in himself.

It now becomes clear in what respect God and the Absolute differ. The Absolute in its indifference has no differentiations whereas in God two principles, ground (darkness) and existence (light), can be distinguished. These principles are truly opposed. Darkness opposes the attempts at understanding, clarification (light). The ground has all content but resists revealing itself in actual existence. Longing strives to preserve the light by "returning unto itself" in order "that a basis of being might ever remain." The ground is the creative potential, but at

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[106] SW 7, 407; 359 note 1; 359.

[107] SW 7, 359.

[108] Gutmann remarks that Schelling does not always honor the Kantian distinction between understanding and reason. See Gutmann 1936, 106.

[109] Tilliette speaks of a language that radiates a "mystical glow" (Tilliette 1975, 98). Many have associated this abrupt change with the influence of Jacob Böhme (1575–1624) whom Schelling has started to study extensively. Robert Brown, who has made an extensive study of the influence of Böhme on Schelling's philosophy, writes, "There is no important evidence of Böhme's impact upon Schelling until the essay on freedom of 1809, which suddenly discloses an unprecedented shift in his thought" (Brown 1977, 116). For the influence of Böhme, see also Fuhrmans 1954, 108–127.

[110] SW 7, 360f.

the same time it carries the threat of dark chaos, which Schelling refers to as "unruliness" [*das Regellose*]. Within God there is now a ground that "belongs to him himself" but is "nonetheless different from him." This implies that God is personal and that God has a life. In Schelling's view, being personal means being a unity of existence and its ground. Personality consists in the connection of "an autonomous being with a ground which is independent of it, in such a way namely that these two completely interpenetrate one another and are but one being." Hence, God, as the unity of ground and existence, is personal. Thanks to these two opposing principles God has a life because "without opposition [there is] no life."[111] God has a life that develops. There is one tendency to bring all of God to light and another to preserve it all. How this leads to creation, real things in and at the same time outside God, we will see in 3.4.2. Here we will continue with the other things that Schelling has to say about the Absolute and God.

Another difference between the Absolute and God remains more implicit. With the contemplation of his own image, understanding [*Verstand*] arises in God, it was said. This imagination, this light of understanding, is at the same time the *Word* of that longing. Schelling also introduces the German term *Geist* here that can both be translated as mind or spirit. The *Geist* is said to feel the word and the longing simultaneously. The introduction of terms like imagination, understanding, and word shows that this birth of God is at the same time the birth of consciousness. This personal God who has a life starts to gain (self-)consciousness. Here we see the old intuition surface that oneness and consciousness do not go together. In order for consciousness to arise, a differentiation has to take place: there must be someone with consciousness and something to be conscious of. Even *self*-consciousness, according to the reflection model, requires a split between the I-subject that is conscious and the I-object that it is conscious of. Likewise, the "start of consciousness [as] the becoming personal of God," implies an internal division of the absolute unity.[112]

The *Freiheitschrift* is the first step towards Schelling's new view of the Absolute. It is still tentative and immature, but it will form the basis for the rest of his philosophical career. The year after, in the *Stuttgarter*

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[111] SW 7, 361; 375; 394f.; 435.

[112] SW 7, 434. We will see the same struggle in Hölderlin's work in the next chapter.

Privatvorlesungen, the two principles in God are basically the same, but the articulation takes on a different coloring.

> The first principle or the first primordial power is that through which [God] is a specific, singular, individual being. We could call this power selfhood or selfishness in God. If this was the only power, God would be a singular, isolated being. There would be no creature. There would be nothing but eternal confinement [*Verschlossenheit*] and deepening [*Vertiefung*] in itself. This self-power of God would be . . . a consuming fire in which no creature could live. However, this principle is opposed by another. This other principle is love. . . . But pure love in itself could not be, not subsist; precisely because it is expansive by its very nature, infinitely communicative, it would flow away were not a contracting primordial power in it. As little as people can only consist of love, so can God.[113]

God's personhood becomes more pronounced in this text. His so-called selfishness is not just his ground but forms his real vitality. Indeed, "love is God himself, the actual God, *the* God," but God's "selfishness" is the "divine primordial power," his majesty. A personal God is a loving God, but one who also has a dark, deep, and powerful side. Again we see the split within the Absolute explained not as loss of unity but as gain in liveliness, personhood. But whereas in people the dark side can get out of control and turn into evil as Schelling will argue in 3.4.3., God's darkness remains an "indissoluble unity" with his light side. God's ground fully functions as it is also meant to function in people: as vitality, as creative potential. The Nonground divides itself "only that there may be life and love and personal existence."[114]

The Absolute of the early Schelling seems to have made place for a personal God. A wholly different vocabulary has been pulled into play, and entirely different images have arisen. The Absolute is an abstract philosophical concept, an It, whereas God is a personal being. When he starts referring to the Absolute as God, *its* characteristics become *his* personhood, *his* life. None of this means, that Schelling has given up on philosophy. After all, it is still a system that he is after. But his ambiguity about the possibility to construct a system becomes more pronounced. After 1809, Schelling is no longer convinced that the Absolute is completely accessible to reason. With all the twists and turns that his philosophy has taken, this is considered the major

113 SW 7, 438f.
114 SW 7, 408.

change in his long career by most who have studied him. He starts to turn away from what he calls negative philosophy, i.e. a philosophy that can only grasp the conceptual, in favor of his so-called positive philosophy, Christian philosophy, or theology. This is not a conscious decision taken at one point in his career and carried through consistently. The following example from the *Freedom* essay is illustrative of Schelling's ambiguity.

> However highly we place reason . . . only in personality is there life; and all personality rests on a dark foundation which must, to be sure, also be the foundation of knowledge. But only reason can bring forth what is contained in these depths.[115]

The world is founded on, grounded in, the nonrational. Nevertheless, it is reason that has to clarify the non-rational?!

This new approach offers new opportunities, but it also has its drawbacks. This God is starting to look all too human. Surprisingly, the accusation of anthropomorphism does not seem to bother Schelling much. He asserts, "In order to raise God above and far from the human, you meticulously take away all understanding and all understandable characteristics, powers, and activity" and have thereby turned him into a dead God. If we are to conceive of God as personal, as a life, then we must "regard him also as wholly human." We must assume that "his life has the greatest analogy with the human, that next to the eternal being in him there is also an eternal becoming." If the abstractions of philosophy yield no more than a lifeless concept of God, something is wrong. God is a living and life-giving being. Since the highest possible life-form that we are familiar with is the human being, why not take our cues from our own conception of life? A human being is "the world on a small scale."[116] Therefore,

> the processes of human life from the utmost depths to its highest consummation must agree with the processes of universal life. It is certain that whoever could write the history of his own life from its very ground, would have thereby grasped in a brief conspectus the history of the universe.[117]

In *Die Weltalter* Schelling's ideas about the life of God become more elaborate and sophisticated. Firstly, he has integrated the idea of

[115] SW 7, 413.
[116] SW 7, 432.
[117] SW 8, 207.

freedom in his concept of God. The duality ground-existence shifts towards necessity-freedom.

> Freedom and necessity are in God…Necessity lies at the basis of freedom and, as far as there can be such a distinction in God, is the first and oldest thing in God himself.[118]

God's necessity is prior to his freedom. Even though the God who is necessary is also the one who is free, the two are not identical. Schelling refers to what is necessary in God as God's nature. And what a being is by nature and what it is by freedom are two quite different things. "In creation God surmounts by freedom the necessity in his nature." God's freedom somehow overcomes his necessity.[119] And it is precisely in the act of creation that God exercises, or even discovers, his freedom, as we will see in 3.4.2.

Secondly, in *Die Weltalter* the wording of the primary duality in God emphasizes the importance of the negative aspect. God is purest love, but love cannot exist by itself. Since love does not seek what is its own, it needs another power "to give it a ground." This is the eternal power of selfhood, of egoity [*Egoität*]. "To be is se-ity [*Seinheit*], own-ness, seclusion." Hence, there are two principles in the divine nature: the outflowing, self-giving; and the return onto self, the being-in-self. God is a Yes, and God is the opposing No. "These contraries are equally essential and original…and neither is to be derived from the other." At this point, Schelling repeats his dissatisfaction with the one-sidedness of a purely idealistic system. In the *Freiheitschrift* he has criticized Fichte by remarking, "God is more of a reality than a mere moral world-order." Now he is able to characterize idealism's shortcomings as its persistent efforts to do away with one of the two roots of all that is. "Idealism…really consists in the denial or non-recognition of that primordial negating power." Thereby it ignores the fact that it is the No that provokes the Yes, that "negation is everywhere the first transition from nothing into something." Hence, it makes God into an "empty Infinite," it mistakes Infinity for perfection. However, the perfect "is in itself rounded, completed, finished."[120] A real, living God needs selfhood in order to prevent him from dissolving in his own infinity, which implies disappearing into nothingness.

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118 SW 8, 209.
119 SW 8, 209f.
120 SW 8, 210f.; 7, 356; 8, 212f.; 225; 212.

A third important change is that whereas in the *Freiheitschrift* Schelling is mainly concerned with emphasizing the dualistic nature of the divine, in *Die Weltalter* he is more elaborate about the "indissoluble unity" of this duality in God. Discerning the opposition is not enough, if the unity "is not recognized at the same time." It is indeed "*one and the same* that is the affirmation and the negation, the outspreading and the restraining." Therefore, he now posits a triad of powers. God is "an eternal No... [and] an eternal Yes.... But God is just as eternally the third principle or unity of the Yes and the No." There must be an inseparable union of these three; none by itself would fulfill the entire concept of the necessary nature of God. "The negating potency is as essential as the affirming one, and the unity, again, is not more essential than each of the opposites is by itself."[121]

Therefore it must be concluded that the "first nature is of itself... in a necessary contradiction." Contradiction is necessary since it is the only thing that can provoke activity and life. "Without contradiction there would thus be no motion, no life, no progress, but eternal immobility, a deathly slumber of all powers." In order to demonstrate how these contradictory powers come into action, one of the central terms of the *Freiheitschrift* is reintroduced: the blind will. Willing something implies a lack of that something. One only wills what is not there. That what is willed and is thus intended to be is thereby posited as not being. "Every beginning depends on that not being which really should be."[122] Since there is nothing outside of the Absolute, it can will nothing but itself.

The very first beginning can only lie in such self-willing. But to will one's self and to negate one's self as being are one and the same thing. Thus the first beginning can also only be by negating self as being.[123]

By willing (itself) the Absolute negates itself. "But the divine nature does not suffer God to be merely eternal No." Thus, the affirming power is aroused. The eternal affirmation opposes the negating power. As a result, the unity of the divine seems torn. Nevertheless, the two opposites "tend toward unity, or to a convergence in one and the same." The negating power can only perceive itself as negating, if there is a

[121] SW 8, 213; 218.
[122] SW 8, 219.
[123] SW 8, 224.

disclosing power. Reversely, the latter can only act as affirming when there is something negated, restrained, something to liberate. "Hence they posit outside and above themselves a third, which is the unity." Nevertheless, each of the three has the same right to be that, which is. Therefore, having attained its summit, the movement itself returns to its beginning. As a result, "primal nature is a life eternally revolving in itself," "an incessant wheel," and "completely involuntary movement." By virtue of this necessary and unconscious movement it can never come to real being. It has to be "delivered from this cycle," otherwise it will remain "in a state of perpetual desire [*Begierde*]."[124]

The described process belongs to God's necessary nature that is only the very beginning of the life of God. God's life, like all other lives, starts involuntarily. Or, in the language of the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, it begins unconsciously "from a condition in which everything is still inseparately together." This is his "still musing [*stilles Sinnen*] about himself without utterance and revelation." God is still entirely caught up in himself, it might be said. But in a life a certain development takes place. In this eternally beginning life the urge to throw off the involuntary movement lies dormant. The seed of freedom, "the longing to escape from the eternal cycle [*Umtrieb*]" is ready to germinate.[125] In the beginning of the birth process the dark principle rules. With the aroused principle of light, the first inkling of consciousness comes into being. In a glimpse, "as a vision," God sees the possibility of creating. This is the first phase of the life of God in which the world of ideas, which is not yet the real world, is born.

The ideas are not mere thoughts, but rather images or visions that, as such, already contain traces of bodilyness. Contrary to Plato, Schelling views these ideas as volatile and transient. In the idea world, actual reality is lacking. Ideas are born from the silent play of the powers within God. They are in God without real selfhood and freedom; they are no more than God's imagination. Nevertheless, the idea world is the first, if only ideal, realization of God. "Such prototypes or visions [are] a necessary moment in the great development of life." Yet, this stage cannot last. "As the games of childhood, in which later life previsages itself, are fleeting, so, too, that blessed dream of the

[124] SW 8, 225–232.
[125] SW 7, 432; 8, 241.

gods could not last."[126] The ideas, which were "without independent life within [God]," long to be realized, to really be. "All life that is merely in germ . . . yearns to be raised from mute, ineffective unity into an expressed, effective one."[127] God creates the world to raise life from a mute to an expressed unity.

This is the turning point between necessity and freedom. Up to this point the process is a necessary one. If life progresses from here on, it is "only by virtue of a free divine resolution . . . Nothing compels it . . . to come forth from itself." If God realizes his ideas, this is the result of a free decision. The eruption of the powers and the birth of the ideas are necessary and involuntary, but the real world is created in freedom. In the plea of the ideas to be realized God understands himself as sovereign. God becomes conscious of the fact that he has the power to create, and in this God first experiences his freedom. "From now on the history of the realization, or of the real revelations of God, begins."[128] Let us now take a closer look at this free act whereby God creates the world.

3.4.2. *God and World*

In the first necessary nature of God is blind necessity and a continual, involuntary rotation of the powers, whereas creation is a free act, it was said.

> If there were nothing except that blind necessity, then life would remain in this dark, chaotic condition of an eternally and therefore never-beginning, eternally and therefore never-ending movement.[129]

Deliverance has to come from "something else that is outside of it, completely independent of it, and elevated above it": freedom. God is "free eternity," and the "decision of God, to reveal his highest self in epochs, came from the purest freedom." This freedom lies exactly in the equal rights of the two contradictory primordial powers. If the godhead were merely a Yes or a No, then it would have to be one way or another, affirmation or negation. That it is both, and both with equal essentiality, is the reason why it is the highest freedom.[130] God is free to choose between two powers that both have equal rights: con-

[126] SW 8, 290; 297.
[127] SW 7, 404; 8, 297.
[128] SW 8, 300; 305.
[129] SW 8, 252.
[130] SW 8, 233; 307; 300.

tracting selfishness that does not want the world and expanding love that does. He can open up or remain in eternal self-sufficient confinement [*Verschlossenheit*]. Hence, God is completely free to either posit the world, to create, or to remain what he is in himself: pure godhead. Here the terminology shifts again: the Absolute of the young Schelling that becomes the *Urgrund* or the *Ungrund* in the course of the *Freiheitschrift* is now referred to as the pure godhead in *Die Weltalter*. The Absolute that gives rise to all that is has become the godhead who chooses to create the world.

By this free act the pure godhead breaks out of this eternal cycle of alternate positing of the Yes, the No, and their unity. The three principles become separated and a hierarchy arises. All three powers have the same right to be: they are equi-essential and equi-primordial. Only when they "give up being one and the same (that which is), there comes to be space and a true 'above' and 'below.'" Schelling now speaks of three potencies. The first potency is "visible nature"; the second potency, a higher one, is the "spirit world"; and the whole is animated, "as with one breath," by the third potency, the universal soul. In addition, "outside of and above God's necessity, which, in the three potencies, constitutes eternal nature,… is eternal freedom, pure willing itself."[131] Even though the three powers or principles have now given rise to three separate potencies, it does not mean that the eternal One has been split up in three separate realms; nature-matter, spirit-mind, and the universal soul. This third potency is a unity principle that permeates all of creation and does not allow a simple subdivision. As Schelling puts it,

> That universal soul whereby the universe is animated… [is] the eternal bond between nature and the spirit world as well as between the world and God, the immediate instrument whereby alone God works in nature and the spirit world.[132]

The universal soul keeps all of creation united and connected with God. In other words, creation is permeated by God's immediate unity principle.

The other two potencies, however, are also subject to internal opposition. Nature, as the first potency, contains the two contradictory powers, "of which the one always longs for the outside [and]

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131 SW 8, 253; 248; 239.
132 SW 8, 252.

the other presses back toward the inside."[133] In nature the negating power dominates and pushes the spiritual back inside. But this does not mean that the spiritual is conquered or annihilated. On the contrary, it becomes the innermost center of nature. It is its very core that never stops trying to come out. Here we see Schelling's conviction that nature is spirited and alive instead of a dead mechanism surface once again. Nature may be material, but it is not dead matter. It enables life and development. It is not merely an obstacle that stands in the way of a superior principle. It also shelters it, so to speak. *Geist*, spirit, or mind live thanks to and within nature. The negating power forms its necessary basis; it provides the creature with a "mainstay," a "real ground," and "it gives it form, limits it in position, and gives body to something that is in itself spiritual and intangible… [and] hostile to all limitations." Things of the world need the negating ground to give them selfhood, to give them "explicitness," to enable them to be. The original negation is "the mother and nurse of the entire world visible to us." Its role or law is to make fast the spiritual again and again, and thus to maintain the ground of eternal progress.[134]

The second potency, the spirit world, has an inner duality as well. But this time the situation is reversed: the spiritual is turned outward and the dark, primordial power is pushed back inside. The difference between visible nature and the spirit world, "only a higher nature," is that, as corporeal, nature has "its limitation external to it," whereas spirits have their limitation within themselves. "The negating power is the enclosed and hidden power in it,… that hidden power of darkness." This darkness will never dominate; it will always "remain within and submissive to the gentle light essence," and "the law of the second potency is to repress the negating original power." Therefore both nature and the spirit world aim at "raising the Yes over the No," and with each new division more of the center of being is disclosed.[135]

> The summit of the progress of nature is the human being in whom that heavenly germ at last completely develops, where the highest potency is placed above all, and where creation's artistry just on that account celebrates the victory of liberation.[136]

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[133] SW 8, 246.
[134] SW 8, 243–255.
[135] SW 8, 287; 250; 287.
[136] SW 8, 279.

In the human being this inner "heavenly, soul-like essence" can be made the highest principle. (Wo)man "is really the connection point of the entire universe," being the first bond between nature and spirit world and mediating "the transmission of the attracting movement up into what is highest."[137] People have the freedom to let the unity principle reign and thus form the living representation of the highest One. Before explaining in the next section how this "heavenly germ" nonetheless abuses its divine freedom to commit evil acts, another difficulty associated with creation should be looked into: namely, time.

God's decision to create is a completely free one, and "eternity opens out into time in this decision," Schelling asserts. The latter needs explanation. "Since there is no time in God himself, how is he to create the world in time?" Schelling wonders. The answer, once again, lies in the fact that God is the unity of contradictory powers. The pure godhead is "a consuming No, the eternal power of wrath which does not tolerate any being outside itself, whole and undivided," but "it is also necessarily eternal Yes, empowering love." The negation and the affirmation are not just properties or parts of the godhead, but *the godhead itself*. God *is* both. God is the No and the Yes as well as the unity of both. Only through the concept of different times can this contradiction between Yes and No and their unity be conceived. Because if "God as Yes and God as No cannot be *in the same time*" [Schelling's choice of words is deliberate], it implies that one must be first and that the other must come later. But it is important that we understand this the right way, Schelling emphasizes. The problem is that in modern philosophy a correct concept of time is lacking. Past time is considered annulled time. This is not correct. It cannot be that the preceding is annulled by what follows, or absolutely ceases being. The past cannot, of course, be the present. But it is *in* the present; namely as something past. The future is also present now as potential, as something yet to be. It would be absurd, Schelling maintains, "to consider being past as well as being future as complete non-being." God's No is not simply substituted by God's Yes. The divine opposing powers must be "at once, *in different times*."[138]

137 SW 8, 297.
138 SW 8, 302; 308; 299; 302.

Of the complexity and the awkwardness of expressing the link between eternity and time also Schelling is fully aware. On the one hand, he must assert that in God's eternity, at least logical, progression has to be distinguished, otherwise God's freedom cannot be thought. On the other hand he emphasizes, "We must conceive this course of events thus," but "the whole thing can only be considered as having happened in a flash, since it is conceived as something which happened without having really (*explicite*) happened." Only by presenting it as such, by going "to work piecemeal," he is able to achieve "the complete concept of the godhead." However, this separation of primordial powers in the pure godhead "recurs eternally and even now in each moment, that dark, impenetrable, and unutterable nature becomes the all." This whole process is from all eternity. The "primordial state is posited as an eternal past, a past... [that] was the past primordially and from all eternity." With a correct concept of time also the true meaning of eternity becomes clear. Eternity must be considered not as those moments of time taken together, but as "coexisting with each single one, so that eternity sees only itself (the entire immeasurable eternity) in each individual moment."[139] In God's decision to create simultaneity is suspended and changed into succession, and time arises within eternity.

In the same act when God decides on creation, it is then determined that God as eternal No is to be the ground of existence of the eternal Yes. The power of negation "is God only with respect to possibility, not in actuality." The ground never dissolves or disappears in this process. It remains free and independent, in exclusion and solitude, "until its time is fulfilled, and it must persevere with all its strength, so that life may [eventually] be raised to the highest glory." Consequently, the entire unity, all that is, is "not yet the real or realized God." It is rather "the state of possibility (of potentiality) in which God has voluntarily placed himself." There is still "concealed being" posited as future. Nevertheless, the whole of God already is with respect to the possibility (of becoming manifest). This is how Schelling can think God on the one hand both as eternal and immutable and make statements like: "There is no becoming in the pure godhead"; "In God is no change [*Wechsel und Wandel*]"; "Now it cannot be thought that God was unconscious for a period of time before he gained consciousness." On the other

[139] SW 8, 304; 254; 242; 254; 307.

hand, he can assert that history and the process of nature are "nothing other than the process of completely coming to consciousness, God's complete personalization."[140] Thanks to Schelling's concept of time, God can both be and not yet fully be. There is a rest, a potential of being, a future.

Creation is Gods turning outwards for Schelling. The world does not arise from a process of emanation in which the quality of the emanated is less than what it emanates from. Neither does he support *creatio ex nihilo*. Instead of being produced from nothing, finite creatures are made out of relative non-being [*Nichtseiendes*] since the principle of ground as the creative potential is opposed to the principle of existence. World is revelation, hence progressive realization of God. Therefore, it proceeds towards ever more perfection. God's life is intimately connected with and involved in the world.

> I posit God…as alpha and as omega, but he is not as alpha what he is as omega…[As alpha] he is the non-unfolded [*unentfaltete*] God, *Deus implicitus*, only as omega is he *Deus explicitus*.[141]

It is the same godhead from all eternity, but God unfolds in time.

After having discussed the creation of the world, it is now time to return to the *Freiheitschrift* and see how Schelling deals with the issue of real evil in the world. He is unwilling to trivialize evil by reducing it to "the so-called *malum metaphysicum* or the negative concept of the imperfection of the creature." Evil is not just lack of goodness, as certain traditions suggest. "Imperfection in the general metaphysical sense, is not the common character of evil."[142] Evil is very real, too real in our world to be ignored. So how does this evil arise from a godhead that has no evil in it whatsoever? An evil root next to and independent of God is not an option for Schelling, as we have seen. Nonetheless, he is convinced that some degree of duality is needed. The important notion of opposition has been lost in modern philosophy, and Schelling thinks he can explain why this is the case.[143] Descartes, the originator of modern philosophy, has broken the world into

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[140] SW 8, 303; 315; 298; 256; 262; 7, 433.
[141] SW 8, 81.
[142] SW 7, 367ff.
[143] Schelling has either forgotten or wishes to ignore the fact that Hölderlin had made opposition the core of his philosophy already a decade earlier. See Chapter 4.

body and mind, and has thus "lost unity for duality." This mistake Spinoza attempts to correct, but in Spinoza's philosophy "duality is lost in favor of unity." He concerns himself only with the two opposites, each for itself. And without the unity as an active, vital bond of the two, his system can only remain in "eternal, immovable, inactive sameness." His "dead substance" cannot explain life and development because unity and duality themselves are not brought "into living antithesis, and thereby also again brought to unity, philosophy [has] with each step become more and more one-sided." It has been shown how the interplay of opposing powers is necessary for the world to come into existence. Now it will be explained how this ground-existence duality has a side-effect that explains the struggle between good and evil. Evil is a real power in humans that cannot be ignored, and Schelling even calls it the "chief subject in question."[144] So let us take a closer look at how real evil comes to be.

3.4.3. *World and Evil*

Two opposing principles exist in all things, Schelling has stated repeatedly, the No and the Yes, the negating and the affirming, selfishness and love. In the language of the *Freiheitschrift* his favorite pair of opposites is the dark principle of the ground and the light of understanding. These he now applies to explain evil. The "principle of darkness…is the self-will of creatures" that "stands opposed to understanding as universal will." The tendency of the dark ground to "return unto itself" operates incessantly in every individual in order to retain a basis of being. It is a centripetal force, a contracting, inward power that arouses self-will and self-preservation. From the dark ground originates selfhood, which is not a bad thing in itself; "without [activated selfhood] there would be complete death, goodness slumbering." Individual existence needs a ground. Hence, selfhood as such is not the problem; its dominance is. Evil arises out of the "exaltation of self-will." When a person's will strives to live for itself disregarding its proper place in the whole, selfhood becomes sovereign instead of "the basis or the instrument." Selfhood is the necessary ground of all being, but it should remain precisely that: ground [*Grund*]. It should stay *im Grunde*, at the bottom, underneath, and it should never become the top-principle.

[144] SW 8, 340f.; 7, 373.

The ground is meant to support, to serve. If it dominates, individuality turns to chaos and becomes evil. "All evil strives back towards chaos, that is, towards that condition in which the initial center has not yet been subordinated to light."[145] Evil is the ground that has gotten out of control.

The dark principle needs to be counterbalanced by its opposite, a centrifugal force, which Schelling calls understanding, that strives towards expansion. As understanding unfolds all that is implicit in the dark ground, love arises as the force that holds the distinguished elements together. Only when the ground is "subdued through love, goodness awakens and becomes actual in man." Love prevents the ground from unleashing evil, but love needs to be provoked. Schelling even states that the ground "rouses egotism and a particularized will just *in order that* the will of love may arise in contrast to it." Love unites what is different and independent. Love cannot be in indifference, nor in two opposites that depend on each other for their existence. No, "this is the secret of love, that it unites such beings as could each exist in itself, and nonetheless neither is nor can be without the other."[146] Thus, it also unites the existent with the ground of existence.

We see a construction of two opposing principles and a third principle of unity similar to the one used in *Die Weltalter* explaining the three potencies. The *Freiheitschrift* was written some four years earlier, when this new approach was only just beginning to form in Schelling's mind, and we see that this idea of two opposites and an equally primordial unity of the two is still immature. Since *Die Weltalter* is never finished, the *Freiheitschrift* essay is Schelling's only lengthy account of the origins of evil. Therefore, we have to make do with the, sometimes unclear, terminology where these three basic principles are concerned.

With these contradictory principles that are active in every human being Schelling has explained the possibility of evil in a world that arises from one single ground that is in itself wholly without evil. It explains why people can be "in" God without being fatalistically determined by God. They arise from the dark ground in God that "is not he himself." Hence, they have an independence over against God. In creating beings that are fully conscious of both principles, "the whole

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[145] SW 7, 363; 400; 365; 389; 374.

[146] SW 7, 400; 381 (italics CvW); 408.

power of the principle of darkness" and "the whole force of light," God has created free beings.[147] But whereas in God these two principles are an indissoluble unity, this unity is lost in the world. People are truly free to choose between good and evil. They can choose between two divine principles that are both active in them and that are both good as such and necessary for individual life. They can either be guided by the principle of understanding and love and recognize themselves as parts of an unfolding unity, or they can follow the principle of darkness and make selfhood their ultimate goal.

However, this freedom to choose evil notwithstanding, individual life can only flourish when there is a balance between the three principles:

1. There must be selfhood to support individual existence (the dark ground);
2. The gradual unfolding of selfhood is roused by understanding (the light);
3. Love acts as the unity that holds it all together.

If this process gets out of control, the dark ground starts working against the individual. This selfhood that is connected with the tendency to turn inward, to contract, can try to drag all that it encounters into this selfish center, as it were. However, eventually an out-of-control selfhood will not serve but only destroy the person because it can never be actualized; it is non-being. "The beginning of sin consists in man's going over from actual being to non-being,... from light to darkness." Selfhood is only the ground of actual existence, not real being itself. Just like when a single organ is out of accord with the organism as a whole and develops a fever, sin is a lack of harmony in the person that leads to destruction, Schelling asserts. "Evil in the moral world is what sickness is in the bodily world." An exaggerated selfhood is evil, and "evil... is no being but a counterfeit of being, which is real only by contrast, not in itself."[148] Real being is a combination of sustaining and developing the self, a balance between closing up and opening out, an alternation of contracting and expanding.

[147] SW 7, 458; 363.
[148] SW 7, 390; 436f.; 409.

Hence, our life depends on a dark ground that we can never actually control, even if we try in evil. Selfhood can never be raised to complete actuality. "This is the sadness which adheres to all finite life," Schelling remarks. Even when the desire for building a system is still fully active in Schelling, it is becoming obvious that the all-controlling I, which is associated with it, is losing ground. In what he calls the "deeper disclosures" of his system an element of insecurity creeps in with sadness as the result. Schelling has found an interesting solution for the problem of the human freedom to do real evil arising from a unitary ground that is totally free from evil. It characterizes his way of thinking that on the one hand he takes selfhood to be the mere ground of existence, not real in itself, and on the other hand feels saddened by the fact that his I will never master the world. Schelling wants to think unity because his system demands it, but he values individuality above all. In the next chapter we will see how for Hölderlin individuality is an obstacle to the unity that he really longs for. But let us proceed with Schelling. It could be objected that since sadness and evil seem to be an inevitable consequence of God's desire to gain consciousness, God acted irresponsibly and thereby caused evil. Schelling's question "How is God to be justified in view of evil?" will be discussed next.[149]

3.4.4. *Evil and God*

With the decision to posit the world God takes a risk since it implies freeing the powers that are until then tamed. By separating ground from existence, evil can take on a life of its own, so to speak. The following fragment forms a summary of Schelling's conception of creation and its accompanying possibility of evil.

> The first period of creation…is the birth of light. Light…is the creative Word which redeems the hidden life in the depths from non-being, raises it from potency to actuality. Spirit rises above the Word and is the first being which unites the dark world and the world of light and subordinates both principles to it for the sake of realization and personhood. However, the depths react to this unity and maintain the original duality, but only for ever increasing intensification and for the final division of good and evil. The will of the depths must abide in its freedom till all has been fulfilled, till all has become real. If it were conquered sooner, the good would remain concealed in it together with evil. But the good

[149] SW 7, 399; 334; 394.

> is to be raised out of darkness to actuality in order to dwell with God everlastingly; and evil is to be separated from goodness in order to be cast out eternally into non-being.[150]

Most of this process has been discussed in the preceding sections. The light of understanding (or the Word) raises the potential of the ground into actual existence. The process of creation results in real, individual, and conscious life. In order for this creative process to continue the dark ground must remain independent from the light of understanding. Only thus the entire creative potential can be brought to light. All that can be must really come to be. All that is good must be revealed, and all that is evil must be unmasked as non-being, as opposed to real life. Besides love, Spirit is a term that Schelling uses for the unity principle that arises to hold the opposites together. Its exact meaning and the difference with love is not very clear. Sometimes it seems a mere synonym. At other times, Spirit signifies the living unity of God's ground and existence, hence God's personal being. In any case, both love and Spirit express a form of realization of the unity principle, a living unity of opposites. Creation is meant to realize an actual, living unity.

That God never wills evil as such should be evident from the aforementioned. But is evil merely an inevitable side-effect of the creative act? At times, Schelling seems to suggest just this. He writes, "that which comes from…the depths, does not come from God, even though it is [also] necessary for his existence." In addition, he asserts that neither God nor the human being can rid himself of the ground; "he can only subdue it through love." Hence, the ground is a possible evil that, once unleashed, can only be subdued at best. Nevertheless, God's impotence with respect to evil seems an unsatisfactory option that causes Schelling to take a different approach. He claims that God's decision to create is "a conscious and morally free act."[151] God is fully aware of all its consequences, and the claim that God should not have created because he foreknew that evil would occur is wholly misguided.

> The question why God did not prefer not to reveal himself at all, since he necessarily foresaw that evil would at least follow as an accompaniment of self-revelation, this question really deserves no reply. For this would be as much as saying that love itself should not be…that is, the

[150] SW 7, 404.
[151] SW 7, 399; 400; 397.

> absolutely positive should be sacrificed to that which has its existence only as a contrast.[152]

Evil exists only as contrast to goodness and love. It needs to be unmasked as non-being and cast out. "The end of revelation is therefore the banishment of evil from the good, its exposure as being altogether unreal."[153] The choice to abstain from self-revelation in order to avoid evil would sacrifice goodness to evil, and real being to non-being.

Creation is meant to produce life. Since the ground makes individuality possible, it enables real life, and as such it provides the opportunity to realize actual love. "Self-will is aroused only in order that love in man may find a material contrast in which to realize itself." The ground arouses the self-will of creatures that serves as the opponent in which love can realize itself. In overcoming the domination of selfhood, love materializes; it takes on flesh and blood in real people. "Goodness without effective selfhood is itself an ineffective goodness." All that is good must be activated into existence. "If there were no division of the principles, then unity could not manifest its omnipotence; if there were no conflict then love could not become real." Only in conquering real opposition, unity triumphs. "If the identity of both principles were just as indissoluble in man as in God, then there would be no difference – that is, God as Spirit would not be revealed." God as Spirit is a living unity that comes to be thanks to the defeat of duality. Evil is "necessary for God's revelation" because only through the expulsion of selfishness goodness and love can be revealed.[154]

According to Schelling, (wo)man's role in this revelation of God cannot be underestimated. After all, "God can only reveal himself in creatures who resemble him, in free, self-activating beings." Human beings are the climax of God's self-revelation because of this freedom. In their acts they will either free the good or the evil. If a person chooses evil and thus allows himself to be led by the self-will of the dark ground, this does not make the ground the cause of evil. "Evil ever remains man's own choice; the ground cannot cause evil as such,

[152] SW 7, 402.
[153] SW 7, 405.
[154] SW 7, 401; 400; 373f.; 364; 373.

and every creature falls through its own guilt."[155] The human being is the center of creation.

> Man has been placed on that summit where he contains within him the source of self-impulsion towards good and evil in equal measure; the nexus of the principles within him is not a bond of necessity but of freedom. He stands at the dividing line; whatever he chooses will be his act, but he cannot remain in indecision because God must necessarily reveal himself.[156]

Only in a human being the Spirit, "that is God as existing" reveals itself. If in a man the dark principle of selfhood and self-will is completely penetrated by light and is one with it, "then God, as eternal love or as really existent is the nexus of the forces in him."[157] A human being who has reached a perfect balance between the two principles, whose dark ground is completely radiant with the light of understanding, fully realizes eternal love and embodies God.

The final purpose of creation is to raise all out of the depth and elevate it into existence, to accomplish God's complete realization. When "God will be all in all, that is,...completely realized," the process of creation will end. It starts with the Nonground, a state of indifference where all being was in an enveloped state. Then a dark, blind will arises in this Nonground, and it changes from indifference into two contradictory principles (ground and existence) and their unity. In the process, the dark, amorphous unity of the beginning develops into a new kind of unity. It is no longer "the identity of the two principles but rather the general unity... – in a word, it is love which is all in all."[158] There will be a unity of individual beings that freely choose to be one, to unite in love instead of a unity in which no individuality, or life, or freedom can be distinguished. The godhead will be most fully realized, if its unity assumes being in free and independent beings that freely choose to unite. This is Schelling's conception of *Hen kai pan*, of a One that grounds all.

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[155] SW 7, 347; 382.
[156] SW 7, 374
[157] SW 7, 363f.; 389f.
[158] SW 7, 404; 408.

3.5. From Here Onwards

This chapter has provided an elaborate description of Schelling's diverse solutions for the philosophical problems that he was up against. At an early age, he sets out to build a system that should combine the best of Kant and Spinoza. It should intimately connect the two aspects of life that can be summarized as mind and body, *Geist* and *Natur*. Schelling's quest starts out as an attempt to reconcile the subjective and the objective into one absolute ground. However, for his system to be complete, he also has to achieve the reverse: to think the emergence of subjects and objects of consciousness from this Absolute. The latter turns out to be a problem. He remains unable to make the transition from the Absolute to the finite subjects and objects of the world. He needs this unitary Absolute to explain knowledge of the world, but starting from the Absolute does not even come near explaining the particular world we live in.

These early philosophical attempts definitely qualify as what Beiser calls absolute idealism as a synthesis of monism (a unitary Absolute), vitalism (development of this Absolute), and rationalism (a purpose in this process that is discernible for human beings). It is the latter that gets infected with a degree of unknowability around the time the *Freiheitschrift* is written. There is a dark ground to all reality that cannot be fully brought to light within the limits of human reason. Schelling still has not mastered the Absolute with his thinking I. He cannot disprove the Kantian rejection of metaphysical knowledge. Duality still threatens in every attempt at absolute knowledge.

In the *Freiheitschrift*, Schelling takes an entirely different approach in order to cope with duality. The Yes and the No are complemented with their unity in the nature of God; selfhood (darkness) and understanding (light) are connected in love. Unity is imposed on opposites. The resulting texts are evocative but often obscure as well. They no longer seem in accordance with the standards of philosophical discourse. In the inability to admit defeat, the immense ambition to outdo each and every one of his opponents, and the overwhelming rhetoric his imagination tends to run away with him from time to time. We cannot ignore the contradictions and the lack of clarity in his terminology: it is not clear how exactly God, the Absolute, the pure godhead, the *Ungrund*, the *Urgrund*, the Eternal, and the Infinite are related. They are one and the same, but then again they are not. They are different sides of the same medal, but then again how many sides can one medal

have? Schelling never gives up, but his attempts at building a system all fail. Perhaps the most obvious illustration of this is the fact that *Die Weltalter*, which is to be his masterpiece, is never published during his lifetime. He promises its publication on several occasions, he even takes a copy to the publishers, only to demand its return. Spinoza and Kant are never reconciled in a grand system à la Schelling.

Nonetheless, the *Freiheitschrift* has brought to light an interesting view on human freedom. Within a unitary Absolute (a term that is no longer used at this point), he is able to think free individuals who can do real evil without having to think an evil root in the ground of all that is. Selfhood constitutes the basis for the unfolding of the Divine, and it provides creatures with a real ground. Being an I is good, but an I that is only directed at its own center is egocentric in the negative sense of the word. Only if there is enough willingness to open up, to flee this self-centeredness, real life develops. We are free to choose our own balance between these two inner forces of contracting or expanding. We are free to commit evil or good deeds. If we open up, we contribute to the unfolding of the *Deus implicitus* into the *Deus explicitus*. This is an important conclusion for the present study.

Schelling's work is interesting in itself, both for its failures and for its profound insights. It will become even more interesting, however, when contrasted to Hölderlin's. The latter's philosophical start at the *Tübinger Stift* is similar to Schelling's; so is the intensity of his drive to find a metaphysics that can give answers to the questions of his time. Nevertheless, the actual solutions are entirely different. Hölderlin, whose intellectual abilities are in no way inferior to Schelling's, makes a different choice. His melancholic temperament, his passivity and receptivity, and his artistic talents lead him in an entirely different direction: poetry. He appears to have never associated with the early romantic circles in Jena, but Hölderlin is, by his very nature perhaps, a romantic. A large portion of the differences between Schelling and Hölderlin coincide with those between German idealism and the philosophy of early German romanticism. The German idealists attempt to build a system on the certainty of a fundamental proposition [*Grundsatz*] that will serve to justify all knowledge. The young Schelling hesitates from time to time but never during his publications parts with his dream of building a philosophical system based on first principles from which all that is can be deduced.

The early Romantics, on the contrary, are of the opinion that people cannot grasp the Absolute or the Unconditioned in thought, and this might imply that they can never have adequate knowledge of reality. "In early German Romanticism, respect for the finitude of our potential for knowledge (a respect which Kant had already shown) begins to be taken seriously," Manfred Frank asserts.[159] He calls the philosophy of early German romanticism a version of ontological and epistemological realism. Ontological realism because it maintains that reality exists independently of our consciousness (even if thought plays a role in structuring reality). Epistemological realism because it asserts that we do not possess adequate knowledge of reality. The early romantics react skeptically to a philosophy based on an absolute principle.

Hölderlin calls the unitary ground of all that is "Being", as we will see in the next chapter. Being does not stand for a highest principle of thought, but rather for the assertion that since Being precedes consciousness, knowledge can never exhaust the content of Being. The term Being in early German romanticism also implies a monistic program of explanation. But the combination of ontological monism and ontological and epistemological realism implies that what cannot be known must nonetheless be presupposed as a condition of not only all knowledge but also of all that is (*omnitudo realitatis*) and of the ability to experience myself as an I.[160]

> The program of a deduction from a highest principle is transformed into an infinite approximation towards a principle that can never be reached. In other words, the first principle becomes a regulative idea.[161]

According to the early German romantics, our knowledge has no absolute foundation. It is situated in an infinite progression. The "very essence [of Romantic poetry] is that it eternally becomes and can never be completed," according to the youngest Schlegel.[162] The focus shifts from the source to the destination, or in theological terms: from creation to eschatology. Whereas Schelling is occupied with explaining how the world came into being, we will see how Hölderlin concentrates on its striving towards perfection.

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[159] Frank 2004, 24.
[160] Ibid., 56f.
[161] Ibid., 32.
[162] Karl Friedrich Schlegel, in: Richards 2002, 22.

German idealism and early German romanticism overlap historically during the time that both Hölderlin and Schelling graduate from the *Stift* and start their intellectual careers, in 1793 and 1795 respectively. The times are dominated by the French Revolution that is seen as the (primordial) birth of a new era. Even when geography makes this impossible, German intellectuals consider themselves directly involved, the partners of the French revolutionaries. They feel real contributors to the changes that are taking place in the world: their thinking is the spirit of the revolution. The *Freiheit* that has become the center of German philosophy is the *liberté* that is realized in France. Thoughts and words not only interpret the world, but they can change it as well! Infected by the initial enthusiasm for an entirely new world arising from the ashes of the old one, the three famous *Stiftler* Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling, erect a tree of freedom in Tübingen. Other famous thinkers such as Schiller, Novalis, Fichte, and the Schlegel brothers ardently believe in this French event as a turn for the better as well. For many, the enthusiastic support turns into disgust when terror and repression are the result of this so-called freedom. For those the French Revolution soon becomes the symbol of the tyranny of reason.

This disillusion with Enlightenment and the resulting suspicion concerning reason dominates early German romanticism. Life must be more than reason. Life is also a dark, mysterious, and terrifying primal force devoid of all rationality. This same conviction is reflected in Jacobi's sharp distinction between reason and faith. The former ultimately leads to despair, fatalism, sterility, and death, and the latter leads to a vital connection with reality. It is influential because it succeeds in "capturing the flavour of a growing disillusionment with the Enlightenment and the claims of reason rampant at the time."[163] The Romantics are not uniformly opposed to the Enlightened emphasis on reason. But they argue "that aesthetic judgment [offers] another, complementary path into the deep structures of reality, a path overlooked by most Enlightenment thinkers."[164] The words of Johann Gottfried Herder obtain new authority: reason is always "reason afterwards." It works with causality and is therefore unable to grasp the creative whole. Causality is predictable, creativity is not. Herder speaks of living

[163] Snow 1996, 23.
[164] Richards 2002, xvii.

or lively [*lebendig*] reason in contrast to abstract reason. Living/lively reason submerges in existence, the subconscious, the irrational, the spontaneous; in dark, creative life itself. Nature is the euphoria of creativity but also the threat of the overwhelming [*das Unheimliche*]. The powers of nature and history are experienced as numinous.[165] We recognize echoes of this in Schelling's concept of the dark power in God, the unruly [*das Regellose*]. We will see even more of it in Hölderlin's approach in the next chapter.

The romantic emphasis on creativity involves the increased prestige of literature. A quarter of the population has now become potential readers. Two and a half thousand different titles are published between 1790–1800. This is as much as was the case in the first nine decades of the same century, according to Rüdiger Safranski.[166] This passion for reading elicits a writing fever. Reading adds drama to lives that are otherwise uneventful. The inability to give a rational explanation is no longer a shortcoming but rather a plus. The deep secrets of life and the dark depths of human feelings become an attractive theme. Especially novels of secret societies (Jesuits, freemasons, Rosicrucians) are popular. Poetry, philosophy, science, and politics fuse in order to show that the world is a piece of art. In the journal *Athenaeum*, which is published from 1798 to 1800, the early Romantics "symphilosophize" and "sympoetize" in the conviction that art should penetrate not only philosophy, but all of life. Poetry is the language that creates the sacred space in which the divine can show itself. Romanticism wants to "bring to light those hidden possibilities of reality with playful and at the same time explorative imagination."[167] A new self-consciousness of artistic autonomy, the encouragement to play and sublime futility, the promise of the whole in the detail is the context of the generation of early German romantics.

It is a reaction to the chill and the rigidity of society. Nature has been turned into a self-preserving mechanism. It is devoid of divine secrets and is supposed to act according to its own laws that guarantee its continuation. The mystery, the awesomeness, has gone out of life. Romanticism tries to recover the drama, the mystery, the beauty, and the passion. The romantic idea of religion as the presentation of the

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[165] See Safranski 2007, 17–28.
[166] Ibid., 48f.
[167] Ibid., 133.

Infinite in the finite is also its definition of art. The romantics believe that art can revive an old and feeble Christianity. True religion is not dogma but explication of creative freedom in people. Another aspect of romanticism is a longing for the golden age of Antiquity. Feasting, *orgiasmus*, ecstatic rage, all Dionysian traits, are seen as the attractive aspects of the antique religion.

Safranski calls romanticism "a continuation of religion with esthetic means."[168] He lists the following aspects of romantic religion:

1. Worldly participation in the Divine, a unification of human being and God.
2. Anti-institutionalism. No mediation of the divine is considered necessary since the religious experience itself builds community.
3. A rejection of official revelation. All intuition of the universe is revelation.
4. Religion is about feeling, intuition, and experience, not about ethics.
5. In religion feelings of love dominate the experience of guilt.

This is just a brief sketch of what we may call the other half of both Schelling's and Hölderlin's context. And both are indeed influenced. But whereas Schelling ultimately remains an idealist, Hölderlin favors the ideas and the atmosphere of romanticism, as we will see in the next chapter. He reads the same books, shares the same admiration for Kant and Fichte, and has the same philosophical ambitions. Nonetheless, he never develops his own form of idealism.[169] His relationship to

[168] Ibid., 13.

[169] Therefore, I disagree with Beiser that "Hölderlin has been considered the father of absolute idealism" (Beiser 2002, 375). Hölderlin was not an absolute idealist, but rather an early romanticist. Even if it is Schelling who moved in early romantic circles for a short period, he is no more than "a traveling companion to the romantic generation" (Frank 2004, 55). Hölderlin, on the other hand, is never associated, but he shares most of the basic romantic insights nonetheless. In addition, I emphatically reject Beiser's suggestion that "what was merely fragmentary, inchoate, and suggestive in Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schlegel became systematic, organized, and explicit in Schelling" (Beiser 2002, 467). I do think that at least Hölderlin goes further. Maybe not in his brief philosophical career, but definitely as a poet, as we will see in the next chapter. Beiser seems to confuse absolute idealism and romanticism since he underestimates what a huge philosophical difference is made by the romantic emphasis on the unknowability and the inaccessibility of what the idealists call the Absolute. The result is an intensity of feeling in the form of intense longing for the unity that overshadows all thought.

philosophy remains ambiguous throughout his lifetime. "Philosophy is once again my almost exclusive occupation… Philosophy is a tyrant, and I endure its force more than that I subject myself to it by free choice," he writes in 1796.[170] Dieter Henrich concludes,

> Philosophy was crucial for him, indispensable, but did not hold out the promise of fulfilling his own nature, which was bound up with the vocation of the poet. Philosophy also brought with it a threat to his inner equilibrium, although he always had to return to it precisely during periods of dejection.[171]

Hölderlin is a poet first and foremost, nevertheless he has ambitions as a philosopher and hopes for a lectureship during a certain period in his life (Jena 1794–1795) and many well-known contemporary philosophers such as Hegel, Niethammer, Schiller, and Von Sinclair take his philosophical views seriously.

Despite his efforts and obvious talent, he never receives an appointment as a philosopher. Most of his philosophical endeavors that have been passed on are no more than notes. They are fragmentary and open for different interpretations and sometimes impenetrable. This is one of the reasons that it is not easy to reconstruct Hölderlin's philosophy. From these, however, several things can be understood. For example that and why Hölderlin is convinced that there is one ground of consciousness, which he calls Being [*Seyn*] and that this ground is beyond the grasp of human knowledge but can be intuited in nature, art, and love.

As time passes, he realizes that his own philosophy and philosophy in general will be unable to meet his life's project, and he starts to concentrate on his true profession as an artist. His mature poems show his ideas about how the unitary ground is at work in individual human beings and in the history of humankind. It is the artist, in particular the poet, "the singer," who foresees the all-reconciliation of the "celebration of peace" [*Friedensfeier*][172] at the end of time and has a role in enabling its realization according to the poem of the same name. Since the tension between an underlying unity and the experienced opposition and separation in daily life never stops to fascinate him, his poetry

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[170] StA VI, 202f. The German quotes are taken from the so-called *Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe*. See the next chapter.

[171] Henrich 1997b, 69.

[172] One of Hölderlin's later hymns that unfold his eschatology. See Appendix C.

is a continuation of his philosophy. This means that Hölderlin's poems cannot be ignored in a discussion of his metaphysics. Therefore, in the next chapter we will not only study his explicitly philosophical texts but also attempt to distill philosophical and theological conceptions from several of his poems.[173]

[173] This is a dangerous undertaking. In an amusing article Howard Gaskill writes, "It is certainly true that critics appear to be considerably better at understanding Hölderlin than each other" (Gaskill 1982, 166). And Walter Hof calls it "a dialogue between those who are extremely hard of hearing" (Hof 1977, 9). The secondary literature on Hölderlin has taken on huge proportions during the past few decades. Most authors seem convinced of their thorough understanding of the work of Hölderlin, but they disagree profoundly on most any interpretation of any of Hölderlin's artistic (and philosophical) endeavors. Aris Fioretos writes, "The complexities involved in interpreting Hölderlin's work remain considerable…It is difficult to avoid the impression that we have only really begun to read Hölderlin in the manner his texts demand" (Fioretos 1999, 5). Peter Fenves observes that Hölderlin has become "the poet of philosophers" and expresses the risks involved in "using" poetry to unfold one's own philosophy (Fenves 1999, 25: Heidegger, Nietzsche, Adorno to name just a few of the greater names). Paul de Man criticizes Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's poems because of "the manner in which it reduces the original text to a relentless philosophical discourse that bypasses the complexity and the nuances of the statement." This is the risk that a "philologically, historically, and stylistically" uneducated theologian runs as well (De Man 1993, 55). However, if I were to limit my research to his (early) philosophical prose, I would not only ignore his more mature insights expressed in the poems, I would also ignore the fact that for Hölderlin his poetry is the consummation of his philosophy. It is capable of expressing what philosophy cannot. Therefore, I will venture into unknown territory. I only claim to present a way in which Hölderlin *can* be understood in my opinion without bending his texts too far.

CHAPTER FOUR

HÖLDERLIN: THE I AND ITS GROUND

Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin is educated in the same philosophical context as Schelling.[1] Other than the standard courses, many of the *Tübinger Stiftler* study Kant and Spinoza and are elated by the events that are taking place in France at the time, as was said. Because Schelling is allowed to enter the *Stift* at the early age of fifteen, Hölderlin who is his senior by five years only graduates two years earlier. He has the same books at his disposal and takes the same courses at the *Stift*. The philosophical context of the two young thinkers is very similar. Nonetheless, the focus is different. Dieter Henrich views

[1] Hölderlin is born on March 20 in 1770 in southern Germany (Swabia) as the son of a jurist in charge of the administration of the secularized possessions of the Regiswindis monastery in Lauffen am Neckar and the daughter of a Lutheran minister. He loses his father when he is only two years old, and his beloved stepfather (Johann Christoph Gok) dies only seven years later. Hölderlin has a full sister Henrike (Rike) who is born a few weeks after the father's death, and from the five children that are born from the second marriage only one half-brother, Karl, survives. Hölderlin receives a pietistic upbringing and enters the Tübinger *Stift* in 1788. After his graduation in 1793, he is unwilling to pursue a career as a clergyman and becomes a private tutor in the household of Charlotte von Kalb in Waltershausen. In 1794–1795, he spends six months in Jena whose university is renowned for its philosophy department. During this time, he works on his novel *Hyperion* and makes plans to habilitate. The official habilitation procedure requires the defense of a published dissertation, but Hölderlin hopes that the flexible and unorganized practice of the university might allow him at least a temporary lectureship based on an exam. However, only a few months later he abruptly leaves Jena, fleeing "from people and books" (StA II, 408) and gives up his ambitions to combine lecturing at the university with his vocation as a poet. He continues to write philosophical texts, but these concentrate on the theory of poetry. In January 1796, he takes a job as a tutor in the household of the Frankfurt banker Jacob Gontard and his wife Susette with whom he falls in love. She is the inspiration for the Diotima of his poems and *Hyperion*. After Hölderlin is forced to leave the household because of the relationship, he moves to his friend Isaac von Sinclair in the nearby Bad Homburg. He keeps in touch with Susette by letter, and they even meet in secret from time to time. Eventually, Hölderlin leaves for his mother's house in Nürtingen and moves on to tutoring jobs in Switzerland and France. Upon his return home, he is mentally unstable. When he finds out that Susette has died in 1802, his mental health deteriorates even further. He is committed to an insane asylum in Tübingen in September 1806. After his release, he is taken in by the carpenter Zimmer and spends the remaining 36 years of his life in a small room in Zimmer's home, his 'tower.' Hölderlin dies in 1843.

Hölderlin's concept as an integration of the theories of Jacobi and Fichte into a Platonian-Kantian foundation.[2] The influence of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte on this new generation has been discussed previously. Therefore, only some specific points of interest for Hölderlin's work will be highlighted. The only name that is new in this list is Plato. Not that Schelling has not read and translated Plato, on the contrary, but Hölderlin's work seems to breathe a more Platonic atmosphere. So let us start there.

1. *Plato*
   Plato's doctrine of the eternal ideas is of major importance for Hölderlin. He studies at least the *Phaidros, Symposion*, and the *Timaios* and is exposed to many (Kantian) interpretations of Plato in his Tübinger years. Hölderlin's conviction that natural beauty is a reflection of primordial Beauty has Platonic characteristics.[3] In addition, his conception of love combines Kantian freedom with the doctrine of Plato's Diotima. Hölderlin searches for what he calls the step "across the Kantian boundary" that strictly separates the empirical and the rational roots of knowledge.[4] In Plato's *Symposion*, love connects visible beauty and goodness. Thus, Hölderlin feels supported in his attempts to combine the origins of beauty with those of freedom. Beauty and the morally good both accomplish that in the domain of the empirical a glimpse of the intelligible world [*Vernünftwelt*] can light up. Earthly beauty can be interpreted as a reflection of the Eternal. Ethics is not the only gateway to God,

[2] Henrich 1992a, 146–160.

[3] However, I agree with Pankow that there might be an importance difference: for Hölderlin there is no return possible to the realm of the ideas. See Pankow 1999, 148. After the birth of consciousness, things will never be the same again for a human being. Even when certain texts suggest a Platonic return to eternal and unchangeable ideas, Hölderlin believes that the unity that will be established at the end of history is not the primordial Oneness that we all originate from, as we will see in the course of this chapter.

[4] StA VI, 137. The original German text in the footnotes is taken from the so-called *Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe*. See the bibliography: *Friedrich Hölderlin Sämtliche Werke* (1946–1985). The roman numeral refers to the volume and is followed by the page number. The translation of Hölderlin's texts is based upon official translations whenever available and suitable. In the bibliography, the following excellent translations can be found: for several philosophical letters (StA VI) and *Judgment and Being* (StA IV) by Thomas Pfau, see Hölderlin 1988. *Hyperion* has been translated by Willard Trask. See Hölderlin 1990. Many of Hölderlin's poems were translated by Michael Hamburger. See Hölderlin 1961, 1990, and 2003.

Hölderlin agrees with the romantics; Beauty is another divine vehicle. Plato supports him in his desire to understand religion "without our practical reason having to come to our aid."[5]

2. *Jacobi*
Jacobi's attempts at disqualifying Spinozism have the opposite effect of bringing him to the attention of his contemporaries, as we have seen. However, his influence on Hölderlin is greater than the unwilling promotion of Spinozism. In the reconstruction of Spinoza's theory, Jacobi renames Substance to *Seyn* [Being]. He views *Seyn* as the principle of all reality in all that is real. This *Seyn* is necessarily real and cannot be reduced to anything else. We have an immediate consciousness of *Daseyn*. in the sense that it is revealed to us, and everywhere that *Daseyn* is experienced *Seyn* is revealed as well. It is the *Seyn in allem Daseyn* [Being in all beings]. Both *Seyn* and *Daseyn* come to us with an immediacy that has no rational ground. Jacobi asserts that if our knowledge of the conditioned [*Bedingte*] is founded in the principle of mediation [*Vermittlung*], the terms imply that it is preceded by an Unconditioned [*Unbedingtes*] that is free from mediation [*unvermittelt*]. Whereas trying to think God or the Absolute necessarily leads to Spinozism in Jacobi's view, he is convinced that we have immediate [*unmittelbar*] knowledge of a personal God in front of whom we live our lives in freedom.[6] Jacobi's rejection of metaphysical knowledge combined with an affirmation of an intuition for the Divine greatly appeals to Hölderlin, as we will see in this chapter and the next on intellectual intuition.
3. *Fichte*
In Jena, Hölderlin starts following Fichte's lectures and is greatly impressed by the latter's philosophy as well as his personality. He combines Jacobi's theory with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as if Jacobi's *Seyn* is consistent with Fichte's absolute I, of which we have an immediate awareness through the experience 'I am.' Consequently, whereas Hölderlin's contemporaries try to develop a so-called *Grundsatz* philosophy, he denies the possibility of discursive knowledge of the unitary ground of all consciousness. *Seyn* [Being] is not accessible for consciousness, thus cannot serve as

[5] StA VI, 203.
[6] See Henrich 1992a, 58–73.

such a principle.[7] Hölderlin is not out to derive consciousness from Being but to prove that consciousness cannot be explained within the limits of regular consciousness. The result is a short but important philosophical outline written in the spring of 1795 on the flyleaf of a book. It is not discovered until 1930 at an auction. Friedrich Beissner, the editor of the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, first publishes it in the 1961 edition and names it *Urtheil und Seyn* [*Judgment and Being*]. Before we turn to this text, we will first look at a letter that Hölderlin writes to Hegel concerning Fichte's absolute I.

4.1. Judgment and Being

> [Fichte's] absolute I (= Spinoza's Substance) contains all reality; it is everything, there is nothing outside of it. Therefore this absolute I has no object because otherwise not all reality would be within it. However, consciousness without an object is unthinkable, and if I am this object myself, then I am as such necessarily limited . . . hence not absolute. Therefore, within the absolute I, no consciousness is conceivable; as absolute I, I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing, hence is the absolute I (for me) Nothing.[8]

Let us take a closer look at this compact statement that Hölderlin writes in response to Fichte's metaphysics.

1. "[Fichte's] absolute I (= Spinoza's Substance) contains all reality; it is everything, there is nothing outside of it. Therefore this absolute I has no object because otherwise not all reality would be within it."

   Apparently, Hölderlin agrees with Jacobi that Fichte's absolute I is the same as Spinoza's Substance. Both are terms to characterize a unitary ground, an Absolute that contains all reality by definition. For it to have an object, there would have to be something outside the Absolute, and that is impossible since the Absolute contains all that is. Therefore, it can never have an object.

[7] The German language capitalizes all nouns. Since this is not the case in English, *Seyn* can be translated as Being or being. I agree with Thomas Pfau's decision to capitalize since Being signifies the Absolute, the Supreme for which Hölderlin frequently uses the predicate divine. I will therefore capitalize Being and other terms (such as Beauty, Love, and Nature) that are for Hölderlin an expression of the divine, unitary ground.

[8] StA VI, 155.

2. "However, consciousness without an object is in unthinkable,"
   Consciousness is for Hölderlin always consciousness of something. It requires a subject, one who has consciousness, and an object, something to be conscious of. Therefore, consciousness without an object is impossible.
3. "if I am this object myself, then I am as such necessarily limited …hence not absolute. Therefore, within the absolute I, no consciousness is conceivable; as absolute I, I have no consciousness."
   Since there is nothing outside the Absolute, it can have no object. Hence, the Absolute can have no consciousness. An I, however, has (self-)consciousness otherwise it would never be able to say 'I.' Consciousness is dependent upon a prior separation in subject and object. Therefore an absolute I is a contradiction in terms. If there is an I, there must be consciousness, and this I is therefore necessarily limited by an object. The Absolute is unlimited and unitary and therefore without consciousness.
4. "insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing"
   (Self-)consciousness is essential for life, as we know it. Without (self-)consciousness I am (for myself) nothing. I do not know about me. As far as I am concerned, I might as well be nothing, not here, dead, since I have no awareness of the distinction between being and not-being, between me and my surroundings.
5. "hence is the absolute I (for me) Nothing"
   This situation of I-hood makes for an interesting dilemma: I need consciousness to live, but consciousness separates me from the very ground of my existence.

This short text is a commentary on and criticism of Fichte's characterization of the unitary ground as absolute I. Hölderlin agrees that there must be an 'Absolute' that precedes and grounds (self-)consciousness, but the Absolute, he asserts, can never be an I.

It is this unitary ground preceding all separation and individualization that Hölderlin seeks to clarify. In a letter he states,

> I want to discover the principle that explains to me the divisions in which we think and exist, yet that is also capable of dispelling the conflict between subject and object, between our self and the world, yes, also between reason and revelation.[9]

[9] StA VI, 203.

This principle he calls Being proper [*Seyn schlechthin*] or absolute Being [*absolutes Seyn*]. Being [*Seyn*] precedes any kind of separation and should be thought without any form of division. The essence of Being is that it is One, undivided and indivisible unity.

> *Being* – expresses the connection between subject and object. Where subject and object are united altogether and not only in part, that is, united in such a manner that no separation can be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated, there and nowhere else can be spoken of *Being proper*.[10]

Hence, Being is where subject and object are united altogether." Being is absolutely unitary, and therefore it precedes every relation of the subject to an object. The fact that any degree of division is foreign to the seamless unity of Being implies that Being has no consciousness. Consciousness belongs to the other realm: Judgment.

> Judgment [*Urtheil*] in the highest and strictest sense is the original separation [*ursprüngliche Trennung*] of object and subject that are most deeply united in intellectual intuition. [It is] that separation through which alone object and subject become possible, the arche-separation [*Ur-Theilung*]. In the concept of separation, there lies already the concept of the reciprocity of object and subject and the necessary presupposition of a whole of which object and subject form the parts.[11]

Consciousness is consciousness of something and therefore impossible without prior division in subject and object, Hölderlin maintains. In order for consciousness to arise, an original separation [*ursprüngliche Trennung*] of Being proper in subject and object has to take place. Hölderlin interprets the German word *Urteil*, or *Urtheil* in the old spelling, (judgment) as related to the word *Ur-Theilung* (arche-separation). An original division, the arche-separation, takes place within Being whereby subject and object arise.[12]

Judgment thus refers to the original separation of a preceding unity into parts whose relationship simultaneously reveals and hides this unitary origin. On the one hand, a judgment relates two different representations to one another and thereby reveals their underlying unity. On the other hand, the unity remains hidden because it never becomes

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[10] StA IV, 216.
[11] Ibid.
[12] This faulty etymology, which was generally accepted in Hölderlin's time, is the core of his metaphysics. Unfortunately, the association of judgment with separation is altogether lost in the translation.

visible as unity but rather as the distinction of the parts. Once the arche-separation has occurred and consciousness has originated, complete and enduring reunification is impossible. For the conscious mind there is no way back into undifferentiated Being because that would imply the mind's overcoming of its very nature. We can experience flashes of our origin, but total reunion is impossible for the intellect. In a letter to Schiller Hölderlin writes,

> I seek to show that ... the unification of subject and object in an Absolute – be it I or whatever one wants to call it – is esthetically possible, in intellectual intuition, theoretically however, only by means of infinite approach.[13]

Being is inaccessible to reflection, but we can somehow intuit it. The possible immanence of Being in the esthetical experience and Hölderlin's views on intellectual intuition will be discussed in 4.3.3. and 5.3. respectively.

Thus in Hölderlin's view, consciousness, reflection, knowledge, and the mind belong to a dimension that is necessarily characterized by separation and opposition. It is the dimension that he calls judgment. Therefore, Hölderlin is convinced that the thought of an absolute I as posed by Fichte contradicts itself. The Absolute ground of consciousness is undifferentiated, free of all internal separation or opposition. It has no division in subject and object and therefore no (self-)consciousness. Hence, it cannot be referred to as an I. Therefore, a different sort of unitary ground preceding all (self-)consciousness has to be thought. This undivided unitary ground of judgment Hölderlin calls Being. Since knowledge belongs to the dimension of judgments, of Being no scientific knowledge in the strict sense is possible. A science of the unitary ground is impossible for Hölderlin even though all consciousness and all knowledge depend upon Being.

Hence, the first dilemma of Hölderlin's metaphysics is that consciousness is important for my existence, but consciousness separates me from Being, the source of my being. But there is another dilemma. Before the arche-separation, there is no consciousness. There is no me, and there is (for me) no unitary ground. Not only my individual consciousness, and therefore my individual life, depends on the arche-separation, consciousness in general cannot come into existence without it. Without the arche-separation there might as well be

[13] StA VI, 181.

nothing. This implies that Being depends upon the arche-separation to be discernable, to be distinguishable from Nothing-ness, to be at all. And this is the second dilemma: the Absolute needs to internally divide to come to life, to be, but in this process it literally 'falls apart.' It breaks down as a unity. Being in its full unitary purity and perfection is Nothing. Being has to harm its own essence to be anything at all, to be. In order to be (for us), in order to realize itself, Being has to stop being Being, pure unconscious unity. The question now is whether it disappears altogether in this process of arche-separation, or whether it is still discernable in conscious life.

Does consciousness destroy Being, replace it? Is there an absolute divide between primordial purity and conscious life on earth? Are there still remnants on earth and echoes in our individual consciousness of this original One-ness? And if so, how does Being appear, become present in the earthly dimension of judgment? These questions dominate Hölderlin's work *and* life. Not only his metaphysics but also his entire life is characterized by an urge to express and experience this sense of unity that underlies all earthly fragmentation. At the same time, it is overshadowed by what he sees as the inevitable burdens of the isolation of individual conscious life. As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, Hölderlin believes that Being remains present in the life of conscious beings at least as the urge towards reunification. We seek its primordial unity in love and in close friendships. We also catch occasional glimpses of Being in nature. Another manifestation of Being is beauty: beauty in general but especially the beauty of works of art. But before discussing these topics, let us first study Hölderlin's views on self-conscious I-hood.

4.2. Self-Consciousness

There is a very specific case of consciousness, "the most fitting example of judgment," as Hölderlin puts it; namely "I am I" [*Ich bin Ich*]. Consciousness is the result of the arche-separation of Being and in this consciousness self-consciousness is included.

> 'I am I' is the most fitting example for this concept of arche-separation as *theoretical* separation, for in the practical arche-separation [the I] opposes the *not-I, not itself.*[14]

[14] StA VI, 155; StA IV, 216.

He views self-consciousness as a type of judgment. In this very specific case of judgment, a separation takes place as well: the I opposes itself to itself, while at the same time being aware of the identity of opposing agent and opposed. It is clear that Hölderlin follows the reflection model of self-consciousness, which was generally accepted in his time. This separation "I am I" has a theoretical and a practical implication, he maintains. In the theoretical sense, this arche-separation results in the division between the I as subject and the I as object: hence self-consciousness. Aware of the problems associated with the duality of the I in the reflection theory, Hölderlin agrees that it takes an underlying unity for the I to recognize this identity of the subject-I and the object-I. The unity of Being is the necessary ground of self-consciousness as "the most fitting example of judgment." A second implication of this example of arche-separation is a practical one. In the practical sense this separation signifies a division between an I and a not-I. The self-conscious I distinguishes itself from the world that surrounds it. Hence, the arche-separation implies a loss of unity, of harmony. At the same time, this split produces another unity, a self-aware being that can oppose itself to the rest, to all that is not-I. (Self-)consciousness, which literally tears us apart, is also indispensable for our human way of being.

Since self-consciousness is the result of a separation, the I can never be fully restored to an original absolute unity. Hölderlin continues,

> If I say: I am I, the subject (I) and the object (I) are not united in such a way that no separation could be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated. On the contrary, the I is only possible by means of this separation of the I from the I.[15]

Self-consciousness is a case of identity for Hölderlin. It implies unity, but this unity is only partial "for in another respect it [the I] is opposed to itself." This opposition proves that self-consciousness is not in itself the ground but must originate from another, underlying unity. This unity, "this Being, must not be confused with identity" since the principle of identity is derived from self-consciousness and does not apply to Being.[16] The Absolute is consciousness-less Being for Hölderlin. Here we see how Hölderlin is well aware of the problems associated with the reflection model of self-consciousness. According to Hölderlin,

[15] StA IV, 216f.
[16] Ibid.

a distinction can be made at the occurrence of arche-separation between two types of separation: a theoretical separation ("I am I") that results in self-consciousness and a practical separation ("I am not the other(s)") from which consciousness in general arises. If the ground is the same in both instances, namely unitary Being, then no explanation is given for my ability to distinguish between two types of "subdivision" (myself and others).

As mentioned earlier, if knowledge is only possible as the result of a judgment that requires the separation of the whole into parts, then no knowledge is possible of what precedes the arche-separation. The arche-separation has resulted in consciousness, and hence it has given us conscious life, as we know it. At the same time, it has alienated us from the unitary source of all that is, and we suffer in our individual solitude and long for reunification. With Being as its ground, self-consciousness becomes an enigma that is beyond the solutions available to reflection. The primordial unity, Being, I am unable to think. It is completely transcendental for me: it is "nothing (for me)."[17] Nevertheless, my entire existence depends on it. In his novel *Hyperion*, Hölderlin points out another and more far-reaching consequence: the arche-separation has burdened us with mortality. "When the beautiful world started for us, when we became conscious, then we became finite."[18] The price we pay for consciousness is high: we have become mortals. Being is absolute, infinite, unitary, and perfect; conscious beings are limited, mortal, solitary, and forever striving to return to the perfect unity of eternal Being. At the same time, we fear total reunification since we would have to pay the price of loss of consciousness, the death of our individuality.

In this last quote, we have made a switch from Hölderlin as a philosopher to the poet and novelist. As has been mentioned, Hölderlin is a serious participant in philosophical circles of his time. He knows the discussions, he criticizes prevalent theories, is able to point out their

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[17] See "insofern bin ich (für mich) nichts" (StA VI, 155).

[18] "Also da, als die schöne Welt für uns anfieng, da wir zum Bewusstsein kamen, da wurden wir endlich" (StA III, 192). So far I have not appended the German text in the footnotes. I feel that the English version is adequate for conveying the meaning of the author's philosophy. However, where Hölderlin's novel and poems are concerned, the richness of the German original cannot be fully captured in the translation. Therefore, in case of his non-philosophical works, I will provide the German orginal in the footnotes.

contradictions and failures. Nevertheless, he is only a passer-by in the world of the philosophers. His true homeland is poetry. It means that we will have to adapt and translate. Some of the subtleties will be lost in the process. This cannot be avoided, but there remains much to be learned in this strange country. We will first look more closely at the daily consequences of life in the arche-separation. Does conscious life as we know it inevitably and irreparably estrange us from our unitary ground? As we will see, the answer is not a simple Yes or No. Being in its primordial oneness cannot be grasped, but it presents itself in the world nonetheless. We are able to hear its echoes.

4.3. Worldly Echoes of Being

In the foreword of the penultimate version of *Hyperion*, Hölderlin writes,

> The holy unity, Being in the unique sense of the word, is lost for us and we had to lose it, if we were to strive, long for it. We tear ourselves loose from the peaceful *Hen kai Pan* of the world, in order to re-establish it through ourselves. We are live in discord with nature; and what once, as one can believe, was One, opposes itself now, and dominion and slavery alternate on both sides. Often it appears to us as if the world were all and we were nothing, but often also as if we were all and the world were nothing. Also Hyperion was torn between these two extremes.
>
> To end this eternal conflict between our selves and the world, to bring back the peace of all peace that is higher than all reason, to unite us with nature into one eternal whole, *that* is the goal of all our striving. We may agree on that or not.
>
> But neither our knowledge nor our actions ever reach at any time during our existence the point where all conflict stops and where all is One; the definite line unites with the indefinite one only in infinite approach.
>
> And we wouldn't divine such an eternal peace, this Being in the unique sense of the word, we wouldn't strive to unite nature with us, we wouldn't think and we wouldn't act, there wouldn't be anything (for us), we wouldn't be anything (for us) when this eternal union, Being, in the unique sense of the word, were not available. It is available – as Beauty; awaiting us is, to speak with Hyperion, a new kingdom where Beauty is queen.[19]

[19] StA III, 236f.

This fragment is a striking illustration of the complexity of our relationship to our primordial ground and the multitude of terms that Hölderlin uses to refer to it: holy unity, Being, the peaceful *Hen kai Pan* of the world, what once was One, the peace of all peace that is higher than all reason, eternal peace, eternal union, and Beauty. Some terms – such as what once was One and eternal peace – express loss, absence, and transcendence; but others – such as available and *Hen kai Pan* of the world – suggest its earthly presence. On the one hand, this primordial unity of Being is "lost for us." The eternal and the mortal can only approach, not unite: "the definite line only unites with the indefinite one in infinite approach."[20] On the other hand, it is available [*vorhanden*], in German this literally means before our hands. It seems within reach. It shows itself. We would not long for it, if it were not in some way "available," even if human hands cannot grasp it and if it is "higher than all reason."

This situation of, let us say, absent presence has a purpose: we have to "re-establish [holy unity] through our selves." This results in a process of conflicts and opposition between ourselves and nature. There is confusion of what has priority; the whole or the individual. We wonder what dominates: nature or we. We seem to strive for a unity that seems impossible to attain in this life but lies ahead of us as "the new kingdom where Beauty is queen." Apparently, we know of a state of reunification, of ultimate peace that is our future homeland. These few lines are a beautiful illustration of the core and the fullness of Hölderlin's work. Unity is "before our hands," but the definite and the indefinite can only approach, not merge. We strive for unification, but we cannot make up our minds about its true importance. Is unity All and are we nothing or, are we All and is pre-conscious unity a mere nothing? Then again, how could we ever long for something that is not there and does not make its presence felt?

For Hölderlin, unitary Being still echoes in conscious life that results from the arche-separation. It is most obvious in three categories of daily life: in young children and even adults of a certain authenticity; in nature; in beauty. They will be discussed in that order.

[20] See StA VI, 181.

4.3.1. *Being and the Innocent*

Clearly, even though the arche-separation gives us consciousness and hence life as we know it, it simultaneously alienates us from the unitary source of all that is. Hölderlin assumes that people have a certain awareness of the unified ground of our earthly, individualized existence that is difficult to pinpoint or to express in words, but that is very persistent nonetheless. A verb that he often uses in a more poetic setting to express this awareness is *ahnden*, to surmise, to divine. Apparently, not all sense of unity has been lost in the arche-separation.

> [The] One-ness with all that lives, that cannot be felt by more limited characters, that can only be surmised in its highest aspirations, but that can be recognized by the spirit and that arises from the impossibility of an absolute separation and individualized isolation [*Vereinzelung*] and that is most easily expressed by saying that the real separation, and all truly materially transient with it, . . . is only a state of the primordially united.[21]

Absolute separation and individualized isolation are impossible, Hölderlin asserts. The separation that we experience in our earthly existence is real, but it is not our ultimate reality. It is "only a state of the primordially united." Being is not radically lost as the result of the arche-separation, and we are able to feel this unity, however briefly, during our lifetime. But human sensibility for unity varies. It takes a certain degree of openness for this One-ness; "more limited characters" are unable to feel it. "It only appears lively in the hearts of the authentic, the ones who think for themselves, the inventors."[22] So, who are these authentic?

To a certain degree, the young belong to this category. Those in whom consciousness has not yet fully developed can experience unity quite easily, in Hölderlin's view. Small children seem to have a natural openness for the original One-ness.

> Yes, divine is the being of the child, so long as it has not been dipped in the chameleon colors of men . . . In the child is peace; it has not yet come to be at odds with itself.[23]

[21] StA IV, 267f.

[22] "er kommt nur in den Gemüthern der Originale, der Selbstdenker, der Erfinder lebendig zum Vorschein" (StA VI, 328).

[23] "Ja! ein göttlich Wesen ist das Kind, solang es nicht in die Chamäleonsfarbe der Menschen getaucht ist. . . . In ihm ist Frieden; es ist noch mit sich selber nicht zerfallen" (StA III, 10).

The child has not yet been torn apart by the high degree of differentiation, opposition, and solitude of adult life. It is still living in the peace of divine unity. "It is immortal, for it has not heard of death."[24] This sense of unity diminishes as, with increasing knowledge, explicit consciousness develops in the maturing child. This realization makes Hyperion exclaim,

> O! had I never gone to your schools! The knowledge which I pursued down its tunnels and galleries, from which, in my youthful folly, I expected confirmation of all my pure joy – that knowledge has corrupted everything for me.[25]

Knowledge does not confirm the One-ness of youth, it does not give insight into our origin, and it does not bring the peace that we hope for. On the contrary, as people grow into adulthood and become more reflective, more educated, more explicitly conscious, their sense of unity becomes corrupted.

There seems to be no simple way back to the unitary pre-consciousness of youth. In one of Hölderlin's poems, Menon cries out in despair, "Once how different it was! O youth, will no prayer bring you back, then, /Never again? And no path ever again bring me back?"[26] Our youthful openness for unity, our innocence will not return in response to our pleas. We cannot actively retrace our steps into pre-consciousness unity. In times of despair, we may long to rid ourselves of the painful conflicts and the loneliness that seem to result from the arche-separation. However, of the peace of pre-conscious Being adults no longer have a true conception.

> Peace of childhood! Heavenly peace! How often do I pause before you in loving contemplation, and try to conceive of you! But our concepts are only of what has degenerated and been repaired; of childhood, of innocence we have no concepts.[27]

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[24] "Es ist unsterblich, denn es weiss vom Tode nichts" (StA III, 10).

[25] "Ach! Wär' ich nie in eure Schule gegangen. Die Wissenschaft, der ich in den Schacht hinunter folgte, von der ich, jugendlich thöricht, die Bestätigung meiner reinen Freude erwartete, die hat mir alles verdorben" (StA III, 9).

[26] In: *Menons Klagen um Diotima*. "Sonst mir anders bekannt! O Jugend, und bringen Gebete / Dich nicht wieder, dich nie? führet kein Pfad mich zurük?" (StA II, 77).

[27] "Ruhe der Kindheit! Himmlische Ruhe! Wie oft steh' ich stille vor dir in liebender Betrachtung, und möchte dich denken! Aber wir haben ja nur Begriffe von dem, was einmal schlecht gewesen und wieder gut gemacht ist; von Kindheit, Unschuld haben wir keine Begriffe" (StA III, 10).

In concepts, we join separate elements. We 'con-ceive'; we literally 'grasp together.' However, a concept is only our attempt at joining what has fallen apart; it is not original unity. Of pre-conscious peace, no concept is possible.

Therefore, I agree with Pankow when he asserts that Being in the sense that Hölderlin views it, does not correspond to the Platonic pre-existing ideas.

> According to the idealized Greek model, the returning to (and of) the same is always possible, at least in principle, since the very memory that leads back to the true transcendental home of man is ultimately guided by the unchangeable character of timeless ideas.... Whereas Platonic anamnesis imagines a return to the preexisting idea itself, Hyperion experiences returning as a displacement of the very place to which he intends to come back.[28]

There is no return to the vaguely "remembered lands" of our childhood, our pre-conscious life of unity and peace. "If I were on my native island, in the gardens of my youth,... ah! even then, even then I should be a stranger on earth, and no god would join me to the past again."[29] After we have ventured into the consciousness of adulthood, we can never fully return to the purity of the homeland.

Each of us seem to go through his or her own, private arche-separation. Even though we might conclude that eternal One-ness is lost forever with the onset of consciousness, this is something that Hölderlin cannot and will not accept. Even adults are able to experience a primordial state of harmony. At times even those who, like most adults, seem to be completely caught up in the oppositions of daily life have a sudden encounter with something that saves them from earthly doom. In the next fragment Hölderlin calls it faith.

> O you who live in this age with me! Seek not counsel of your doctors nor of your priests when your hearts wither away! You have lost all faith in anything great; you are doomed, then, doomed to perish, unless that faith returns, like a comet from unknown skies.[30]

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[28] Pankow 1999, 148.

[29] "wär' ich auch auf meiner heimatlichen Insel, in den Gärten meiner Jugend..., ach! Dennoch, dennoch, wär' ich auf der Erd' ein Fremdling und kein Gott knüpft ans Vergangne mich mehr" (StA III, 150).

[30] "O ihr Genossen meiner Zeit! Fragt eure Ärzte nicht und nicht die Priester, wenn ihr innerlich vergeht! Ihr habt den Glauben an alles Grosse verloren; so must, so must ihr hin, wenn dieser Glaube nicht wiederkehrt, wie ein Komet aus fremden Himmeln" (StA III, 42).

Apparently, even when we are totally lost in the struggles of the here and now, when we are so totally absorbed in the fragmentation and the "me against the rest" of daily life that our "hearts wither away," we can be hit by "a comet from unknown skies," a sudden flash of insight that gives us back our faith in "something great," the possibility of peace and harmony.

In some people a certain more permanent innocence, "gold long submerged," is able to re-establish itself even.[31] They seem to have a familiarity with the One-ness of all that is.

> It is eternally true, it is visible everywhere: the more innocent, the more beautiful a soul is, the more familiarly will it live with those other happy beings to which men deny souls.[32]

These "beautiful souls" recognize the "familiarity," the connection between all the separate beings of the world. For them, all that is, even plants and animals that are traditionally considered soulless, are included in this unity. Hölderlin's beloved Diotima from the novel *Hyperion* and several poems is an example of such a beautiful soul. She seems to be modeled on Susette Gontard, the love of Hölderlin's life and the wife of his employer, whom we will meet again later.

Hence, primordial peace and harmony can be experienced by the more innocent or authentic of the human race, and this shows in their peaceful and familiar way of interacting with all that surrounds them. They still partially live in the harmonious unity of the homeland. But Being is not only reflected in this particular group of human beings. In 4.3.3. we will see that all real artists, poets in particular, must somehow have a sense of primordial Unity in order to be creative. The Beauty that the piece of art expresses is also the "living presence" of perfect unity that *can* be seen among us. Nevertheless, the conflicts, and the oppositions *are* real, and daily adult life is marked by the results of the arche-separation: individuality and reflection, the pain of loneliness and mortality, and longing for reunification. The truth of our everyday life is that we are mostly cut off from the peace of the unification that we long for.

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[31] "das begrabene Gold" (StA II, 77).

[32] "Es ist doch ewig gewiss und zeigt sich überall; je unschuldiger, schöner eine Seele, desto vertrauter mit den andern glüklichen Leben, die man seelenlos nennt" (StA III, 56).

In the next fragment from *Hyperion*, we once again see how momentary our encounters with pure unitary Being are during our lifetime. Mere reflection, explicit consciousness, is enough to chase it away and leave us isolated and lost.

> An instant of reflection hurls me down. I reflect, and I find myself as I was before – alone, with all the grief of mortality, and my heart's refuge, the world in its eternal oneness, is gone; Nature closes her arms, and I stand like an alien before her and do not understand her.[33]

Here another term is introduced: Nature. Hölderlin often uses Nature as a synonym of Being. Thus, he can say "All wandering streams of human activity run into the ocean of Nature, just as they sprang from it."[34] Let us now concentrate on this conception of Nature as the image of unitary Being.

4.3.2. *Being and Nature*

The word nature [*Natur*] can have several different meanings in Hölderlin's work. He speaks of a person's nature, meaning her character, personality. Sometimes nature is the whole of flora and fauna that surrounds us in the world and to which we belong as well. These are common uses of the word in both the English and the German language, but Hölderlin often goes further in his concept of nature as the all-encompassing totality of which the natural world with its trees, birds, summer rains, and landscapes is only a manifestation. On the one hand, nature is our natural habitat; well-known and "intimate." On the other hand, in its beauty and mystery it resembles "alien powers" that transcend us, as Hölderlin describes it in his poem *Friedensfeier* [*Celebration of Peace*].[35] With that particular connotation, nature becomes the All of Nature.[36] It is the All of Nature that has preserved

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[33] "ein Moment des Besinnens wirft mich herab. Ich denke nach und find mich, wie ich zuvor war, allein, mit allen Schmerzen der Sterblichkeit, und meines Herzens Asyl, die ewigeinige Welt, ist hin; die Natur verschliesst die Arme, und ich stehe, wie ein Fremdling, vor ihr, und verstehe sie nicht" (StA III, 9).

[34] "alle die irrenden Ströme der menschlichen Tätigkeit in den Ocean der Natur laufen, so wie sie von ihm ausgehen" (StA VI, 329).

[35] For the German original, *Friedensfeier*, see Appendix C. See also 4.7.

[36] As has been mentioned before, the German language capitalizes all nouns and thus cannot make the distinction between nature in the regular sense of the word and all-encompassing Nature. Since the distinction is possible in English, I will capitalize Nature whenever the latter is meant.

the primordial One-ness where the restless mind of the romantic finds peace.

> To be one with all that lives, to return in blessed self-forgetfulness into the All of Nature – this is the pinnacle of thought and joys, this the sacred mountain peak, the place of eternal rest.[37]

In the unification with the All of Nature, we can forget ourselves for a while.

> Often, lost in the wide blue, I look up into the ether and down into the sacred sea, and I feel as if a kindred spirit were opening its arms to me, as if the pain of solitude were dissolved in the life of the Divinity.[38]

In the encounter with Nature the loneliness that is the inevitable consequence of life in the arche-separation is temporarily dissolved; the burden of our earthly individuality is lightened for a while.

Nature is not just a reminder of the original unitary peace of Being for Hölderlin; Nature *is* "the changeless, the quiet."[39] The conception of Nature as unchangeable and divine Being that comforts us in our solitude and gives us temporary reprieve from the unrest that is inevitable in our earthly condition is prominent in the early stages of Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion*. For Hyperion Diotima is the personification of Nature; she is eternal Being. There is a huge contrast between his own restless existence and the imperturbable and unchangeable peace of Diotima's nature: "I [with] a mind full of wild contradictions" and "she…in changeless beauty, effortless, in smiling perfection."[40] During their love affair, the two spheres of her primordial unitary peace and his own discordant earthliness merge, but this offers only temporary reprieve.[41] Hyperion starts to realize that the peace and quiet perfection of Being that he strives to attain is not a lasting earthly reality.

[37] "Eines zu seyn mit Allem, was lebt, in seeliger Selbstvergessenheit wiederzukehren in's All der Natur, das ist der Gipfel der Gedanken und Freuden, das ist die heilige Bergeshöhe, der Ort der ewigen Ruhe" (StA III, 9).

[38] "Verloren in's weite Blau, blik' ich oft hinauf an den Aether und hinein in's heilige Meer, und mir ist, als öffnet' ein verwandter Geist mir die Arme, als löste der Schmerz der Einsamkeit sich auf in's Leben der Gottheit" (StA III, 8f.).

[39] "d[ie] wandellose[n], stille[n]" (StA III, 8).

[40] "Ich [mit] ein Gemüth voll wilder Widersprüche…; sie aber…in wandelloser Schönheit, mühelos, in lächelnder Vollendung" (StA III, 58).

[41] The desire to return to the unitary source of all beings drives us towards intimacy with other (human) beings. Ultimately, this is just a surrogate for the all-unity that is our destination, as we will see in 4.5.

However, he gains another and more important insight. When Diotima dies, Hyperion discovers that separation might not be radically opposed to unification. Separation and changeability are essential to Nature, to primordial Being itself. Nature is not just the "changeless"; "all transformations of pure Nature are part of her Beauty too."[42] Being is not a static unity. Within Nature/Being are the dynamics of change, of life.

> Must not all things suffer? And the more excellent, the more deeply! Does not sacred Nature suffer? O my Divinity! That you could mourn as you are blissful – that was long beyond my understanding. But the bliss that does not suffer is sleep, and without death there is no life. Should you be eternally like a child, and sleep like that which is nothing?[43]

Nature/Being would be asleep, unconscious, "like that which is nothing," without the changeability of life. Being finds itself in a state of "suffering" and "mourning" typical for earthly life of separation "because it has to go outside itself."[44] Being cannot remain a static unity

> because the parts of the One cannot remain in the same close or more distant relationship in order that everything meets everything, and everything attains its entire right, its entire measure of life.[45]

The "parts of the One" have to differentiate in order for individuality to develop, and for this, the dynamics of change are needed. The "parts," (human) beings have to experience the fullness of life through conflicts, reflection, and momentaneous states of reunification. They are entitled to it.

There is another reason for the transformations of life. Hölderlin continues,

> [It is] eternal law, that the Whole that is full of content in its Oneness does not feel itself with the definitiveness and liveliness, not in the

[42] "alle Verwandlungen der reinen Natur auch mit zu ihrer Schöne gehören" (StA III, 103).

[43] "Muss nicht alles leiden? Und je treflicher es ist, je tiefer! Leidet nicht die heilige Natur? O meine Gottheit! Dass du trauern könntest, wie du seelig bist, das konnt' ich lange nicht fassen. Aber die Wonne, die nicht leidet, ist Schlaf, und ohne Tod ist kein Leben. Solltest du ewig seyn, wie ein Kind und schlummern, dem Nichts gleich?" (StA III, 150).

[44] "weil es aus sich herausgehen müsse" (StA IV, 268).

[45] "weil die Theile des Einigen nicht immer in derselben näheren und entfernteren Beziehung bleiben dürfen, damit alles allem begegene, und jeden ihr ganzes Recht, ihr ganzes Maas von Leben werde" (StA IV, 268).

> sensorial unity in which its parts that are also a unity, only more loosely connected, feel themselves.[46]

Therefore, primordial One-ness needs to separate within itself in order to feel life, to be conscious. Perhaps it is perfect in its spiritual One-ness, but it might as well be dead. It can only feel alive within another, more material unity that is more loosely connected, but a unity nonetheless. In the metric version of *Hyperion*, Hölderlin writes, while employing the term pure Spirit to denote Being,

> The non-suffering, pure Spirit does not occupy
> Itself with matter, but is also
> Not conscious of any object nor of itself,
> For it no world exists, since outside of it
> There is nothing.[47]

Hölderlin considers the arche-separation a matter of life and death for Being. It has to differentiate, to divide to "feel itself." The price that is paid is that Being becomes a more loosely connected, a less perfect unity. Thus, the price is also opposition, conflict, suffering, and mortality. Nonetheless, without conscious beings to think and experience its primordial unity, Being might as well be "Nothing."[48] That is the gain; that is why arche-separation occurs. I will let Hölderlin express this for him so crucial thought once again, this time by way of a fragment from his poem *Der Rhein* [*The Rhine*].

> ...and if there be
> One thing the celestials need
> It is heroes and men
> And mortals generally. For since
> The serenest beings feel nothing at all,
> There must come, if to speak
> Thus is permitted, another who feels
> On their behalf, him
> They use and need...[49]

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[46] "ewiges Gesez, dass das gehaltreiche Ganze in seiner Einigkeit nicht mit der Bestimmtheit und Lebhaftigkeit sich fühlt, nicht in dieser sinnlichen Einheit, in welcher seine Theile, die auch ein Ganzes, nur leichter verbunden sind, sich fühlen" (StA IV, 268).

[47] "Der leidensfreie reine Geist befasst / Sich mit dem Stoffe nicht, ist aber auch / Sich keines Dings und seiner nicht bewusst, / Für ihn ist keine Welt, denn ausser ihm / Ist nichts" (StA III, 195).

[48] StA VI, 155. See 4.1.

[49] "...und bedürfen / Die Himmlischen eines Dings, / So sinds Heroën und Menschen / Und Sterbliche sonst. Denn weil / Die Seeligsten nichts fühlen von selbst, /

Being needs mortal beings to "feel on [its] behalf." Since it is a necessity for Being to feel and to become conscious, humans should not turn their backs on the contradictions of earthly life in order to find peace prematurely. They are "needed" for an "eternal law" by which Being goes "outside itself" in order "to feel itself" with the "liveliness" that only mortal, conscious beings can provide. Being needs people in order to feel, to be alive. "It is human destination to replicate, hasten, individualize, mix, separate, bind the life of Nature."[50]

People should not turn away from discordant, conscious life but find peace in the acceptance of the oppositions instead. Without our earthly experiences, not only Being would be dead but we would lead incomplete lives ourselves. "Our soul, when it puts off mortal experiences and lives only in blessed quietness – is it not like a leafless tree? Like a head without hair?"[51] As Hyperion develops into more mature adulthood he can say, "Since then much has changed in my eyes, and now I have peace enough in me to remain quiet with any look into human existence."[52] Hölderlin's Hyperion finds out that the contradictory tendencies in life are not just proof of human malfunctioning; it is the very structure of life.[53] Human activity is indispensable for the unfolding of the unitary ground in all that is. "The drive towards arts and education with all its variations and diversity [are] actually a service rendered to Nature by people."[54]

We will now turn to the specific "service rendered to Nature" by the artist. It is the poet in particular who Hölderlin considers the special

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Muss wohl, wenn solches zu sagen / Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Nahmen / Theilnemend fühlen ein Andrer, / Den brauchen sie" (StA II, 145).

[50] "Menschenbestimmung,… das Leben der Natur zu vervielfältigen, zu beschleunigen, zu sondern, zu mischen, zu trennen, zu binden" (StA VI, 328).

[51] "Unsrer Seele, wenn sie die sterblichen Erfahrungen ablegt und allein nur lebt in heiliger Ruhe, ist sie nicht, wie ein unbelaubter Baum? Wie ein Haupt ohne Loken?" (StA III, 103).

[52] "Seitdem ist manches anders in meinem Auge geworden, und ich habe nun so viel Frieden in mir, um ruhig zu bleiben, bei jedem Blik ins menschliche Leben" (StA III, 103).

[53] There is a distinct parallel between Schelling's *Freiheitschrift* and Hölderlin's views on the striving of Being to obtain life. Schelling speaks of an *Urgrund*, which is also *Ungrund*, that longs to come to the light of understanding. *Hyperion* is written between 1792 and 1795 and published in 1797 (Volume I) and 1799 (Volume II), whereas the *Freiheitschrift* is from 1809.

[54] "der Kunst- und Bildungstrieb mit allen seinen Modifikationen und Abarten [sind] ein eigentlicher Dienst, den die Menschen der Natur erweisen" (StA VI, 329).

mouthpiece of Being. Let us take a closer look at the enormous burden that rests on the shoulders of the poet.

4.3.3. *Being, Beauty, and the Poet*

Nature is an expression of Being that is present without requiring any human activity. All we need is a degree of openness, as we have seen. "Blessed Nature had remained unchanged in her beauty…with our mortal powers we strive to cultivate the Beautiful yet it grows light-heartedly beside us."[55] Nature is the Beautiful that "grows light-heartedly beside us." It is there without any effort on our part. Apparently, there is another real presence of Being that depends on human effort and cooperation. This presence is what the artistic soul seeks.

> I have seen it once, the one thing that my soul sought, and the perfection that we put somewhere far away above the stars, that we put off until the end of time – I have felt it in its living presence….the name of that which is One and All? Its name is Beauty.[56]

Beauty, or the Beautiful, is another term that Hölderlin frequently uses for Being. The perfection of our ground, Being, "that which is One and All," is not so far away as we tend to think, this fragment suggests. It is not "above the stars" or unavailable "until the end of time"; "its living presence" can be felt here and now. Being is alive among us as Beauty. It is the "Beautiful" that artists "cultivate" in their works of art. Art is the joint product of the human artist and divine Being. Creating art is not just a matter of divine inspiration; it is the "work of gods and men." Works of art arise from both human and divine activity. Art is "the first child of human, of divine Beauty."[57] It takes an effort on the part of the artist to contribute the human share of this child. But also the divine parent contributes as a result of

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[55] "…die seelige Natur war wandellos in ihrer Schöne geblieben….wir ringen mit sterblichen Kräften Schönes zu baun, und es wächst doch sorglos neben uns auf!" (StA III, 126f.).

[56] "Ich hab' es Einmal gesehn, das Einzige, das meine Seele suchte, und die Vollendung, die wir über die Sterne hinauf entfernen, die wir hinausschieben bis an's Ende der Zeit, die hab' ich gegenwärtig gefühlt….den Nahmen dess, das Eins ist und Alles? Sein Nahme ist Schönheit" (StA III, 52f.).

[57] "der Götter und Menschen Werk" (StA II, 119). I will elaborate on the meaning of the terms God, the gods, and their relationship to Being in 4.7. and 4.8. "Das erste Kind der menschlichen, der göttlichen Schönheit ist die Kunst" (StA III, 79).

> the necessary conflict between the most original postulate of the Spirit which aims at communality and unified simultaneity of all parts, and the other postulate which commands the Spirit to move beyond itself and to reproduce itself, within itself and others.[58]

In the context of his poetology, Hölderlin often uses the term Spirit (poetic, absolute, or pure Spirit) for Being. Being wants to unify all its parts and gather all beings inside of it, but at the same time it needs to move beyond itself and reproduce itself in order to be everywhere and in everything.[59] For this movement of Being beyond itself the efforts of the artist are essential, and among the arts poetry is the highest of all. It is the "teacher of humanity," and "poetry alone will survive all other sciences and arts."[60] Therefore, the poet should never think lightly of his task. In the poem *Dichterberuf* [*Poet's Vocation*] Hölderlin writes that the poet's work is not that of a regular person who "labors and earns his living…for a different task is in question here, Entrusted to the poet's care and service! The Highest it is to whom we are dedicated."[61] The poet is a priest-like figure in Hölderlin's conception, a "divine man."[62]

The creation of this mixed breed is of utmost importance for both parents. In Hölderlin's words, "In art the divine man rejuvenates and repeats himself. He wants to feel himself; therefore, he sets his Beauty over against himself. Thus did man give himself his gods."[63] The true artist can become conscious of himself ("feel himself") by separating from and opposing himself to the One-ness of his ground (Being/Beauty). From this process, two things result. The first of the artist's activities is to capture a certain degree or fragment of divine presence

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[58] "ein notwendiger Widerstreit…zwischen der ursprünglichsten Forderung des Geistes, die auf Gemeinschaft und einiges Zugleichsein aller Teile geht, und zwischen der anderen Forderung, welche ihm gebietet, aus sich herauszugehen, und in einem schönen Fortschritt und Wechsel sich in sich selbst und in anderen zu reproduzieren" (StA IV, 241).

[59] This reminds us of the centripetal and the centrifugal forces in Schelling's *Urgrund*. Again, Hölderlin's text precedes Schelling's by approximately a decade.

[60] "Lehrerin der Menschheit"; "die Dichtkunst allein wird alle übrigen Wissenschaften und Künste überleben" (StA IV, 298).

[61] "sich / Wehret und nährt! Denn es gilt ein anders, // Zu Sorg' und Dienst den Dichtenden anvertraut! / Der Höchste, der ists, dem wir geeignet sind" (StA II, 46).

[62] This lack of modesty, uncharacteristic for Hölderlin, will be discussed in the next chapter.

[63] "In ihr verjüngt und wiederholt der göttliche Mensch sich selbst. Er will sich selber fühlen, darum stellt er seine Schönheit gegenüber sich. So gab der Mensch sich seine Götter" (StA III, 79).

in his work and thereby realize something of Being for himself and for others – "man gives himself his gods". The artistic work is a reminder or (partial) realization of Being in and for the world. But it is more than that.

The artistic endeavor has another effect. Hölderlin continues, "For in the beginning man and his gods were one, when, unknown to itself, eternal Beauty *was*."[64] The work of art constitutes a step in the self-realization of Being at the same time. It helps the primordial One-ness to become conscious of itself because before the arche-separation – "in the beginning [when] man and his gods were one" –, "Beauty *was*" but it was "unknown to itself." Once again we see that Being has the drive to realize itself, to become known to itself. Not just to please us or to remind us where we come from. It is not enough for Being to just be because Being without consciousness might as well not be, be Nothing. In order for Being to become known, not only to conscious beings, but also to itself, "it needs to [move beyond itself]. And since the poetic Spirit cannot know the world in itself nor of itself, an external object is necessary."[65] By externalizing itself in works of art, Being gains (self-)consciousness. The perfect One-ness of Being loses some of its ontological quality and unitary purity when becoming "tangible."[66] However, this loss seems to be the price to be paid for emergence in the world and thus for self-awareness, for life even.

Several of Hölderlin's poems deal with his views on the artistic endeavor. Two of these will be discussed in the next chapter on intellectual intuition (5.3.2. and 5.3.3.). They are illustrative of his high expectations and the immense task that he takes upon himself. Hölderlin's decision to turn his back on philosophy was not the easy way out, as will become clear in the same chapter. In 5.3.1. it will be explained why philosophy can never be more than second best, in Hölderlin's view. How a more mature Hölderlin will come to recognize this conception of poetry as hubris will be discussed in 5.3.4. By then, the brilliant young man has said goodbye to the career as a minister that

[64] "Denn im Anfang war der Mensch und seine Götter Eins, da, sich selber unbekannt, die ewige Schönheit war" (StA III, 79).

[65] "und doch muss er es. . . . Da [der poetischen Geist] aber [seine Individualität, sein Ich] nicht durch sich selbst und an sich selbst erkennen kann, so ist ein äusseres Objekt notwendig" (StA IV, 252).

[66] "aus sich heraus zu gehen um ‚fühlbar' zu werden" (StA IV, 241).

his mother had planned for him. Nonetheless, in 1801 he writes to his brother, "Religion occupies me above all."[67] It is, indeed, a religious urge that pushes him onwards. Let us see how the thirty-one year old who prefers poetry to serve the Divine relates to religion.

4.4. Religion

Hölderlin has finished his theological studies several years earlier. Repeated justifications in his letters are evidence that he is under considerable pressure to take on the life of the Lutheran parson that is pressed upon him by the Württemberg Consistorium and especially by his own mother.[68] David Constantine gives two reasons for Hölderlin's refusal: his vocation as a poet and the unorthodoxy of his religiosity.

> A country parson could have lived in the way Hölderlin professed to find admirable…For his poetry's sake he could not agree. His poetry was not of a kind to be pursued as a sideline to anything else; nor could the religion it professed possibly be squared with the dogma of orthodox Christianity.[69]

The first reason conforms to Hölderlin's own words; the second is more speculative. It is no easy task to shed light on Hölderlin's views on Christendom since he never writes anything even vaguely resembling a systematic theology. Little prose on the subject can be found in his letters, and there is a philosophical fragment that deals with religion. It is Beissner, the editor of the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, however, who names it *Über die Religion* [*About Religion*], not Hölderlin himself.[70] His views on religion are expressed mainly in his poetry. It would be impossible to force these mostly artistic expressions into a system, and

[67] "Die Religion beschäftigt mich vorzüglich" (StA VI, 420).

[68] See, for example, the letter of 30–1–97 to his mother. Apparently, he answers to her request to respond to a job offer that consists of both taking over the work *and* the daughter of a retiring parson, which is not unusual in those days. He rejects his mother's plan arguing that the life of a husband is beautiful but that he is too restless to settle down, that there is too much left to do, that his present situation is better fit for his inner being, and that he prefers his role of teacher to that of preacher. A few days later on 4–2–97, in a letter to his brother, he adds the argument that a job offer is no basis for a life-long bond with someone he might not have noticed otherwise. See StA VI, 232–235. See also the letter of 20–11–96 to his mother, StA VI, 224–226.

[69] Constantine 1979, 74.

[70] See StA IV, 275–281.

it may even be contrary to Hölderlin's views. Therefore, I will only sketch some outlines.

If it is religion that occupies him above all, why indeed does Hölderlin refuse to practice the theological profession? Why is he desperate to flee his Württemberg homeland to be rid of "our lords in Stuttgart" whom he does not trust to "leave him in peace?"[71] Is this about the lifestyle of the parson, is he afraid that the job will consume too much of his energy? Or is it really fear that the unorthodoxy of his religiosity will get him in trouble, as Constantine suggests? Hölderlin does not explicitly mention any such fear, but he *does* feel a personal need to search for the unitary ground of all that is far beyond the domain of the village parson and even beyond the theology and philosophy of his education. Already as a young student Hölderlin writes to his mother,

> I studied that part of world-wisdom which deals with proofs of reason for the existence of God...I suspected that those proofs of reason for the existence of God and also for immortality were so imperfect that they could be overthrown entirely or at least in their main parts by acute opponents.[72]

Hölderlin is not particularly interested in dogma and rational proof of God's existence. For him religion is about the experience of the living presence of our unitary ground. Religion arises from the "belief of the heart which has been given such an unambiguous longing for the eternal, for God," and this type of religiosity has very little to do with "proofs of reason."[73] Kant has undermined his belief in rational metaphysics. It is an intuition for One-ness, which still lives in all of us, that drives him towards religion. "Art and religion, and philosophy...are flowers and fruits of the tree, not soil and root." They are the "effects" and not the "cause."[74] It is this root that Hölderlin is after.

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[71] "Denn ich zweifle ob mich unsere Herren in Stutgard werden in Ruhe lassen" (StA VI, 187).

[72] "Ich studirte denjenigen Theil der Weltweisheit, der von den Beweisen der Vernunft für das Dasein Gottes...Ich ahnete nemlich bald, dass jene Beweise der Vernunft fürs Dasein Gottes, und auch für Unsterblichkeit, so unvollkommen wären, dass sie von scharfen Gegnern ganz oder wenigstens nach ihren Haupttheilen würden umgestoßen werden können" (StA VI, 63f.).

[73] "Glaube meines Herzens, dem so unwidersprechlich das Verlangen nach Ewigem, nach Gott gegeben ist" (StA VI, 64).

[74] "...Kunst und Religion, und Philosophie...sind Blüthen und Früchte des Baums, nicht Boden und Wurzel. Ihr nehmt die Wirkungen für die Ursache" (StA II, 77).

"The first child of human, of divine Beauty is art," Hyperion pronounces, as we have seen in 4.3.3. He continues,

> Beauty's second daughter is religion. Religion is love of Beauty. The wise man loves Beauty herself, eternal, all-embracing Beauty; the people love her children, the gods, who appear to them in multifarious forms.[75]

Other than in art, Beauty can be found in religion. Hölderlin apparently goes along with the dictum of the Early German romantics. But for him this is not beauty in the sense of the esthetics of religious rituals, paraphernalia, or architecture; Beauty is the epiphany of eternal unitary Being. The "gods in multifarious forms" are the fruits and the flowers of this primordial One-ness of Being that common people love, but the "wise" love "eternal, all-embracing Beauty" herself. Thus religion can mean "love of the gods," the worship of the children of divine Beauty in all their different shapes and colors. These are the personified divine powers of positive religions that Hölderlin considers partial and historically determined revelations of Being. However, a minority can see beyond these fixed and temporary forms. They are "the wise" who love Being, the eternal unitary ground of all that is.

This view echoes the fundamental meaning of the word "religion" in the sense of the Latin *religare*; reconnecting what once was One. It is this divine unitary ground that Hölderlin seeks to fathom. All his endeavors, other than perhaps his work as a private tutor, which is meant to sustain him financially, are about the human (re-)connection with a realm that at once transcends and permeates our daily existence. Both his poetry and his philosophy are embedded in his life's attempt to (re-)find our unitary origin in human bonds, in nature, in beauty. Even his poetological texts are an analysis of the necessary techniques, methods, and talents of the poet to bring about a mutual approach of God and world, to reconnect the One and the All. Hence, it is religion in the sense of the desire to reconnect and as the reflection on the (im-)possibility of reconnection in or beyond our lifetime, that "occupies [him] above all."

Whether Constantine is right with respect to the unorthodoxy of Hölderlin's view has not become clear yet. Before continuing with this

[75] "Der Schönheit zweite Tochter ist Religion. Religion ist Liebe der Schönheit. Der Weise liebt sie selbst, die Unendliche, die Allumfassende; das Volk liebt ihre Kinder, die Götter, die in mannigfaltigen Gestalten ihm erscheinen" (StA III, 79).

topic, however, it is now time to take a closer look at his deeply felt need for unity on earth, for *Hen kai Pan* here and now. It is closely related to his own sense of being torn between the here and the beyond, between mortal selfhood and eternal peace, between individuality and unity. This ambivalence in the human, his own, way of being is what he seeks to understand and level out in all three of his major occupations: poetry, philosophy, and religion.

4.5. Life's Conflicting Tendencies

As consciousness develops, the relation to our unitary ground becomes more and more distant, but it does not disappear altogether in Hölderlin's view, as we have seen. Even though it is beyond our explicit consciousness, we still have an awareness, catch an occasional glimpse, of this primordial unity in the experience of true Beauty and Nature. However, this experience of unity is only momentaneous and therefore remains unstable; "a person falls out of it and strives after it again – rattled from then on, because only now he really feels his torn apart existence," Büttner asserts.[76] The experience of One-ness seeks to stabilize itself into a permanent awareness, but it does not and cannot last and thus stays limited to moments of ecstasy. The total union we long for is impossible in this life, Hölderlin believes. It would result in a state of unconsciousness, and unconscious existence is like death because "insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing."[77] Since we fear this loss of our individuality, we strive to safeguard the I against unconsciousness. Thus, we are caught in a life-long struggle between the drive for unity and the urge to preserve our individual I-hood. As Hölderlin words this contradiction in *Hyperion*:

> Now we feel the limits of our being
> And the inhibited power impatiently resists
> Its chains, and the spirit yearns
> For the unspoiled Ether.
> Then again there is something else in us, that
> Likes to keep the chains, because were
> The divine in us not by any kind of resistance
> Limited – we wouldn't feel ourselves or others.

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[76] Büttner 2003, 230.
[77] See 4.2.

> Not to feel oneself, however, is death,
> Not knowing anything, and being destroyed
> Is one and the same for us.[78]

Hence, we recognize in ourselves and in the world as a whole two contradictory tendencies. "There is a fight in the world about what is more; the whole or the individual," "the most alive Eternal or the transient."[79]

On the one hand, we have a longing for unification. We detest the isolation that seems the inevitable companion of our individuality, and we long for unconsciousness. "It sometimes seems better to me to sleep than to be utterly without companions as we are."[80] We want to unite with everything and everyone in order to retrieve the original intimacy of Being. "To be one with all – this is the life divine, this is man's heaven."[81] Since we realize that total union with all that surrounds us is impossible to achieve in our lifetime, we tend to concentrate on our immediate circle of kindred spirits. "The ideal is what Nature was. By this, by this ideal, this rejuvenated divinity, the few recognize one another and are one, for one thing is in them."[82] We try to neutralize the feelings of isolation that the arche-separation forces upon us by forging intimate bonds with those who recognize this longing for union in one another.

> Where do we find the One that gives us peace, peace?… [I sought it] in fraternizing with people. It seemed as if the poverty of our being would become riches, when a few poor became One heart, One inseparable life, as if the whole pain of our life consisted in the separation of that which belongs together.[83]

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[78] "Nun fülen wir die Schranken unsers Wesens / Und die gehemmte Kraft sträubt ungeduldig / Sich gegen ihre Fesseln, und es sehnt der Geist / Zum ungetrübten Aether sich zurük. / Doch ist in uns auch wieder etwas, das / Die Fesseln gern behält, denn würd in uns / Das Göttliche von keinem Widerstande / Beschränkt – wir fühlten uns und andre nicht. / Sich aber nicht zu fühlen, ist der Tod, / Von nichts zu wissen, und vernichtet seyn / Ist Eins für uns… " (StA III, 195).

[79] "Es ist nur ein Streit in der Welt, was nemlich mehr sei, das Ganze oder das Einzelne" (StA VI, 419); "das Lebendigstewige, oder das Zeitliche" (StA VI, 418).

[80] "Indessen dünket mir öfters / Besser zu schlafen, wie so ohne Genossen zu seyn / So zu harren" (StA II, 94).

[81] "Eines zu seyn mit Allem, das ist Leben der Gottheit, das ist der Himmel des Menschen" (StA III, 9).

[82] "Ideal ist, was Natur war. Daran, an diesem Ideale, dieser verjüngten Gottheit, erkennen die Wenigen sich und Eins sind sie, denn es ist Eines in ihnen" (StA III, 63f.).

[83] "wo finden wir das Eine, das uns Ruhe giebt, Ruhe?… [Ich suchte es] in Verbrüderung mit Menschen. Es war mir, als sollte die Armuth unsers Wesens Reichtum

On the other hand, we are afraid to lose our individual I-hood, our life. We have a sense of self-preservation that drives us away from the eternally peaceful but deadly unity of Being. This drive tends to make us more "bestial than divine."[84] We have the tendency to violently destroy the need, "to disavow all receptiveness, and to tear up the beautiful bond that keeps us united with other spirits, to make the world around us into a wasteland."[85] We live in the inevitable disharmony of the drive towards infinite unity and the urge for the preservation of I-hood.

The goal of conscious life is to find a compromise and a sense of peace in which neither of these conflicting tendencies is suppressed or prohibited. For Hölderlin, Manfred Frank claims, life is

> the contradiction of the real activity towards the infinite and the ideal activity that drives one back on oneself. If the Absolute presented itself under the scheme of an infinite striving, it would remain unconscious. If it presented itself limitedly, it would contradict its own meaning.... Therefore it presents itself as inhibited striving.[86]

In Hölderlin's language that is more poetical, real activity [*reelle Tätigkeit*] is called longing or yearning [*Sehnsucht*], and ideal activity [*ideelle Tätigkeit*] is faithfulness [*Treue*]. These two will always and inevitably be in opposition. "And always there is a yearning that seeks the unbound. But much must be retained. And faithfulness is needed."[87] In the course of our life, we are pulled back and forth between yearning and faithfulness. And it does not take much to get us off track: "Our spirit glides out of its path so easily that often we'd better avoid even the rustling of a leaf, in order not to disturb its quiet affairs."[88]

If it were not for divine help, we would rush head-on into our own destruction. We receive assistance to counter "the eternal tendency,

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werden, wenn nur ein Paar solcher Armen Ein Herz, Ein unzertrennbares Leben würden, als bestände der ganze Schmerz unsers Daseyns nur in der Trennung von dem, was zusammengehörte" (StA III, 164).

[84] "Mer thierisch, als göttlich" (StA III, 188).

[85] "gewaltsam jedes Bedürfnis zerstören, jede Empfänglichkeit verläugnen, und so das schöne Vereinigungsband, das uns mit andern Geistern zusammenhält, zerreissen" (StA III, 190).

[86] Frank 1993, 460.

[87] "...Und immer / Ins Ungebundene gehet eine Sehnsucht. Vieles aber ist / Zu behalten. Und Noth die Treue" (StA II, 197).

[88] "Unser Geist gleitet so leicht aus seiner Bahn; müssen wir doch oft dem Säuseln eines Blatts entgehen, um ihn nicht zu stören in seinem stillen Geschäfte!" (StA III, 165).

to reverse *the striving from this world to the other* into a striving *from another world to this one*."[89] Or as Hölderlin notes elsewhere, "The Heavenly who are devoted to mortals make their hasty return more difficult."[90] In *Hyperion* he writes,

> What is it for which man so immeasurably longs?…what is eternity doing in his breast?…Man wants more than he is capable of!…this is it, and nothing else, which creates our fair dreams of immortality and all the enticing, all the colossal phantoms that ravish men a thousand times over; this it is which creates his Elysium and his gods for man, that the line of his life does not run straight, that he does not speed to his goal like an arrow, that a power outside of him stops him in his flight.[91]

The human being is unable to speed to this goal of ultimate unity "like an arrow" because "a power outside of him stops him in his flight." He is prevented from running from individual life towards the longed for unconscious unity of Being, and therefore towards death, by a divine "power outside of him." Nonetheless, this "immeasurable" longing for eternity continues to reside "in his breast" since he cannot prevent these dreams of immortality and he "creates his gods."

Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion* is about this conflict in all its complexity and the attempts to bring it to a conclusion. The main character's name, Hyperion, refers to the Sun-god and is interpreted in mythological handbooks of Hölderlin's time as "going beyond, transcending."[92] Hyperion longs to transcend, to go beyond his earthly self with all its bonds and limitations; he "was born to be homeless and without a resting place."[93] Hyperion's true being longs for unitary Being, but as a mortal human person he wants to safeguard his individuality, his life, as well. Therefore, he seeks unity in earthly intimacy instead. He

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[89] "sein Karakter ist, der ewigen Tendenz entgegen, *das Streben aus dieser Welt in die andre* zu kehren *zu einem streben aus einer andern Welt in diese*" (StA V, 268).

[90] "Die Himmlischen, den Sterblichen hold, / Erschweren ihnen die eilende Rü[h]kkehr" (StA II, 490).

[91] "Was ist's denn, dass der Mensch so viel will?…was soll denn die Unendlichkeit in seiner Brust?…Mehr will er, als er kann!…das eben macht die schönen Träume von Unsterblichkeit und all' die holden und die kolossalischen Phantome, die den Menschen tausendfach entzüken, das schafft dem Menschen sein Elysium und seine Götter, dass seines Lebens Linie nicht gerad ausgeht, dass er nicht hinfährt, wie ein Pfeil, und eine fremde Macht dem Fliehenden in den Weg sich wirft" (StA III, 41).

[92] See Binder 1961/62, 137.

[93] "dazu geboren heimathlos und ohne Ruhestätte zu seyn" (StA III, 120).

tries to satisfy his longing for transcendence by losing himself in close friendships.

Hyperion meets Alabanda. Their friendship is based on a mutual denunciation of the times in which they are living and an ardent hope for a new era. But it turns out that they are radically opposed in their ideas of how it is to be realized. Alabanda thinks his destiny and power are his own. He considers himself the source of his own being and denies any type of need and limitation. He is ultimately free to choose whether to engage in earthly or transcendent bonds or not. The inevitable human conflict between faithfulness and longing, between individuality and the need for unification are alien to him. In Alabanda's own words,

> I feel a life in me which no god created and no mortal begot. I believe that our existence is from ourselves and that it is only of our own free pleasure that we are so intimately connected with all that is…because I feel that I am free in the highest sense, that I have no beginning, therefore I believe that I shall have no end, that I am indestructible.[94]

That is "why [he has] never thought anything but lightly of death."[95]

For Alabanda there is no complicated relationship between himself and the Absolute; he has made his I absolute. We cannot help being reminded of Fichte here. Not only Alabanda's philosophy also his personality points in that direction. Alabanda is all activity. He is self-positing incarnate, one could say. He is a born revolutionary. If life's conditions do not suit you, you set things straight with your own two hands, even if this results in warfare. He finds true life in the activity itself. This point of view is tempting for Hyperion, but ultimately it cannot satisfy. It does not correspond with the complexity of Hyperion's nature and philosophy. The friendship inevitably comes to an end. He bitterly mourns his loss. Again he feels isolated in his I-hood and loses his sense of unity. "Never now did I say to the flower, 'You are my sister!' and to the springs, 'We are of *one* race.'"[96]

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[94] "Ich fühl' in mir ein Leben, das kein Gott geschaffen, und kein Sterblicher gezeugt. Ich glaube, dass wir durch uns selber sind und nur aus freier Lust so innig mit dem All verbunden…weil ich frei im höchsten Sinne, weil ich anfangslos mich fühle, darum glaub' ich, dass ich endlos dass ich unzerstörbar bin" (StA III, 141).

[95] "Warum [er nie] den Tod geachtet" (Ibid.).

[96] "Nun sprach ich nimmer zu der Blume, du bist meine Schwester! Und zu den Quellen, wir sind Eines Geschlechts!" (StA III, 42).

In the course of the novel, Hyperion meets the love of his life: Diotima, she who worships the gods or who is worshipped by the gods.[97] Hyperion describes her as "free from needs" and "divinely content."[98] Neediness [*Bedürftigkeit*] is Hölderlin's typical characterization of mortal existence. Hence, Diotima is the personification of eternal, divine Being. As "the sister of Nature" she is "divinely calm," the "peace of Beauty, divine peace." Everything is "blessed and beautified by her presence."[99] The love affair of Diotima and Hyperion appears to be perfectly fulfilling at first. Theirs is a seemingly perfect unity. "We were but *one* flower, and our souls lived in each other, like the flower when it loves and hides its tender joys in its closed cup."[100]

It does not and it cannot last, however, and the problem is exactly in the "closed cup." It is All-Unity, the unification of all, that Hyperion yearns for.[101] An exclusive love affair, even with the incarnation of Being itself, is not enough. "O! How often did I believe to find the Unnameable that should become mine, mine, by risking to lose myself in the beloved."[102] Losing oneself in the beloved, "submitting, eclipsing yourself for love, . . . becoming like [the beloved]," is not the solution.[103] Hyperion cannot find peace in a unity with only one human being, and Diotima realizes,

> what you mourn for in all your sorrow . . . It is a better age that you seek, a more beautiful world. It was that world alone that you embraced in your friends, with them you were that world.[104]

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[97] See Binder 1961/62, 152. Diotima is also the name of the priestess who allegedly educated Plato on his eros-theory in *Symposion*, which Hölderlin has studied extensively.

[98] "bedürfnisslos"; "göttlichgenügsam" (StA III, 58).

[99] "göttlich ruhig"; "Friede der Schönheit"; göttlicher Friede" (StA III, 51); "es war alles geheiliget, verschönert durch ihre Gegenwart" (StA III, 53).

[100] "Wir waren Eine Blume nur, und unsre Seelen lebten in einander, wie die Blume, wenn sie liebt, und ihre zarten Freuden im verschlossenen Kelche verbirgt" (StA III, 61).

[101] Hölderlin's views on the relationship between primordial Being and All-Unity will be discussed in detail in 4.7.2.

[102] "Ach! Wie oft glaubt' ich das Unnennbare zu finden, das mein, mein werden sollte, dafür, dass ich es wagte, mich selbst an das Geliebte zu verlieren!" (StA III, 164).

[103] "und du gabst dich hin, verdüstertest dich aus Liebe . . . und wardst mir gleich" (StA III, 132).

[104] "woran du darbest, was dir einzig fehlt . . . Es ist eine bessere Zeit, die suchst du, eine schönere Welt. Nur diese Welt umarmtest du in deinen Freunden, du warst mit ihnen diese Welt" (StA III, 60f.).

Even the human love of our life will only temporarily quiet the drive towards the perfection of All-Unity, it cannot nullify the loneliness and the longing. "The beautiful joys of our love…made me forget that you were essentially inconsolable."[105] Earthly love can intimately connect you with another human being, but this is only a surrogate for All-Unity. As Diotima writes, "I soon understood; I could not be all to you."[106]

Hyperion is lured back to Alabanda. He leaves Diotima and goes to war in another attempt to obtain All-Unity that is doomed from the beginning; namely by killing all those who oppose it! This undertaking, which nearly costs him his life, ends in chaos and destruction instead of peace and harmony. During Hyperion's absence Diotima dies. Upon his return, Hyperion is inconsolable at first. However, as time passes and he matures, he becomes resigned to the irreconcilable opposites in human nature. He realizes that the conflicts in life are necessarily part of a process of ripening. We are involved in a dance with Being, an alternation of approaching and withdrawing, that is sometimes joyful and sometimes sorrowful. However, it would be self-destructive to force a reunification with our ground prematurely. We have to respect our individuality, "that a man shall be something in himself."[107] Not because individuality has priority over unity, but because in this rhythm of I-hood and togetherness mortal existence reaches its full beauty. It is not until the end of time that there will be a harmonious simultaneity of individuality and unity. That is when Being will have developed into All-Unity, as we will see in 4.7.2.

To be human is to live with the opposing drives of unification and individualization. Denying either one of these opposing tendencies leads to the death of our humanity.

> How could we deny the drive to infinitely advance, to purify ourselves, to ennoble, to free ourselves? That would be bestial. But neither should we proudly exempt ourselves from the drive to be limited, to receive. Then it would not be human, and we would kill ourselves. The discord of the drives, that no one can live without, love unifies.[108]

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105 "Die schönen Freuden unserer Liebe…machten mich vergessen, dass du im Grunde trostlos warst" (StA III, 129).

106 "Ich wusste es bald; ich konnte dir nicht Alles seyn. Konnt' ich die Bande der Sterblichkeit dir lösen? Konnt' ich die Flamme der Brust dir stillen…?" (StA III, 129).

107 "dass einer / Etwas für sich ist" (StA II, 158).

108 "…Wie sollten wir den Trieb, / Unendlich fortzuschreiten, uns zu läutern, / Uns zu veredlen, zu befrein, verleugnen? / Das wäre tierisch. Doch wir sollten auch /

Thus, antagonism becomes the practice of everyday life of the individual, but also of the history of humankind. The contrary drives are united in love, temporarily. Love is what enables us to transcend our I-hood from time to time. It drives us towards a unity in which an I does not need to give up its individuality. Nonetheless, even if we can relieve the isolation of our I-hood in loving intimacy, all one-on-one solutions are provisional at our point in history. However, it has not always been this way, and it will not be. As time progresses, humanity is evolving towards (a new) unity. On this development we will now concentrate.

4.6. Being and History

Before the arche-separation there is pure primordial One-ness; Being is totally One, undivided but unconscious, as we have seen. As a result, it cannot be distinguished from nothingness. With the arche-separation not only consciousness sets in, but also time and mortality. History begins.

We encounter two models of history in Hölderlin's work. In his earlier work he conceives of history as cyclical, but around the turn of the century he gradually shifts towards a linear model. In the cyclical model the pure nothingness of primordial Being moves towards a real, earthly presence as time progresses. It reaches a stage where its availability and its transcendence are balanced, but this phase cannot be stabilized. Being becomes more and more tangible at the detriment of its transcendence up to the point where it can only fall back into the chaos of nothingness. From here, the cycle starts all over again. According to Hölderlin, Antiquity is structured according to the cyclical model and its corresponding laws of revolution.

The linear model, on the other hand, conceives of history without integrating the necessity of revolutions and chaos that are characteristic for the cyclical model. Hölderlin develops this linear model in the three hymns *Friedensfeier, Der Einzige*, and *Patmos*.[109] According to

Des Triebs, beschränkt zu werden, zu empfangen, / Nicht stolz uns überheben. Denn es wäre / Nicht menschlich, und wir töteten uns selbst. / Den Widerstreit der Triebe, deren keiner / Entbehrlich ist, vereiniget die Liebe" (StA III, 195).

[109] The German original of *Friedensfeier* can be found in Appendix C and the English prose translation in 4.7. For *Der Einzige* see StA II, 153–164 and for *Patmos* StA II, 165–187.

the concept of these poems, Being will become more and more immanent. Since he often names the presence and the activity of Being in history as Spirit, Hölderlin views history as a process of gradual spiritualization until the Spirit will be revealed universally at the end of time. We will focus on this model.

It takes a long process of historical ripening for humankind to be able to cope with the Divine, is Hölderlin's conviction. The problem is that human needs tend towards the visible, the tangible; things that can be experienced by the senses. This is also how Hölderlin explains his own fascination with the Greek gods. "What is it that binds me to the ancient, blessed shores, so that I love them still more than my fatherland?" he wonders in the poem *Der Einzige* [*The Only One*]. He goes on to answer his own question: it is "there where, the stones tell, Apollo walked in the guise of a king, and Zeus condescended to innocent youths and in holy fashion begot sons and daughters."[110] In "blessed Greece," the gods were very visible.[111] They literally walked the earth, they interacted with humans even to the point of procreation, and their tangible presence was a constant and reassuring reminder of the Divine. It was a time when all rejoiced in the collective worship of the Divine:

> from tongue to tongue it flew on a thousandfold, and not one endured life alone; shared out, such wealth delights and, bartered with strangers, it swells into exultation... as far as it can travel.[112]

This was the Golden Age.

He is aware of a theological dilemma, however. On the one hand, human dependence upon visibility and tangibility makes us seek the Divine in what can be perceived, hence is objectified. This makes it difficult for people to free themselves from the fixed images of positive religion. On the other hand, true religiosity calls for a spirituality that transcends all fixations in images since the objectification of Being is an impossibility. The worship of individual gods cannot be the

[110] "Was ist er, das / An die alten seeligen Küsten / Mich fesselt, dass ich mehr noch / Sie liebe, als mein Vaterland? / ... wo, wie Steine sagen Apollo gieng / in Königsgestalt, / und zu unschuldigen Jünglingen sich / Herablies Zeus und Söhn in heiliger Art / Und Töchter zeugte" (StA II, 153).

[111] "Seeliges Griechenland" (StA II, 91).

[112] "so riefs und flog von Zunge zu Zunge / Tausendfach, es ertrug keiner das Leben allein; / Ausgetheilet erfreut solch Gut und getauschet, mit Fremden, / Wirds ein Jubel, ... so weit es gehet" (StA II, 92).

ultimate stage of religiosity. Therefore, the withdrawal of the gods is an inevitable step in the spiritual evolution of humankind. The Greek day had to and has ended. "But, my friend, we have come too late. True, the gods are living, but above our heads, up there in a different world."[113] At our point in history, the divine has become transcendent, "up there in a different world." And, his longing notwithstanding, Hölderlin thinks we should be faithful to the present situation instead of retreating in a glorious past.

> Not them, the blessed, who once appeared, the images of gods in the ancient land, I may no more invoke…and backwards my soul shall not flee to you that are past, too dear to me.[114]

There is no way back; we should not try to reverse history.

In our times, the Divine seems to have retreated; we experience it as alien and remote. Words like "distant," "from afar," "distantly thundering," and "far off" abound in Hölderlin's descriptions.[115] We live in an interim age characterized by separateness and disunity: "it is terrible how here and there unendingly God disperses the living."[116] Ours is an era of emptiness in which "tokens and words are very often still missing among us." "Too long, too long now the honor of the Heavenly has been invisible."[117] We live in the nighttime of history in which the divine light has faded: "now evening has come."[118] In the poem *Brod und Wein* [*Bread and Wine*] Hölderlin describes how he goes to blessed Greece, "the house of all the Heavenly," only to find it abandoned. Its nature is still as splendid as he expected: "Festive hall! The floor is ocean! Its tables are mountains." But it seems no longer in use for the "single purpose it was built for," namely the communal worship of the Divine. The Divine has left the world, ancient Greece is gone.

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[113] "Aber Freund! wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter, / Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt" (StA II, 93).

[114] "Nicht sie, die Seeligen, die erschienen sind, / Die Götterbilder in dem alten Lande, / Sie darf ich ja nicht rufen mehr,…/ Und rükwärts soll die Seele mir nicht fliehn / Zu euch, Vergangene! Die zu lieb mir sind" (StA II, 149).

[115] See, for example, the poems *The Archipelago*, *Patmos*, *Mnemosyne* (Sta II, 103ff.; 165ff.; 193ff.).

[116] "…furchtbar ist, wie da und dort / Unendlich hin zerstreut das Lebende Gott" (StA II, 168).

[117] "es fehlt sehr oft noch unter uns Menschen an Zeichen und Worten" (StA VI, 420); "Zu lang, zu lang schon ist / Die Ehre der Himmlischen unsichtbar" (StA II, 171).

[118] "da nun / Es Abend worden" (StA II, 167).

> Where the temples, and where the vessels, where, filled with nectar, fit to please gods, is song? Where, oh where do they shine, then, the far-striking oracles? Delphi slumbers, and where does the great destiny sound?[119]

The Divine has disappeared and so have the places and the means of worship. Left behind is the depressing emptiness of the "festive hall" after the party is over and the guests have gone home.[120] At this time in history when obscurity reigns, people can no longer believe in the peace and harmony that is their future homeland.

> Then you prove it to me, and tell me, so that to others I can repeat it, for there are others too who do not believe it, that joy after all outlasts both worry and anger, and a golden day daily still shines in the end.[121]

During this time of doubt and confusion the Divine is ungraspable, and a person no longer knows how to interpret his rare encounters with it. He "can hardly say" what it is "that approach[es] him with gifts," and he "scarcely knows to what use he should put his assets, bustles, squanders it, and almost regarded as holy, things profane."[122]

This fumbling "the Heavenly tolerate as far as they can" because in the end the emptiness is all for the best.[123] "Much do the Heavenly spare us" since we do not yet have the strength and attitude necessary to survive divine encounters.[124] Only a long process of maturation will prevent us from being killed by divine encounters. "For sparing, at all times sure of the measure, for a moment only does a god touch

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[119] "Seeliges Griechenland! du Haus der Himmlischen alle, / Also ist wahr, was einst wir in der Jugend gehört? / Festlicher Saal! der Boden ist Meer! und Tische die Berge, / Wahrlich zu einzigem Brauche vor Alters gebaut!"; "wo? die Tempel, und wo die Gefäße, / Wo mit Nectar gefüllt, Göttern zu Lust der Gesang? / Wo, wo leuchten sie denn, die fernhintreffenden Sprüche? / Delphi schlummert und wo tönet das große Geschik?" (StA II, 91).

[120] In 4.7. we will see how this description is almost the exact opposite of the opening stanza of *The Celebration of Peace* where Hölderlin uses similar images to picture the setting of the *eschaton*.

[121] "So bezeugest du mir's, und sagst mir's, dass ich es andern / Wiedersage, denn auch Andere glauben es nicht / Dass unsterblicher doch, denn Sorg' und Zürnen, die Freude / Und ein goldener Tag täglich am Ende noch ist" (StA II, 78).

[122] "kaum weiß zu sagen"; "die mit den Gaaben ihm nahn"; "und kaum weiß er zu brauchen das Gut, / Schafft, verschwendet und fast ward ihm Unheiliges heilig" (StA II, 92).

[123] "Möglichst dulden die Himmlischen diß" (StA II, 92).

[124] "so sehr schonen die Himmlischen uns" (StA II, 93).

the dwellings of men."[125] An intermediate period of darkness serves to strengthen the individual and prepare her for the new era. "Confusion helps… and need and night make us strong, until heroes enough have grown in the iron cradle, and hearts, as before, resemble the heavenly in strength."[126] So far "we lack those strong enough for supreme joy."[127] We have to "grow used to joy, to day, and to the sight of these now manifest."[128] But in the end even "travails" will be recognized as "the spice of life" and will become "pleasing" instead of fearsome and repulsive, because they are recognized as "designed from above."[129]

This whole process of strengthening enough individuals to make them ready for the state of perfection is paralleled by a historical movement of the purification of religions.

> It is the sower's throw when he picks up
> The wheat with his shovel
> And throws it, towards the open, swinging it over the thrashing floor.
> The husks fall at his feet, but
> The grain reaches its end,
> And there is no harm if some of it is lost…
> For…
> Not all things at once does the Highest will.[130]

In this gradual process, the marginal aspects of the various religious forms, the "husks," will get separated from the essential, the "grain." That some of the fixed forms of religiosity will be lost is an acceptable,

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[125] "Denn schonend rürht des Masses allzeit kundig / Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen / Ein Gott an," (BrA IX, 232). Since the poem *Friedensfeier*, which is quoted here, had not yet been discovered when the second volume of the Stuttgarter Edition of 1951 that I use was published, I have been quoting and will continue to do so from Volume IX of the so-called *Bremer Ausgabe* (BrA IX), a chronological edition of Hölderlin's work, edited by D.E. Sattler. See the bibliography.

[126] "Aber das Irrsaal / Hilft,… und stark machet die Noth und die Nacht, / Biß daß Helden genug in der ehernen Wiege gewachsen, / Herzen an Kraft, wie sonst, ähnlich den Himmlischen sind" (StA II, 93).

[127] "noch fehlen die Starken zu höchsten / Freuden" (StA II, 94).

[128] "gewohnt werden die Menschen des Glüks / Und des Tags" (StA II, 92).

[129] "Wohl sind die Würze des Lebens, / Von oben bereitet und auch / Hinausgeführet, die Mühen" (BrA IX, 235). Since this poem, *Friedensfeier*, was discovered after the version of the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe* that I use had been printed, I will be quoting from the ninth Volume of the so-called *Bremer Ausgabe*. See Hölderlin 2004 in the bibliography. See also 4.7.

[130] "es ist der Wurf des Säemanns, wenn er fast / Mit der Schaufel den Waizen, / Und wirft, dem Klaren zu, ihn schwingend über die Tenne. / Ihm fällt die Schaale vor den Füssen, aber / Ans Ende kommet das Korn, / Und nicht ein Übel ists, wenn einiges / Verloren gehet… / Denn… / Nicht alles will der Höchste zumal" (StA II,169f.).

even necessary, step in the process of increasing spiritualization. We must let go of the familiar religious handholds even if the present seems empty and the future unsure. One of the reasons Hölderlin gives for the fact that even though the Divine is "near," it is "difficult to grasp" is that the historical separations of the Divine make it hard to detect the underlying unity. "All around the summits of time are heaped, and the most loved live near, growing faint on most separate mountains."[131] This isolation "on most separate mountains" threatens to exhaust the Heavenly; it "makes them grow faint." It is only while history still lasts that we tend to be confused and think that we have to choose between the different religions, "as if you Heavenly yourself excitedly cried that if I serve one, I must lack the other."[132] This is not true, but only from the end perspective of the completed whole will we be able to understand the role of each and every religious form in history. The Spirit will not only reconcile people with each other and with God, but also integrate all historical (partial) revelations of the divine. The end of time, which Hölderlin calls the *Friedensfeier*, the celebration of peace, will be discussed in 4.7.

Some other points about Hölderlin's view on history must be made before. The first one is that the experience of divine absence tempts the modern individual to think that history is of human making. However, in his novel *Hyperion* Hölderlin shows this to be a misconception: Hyperion's autonomous attempts to bring about peace and unity fail frightfully, as we have seen. The French Revolution is no more than a decade old when Hölderlin concludes that forcing a historical process before the time is ripe only creates havoc and destruction. History is not the domain of humankind "for they do not rule, but the fate of the Immortals rules, and their work moves of itself."[133] History is not human achievement but neither is it the work of an external god. History is *explicatio dei*, the living unfolding of unitary, divine Being. Human impatience will not be able to speed up this process. Even if "to us it seems long" that the divine "averted his face from

[131] "Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott.... Drum, da gehäuft sind rings / Die Gipfel der Zeit, und die Liebsten / Nah wohnen, ermattend auf / Getrenntesten Bergen" (StA II, 165).

[132] "Als eifertet, ihr Himmlischen, selbst / Dass, dien' ich einem, mir / Das andere fehlet" (StA II, 154).

[133] "Denn sie nicht walten, es waltet aber / Unsterblicher Schicksaal und es wandelt ihr Werk / Von selbst" (StA II, 170).

humankind," all people can do is wait for the process "to ripen" and not engage in "fearful activity" that is only an expression of fear and lack of hope.[134] The "Heavenly… will return at the proper time."[135] This is the time when the readiness of the divine is met by sufficient human openness and strength.[136]

The second point that can be made about Hölderlin's view on history concerns the role of the necessary mediation of divine contact.

> Sparing, at all times sure of the measure, for a moment only does a god touch the dwellings of men.… For were not the giver sparing, long ago the blessings upon our hearths would have set fire to both roof and floor.[137]

The average person cannot survive immediate contact with the Divine. It takes mediators to filter, to dim the Divine light. This theme we will encounter again in 5.3. where we discuss Hölderlin's view of the role of the poet, namely to "grasp the Father's ray" and "wrap the heavenly gift in song." The Divine has to stay in gradual contact with the earth "as though by a ladder."[138] "Always something or someone stands between people and him. And by degrees the Heavenly descends," says an elaboration to the first version of *Der Einzige*.[139]

All through history, the Divine has been mediated by certain figures that Jochen Schmidt calls soter-figures. There are three demigods whom Hölderlin considers so closely related that he calls them

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[134] "als vor einiger Zeit, uns dünket sie lange,… Als der Vater gewandt sein Angesicht von der Menschen" (StA II, 94); "Bis das es reift"; "furchtsamgeschäfftiges" (BrA IX, 236).

[135] Die Himmlische "kehren in richtiger Zeit" (StA II, 94).

[136] Jochen Schmidt sees a difference here between Hölderlin's view and the biblical perspective. The proper time, "the kingdom of God," he asserts, takes place in the Bible independent from the human state of existence. "Not so in Hölderlin's work. While scripture demands *metanoia*, an inner change, *because* the kingdom of God is near, he demands it *in order that* the kingdom of God can… reveal itself" (Schmidt 1968, 145). I agree that for Hölderlin God and people are interdependent, but I do not agree that this is contrary to the biblical meaning of the kingdom of God. See, for example, Helmut Merklein (1978), *Die Gottesherrschaft als Handlungsprinzip. Untersuchung zur Ethik Jesu*, Echter: Würzburg.

[137] "Denn schonend rührt des Masses allzeit kundig / Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen / Ein Gott an… Auch wär' uns, sparte der Gebende nicht / Schon längst vom Segen des Herds / Uns Gipfel und Boden entzündet" (BrA IX, 232).

[138] "Des Vaters Stral, ihn selbst, mit eigner Hand / Zu fassen und dem Volk ins Lied / Gehüllt die himmlische Gaabe zu reichen"; "als an einer Leiter" (StA II, 159).

[139] "Immer stehet irgend / [Ein] Eins zwischen Menschen und ihm. / Und treppenweise steiget / Der Himmlische nieder" (StA II, 645).

a "cloverleaf": Heracles, Dionysius, and Christ.[140] They share the following characteristics:

1. They are the son of a human mother and a father-god (Heracles is the son of Alcmene and Zeus, who slept with her in the disguise of her husband; Dionysius is the son of Zeus and the princess Semele; and Christ is the son of God and the Virgin Mary). Because of this dual heritage, they can mediate between heaven and earth. They are greatly devoted to the earth and its inhabitants, but at the same time suffer from their earthly imprisonment and have to fight the tendency to escape towards heaven.
2. They survive great dangers during childhood. Hera, the wife of Zeus who is sick and tired of his philandering, sends two snakes to murder the young Heracles, but he strangles them with his bare hands. The jealous Hera also provokes Semele, Dionysius' mother, to demand to see Zeus in his divine form, and is struck by his lightning. Zeus subsequently rescues the fetus by sewing him into his own thigh. Christ survives Herod's infanticide by divine intervention.
3. They perform many miracles in adult life, in particular their descent in the Underworld and their victory over death.
4. Their deeds as adults testify of their devotion towards humans, especially as bringers of peace.
5. They die a brutal and sacrificial death that is followed by miraculous signs such as their ascension.
6. They moderate the human drive towards the unbound, towards the unconscious unity of Being and thereby secure human existence. In the second version of *Der Einzige*, it is said that Dionysius "restrains the death-wish of peoples." Soters make sure that people "will not follow the way of death and maintain the measure, that a man shall be something in himself" since "God hates the unbound."[141]

This theme of human frailty, the danger of immediate contact with the Divine, and the important role of mediators runs all through Hölderlin's work.

[140] "Ein Kleeblatt," see StA II, 163.

[141] "der / Die Todeslust der Völker aufhält"; "dass sie / Nicht gehn den Weg des Todes und hüten das Maass, dass einer / Etwas für sich ist" (StA II, 158); "Ungebundenes aber / Hasset Gott" (StA II, 159). See Schmidt 1990, 119ff.

The third and final point that must be made about Hölderlin's views on the course of history is that the threatening aspect of the nighttime of history becomes more emphatic in his work as his own mental breakdown approaches. The optimism of the earlier views is challenged, which becomes obvious in the frequent use of words like "furious" and "horrible."[142] The Divine seems more distant than ever, and "like fire…deadly-loving are the voices of God."[143] Horst Rumpf remarks, "Until the end Hölderlin fights an almost desperate struggle against the threatening dualism of his world that is falling apart."[144] I agree that the suffering that is experienced as a result of the absence of divine light often seems to dominate the hope for and visions of a better era in Hölderlin's later work. It is not an abstract, romantic longing for the Divine that drives Hölderlin; it is the real suffering of a human being in the real darkness of an existential crisis. All he can do at those times is cling to words that have become empty and almost useless. Nevertheless, he never gives up on his eschatological hope. His very latest version of *Patmos* from mid 1803 starts with the words: "Full of goodness is, but no one by himself can grasp God."[145] From time to time, the loss of meaning and the doubts of the interim age of darkness seem overwhelming, but Hölderlin's vision of hope does not change. Let us now turn to his eschatology.

4.7. The *Eschaton* and Celebration of Peace

The poem *Friedensfeier* [*Celebration of Peace*] constitutes Hölderlin's vision of the *eschaton*. A prose translation is printed in full for the sake of clarity and the German original can be found in Appendix C.[146] The poem is published in a period of harsh censorship laws, and Hölderlin is taking a risk. His worry that it might extend beyond orthodox Christian horizons is suggested by the introductory words that seem to echo Martin Luther.

142 "ergrimmt" (StA II, 177); "furchtbar" (StA II, 176).

143 "Wie Feuer…tödtlichliebend / Sind Gottes Stimmen" (StA II, 185).

144 Rumpf 1958, 92.

145 "Voll Güt' ist; keiner aber fasset / Allein Gott" (StA II, 184).

146 See Hölderlin 2004, 231–236. Since this poem had not yet been discovered when the second volume of the Stuttgarter Edition of 1951 that I use was published, I have been quoting and will continue to do so from Volume IX of the so-called *Bremer Ausgabe* (BrA IX), a chronological edition of Hölderlin's work, edited by D.E. Sattler. See the bibliography.

All I ask is that the reader be kindly disposed towards this text. Then it will certainly not be incomprehensible, far less objectionable. But if, nonetheless, some should consider such a language too unconventional, I must confess to them: I cannot help it. On a fine day almost every mode of song makes itself heard: and Nature, whence it originates, also takes it back again.

The author intends to offer the public an entire collection of similar pieces, and this one should be considered a kind of sample.

WITH heavenly, softly re-echoing, with calmly-murmuring music filled, and aired is the anciently-built, blessedly-familiar hall; about green carpets there wafts the fragrant cloud of joy and, widely-glistening, full of succulent fruit and gold-wreathed chalices, seemly-ordered, a splendid array, rising here and there above the leveled floor, the tables stand. For hither, from afar, at the evening hour, loving guests have repaired.

And with dawning eyes I think that I already, smiling with the grave daily task, see him in person, the prince of the feast-day. But though you like to disavow your foreign land, and, as though weary after the long heroic campaign, cast down your eyes, forgotten, lightly-shaded, and assume the shape of a friend, you All-known, yet such greatness almost forces knees to bend. Nothing I know before you, but one thing, you are no mortal power. A wise man may enlighten much for me; but where a God as well appears, a different clarity reigns.

Yet not sprung up today, not unproclaimed he is; and one who did not shy away from either flood or flame, astonishes, now that all has grown silent, not without reason, now that dominion is visible nowhere among spirits or mortals. That is, only now they hear the work, though long it has been prepared, from morning until evening, for immeasurably rumbles, subsiding in the depths, the Thunderer's echo, the millennial storm, to sleep, drowned out in peaceful tones. But you, grown dear to us, O days of innocence, you bring also today's celebration, you beloved! And nocturnal all around the Spirit flowers in this stillness; and I must advise you, even with hair silver-grey, O you friends!, to provide both garlands and banquet, now resembling eternal youths.

And many I would like to invite, but O you, the friendly-seriously devoted to people, there beneath the Syrian palm-tree, where the town lay near, by the well you liked to be; all around the cornfield rustled, quietly the coolness breathed from the shade of the blessed mountains, and your dear friends, the faithful cloud, cast their shadows about you also, so that the sacredly-bold, your ray would gently come through the wilderness to humans, O youth! But, O!, more darkly in the midst of the Word, dreadfully-determining, a deadly doom overshadowed you. Thus quickly fleeting is all that is heavenly; but not in vain;

For sparing, at all times sure of the measure, for a moment only does a God touch people's homes, unforeseen, and no one knows when. Even when subsequently the insolent passes over it, and to the holy place must come the savage from ends remote, and coarsely-touching exercises

delusion, and thereby meets a fate; but gratitude, never does it follow upon the god-sent gift at once; deeply-probing this can be grasped. And long ago, were not the giver to spare us the blessings upon our hearths, our roofs and floors would have gone up in flames.

Of the Divine we received much nonetheless. The flame was put in our hands, and shore and sea flood. Much more than in human fashion these, the alien powers, are familiar with us. And the stars teach you, which are in front of your eyes, though never you can be like them. Yet of the All-Living, from whom many joys and songs have sprung, one is the Son, he is calmly-powerful, and now we recognize him, now, that we know the Father, and to keep holidays, the Exalted, the Spirit of the World, has inclined towards people.

For long now he has been too great to be the Lord of Time, and wide his field extended; yet when has it exhausted him? For once, however, a god may choose the mere daily task, like mortals, and share all fate. This is the law of fate, that all shall know of themselves, that, when silence returns, there may be a language too. But where the Spirit is active, we too will stir and dispute what might be best. Hence it seems best to me that now the Master completes his image, and is ready, and, himself glorified by it, steps out of his workshop, the quiet God of Time, and the law of love alone, the gently-leveling, rules from here right up to heaven.

Much, from morning onwards, since we have been a discourse, hearing from one another, humankind has learnt; but soon we shall be song. And that character of the age, which the great Spirit unfolds, as a sign lies before us that between him and others, that a covenant is between him and other powers. Not He alone, the Unconceived, the Eternal are all to be known by this, as likewise by the plants our Mother Earth and light and air are known. But ultimately, O you holy powers, our token of love for you, our testimony that still you are holy, is the feast-day.

The All-assembling, where the heavenly powers in miracles are not revealed, nor unseen in thunderstorms, but where in song hospitably gathered, present in choirs, a holy number, the blessed in every way are assembled, and also he, their most beloved, to whom they cling, is not missing; that is why I called you to the banquet that has been prepared, you, the unforgettable you, at the evening of time, you O youth, to the Prince of the feast-day; and our nation will not lie down to sleep, until all you who were promised, all you Immortals, to tell us about your Heaven, are here in our own house.

Lightly-wafting breezes proclaim you already, you proclaims the smoking valley, and the ground still resounding with the thunderstorm, yet hope flushes the cheeks and in front of the door of their house sit mother and child and gaze upon peace, and few appear to be dying; for now a divining, sent by golden light, holds back their souls, a promise holds back the most elderly.

True, it is burdens, designed from above and carried through too, that are the spice of life. For now all things are pleasing, but most of all the ingenuous, for it is the long-sought, the golden fruit fallen in shattering

> storms from the ancient stem, but then, the most loved goods, sheltered by holy fate itself, the shape of the Heavenly it is.
> Like the lioness, you have lamented, O Mother, for you lost, Nature, your children. For them, All-too-loving one, your enemy stole from you when almost like your own sons you had nurtured him, and with satyrs would join the gods. So you built much and buried much, for you are hated by that which you, All-powerful one, you brought to light before its time. Now you know, now you leave off; for willingly, until it matures, the fearfully-active rests unfeelingly below.

In the beginning of the poem *Friedensfeier*, Hölderlin pictures the feast that has been prepared for the celebration. Its setting is obviously worldly: the hall in which it takes place is "blessedly-familiar" with "green carpets" and tables "full of succulent fruit."[147] It is the landscape of Southern Germany where Hölderlin was born and raised. There are the grassy valleys and the hills that resemble tables full of fruits (orchards and vineyards). The peace of Being has descended on earth with "heavenly music" and "stillness." He sketches an idyllic image of the peace and harmony that will prevail.

> In front of the door of their house sit mother and child and gaze upon peace, and few appear to be dying; for now a divining, sent by golden light, holds back their souls, a promise holds back the most elderly.[148]

At the end of time there will be peace and harmony, people will not be submitted to the hardships of temporality anymore. Mortality has been abolished: "even with hair silver-grey, [we are] now resembling eternal youths."[149]

It is the poet who has organized the feast. He has provided "garlands and banquet," and he has invited the guests.[150] We will return to the grand role of the poet in 5.3. He is the I-figure who also is the first to notice the arrival of the prince, the center of the feast. After a day of serious work, "the prince of the feast-day" arrives smiling and ready to celebrate.[151] It is "the evening of time" and daylight is fading.[152] History

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[147] "seliggewohnt"; "grüne Teppiche"; "gereiftester Früchte voll"; "Der himmlischen, still wiederklingenden, Der ruhigwandelnden Töne voll" (BrA IX, 231).

[148] "Und vor der Türe des Hauses / Sitzt Mutter und Kind / Und schauet den Frieden / Und wenige scheinen zu sterben / Es hält ein Ahnen die Seele, / Vom goldnen Lichte gesendet, / Hält ein Versprechen die Ältesten auf" (BrA IX, 235).

[149] "und ware silbergrau"/ Die Locke, . . . Jetzt ewigen Jünglingen ähnlich" (BrA IX, 232).

[150] "Kränze . . . Mahl" (ibid.).

[151] "den Fürsten des Festes"; "Vom ernsten Tagwerk lächelnd" (BrA IX, 231).

[152] "Abend der Zeit" (BrA IX, 234).

has come to an end and in the twilight the contours of objects fade and objectification looses its dominance. At first, the poet "thinks" he sees him, but the image is still very unclear, he sees with "with dawning eyes." But soon a "different clarity reigns."[153] It is the appearance of the prince that leads to this higher level of insight. It is no longer the twilight zone of intuition, as we will see in the next chapter, nor is it the light of mere rational knowledge; it is an all-encompassing clarity that contrasts with the explanations of wise, but mortal men. For "a wise man may enlighten much for me; but where a God as well appears, a different clarity reigns."[154] The human way of being implies fragmentary knowledge, whereas the true interpretation of self and of history as a whole will only be possible from the eschatological perspective.

In our times, we struggle with the contradiction between unity and individuality, but this will resolve at the celebration of peace. The individuality of all historical manifestations, both religious and otherwise, will be left intact. Each individual person will be fully understood and understand herself and her own role in the unfolding of the divine, but at the same time peace and unity will reign. "This is the law of fate, that all shall know of themselves."[155] At the end of time, all things will not just dissolve into an amorphous mass and go back to the nothingness of primordial Being; individuality and consciousness will somehow both be preserved. In a reversal of St. John's Gospel, Hölderlin says about Christ, "and now we recognize him, now, that we know the Father."[156]

It is not that the signs have not been there all through history, but it takes a long process of ripening for humankind to be ready for this sort of perspective. "Not sprung up today, not unproclaimed he is." Now that all has grown silent, and "dominion is visible nowhere among spirits or mortals. That is, only now they hear the work, though long it has been prepared."[157]

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[153] "dämmernden Auges denk' ich schon"; "Da ist doch andere Klarheit" (BrA IX, 231).

[154] "Ein Weiser mag mir manches erhellen; wo aber / Ein Gott noch auch erscheint, / Da ist doch andere Klarheit" (BrA IX, 232).

[155] "Schicksalgesetz ist dies, dass Alle sich erfahren" (BrA IX, 233).

[156] "Und nun erkennen wir ihn, / Nun, da wir kennen den Vater" (ibid.). See John 14,7. The role of the Father will be discussed in 4.7.2.

[157] "Von heute aber nicht, nicht unverkündet ist er; … da es stille worden / Da Herrschaft nirgends ist zu sehn bei Geistern und Menschen / Das ist, sie hören das Werk, / Längst vorbereitend … jezt erst" (BrA IX, 232).

In this state of peace where "all has grown silent" and "all around the Spirit flowers in this stillness," dominion, which implies separation and opposition, will be replaced by true unity. No one will be excluded from this peaceful togetherness.[158]

However, the peace at the end of time will not only reconcile individuals. In Hölderlin's conception of the "all-assembling" celebration of peace, all successive historical partial revelations of Being will be present simultaneously in an all-encompassing harmony.[159] All will be proven to be legitimate and valuable fragments of the whole, "the All-Living, from whom many joys and songs have sprung." The "divinely constructed palaces" of Asia, the "ancient blessed shores [where] Apollo walked," "the gods," the "brave sons of life," and "Christ their brother."[160] Especially the Greek and the Christian religions are the focus of Hölderlin's unification, but also all other traditions will be integrated in a harmonious unity that ends all oppositions. The "heavenly powers" will be "in song hospitably gathered, present in choirs."[161] All will be included in this peaceful unity at the end of time. It is a true All-Unity, "for nothing is common."[162] The use of the word "common" as the opposite of "sacred" or "holy" emphasizes once again that all will be included in the celebration of peace.

This interpretation of the all-inclusiveness of the *eschaton* is one of the ideas that Hölderlin fears will be judged "too unconventional," as the introduction to the poem suggests. It refers to the doctrine of *apokatastasis pantoon*, the universal reconciliation at the end of time. Even though it is a view with points of reference in Scripture, this doctrine of Origines was considered a heresy. Origenes saw the beginning of St. John's Gospel as proof for the ontological negation of evil.

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.[163]

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[158] "da es stille worden"; "und es blüht / Rings abendlich der Geist in dieser Stille" (ibid.).

[159] "Allversammelnde" (BrA IX, 234).

[160] "Vom Alllebendigen aber, von dem / Viel Freuden sind und Gesänge" (BrA IX, 233); "göttlichgebauten Palläste" (StA II, 166); "die alten seeligen Küste…wo… Apollo gieng" (StA II, 157); "die Götter"; "Söhne des Lebens"; "Christus…Bruder" (StA II, 158).

[161] "Himmlische"; "bei Gesang gastfreundlich untereinander / In Chören gegenwärtig" (BrA IX, 234).

[162] "Denn nichts ist gemein" (StA II, 170).

[163] John 1,1–3. 1Cor 15,28, "God may be all in all," echoes this view as well.

If all things arise from the divine Logos, then ultimately nothing can be condemned. The doctrine continues to survive in Neo-Platonist circles, and in the 18th century, this theological tradition receives new emphasis. In this worldview, true evil does not exist; it is mere *privatio boni*. That Hölderlin seems to support this view is also illustrated by the poem *An die Madonna* [*To the Madonna*] where he writes: "A mere nothing is evil."[164] In addition, Hölderlin writes to his brother, "Thus the largest and the smallest, the best and the worst of people arises from One root, and overall everything is good."[165] And to his sister, "Such is my conviction that in the end all is good, and sadness is just a road to true, holy joy."[166] Here we see a fundamental difference between Hölderlin and Schelling. Whereas Hölderlin tends to trivialize evil, Schelling takes it very seriously and attempts to explain human freedom to commit evil without having to give up on a single and good root for all that is.

The second idea in Hölderlin's eschatology that might be held against him by the orthodoxy of his time is the inner-worldly setting of the *eschaton*. As was mentioned earlier, the first stanza pictures a very worldly stage for the feast. But he goes a step further by writing that at the "all-assembling" feast "the heavenly powers in miracles are not revealed."[167] In the era of the Spirit, the Divine has been so distant, so very different from the earthly, that it was experienced as a miracle whenever the Holy touched the earth. This will no longer be the case at the end of time, when the Divine has become fully immanent; when "all you Immortals, to tell us about your Heaven, are here in our own house."[168]

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[164] "nichts ists, das Böse" (StA II, 213).

[165] "So gehet das Grösste und Kleinste, das Beste und Schlimmste der Menschen aus Einer Wurzel hervor, und im Ganzen und Grossen ist alles gut" (StA VI, 328).

[166] "Und so ists mein gewisser Glaube, dass am Ende alles gut ist, und alle Trauer nur der Weg zu wahrer heiliger Freude ist" (StA VI, 387). We can appreciate that this view does not leave much room for freedom. Hölderlin never seems to have struggled with this aspect of I-hood to the same extent that Schelling has. We will return to this subject in Chapter 7.

[167] "Der Allversammelnde, wo Himmlische nicht / Im Wunder offenbar" (BrA IX, 234).

[168] "All ihr Unsterblichen, uns / Von eurem Himmel zu sage, / Da seid in unserem Hause" (ibid.).

Before we return to the "all-assembling" celebration of peace, we should spend some time on one of these "Immortals" that is unique in Hölderlin's view: Jesus Christ.

4.7.1. *Christ*

It is not easy to distill a coherent picture of Christ from the totality of Hölderlin's work. On the one hand, he is described as an ancient (demi)god. Schmidt has pointed out that the imagery that Hölderlin uses in the poem *Brod und Wein* [*Bread and Wine*] of 1800 fuses Dionysius and Christ into one and the same "wine god." Although in combination with bread, which is the gift of the goddess Demeter rather than Dionysius, it might be argued that the emphasis in the poem is on Christ rather than Dionysius.[169] In the early Hölderlin, Christ is one of the gods. No "god" is singled out when the poem says that it is the heavenly choir, the community of the gods, that provides the gifts.

> The heavenly choir left a few gifts behind in which human, as before, we could take pleasure... Bread is the fruit of Earth, but blessed by the light, and from the thundering god comes the gladness of wine.[170]

The gifts are the products of heaven and earth and that is how they remind us of the Divine. "That is why through these we think of the Heavenly, who once were here and who will return at the proper time."[171] The Christ of Hölderlin's early work is just the "brother" of Heracles and Dionysius with whom he forms one "cloverleaf."[172] He is faceless and interchangeable with the other (demi)gods. None of them is unique. "We may celebrate [the holidays] all and not count the gods; one always stands for all."[173] Hölderlin's emphasis is on their unity, on Being as their common origin, and he seems uninterested in the descriptions of their individual differences.

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[169] StA II, 90–95. See Schmidt 1968, 160–167.

[170] "der himmlische Chor einige Gaaben zurük, / Derer menschlich, wie sonst, wir uns zu freuen vermöchten,... Brod ist der Erde Frucht, doch ists vom Lichte geseegnet, / Und vom donnernden Gott kommet die Freude des Weins" (StA II, 94).

[171] "Darum denken wir auch dabei der Himmlischen, die sonst / Da gewesen und die kehren in richtiger Zeit" (StA II, 94).

[172] See 4.6.

[173] "sie alle feiern und nicht / Die Götter zählen, Einer ist immer für alle" (StA II, 132).

On the other hand, this image of "just another" Greek god does not seem to satisfy him in the course of time. Hölderlin becomes more interested in the actual historical figure of Jesus, in the details of his life, in his death, and in the consequences of both throughout the following ages of darkness. The timeless "god" of his early work, the "quiet genius…who proclaimed the end of day and withdrew," becomes a little more situated in the words "there beneath the Syrian palm-tree, where the town lay near, by the well."[174] And only a few years later a geographically located, historical person emerges: "Far from the Jordan and Nazareth and far from the lake, in Kafarnaum, where they looked for him and Galilee the skies, and from Cana."[175]

Around the age of thirty, during his last sane years, Hölderlin tries to reconcile his devotion for the gods of Antiquity and his intuition that they all arise from the same divine unitary Being with the *filius unigenitus* of the creed.[176] In *Friedensfeier* it says, "Yet of the All-Living from whom many joys and songs have sprung, one is a Son."[177] Referring to the poem *Der Einzige*, Jean-Francois Courtine writes,

> The central question of the hymn and Hölderlin's christology in general could…be formulated thus: How can Christ be *der Einzige* without, for

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[174] "ein stiller Genius…welcher des Tags Ende verkündet' und schwand" in *Bread and Wine* that was finished in 1800 (StA II, 94); "Dort unter syrischer Palme, / Wo nahe lag die Stadt, am Brunnen" in a preliminary draft for *Friedensfeier* from 1801 (StA II, 134).

[175] "Vom Jordan fern und Nazareth / Und fern vom See, an Caparnaum, wo sie ihn / Gesucht und Galiläa die Lüfte, und von Cana" in the last version of *Patmos* from 1803 (StA II, 185).

[176] This search never results in an unambiguous image of Jesus Christ. Hence, according to Constantine, Hölderlin fails in his project. "'Der Einzige' and 'Patmos' in their several versions are the evidence of his final failure to clarify his own relationship with Christ" (Constantine 1979, 113). I do not agree that failure describes Hölderlin's efforts. He seeks to integrate the ancient with the modern, mythology with philosophy, his intuitions about our unitary ground with the reality of conflict and isolation of this world. He is convinced that the whole picture will not be revealed until the end of time when the Father Himself appears and enough heroes have gained the strength that is needed to survive the fullness of divine presence. Only then, the role of each individual and each (demi)god will become known. In the meantime, our understanding is necessarily imperfect. Therefore, Hölderlin tries to gain insight for himself and for his readers by approaching the figure of Christ from different angles and the perspective shifts as time goes by. The fragmentation that results is not Hölderlin's failure so much as the human failure to shed light on what is ultimately beyond understanding. Trying to put all these fragments into one coherent system would neither do justice to the complexity of the problematic nor to the depth of Hölderlin's thinking.

[177] "Vom Alllebendigen aber, von dem / Viel Freuden sind und Gesänge, / Ist einer ein Sohn" (BrA IX, 233).

> all that, pronouncing some exclusion of the other demigods? How are we to conceive such a nonexclusive unicity?[178]

Let us attempt to sketch some outlines of Hölderlin's thoughts on Christ, as they surface in and around the time of *Friedensfeier* based on four major differences between him and the antique gods.

Around 1802–1803, Christ is no longer simply *a* god, in Hölderlin's view. He is not just one of the many sons of the Father; he is also "the jewel of your house," "the best" of the Father, "the most loving," and the one "whom most the [blessed] love."[179] He "completed and, comforting, ended the divine festivity."[180] When he appears at the celebration of peace, he brings the other "immortals" along. Hölderlin experiments with Christ as the last one in a long line of (demi)gods. "And yet, you ancient gods and all you brave sons of the gods, there is one other I seek whom I love among you,…the last one of your kind."[181] But also this perspective no longer exhausts Christ's true being for Hölderlin. He does not simply come later than the others; he is different. He does not just happen to be the last god; he is the completion, the perfection of the different historical revelations of the Divine. He is the ultimate god, the one to whom the other gods "cling."[182] "Christ is the end. He is of yet another nature."[183] Compared to the antique gods, Christ's is "a different fate. More marvelous. Richer to sing."[184] He is different and

> A feeling of shame forbids
> Me to compare with you
> The worldly men. And indeed
> I know that, He who begot you, your Father,
> The same who…
> For never He reigns alone…,

[178] For *Der Einzige* see Sta II, 153–164; Courtine 1999, 131.
[179] "sein Bestes" (StA II, 156); "Das Liebendste" (StA II, 132); "ihr Geliebtestes" (ibid.).
[180] "vollendet' und schloss tröstend das himmlische Fest" (StA II, 93).
[181] "aber dennoch / Ihr alten Götter und all / Ihr tapfern Söhne der Götter / Noch Einen such ich, den / Ich liebe unter euch, / (…) den lezten eures Geschlechts" (StA II, 154).
[182] "An dem sie hängen." Hamburger translates "to whom they are devoted." To cling is a more literal translation that I prefer, since it puts Christ in the center. When he appears the others "automatically" come along. See Hamburger 1961, 182.
[183] "Christus aber ist / Das Ende. Wohl ist der noch andrer Natur" (StA II, 753).
[184] "Anders ists ein Schiksaal. Wundervoller. / Reicher, zu singen" (StA II, 181).

Hölderlin says falteringly.[185] The "worldly men," whom Christ is not to be compared with, are the "brothers" of the preceding stanza: Heracles and Dionysius. Christ "is of yet another nature," which seems to refer to the dogma about the two natures of Christ. He is not a (demi)god: he is fully God as well as fully human. "For once, however, a god may choose the mere daily task, like mortals, and share all fate," he says in *Friedensfeier* with reference to the incarnation.[186]

Secondly, Christ's presence (and absence) is of a different nature. When the antique gods were worshipped, they literally "walked the earth." They mingled with mortals and thus were very visible. This is in stark contrast to the absence of the Divine in our times. The effectiveness of the (demi)gods however, lasted only while they were around, whereas Christ works in history still, even after his disappearance. "Christ lives yet."[187] Christ's death marks the end of the antique era of the clearly visible forms of the gods and starts a new era. His activity is no longer directly in his deeds, but he is present in the gifts of bread and wine and "mediated in holy scriptures"; not in the concrete visible presence but in "a trace of a word."[188] The Divine is in "the writings of the bard or the African."[189]

Thirdly, Christ works in silence: "Silent is his sign."[190] Christ's activity is not like the fight of a Greek warrior. He does not use violence and does not fight the limitations of the human condition with force. He is not of "the great era," of "fire," of "the din of war, and the story of the heroes."[191] The glamour of the Divine of which the Greek gods were an expression and their (over)activity, their heroism, and their urge to outdo the enemy, has been banished in the figure of Jesus Christ. He is "calmly-foreknowing" and "calmly-powerful."[192] He attempts

[185] "Es hindert aber ein Schaam / Mich dir zu vergleichen / Die weltlichen Männer. Und freilich weiss / Ich, der dich zeugte, dein Vater, / Derselbe der,. . . . / Denn nimmer herrscht er allein . . ." (StA II, 155).

[186] "Einmal mag aber ein Gott auch Tagewerk erwählen, / Gleich Sterblichen und teilen alles Schicksal" (BrA IX, 233).

[187] "Denn noch lebt Christus" (StA II, 171).

[188] "Mittelbar / In heiliger Schriften"; "eine Spur eines Wortes" (StA II, 163).

[189] "die Schrift / Des Barden oder Afrikaners" (StA II, 159). The bard is the poet and the African refers to Saint Augustine.

[190] "Still ist sein Zeichen" (StA II, 171).

[191] "Das Geschik der grossen Zeit"; "Feuer"; "Kriegsgetön, und Geschichte der Helden" (StA II, 158f.).

[192] "ruhigahnend" (StA II, 167); "ruhigmächtig" (BrA IX, 233).

"to silence the raging of the world."[193] On another occasion, Hölderlin speaks of raging when describing the fury of rivers at being hemmed in by mountains.[194] One who rages refuses to resign himself to the human condition in general and the personal destination that the Divine has set out for him in particular. Christ does not counter this raging with force. His actions are gentle and mild, "with drops he quenched the sighing of the light" in contrast to "thirsty wild beasts in those days."[195]

Fourthly and finally, with Christ the Divine has become disclosed for common people, for the "many timid eyes [that] are waiting to see the light," and not just for the (demi)gods.[196] He is of "the penitent and the wandering of pilgrims and the peoples," of the "unillustrious."[197] "For now more to men does night belong. Not to youths."[198] Christ is the "benignly, gravely disposed to men" as Michael Hamburger translates, or more literally the "friendly-seriously devoted to men."[199] He is the one who "pronounced ultimate love."[200] Without this love, the urge to escape into the unbound, the wish to die would become too powerful to resist, as we have seen in 4.5. Christ is the very picture of faithfulness; he stays even when "to stay in innocent truth is suffering."[201] In that respect, he is an example for all people who suffer the inevitable contradictions and loneliness of life. In the darkness of history we have to fight the urge to return to the safety of eternal Being, to escape the doubts and the suffering of the wilderness, the emptiness and danger of an apparently God-less life. Christ is our "Master and Lord," our "Teacher" on how to resist the "boundless temptation."[202]

This "youth" died a violent death. Again, we see Hölderlin's struggle with the idea of an inevitable step in a divine scheme on the one hand,

[193] "zu schwaigen … das Zürnen der Welt" (StA II, 175).

[194] See Preliminary drafts for *Friedensfeier* (StA II, 131).

[195] "mit Tropfen / Stillt er das Seufzen des Licht, das dürstigem Wild / War ähnlich in den Tagen" (StA II, 181).

[196] "Es warten aber / Der scheuen Augen viele / Zu schauen das Licht" (StA II, 170).

[197] "Büssenden, und / Der Pilgrime Wandern und der Völker"; "Ruhmloser" (StA II, 159).

[198] "Denn Männern mehr / Gehöret das Licht. Nicht Jünglingen" (StA II, 159). Eternal youth is a term that Hölderlin frequently uses for the gods.

[199] "freundlichernst den Menschen zu gethan" (BrA IX, 232).

[200] "die lezte Liebe" (StA II, 167).

[201] "Jener aber bleibet" (StA II, 745); "zu bleiben in unschuldiger / Wahrheit ein Leiden ist" (StA II, 745).

[202] "Meister und Herr"; "Lehrer"; "Versuchungen sind nemlich / Gränzlos" (StA II, 158–160).

and, especially in his later poetry, with the reality of the gruesome death of a real man on the other. Whereas the words "dreadfully-determining, a deadly doom overshadowed" him are still immediately followed by the observation that it is "not in vain" in *Friedensfeier*, the horror of the death becomes obvious in his later work.[203] Then Golgotha is referred to as the "hill of rage," and Christ dies because of "statutes…in anger whetted."[204] The laws of people have been sharpened beyond the point where they serve the purpose of protecting life on earth. Laws are to guard the human, to prevent people from fleeing into the unbound, the deadly. But laws that are sharpened by anger "like dragons' teeth they cut and kill the living."[205] Laws that should protect life on earth have come to "fetter" it. Laws that are meant to serve as "bonds of love" have become "ropes."[206]

Nevertheless, even if not everywhere in Hölderlin's poetry the death of Christ is calm and peaceful according to divine design, its inevitability in the course of history predominates. There are two reasons for his unavoidable death. First, as the "son of the Highest" Christ is "the bearer of lightning."[207] Lightning stands for the brief but powerful connection of heaven and earth. Since it carries the danger of burning what it strikes from "roof to floor," it can last only for a brief moment in order to protect people from too much (divine) exposure.[208] In *Friedensfeier* the disciples are called the "dear friends" of Christ who "cast their shadow about" him, so that the "sacredly-bold" ray would come gently "through wilderness" to people." Christ is "the beam through wilderness" that needs the "faithful cloud of dear friends" as mediators to prevent his light from searing people and make sure that it "gently would come to men."[209] To protect us from too much divine exposure his life could not last long.

The second reason that his death is inevitable is that his individual presence has to be destroyed to set a process of spiritualization in

[203] "umschattete…Furchtbarentscheidend ein tödlich Verhängnis…aber umsonst nicht" (StA II, 177).
[204] "Zornhügel" (StA II, 177); "Sazungen…wenn im Zorn sie schärft" (StA II, 212).
[205] "Wie Drachenzähne, schneiden sie / und tödten das Leben" (StA II, 212).
[206] "fesseln"; "Strike" (StA II, 144f.).
[207] "Sohn[e] des Höchsten"; "der Gewittertragende" (StA II, 167).
[208] "Uns Gipfel und Boden entzündet" (BrA IX, 232).
[209] "Und die lieben Freunde, das treue Gewölk, / Umschatteten dich auch, damit der heiligkühne / Durch Wildniß mild dein Stral zu Menschen kam, O Jüngling!" (BrA IX, 232).

motion: “He sent them the Spirit.”[210] With the death of Christ, visible divine presence has disappeared from the earth, and a new and difficult era has started. The death of Christ signifies the transition from the secure tangibility of the Divine in the gods, to the volatility of the pneumatic.[211] This is difficult for human beings.

> Upon the god-sent gift for years at first there follow suffering and confusion, so that more mildly in the subsequent period the lofty beam shall shine through holy wilderness.[212]

Hölderlin describes how the disciples “mourn” since “fame is extinguished, the delight of the eyes.”[213] The disciples “mourned since now evening had come.”[214] They clung to the memories for “they did not wish to part from the face of the Lord and their homeland.”[215] As Hölderlin ironically phrases it in the poem *To the Virgin Mary*: they wanted to “endlessly sit on their mother’s lap.” They want the reassuring presence of the divine back in their midst, Christ’s immediate presence, to “remain at the beginning.”[216] This, however, would be contrary to the unfolding of Being in history. The unconscious unitary ground has to develop into a harmonious unity of conscious individuals. “But much is to be avoided. Too much of love, where there is idolatry, is dangerous,... Therefore he sent them the Spirit.”[217]

With the death of Christ, visible divine presence has disappeared from the earth and the Spirit has become active because only the destruction of his individuality could bring about the universality and the freedom of the divine Spirit. At that point in time, history changed into a steady process of spiritualization. A long and hard process of strengthening common people into heroes will set in, “Driven in, as fire into iron, was this.” In the nighttime of history, many will grow

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[210] “[Drum] sandt’ er ihnen / Den Geist” (StA II, 168).

[211] See John 19,30: He bowed his head and gave up his Spirit. This gospel was of major importance for Hölderlin and his fellow *Stiftler*.

[212] “Auf göttliche Gaabe aber jahrlang / Die Mühe erst und das Irrsaal, / Dass milder auf die folgende Zeit / Der hohe Stral / Durch heilige Wildniss scheine” (StA II, 131).

[213] “trauern”; “erloschen ist der Ruhm die Augenlust” (StA II, 180).

[214] “trauerten sie, da nun / Es Abend worden” (StA II, 167).

[215] “lassen wollten sie nicht / Vom Angesichte des Herrn / Und der Heimath” (StA II, 168).

[216] “Der Mutter ewig sizen / Im Schoose” (StA II, 214); “bleibet im Anfang” (StA II, 181).

[217] “Zu meiden aber ist viel. Zu viel aber / Der Liebe, wo Anbetung ist, / Ist gefahrreich,... Drum sandt er ihnen / Den Geist” (StA II, 182f.).

stronger and the result will be that the Divine will be available to the "unillustrious."[218] Thanks to the Spirit, all people can come in touch with the Divine. However, the lack of clearly defined "gods" initially only leads to a period of conflicts and misunderstandings. "Where the Spirit is active, we too will stir and dispute what might be best."[219] But as time progresses and humankind matures, our interactions will move from conflict and "dispute" to a more reasonable exchange, "discourse," and eventually to harmony, "song."[220] In the end "the law of love alone, the gently-leveling, rules from here right up to heaven."[221]

For Hölderlin the life and the death of Christ is a turning-point in history. He is the last and the ultimate in a long line of gods who walked the earth, and with this theory, he has strayed from the *solus Christus* of the theology of the *Stift*. Nonetheless, he is the Only One, as the tile of the poem says.[222] This is not a contradiction for Hölderlin. Christ was one of the many gods, but he was the only one who started a new divine process of spiritualization. The times have changed, and we have to remain faithful to our present situation. Clinging to idols, focusing solely on one divine manifestation is not the right attitude in our times. In *Patmos*, Hölderlin prays for "pinions, most faithful in mind to cross over and to return."[223] He wants to understand the underlying unity of all divine manifestations. The fact that they are historically separated makes them grow faint. "All around the summits of time are heaped, and the most loved live near, growing faint on most separate mountains."[224] This isolation "on most separate mountains" threatens to exhaust the Heavenly. Even though at our point in history the Divine is "near" but "difficult to grasp," Hölderlin no longer desires to retreat in the golden age of divine light. When he is

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[218] "Eingetrieben war, / Wie Feuer im Eisen, das" (StA II, 168); "Ruhmloser" (StA II, 159).

[219] "Wo aber wirkt der Geist, sind wir auch mit, und streiten, / Was wohl das Beste sei" (BrA IX, 233f.).

[220] "Streit"; "Gespräch"; "Gesang" (ibid.).

[221] "nur der Liebe Gesetz, / Das schönausgleichende gilt von hier an bis zum Himmel" (ibid.).

[222] *Der Einzige*, StA II, 153–164.

[223] "O Fittige gib uns, treuesten Sinns / Hinüberzugehn und wiederzukehren" (StA II, 165).

[224] "Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott.... Drum, da gehäuft sind rings / Die Gipfel der Zeit, und die Liebsten / Nah wohnen, ermattend auf / Getrenntesten Bergen" (StA II, 165).

flown to Greece, he faithfully returns.[225] But he realizes that also too exclusive a love for Christ is a mistake since it risks excluding the other partial revelations of the same Divine, "if I serve one, I must lack the other."[226] The uniqueness of Christ lies in his role as Conciliator. He reconciles all. He gathers the "Heavenly" around and into himself.

Exactly through the work of Christ, we are ready to look beyond the fragmentation of positive religions. "For behold, it is the evening of time and no longer alone the Father sits enthroned above. Others yet are with him."[227] It is Christ who has set this process of reconciliation in motion. The already quoted, "There beneath the Syrian palm-tree, where the town lay near, by the well" from the *Friedensfeier*, is an allusion to the scene at the well of Sychar, according to Saint John's gospel. Here Jesus encounters a woman from Samaria and declares,

> Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth.[228]

Hölderlin interprets this as an argument against a positive fixation of religion. He broadens the concept of reconciliation of the world with the Christian God to all-reconciliation. All mortals, all gods, all religions are to be included. This makes Hölderlin's Christ the Son *par excellence* of his Father. Hence when Christ is invited to the celebration of peace as its most important guest, all those who cling to him in devotion, heavenly as well as earthly, come along. He is the reconciler who reunites in the One the All that has become dispersed in time.

Let us now return to *Friedensfeier* and find out who the Father of Jesus is, "He who begot you" and who "never He reigns alone."[229]

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[225] "Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott" (StA II, 165).

[226] "Von Trauern meine Seele / Als eifertet, ihr Himmlischen, selbst / Dass, dien' ich einem, mir / Das andere fehlte" (StA II, 154).

[227] "Denn siehe es ist der Abend der Zeit... Und der Vater thront nun nimmer oben allein. / Und andere sind noch bei ihm" (StA II, 137).

[228] John 4: 21–24.

[229] "der dich zeugte, dein Vater, /... Denn nimmer herrscht er allein" (StA II, 155).

4.7.2. *The Father, Being, and All-Unity*

In *Friedensfeier* Hölderlin never clearly defines the central figure, the host of the celebration. Who is the prince of the feast-day? Supposedly, he is "all-known." He is "greatness" and "a god," and he surely is "no mortal power."[230] At one point in the poem, Hölderlin calls him "the Father…the Exalted, the Spirit of the World" who now "inclined towards people."[231] In order to gain more clarity about this figure, we need to turn to other poems in which the term "Father" appears more frequently. On other occasions, the Father is characterized as "faithful and friendly" and "the god of gods."[232] In the poem *An den Aether* [*To the Ether*], Hölderlin calls him "Father Ether" who feeds the newborn with "holy breath."[233] He is "the creative one" who "permeates all ducts of life." He is the "Father of hope."[234] He has been active all through history; he is "the Great Father…who up there in the heights refreshes wandering Time."[235] Apparently, the latter has not been an easy feat. He arrives at the celebration "smiling," but he also looks "as though weary after the long heroic campaign."[236] At the end of time, he "cast[s] down [his] eyes,…and assume[s] the shape of a friend."[237] However, the poet is not fooled by this modesty; his greatness "almost forces knees to bend."[238]

The Father is Being, the source of all that is. The Father is the unitary ground of whom we do not get a clear picture until the end of time. He has been revealed in brief flashes only to individual persons and fragmentarily through history. Nevertheless, as totality, as unification of the all, he could never be identified with any of these modes of activity or appearances that have varied with cultural and historical settings. When he appears at the celebration of peace, the *eschaton*, all historical and partial revelations will integrate around the Father. Only then will we have full clarity about his unifying work in history

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[230] "Allbekannter"; "das Hohe"; "ein Gott"; "Sterbliches bist du nicht" (BrA IX, 232).

[231] "de[r] Vater…, / Der hohe, der Geist / Der Welt [der] sich zu Menschen geneigt hat" (BrA IX, 233).

[232] "true und freundlich" (StA I, 204) [CvW]; "der Götter Gott" (StA II, 132).

[233] "heilige[n] Othem (StA I, 204).

[234] "der Schöpferische" (StA II, 97); "Vater der Hoffnung" (StA II, 59).

[235] "[der] grosse[n] Vater…welcher die wandernde Zeit / Droben in Höhen erfrischt" (StA II, 98).

[236] "als vom langer Heldenzuge müd" (BrA IX, 231).

[237] "Dein Auge senkst,…/ Und Freundesgestalt annimmst" (BrA IX, 232).

[238] "doch beugt fast die Knie das Hohe" (ibid.).

all along. He differentiated himself in history. However, only at the end of time we will not only understand all these temporary manifestations but also their completed unity. Hence, when Hölderlin speaks of the "Fatherland," I do not think that he refers to Germany, as Hitler would have his soldiers believe when he provided them with copies of Hölderlin's poems.[239] In fact, the exact opposite is meant. Hölderlin's Fatherland has nothing to do with nationalism; the land of the Father is the domain of All-Unity at the end of time. Let us look at this term more closely.

Being, pure original unity, that is absolutely One "in such a manner that no separation can be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated," as it says in *Urtheil und Seyn*, divides in the arche-separation.[240] Time and conscious life emerge. With Being as its source, *all* of this life is touched by the Divine. "Into all the veins of life, rejoicing them all at once, may the Heavenly divide."[241] This arche-separation has dramatic consequences; it not only results in consciousness, time, diversity, and history, but also in mortality. All this occurs so that we will "re-establish [unity] through ourselves," says the foreword to *Hyperion*. Because Being has gone "outside itself," has differentiated, it has enabled its "parts" to experience the fullness of life. But that is not all. Because of its presence in history, because of the development of consciousness through time, primordial Being itself will also change. Before the arche-separation it is unconscious and hence indistinguishable from "nothingness," but through the life and the consciousness of individual persons all through history eternal Being will be transfigured. In the course of history, Being gradually comes to full self-consciousness.

Friedensfeier gives an impression of the completion of this process at the end of time. The "work that was heard" all through history now becomes "the completed image."[242] We will finally reach the stage that we have always longed for.

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239 See Fioretos 1999.

240 See 4.1.

241 "in die Adern alle des Lebens, Alle freuend zugleich, teile das Himmlische sich!" (StA II, 99).

242 "sie hören das Werk, / Längst vorbereitend, von Morgen nach Abend, jetzt erst"; "Wenn nun vollendet sein Bild und fertig ist der Meister" (BrA IX, 232).

> The Heavenly…appear in person, and people grow used to joy, to Day, and to the sight of these now revealed, the countenances of those who were called the One and All, already long ago, who deeply had filled the taciturn heart with free self-content, and were the first and only to satisfy every longing.[243]

Here we encounter the One and All again, the *Hen kai Pan* that was already mentioned briefly as one of the terms with which Hölderlin refers to eternal Being.[244] At this point, however, we are ready to make a distinction between Being and the One and All. Before the arche-separation Being is One. Nothing or no one is to be distinguished in this unity. At the end of time, Being will have become a unity again, but a different kind of unity. It is no longer unconscious Oneness that cannot be distinguished from nothingness. This new unity is not an amorphous whole in which historical events and all individuals dissolve. On the contrary, all are assembled and all are reconciled in it. This harmonious whole throws light on the true value and role of each particular individual whom "now we recognize him, now, that we know the Father."[245] The individual only now fully understands her place in the world and obtains full self-consciousness. I-hood is perfected. Being that is just Oneness becomes a unity that is One *and* All simultaneously because all individual I's and events have become united without losing their individuality, their singularity. The completion of the world and the self-realization of Being are parallel movements. Being will gain full consciousness, and the individual and history will obtain a totally new "clarity." In the course of history, Being becomes All-Unity, a unity in which also individuality comes to fullness. Ultimately, Being and consciousness become reconciled; Being reaches full self-consciousness in beings, and conscious beings peacefully unite: "the definite and the indefinite lines have approached" and…touch. This is Hölderlin's concept of *Hen kai Pan*, of a One that grounds all.

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[243] "die Himmlischen…/ Kommen sie selbst und gewohnt werden die Menschen des Glüks / Und des Tags und zu schaun die Offenbaren, das Antliz / Derer, welche, schon längst Eines und Alles genannt, / Tief die verschwiegene Brust mit freier Genüge gefüllet, / Und zuerst und allein alles Verlangen beglükt" (StA II, 92).

[244] See 4.3.

[245] "Und nun erkennen wir ihn, / Nun, da wir kennen den Vater" (BrA IX, 233). See also John 14: 7.

4.8. From Here Onwards

"German idealism can be viewed as the various attempts ... to overcome dualism," it was said in 2.7. In that respect Hölderlin's metaphysics is indeed idealistic. In his view, all that is originates from one, unitary ground. However, to him this Absolute is not an I as Fichte (and the early Schelling) maintain. It cannot be, Hölderlin argues, because an I is already internally divided in order to be aware of its I-ness, to be (self-)conscious. Hence, he calls this primordial unity Being. Since Hölderlin departs from the reflection theory of self-consciousness, as do most of his contemporaries, he seems forced to decide between an absolute I or an absolute It; between idealism and dogmatism, or build a system that integrates both. However, he circumvents the dilemma of his time: the ground is not a subject and it is not an object either. Being is not an it; Being is nothingness. This nothingness has the urge to be, but in order to really be, to be real, it has to "go outside itself" and destroy its perfect unity. Hence, life emerges from Nothingness, conscious I's emerge from unconscious Being.

Even though his philosophy also ventures "beyond the Kantian limits," Hölderlin never supports the idealistic foundationalism of his fellow *Stiftler* Schelling. In the latter's eyes, Hölderlin's metaphysics fails because he is never able to develop an adequate philosophical concept of the connection between the finite and the Infinite, of the All emerging from the One. This is exactly Hölderlin's independence vis-à-vis his generation. He simply refuses to take this step because he maintains that Being as pure unity is by definition beyond theoretical consciousness. He never claims knowledge about what lies past the Kantian limits, and he never searches for a *Grundsatz*. Nonetheless, he *does* claim intuitions of the presence of the unitary ground in nature, in beauty, in love. Father Ether breathes in all that is, but breath cannot be grasped, much less does it explain the One from which it emerges. Understanding our unitary ground will have to wait until the end of time when consciousness and unity are no longer mutually exclusive. Hölderlin does not fall in the trap of philosophical hubris that characterizes German idealism.

His is only a short-lived poetical hubris, his romantic inheritance, as we will see in the next chapter. Hölderlin's romanticism is also obvious in his emphasis on feelings, on love, on intuition, and in his glorification of the antique golden era. But his philosophy forms a rejection of the solipsism that has captured the great thinkers of his era, idealists

and romanticists alike. His life's quest is not so much 'Who am I?' but rather 'Why can't we live in peace?' The road towards a 'mature' unity is necessarily long and arduous, he decides. Consciousness is indispensable for life, but it comes at a high price. Our entire life is caught up in the contradiction of longing for and attempting to unite with all living beings on the one hand, and fear of giving up our individuality and independence, on the other. He knows that these opposing drives are both real but cannot be resolved. Human life is literally torn between the lonely drive to preserve one's I-hood and exaggeration of earthly relationships in order to experience unitary bliss here and now: "One, one friend in whom our soul can recover itself [because] the participation in All does not satisfy."[246] As long as we experience the Oneness of Being as fallen apart in the All of the realm of judgments, it is hard to endure our individuality and be content with an intuition of a new sort of unity, All-Unity, that will grow in time.

The duality of daily life as Hölderlin experiences it has a lot in common with the *Grundverhältnis* as we have encountered in Henrich's theory of self-consciousness.[247] A human being is both a self-conscious subject that enjoys and wants to preserve its uniqueness in opposition to the rest of the world and a person within this world. This duality arises out of one unknowable ground, also for Henrich, as we will see in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, there are considerable differences. According to Henrich, we are torn between uniqueness (subjecthood) and self-relativization (personhood). Our sense of infinity is connected with being a subject over and above the things of the world, our contingency with being a person *in* the world. In both cases, we are isolated from other I's. As subject we are opposed to all, as person we are afraid of losing ourselves in the masses. Henrich's I never experiences a natural basis for connection. He poses a singular, ultimate ground for all, but this ground is beyond the human grasp. For Hölderlin, this unitary ground is still experienced as a yearning for togetherness. I-hood is a source of loneliness, but we never lose our sense of unity completely. We can catch glimpses of it in nature, in beauty, and in love. How Hölderlin thinks we can even have an inner experience of pure unity will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[246] "Wo einem doch die Teilnahme an Allem nicht genügt, wo man Eines will, Einen Freund, indem sich unsere Seel wiederfinde" (StA VI, 92).

[247] Henrich's philosophy is greatly indebted to Hölderlin's thinking. Henrich's own theory of the ground of consciousness will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Now let us return to Hölderlin's metaphysics on which a consensus has never been reached among experts. He has been called a pantheist, but also a true Christian and even a polytheist who places Christ among the Greek gods.[248] To start with the latter: Hölderlin mentions "the gods" in plural frequently and they are a very real presence for him. However, it would be very superficial to see this as evidence of polytheistic inclinations. The gods, in the sense of divine individuals, are gone. They belonged to a different and long lost (golden) era. In our times of absence, "a god" is an expression Hölderlin also uses for the human experience of a transcendent power, something beyond purely human capacities. Whenever a connection between people succeeds, in friendships or in love, there is a god [*Gott*] or a deity [*Gottheit*]. This is how he can also write to his brother about the deity between them.[249] There seems no need to take polytheism as a serious characterization of Hölderlin's metaphysics. We should, however, take a closer look at the other two terms: pantheism and Christianity. Let us start with the latter.

While some see strong connections with the pietism of his upbringing, many recognize in the use of biblical passages at least the echoes of a Lutheran education.[250] Xavier Tilliette goes even further. He claims Hölderlin to be a true Christian poet who merely strays in his youth but returns to Christianity "with timidity and ardency" after a detour in the world of Greek mythology. This return, however, is "smothered" because "Beissner [the editor of the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, CvW]...and his disciples practice a sort of intellectual terrorism concerning the Christianity of Hölderlin."[251] Before continuing this dangerous undertaking of labeling Hölderlin's metaphysics, it might be wise to keep this controversy among experts in mind. Even Schelling warns us that "in any case it seems questionable whether much is gained by resurrecting such general labels...they seem to be much too clumsy."[252]

Hölderlin has at times provoked passionate controversy, and like most creative thinkers, he is not easy to categorize. As a graduate of the *Stift*, he is obviously well-schooled in what constitutes (Lutheran) Christian thinking. His poetry in particular gives the impression that

[248] For the latter, see Bennholdt-Thomson and Guzzoni 2003, 307.
[249] "der Gottheit, die zwischen mir und Dir ist" (StA VI, 293).
[250] See, for example, Schäfer 1991 and Binder 1961/62.
[251] Tilliette 1986, 106.
[252] SW 7, 344. Schelling is not referring to Hölderlin.

he seeks to reconcile – an activity that he views as uniquely Christian – what he finds valuable in his Christian education with a more intuitive sense of and an existential need for unity. Binder remarks that Hölderlin is not satisfied by the two extremes of the Christian thinking of his time. On the one hand, he rejects a theology that assumes a "positive revelation, whereby the revelator is the only active party." The one whom the revelation is given to is not even allowed "to stir [*sich regen*] in order to receive it since this would imply that he had added something of his own." This type of theology he calls an "*Unding*," literally a non-thing, a piece of junk, because it is a theology without a recipient. To receive, or to understand, automatically implies an alteration of the understood. On the other hand, Hölderlin rejects a *Vernunftreligion*, a system that calls its highest idea or ultimate value 'God.' Whereas revelation theology abolishes the recipient, *Vernunfttheology* does away with the giver.[253] I agree. The former does not do justice to Hölderlin's conviction that people are needed to realize the development of Being into All-Unity, to give Being consciousness. The latter is the kind of absolute idealism that he rejects as philosophically untenable. Furthermore, the hubris does not square with his personality and his religiosity. Romano Guardini rightly asserts,

> The interiority that he was after was not a subjective sphere, but the unfathomable depth [*Tiefenbereich*] of real being.... This man was confronted with a Christianity that had lost its religious character – or had slipped loose from world and history into an otherworldly [a*bseitig*] pietism.[254]

This brings us to another Christian tradition, one that Hölderlin is raised in: Württemberg pietism. Let us briefly look at some parallels between this specific type of Christianity and Hölderlin's thinking. Pietism has an ambivalent attitude towards institutionalization. Since the Church represents the fixed dogmas, rites, sacraments, images, etc., it cannot always be reconciled with what is considered true inner spirituality. This makes for a theological dilemma. We can only seek the Divine in what can be perceived and is thus fixed to a large degree, but religiosity calls for a spirituality that transcends all fixation in images. The only exception is Scripture, which is considered both fixed, "the solid letter" [*feste Buchstabe*], and spiritual. In his poem

[253] See Binder 1961/62, 2f.
[254] Guardini 1955, 197.

Patmos, Hölderlin refers to this warning against self-willed manipulation of biblical texts, a message that is considered most explicit in the book of Revelation.[255] The name Patmos refers to the isle where Saint John allegedly wrote the book of Revelation after either being exiled or having fled during the reign of Emperor Domitianus (81–96). According to the legend, this was the same person as the evangelist and the apostle. Therefore, Patmos is for pietists, who favor both the book of Revelation and the Gospel of Saint John, the paragon of inspired interaction with the Bible because of its spiritual content. The pneumatic emphasis is especially deduced from the fourth chapter where Jesus meets the woman from Samaria at the well of Sychar. Furthermore, the poverty of Patmos complies with pietistic ideals. Pietism is a cult of silence, which is considered the state of inner fulfillment. In those days, pietists are often referred to as the silent [*die Stillen im Lande*].[256] The landscape that is a wasteland devoid of outward glamour is considered a token of its inwardness.

Hölderlin's thinking is said to be influenced by the pietistic spirituality of Friedrich Christoph Ötinger (1702–1782). The main motive of the latter's work concerns the ingenuousness of the primordial golden era and a returning golden era of peace in which all gods and all mortals will be united. Ingenuousness is synonym for a pure kind of wisdom that is opposed to the rationality of Enlightenment, and that is reminiscent of the biblical "blessed are the poor in spirit." Hölderlin speaks of the "ingenuousness" of the disciples.[257] The process that will lead to the golden fullness at the end of time is viewed as inherent in nature, and this unfolding of nature, this ripening, takes place according to divine will. History is also considered the planned self-realization of God, not the result of human planning, in Ötinger's view. Both history and the Bible are only understandable from the end perspective. Moreover, the concept of the celebration of peace at the end of time is anchored in the chiliasm especially prominent in Württemberg pietism. It is an eschatological concept of an actual golden era at the end of time which is to take place on earth instead of in an otherworldly

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[255] See StA II, 172. See Revelation 22: 18f. "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

[256] See Schmidt 1968, 130ff.

[257] "Einfalt / Der Jüngers" (StA II, 167).

setting. In addition, "Prince of peace," that reminds us of the prince of Hölderlin's *Friedensfeier* is a traditional chiliastic term. There are indeed clear pietistic themes in Hölderlin's thinking.[258]

How about the third characterization: was Hölderlin a pantheist? He has been labeled as such based on (early) passages in his work as the following: "Does our Spirit not encounter a kindred Spirit in everything that exists?" The Spirit is "the Archetype of all Unity."[259] Spirit of the World is considered a pantheistic key term. This Great Spirit, the divine but immanent Logos, is the forming principle that is active in history. The Stoics saw this Logos as the pantheistic God.[260] Hölderlin supposedly transposes this stoic-pantheistic concept into history. However, just reading the beginning verses of the Gospel of Saint John will make it clear that this concept is not alien to Christian thinking either. In addition, Hölderlin clearly says,

> The blessed Unity, Being in the unique sense of the word is lost for us. And we had to lose it if we were to strive, to fight for it. We tear ourselves away from the peaceful *Hen kai Pan* of the world in order to reconstruct it through ourselves…But neither our knowledge, nor our actions ever reach in any period of our existence, the point where all opposition ends and where all is one; the definite line unites with the indefinite only in infinite approach.[261]

This might not be acceptable to all Christian thinkers, but it is definitely not straightforward romantic pantheism either.

Paul de Man has shown that Hölderlin makes it clear in the poem *Der Rhein* that "pantheism is only the first stage in the history of the Western mind."[262] The Rhine starts out in the direction of pantheistic Greece, its "royal soul drove it, with impatience, towards Asia," but

[258] For a more detailed study on this subject, see Schäfer 1991.

[259] "Begegnet nicht in allem, was da ist, unsrem Geiste ein freundlicher verwandter Geist?" and "Das hohe Urbild aller Einigkeit" (StA III, 201). See Also Binder (1961/62).

[260] See Görner 2003, 94.

[261] "Die seelige Einigkeit, das Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, ist für uns verloren und wir mussten es verlieren, wenn wir es erstreben, erringen sollten. Wir reissen uns los vom friedlichen *Hen kai Pan* der Welt, um es herzustellen, durch uns Selbst (…) Aber weder unser Wissen noch unser Handeln gelangt in irgend einer Periode des Daseyns dahin, wo aller Widerstreit aufhört, wo Alles Eins ist; die bestimmte Linie vereiniget sich mit der unbestimmten nur in unendlicher Annäherung" (StA III, 236).

[262] De Man 1993, 135.

turns away from it and continues towards the West. After a period of "raging" at being "hemmed in by holy Alps," it "meanders quietly through German lands, content."[263] Nowhere in the poem does Hölderlin refer to its ending in the sea.

> As the sea symbol indicates, pantheistic unity, for the romantic mind, is the final consummation of all individual destinies, the end point of the quest. In the Rhine poem, however, the sea is not even mentioned, and the last glimpse we are given of the river is as it flows through the cities and by the towers of civilized Europe.[264]

Hölderlin's conviction that we find our ground in a primordial unity that has been lost to our reflection but for which we keep a certain intuition, is not a pantheistic one. "He does not identify nature with God, but experiences special occasions, situations, and relationships as divine," as Rudiger Safranski puts it.[265] According to Charles Hartshorne and William Reese, pantheism is the paradox "that the unchanging and wholly necessary contains whatever is real in change and the contingent," and every pantheist has to "seek in some way to soften the difficulty."[266] The world emerges from a single unitary ground; Being. However, from the moment Being separates internally, it changes. The One is still in the All as a sense of unity, as a longing and an intuition for peace, harmony, and beauty. But the Oneness tends to drown in the All of everyday life. The Divine is in the world, but the world is not divine. God is in us, but human being is not divine being. God is the appeal for and the momentum towards a unity in which each individual plays his or her unique role. As long as we are in the world, we have no more than vague notions of this living unity. It is not until the end of time that God and world will be united. However, when that happens God will have been changed by this world.

It might be a daring theology, especially two centuries ago, but that does not necessarily make it a heresy. If Hölderlin is to be convicted of heterodox, or rather unbiblical, tendencies, it is not his search among the Greek gods that is at fault. What might be unchristian in his theology is something that he shares with many Christians in the past and

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[263] See "ungeduldig ihn /Nach Asia trieb die königliche Seele. (…) Wenn unenthaltsam, aber gehemmt /Von heilgen Alpen, ihm/In der Tiefe, wie jener, zürnen die Ströme. (…) Stillwandelnd sich im deutschen Lande /Begnüget" (StA II, 143f.).

[264] De Man 1993, 135.

[265] Safranski 2007, 167.

[266] Hartshorne and Reese 2000, 165.

even today, some of whom have even reached sainthood. Hölderlin's main unchristian characteristic might be the tendency to flee from the here and now. This does not turn him into a heretic, but it makes him a certain type of Christian: the dualistic kind, which is exactly what he strives to overcome in his metaphysics.

With all the different labels that Hölderlin's thinking has received, mysticism has never been one of them, as far as I know. This is surprising since his true, perhaps even desperately true, religious urge has mystical tendencies. Is it perhaps the loss of a sense of reality, his "madness," that makes the experts reluctant to call him a mystic? Hölderlin's God (and gods) comes too close for comfort, and both the divine presence and the absence are more than he can bear. Darkness is familiar to him. Is it the dark night of the mystic or the black hole of a depressed man at the verge of a nervous breakdown? In any case, Hölderlin struggles with the dangers and the temptations of intimacy with the divine. The lure of the Great Beyond, of leaving the world behind, has tempted Hölderlin all of his life. In a letter he writes,

> At other times, I could jubilate about a new truth, an important outlook on what is above us and around us; now I fear that I might end like the old Tantalus who received more from the gods than he could take.[267]

He definitely does not agree with Schelling that "the idea of an infinite being was accompanied by a notion of infinite *boredom*," and that such a notion makes him "uneasy and sick." And the "(blasphemous) exclamation: I should not want to gain eternal bliss for anything in the world," seems contrary to his strongest desires.[268] According to Alan White,

> Schelling's remarks suggest that the crucial difference between philosophy and mysticism is visible in the philosopher's rejection of what the mystic most ardently desires.

Both philosopher and mystic demand the Absolute. For the mystic it is the end in the sense of total bliss. For the philosopher it is the starting point for an account of consciousness and world.[269] White makes

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[267] "Sonst konnt' ich jauchzen über eine neue Wahrheit, eine bessere Ansicht dess, das über uns und um uns ist, jezt fürcht' ich, dass es mir nicht geh' am Ende, wie dem alten Tantalus, dem mehr von Göttern ward, als er verdauen konnte" (StA VI, 427).

[268] Schelling SW 1, 326. Schelling makes this assertion with reference to Lessing.

[269] White 1983, 36f.

a mistake, of course, in not realizing that the mystical experience and philosophical interest need not be opposed. The experience may actually be an incentive to philosophize. Total bliss makes a person especially eager to look for its source, if only in order to find out how to make it last!

In this chapter, we have established that Hölderlin's metaphysics is not fully rational. The same is true for Schelling's, contrary to his own assertions. More than two centuries ago, at the height of speculative reasoning, there is the insight that the ratio has its limits. In the next chapter we will see how philosophy seeks a way out of the straight-jacket of the rational by way of the concept of intellectual intuition.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTELLECTUAL INTUITION AND METAPHYSICS

The term intellectual intuition is the translation of the German *intellektuelle* or *intellektuale Anschauung*. Interestingly, Kant consistently uses the term intellektu*elle* Anschauung, and so does Fichte. The younger generation (Schelling, Hölderlin, and Novalis a.o.) use intellektu*ale* Anschauung. The reason is unclear. Frank wonders whether "this is a type of agreement on the part of the young Jena thinkers to separate themselves from Kant and Fichte."[1] Kant introduces the term in modern philosophy in connection with freedom. In *Reflexion 4336* he writes, "The reality of freedom cannot be concluded from experience. However, we only have an understanding of it through our intellectual intuition…our activity."[2] In addition, he hints at its possible connection with I-hood. If the I knows of its existence, this has to be caused by an intuition, which is the only possible proof of existence. At the same time, such an intuition cannot be sensory. The consequence: a paradoxical intellectual intuition that cannot be squared with his strict dualism. Nonetheless, even though his texts suggest a latent 'Yes' from time to time, the outspoken 'No' to a human faculty of intellectual intuition dominates. For Kant, only God, the *intellectus archetypus*, possesses intellectual intuition in the sense that his young admirers insist on transferring to the I. *Intuitus originarius* is divine understanding of the essence of all things-in-themselves, the noumena, instead of the way they appear, the phenomena, which form the limitation of human knowledge. It is a creative knowledge, a vision that makes what it sees; a capacity that is obviously way beyond the human. Let us first look at the general controversy around the term and its brief popularity in idealistic and romantic circles before we move on to its two main philosophical defenders Fichte and Schelling, and the poet who practices what the others only preach: Hölderlin.

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[1] Frank 2004, 89.
[2] See also KpV A242–255.

In an essay called *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie* [*About a Recent Proud and Distinguished Tone in Philosophy*], Kant berates the latest form of a tradition of philosophy-by-inspiration that claims a type of insight that cannot be passed on to others, called intellectual intuition.[3] Those who claim to practice this type of philosophy consider it "distinguished" to listen to and enjoy the "oracle in themselves," whereas the more modest philosopher has to work hard for philosophical insights. Who, indeed, can refute a philosophy that appeals to a feeling [*Gefühl*] that leads to the heart of the matter, without the cleverness [*Vernünftelei*] of concepts, Kant wonders sarcastically. Such presumed supernatural means of knowing, such "mystical inspiration," is "the death of all philosophy."[4] Intuiting the veiled goddess [Kant refers to the veiled Isis] is pointless. What we all kneel for is the majestic moral law in ourselves. We hear its voice, and we understand its imperative. But while we hear it, we are unsure whether we are its source or Another whose Being is unknown to us but who still speaks through us. We had better not speculate though; this only leads to *Schwärmerei*. It does not change our duty to raise the moral law in ourselves into clear concepts according to logical doctrine.[5]

As has also been the case with the I, Kant claims to be satisfied with erecting a building on unknown foundations, and once again, his followers protest. Kantian disapproval notwithstanding, the term blossoms. Somehow, the void between the form and the matter of knowledge has to be bridged. In order to make real knowledge of the world possible, there has to be a connection between the subject and the object, between me and the things that I encounter in the world, according to the young generations of philosophers. Somewhere, sometime before I start differentiating between me and the rest of the world in my own consciousness, there must be a unity. This unity, which is prior to and beyond all difference that I discern, must still be accessible to me because I was fully one with it before I came to be (conscious) and because I still participate in it. Somehow. What Xavier Tilliette calls *un nouveau philosophème* is born in the intellectual environment of the *Stift* at the time of Hegel, Hölderlin, and

[3] Kant 1928, 387–406.
[4] Ibid., 398.
[5] See Kant 1928, 405. For the veiled Isis, see also 2.5.

Schelling. It is the latter, indeed, who is its most daring and outspoken proponent.[6] "Without intellectual intuition no philosophy," he states. Hegel agrees, "Without transcendental intuition one cannot philosophize." All hopes for metaphysics after Kant rest on "a wonderful and secret faculty": intellectual intuition.[7]

Because it fills an epistemological void, intellectual intuition is enthusiastically received.[8] Carl Leonhard Reinhold is the first to very carefully approach the Kantian divide between the form (the categories of understanding) and the matter (sensory perception) of knowledge. Knowledge need not always be a conjunction of intuitions and the categories of understanding, he asserts. Knowledge is sometimes provided by pure intuitions, pure concepts, and pure ideas; hence by just one of the two Kantian roots. He posits a form of super-sensory intuition with the Unconditioned, the Absolute, as object.[9] It is Fichte who subsequently applies the term to the realm of the (absolute) I. He claims that the absolute subject, the I, "is not given by means of an empirical intuition, but by an intellectual intuition, and the absolute object, the Not-I, is opposed to it."[10] The I distinguishes itself from everything else because of the fact that I realize it by an intellectual intuition, by the 'I am' that is our most immediate certainty. He and Kant are not in disagreement, Fichte believes. They both view the I as a spontaneous act. When he (Fichte) calls it intellectual intuition, he does not mean it in the Kantian sense of a (Platonic) intuiting of the ideas, or the Absolute, which would make his *Wissenschaftslehre* absurd.

The die is cast; intellectual intuition has become linked to the human I. Nonetheless, there is little agreement about its exact meaning. According to Fichte, "it is the immediate consciousness, that I act, and what I enact."[11] With reference to Fichte, Hegel calls intellectual intuition "pure thinking of itself, pure self-consciousness, I=I, I am; the Absolute is subject-object, and the I is this identity of

[6] See Tilliette 1995.

[7] Schelling SW 5, 255; Hegel 1977, 110; Schelling SW 4, 362.

[8] By Schlegel, Schiller, and others. See Tilliette 1995, 112f.

[9] See Reinhold (1794), *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen Band VI, Erörterung*, 399f.

[10] GA I, 2, 48. The reference is to the type, volume, and page of *J.G. Fichte – Gesamtausgabe* of the Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Mostly I am using the translations of D. Breazeale, see Fichte 1994.

[11] GA I, 4, 217.

subject and object."[12] To Schelling, intellectual intuition is an intuition of what cannot become object, of what, like freedom, cannot appear in consciousness. He then combines Fichte's absolute I with Spinoza's Substance and thereby transfers the term that is first grafted onto the absolute I to an Absolute that resembles the mythical *Hen kai Pan*. It is this use that becomes popular, especially in literature. What starts out as a capacity that Kant attributes solely to God becomes the human faculty of intuiting the unity of all that is.

The term is enthusiastically received, but it lasts no more than a decade or two. By then, it has become a mere slogan. Any experience of awe, any feeling of losing oneself in the vastness of nature or in the beauty of a work of art, or any intense feeling of connection with others will soon be called an intellectual intuition. The meaning differs considerably from on individual author to another, but that does not seem to bother them. Intellectual intuition becomes trendy. In literature, it becomes closely associated with dying. Being placed outside the I, in the All, means losing oneself, losing (individual) life. This can be experienced as a nightmare or as a blissful state of slumber in which the meaning of life becomes suddenly clear. Philosophers are intrigued, but after Fichte and Schelling have left it philosophically unfinished, the fear to be branded a mystic or a *Schwärmer*, forces most to remain vague or limit the meaning of the term. The literary use of the term gradually makes intellectual intuition lean more and more towards the esthetic. The work of art is viewed as the receptacle of the Infinite. Art is the synthesis of nature and freedom brought about by the joint effort of the Divine and the artist. Hölderlin chooses to leave philosophy and concentrate on poetry precisely because art can go where philosophy is at a loss. He will only sporadically use the term intellectual intuition as such. He will (in line with his philosophy) no longer theorize about it but practice it as a poet instead. Even so, he will start to recognize its limitations and the hubris of the poet and the philosopher alike who think they can grasp the Divine.

Before we turn to our young heroes of the preceding chapters, we will first study the views of Fichte on intellectual intuition. This has two reasons: First, in transferring a divine faculty to the I, Fichte nonetheless thinks himself to be true to the spirit, if not the letter,

[12] Hegel 1977, 119, slightly adapted.

of Kantian philosophy. Secondly, he is influential in the development of both Schelling and Hölderlin. His proclaimed 'Kantian' use of the term constitutes their justification of taking intellectual intuition to be a capacity of human beings, despite Kant's protests. For the short period of time that forms the focus of this study, intellectual intuition becomes the favorite route from the I to the Absolute. Let us see how this happens.

5.1. Fichte

In the Prefatory Note to the *First Introduction* of the *Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte writes, "My system is nothing other than the Kantian . . . but is in method quite independent of the Kantian presentation." Both his and Kant's system are true transcendental idealism, Fichte maintains. The main difference is not the content, but the form. Part of the problem with Kant's work is that it is notoriously difficult to interpret. After all, "Kant himself, in the modest admission that he was not specially conscious of a gift for clarity, attaches no great value to the letter of his doctrine."[13] Therefore, Fichte feels "obliged to read [it] by the spirit, if reading by the letter gets us no further." Since Kant's philosophy has generally been completely misunderstood, he has "decided to dedicate [his] life" to the independent presentation of Kant's great discovery.[14] That Kant vehemently disagrees with the avowed similarity of the two systems has been brought to Fichte's attention by the time he writes the *Second Introduction*. This does not seem to disturb him too much, since "the question then is whether [Kant] was speaking of the *Wissenschaftslehre genuinely perused and understood*," or rather of the misinterpretations of others.[15] After all, "the inventor of a system is one thing, and his commentators and disciples are another."[16] The tone is set! Fichte's philosophy is a clarification of Kant's transcendental idealism. Period.

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[13] GA I, 4, 231. Fichte refers to the Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xliv.

[14] Ibid., 183. Fichte does not miss an opportunity to literally quote the more obscure passages in Kant's work and explain in his own words what it really is that Kant wants to say.

[15] Ibid., 222 – note.

[16] Ibid., 238. The stupidity of the average colleague is something that Fichte cannot emphasize enough.

5.1.1. *Intellectual Intuition in Line with Kant*

In this context, it is all the more surprising that Fichte would claim a central role for intellectual intuition, the "primordial act" of the I.[17] After all, he is fully aware of the fact that "there is nothing [Kant] is more decidedly – one might almost say, disdainfully – against, than the claim to possess a faculty of intellectual intuition."[18] This disagreement is no more than a misunderstanding of the true meaning of his use of intellectual intuition, Fichte maintains. Intellectual intuition is the capacity of the I to be aware of its own activity, and every person who ascribes an activity to himself appeals to this intuition. Without it I would be unconscious of my own actions. I would not know what I am doing and that it is me doing what is being done. "Intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I enact."[19] Hence, Fichte's intellectual intuition is not directed at the being of dead objects, the things-in-themselves, which is a faculty that Kant rightly rejects for humans, but at the activity of living consciousness that is the expression of freedom, the fact of reason. Ergo, Kant simply cannot disagree.

In order to become acquainted with this act, Fichte advises, "Think of yourself; construct the concept of yourself and take note of how you do this."[20] In this process, intelligence reverts into itself and makes itself its own object. By thinking itself, the I comes into being. Fichte is, of course, aware of the circularity of this type of reasoning. How can the I revert *into itself*, if it is not already there? Therefore he tells his students to distinguish between the I and the philosopher. The I originally comes to exist for itself through this act, and it is the only way it comes into being at all. It is not preceded by anything or any act in general. The philosopher, on the other hand, has already run through this whole process, conceived of it, and for him the I is there beforehand. Hence, it is only a matter of the philosopher making himself understood that makes the procedure seem circular.[21] This primary act of self-reversion, Fichte assures us, is intellectual intuition.

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[17] Ibid., 216.
[18] Ibid., 224.
[19] Ibid., 217.
[20] Ibid., 213.
[21] Ibid., 213f.

> What 'acting' is is something that can only be intuited; such knowledge cannot be developed from concepts nor can it be communicated thereby…In order to understand the true nature of acting, one has to turn to intuition.[22]

Intellectual intuition is neither consciousness nor self-consciousness; it is the condition of the possibility of all consciousness.

This intellectual intuition never occurs in isolation, and that makes it easy to miss. It is only one element of the three that constitute the representation [*Vorstellung*], but it is a vital one. Sensory intuition and conceptualization are the other elements.

In Kant's opinion…and my own, three elements are required for a complete representation:

> [1] There is that whereby the representation obtains a relation to an object and thus becomes a representation of something. We all agree in calling this 'sensory intuition.'
> [2] There is that whereby the representation is related to a subject, and thus becomes my presentation. This according to Kant…should not be called 'intuition.' I, however, call it by this name, for it bears the same relationship to a complete representation that sensory intuition does.
> [3] Lastly, there is that whereby the first two elements are united and thus become a representation. Here again, we agree in designating this a 'concept.'[23]

Each representation needs to be related to an object and to a subject in order to be someone's representation of something. Sensory intuition connects it to the object and intellectual intuition to the subject. In Fichte's view, this implies that sensory and intellectual intuition are inseparable. There can be no sensory intuition without intellectual intuition and vice versa. How else would I know that my representations are mine? How could I connect all the loose representations, if I remain purely passive, the inert stage on which presentations succeed one another, instead of the active principle that brings them forth? It takes "an intuition of sheer activity – not an activity that has been brought to a halt, but one that continues; not a being, but something living."[24] However, even when intuition is and remains

[22] Ibid., 215.
[23] Ibid., 227.
[24] Ibid., 218.

the basis of the concept, "a mere intuition yields no consciousness."[25] The sphere of consciousness is not complete until both forms of intuition (sensory and intellectual) are 'grasped' by means of concepts, or comprehended.[26]

The philosopher discovers intellectual intuition only by resolving the whole into its constituent parts. It is not something that can be pointed out all by itself, much less can it be proven. Fichte is convinced that Kant will not disagree that there must be something that relates the representation to the subject; it is only the term that he rejects. In Kant's system there is also a concept of the *pure* I that conditions all consciousness, exactly as it is presented in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.[27] What he himself calls intellectual intuition is mentioned in Kant's philosophy "perhaps, under the name 'pure apperception.' "[28]

Now we can see how Fichte can, indeed, consider himself to be a real Kantian. He approves of the two roots of knowledge, but he is convinced that he has found the principle that connects them. Intellectual intuition bridges the Kantian divide, and thereby it also manages to connect the separate Kantian doctrines: practical reason and theoretical reason. This is something Kant himself never achieved simply because, according to Fichte,

> he nowhere dealt with the foundation of *all* philosophy, but treated in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* only its theoretical part, in which the categorical imperative could make no appearance; and in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, only of its practical side, in which…questions about the type of consciousness involved could not arise.

There is no real difference between his system and Kant's. It is all a matter of terminology and an (excusable) oversight on Kant's part: he merely forgets to ask himself what sort of consciousness the categorical imperative is. Fichte is more than happy to do this for him. This consciousness is "undoubtedly immediate, but not sensory; hence it is precisely what I call intellectual intuition."[29] He affirms the similarity by stating it in more Kantian terms. It is this "pure I" that provides

[25] Ibid., 245.

[26] Fichte uses *begriffen werden*. This translates to "being understood" or "comprehended" in English. In the German language the related noun, *Begriff*, means "concept." Being comprehended is being grasped by means of a concept.

[27] Ibid., 228f.

[28] Ibid., 225.

[29] Ibid.

the conditions for all consciousness. "Thus, just as in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, so for Kant as well: the possibility of all consciousness is conditioned by the possibility of the I, or of pure self-consciousness."[30]

Intellectual intuition is "an intuition of sheer activity" for Fichte, it was said. By relating both freedom and intellectual intuition to activity, he cleverly combines the two Kantian realms. By giving a more dynamic role to this I that enables all knowledge, it merges with the subject of morality.

> The concept of acting, which becomes possible only by means of this intellectual intuition of the self-active I, is the sole concept that unites the two worlds that exist for us: the sensible world and the intelligible world.[31]

Both freedom and intellectual intuition are based on the fact that "I am simply active." If "I am given to myself, by myself, as something that is to be active in a certain fashion [morality] . . . I necessarily see myself as self-active [intellectual intuition]."[32] The I is free to act: the free act of reverting into itself is called intellectual intuition and the freedom to act morally is the categorical imperative.

Fichte must have caused Kant a lot of aggravation. It is hard to imagine Kant in a rage, but we can almost hear him grit his teeth when transcendental idealism is defined as,

> the mode of thinking in which speculation and the ethical law are most intimately united. I *ought* to begin my thinking with the thought of the pure I, and I ought to think of this pure I as absolutely self-active – not as determined by things, but rather as determining them.[33]

How aggravating it must be to see one's thoughts taken one step too far time and again! This intuition, this claim to 'know' affairs that are beyond knowing, is exactly the type of speculation that Kant rejects. And it will get worse, as we will see in 5.2. Schelling will go even further when claiming that intellectual intuition gives access not only to the I, but to an absolute I that can hardly be distinguished from God! This is not just *Schwärmerei*: it is *Schwärmerei* that claims to be Kantian in spirit! But let us limit ourselves to the lesser insults of Fichte for the time being.

[30] Ibid., 229.
[31] Ibid., 220.
[32] Ibid., 219.
[33] Ibid., 219f.

5.1.2. *Idealism versus Dogmatism*

To Fichte it is clear *that* this intellectual intuition exists. But since idealism "is nothing more than speculation," demanding proof of it is far more extraordinary than someone born blind demanding that we explain colors to him.[34] How, then, can the philosopher ensure the objectivity of this purely subjective act of the individual, empirical person? It cannot be demonstrated by means of concepts that this power of intuition exists, nor explained from concepts what it may be. It is beyond proof because it is the condition of the possibility of conceptual thinking, hence of the ability to prove. Everyone must discover it immediately in himself, or else he will never make its acquaintance. But if sensory intuition is not denied, then why reject intellectual intuition? It is strange, Fichte asserts, that philosophers do not realize that "everything that can be said against the claim that an intellectual intuition exists applies equally against the claim that sensory intuition exists."[35]

Ultimately, this demand for objectivity is based on the strange and faulty assumption that the I is something over and above its own thought of itself. "God knows what!" Fichte exclaims theatrically.[36] "For the idealist nothing is positive but freedom, and, for him, being is nothing but a mere negation of freedom."[37] The I is nothing other than the free, self-reverting act, and vice versa. This act is obviously objective by its very nature. After all, *that* I exist for myself is a fact, and I can only come to exist for myself through this particular, free act called intellectual intuition. In all other acts something wholly different comes about for me. In these other acts thinker and thought are opposed, and the thinker's activity is directed at something distinct from himself. In the self-reverting act, however, thinker and thought are the same. By thinking this self-reverting act, it becomes objective for the philosopher,

> that is to say, something that – insofar as he thinks of it – hovers before him as something that limits the freedom (i.e., the indeterminacy) of his thinking. This is the true and original meaning of the term 'objectivity.'[38]

[34] Ibid., 211 – note.
[35] Ibid., 218.
[36] Ibid., 215.
[37] Ibid., 252.
[38] Ibid., 246.

Whenever I think, I think something determinate and thereby restrict my freedom by confining it to something specific in a multiplicity of objects. The I also possesses this sort of objectivity since it can also be an object of my thinking.

Fichte acknowledges that this might not be the type of objectivity that satisfies all of his readers. Therefore, he is willing to explore what might be a crucial difference between his system and Kant's.

> According to Kant, all consciousness is merely conditioned by self-consciousness; i.e., the contents of consciousness can still be grounded by or have their foundation in something or other outside of self-consciousness.

For the *Wissenschaftslehre* on the other hand,

> all consciousness is determined by self-consciousness, i.e., everything that occurs within consciousness has its foundation in the conditions that make self-consciousness possible – that is to say, is given and is produced thereby and possesses no foundation whatsoever outside self-consciousness.[39]

Hence, for Kant pure self-consciousness *conditions* consciousness, whereas for Fichte this same faculty, now called intellectual intuition, *determines* consciousness. For Kant the I does not provide the content of its representations, whereas for Fichte it does. Hence, for Fichte the issue is whether there is really something outside the I. The problem lies in the postulation of the thing-in-itself that is supposed to operate upon the I.[40]

Fichte agrees with the Kantians that it definitely *feels* as if there is something not-I 'out there.' Our nature forces us to claim, "just as truly as I exist and live at all, there also exists something outside of me, something that does not owe its existence to me."[41] In order to explain this feeling, dogmatists think a real ground, an object that they call a thing-in-itself, "that is, something that is not a product of thinking."[42] Dogmatists start with being, and this is something that the idealist totally disagrees with. "Idealism is not in the least acquainted with any sort of being, considered as something that subsists for itself."[43] If one

[39] Ibid., 229f.
[40] Ibid., 236f.
[41] Ibid., 211 – note.
[42] Ibid., 244.
[43] Ibid., 261 – note.

were to ascribe this type of being to the I, the I would cease to be an I at all; it would become a thing, and the very concept of the I would be destroyed.[44] How could anything exist for a thing, and how is a thing to exist for itself? The I is not a thing; it is an activity. Being is not the original concept, but merely derived through opposition to activity.

Therefore, Fichte refuses to believe that Kant would expressly declare "to employ his own terminology, that *sensations have to be accounted for within philosophy by appealing to a transcendental object that exists in itself outside of us*."[45] Thus, Fichte disqualifies the Kantian thing-in-itself as a left-over from dogmatism! But since Kant cannot possibly be accused of dogmatism, he must have been misunderstood by his interpreters.[46] To the question whether there is assumed to be no "contact or affection" whatever accounting for cognition, Fichte answers, "All of our cognition does indeed begin with an *affection*; but not with affection *by an object*." It is "by means of this act of your own thinking" that you ascribe to yourself receptivity or sensibility. "This is Kant's view of the matter, and it is also the position of the *Wissenschaftslehre*."[47] Hence, in Fichte's idealism there are no things-in-themselves. How could things-in-themselves in a world beyond our thinking affect our thinking? There are both conscious and unconscious products of the I. Since the I is unable to recognize its unconscious products as I, it takes them for alien, for not-I.

Nonetheless, Fichte agrees with the dogmatists that this feeling of the separate reality of the not-I is very persistent. The philosopher, however, "can separate what is conjoined in experience through the freedom of thought," namely the thing and intelligence. If he leaves out the former, he retains intelligence-in-itself, and the representations are its products. This procedure is called idealism. If he leaves out the latter, he retains a thing-in-itself that causes the representations. This procedure is called dogmatism.[48] In other words, dogmatism begins with necessity, and idealism begins with freedom; hence, they find themselves in two completely different worlds.[49] Idealism has a distinct advantage over dogmatism, Fichte believes. The dogmatist cannot

[44] Ibid., 248.
[45] Ibid., 239.
[46] The main problem of the average Kant-interpreter is that he uses passages from Kant's text without understanding the whole, according to Fichte.
[47] Ibid., 241.
[48] Ibid., 188.
[49] Ibid., 261 – note.

make the connection between being and representation, whereas the idealist can: the I's representing *is* its being. Even so, neither system can refute the other. Whether it is the thing-in-itself or the freedom of the I, ultimately both systems cannot prove their own starting-point. Therefore, the decision depends upon the interests and the inclination of the philosopher, Fichte assures us.

However, let us not be fooled by this apparent truce between dogmatism and idealism. In Fichte's opinion, there are two types of philosophers: those who have not risen to full realization of their freedom and those who have. The former are dogmatists. Their self-image is "thrown at them by objects" that act as a mirror.[50] It is the outer world that has made them into who they are. Without it also their own selves would be lost. Idealists, in contrast, are independent of all that appears outside of them. They do not need these things as a crutch because they have an immediate belief in themselves. They are free. They know that the "'I' and 'self-reverting acting' are completely identical concepts."[51] The I is its own positing of itself and nothing other than that. The I is only *ideal* being; it is only for itself.

If everything (and everybody) that the I encounters in the world is its own product, this I of Fichte is blown well out of (human) proportion. He is aware of the confusion between the I that is the object of idealistic philosophy, the "I-in-itself" (not to be confused with a thing-in-itself), and the empirical individual that can say "I." The former is I-hood in general, subjectivity, "the non-object." It originates "through an absolute thesis" and is beyond all experience. The latter is living in two worlds:

> I cannot be for me, without being something, and this I am only in the sensible world; but neither can I be for me, without being me, and this I am only in the intelligible world that opens itself for me by means of intellectual intuition.[52]

When someone calls out to me in the dark, "Who is it?" and I reply, "It is me," I obviously refer to myself as a particular one of all possible rational beings, Fichte explains. This individual, this I that is determined and opposed to all other I's, arises through a synthesis of an object with selfhood. "In brief, I-hood and individuality are very

[50] Ibid., 194.
[51] Ibid., 216.
[52] Ibid., 190.

different concepts, and the element of composition in the latter is very plain to see."[53]

This duality in our daily, empirical I is something we are trying to overcome. There is this perfectly rational being that exists in everyone. It is this ideal, the being that has ceased to be an individual and is pure rationality, that we strive for.

> Reason is the only thing-in-itself, and individuality merely accidental, ...merely a special way of giving expression to reason, and one which must increasingly merge into the general form thereof.[54]

The I lives towards a state in which it is no longer an individual because it has merged with pure reason. With the intellectual intuition of what it means to be an I, to be free to act, comes the awareness of the true freedom to be not just one particular way but all possible ways to give expression to reason: to be reason itself. To merge with reason is only to be postulated as the supreme goal of the striving of the I. It is never to be actualized, we are merely to approximate ourselves to this idea *ad infinitum*. This is the background to the assertion: That which stands opposed to my action is the sensible world. That which is to come about through my action is the intelligible world.[55] As long as the I is a creature of the world, it will be both free and unfree. It will be bound to the sensible world of necessity (its own unconscious products), but it will strive to throw off these limitations in order to fully merge with the intelligible world of pure freedom (its conscious product).

Fichte struggles to cross the Kantian divide. Intellectual intuition is to connect Kant's separate worlds of the noumena and the phenomena. The I strives to become absolute I by throwing off all that is unfree and unconscious. Fichte never goes so far as to claim that (even momentary) access to the Absolute is possible for the actual human being here and now.[56] It is Schelling who relates intellectual intuition to the Absolute in no uncertain terms. The absolute I, as absolute aspect of

[53] Ibid., 256.
[54] Ibid., 257f.
[55] See ibid., 220.
[56] There is an ongoing debate about the early Fichte (as in the text discussed here) versus the late Fichte. The latter does seem to claim access to an absolute ground for which he uses terms like life [*Leben*] and pure life [*lauter Leben*]. See *Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, GA I, 9.

the empirical I of Fichte that makes it able to say "I am," becomes the absolute I of Schelling as an I that thinks "I am it, the Absolute!" Let us see how this shift takes place.

5.2. Schelling

Like all of Schelling's metaphysical solutions, intellectual intuition has gone through several stages. It is a persistent theme in his texts for a little over a decade and disappears around the time of the *Freiheitschrift*. Especially for the young Schelling the influence of Fichte with respect to his view on intellectual intuition is considerable. The historical relationship between their use of the term is a complicated one. It is Fichte who first employs it in 1792 in the *Recension des Aenesidemus* [*Aenesidemus Review*], but he does not mention it at all in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*.[57] It is not until he adds the *First Introduction* in 1797 that he reintroduces the term polemically and in detail, as we have seen in the previous section. By then, Schelling has published his *Vom Ich*. Since this work is taken to be an interpretation of Fichte's less accessible theory at the time, it is Schelling's use that dominates the term for several years. We will first look at the similarities and the differences between both philosophers before unfolding Schelling's concept in more detail.

5.2.1. *From Fichte's Absolute I to Spinoza's Substance*

Both Fichte and the young Schelling realize that the concept of the I implies that the I has to think itself in order to be. In Schelling's words: "It is *not at all thinkable except insofar as it thinks itself*, that is, *insofar as it is*."[58] Both agree that the starting-point of all knowledge may not be objectified; it can never be an object of conceptual knowledge. This would place it beyond the philosopher's domain. According to the young Schelling, it is Reinhold who first brings "the intrinsic problem of philosophy…into the clearest focus."[59] His failure to present "imagination" [*Vorstellungsvermögen*], hence a faculty of consciousness, as the first principle of philosophy leads philosophers

[57] See GA I, 2, 31–67.
[58] SW 1, 168.
[59] SW 1, 175.

to search for a principle prior to consciousness: the (absolute) I for which another type of "knowing" has to be found. The I cannot be given by a concept. Only concepts of objects are possible. "Therefore the I can be determined only in an intuition [*Anschauung*] ... [not] in an intuition of sense [but] in an *intellectual* intuition."[60] Intellectual intuition reveals the I, and reversely the I can be determined in an intellectual intuition only.

> Since the I is I only because it can never become an object, it cannot occur in a sensory intuition, but only ... in an *intellectual* intuition. Where there is an object there is sensory intuition, and vice versa. Where there is no object, that is, in the absolute I, there is no sensory intuition, therefore either no intuition at all or else intellectual intuition.[61]

Sensory intuition reveals the object. In the case of the (absolute) I there can be no object, hence no sensory intuition is possible. The absolute I, or the absoluteness of the I, can only be revealed by an intellectual intuition. So far Fichte and Schelling seem in agreement.

It is when Schelling elaborates on this absolute I that we begin to see important differences. For Fichte intellectual intuition reveals the "I am." Intellectual intuition is not a source of knowledge of the Absolute: the only "object" of unmediated knowledge is what we might call the absoluteness of I-hood. He himself believes that his use of intellectual intuition comes close to self-consciousness or Kant's transcendental unit of apperception. "Everyone is immediately certain of *his* self; for he can intuit only it."[62] For Schelling, however, the absolute I is "the One Unconditionable, ... the absolute all-comprehending reality,"[63] and in his descriptions of this One Unconditionable we hear Spinoza's influence. It is "absolute causality," "all [of its] attributes must be infinite," it is "indivisible," and "the only true Substance."[64]

Because of these Spinozistically sounding characteristics, the absolute I becomes more like an absolute It, the unity of all that is. Hence, intellectual intuition becomes the immediate experience of absolute unity à la Spinoza. "No sense perception, no concept reaches [the] One Substance whose infinitude is present only to intellectual intuition."[65]

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[60] SW 1, 181.
[61] Ibid.
[62] GA II, 3, 28.
[63] SW 1, 176.
[64] SW 1, 167; 192; 192; 193.
[65] SW 1, 171.

This Absolute (I) is also "absolute power" and "absolute reality outside of all time."[66] The result is a tendency in the early work of Schelling that will become more apparent in the years to come. For Fichte the absolute I is the absolute aspect of the I, that urges the empirical, finite I to strive for the Infinite. But Schelling does not speak of an ideal that we strive for *ad infinitum*; he speaks of intellectual intuition as a capability of free human beings here and now. Thereby he unmistakably moves away from his teacher. Repeatedly, we will see how Schelling's I itself becomes absolute, infinite, omnipotent. This "I am" no longer merely strives for absoluteness but merges with the Absolute here and now, as it appears.

Something similar seems to happen when, in line with Fichte, Schelling links the I with the only gateway to transcendence that Kant has left open for people: freedom. "The essence of the I is freedom," Schelling asserts, and Fichte would not disagree. But Schelling's description of freedom again reminds us of a Spinozistic type of Substance. "Freedom is only through itself, and it encompasses the Non-finite." Subsequently he connects it with the immense I of the overly self-confident adolescent: "For the I, its freedom is neither more nor less than unconditional positing of reality in itself through its own absolute self-power [*Selbstmacht*]."[67] By connecting freedom that "encompasses the Non-finite" with the self-positing of the I, he creates a mixture of Kant, Fichte, and Spinoza colored with his own personality. Consequently, the absolute I evolves towards Spinozistic Substance and intellectual intuition towards an intuition of the Absolute instead of the absoluteness of the I. The I becomes all that is and Intellectual intuition as the awareness "I am!" becomes more like "I am it; the Absolute!"

This latter realization outdoes all morality. Hoping for mere good-will as a basis for progress for humanity is futile. Humanity has to become aware of the fact that its very essence is absolute unity. "Give man the awareness of what he is, and he will soon learn to be what he ought to be. Give him the theoretical self-respect and the practical will soon follow," the young Schelling writes. Once we have realized that the principle of unity has been "the regulating basis of the history of mankind" from the beginning, we will learn to act according to a

[66] SW 1, 195; 206.
[67] SW 1, 179.

moral goal of unity.[68] "What is moral law for the finite I..., is natural law for the non-finite I, that is, it is given simultaneously with and in its mere being."[69] Morality will come naturally, so to say. In the free act of intellectual intuition, people are able to get in touch with their roots, their destination, and their absolute power simultaneously, and thus they overcome earthly limitations and shortcomings. Kant's sense of moral duty has been transformed into an absolute I that, like Spinoza's *Deus*, rules from the natural laws of its own Infinity.

Both Fichte and Schelling search for an unconditionally certain foundation for philosophy. For Fichte this is a foundation for knowledge. "Our task is to discover the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge," he asserts.[70] This foundation must be found in an activity that brings forth an I that is capable of knowledge: intellectual intuition. Schelling, on the other hand, wants to find the foundation of all being. Intellectual intuition offers it to us, but we are too "dim" to notice.

> Since your perception ties you to objects, and since your intellectual intuition is dimmed and your existence is determined for you by time, even that to which you owe your existence, that in which you live and act, think, and know, becomes in the end...only an object of faith – something which seems different from yourself...[and] never find as real in yourself.[71]

Intellectual intuition shows us "that to which we owe our existence" and in which we "live and act, think, and know." If only our faculty of intuiting the Absolute had not dimmed so much, we would directly experience what now appears as an object of faith to many.

Very early in his career, Schelling's concept of intellectual intuition becomes the human means of access to the Absolute thanks to a Spinozistic twist to Fichte's absolute I. He claims,

> [Spinoza] recognized that originally something had to be the basis for all existence, a pure immutable archbeing [*Ursein*], a basis for everything that comes about and passes away, something that had to exist by itself, in which and through which everything in existence had to attain the unity of experience.

[68] SW 1, 157f.
[69] SW 1, 198.
[70] GA I, 2, 255.
[71] SW 1, 216.

Spinoza just never realized "that this unconditional, immutable arch-form [*Urform*] could be found only in the I."[72] As a result, he tried to prove its lying in the not-I; and he failed. But what he in fact did was elevate the not-I to the I. Schelling is convinced that his own metaphysics proves that "Spinoza's error was not in the idea of the Unconditioned but in the fact that Spinoza posited it outside the I [in order to find] the way to philosophy as a science."[73] Schelling is sure that he has incorporated Spinoza's dogmatism in Fichte's idealism. And like Fichte, he claims that he does not betray Kant but merely completes his work. Kant was the first to "establish the absolute I as the ultimate substratum of all being and of all identity (though he established it nowhere directly but at least everywhere indirectly)."[74] Kant's transcendental unity of apperception simply begs for the postulation of an absolute I, in Schelling's opinion. What his efforts at building one grand system have resulted in is a very dangerous mix! It is not only an attempt to grasp and control the unitary ground of all that is; it can easily result in an I that swallows all that is.

After this comparison of Fichte's and Schelling's views on intellectual intuition, it has become clear that the differences are about to cause a head-on collision between the mentor and his favorite student. We will now concentrate on Schelling's development of the concept.

5.2.2. Schwärmerei, *Art, or Philosophy?*

In the summer of 1795, the same year that *Vom Ich* is finished, Schelling, then twenty, writes the *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*. The final three letters (eight through ten) deal with the striving of the finite for the Infinite. Here Schelling also speaks of intellectual intuition as a possible human experience here and now. However, the tone is so entirely different that one starts wondering whether the suggestion of the more dangerous aspects of intellectual intuition à la Schelling is a mistake. It has been asserted that Schelling's views on intellectual intuition in the eighth letter have been written with, or at least under the influence of, Hölderlin.[75] The following quote does indeed breathe a Hölderlin-like atmosphere.

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72 SW 1, 194.
73 SW 1, 172f.
74 SW 1, 232 – note.
75 See, for example, Tilliette 2004, 35–37 and Beiser 2002, 476–479.

> We all have a secret and wondrous capacity of withdrawing from temporal change into our innermost self. ... There, in the form of immutability, we intuit the eternal in us. This intuition is the innermost and in the strictest sense our own experience, upon which depends everything we know and believe of a supersensory world.[76]

Hence, we can all experience the eternal by withdrawing from the bustle of daily life into an innermost self, Schelling asserts. This escape into a primordial pre-conscious unity is Hölderlin's deepest desire, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, even if Schelling calls it "the silent surrender of myself in the arms of the Absolute" for a while, Schelling's intellectual intuition has nothing in common with the tentative and dangerous encounter with unconscious Being that characterizes Hölderlin's meaning of the term, as we will see in the next section.

For Schelling intellectual intuition is a means of access to the Absolute or the Unconditioned. It gets us beyond the phenomena to a philosophically necessary, unitary ground. And what we discover there is the identity between our innermost self and what Spinoza called the One Substance. It takes place "whenever I cease to be an object for myself" and when everything objective has vanished. Even though Schelling asserts that we all have this ability to intuit the eternal in our innermost self, this experience is not easily achieved. Intellectual intuition is produced by freedom alone, and those who are "overcome by the invading power of objects" have a hard time experiencing it.[77] Intellectual intuition and self-power always remain closely linked in his view. Whereas for Hölderlin it constitutes a loss of control, for Schelling it is hard work.[78]

His brief flirt with romanticism notwithstanding, the young Schelling is still keen on Fichte's consent and wants to make sure that nobody can accuse him of dogmatism, or mysticism and other forms of *Schwärmerei*. Intellectual intuition, whereby subject and object fully merge, can be interpreted in two ways, he asserts. Either the I is viewed as becoming identical with the Absolute or the Absolute with the I.

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[76] SW 1, 318.

[77] SW 1, 318f.

[78] However, when Tilliette remarks that "for Schelling intellectual intuition is not a shock, that electrifies the reader, nor a vision that delights him, but the conclusion of an effort of ascesis and purification [*Läuterung*]," I think this might be too religious an interpretation, at least where the young Schelling is concerned (Tilliette 1995, 35).

"In the latter case, intellectual intuition [is] intuition of the I; in the former, intuition of an absolute object."[79] All dogmatism is based on the latter objectification of intellectual intuition; it takes

> the intuition of oneself for the intuition of an object outside oneself, the intuition of the inner intellectual world for an intuition of a supersensory world outside of oneself.[80]

The latter is what Spinoza did, in Schelling's view. Since he chose to interpret it as an intuition of the absolute object, he was a dogmatist and thereby deceived himself, like many of his predecessors. Schelling, as a true idealist, avoids this fatal error.

Mysticism, in the sense of losing oneself in the Absolute, is also unconvincing to him. "We cannot get rid of ourselves." Even when intuiting myself as merged in the Absolute, it is still myself that I intuit. Thinking myself as lost in the Absolute or God is still the thought of myself, even if now a lost self. A person cannot "conceive of himself as annihilated without thinking of himself, at the same time as existing." To Schelling it is obvious that everyone, even the mystic, always thinks of himself. It is exactly this ineradicable quality of I-hood that causes our fear of death.

> For I could not feel any fear of a collision with not-being, if I did not apprehend a survival of my I, so that my feelings would survive too…I'll gladly not be, only I don't want to feel my not-being.

Spinoza was able to bear the apparent annihilation of his I because he never thought of himself as lost in this absolute state; "he thought of his personality as expanded into it!"[81] Schelling's "I am it, the Absolute" resurfaces.

Despite his conviction that the I of the real philosopher can make all objects disappear, Schelling realizes that intellectual intuition cannot occur in regular consciousness. Consciousness needs an object, whereas intellectual intuition that "arises in us by means of an instantaneous unification of two opposing principles" cannot have an object by definition.[82] This implies that there can be no rationally compelling theory about the Absolute because intellectual intuition is

[79] SW 1, 319.
[80] SW 1, 312.
[81] SW 1, 320ff.
[82] SW 1, 285.

an experience where consciousness ceases. It is a "state of death" from which we "awaken through reflection, that is, through a forced return to ourselves. But no return is thinkable without resistance, no reflection without an object."[83]

Here Schelling sees a distinct difference between sensory intuition and intellectual intuition. In a way, all intuition, even sensory intuition, is an "abyss. Should I maintain it *as* intuition I would cease to be I." In the case of sensory intuition however, this risk is limited because the object offers resistance to which the I naturally takes a stand and returns to itself; it re-flects. With intellectual intuition "there is nothing but infinite expansion" in which the I might easily disappear into nothingness. "Should I maintain intellectual intuition I would cease to live; I would go 'from time into eternity.'"[84] Reversely,

> with absolute freedom no consciousness of self is compatible. An activity without any object, an activity to which there is no resistance, never returns into itself. Only through a return to one's self does consciousness arise. Only a restricted reality [*Realität*] is an actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] for us.[85]

The I needs restrictions. It needs to encounter objects, not-I's, in order to feel its own existence, to be self-conscious. This, in turn, would lead to the Hölderlinean line of thinking. The Absolute cannot be an I for an I is opposed to a not-I. And if there is something outside the I (the not-I), the I cannot be the Absolute. Again, we see a more romantic influence, be it Hölderlin's or from the Jena circle.

This is also the case in the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* of 1800 that aims to explain "how the ultimate ground of the harmony between subjective and objective becomes an object to the I itself."[86] The whole of philosophy starts, and must start, from an

> absolute principle [that] is also at the same time the absolutely identical. [This] cannot be grasped or communicated through description, or through concepts at all. It can only be intuited. Such an intuition is the organ of all philosophy.

83 SW 1, 325.
84 Ibid.
85 SW 1, 324.
86 SW 3, 610.

The philosopher's task is to establish "beyond doubt that such an intuition does not rest upon a purely subjective deception," that it possesses objectivity that is universal and acknowledged by everybody.

> This universally acknowledged and altogether incontestable objectivity of intellectual intuition is art itself because the esthetic intuition simply is the intellectual intuition become objective.[87]

Thus Schelling's search for the objectivity of this intellectual intuition, his attempt to justify its use in philosophy, forces him to venture into new and alien territory: the world of art. He has seen his Romantic friends in Jena at work, and he has attended their discussions on the meaning of art. They have contemplated famous works of art together and "symphilosophized" and "sympoetized" about this experience. Subsequently, Schelling does what he does every time he is impressed by a new way of thinking: he tries to integrate it into his system. He is now convinced that art can prove that intellectual intuition is real. "The esthetic intuition is objectified intellectual intuition."[88] How so?

For Kant, the world we know is at least in part product of the knowing mind. For Fichte, it *is* the production of the I. If the I does not recognize the world as itself, it is because it is its unconscious product. The *Wissenschaftslehre* teaches that theory and praxis are two relations between the I and its unconscious product. In cognition, the I is finite and must passively accept its own unconscious, infinite product as alien. In morality, the opposite holds true. There the world is experienced as finite, forever transcended by the striving of the I, which is infinite. In ideal Infinity the world, as the material of the I's duty, will lose its independence. But neither in theory nor in practice does the I here and now recognize itself in its own unconscious product. This situation of a divide between the conscious and the unconscious, which still has a Kantian feel, is solved in art, in Schelling's opinion.

In art, the conflict between the I's conscious and unconscious products is experienced as an internal one. The artist has conscious aims and techniques, but in genuine art there is also an element of incomprehensibility, of unconsciousness.

> The basic character of the world of art is...an unconscious infinity...In addition to what he has placed into it on purpose, the artist seems to

[87] SW 3, 624.
[88] SW 3, 625.

> have represented in it by instinct an Infinity which no finite understanding can wholly explicate.[89]

In art, the conscious and the unconscious are no longer opposed. In the work of art, the artistic I recognizes itself in its unconscious product, and the conflict ends in total harmony and infinite satisfaction. The unconscious and infinite element, which is inevitably reflected in the work of art, is called genius. Truth and Goodness are mere ideals that drive science and morality, whereas Beauty is the miracle of the real presence of the Infinite in the finite. Only the esthetic experience can synthesize the subjective and the objective pole of the Absolute, "the absolutely identical," here and now.

The artist begins his work with a conscious design, but because the Absolute subconsciously works through him, more is produced than he intended or predicted. "In genius…a contradiction is solved that is absolute, and insoluble elsewhere."[90] The artist's work is the Absolute creating through him. To the non-artist this process remains a miracle. The philosopher may understand why the work of the artistic genius is necessary, but he cannot understand how he does it. Nonetheless, art is the organon of all philosophy.[91] Philosophy only raises *thought* above fragmentation, but "art carries *the whole man, as he is*, to the knowledge of the Highest, and in this lies the eternal difference and miracle of art."[92] The intellectual intuition of the philosopher is the subjective intuiting of the Absolute. This intuition "can become objective only through a second intuition. This second intuition is the esthetic."[93] What makes the esthetic intuition superior in Schelling's view is that it provides actual products in which the "infinite dichotomy of opposed activities" is resolved.[94] What the philosopher can only *think* together, the artist actually presents.

Again, we see a synthesis of different lines of thinking that we have come to recognize as typical for Schelling. Creative genius is combined with the absolute I. Genius is "for the esthetic what the I is for philosophy, namely the supreme, absolute reality that never itself

[89] SW 3, 619.
[90] SW 3, 624.
[91] See SW 3, 627.
[92] SW 3, 360.
[93] SW 3, 624.
[94] SW 3, 625.

becomes objective but is the cause of everything that is so."[95] Whereas Fichte is content to conclude that intellectual intuition of this absolute reality cannot be proven objectively and that there might be something wrong with such a demand for objectivity, Schelling does not hesitate to declare that he has managed to provide just such a proof. Emphasizing this absolute reality as the One Source from which all that is has sprung and connecting this immediately with the artistic endeavor is more or less in line with Hölderlin's thinking, were it not that Schelling identifies this Absolute with "the absolutely identical." Hölderlin claims that since the essence of judgment (*Urteil-Urtheilung*) is characterized by the "is" of identity, identity can never be the highest. Over and above it is Being. And this ineffable, ungraspable unity, which grounds me and is in me but not within my realm of control, is what we long for from day to day. Philosophy can speculate about "it," but while speculating the philosophers makes it into an object while at the same time having to acknowledge that is not and cannot be objective. "Reason…judges, and it takes place in the dimension that has been opened up by arche-separation," as Henrich puts it.[96] Schelling seems to forget to distinguish between what we call 'I' in daily life and the absoluteness of our I-hood time and again. Fichte's absolute aspect of the empirical I is turned into all there is. The I is absolutized. Intellectual intuition thus becomes "a knowing that is simultaneously a producing of its object…and in which producer and product are one and the same."[97] The I becomes its own Creator and the Source of all that is. Fichte has a similar tendency but shies away from absolutizing the I as such. Thus we see Fichte's "I am!" shift to Schelling's "I am it, the Absolute!" almost imperceptibly once again.

Even when Schelling writes that the artist is "governed" by a "power that separates him from all other people and compels him to say or depict things that he does not fully understand himself and whose meaning is infinite," he seems unaware of the importance of his own choice of words.[98] The artist is "governed" by a sense of the Absolute. The artist realizes that in certain ways he is merely instrumental to this creative production. He cannot and does not try to master it, grasp it,

[95] SW 3, 619. See 5.3.4. for more about the genius tradition in romanticism.
[96] Henrich 1992a, 82.
[97] SW 3, 369.
[98] SW 3, 617.

and control it. With this assertion, Schelling does indeed touch upon a crucial difference between Schelling, the philosopher, and the artist. The latter, and the theologian for that matter, opens her thinking for what she can no longer control in thinking and is in that sense "governed." Instead of resolving it reasonably or otherwise, she lives it, or lives with it, in it. The artist is an I in touch with "the supreme, absolute reality," but the artist's I, and every I in the world, is merely the opening to this reality. The I, as I, is not absolute and cannot control the Absolute. Judgment and participation denote different perspectives. Judgment and thinking make the I an outsider that controls; participation and intuiting imply its involvement. It is characteristic of Schelling's thinking that even when writing about intellectual intuition, as, let's say, the twilight zone of knowing, he does not allow anything other than clarity to reign. Intuition, however, does not take place in the bright daylight of philosophical reflection. Intuition is not and can never serve as objective proof, but it can drive us nonetheless.

Around 1802, Schelling makes a final attempt at justification of intellectual intuition as an objective instrument for the philosopher. He now defines intellectual intuition as "the capacity to see the universal in the particular, the Infinite in the finite, and indeed to unite both in a living unity."[99] He tries an approach based on Kant's view concerning mathematics. According to Kant, proof in mathematics consists in constructing a concept *a priori* in intuition. Hence, Schelling finds proof in mathematics that the human mind has the capacity to perceive the universal in the particular. By abstracting from all accidental features, the particular is viewed as a pure case of the universal. In geometry, we see how the rules for one particular form hold for all. The geometer deals with a universal that is the *a priori* form of sensory intuition (space and time) whereas the philosopher deals with a universal that is the *a priori* form of intellectual intuition. Just like the geometer abstracts from the accidental properties of his particular figure and considers its essential properties as pure instances of space in general, so the philosopher abstracts from all the contingent features of a particular object and sees it as a pure case of the Absolute.[100]

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[99] SW 4, 362.
[100] SW 5, 128–131.

Kant only denies the existence of anything like *a priori* intuition for the philosopher because his concept of reason is far too narrow, in Schelling's opinion. Kant reduces it to logic and makes it an extension of the concepts of understanding. What philosophy sorely needs is a new conception of reason. If it is the task of reason to find the causes of an event, all it can ever hope to supply are the conditions for everything conditioned. Reason according to this conception will never be able to grasp the Unconditioned, the Absolute. Intellectual intuition is not explanation (i.e. showing how other objects act on something and cause it to act as it does), nor deduction (i.e. deriving something from higher principles), but contemplation, to consider something in itself, apart from its relations with other things. In intellectual intuition, we can see an object as a representation of the entire universe. We intuit the identity of this particular with the universal. This intuition is not mediated by the senses because they grasp the object individually without recognizing it as part of a wider whole. Neither is it conceptual because to conceive an object is to subsume it under some universal and contrast it in some respects to other objects. Reason must be viewed as, say, the faculty of contemplation. Kant has indeed revealed the limitations of prevailing non-philosophies [*Unphilosophien*], Schelling agrees, but a new type should be possible, based on intellectual intuition. It should be in line with the Kantian *Critique* and systematically developed in order to test the truth of the original intuition.[101]

When also this attempt fails to convince his opponents, the term intellectual intuition, at least as philosophema, dies quietly and Schelling turns to his philosophy of freedom.[102] Let us nonetheless continue with the intuitive for as while and study Hölderlin's philosophical and artistic views on intellectual intuition.

[101] SW 5, 5; 270.

[102] It is fair to mention at least once that not much of the blown up I remains in the philosophy of the late Schelling. By then the philosophy of the intuiting I has become the philosophy of Revelation. The I is no longer (the way to) God. The philosopher cannot ascend to God. He can only find God, if God descends. "God Himself must meet him with his aid and succor" (SW 10, 566).

5.3. Hölderlin

> Nature confounds the Pyrrhonian;
> Reason confounds the dogmatic.
> We have an incapacity to prove, in-
> vincible for all dogmatism; we have
> an idea of truth, invincible for all
> Pyrrhonism.[103]

This short text Hölderlin writes to his friend Johann Caspar Camerer. On the one hand, "we have an idea of the truth" that no Pyrrhonism, no skepticism, can undermine. On the other hand, "we have an incapacity to prove" all dogmatism notwithstanding. Hölderlin believes that we have a certain awareness of a primordial unity, Being in his terminology, that cannot be supported by reason because it precedes the dimension of reasoning: it is "invincible for all dogmatism." No scientific knowledge will ever prove the ineradicable "idea" that we have of Being proper that precedes all consciousness and therefore all thoughts and acts. The indestructible certainty that we have of our unitary ground, of the "one-ness with all that lives" is the result of an intellectual intuition.[104]

As is the case with all of Hölderlin's metaphysics, he has not theorized much about intellectual intuition. Nonetheless, he seems to categorize this non-reflective "idea of the truth" as a theoretical point of access at least at some point during his life. In a letter to Niethammer he writes,

> I want to discover the principle which explains to me the divisions in which we think and exist, yet which is also capable of dispelling the conflict between subject and object, between our self and the world, yes, also between reason and revelation, – *theoretically, in intellectual intuition* [italics CvW].[105]

However, in a letter to Schiller he asserts that the philosophical demand that subject and object be unified in an Absolute, "I or however one wants to name it," is possible "esthetically, in the intellectual intuition,

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[103] "La nature confond les Pyrrhoniens; / La raison confond les Dogmatistes. / Nous avons une impuissance à prouver, in- / vincible à tout le dogmatisme; nous avons / une idée de la verité, invincible à tout le / Pyrrhonisme" (in: Henrich 1992a, 74).

[104] "Einigkeit mit allem, was lebt" (StA IV, 267).

[105] StA VI, 203. Again, I will append the German original only when Hölderlin's non-prose is concerned.

but theoretically only through an infinite approach."[106] Like Schelling, Hölderlin believes that intellectual intuition is indispensable to inspire the intellect to surpass itself, to turn mere reflection into philosophical inspiration. He finds something lacking in cold rationalism as well. Reflection, mere human reason, is only "dry bread," whereas he who has experienced a flash of true insight into Being has been "secretly feasting at the table of the gods." "The light of the divine [One differentiated in itself is] the ideal of the Beauty of striving reason."[107]

These quotes suggest that there is no clear demarcation between the experience of One-ness in theory and in poetry for Hölderlin. Sometimes he calls intellectual intuition esthetical rather than theoretical. Early in his career, he starts to view poetry as superior to philosophy, and in *The Oldest System-Program of German Idealism* it is explained why.[108] The exact authorship of this text is contested, but it is agreed that it was written in the immediate circle(s) of our famous *Stiftler*. It has been preserved in Hegel's handwriting, it comprises a theory of beauty that is supposedly mainly Hölderlin's work, and it could be said that Schelling's work constitutes the most complete elaboration of the program. Let us start there to get an idea of Hölderlin's views on the relationship between poetry and philosophy and the crucial role of intellectual intuition.

5.3.1. *Poetry and Philosophy*

It is argued in this text that "reasonable" ideas will not appeal to "the populace" because the masses need an approach based on the senses instead of the abstractions of metaphysics. "Until we render the ideas esthetic... they will not be of any interest to the populace."[109] Therefore, philosophy needs to be made "sensuous" by esthetics and poetry "reasonable" by ideas. Only in a successful combination, "there prevails eternal unity among us. No longer the contemptuous look, no longer the blind trembling of the populace before its sages and

[106] StA VI, 181.
[107] "Das *trokne Brod*, das menschliche Vernunft wohlmeinend ihm reicht, verschmähet er, weil er *ingeheim am Göttertische schwelgt*" (StA III, 81); "das göttliche divine ἐν δειαφερον εαυτῳ, das Ideal der Schönheit der strebenden Vernunft" (StA III, 83).
[108] See StA IV, 297–299.
[109] StA IV, 299.

priests."[110] Reasonable poetry is preferable to the philosophy of sages and the institutionalized religion of priests because both keep people blind and trembling for those who claim access to the Divine. Poetry "at the service of ideas" is superior to any metaphysical theory because of its "sensuous" liveliness. Such poetry is the consummation of what is only begun in philosophy. Through a combination of fragmentary speech and the "personification of abstract terms," the poem can stimulate the educated reader to complement the fragment into a "total impression," Hölderlin writes elsewhere.[111] Poetry can help us intuit the whole.

Since Being is an all-encompassing unity in which we all participate, we cannot oppose ourselves to it. It cannot be objectified, and it remains in the realm of the unconscious. Being cannot be grasped by way of rational argumentation; it cannot be defined or presented by philosophy. It is through the non-discursive and intuitive expression of the poem that Being is articulated or realized, albeit only in flashes. Intellectual intuition cannot be permanent in people; it would kill them. As we have seen in the previous chapter, too long an encounter with pure divine unity implies loss of consciousness, death. Hence, these flashes of intellectual intuition are immediately followed by reflection, a return to individual being. This antagonism between unity and (self-) consciousness has been discussed extensively in 4.5.

Both poet and true philosopher rely upon the experience of One-ness that Hölderlin calls intellectual intuition. Without intellectual intuition, both occupations can produce no more than mere handicraft: "How ineffectual is the best-intentioned diligence of men compared with the power of pure inspiration!"[112] True philosophy should be more than intellectual analysis, more than instrumental use of reason.

> The entire business of intellect is makeshift. By its ability to sort out, it saves us from folly, from injustice; but to be safe from folly and injustice is, after all, not the highest level of human excellence…Mere intellect produces no philosophy, for philosophy is more than the limited percep-

[110] StA IV, 298f. I will not elaborate on the term that the text uses for this fusion of poetry and philosophy: "new mythology." This will start to play a large role in the late Schelling's work.

[111] StA IV, 183.

[112] "Wie unvermögend ist doch der gutwilligste Fleiss der Menschen gegen die Allmacht der ungetheilten Begeisterung" (StA III, 14).

> tion of what is . . . more than blind demand for ever greater progress in the combination and differentiation of some particular material.[113]

True philosophy is touched by the divine light of Being. Both poetry and true philosophy originate from the same source: divine Being. When one of Hyperion's companions asks, "What has philosophy . . . what has the cold majesty of this discipline to do with poetry?"[114] He answers, "Poetry . . . is the beginning and the end of philosophy . . . philosophy springs from the poetry of eternal, divine Being."[115] However, since philosophical theory (reflection) belongs to the dimension of judgment, it can never be adequate to express the primordial One-ness of Being. Even inspired philosophy cannot be compared to poetry, according to Hölderlin. That is why he considers the profession of the poet superior to that of the philosopher. The following quote expresses Hölderlin's opinion on the subject quite eloquently. "There is an asylum where every poet who is stranded like me can find a honorable refuge – philosophy. But I cannot leave my first love, the hope of my youth."[116] May this be a comfort to those of us who are artistically not particularly gifted!

Elsewhere he phrases the connection of poetry and philosophy differently. Philosophy is more than a home for failed poets. It plays its own, specific role in the relationship with our unitary origin and its drive "to promote life, to hasten the infinite process of perfection of Nature." To show people which is the right course in life,

> that they may take it with their eyes open and with joy and nobility, that is the business of philosophy, the fine arts, religion, which themselves

[113] "Des Verstandes ganzes Geschäft ist Nothwerk. Vor dem Unsinn, vor dem Unrecht schützt er uns, indem er ordnet; aber sicher zu seyn vor Unsinn und vor Unrecht ist doch nicht die höchste Stuffe menschlicher Vortreflichkeit. . . . Aus blosem Verstande kommt keine Philosophie, denn Philosophie ist mehr, denn nur die beschränkte Erkenntniss des Vorhandnen . . . mehr, denn blinde Forderung eines nie zu endigen Fortschritts in Vereinigung und Unterscheidung eines möglichen Stoffs" (StA III, 83).

[114] "Was hat die Philosophie . . ., was hat die kalte Erhabenheit dieser Wissenschaft mit Dichtung zu thun?" (StA IV, 81).

[115] "Die Dichtung . . . ist der Anfang und das Ende dieser Wissenschaft . . ., entspringt aus der Dichtung eines unendlichen göttlichen Seyns" (StA IV, 81).

[116] "Es giebt zwar einen Hospital, wohin sich jeder auf meine Art verunglükte Poët mit Ehren flüchten kann – die Philosophie. Aber ich kann von meiner ersten Liebe, von den Hofnungen meiner Jugend nicht lassen" (StA II, 289).

> arise from this drive. Philosophy makes aware of this drive, shows it its infinite object in the ideal, and strengthens and purifies it through this ideal. The fine arts present its infinite object to this drive in a living image in a presented higher world; and religion teaches it to divine and believe in this higher world right there, where he is seeking it and wants to create it, . . . like a hidden aptitude, like a spirit that wants to unfold.[117]

Philosophy, religion, and poetry all have a different function. Philosophy makes us conscious of our drive towards perfection and further defines it ("it opens our eyes"). Religion teaches us to intuit the presence of this ideal and believe in it (with "nobility"). However, only the fine arts are able to give us the "joy" of "a living image," to realize a fragment of eternal Being. There is a limit to what can be expressed rationally. Distinctions and specifications clarify and order our thinking, but it will never enable us to get in touch with the Divine.

Hölderlin is not prepared to content himself with clarification and analysis, as is the philosopher's task. His impatience with the imperfection of all that is said and his urge to realize perfection here and now are the ingredients for the tragedy that his attempts at philosophy lead to. He realizes the shortcomings of his own philosophy and philosophy in general. This insight puts an end to his ambitions as a philosopher. But when he flees from Jena and a career in philosophy, he does not try to escape from what he considers his task in life; the presentation of what cannot be presented [*Darstellung des Undarstellbaren*]. He wants to reunite what has been separated. Nothing, no creature and no thought, can and should be left out of this Unity. Art, especially poetry, seems to be the only instrument for expressing and presenting the underlying unity of all that is: Being. As we will see in 5.3.4., he soon comes to realize that also poetry is doomed to fail such a grand task. But let us first look at Hölderlin's thoughts on the production of the poem.

5.3.2. *Grasping the Father's Ray . . .*

In the poem *Wie wenn am Feiertage* [*As on a Holiday*], Hölderlin describes the process of the conception of the poem. Artists cultivate Beauty, which is an expression of unitary Being, and works of art

[117] StA VI, 329.

arise from the joint activity of the Divine and the human and both benefit from it, we have learned in the preceding chapter. Artistic activity brings Being and people closer together; the definite and the indefinite lines approach. Or as he writes elsewhere, Being becomes "more organic as a result of the molding cultivating human beings," and people become more "general and infinite."[118] In *Wie wenn am Feiertage* Hölderlin describes the poet's task as "grasping the Father's ray" and "wrapping it in song." For clarity's sake, we will start with a prose translation of the entire poem.[119] Since translations cannot do justice to the virtuosity of Hölderlin's poetry, the German text will be included in *Appendix A*.

> As on a holiday, to see the field, a countryman goes out, in the morning, when out of the hot night the cooling lightning has fallen for hours on end and far away the thunder still sounds, the river returns to its banks, and freshly the ground turns green, and with the joyful rain of heaven the grape-vine drips, and glistening in the quiet sunlight the trees of the orchard stand:
>
> So in favorable weather they stand, they whom no master alone, whom wonderfully omnipresent teaches in a light embrace, mighty, divinely beautiful Nature. So when she seems to sleep at certain times of the year, in the heavens or among the plants or the peoples, the face of the poets also will mourn. They seem to be alone, yet always they are foreknowing. For foreknowing she herself also rests.
>
> But now day breaks! I awaited it and saw it come, and what I saw, it is holy, now be my word. For she, she herself, who is older than the ages and above the gods of Evening and Orient, Nature now has awoken with clash of arms. And high from the Ether down to the abyss according to rigid law, engendered out of holy Chaos, as once she was, rapture feels herself, the All-creative anew.
>
> And as a fire gleams in the eye of the man when he devises a noble conception, so anew by the signs, the deeds of the world now a fire has been kindled in the souls of the poets. And what happened before, though scarcely felt, only now is revealed, and those who smilingly tended the fields for us, in the guise of laborers, have been recognized, the All-living, the powers of the gods.
>
> Do you ask who they are? In song their spirit hovers, when it grows from the sun of day and the warm soil, and storms in the sky, and others, more prepared in the depths of time, and more meaningful, and more

[118] "die Natur organischer durch den bildenden cultivirenden Menschen" and the human being "aorgischer, allgemeiner, unendlicher geworden ist" (StA IV, 153).

[119] StA II, 118–120. For Michael Hamburger's poetic translation, see Hölderlin 1990, 192–196.

> perceptible, drift toward us between Heaven and earth and among the peoples. The thoughts of the communal Spirit are silently ending in the soul of the poet,
>
> So that swiftly visited, familiar to infinite powers for a long time, trembling with recollection, and set on fire by the Holy Ray, the fruit conceived in love, the work of gods and men, the song, that it may bear witness to both, succeeds. Thus, as poets tell, for she desired to see the god in person, visible, his lightning hit Semele's house and the divinely struck gave birth, to the fruit of the thunderstorm, to the holy Bacchus.
>
> And hence the sons of the earth now drink heavenly fire without danger. Yet it befits us, you poets!, to stand bare-headed beneath God's thunderstorms, to grasp the Father's ray, himself, with our own hands, and to offer the heavenly gift to the people, wrapped in song. For only if we are pure in heart, like children, and guiltless our hands,
>
> Then the Father's ray, the pure, will not scorch it. And, deeply shaken, sharing the sufferings of the stronger one, in the storms of the god, crashing down from above, as he nears, yet the heart will stand fast. But woe is me! When with [a self-inflicted wound my heart is bleeding, and peace is deeply lost to me, and freely modest self-contentment, and when unrest and lack drive me towards the abundance of the gods' table, when all around me…][120] Woe is me!
>
> And let me say at once…I was approached to look upon the Heavenly; they themselves cast me, the false priest, down far below the living, into the dark, that I may sing the song of warning for those eager to learn. There…

The poem starts with a sketch of the countryside on a summer morning after a stiflingly hot night with thunderstorms. Nature is green and fertile, still dripping with the night rains. All is quiet still, but the moment of Nature's awakening is near. In the second stanza, the poets' predicament is described. They are the students of Nature. In Hölderlin's philosophical terminology, this means that they are directly in touch with unitary Being. The "wonderfully omnipresent," who is "mighty" and "divinely beautiful," "older than the ages," and even "above the gods," has been sleeping, unconscious. In our time of darkness, as we have seen in 4.6., the Divine seems far removed. Being and consciousness are not on speaking terms, so to say.

[120] I follow Hamburger in inserting the lines in brackets from an earlier prose draft (StAII, 2 669f.) to explain the abrupt change of tone and the inconclusiveness of the poem. See Hamburger 1961, 80.

Poets in particular suffer because of this remoteness. They "mourn" and feel "alone." Nevertheless, they have not lost touched with Nature/ Being altogether: they are "foreknowing." Hölderlin uses the German word *ahnen* or *ahnden* that is sometimes also translated with "divining." Even when Nature "rests" and the Divine seems absent in sleep, the poets seem to have an awareness of unitary Being that precedes all knowing, all reflection. This awareness is what Hölderlin describes as intellectual intuition in his philosophical texts. It is an intuition of the unitary ground, of the One-ness of all that is. Surprisingly, not only the poets are foreknowing, so is Nature herself. Poets seem to be connected with our unitary ground by this mutual "foreknowing." They communicate in this twilight zone between the nightly darkness of sleep and the daylight of consciousness. Because of their ability to allow the contours of their thinking to blur, Nature is starting to wake up. Being seems to be gaining consciousness, or at least have an awareness of the possibility of doing so through the art of the poets.

In the third stanza "day breaks" and Nature stirs. The "All-creative" now has awoken from the "holy Chaos, as once she was," and she "feels herself anew." This is not full, explicit consciousness, but it takes a certain degree of consciousness to feel oneself. This feeling is closer to explicit consciousness than divining. Poet and Being approach. Being that was always there, but could only be foreknown and not experienced because all consciousness was lacking, is becoming more explicit in the poets' (its own) consciousness. A "fire has been kindled in the souls of the poets." That which was "scarcely felt, only now is revealed." The poets have labored on their fields, and finally their hard work is beginning to bear fruit. "The All-living, the powers of the gods," the "thoughts of the communal Spirit…silently ending in the poet's soul." The seed of divine Being has been planted in the poet where it has been growing. The "fruit conceived in love" is about to be born. The poem is the product of the intimacy of the poets and Nature. The "song" that "bear[s] witness to both," that is "the work of gods and men," will succeed and bring Being into being.

This sounds almost like a romantic love story, but the sixth stanza warns us. The encounter with the Divine can only be "swift" and "fleeting." As can be learned from the old myth of the birth of Bacchus, too much contact, seeing "the god in person, visible" is like being struck by lightning. Intellectual intuition is dangerous business. It sets on fire, and the "divinely struck" may give birth to holy offspring but not

survive the ordeal. Nonetheless, Hölderlin seems quite self-confident. History has taught the poets how to "grasp the Father's ray," and "the sons of earth now drink heavenly fire without danger." If the poet is "pure in heart," he can "stand bare-headed" and remain upright "beneath God's thunderstorms" that come "crashing down" when "the god nears." Only the impure will be seared by this heavenly light.

The poet is depicted as hero and priest. He is the mediator of the Divine. Thanks to the poets' efforts, the "heavenly gift" is offered to "the people," "wrapped in song." But this sacramental conception of poetry, to which the word "signs" in the fourth stanza also refers, forbids complacency. The conception of the poem is not a magic trick of "grasping the Father's ray" that the poet performs in order to nicely package Divine Being. "But woe is me!" Hölderlin hesitates. Abruptly the poem's tone changes in the penultimate stanza. Hölderlin has been known to revise his poems frequently, sometimes over a period of several years. The unfinished sentence and the fragment of a preliminary prose draft that has been inserted show Hölderlin's discontent with this section. This conception of the role of the poet is apparently not as straightforward as it might seem and is rejected as false priesthood in the final stanza. Before discussing Hölderlin's realization of the hubris of this view, let us first take a closer look at the next step in the production of the poem. This is the process of naming [*nennen*].

5.3.3. ... *and Wrapping it in Song*

The poet is to "offer the heavenly gift to people" by "wrapping it in song." What is essentially wordless has to be expressed in words. What is only intuited has to be named. Naming the nameless plays an important role in Hölderlin's ideas about the responsibilities of the poet. Wolfgang Binder has made an extensive study of the name symbolism in Hölderlin's work.[121] Three types of namelessness in connection with Being can be distinguished: the unnamable name of original Being, the neglected and renounced name of unitary Being, and the name of Being that is celebrated wordlessly.

[121] See Binder 1961/62. I follow Binder's categories, but my interpretation of and my reference to Hölderlin differ considerably.

The poem *Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und Jupiter* [*Nature and Art or Saturn and Jupiter*] will serve to illustrate the three different types of namelessness.[122] A prose translation of the entire poem is provided and the German original can be found in Appendix B.

> You govern high up in the day and your law prevails.
> You hold the scales of judgment, O Son of Saturn.
> You hand out our lots and rest contented
> In the fame of the immortal art of kingship.
>
> Yet to the abyss, the singers know,
> You have dismissed the Holy Father, your own.
> And long now he has lain lamenting
> There where the wild ones before you justly remain.
>
> Guiltless the god of the golden age:
> Once effortless and greater than you, even though
> He uttered no commandment, and
> No mortal on earth ever named him.
>
> So down with you! Or do not be ashamed to give thanks!
> And if you want to stay, defer to the older one,
> And grant him that above all others,
> Gods and humans, the singer name him!
>
> For see, as from clouds your lightning, thus comes
> From him what you call yours! Thus to him bear witness
> Your commands, and from Saturn's
> Peace every power has developed.
>
> And once I have felt in my heart of hearts and
> Do the things that you shaped grow dim,
> And in its cradle to my delight
> Changing Time has dozed off:
>
> Then I will know you, Kronion, then I will hear you,
> The wise master who, like ourselves, a son
> Of Time, gives laws to us and,
> Uncovers what lies hidden in holy twilight.

Let us look at the three categories of namelessness as they appear in the poem:

1. Unknown

The first type of namelessness is found in the characterization of Saturn in the third stanza. As the title of the poem indicates, Saturn is

[122] StA II, 37f.

synonymous to Nature that, in turn, stands for unitary Being, as we have seen in 4.3.2. Before time existed, Saturn ruled "effortless[ly]." "He uttered no commandment," but his peace ruled. Before the arche-separation occurs, there is no separation, no opposition, and neither mortals nor conflicts exist. But there is no consciousness either. There was only Saturn/Nature, "the god of the golden age." Primordial, unconscious Being is still unknown, hence nameless: "no mortal on earth ever named him."

2. Renounced

Then comes Jupiter. Jupiter, a synonym for art here, is Saturn's son and "son of Time," Kronion. His laws prevail, but he (art) seems to deny his/its own origins: the "immortal kingship" of unitary Being. He "dismissed the Holy Father to the abyss" where he "long now has lain lamenting." The arche-separation occurs, time and consciousness set in: the age of Jupiter. Saturn/Nature lies "guiltless[ly]" suffering in the abyss, neglected and renounced; nameless. Hölderlin orders the younger god to put an end to this situation, to either leave or "defer to the older" god and "grant him that above all others…the singer name him." Saturn should be given the honors that he is owed, after all from comes "what you call yours." It is from Saturn's peace that every power develops; Being is the source of all that is. Saturn is the father of Jupiter; art is a child of Being. Art has its own laws, its own ways of judging and ruling, and there is nothing wrong with that. But it tends to forget where it came from; it renounces its creative source, the origins of its powers of speech. These laws should not replace what art is ultimately about: recognizing and naming the nameless "above all."

Hölderlin recognizes the difficulties involved in naming. Elsewhere he warns for an all too easy and wrong type of naming. People have a way of labeling that gives them the illusion that attaching a name automatically implies knowledge of what has been named. But a fixed, standard, thoughtless type of naming according to the rules and the conventions we have learned during childhood is counterproductive. It merely causes objectification. It opposes the named to the namer and emphasizes separation. Thereby it creates a distance that belies our intimate connection in a common, original ground. The wrong type of naming only serves to isolate us from each other and from the Divine. Even the gods themselves we have learned to objectify, thus causing alienation. How different is the relationship of the young

child to the "friendly gods" as expressed in the poem *Da ich ein Knabe war*… [*When I was a boy*…].

> How my soul loved you.
> True, in those days I did not
> Call you by name, and you
> Never called me as men do, as if
> They knew one another, with names.[123]

The language "of men" tends to destroy the familiarity with Being. That is why the wise Empedocles advises his listeners to bravely forget the old names of the gods, learned from their fathers, and to lift their eyes to divine Nature like newborns.[124]

To return to our original poem: Jupiter/art has taken over the world giving "laws" and "judgments" and enjoying the "fame" of "kingship." Since it took the birth of Jupiter for naming to become possible at all, this is not a bad event as such. Jupiter is a "wise master" from whom there is much to be learned. However, his kingship should not exist at the cost of the "older one," the unitary Being of Saturn. Art, the artist, should acknowledge the One, Being, as the other parent of its offspring, the work of art. The poet should give a voice to Being, name his intellectual intuition of absolute Oneness, and uncover what "lies hidden in holy twilight." Therefore a different kind of namelessness is called for: the name that does not objectify but celebrates unity.

3. Celebrated

The final type of namelessness results from a deep respect for the Divine. As Diotima expresses this in *Hyperion*,

> the One, that we honor, we do not name; even though He is as intimate to us as we are to ourselves, we do not pronounce His name. No day celebrates Him; no temple is appropriate for Him; the harmony of our spirits and their endless growth alone celebrate Him.[125]

[123] "Freundlichen Götter! / Dass ihr wüsstet, / Wie euch meine Seele geliebt! / Zwar damals rief ich noch nicht / Euch mit Namen, auch ihr / Nanntet mich nie, wie die Menschen sich nennen / Als kennten sie sich / doch kannt' ich euch besser, / Als ich je die Menschen gekannt" (StA I, 266).

[124] See StA IV, 65.

[125] "Den Einen, dem wir huldigen, nennen wir nicht; ob er gleich us nah ist, wie wir selbst sind, wir sprechen ihn nicht aus. Ihn feiert kein Tag; kein Tempel ist ihm angemessen; der Einklang unserer Geister, und ihr unendlich Wachstum feiert ihn allein" (StA III, 224).

Being, the One, in its purity can and should never become the object of our rituals. Any type of objectification would rob it of its all-encompassing unity, "no day…no temple is appropriate." The right type of namelessness is the only way to protect absolute One-ness. As participants in this unity, we can only celebrate "the One" with our lives, by living in a "harmony of our spirits" and by an "endless growth" towards a state of being that will honor both our individuality and our unity.

Poets are aware of this ("the singers know") and order Jupiter, "do not be ashamed to give thanks" and "defer to the older one" on whose "fame of the immortal art of kingship" he "contented[ly] rest[s]." They demand that he "grant him [Saturn/Nature] that above all others, gods and humans, the singer name him" because "from him has come what you call yours," namely the "commands" and "every power." In this sacramental act of the nameless naming of eternal Being poets take on the role of "holy priests."[126] Hence Schmidt remarks,

> When Hölderlin says I…this I is always a visionary and priestly elevated I, that stands out not as the result of its own wishes, but thanks to a holy office and as the organ of the Divine.[127]

Such priesthood takes a special state of mind in which "the things that you shaped grow dim, and…changing Time has dozed off." Then the poet can feel in his "hearts of hearts" the delight of "changing Time" that "has dozed off." This refers to the semi-conscious awareness of intellectual intuition in which the contours of the objects fade (the "things that you shaped grow dim") and the difference between the subject and the surrounding objects becomes less defined. When this happens, the poet will "hear" Jupiter's laws and understand how he "uncovers that which lies hidden in holy twilight": the eternal unity of Saturn.

Names distinguish and identify the different aspects of life on earth. This is inevitable and even useful. However, a thoughtless, automatic type of naming makes the distinction absolute, objectifies, isolates, and thus obscures the One Source from which all things arise and in which they participate: eternal Being. The two poems discussed have given us

[126] "heilige Priester" (StA II, 94).
[127] Schmidt 1968, 23.

an idea of the relationship of poetry to Being and the role of the poet. The poet needs an (intellectual) intuition of the unitary origin and the ever existent intimate connection between all that is. Laws of art are worthless, if they renounce their ultimate source. The poet grasps the Father's ray and wraps it in song. There is an undeniable presumptuousness in this conception of poetry, which seems very unlike Hölderlin. Let us see how he seems to play with this romantic notion of artistic genius for a while only to unmask it as hubris.

5.3.4. *The Hubris of the Poet*

Works of art arise from the intimacy of the human and the divine, and in this process the role of the artist is of major importance, Hölderlin has asserted in the preceding. The immensity of this task is underlined in his theory on poetry. In the theoretical self-definition unfolded in *Über die Verfahrungsweise des poëtischen Geistes* [*On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit*] the role of the poet becomes frighteningly grandiose.[128] In the first sentence, extending over nearly three pages, he claims that the poet needs to be "in control of the Spirit." He has to have "felt and appropriated, held fast and assured himself of the communal soul that is common to everyone and proper to each."[129] To think that the artist can be "in control of the Spirit," can manipulate Being so to say, sounds like a less than modest conception of the role of the poet.

Hölderlin has also been connected with the romantic notion of creative genius, a tradition primarily associated with Schelling. Lavater defines genius as follows: "Where there are effect, power, activity, thought, and sentiment that cannot be learned from people and that cannot be taught." The genius is considered sovereign to all norms that are established and fixed by tradition because in his geniality the poet is identical to God [*Gottgleich*].[130] The genius transcends the earthly, as also the name Hyperion implies, and moves as a fettered stream "towards the immortal…where the arms of the Father absorb it."[131]

[128] StA IV 241–265.
[129] StA IV, 241.
[130] Lavater 1949, 815.
[131] See the poem *Der Gefesselte Strom* [*The Fettered Stream*]; "wandelt hin zu Unsterblichen…wo ihn in die Arme der Vater aufnimmt" (StA II, 67).

The genius tradition is a modern attempt to grant ultimate legitimacy and authority to the poet who views himself as "the natural organ of public justice." This unrealistic self-image contrasts sharply with the social status and financial dependency of the late 18th to early 19th century poet whose life is very insecure. Many young men aspiring to be poets are forced to accept a job as a private tutor [*Hofmeister*] to make ends meet.[132]

The two poems that have been discussed in this chapter definitely contain elements that could categorize Hölderlin's self-definition as that of the romantic creative genius. He seems to have overestimated his own creative role from time to time, especially in his younger years. However, in his mature work (around the turn of the century) he seems to become well aware of the limitations of the poet, or of any human being for that matter, in the ability to "grasp" the Divine. The final stanzas of *Wie wenn am Feiertage* [*As on a Holiday*], written in 1799, could be interpreted as an indication of his hesitation to picture the poet as a direct mediator of the Divine. "Woe is me!" He shies away from the hubris of such a self-conception calling himself a "false priest." In *Wie wenn am Feiertage* he asserts that Nature/Being is the poets' only master, but in *Natur und Kunst* he explicitly calls Jupiter/art a "wise master" who "gives laws" to the poets and thereby uncovers "what lies hidden in holy twilight." Apparently, a close connection with Being does not allow the poet to think himself above the law. Besides, in the last stanza of *Wie wenn am Feiertage* Hölderlin uses the passive tense: "I *was* approached to look upon the Heavenly."[133] The initiative apparently lies with the Divine and not with the poet. When the Divine makes itself known to mortals, humility rather than genius seems to be called for. It takes one who is "pure in heart" to be able "to stand bare-headed" when "the god nears" otherwise he will be "scorched" by this heavenly light and cast "into the dark."[134]

Moreover, in the poem *Der Rhein* of 1801 he seems to connect a type of ascetics with the poet's, or maybe even the mystic's, role that has nothing to do with the triumphal march of the genius. Since the Heavenly "feel nothing at all,"

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[132] See Kurz 2003, 68–70.
[133] "Ich *sei* genaht, die Himmlischen zu schauen" (StA II, 120) [italics CvW].
[134] See 5.3.2.

> There must come, if to speak
> Thus is permitted, another who feels
> On their behalf, him
> They use and need.

However, the *Schwärmer* who "should seek to be like them and not allow inequality" has to be prepared for the consequences of this desire. For

> ...their deposition
> Is that he shall destroy
> His own house, curse what he loves most
> As his enemy, and under the rubble
> Bury his father and his child.[135]

Too much equality with the unitary source of all that is could put people in mortal danger and requires strict ascetism. Otherwise, they are struck by a fate similar to that of Empedocles of Hölderlin's unfinished tragedy.[136] Empedocles calls himself a god and believes to be able to free himself from all earthly dependencies. He is punished for his lack of humility and ceases to be the mouthpiece of the gods. Hölderlin labels this attitude as the "hubris of the genius" who "chose foolhardy arrogance making a mock of heavenly fires despising mortal paths to become the equal of gods on their own authority."[137]

In *Friedensfeier* of 1802, which has been discussed in the previous chapter, Hölderlin displays yet another perspective on the work of the poet. He is viewed as the one who prepares the realization of Being that will be completed at the end of time. It is the poet who assists in the organization of the celebration of peace: he provides the "banquet" and the "garlands" and sends the invitations for the *eschaton*. This does not imply that the poet is capable of realizing this celebration autonomously. The poet can "foreknow" or "divine" the state of

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[135] Denn weil / Die Seeligsten nichts fühlen von selbst, / Muss wohl, wenn solches zu sagen / Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Nahmen / Theilnemend fühlen ein Andrer, / Den brauchen sie; jedoch ihr Gericht / Ist, dass sein eigenes Haus / Zerbreche der und das Liebste / Wie den Feind schelt' und sich Vater und Kind / Begrabe unter den Trümmern, / Wenn einer, wie sie, seyn will und nicht / Ungleiches dulden, der Schwärmer" (StA II, 145).

[136] *Der Tod des Empedokles* (StA IV, 3–168).

[137] "Übermut des Genies" (StA IV, 446); See "Dann haben des eigenen Rechts/ Und gewiss des himmlischen Feuers/ Gespottet die Trotzigen, dann erst/ Die sterblichen Pfade verachtend / Verwegenes erwählt/ Und den Göttern gleich zu werden getrachtet" (StA II, 145).

all-reconciliation at the end of time and hence further human readiness by prophesizing about its peace and harmony. He is the visionary whose task it is to explain "secret sign[s]" from heaven. The image that Hölderlin uses elsewhere of "the baton of song" fuses the role of the visionary whose most important attribute is the baton, with the task of the poet whose tool is the song.[138] Hölderlin also presents a similar point of view in the poem *Rousseau*. The poet is one who can "see beyond his own time," who understands the "hints,... the language of the gods," who "reads the ultimate perfection in the first sign" and "prophetically flies before his approaching gods."[139]

The poet is the person with the talent to anticipate a new reality. He prepares people for a new era. "O wake, you poets, wake [the peoples] from slumber, those who are still asleep." It is his song that "awakens the dead who are not yet made captive by coarseness."[140] He may even hope for this effect to last beyond his lifetime: "This is the holy goal of my desires, and my pursuit – This, that I awaken the germs now that will ripen in times to come."[141] But no more than that. The process of realization of a new era is not dictated by human planning and remains dependent upon the Divine. Even the poet can do no more that anticipate and await the flow of this gradual process of spiritualization until "it grows mature."[142] In the mean time, his task is to make sure that "the existing be well explained."[143] As Hölderlin matures, he learns to relativize the genius as the "fearfully active" I that is an expression of hubris and lack of hope. "For much can our kind accomplish,... but faced with powers divine, the strong will stand abashed."[144] The poet may only hope that "the Hallowed *be* my word."[145]

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[138] "der Stab/ Des Gesanges" (StA II, 170).

[139] "siehet über die eigne Zeit"; "Winke... die Sprache der Götter"; "kennt im ersten Zeichen Vollendetes schon"; "fliegt... weissagend seinen kommenden Göttern voraus" (StA II, 12f.).

[140] "O wekt, ihr Dichter! Wekt sie vom Schlummer auch, Die jezt noch schlafen" (StA I, 261); "Die Todten weket / Er auf, die noch gefangen nicht / Vom Rohen sind" (StA II, 170).

[141] StA VI, 93.

[142] "Bis dass es reift" (BrA IX, 236).

[143] "Bestehendes gut gedeutet," see StA II, 172.

[144] "furchtsamgeschäftig" (BrA IX, 236); "Denn vieles vermag (...) der Mensch (...) aber es steht / Vor Göttlichem der Starke niedergeschlagen" (StA II, 127).

[145] "das Heilige *sei* mein Wort" (StA II, 118) [italics added].

Hölderlin has not written an extensive theory about intellectual intuition. Nonetheless, I am convinced that in his poetry he wants to "practice" precisely that. He does indeed try to grasp the Father's ray and wrap it in song in order to offer it to people. There is a certain amount of hubris in that conception. But whereas Schelling's and Fichte's metaphysical point of departure is an I that takes on absolute proportions thanks to its ability of intellectual intuition, Hölderlin remains hesitant about "fearfully active" self-positing. The starting-point and the center of his philosophy is never the I but rather a longing for harmony and unity. It is the whole, the unity of all that is, which is to benefit from his efforts. He believes in its holiness and in its eternal progress. Ultimately, intellectual intuition is not something for the happy few, the brilliant philosopher or the gifted artist, but the destiny of all human beings. At the end of time, each and everyone will be able to intuit the Father and at the same time continue to be an individual I, but here and now intellectual intuition is not to be fit into a system.

5.4. From Here Onwards

In the late 18th century, the term intellectual intuition is introduced in philosophy. It constitutes another attempt at bridging the Kantian divide. Kant's principle of pure reason is self-consciousness; his principle of practical reason is freedom. The German idealists claim that a philosophical principle can never be partial. Moreover, if praxis is to be reasonable, it must be the same reason as the one in theory. Therefore, there must be one principle for both theory and praxis. In less than two decades, the term intellectual intuition moves from a creative knowledge, which Kant attributes solely to God, to a human faculty of immediately experiencing the Absolute. Fichte is the first to connect it to the human I, and his students Schelling and Hölderlin make it into an experience in which this human I encounters the Absolute. The young ones disagree on the nature of this encounter. Schelling is convinced that it is the I that initiates and controls, whereas for Hölderlin the I is dependent upon the Divine for the encounter to take place. In any case, "production or revelation, intuition accesses the Absolute, Eternity…The obstacles of critical philosophy have been lifted," as Tilliette puts it.[146] Regardless of the exact name and the interpretation of

[146] Tilliette 1995, 59.

the "object" of this experience – Absolute, Unconditioned, the absolute I, or Being – the philosophers discussed in this chapter agree that intellectual intuition is the capacity to experience what lies beyond thinking, beyond regular consciousness. It becomes the term for the paradoxical "knowing the Unknowable."

There are three views on the possibility of intuitive knowledge in the philosophical tradition, according to Saskia Wendel:

1. "The first school differentiates between intuitive and discursive knowledge, but classifies both as thinking, therefore reflection." Aristotle with his distinction between *dianoia* and *noesis* is its best-known representative. *Dianoia* is a discursive type of knowledge in the form of judgments, but *noesis* is more intuitive. It is an instantaneous and immediate grasping of something that is immune for errors. Both forms are intentional and classified as reflection.
2. A second school makes a distinction between intuition on the one hand and discursive or propositional knowledge on the other. It emphasizes its intelligibility, but points out its non-reflectivity. Intuition is not interpreted as thinking "since reflection is considered the equivalent of discursivity. Non-discursive thought does not exist, but non-discursive knowledge does. It is called intuition." This intuition is understood as a kind of sensing that takes place in the intellect and is a prerequisite for discursive knowledge.
3. "A third school rejects the possibility of instantaneous and intuitive knowledge."[147]

Kant is obviously an advocate of this last line of thinking. The three authors discussed in this chapter can best be classified in the second category. According to their theories, reflection necessarily takes place in the dimension where the subject experiences itself as opposed to the object, whereas intellectual intuition is an intuitive grasping of the unitary ground prior to all differentiation. Even though they do not view intellectual intuition as reflection, it is still considered a major source of knowledge. It might even be the basis of true knowledge.

The development of the term from a divine ability to a human point of access to the Divine is an interesting one. Fichte sees it as the ability of the human I to come in touch with its own absoluteness, the absolute I. The I comes to know without a doubt that it *is*, and with

[147] See Wendel 2002, 28–30.

the realization "I am" it breaks through to its subjectivity, its own absoluteness: the absolute I. In line with Fichte, also Schelling connects intellectual intuition with the Absolute, which he still explicitly thinks of as the absolute I early in his career. However, he endows it with characteristics that evoke images of Spinoza's Substance, his *Deus*. Even when Schelling criticizes a dogmatist objectification of the Absolute – "The absolute I is... neither a phenomenon nor a thing-in-itself, because it is no thing at all, but simply and purely I..."[148] – it is more or less what he does to his conception of the absolute I. He knows that an I can never be a thing, but his absolute I is so much like Spinoza's It that Fichte's absoluteness of the I merges with a Spinozistic Absolute. Since Schelling's (and Fichte's) absolute I also tends to get confused with the empirical I, it sometimes seems as if his I (the I called Schelling) becomes indistinguishable from the Absolute (the God of Spinoza). Intellectual intuition thus develops into the ability of the artistic or philosophical genius to grasp the Absolute, to enclose it in his mind, as it were. The genius not only encounters the Divine; he *is* divine.

Hölderlin is attracted to this approach for a while. But it is so thoroughly contrary to his personality, which seeks to connect and to harmonize instead of to master, that he shies away from the inherent hubris. The Absolute is not a continuation of the I; an I can only "pray" to be approached by it and live to tell. Hölderlin's intellectual intuition is more like the experience of the mystic who after a brief moment of ecstasy is cast into the dark night of purification, instead of rejoicing in the power and enlightenment of the idealistic I. But as is the case for all darkness and suffering, it is merely a stage of the great process of approach between Being and consciousness, between unity and individuality, Hölderlin believes. At the end of time, all human beings will intuit the Father and understand their own specific role in the historical process and Being will have gained full consciousness, but such an intuition is not to be put into a philosophical system. "Do you seriously believe the ideal of knowing could be presented at any point in time in any kind of system?" he writes as if addressing Schelling. "I rather believe that a human being needs for his knowing as for his acting an infinite progress, unlimited time."[149] Intellectual intuition is the poet's or the mystic's vision of the completion of

[148] SW 1, 177.
[149] StA IV, 213.

human life and the idea of infinite progress and indefinite approach curbs human hubris.

Hölderlin has been called a revolutionary, a brain researcher, and a madman in different studies.[150] Never has any serious study been done on his possible mysticism, to my knowledge. Beiser merely mentions the term in connection with Hölderlin, but relates his philosophy to the Platonic powers of intuitive reason, not to any kind of Christian religiosity.[151] Others have connected him with the pietistic tradition of his youth, as we have seen.[152] This would be an interesting topic for further research, but it is beyond the scope of the present one. In any case, it should be realized that the fear of being ridiculed as a mystic is enormous around 1800, as it is in contemporary philosophical and theological circles, and perhaps always has been. Both Kant and Fichte abhor it. Fichte calls it, "the production of an Unknown and Incomprehensible, by means of unrestrained imagination." He seems to echo Kant when ridiculing "bold and adventurous thoughts [that] make their appearance in our minds without we ourselves being called on to think at all." Sarcastically, he accuses his young students who believe that by these supernatural insights

> study is changed into the most pleasant business in the world. And then, above all, the glorious results! – when scarcely released from school, or even while still there, to confront the most approved men in the land with brilliant thoughts.[153]

Hölderlin studies with Fichte in Jena but flees after several months, as we have seen. The reason is unclear. It has been said that his adoration of Schiller feeds his own sense of inferiority and paralyzes his poetical efforts. Does he perhaps (also) try to escape Fichte's influence? The hyperactivity of the latter's (philosophical) I is utterly contrary to Hölderlin's Being, and its solipsism goes against Hölderlin's openness

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[150] See Bertaux 1980, Linke 2005, Weineck 2002, respectively.

[151] The Absolute "is identified with the *logos* or *telos*, the archetype, idea, or form that governs all things.... To be sure, Hölderlin... [was] critical of the powers of a *discursive* reason; but, true to the Platonic tradition, [he] clung all the more firmly to the powers of an *intuitive* reason." Hence, his use of the term intellectual intuition, "which [he] identified with aesthetic feeling or perception." He concludes that Hölderlin's metaphysics "should not be seen in terms of the religious mysticism characteristic of the Protestant tradition" (Beiser 2002, 354f.).

[152] See 4.8.

[153] GA I, 8, 283; 293f.

for all of creation. Hölderlin stops pursuing a career in philosophy because philosophical reflection turns out to be contrary to his (religious) urge. Philosophy claims the utmost of explicit consciousness, of discursive reasoning. It attempts to think its object as sharply as possible: it analyzes, lays open, and pulls apart. Thereby it objectifies. Hölderlin not only sets out to think unity; he wants to live it. However, the philosopher cannot allow himself to merge with his object. Since thinking opposes unity, he soon turns away from an enterprise that can only fail in his eyes. There must be ways from human being to Being, from the I-sayer to God, but Hölderlin doubts whether a philosophical system with intellectual intuition as its core will ever be it. His fellow *Stiftler* seems to prove him right.

The questions, the answers, and the *aporias* surrounding intellectual intuition form the core of the problematic of German idealism. What is this mysterious human ability? Is it an intuition of me as me, a pre-reflective awareness that I am, that I act; is it self-consciousness? Is it an intuition of the Absolute, the Divine? Or is this one and the same thing, after all? Is my me-ness something absolute, divine even? The inexplicable and wonderful ability to say 'I' makes us into beings of transcendence. We transcend the physical, we transcend our own activities. We are always one step ahead of all we think and do, or rather above. We are always hovering above ourselves, it seems. We can apparently observe ourselves in the act of living, and then again in the act of observing. *Ad infinitum*. Some believe that makes us divine; others believe that our very acts and thoughts prove the exact opposite: we are not divine but lowly and sometimes evil earthlings. Or is earth not opposed to the Divine? And are we to realize heaven on earth by the very transcendence that we are? The advocates of intellectual intuition somehow refuse to accept dualism as the ultimate. No absolute divide exists between heaven and earth, between the subject and the things of the world, between the I and the Absolute, between me and God. They get into philosophical trouble, they sometimes get carried away by an unholy hubris, and they never manage to prove the philosophical soundness of their intuition of the Absolute. But they refuse to let God disappear into the Great (Kantian) Unknown. And, by God, how hard they try! The beauty of the theme of intellectual intuition is not the philosophical outcome as much as the desire of all metaphysics to connect God and earth while doing justice to the singularity of both.

In the mid 18th century, Kant has erected a border fence and has forbidden all self-respecting philosophers to trespass. But his "*sapere aude*" at the same time whets the appetites of adventurers who feel challenged to find out for themselves. This inevitably leads to illegal border crossings on a large scale. The young explorers get themselves into serious trouble in unknown territory. Fichte never quite dares to trespass and ends up straddling the Kantian fence, which makes for an awkward position. Schelling refuses to admit that he gets lost "on the other side" and keeps walking in circles. Hölderlin crosses the Kantian line, sees more than he can recount, and loses his mind. He cannot stay and he cannot leave and spends the rest of his life in the shadows of no-man's-land.

We will now leave this era of attempts at connecting the I with the Absolute, at thinking "me and God" in precisely that order. What remains two centuries later is Kant's strong argument why trespassing is an illegal pastime, Schelling's and Fichte's occasional glimpses of alien territory, and Hölderlin's longing for his Homeland. Contemporary philosophy mostly seems to have lost interest in this *terra incognita* altogether. Metaphysics in general is considered too troublesome, vague, and speculative in the modern, negative sense of the word. The Kantian border fence has been resurrected (a risky term in philosophical circles), fortified, and supplied with clear signs "no philosophers allowed." What lies beyond is supposedly the land of the Church and its believers. Only theologians venture abroad occasionally thereby either trying their utmost to keep one foot on solid academic soil or gambling away their academic reputation. Nonetheless, I would like to make an idealistic, or rather romantic, plea for venturing beyond simply because people do not thrive when imprisoned by any kind of fence. Instead of claiming the land as ours, we could just visit and bring back stories of what we have seen and heard.

In the next chapter, we will look at two respected scholars, two thinkers from the 20th century who are well acquainted with the inventor of the fence, the idealistic explorers, and their critics of later times. Dieter Henrich, the philosopher, we have met in the first chapter and Karl Rahner, the theologian, will be introduced. The reason we need both is that the Kantian fence not only served to outlaw theology as a scientific discipline; it also put a huge divide between philosophy and theology as academic disciplines. When studying Henrich's theory of the unitary ground, we will see how he has partially ignored the

Kantian warning. He maintains that there is indeed land on the other side. With this, he refutes Kant who says that we can neither confirm nor deny its existence within theoretical limits. Henrich is certain that within the limits of philosophy we may indeed conclude that this foreign land exists. However, its landscape, its traditions, and its laws are a matter of belief. Karl Rahner comes to similar philosophical conclusions. He also maintains that the other land exists. The reason that we know about it is that we hear someone calling out from the other side of the fence. As a Catholic theologian, he believes that we can turn to the Christian tradition to understand what is being said. Let us now step into 20th century metaphysics.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ABSOLUTE GROUND VERSUS GOD

Andrew Bowie writes about German idealism and its concept of the Absolute,

> The Absolute need not be thought of as some strange mystical entity: it is initially just the necessary correlate of the relative status of anything that can be explained causally.[1]

We normally think of the world as a collection of individual things in a causal (or other) configuration, but this conception becomes problematic when we try to think the world or the universe as a whole, as all there is. The causal configuration is not capable of explaining its own existence since this would lead to an infinite regress of causes. Everything that belongs to this configuration is relative. Hence, it takes an Absolute as correlate. Thinking an Absolute, the Unconditioned [*das Unbedingte*], is the "natural" result of trying to understand the totality of the world or universe, including ourselves as knowing subjects. For Bowie the Absolute appears to be no more than a logical counterpart of our natural ontology, a thought construction without reality or content.

Selbstbewusstsein und spekulatives Denken [*Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thinking*], one of Henrich's metaphysical texts, ends with the sentence:

> In a time that either expects theoretical redemption from progressive science and increasingly subtle conceptual analysis, or seeks final satisfaction and appeasement in abstinence from theory, the Kantian imperative '*sapere aude!*' must include emphatically the imperative '*speculari aude!*' – Have the courage to think beyond your world in order to understand it and also yourself in it![2]

This appeal to "think beyond your world" expresses an existential need to understand one's own obscure existence in a world that is not self-

[1] Bowie 1994, 4.
[2] Henrich 1982a, 181. For the English translation, see Henrich 1997a.

explanatory. This "beyond" seems more than the mere logical correlate to the relativeness of this world that Bowie refers to as Absolute. In addition, Henrich rejects the divide between contemporary alternatives: scientific and theoretical thinking versus an attitude that finds its peace in irrationality, a life without theory, blind faith. Then again, Henrich observes that it could be the case that philosophy is unable to give the answers itself so that its task would be no more than to untangle the thoughts, to test the possible grounds in order to understand the situation of people who are faced with such questions in greater depth, but not to decide about them.[3] Metaphysics has become a taboo in contemporary philosophy.

As a term first applied to the works of Aristotle about a *prima philosophia*, it is an old philosophical discipline. However, the Kantian insight that it is unable to provide reliable *knowledge* concerning God has had a huge impact on modern philosophy. Initially, a new generation of philosophers refuses to give in. This gives rise to the type of speculative thinking that links (self-)consciousness with an absolute, transcendent ground in German idealism. Exactly this combination of subjectivity and metaphysics is rejected several decades later. Self-consciousness as a philosophical principle is viewed as a foundationalist project that is no longer considered viable. Ludwig Heyde writes,

> From the second half of the nineteenth century onward philosophy teems with 'farewell speeches.' The most spectacular must be Nietzsche's message of the death of God…There is Marx' announcement of the end of speculative thinking…With much pathos the members of the *Wiener Kreis* stand up for a radical positivism with their manifest *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*…The fake questions of metaphysics and theology should be exposed once and for all.[4]

Philosophy and theology are pulled apart. Philosophy is the domain of reason and theology is concerned with the realm of faith. Metaphysics as the discipline where the two overlap seems to have lost its right to exist. In the second half of the 20th century, idealistic metaphysics is not only disqualified as unscientific and irrelevant but unmasked as an expression of power-hunger that has turned out to be disastrous in history as well.

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[3] See Henrich 1999, 75.
[4] Heyde 2000, 11f.

Obviously, such metaphysics becomes an even more difficult subject towards the end of the second millennium in which (neuro-)scientific research and its mostly naturalistic explanations are taken very seriously. The rise of the natural sciences and the increased importance of technology have caused a major shift in our self-understanding. The uncovering of our enormously complex brain has seduced many a philosopher to seek the wonders of our self-conscious existence solely in grey matter. The I has been naturalized and can therefore no longer function as a gateway to God; there is nothing beyond physics. The God of (monotheistic) religion has become a matter of faith arising, as far as many naturalists are concerned, from ill-informed complex brain tissue in the final stages of a predominantly Christian, cultural context.

In such a context, the two authors discussed in this chapter, Dieter Henrich (*1927) and Karl Rahner (1904–1984), start their careers. Nonetheless, both choose to make metaphysics the core of their professional life. Both have learned from the mistakes *and* the achievements of the two centuries of philosophy that precede their own work. However, they take separate roads.

Henrich develops a philosophy of subjectivity that logically leads him to assume a unitary ground of all subjectivity, a ground that is beyond the physical. All through the 20th century criticism of a philosophy of subjectivity, Henrich sticks to his conviction that the I is the point of access to what lies beyond physics even when all we can say is *that* it is and not *what* it is. That German idealism has led to disasters is not the consequence of this point of departure but of its attempts to control the Absolute by means of a supposedly fully transparent and powerful I, the master of its own origins, in Henrich's view. Actually, the exact opposite is true: the I is grounded in obscurity so totally beyond its own control that it gives rise to anxiety about its ability to preserve itself as well as gratitude for consciousness received (from where, from whom?).

Whereas the metaphysical is an absolute, unknowable, and I-less ground for Henrich, Karl Rahner develops a metaphysical anthropology in which the ground of I-hood is God as holy mystery. He has been called "one of [the Church's] most loyal sons" and "the dominant theological voice of the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century" whose work expresses the spirit of *aggiornamento* of the Second

Vatican Council.[5] Nevertheless, his creative affirmation of tradition in his early years is not altogether uncontested. His first work *Geist in Welt* (1939) is a daring interpretation of Thomas Aquinas based on the (Kantian) work of Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944). It is to be his Ph.D. dissertation, but it is rejected by his supervisor Martin Honecker.[6] This never really discourages him. His concern for the questions and doubts of his contemporaries concerning the Christian faith challenge him to search for intellectually acceptable foundations. Rahner says of his own career,

> I think that ultimately my theological work was really not motivated by scholarship and erudition as such, but by pastoral concerns… [Aside from my research into the history of dogma] I have always chosen, and in fact had to choose, tasks and themes that somehow dealt with… the questions of our day.[7]

He is never afraid to take the philosophical achievements and conclusions of his era seriously and attempts to integrate them in his theology. This automatically leads him towards a metaphysics that has the modern emphasis on subjectivity as its starting-point, just like Henrich. And even if his work is less explicitly based on the successes and the failures of German idealism, he has a thorough knowledge of the philosophy of Kant and his young, rebellious followers.

Hence, two (predominantly) 20th century thinkers who both venture "beyond physics" and believe that human existence needs this *meta* to thrive are the subject of this chapter. Both have theories about human subjectivity and a unitary ground from which it arises that connect them with the type of thinking that originates in German idealism. One, Henrich, searches his answers within the realm of philosophy; the other, Rahner, does not hesitate to connect his metaphysical anthropology with theological concepts. Henrich appears to be trapped in a world of contradictions, like many of us who live and think in this still young 21st century. On the one hand, we seem afraid of being banned from the world of science, unmasked as mere believers. On the other hand, we feel the need to fill this scientific world with meaning that cannot be provided within the domain of these sciences.

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[5] Krauss 1985, 1; Marmion and Hines 2005, 1.

[6] See Rahner *Sämtliche Werke, Band 2* (1996) for the German original and Rahner 1968 for the English version, *Spirit in the World*.

[7] Rahner 1985, 22.

Rahner is at home in his world of Christian thinking and faith but feels compelled to leave the comfort of what he fears will become an island of believers, "a self-enclosed Catholic ghetto," instead of the universality that Catholicism should stand for.[8]

In that respect, both are illustrative of our modern problematic: we have to choose on which side of the Kantian fence we stand. Are we to choose philosophy and respect the Kantian limits or theology and accept that what we are talking about is beyond the scientific realm, a matter of faith only? We will first follow the thoughts of the philosopher who maintains that knowing about ourselves means that we have to acknowledge that not all is explained by the physical aspects of our existence. Subsequently, we will study the theologian who is much less hesitant to speak from a religious tradition but who also realizes that the naturalness of this type of thinking has disappeared in the course of the 20th century.

6.1. Henrich's Metaphysics

All through his career, Henrich has defended his modification of the monistic view of the Absolute as it was developed by the philosophers of German idealism. Even if their ambition to develop an all-encompassing theory may have failed, it gives openings that form the basis for Henrich's speculative thinking. The type of metaphysics that he proposes endeavors to find an interpretation of the world and of I-hood that gives us insights into the meaning of our lives, and it tries to phrase thoughts about the relationship between the contingent and the Absolute. Metaphysics was and still is the effort that seeks to find an agreement between a totality that is relative to nothing, insofar absolute, and the human tendency towards self-explanation, in his view. He thinks we might need to stop using the term "metaphysics" and speak of "ultimate thoughts" [*letzte Gedanken*] or "thoughts of closure" [*Abschlussgedanken*] instead. These thoughts are "ultimate" because they provide an overall view of someone's life. They place a personal biography in a larger perspective and claim to say something about the truth of human existence. They enable a person to bring her life to a "closure," to prevent this life from evaporating into

[8] Ibid., 56f.

meaninglessness. This type of thought goes beyond everyday insights as well as scientific knowledge and in that sense point beyond (*meta*) the physical. Nonetheless, they need not be religious in the traditional sense.[9]

Henrich fully accepts Kant's criticism of the rationalist metaphysical tradition. In his view, ultimate thoughts are regulative ideas in the Kantian sense of postulates and projections of reason that have a practical rather than theoretical ultimate justification.[10] Contrary to the natural sciences, epistemic certainty cannot be achieved in the realm of transcendental argumentation and "ideas" in the Kantian sense. Ever since Kant wrote his *Critiques*, philosophers have been aware of the fact that provable answers to questions concerning God and our own being do not exist, Henrich points out in an essay *Warum Metaphysik?* [*Why Metaphysics?*].[11] However, in his ethics Kant himself argues that provability is not a sufficient criterion for reasonable conviction [*vernünftige Annehmbarkeit*].[12] In an attempt to develop a form of speculative philosophy that has contemporary validity and relevance, Henrich proposes a searching and explorative instead of founding approach.

All past excesses notwithstanding, Henrich refuses to see the historical development of speculative thinking as proof of its impossibility. The challenge is to find a type of speculative philosophy that is not branded by the overconfidence of modernity but does not shy away from thoughts that can support and surround the type of metaphysical questions that all people inevitably encounter when confronted with pain, suffering, and the perceived complexity of earthly existence. He thinks that it might be best to view the idealist program of foundation as a rather clumsy answer to the stimulus that makes people philosophize: the need for orientation of conscious life by ultimate thoughts about a totality that supports (self-)conscious life.[13] Henrich's plea for speculative thinking is influenced by both Kantian philosophy and naturalism. He honors a strict divide between philosophy and theology, but at the same time, he feels assaulted by the reductive, naturalistic rejection of anything beyond the physical. He considers it the

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[9] See Henrich 1999, 195.

[10] Practical in this context is more than strictly moral as is the Kantian connotation. Even though moral implications are part of conscious life for Henrich, practical here has the more general meaning of being linked to the everyday experience of life.

[11] See Henrich 1999, 111.

[12] See Henrich 1988.

[13] See Henrich 1999, 95–97.

duty of philosophers to provide people with a concept of consciousness since such a concept is indispensable for consciousness to realize an existence in freedom.[14]

As Freundlieb puts it,

> Henrich's philosophy is an attempt to remind us that there may be more to reality than what most contemporary philosophy and the modern sciences consider to be real.[15]

His concept of the Absolute opens perspectives for religious interpretations, but he seems to refuse to draw such conclusions explicitly. From time to time, he expresses sympathy for Eastern religions without ever truly elaborating. He claims that his philosophy is preferable to theology because it does not deny the legitimacy of both aspects of the *Grundverhältnis* whereas the major religions tend to absolutize just one.[16] He calls Western religions "codex-religions" that can no longer convince because they contradict a modern conception of subjectivity. Monotheistic religions in general and Christianity in particular have arisen in defiance of philosophy contrary to Buddhism, he asserts.[17] Nevertheless, in an essay called *Eine philosophische Begründung für die Rede von Gott in der Moderne? Sechzehn Thesen* [*A Philosophical Motivation for God-Talk in Modernity? Sixteen Theses*] Henrich says, "Yes. As a philosopher I want to speak about God... God-talk of which I think that it can be motivated."[18]

Let us now turn to Henrich's metaphysical solution to the obscurity of our existence in the thought of an absolute, a truly non-finite, ground from which the world enfolds but that is not separate from the world.

6.1.1. *An Absolute and Obscure Ground*

Even though it seems to be the starting-point for all our knowledge, the I is an enigma for itself, is the conclusion of Henrich's theory of self-consciousness. The major reason for the precarious position we find ourselves in is the incompatibility of the different ontologies of

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[14] See Henrich 1982b, 106.

[15] Freundlieb 2003, viii.

[16] For *Grundverhältnis* see 1.3.3. Henrich's explanation for the variety of religions will be discussed in 6.1.3.1.

[17] Henrich 1999, 204.

[18] Henrich 2005, 130.

our existence. Conscious life unfolds within the inevitable tension of being aware of the uniqueness of our I-perspective and self-relativization. Kant has not succeeded in reconciling the dualism of our existence as both *noumenon* and *phenomenon*, or subject and person in Henrich's terms. It is impossible to dispose of the subject-aspect because it is a prerequisite for knowledge of the world. Neither can we eliminate the person-aspect since it articulates the experience of being *in* the world. Our thinking about what we really know about ourselves leads us beyond ourselves towards a whole that surpasses us as well as enables our life, in Henrich's view.[19]

Understanding subjectivity, its ground, and the whole to which it belongs asks for an extrapolating kind of thinking since these are concepts that go beyond the objectivities of the world of knowledge. This extrapolation goes in two directions: first, the subject must go back beyond itself to its ground. Secondly, since the world appears as a whole opposed to a subject, a totality must be thought in which subjectivity is included. Hence, an extrapolation is necessary beyond the regular form of the world. These two extrapolations should somehow be combined. The ground of subjectivity and the whole of subjects, the way in which subjects are individuals and the totality in which they co-exist, need to be integrated in one single thought construction. This is necessarily a postulating kind of thinking since it cannot prove its truth. To think a ground that is capable of producing self-determining subjects surpasses regular knowledge. It can only demonstrate its consistency and acceptability as opposed to the alternatives, in Henrich's view.[20]

The idea of a ground only seems to make sense within a monistic conception of the world, a world that is differentiated within itself, but whose differentiation is ultimately seen as part of a unitary whole. Henrich distinguishes three types of monism:

1. Methodological monism is the program to deduce at least the major characteristics of everything that can be known from one single basic principle [*Grundsatz*]. Carl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1825), Fichte's predecessor in Jena from 1788 to 1794, was the first to propose this methodological approach. He took the structure of the

[19] See Henrich 2007, 26.
[20] See Henrich 2007, 260.

representation [*Vorstellung*] to be the basic principle, as we have seen. Henrich also views Fichte's absolute I as such a principle.

2. Metaphysical monism asserts that everything real can be understood as a modification of one single self-sufficient reality that is beyond human powers of cognition. Hölderlin and Henrich himself both belong to this category, the latter claims.
3. Ontological monism is the attempt to develop a speculative knowledge that does more than just present a metaphysical monism in the way of the traditional *via negativa*: it develops concepts that have the status of "knowledge." Hegel is a proponent of this type of monism, and this is also the early Schelling's project.[21]

Hence, in Henrich's metaphysical monism "everything real can be understood as a modification of one single self-sufficient reality." Somehow our point of departure in life, the certainty of the "I am," is entwined with a total lack of clarity about who I really am and where the certainty *that* I am comes from. Henrich refers to the inability to understand the own self as the darkness or obscurity [*Dunkelheit*] of the human condition that is confirmed and reinforced through all possible attempts at explication.[22]

Such a metaphysics of the obscurity surrounding human subjectivity has consequences. First, it no longer implies the I's self-power and self-presence. Hence, the more important theoretical arguments against subject philosophies disappear, in Henrich's view. Secondly, from this incomprehension and lack of control of conscious life over its origins, its development, and its preservation the need for a self-interpretation arises. Without such a self-description, a factual continuity of conscious life may be possible but none founded in understanding, Henrich argues. Despite conflicting ideas about uniqueness and self-relativization that can exist in one and the same person, we experience the I as a unity and the discrepancies as something we need to overcome. Therefore, a self-interpretation should have the capacity to surpass both poles of self-conscious life without ignoring or abandoning this inherent tension.

Supposing an underlying unitary ground can fulfill these conditions. Such a ground of self-consciousness cannot be thought separate from

[21] See Henrich 2003, 127–139.
[22] See Henrich 1982a, 160–163.

the subject. It is an internal enabling of the subject's self-activity, not a hidden cause that merely provokes the illusion of self-determination. It must somehow be of such kind that it can enable spontaneity instead. This ground is not an individual cause for each subject, and it is not an (absolute) I. It is rather the communal ground of all subjects, present in all, and opening the possibility of a being-with [*Mitsein*] that also enables this subjectivity to enhance itself. This ground should not be viewed as something that brings about I-hood at a certain point (in time), and subsequently gives rise to a self-generating act. It is rather a continuously enabling ground.[23]

At this point, the question may arise what this ground really is. What do we call it; how and especially why does it give rise to subjects? Henrich has consistently refused to go past the limits of philosophical reasoning in order to provide content for this ground but has struggled within those limits. At times, for example in an earlier work that was discussed in the first chapter, he seems to suggest that the ground of self-consciousness is consciousness, a field or a dimension in which an I becomes active.[24] This consciousness seems to be I-less and pre-existent. "If one asks how such consciousness is to be understood, it is no longer 'obvious' that it belongs to an I, and hence is basically self-consciousness."[25] Then again, he neutralizes this sort of claims by saying, "It is probably even necessary to assume that consciousness always makes its first appearance in an egological orientation."[26]

Whether self-consciousness is dependent upon a pre-existent dimension called consciousness or the two arise equi-primordially from another unknowable ground is not really the issue. In the course of his career, Henrich seems to become more firmly convinced that the basis of all our knowledge about ourselves and the world cannot be understood within the boundaries of this same knowledge. He agrees that Kant's *Critiques* have closed off the possibility of returning to the old metaphysics that claims knowledge about the precise nature of the Absolute. A ground of self-consciousness, no matter how we interpret it, can only be thought as a hypothesis that can never be turned into demonstrated knowledge.

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[23] See Henrich 1999, 20–23.
[24] Henrich 1971. See 1.3.4.
[25] Ibid., 6.
[26] Ibid., 20.

Therefore, he suggests that we start from what he calls our primary rationality, our basic understanding of the world that guides conscious life since a type of "transcendence that does not arise from the extrapolation of worldly terms into absolutes can only be conceived in relation to what constitutes conscious life."[27] Philosophy does not open the road to an abstract wisdom separate from the world. However, a philosophy of subjectivity uncovers the problem that objective knowledge of the world and its valid rules of configuration cannot solve the enigma of the ground of that subjectivity. Therefore, the fact of our subjectivity urges us, who (also) belong to the physical world and its laws, to keep the dimension open of a type of thinking that goes beyond facts and intelligent explanations of the world toward a metaphysical.[28] This "beyond" is obscurity, in Henrich's view.

Henrich has always been aware of the monistic view of naturalism or materialism as a philosophical alternative. Both he and the naturalistic philosopher assume a single ground to all that is, but in the case of the latter, this ground is matter. Henrich repeatedly asserts that both types of explanation are just interpretations that cannot be proven. Nonetheless, he has a strong preference for a metaphysics of transcendence for philosophical reasons, but especially from an existential point of view. To start with the latter. The truth of metaphysics can only be found in key experiences of conscious life, such as: feeling supported, preserved, and confirmed by an inner ground; hearing an appeal in the infinite freedom of conscience; and experiencing a confirmation of meaning in the encounter with other conscious life. Since his philosophy takes the ground of the world order to be present in every individual, it therefore endows every conscious life with absolute meaning, whereas naturalism leads to self-interpretations that rob life of ultimate meaning, according to Henrich.

As for the philosophical arguments against naturalism, Henrich observes that debates over the past decennia have shown that philosophical theories based in physical data are unable to design an anthropology that can accommodate subjectivity. A coherent theory based on only the material aspect of life inevitably reduces the ontological multiplicity of human existence. An interpretation of the world that

[27] Henrich 1999, 37.
[28] See Henrich 2007, 90.

depends upon prior destruction of all that has to do with subjectivity can neither claim to be complete nor scientific. Self-consciousness as the familiarity that I have with my existence as mine, my me-ness, cannot be explained from empirical facts and laws of nature. Subjectivity cannot be trapped in the laws of the natural sciences and elicits the postulation of a non-physical ground.

In addition, the natural sciences are unable to pass judgment on the origination of conscious life as we know it or on any kind of purpose in evolution. Upon close inspection even naturalistic theories often presuppose a principle that precedes matter and that explains the existence and laws of conscious life. In fact, Henrich argues, naturalism is a veiled attempt to implicitly come to a self-interpretation, thereby expressing the urge of the explicitly denied self-consciousness. The thought of a principle in nature that steers evolution into conscious life gives this life a perspective of a certain kind of salvation and direction. What these philosophies call "nature" has been enriched with concepts that are beyond the domain of the natural sciences since material nature as it presents itself to our senses can never be self-explanatory. That it exists at all, and that laws are active under specific conditions can only be accepted as mere facts when it is impossible or illegitimate to think beyond what can be demonstrated by experience and theoretical analysis.[29]

Henrich's metaphysical theory attempts to save the human being from being nothing more than a trick of nature. This brings us to an issue that is closely related and that naturalism seems unable to deal with: freedom. Its assumption still forms the backbone of Western societies even though it can hardly be supported by popular contemporary naturalistic theories. Let us see how Henrich proposes to integrate freedom and subjectivity in a modern metaphysics of a unitary ground.

6.1.2. *All-Unity and Freedom*

In Henrich's classification, his is a metaphysical monism in which "one single self-sufficient reality that is beyond human powers of cognition" exists and "everything real can be understood as its modification," it was said. It is obvious that also in such a description of the Absolute,

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[29] See Henrich 1999, 33f.

plurality and individuality need to be protected from disappearing altogether for at least two reasons. First, it may be asserted that everything in the world is grounded in unity, but it is obviously not as unity that we experience the world, as Henrich emphasizes repeatedly. Secondly, in our daily conscious life we do not experience ourselves as mere modifications of an underlying reality. We value our individuality and our freedom to act. We may not be fully in control, but we do not experience ourselves as mere puppets that play a role in a script that is directed by an external preceding ground or merely the result of natural laws.

Therefore, it seems necessary that an explicit distinction be made in the discussion between a unitary ground and our daily reality of free individuality. Both individual independence and the possibility of unity are characteristic for human conscious life. Hence, the being-with [*Mitsein*] of subjects cannot be an unquestioned unity. Adult life is about the hope to recover a being-with in which the initial security of the unity of life is merged with the freedom of being an I, Henrich asserts.[30] Therefore, a term is needed that makes room for both unity and the experienced individuality and plurality in the world. All-Unity [*All-Einheit*] manages to combine both aspects of this dual perspective. It somehow integrates the subject and a unitary ground and the world form and the individual in our thinking. It thinks individuals in their independence within a whole in relation to which individual subjects are not originally independent.[31]

A modern philosophy of All-Unity, he argues, must include at least the following elements:

1. All of differentiated reality must be thought as ultimately belonging to one unity.
2. There should be no unbridgeable divide between finite, individualized life and its ground.
3. Individual beings are viewed as not *ultimately* isolated from each other.
4. The unitary ground is present in all that is, and as a result the finite tends towards infinity and the Infinite tends to express itself in finite beings.

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[30] Henrich 2007, 242f.
[31] See Henrich 2007, 265.

Henrich warns us that the thinkers of German idealism have shown how easily the subject that arises from such a concept of All-Unity somehow ends up losing its contingency. The I should never be thought as an Absolute, I's remain world-things. Neither should the individual I be viewed as striving to disappear in the infinity of this ground because it is exactly this ground that enables it to be independent. The radical dependence of the individual and its original independence must be thought together.

In order to accomplish this, Henrich reasons as follows. If this all-unitary ground is that in which all difference exists, it must be self-differentiation. If the many are enclosed in the All-Unity, they basically possess the same form. It follows that the many must also possess this property of self-differentiation. Since the many clearly differ from the One, in which they are enclosed, in their finiteness, their self-differentiation takes a different form because in their self-differentiation they must establish and secure their difference with other individuals. Hence, the individuality of the finite is constituted by processes of inner differentiation. Both poles of the *Grundverhältnis*, subject and person, follow this same form of continuously differentiating while remaining a unity: subjects in the unity of their self-consciousness in respect to all that is given in the world and persons in their identity in being in the world. Thus, both subjectivity and personhood can arise from an original unity and develop into finite, independent individuality.[32]

Henrich's theory of All-Unity is not just the solution to a philosophical riddle. If individuals gain the insight that they belong to an all-encompassing whole this can have consequences for the way they lead their lives, he believes. In this, he follows Hölderlin who also calls the highest ground of all that is the ideal. In a letter to his brother, Hölderlin denies that Being should be seen as a basic principle [*Grundsatz*] of philosophy but rather as the lost unity that conscious life must aim to recover.[33] Such a philosophy of All-Unity is an appeal to constitute peace and harmony in the here and now. That makes it more than a mere theory and might be an explanation for the long history of monistic philosophies that originate in Antiquity but receive renewed

[32] See Henrich 2007, 270.
[33] See StA VI, 208.

attention in the turbulent times of the French Revolution and German idealism. All-Unity, *All-Einheit, Hen kai Pan*, is the testimony to a need of conscious life to understand itself and the world as based in an ultimate unity instead of in everlasting dualism and antagonism.

Henrich's metaphysics is largely based on Hölderlin's as has become clear in his major work *Der Grund im Bewusstsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794–1795)* [*The Ground of Consciousness. Studies of Hölderlin's thinking (1794–1795)*].[34] The date in the title is of major importance here. Henrich's research is based on the time span in which Hölderlin writes his only explicitly philosophical prose on general metaphysics: *Judgment and Being* and several letters to Hegel among others. Unfortunately, Henrich has not extended his research to the (poetical) work written in the five to ten years following Hölderlin's stay in Jena. As was shown in Chapter 4, Hölderlin develops a view of All-Unity in the course of his poetry that is much more complete (and theologically oriented) than his Jena-work. In his later work, Hölderlin makes a clear distinction between three stages of reality: 1. the amorphous unity of the origin and ground of (self-)consciousness, Being [*Seyn*], that cannot distinguish itself from Nothing because it is unconscious; 2. the world as we know it that is characterized by the isolation of individuals and the conflicting tendencies of longing for unity and fearing the loss of self that would result from true unity; 3. the situation at the end of history in which individuality and the inherently conflicting tendencies of consciousness will be harmoniously combined with unity. Hölderlin is convinced that history will eventually lead to this harmonious state of All-Unity in which the unconscious ground merges with the consciousness of individuals. Of this ideal state, we can catch glimpses in the present. In Henrich's philosophy, (All-)unity is a mere postulate, a thought construction, nothing to be experienced here and now. Thereby he has overlooked the (eschatological) hope in Hölderlin's thinking. We will return to this subject in the final chapter. Right now, it is time to turn to a related concept that Henrich repeatedly mentions in his earlier work and has discussed somewhat more extensively recently: freedom.[35]

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[34] Henrich 1992a.
[35] In: Henrich 2007.

Freedom is of major importance in this context. If a unitary ground is assumed that enables all that is and remains present in all beings, it needs to be explained how and in how far individuals can be the master of their own self-differentiation. Even when his most recent work is not a comprehensive study on this subject, Henrich discusses certain aspects of freedom that are interesting. First, he draws some parallels between subjectivity and freedom. He remarks that we can observe the symptoms of free actions but never the actual execution of freedom. Therefore, if freedom is real, it can only be known "inside." A free act cannot be understood objectively by definition. Were it to fit in a certain system and to be explainable and predictable by laws, it would no longer be a free act. Both characteristics it has in common with subjectivity.[36] Indeed, freedom is closely connected with the conscious achievements of subjectivity. Only persons who know of themselves can be free. Free choice implies that a conscious subject can think of alternatives and that the decision for one of these does not come about by external or internal coercion (the latter in the case of addiction, for example). Being able to say 'I' and to be free go hand in hand. This type of reasoning is in line with the German idealists' attempts to connect the Kantian view of freedom with the noumenal aspect of being an I.

Secondly, Henrich remarks that human freedom is self-determination.[37] Philosophical freedom focuses on the actions of people. It assumes the possibility to choose between different goals and the ability to distance oneself from one's own actions and thus avoid being the pawn of one's impulses. It takes a certain reflection about the appropriate means to reach a certain goal. Freedom is not a characteristic that realizes itself in each individual action. It rather takes form in a process that grounds a *type* of actions. Freedom is not about the decision to do this or that whenever I feel the impulse. It is rather a way to appropriate a specific way of acting and make this part of my perspective on life. It is about determining who I am.

This description of freedom links it closely to Henrich's views of conscious life. Hence, he feels the need to defend it against the determinism of naturalistic philosophies. It is in this context that his emphasis on the so-called consequence principle [*Konsequenzprinzip*] should

[36] Ibid., 283.
[37] Ibid., 330.

be interpreted, in my opinion. The latter principle is concerned with weighing the pull of the different motives involved in a decision. It maintains that all events are triggered as the result of preceding events. This principle constitutes the foundation of the natural sciences. When it is applied to human behavior, the consequence principle concedes that the actor is perhaps capable of acting otherwise but never in the exact same situation. Such a limited concept of freedom, however, does not square with the self-image of people, he rightly asserts. For Henrich, this implies that if a sense of freedom is not declared obsolete, an explanation has to found in which both the consequence principle and freedom can be integrated. He adds that even though the consequence principle is the basis of scientific research, it cannot be proven as universally valid and might not be applicable to all dimensions of life.[38]

When Henrich asserts, that every conception of freedom always has the consequence principle to contend with, it is once again clear that his major opponents are the naturalists. Speculative thinking he consistently calls postulatory: it cannot be proven, nor can it be solved in "an intuitive and quasi-theoretical certainty."[39] With the latter assertion, he explicitly rejects the idealistic attempts at solving the problem of the unknowability of the unitary ground with a form of intuitive knowledge posited with the term intellectual intuition. All-Unity is not the knowable Absolute (I) of the young Schelling, for Henrich, nor is it the mystical experience of Oneness that Hölderlin longs for and seems to find at brief moments. His thoughts on freedom can never become more than mere postulates that are unable to counterbalance the utter conviction of the deterministic truth of naturalism. Henrich's professed monism notwithstanding, the young ones of the Tübinger *Stift* have not succeeded in helping him across the Kantian fence even at the point where Kant himself thought to see an opening. As a philosopher, Henrich dares to speculate in the most basic sense of the word of looking around meticulously, thoroughly, and with circumspection, but he refuses to name what he sees in the process. He insists that obscurity is the only justifiable description of the view. Therefore, when he claims in *Eine philosophische Begründung für die Rede von Gott in der Moderne? Sechzehn Thesen* [*A Philosophical Motivation for*

[38] Ibid., 285–293.
[39] Ibid., 264.

God-Talk in Modernity? Sixteen Theses] that there are certain things that the philosopher can say about God, it might come as a surprise.[40] Let us take a closer look.

6.1.3. *The Philosopher about Religion*

What are the God and the religion that Henrich says he *can* talk about as a philosopher? A distinction needs to be made between the God of monotheistic religions and a metaphysical God first, he asserts. The monotheistic God is personal, which means equipped with reason, will, and commitment to people. Within monotheism, this God is opposed to the world, and faith to reason, which would be unacceptable for the concept of the metaphysical God.[41] In what he considers philosophically acceptable God-talk, the metaphysical God should explain: the unity of the world, its existence that cannot be explained through itself, and its configuration that is subject to laws and that allows a high degree of differentiation and individual life. Henrich sees three ways to conceive of this metaphysical God:

1. As opposed to the finite world, as eternal Being itself versus finite beings who are unable to bring forth their own existence. This concept of God leans towards the monotheistic God and does not have his preference. Elsewhere he writes that he does not find a Creator who causes the genesis of subjectivity out of a creative act philosophically convincing since it presupposes a subject with a type of consciousness that is fundamentally similar to ours and just as obscure concerning its origins.[42]
2. The metaphysical God can also be conceived as an infinite Being that is beyond opposition and therefore Unknowable.
3. The third and final way to view the metaphysical God is as Absolute, therefore inclusive of the world and effective in the life and thinking of people, instead of separated from and opposed to them.[43]

In this overview God, or the Divine, becomes progressively less personal. This last option is for Henrich the only valid way of thinking

[40] Henrich 2005.
[41] See Henrich 2005, 132f.
[42] See Henrich 1999, 64.
[43] See Henrich 2005, 133.

beyond the finite world. The truth of thinking such an Absolute is not to be found in scientific proof. A first step towards legitimate thinking about transcendence can be the experience of our conscious lives that seem so natural and obvious in a daily setting but that remain obscure for us in many ways. As point of departure, the positive key-experiences in this conscious life could serve, such as feelings of support and affirmation by an inner ground, the sense of the infinite freedom of conscience, and meaningful encounters with other conscious lives. Thus, Henrich makes a plea for an ascertainment of the Divine through the positive experiences of life that stand firm against distress [*Not*] and not from basic experiences of guilt, suffering, and fear of death. That Henrich's philosophy yearns for a more optimistic approach is also clear from his remark that the Christian message (the Gospel speaks of Glad tidings, *euangelion*) in the antique world concerned such positive experiences as love and gratitude.[44]

Since the essay provides no further clarification of this obscure ground, we will turn to two other topics in Henrich's philosophy of religion. We will study his interesting views on what he understands to be the most important roots of religion and his explanation for the variety of religions that we encounter in the world in 6.1.3.1. and 6.1.3.2, respectively.

6.1.3.1. *Explanation for the Variety of Religions*

Religions arise from all kinds of feelings and experiences in a human life such as fear (of death), the experiences of failure that accompany human activity, moments of ecstasy and transcendence, and hope, Henrich asserts. He recognizes all of these origins. Nevertheless, he believes that there is a set of three questions that is central to all religions and gives rise to multiple potential answers, according to Henrich: Who am I?; Where do I come from?; Where am I going? These questions and the multitude of answers that have been given in the past, and still are, express the confusion and the enigmas surrounding our own existence. They arise from self-consciousness, possible answers are given within self-consciousness, and those answers have consequences for our view on self-consciousness. Therefore, the most fundamental root of religion is the question 'Who am I?' The obscurity of our subjectivity makes us seek answers beyond our

[44] Ibid., 139.

everyday reality. Because whenever a person understands herself as "an individual thing 'with' subjective life," this immediately provokes questions about the meaning of this subjectivity.[45] Who is this being that can say 'I'? Religions enable a type of behavior in which the relation of subjectivity with its unknowable ground can find expression. Therefore, Henrich calls religions "the major self-interpretations of self-consciousness."[46]

Self-interpretations he defines as "cultivated and ultimate self-descriptions of conscious life in the *Grundverhältnis*."[47] These are not explanations of the value of the *Grundverhältnis* or of what causes it to arise. They are merely the inevitable consequence of being aware of one's own life in the *Grundverhältnis*. Hence every self-interpretation must be in line with our self-understanding as experienced in this *Grundverhältnis*. No distance should be felt between the experiences of (self-)conscious life and the self-interpretation; otherwise the continuation of that self-interpretation is threatened by alienation. This *Grundverhältnis*, however, is characterized by fundamental contradictions, as we have seen in the first chapter. "The immediately familiar conscious life can be analyzed ontologically in various ways," as Henrich puts it.[48] This can automatically lead to a variety of interpretations of life. Therefore, self-interpretations are provisional, subject to misconception, and will not be able to cancel the disparity of the different aspects of the *Grundverhältnis*. This can result in conflicting self-interpretations not only from one individual opposed to another but also in the course of the life of one and the same person.

Since it is hard to live peacefully in a situation of insurmountable contradiction, the need arises to concentrate on one of the two poles of the *Grundverhältnis* and subordinate the other. Religions tend to do this and thus enable people to neutralize the tensions within their self-understanding and soothe the turmoil of life to a certain degree. Furthermore, self-interpretations can be integrated in the original self-perception and cause it to change or realize continuity in preceding variations of that self-perception. Religions are attempts to understand *and* change the human *Grundverhältnis* to the world. Henrich speaks of a basic sense of deliverance,

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[45] Henrich 1982a, 114.
[46] Ibid., 116.
[47] Ibid., 113.
[48] Ibid., 112.

> namely of being liberated to an unambiguous self-orientation, to a well-determined place in an understood totality, and to the end of disquietude that results from the confusion and the obscurity that dominates the natural world.[49]

However, the price that is paid is a measure of neglect of one of the poles of the *Grundverhältnis*.

Henrich argues that from the duality that characterizes the *Grundverhältnis* two major types of religion can be deduced:

1. When the subject-aspect is the center of orientation, it leads to the appeal to transcend life *in* the world and to retreat into the purity of consciousness, a sphere that precedes all individuality. This type of religion is monistic. It views the ultimate fulfillment either in an absolute I or in a hyperindividual and undifferentiated I-less reality. This can subsequently lead to two possibilities: on the one hand, a striving for pure consciousness [*reine Bewusstheit*] with denial of the I and the desire to give up consciousness altogether, on the other.
2. When the person-aspect is viewed as the ultimate orientation, this asks for a surrender of subjectivity. The idea of uniqueness is perceived as vanity, and believers are stimulated to resign to the existing world order. In these religions, the established world order is viewed as just, trustworthy, and thus willed and continuously renewed by a Highest Person. This results in the pluralism of monotheistic religions.

The different types correspond to "Eastern" and "Western" religions respectively.[50]

Every major self-interpretation has developed from and is experienced in the *Grundverhältnis* and seeks to neutralize its innate tensions by subordinating one of its aspects. Thus, it attempts to transcend the *Grundverhältnis* even though the possibility of awareness of this other pole remains. This neglected aspect will always be a source of instability in every religion, Henrich claims. Religions will always be pressured to re-integrate that pole of the *Grundverhältnis* that they try

[49] Ibid., 116.

[50] It is noteworthy that both major types coincide in their renunciation of centering one's life on finite I-hood, even if they approach self-denial from entirely different angles.

to transcend, thereby weakening the clarity of their symbols and provoking a confusion of diverging explanations. Therefore, it is doubtful whether religions in their ultimate aim to transcend the *Grundverhältnis* by extrapolation of one of its poles can ever succeed. Monotheism, which has tried to absolutize the person-aspect of the *Grundverhältnis*, has struggled with monistic influences that tend towards absolutization of the subject-aspect. Hence, it is accompanied by a threat from something it describes as "mysticism." Monistic religions, on the contrary, which emphasize the subject-aspect are threatened by the suspicion that personhood is the essential form of humanity and that individuality is the ultimate reality. If so, then giving up this individuality will merely lead to self-loss and not to deliverance.[51]

Therefore, the contradictory aspects of the *Grundverhältnis* inevitably result in the possibility of different cultures and religions. However, as attempts to transcend the *Grundverhältnis* they are all doomed to fail ultimately. The one-sidedness of their basis makes lasting, self-centered, insular religious traditions impossible in history, if they are to carry any truth in them. The philosophy of religion should avoid treating this plurality of religions as mere fact or peculiarity. Neither should it explain the differences solely in terms of opposites since cultures and religions do not develop in simple reaction to other cultures and religions. For a large part, they have developed independently. Moreover, it is outdated to view the different religions as different stages in the same process of maturation. There is no such thing as linear progress from one religion to the next. It would be more fruitful for philosophers of religion to focus on clarifying the origins of religions as self-interpretations of conscious life instead.

Hence Henrich asserts,

> This leads to the conclusion that the major self-interpretations need philosophy…It alone opens the perspective, if such a perspective exists at all, to combine conscious life and individuality [*Einzelnheit*] not only in confusing thoughts and deep symbols but in a kind of understanding that can last.[52]

Only speculative philosophy is able to transcend the ideas that are unfolded within religions and develop a non-doctrinal type of thinking that starts from the *Grundverhältnis*, in his view. Such a philosophy

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[51] See Henrich 1982a, 118.
[52] Ibid., 119.

can never be a scientific discipline because just as the *Grundverhältnis* springs from an unknowable source, it can only obtain its fullness in a type of closure that cannot be proven within the domain of regular knowledge. Starting-point should be conscious life, its need for self-interpretations, and an approach that is an extrapolation of the way this conscious life is experienced. People want to *lead* their lives instead of viewing them as mere objective processes that happen to them. They cannot give meaning to their lives in an atmosphere of fatalism or arbitrariness. Even if such self-interpretations can never be supported by "hard" evidence, they seek thoughts of closure [*Abschlussgedanken*] that help them think their lives as a coherent whole. In that respect metaphysics is of all times, according to Henrich.[53]

One element to be studied in Henrich's philosophy of religion remains: gratitude. The obscurity of the ground of I-hood, our inability to control and preserve self-consciousness, elicits intense feelings of gratitude for the gift of a life that can succeed. Let us see how Henrich can connect gratitude with an I-less ground of conscious life.

6.1.3.2. *Gratitude as the Basis of Religious Praxis*

The fundamental inability to explain our subjectivity leads to religion and the religious praxis centers around gratitude, in Henrich's view. This results in two questions:

1. Is there a link between the obscurity of self-consciousness and the gratitude that people experience for their lives?
2. Is this gratitude the obsolete remainder of feelings provoked by the conception of the monotheistic all-mighty Creator-god, or is it still viable in the type of metaphysics that he promotes?

These questions, which will be discussed here, are from an essay called *Gedanken zur Dankbarkeit* [*Thoughts on Gratitude*].[54]

In everyday interactions between people where gratitude is involved, there is a benefactor [*Wohltäter*] who opens herself to another conscious life, the receiver of the benevolence [*Wohltat*]. This makes gratitude first and foremost a confirmation of dependence. It presupposes

[53] Ibid., 121.
[54] See Henrich 1999, 152–193.

that both parties are aware of the moral need to enter into close bonds with others. This implies an awareness of the tension as well as the relation between the subject-aspect and the person-aspect of conscious life because both benefactor and receiver of the benevolence realize that they have to carry out their subjectivity in relationships with other subjects.[55] This situation makes Henrich conclude that his insights into conscious life can be linked to his thoughts on gratitude.

In order to explore this possible link, Henrich takes a closer look at the phenomenon itself. A basic characteristic of gratitude is that it is not felt in the familiar immediacy of another person but rather in a movement of turning towards and focusing on a specific other from a distance. We feel gratitude towards a person who is experienced as another. The type of thanks that is directed at other persons or person-like beings Henrich calls communal thankfulness [*kommunaler Dank*]. Feelings of gratitude need not always be directed at other people, however. Thankfulness can go beyond the human interaction of give and take. People can also be thankful for things that did not fall to them because of the actions of other people, such as a turn for the better after times of distress, illness, and mortal danger. Such gratitude Henrich calls contemplative thankfulness [*kontemplativer Dank*]. It is a form of gratitude that "goes beyond the interactive play of give and take."[56] It has nothing to do with feelings of dependence; it is rather an expression of freedom. Even if it could be argued that also this type of thankfulness is often directed at a personal helper, alive or deceased, or a personal power, this need not always be the case, Henrich maintains.

He sees plenty of instances of gratitude that transcend the system of personal interaction. Of these, he gives several examples, such as the deep gratitude that we feel *for* a beloved, for example the gratitude of parents for a child or those situations in which our own life seems to succeed. Feelings of gratitude can even be detached from specific situations and people and become a more general attitude in life.[57] A life that is grateful has grown beyond the conflicts that determine its course and has reached an awareness of a totality in which it participates. When we feel thankful for all that is good in the world, we experience a distance between ourselves and the world as a whole, turn

[55] Ibid., 156ff.
[56] Ibid., 160.
[57] Ibid., 170.

towards this totality, and feel gratitude for our ability to participate in it. In this distancing from and turning back towards the world, the self-relation changes as well. I am no longer immediately present to myself as I was before, but I become aware of all the other subjects that are relative to the whole and thus connected. Such gratitude makes my self-centeredness subside.

This analysis of the social aspects of gratitude can be applied to the religious praxis. To start with communal gratitude: People need each other and acknowledge this by thanking others for their assistance. Likewise, they could view themselves as dependent on an almighty power for support and other services. In view of this power's omnipotence, the dependency is even larger. If thankfulness is understood as communal, then this power has to have characteristics of a person, or a person-like being: God. Moreover, if thanking is understood as a prerequisite for services rendered in the future, it would thus be obvious that prayers of thanks play a major role in religious rituals. However, this would be an explanation for the role of gratitude in the religious praxis that borders on calculation. But even if communal gratitude is not considered to be a purely self-serving act, the interpretation of gratitude as communal results in existential difficulties. Christian theology has the tendency to demand thanks for all that is and happens since it all comes from God and belongs to his world which is the best possible world albeit corrupted by sin, Henrich remarks.[58] This is not the type of gratitude that can be understood from a philosophy of conscious life because it would imply thanks for the suffering and the distress of others as well as our own negative experiences, he claims. In those cases gratitude could only arise in view of the experienced strength to endure and not be directed at the immediate cause of the distress.

Even when Henrich considers basic feelings of thankfulness for the world and one's own life one of the most powerful roots of the religious praxis, he thus rejects the Christian interpretation of gratitude. But if there is no longer room for the personal God of monotheism as the Giver of this life in a modern world, does this mean that gratitude for the gift of one's life has to disappear altogether? Henrich insists that being thankful for life is an important and very real experience

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[58] Henrich refers to Bible verses that speak of this command to be thankful for all that is, such as Eph. 5: 4; 20 and 1 Thess. 5: 18.

of conscious life. At any point in a mature conscious life, we can turn around and look at its course, but especially towards the end, we tend to take stock of this life as a whole. We not only weigh the positive against the negative; we feel gratitude for what has made this life to our own, he asserts. With his concept of contemplative thankfulness that is not directed at a person or a person-like being, Henrich can hold on to feelings of gratitude for life without the recognition of a personal God. If self-consciousness is viewed as something that we are unable to bring about, to control, and to preserve by ourselves but that is not the gift from a personal God, gratitude for this gift can be considered contemplative. Hence, he has disconnected feelings of gratitude concerning the gift of life from a personal Giver. Thus, a modern worldview without a personal God can still include the basic experience of gratitude without contradicting itself. Once again, Henrich emphasizes that in the dimension of metaphysics decisive arguments cannot be provided. These thoughts on gratitude cannot decide whether our thanks should be contemplative or directed at a personal God.

Let me end this first part of the chapter with a short commentary of Henrich's metaphysics. All of his arguments against naturalism are to the point, in my view. It does, indeed, not provide convincing ways to deal with the human sense of free I-hood. In addition, posing a material ground to all that is seems counterintuitive to the human experience of self-conscious life. However, claiming a unitary ground that precedes the dualism of life in the *Grundverhältnis* but insisting upon its absolute transcendence might make Henrich's theory more vulnerable to naturalistic attacks. After all, the human race is getting more and more adept at manipulating matter. Control of matter could provide a sense of security, a home for our still unanswered questions, and the hope that with the progression of scientific research, this home may be modeled for life-long, if not eternal, happiness. I agree with Henrich that scientific proof of either alternative is impossible, but I find his metaphysical solution of mere obscurity as a ground unsatisfactory. Obscurity cannot give meaning to life. It might rather serve to confirm the naturalistic relativization of the unique worth of each I, which is exactly what Henrich tries to counteract.

It is interesting to note yet another parallel between Henrich's metaphysics and naturalism besides the monism. Both reject theology as a "doctrinal type of thinking" that refuses to integrate scientific results

in its anthropology. This is an assertion that is unjustified, in my view. Many contemporary theologians, if not the majority, attempt to reinterpret an age-old tradition in view of new insights in psychology, sociology, neurology, and virtually ever other scientific discipline. Moreover, in the realm beyond physics, no such distinction between theology and philosophy can be made, in my view. There is no clear choice between the God of the Bible who is the object of blind faith and the God, or the Absolute, of unfaltering reason. The modern theologian who ventures in the land beyond the Kantian fence, has the tendency to call what she encounters there "God," but not at the expense of leaving reason and the insights of the many scientific achievements of our time behind. If metaphysics is about an unknowable ground, why allow ourselves philosophical postulates but reject the theological equivalent as mere doctrine? Henrich's analysis of the variety of religions based on the *Grundverhältnis* is interesting, but as a philosopher, he seems unwilling to do justice to theological attempts to link conscious life within a Christian setting with philosophical reasoning. He strives to provide something that is a notch up on the scientific ladder while at the same not claiming scientific foundations. It invites the question what this type of philosophy can provide that theology cannot. Moreover, he promotes precisely the metaphysical type of thinking that lead German idealists to speak of God and religion. It makes for a strange mixture.

Finally, his views on gratitude as contemplative – hence not directed at a personal Giver of life – seem rather artificial. Even though I do agree that gratitude can be beyond the immediate give and take of daily life, this does not imply that gratitude can occur wholly separate from the context of personhood. I do not find Henrich's examples convincing. We cannot feel gratitude towards an obscure ground. If we thank for our lives, we do not thank its ground; we thank its Giver, One to whom we can relate. I cannot help thinking that Henrich wants to save certain religious experiences from his own philosophy. Maybe the problem rather lies with his insistence on a metaphysics of an obscure impersonal ground?

Therefore, it might be interesting to turn our attention to the metaphysics of a theologian who holds on to a personal God as the unitary ground of all that is.

6.2. Rahner's Metaphysics

Karl Rahner[59] distinguishes a transcendental, *a priori*, theology and a descriptive, historical, *a posteriori* theology. We will focus on the former. It constitutes Rahner's attempt to show that we are "naturally" open to transcendence, that the conditions for the possibility of religiosity are present in the human being. Rahner's heartfelt involvement in the Christian tradition makes him sensitive to the loss of ground of its intellectual heritage in modern culture. He knows how hard it is for modern people to believe, even for those who are still closely involved with the Christian worldview. The average person who comes to theology today "does not feel secure in a faith which is taken for granted and is supported by a homogeneous religious milieu common to everyone." He is convinced that the major problem is the contemporary theological discourse, which is of such a nature that we can no longer connect it with our modern self-understanding. It employs terms and concepts that are alien to the ones in which we express our experiences of transcendence in daily life. In addition, it claims certainties that we are no longer able or willing to accept in all seriousness. But if we find the way in which our sense of the metaphysical is worded unworthy of belief through the fault of theology, we will think ourselves justified, not illogically, in further doubting the reality of anything beyond the physical. Therefore, it is important that theology explain Christian faith in a way that is consistent with modern life and that takes its doubts and its achievements into account.[60]

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[59] Karl Rahner is born on March 5, 1904 in Freiburg, Germany, as the fourth of seven children of the daughter of an innkeeper, and a teachers' college professor. It is what Rahner calls "a normal, middle-class, Christian family" (Rahner 1985, 24). After finishing high school in Freiburg, he follows his brother Hugo and enters the Jesuits in Feldkirch, Austria, on April 20, 1922. He studies in Pullach (near Munich) and in Valkenburg (Netherlands). His ordination takes place on July 26 in 1932. In 1934, he is sent to Freiburg to study philosophy where he attends Martin Heidegger's philosophy seminars. In 1939, he finishes what is supposed to be his dissertation, *Geist in Welt*, which is rejected by his supervisor Martin Honecker. During World War II, he mostly does pastoral work in Vienna and in a Bavarian country parish. After fifteen years of teaching at the University of Innsbruck, Rahner receives an appointment for the academic chair for Christian philosophy and the philosophy of religion in Munich in 1964, where he becomes the successor of Romano Guardini. In 1967, he is appointed professor of dogmatics and the history of dogma in Münster until his retirement in 1971. Karl Rahner dies in 1984.

[60] SW 26, 12. The references are to the *Karl Rahner Sämtliche Werke* 1995–2000 edited by K. Lehmann, J.B. Metz a.o. Volume 26 is the *Grundkurs des Glaubens. Stu-*

This requires, Rahner agrees with Henrich, that subjectivity should be the philosophical point of departure. To Rahner modern times are about "the process of man's understanding himself as subject," as Thomas Sheehan puts it. A modern philosophy of religion ought to start with a reflection upon the human being as the universal question that she is for herself.[61] In addition, for determining the possibility of any type of knowledge, a study of the limits of the human way of knowing is relevant. Every philosophical question about an object of knowledge implies the question of the knowing subject "because *a priori* the subject must carry with it the limits of the possibility of such knowledge."[62] A transcendental anthropology investigates the necessary conditions for the possibility of knowledge of the Divine on the part of the human subject. This does not mean that the content of faith can be deduced from the subject, but that the transcendental side of knowledge, the subject, must be taken seriously.[63] This, of course, assumes a human capacity for metaphysics, which tries to put into concepts "what we have always already anticipated in our being and in our activity."[64] Metaphysics is not about the discovery of new knowledge, but about becoming aware of what one already knows, albeit unthematically.

Since "metaphysics is the question about the being of beings as such," a metaphysical analysis of human nature is always at the same time a general ontology.[65] A metaphysical anthropology speaks of the human being, of being in general, and of absolute being. Reversely, all general ontology is and necessarily remains metaphysical anthropology. Whatever is said about being must be *said*; it must be communicated by human means. "Every *onto*logy is onto*logy*."[66] Rahner's

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dien zum Begriff des Christentums of 1976. See Rahner (1999) in the bibliography. The translation is based on the 2002 edition of The Crossroad Publishing Company.

[61] Sheehan 1987, 2. The German *Mensch* has until recently been translated in English as "man." Since *Mensch* means human being and since Rahner included all human beings in God's grace, he would no doubt agree that excluding the female half is a bad start for any theology. Therefore, I will often modify the translations into gender neutral or more inclusive language, and in case that I use the original translation the reader is kindly requested to remember this footnote.

[62] Schr 9, 34.

[63] Schr 9, 29.

[64] SW 4, 52. Volume 4 of the *Sämtliche Werke* is *Hörer des Wortes*. See Rahner (1997) in the bibliography. The translation is based on the 1994 edition of *Hearer of the Word* translated by J. Donceel.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Schr 9, 34.

general ontology says that pure being cannot contain anything that cannot be communicated, that is absolutely irrational. His anthropology says that human beings possess an unlimited openness for being as such and that our nature does not *a priori* exclude any kind of disclosure of being. This forms a difference with Henrich's philosophy. Rahner claims human openness for what lies beyond the physical and the domain of explicit knowledge. Even if he calls pure being, or God, a mystery, it is not entirely irrational; it is not obscurity.[67]

None of this, however, tempts him to take the idealistic route from the I to a knowable Absolute that also Henrich rejects. But, contrary to Henrich, Rahner's turn to the subject does not imply a modern secular move away from the Christian tradition. It is Rahner's conviction that God must be more than the Absolute of German Idealism, pure being of metaphysics, or obscurity. The God of Christianity is a personal and free God, as we will see in 6.2.3. This implies that people are unable to determine the relationship unilaterally since that would be in blatant contradiction with God's freedom. If theological God-talk must be illuminated by referring back to the human being, this is not the same as deducing it therefrom, Rahner warns us. It is more than the mere objectivation of humanity's subjective religious state.[68] To Rahner both God and human being are essentially open to each other. If the human being is understood as

> the being who is absolutely transcendent in respect of God, 'anthropocentricity' and 'theocentricity' in theology are not opposites but strictly one and the same thing, seen from two sides.[69]

Humanity and God are two sides of the same medal. It is impossible to speak theologically about God without at the same time saying something about human subjectivity, and vice versa.

[67] A translator of Rahner's work can either choose to translate *Sein* as Being (with a capital B) or as being. One of the publishers chooses the latter arguing that for Rahner being is not divine. As Andrew Tallon writes in the Editor's Introduction to *Hearer of the Word*, "Rahner says God where he means God" (Rahner 1994, xi). I agree. Therefore even when translating *Seyn* to "Being," with a capital B, in case of Hölderlin, I opt for "being" in the case of Rahner. The argument is that Hölderlin does indeed tend to divinize Being, whereas to Rahner it is a philosophical concept. Thomas Sheehan chooses to speak of beingness as the translation of the German *Sein*, but I find this term too artificial.

[68] SW 4, 44.

[69] Schr 9, 28.

Moreover, since modern metaphysics is necessarily involved with people's secular understanding of themselves, a plurality of additional disciplines has become relevant for theology, such as the social and the natural sciences. The latter in particular dominate in the present age. Even though Rahner does not see that as a problematic aspect of our times – he even calls it a legitimate process by which the world is allowed to become "worldly" willed by Christianity itself – , he is well aware of the influence of the sciences on contemporary religiosity. It is far from obvious how theology should cope with this situation, he admits.[70] Besides our self-understanding, the development of the natural sciences and technology has undeniably affected our relationship with nature. Nature is no longer divinized. Its laws are becoming ours to manipulate. God is no longer the incomprehensible and omnipotent ruler of the elements. As the natural sciences have progressed, we no longer experience ourselves as living *in* nature, left to the mercy of the elements. On the contrary, we feel that we are to a large degree its creators. The Copernican Revolution from cosmocentrism to anthropocentrism has not merely taken place in the theoretical sense; it is the practice of modern life, according to Rahner.[71]

Our creativeness with regard to nature, our mastery of the world, burdens us with an ever-greater responsibility. This has had an enormous impact on our religiosity. The world has become "demythologized," "hominized." In general, it has become more Godless. However, the resulting situation of profanity that makes "the world Godless and God world-less" is not a reason to despair, Rahner asserts. It is just that the medium in which God is experienced has shifted from the objective world to our subjectivity.

> In earlier times it was the external world with its order and harmony that provided the initial start for a person's experience of transcendence. Today it is his existence with its unfathomable depths.[72]

The human way of being recedes into mystery once again. The mystery no longer mainly approaches us from our natural surroundings, but "it now breaks out of [our] own being." Once again, we experience

[70] Schr 13, 77.
[71] Schr 6, 8f.
[72] Schr 11, 162.

ourselves as living in the land of the uncontrollable: "This modern Titan is a poor mortal in all his Promethean pride."[73]

All this implies that our religious context has changed dramatically. Rahner believes that there will be no religious convictions and customs shared on a large scale in the (near) future. Hence, in order for us to have the courage to persevere in a relationship with an ever more ineffable God, we will have to rely on personal experience and decision. He is convinced that "the devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic,' one who has 'experienced' something, or he will cease to be anything at all."[74] This opinion, which is half a century old, still stands, in my view. The contemporary mystic experience or experience of God is thought of as an experience of transcendence that is more fundamental and more original than and provides the basis for the reflection about God. As such, it is no longer considered the exclusive privilege of the mystic in the traditional sense of the word; it is inescapably present in everyone.

Hence, similar to Henrich's philosophy, Rahner's starts with the subject and is willing and convinced of the need to think beyond physics. Rahner also criticizes the hubris of German idealism with a metaphysics of an Absolute to be mastered. Contrary to Henrich, Rahner calls it the personal and free God of Christianity and not the obscure ground of our subjectivity. For our knowledge of this God, we are ultimately dependent upon his willingness to disclose himself to us as well as a natural capacity for transcendence. Let us see how Rahner proposes to go beyond physics in what he calls an intellectually honest justification of Christian faith.

6.2.1. *Being and Beings*

Human beings do not stop at asking questions about specific things in the world. It is in our very nature to go beyond the beings of the world and inquire about being as such, Rahner asserts. We have an urge to know what reality is all about in its unitary totality. Even if we do not really know being as such, at least we know *of* it. We can distinguish between being and beings and we can inquire about being, which would be impossible about something that is absolutely unknown to

[73] Schr 6, 13f.
[74] Schr 7, 15.

us in every respect. Exactly in asking the metaphysical question, we become aware of our essence. A human being "*is* insofar as *he asks about being*."[75] Nevertheless, the fact that we *need* to inquire about it shows that the question is not from the start and from every point of view made superfluous by an answer.

> If I, the questioner, ask about being…my question shows that I already know about being…Yet, as inquirer, I cannot be the being about which I inquire, since otherwise…I should be in unquestioning possession of the being I inquire about.[76]

Human beings are the beings that *can* inquire about being, but they also *must* inquire about being. We know about being but we do not know all about it, otherwise we could stop asking altogether. Let us try to find out why Rahner's metaphysical point of departure is that people are always already practicing metaphysics even when being is not fully transparent to us.[77]

6.2.1.1. *The Openness for Being*

In Rahner's view, transcendence is not just one among many topics that intrigue people; it forms the very core of human knowledge. Without our ability to transcend what is offered to our sense organs, we would have no knowledge whatsoever. Our capacity for transcendence becomes obvious first of all by looking at all the different things that we know about ourselves as human beings from the various viewpoints available to us. All these empirical data result in a plurality of particular anthropologies that approach the human being from a definite standpoint such as psychology, genetics, neurosciences, etc. At the same time, these disciplines intend to say something about who we are as a whole. In these attempts to analyze and reconstruct our own being, we experience ourselves as the subject "of these multiple objectivities." We transcend every possible element of this analysis and affirm ourselves "as more than the sum of such analyzable components of our reality."[78] We are over and above all the components, and we

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[75] SW 2, 54. See bibliography. Volume 2 of the *Sämtliche Werke* is *Geist in Welt*. See bibliography Rahner (1996). The translation is based on the 1968 edition of *Spirit in the World* of W. Dych.

[76] SW 4, 72. This identification of being and knowing will be explained in 6.2.1.3.

[77] SW 4, 54.

[78] SW 26, 34.

can consciously and freely relate to the totality. As a result, we realize that to be a human being means to be

> someone who cannot be derived, who cannot be produced completely from other elements at his disposal…He experiences himself as something necessarily prior to and more original than this plurality.[79]

As a unitary subject we transcend all the different aspects of our human (way of) being. We are the *subiectum* of our multiple empirical objectivities.

But there is more. We not only transcend our own separate components; we also transcend all the individual objects of our knowledge. Even though we exist within a world full of objects, we are able to detach ourselves from these objects in thought and in action. We "step out of ourselves" into the world and somehow manage to "return into ourselves" without losing ourselves in the world. We always recognize our I as separate from and opposed to all the things we encounter.

> We pronounce judgments about the world…We are subjects as against objects…When we step out of ourselves in grasping the things, we also return so completely into ourselves as 'subjects'…that we subsist in ourselves as subjects, as separates, as opposed to the outside objects we know.[80]

The knowing self-subsistence that we exercise with every judgment belongs to the essential makeup of human beings.

Besides the transcendence of our own objectivities and the ability to distinguish the objects of our consciousness from ourselves as a (self-) conscious subject, we possess a third form of transcendence. We are able to distinguish single, separate objects from the totality of the field into which they are projected, because we are able to "reach beyond" them. We transcend the separate objects towards a distant, infinite horizon.

Before we elaborate on this third form, it should be emphasized that Rahner considers this threefold capacity to transcend the result of the way our mind is constituted. It is "precisely what the intellect has to contribute to mere sensibility as such in the constitution of the human experience of the world."[81] With this statement, Rahner underlines

[79] SW 26, 36.
[80] SW 4, 84.
[81] SW 2, 42.

his recognition of the two Kantian roots of knowledge. There is an object that is given to us (through sensibility), and there is the ability to objectify (which Rahner calls intellect). One is dependent upon the other. Without the former we would be unable to experience the world around us, but without the latter we would lose ourselves in that world. Given this Kantian point of departure with sensibility as indispensable for human knowledge, the familiar question returns once again: How can metaphysics be possible? We can apparently transcend the world of our senses and avoid getting lost inside of it. But is there something in human nature that opens up the possibility of "real" transcendence, of knowing (of) more than the objects present to our senses? Rahner is convinced there is. In order to explain his third form of transcendence he takes the traditional route of investigating the peculiar nature of the judgment. Let us see where it leads.

The most general form of a judgment is: this is such or so (for example, this pen is blue). In a judgment, we grasp a single object under a universal concept; we grasp the universal in the singular (the blueness in the pen). Rahner calls this "abstraction."

> 'Abstracting' means 'detaching' [*herauslösen*]. When we abstract, we know that the quiddity [the whatness, *Washeit*] given in sense knowledge may be detached from the individual thing in which it presents itself to us.[82]

(We know to detach blueness from this particular ballpoint pen. It could also be the blueness of another pen, my teacup, or your socks.) So what is it in our human way of being that enables us to understand that even if the quiddity only presents itself to us in a particular sense object, we know it is not restricted to it?

Rahner asserts that we know that the whatness in the individual object is limitless "only if the activity that grasps this individual sense object reaches out, prior to this grasping, beyond this individual object."[83] In every particular object we grasp, we have already reached beyond it. We can only perceive individual objects because they are profiled against a horizon. Without this horizon, all would be presented to our senses as one massive whole. Thanks to this horizon, we can perceive depth, so to say. The horizon enables the individual objects to stand out. This "reaching beyond" Rahner calls the *Vorgriff*.

[82] SW 4, 90.
[83] SW 4, 92.

It is an *a priori* power given with human nature. It is "an unthematic but inevitable knowing of the infinity of reality" that opens up the horizon within which the single object can be grasped.[84] This *Vorgriff* is the condition of the possibility of abstraction. Thanks to an inborn power to perceive a horizon, we are always already a step beyond each individual object of our knowledge.

Here we begin to understand where Rahner radically surpasses Kant. For finite knowledge to be possible at all, it takes an *a priori* capacity of the human mind to have an awareness, or an unthematic knowledge in Rahner's words, of infinity.

> Through the *Vorgriff*, which is the condition for the possibility of objective knowledge and of our self-subsistence, we continually transcend everything toward pure being.[85]

In that it opens up an horizon against which individual objects can come to stand out, it also enables us to become subjects. The *Vorgriff* as an essential power of human nature enables both the subject and the object of every act of knowing.

Rahner thus claims, "The *Vorgriff* toward being as such in its essential infinity belongs to the basic makeup of human existence."[86] Somehow, we are open to all of reality, all of being. We already have a provisional knowledge about being as such. As subjects, we are able to reach beyond all that we positively know about ourselves and about the things of the world. Being a knowing human being means being more than a mere world-thing lost in the multitude of objects. This more consists in an openness for being as such. As subjects we recognize ourselves as "that particular being that is *quodammodo omnia*," in a certain way all. In all we know, in all we do, we have already reached beyond the specific object of our knowledge and the particular act and affirmed the existence of absolute being. We are not "one particular subject among many others at the material level, but that inconceivable being in which the sum total of reality as such achieves realization of itself."[87]

Hence, metaphysical anthropology is concerned with being as such, and the only way to fully understand the human being would be to

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[84] SW 26, 37f.
[85] SW 4, 92.
[86] SW 4, 98.
[87] Schr 13, 122.

understand reality itself, to understand God. Reversely, Rahner can claim that every pre-reflexive, unthematic experience of self that is the very root of all cognition is enabled by the original and ultimate experience of God.[88] This is a far-reaching conclusion. Metaphysical anthropology is thus at the same time a philosophical theology. To speak with Thomas Sheehan,

> If man is intrinsically the movement beyond (meta) beings...to their [being]..., that is, if he is the concrete and worldly differentiation of beings and their [being], then the thematic discipline called metaphysics is not a flight to heaven but a worldly hermeneutics...which merely lays out – i.e. brings to light, appropriates, and articulates – the knowledge man already has.[89]

We will elaborate upon Rahner's ideas about God in 6.2.3. It will then be shown that God is ultimately more than pure or absolute being. God is not Being or the Absolute of German Idealism. God "in spite of – no, because of – his absoluteness is no impersonal 'It.'"[90] God is personal and free. For right now, let us return to the language of being.

All we do and all we know is based upon our capacity to transcend specific beings toward pure being. Nevertheless, our openness towards being as such can easily be overlooked. The silent horizon against which all is profiled can be ignored in the face of the distracting variety of the immediate phenomena that dominate the space of our conscious life. Furthermore, transcendence is always given only as the condition of the possibility of knowledge and not by itself alone. "One can never reach out to it directly. It gives itself only in so far as it directs us silently to something else, to something finite as the object of direct vision."[91]

Therefore, we should not understand the *Vorgriff* as an inborn concept of being as such or of Gods pure being itself. The *Vorgriff* is not an act of knowledge in which pure being, or God, is the object. In this respect, Rahner remains a student of Kant. Human knowledge is originally receptive. Human knowledge demands, besides the *Vorgriff* toward being as such, also the representation of a finite object. "This means that we do not from the start, on account of our essence, possess

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[88] See Schr 13, 125.
[89] Sheehan 1987, 158.
[90] Schr 6, 188f.
[91] Schr 6, 180.

any knowledge." Our knowledge is dependent upon a foreign starting point. What being is becomes clear to our finite receptive knowledge only in the reception of a sense object that is comprehended as a stage on the way to being as such. It is through the appearance of the individual object that an outlook upon being is offered. And it is a synthesis of the appearing object and of being as such that is opened up in the *Vorgriff*. We always comprehend being as the being of a being, whereby we both separate and connect being and the particular being. "Thus in both direct and reflective metaphysical knowledge, being can be comprehended only in a phenomenon." The whole of being as such cannot appear to us.[92]

For our knowledge, we have to depend upon our senses, Rahner agrees with Kant. Nevertheless, in the claim that we always have a rudimentary knowledge of being beyond the beings that appear to our senses thanks to the *Vorgriff*, Rahner radically surpasses Kantian philosophy. "In the *Vorgriff* the most general structure of being as such, i.e. everything which belongs to being as being, is co-known [*mitgewusst*] by us," he claims.[93] Even when all human knowledge is necessarily related to sense intuitions, metaphysics is possible. In every act of knowledge, we reach beyond the specific object presented to our senses. Without this *Vorgriff* towards being as such, knowledge would be impossible. Having established that all our knowledge is enabled by an infinite horizon, being, let us now see what it is that we (co-)know about being. In what sense is being open to human being?

6.2.1.2. *The Openness of Being*

It will be clear from the preceding that Rahner never thinks of pure being as one object among others. Pure being must not be confused with *a* being. Being is not an object, and we cannot experience "it" in itself. "It is itself present only as the whither [*Woraufhin*] of transcendence itself, which is enough to eliminate all forms of ontologism."[94] Pure being is not something to be grasped, but neither is it a reality that is distinct from all the beings of the world. Our capacity for transcendence towards pure being always refers us back to the things of the world. Nonetheless, pure being is not the totality that arises after

[92] SW 4, 178. Our knowledge is receptive because we are material beings. This will be explained in 6.2.1.3.

[93] SW 4, 224.

[94] Schr 4, 52.

all that is has been added up. It is the unity against which multiplicity stands out, it is the one ground from which all beings originate. "This totality, precisely as the 'whither' of the *Vorgriff*, cannot be the subsequent sum, but only the original unity of the possible objects."[95] Rahner agrees with the thinkers of the preceding chapters that there is one unitary ground to all that is.[96] Like Hölderlin, he calls it *Sein*, and this being opens up to us in all the individual beings of this world.

In line with Thomist metaphysics that asserts *quidquid enim esse potest, intelligi potest* [for whatever can be, can be known], for Rahner being and knowing are related to each other because originally, in their ground, they are the same reality.[97] "Basically knowledge is self-presence [*Beisichsein*] of a being in its being."[98] Knowing is an activity by which the knower returns into herself, thus resulting in self-presence; knowing is coming-to-oneself. This self-possession implies two stages: an outward expansion and a taking-back. "A being possesses being to the extent that it possesses the possibility of such a *reditio in seipsum* [return into self]."[99] Knowing is the being-present-to-self of being, essentially the subjectivity of being itself.

> Everything strives back toward itself, it wishes to come into itself, to take possession of itself, since it is what it wishes to be, namely being, to the extent that it takes possession of itself.[100]

Where self-presence is complete, knowledge too is complete.

This implies that there must be different degrees of being dependent upon the gradation of the return of a being into itself. Hence, the intensity of being is determined by the degree of ability to be present to self. The degree of being "of its very nature, self-presence, reflection upon self, is different with every different being." A thing, a dead object, utters itself to some extent; it is a possible object of knowledge. But it cannot reintegrate what was uttered. Therefore, it remains hidden to itself and is only luminous for others.

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[95] SW 2, 117.

[96] In the course of this chapter, however, we will see that a seemingly similar point of departure notwithstanding, Rahner has no affinity with the German idealistic notion of Being or the Absolute. Ultimately, pure being is the God of Christianity for Rahner. What this means for his theology will be clarified in 6.2.3.

[97] SW 4, 64.

[98] SW 4, 148.

[99] SW 4, 70.

[100] SW 4, 76.

> The *degree* of self-presence…corresponds to the intensity of being… And the other way round: the degree of intensity of being shows in the degree in which the being in question is able to return into itself, in which it is capable, by reflecting upon itself, to be luminous for itself.

In human beings the utterance of our own essence in thought and in action returns for the first time wholly to ourselves.[101] Through our thinking and acting, we utter who we are, and this we can perceive and understand ourselves.

"The nature of being is to know and to be known in an original unity, in other words, self-presence, luminosity."[102] If being able to know and knowability are intrinsic to being itself, then an individual act of knowing can no longer be understood as a relationship between a subject and an object distinct from it. Knowing is understood as the subjectivity of being itself. Rahner realizes that with this interpretation of being he could be accused of having "strayed into the basic assertion of the philosophy of German idealism, as it finds its peak in Hegel: being and knowing are identical." Nevertheless, he wants to emphasize that his own statement of the original unity of knowing and being "has nothing in common with any kind of pantheism or of idealism."[103] In reaction to German idealism he asserts, "True, being is knowing. But only to the extent that a being is or has being…Not every being is 'knowing' or 'true' in the same sense and measure."[104] Only pure being is the absolute identity of being and knowing. Human "presence to" or "possession of" being is not absolute but finite. That is why Rahner likes to call human beings finite spirits.

Before studying the reasons that Rahner refers to human beings as finite spirits, it should be remarked that his use of the term spirit does not imply any kind of ontological dualism. For Rahner people are *not* essentially spiritual beings who were punished to live a worldly life, found themselves in an alien environment by pure chance, or whatever world-unfriendly interpretation has been put forward in the past. He does not in any way mean to ignore or reject our physicality, our material presence in the world of time, space, and history. In Rahner's

[101] SW 4, 74ff.
[102] SW 4, 60.
[103] SW 4, 72.
[104] SW 4, 78.

metaphysics, we truly live and are meant to live here and now. Every kind of rationalism, "as an attempt to lift human existence above history, must be rejected as inhuman and therefore also as lacking due respect for the human spirit."[105] Hence, the human being is spirit, but spirit in a peculiar way. We are spirit endowed with senses and living in history. Let us see how this works out in Rahner's metaphysical anthropology.

6.2.1.3. *Human Being as Finite Spirit*

Rahner maintains that the absolute openness for being as such belongs to our fundamental makeup, as we have seen. That is why he asserts that to be human is to be spirit. "Human nature is absolute openness for all being, or, to put it in one word, the human person is spirit."[106] We continually transcend all the objects we encounter toward pure being. "From the start, in our dynamism toward being as such, we grasp single objects as moments of this unending movement of the spirit."[107] We have also seen that for Rahner

> knowing is being-present-to-self [*Beisichsein*], the reflectedness-upon-self [*Insichreflektiertheit*] of being itself. Knowing will know something to the extent in which it *is* this something.[108]

With Aquinas, Rahner calls this complete return of the subject into itself the characteristic feature of spirit. "Spirit is the single person insofar as he becomes conscious of himself in an absolute presence to himself."[109] But even though we possess this openness for being, we are not absolutely open; we are not absolute being, and we do not experience ourselves as pure spirit. We are not the unquestioning and unquestioned infinity of reality. This makes us *finite* spirits. "We live life while reaching ceaselessly for the absolute, in openness toward [pure being] . . . We are forever the infinite openness of the finite for [pure being]."[110]

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[105] SW 4, 248.
[106] SW 4, 60 (*Der Mensch ist Geist*, SW 4, 102).
[107] SW 4, 102.
[108] SW 2, 83.
[109] SW 26, 178.
[110] SW 4, 102. Rahner in fact uses "God" here, instead of pure being. In the case of this statement, the terms are more or less interchangeable; the difference between God and pure being will be discussed in 6.2.3.

If presence-to-self in knowledge and the intensity of being are the same, then one's own intensity of being, one's own subjectivity, should be the proper object of knowledge. No objective other could ever "intrude." So the question is: How can sense knowledge of this other come about? How can Rahner combine our materiality with the Thomistic notion of knowledge as self-presence? How can he honor the two Kantian roots of knowledge in this context: a someone who contributes the thinking and a something that provides the content? The difference between the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge and the Kantian is that the latter has a gap between the knowing subject and the object that needs to be bridged. In the former, there is no gap. Knower and knowable must have the same origin, otherwise it cannot be comprehended how knower and knowable can become one in the act of knowing. To Thomas the ontological unity of knowing and object logically precedes the separation.[111] Then the question is how the known that is identical to the knower can come to stand over and against the knower as other. How does this come about? How can finiteness and spirit go together?

The answer can be found in our materiality. We are essentially material beings. Materiality is not something that is merely added to our true spiritual nature or something provisional. "It would be unchristian to understand matter and spirit as merely existing alongside each other," Rahner asserts.[112] It is ultimately from the human being that we know that spirit and matter are related to each other. We are truly material beings, but we are also knowing beings. Since we are material beings, we are dependent upon our senses for knowledge. Hence, human knowledge is receptive: it needs input from things that are distinct from it, that stand outside it. The essential characteristic of sensation is not-being-with-self or being-with-another. "Sensibility means the givenness of being (which is being-present-to-self) over to the other, to matter."[113] Therefore, the return into oneself, the self-reflection that constitutes the essence of knowledge, is possible to us only when we step outside ourselves toward another reality distinct from us. "Human knowledge can be self-return [*Rückkehr in sich*]

[111] SW 2, 73f.
[112] SW 26, 177.
[113] SW 2, 98.

always only by stepping out [*Auskehr*] into the world."[114] As a material, sensible being, as a sentient knower, the human being is always situated at the midpoint between total abandonment [*Verlorenheit*] to the other and setting-self over against [*Sichabsetzen*] every other. Sensation loses itself in the other, and the intellect liberates the self by objectifying.

Hence in our original knowledge we are ontically [*seinsmässig*] present to the other. Being in us does not stand in itself alone, but is with "another." This other cannot itself be being, but it must be the *possibility* of being. "Therefore, to be human is to be an empty, undetermined possibility of being...That is what Thomist metaphysics calls *matter*."[115]

> The capacity of the one human knowledge to place the other, which is given in sensibility, away from itself and in question, to judge it, to objectify it and thereby make the knower a subject for the first time, that is, one who is present to himself [*bei sich selber*] and not to the other [*beim andern*], one who knowingly exists in himself, this we call thought [*Denken*], intellect.[116]

Sensibility is what lures us out into the world, and thought is what brings us back into ourselves, enriched with world, so to speak. We only know by stepping out of ourselves into a world, an other that is distinct from us. All things only become understandable for us, are "conceived of," when "resolved on the one hand into the laws of thought and on the other, into elementary data of the senses."[117] Since the structure of the knower as a being is the structure of the known (what we are determines what we can know), this implies that "the being of the receptive sense knower is the being of matter."[118] Human being is essentially material being and human knowing is always related to a something. This something Rahner calls "the empty yet necessary 'whither' [*Woraufhin*] of knowledge." This "whither" that is at the same time the "whereat" [*Woran*] of the known is matter. "Knowledge, still wandering and seeking its goal, comes to rest in [an] object."[119] Or from an ontological point of view it can be said that we

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[114] SW 4, 178.
[115] SW 4, 186.
[116] SW 2, 98f.
[117] Schr 4, 57.
[118] SW 4, 190.
[119] SW 2, 44.

always grasp being as the being of a being. We distinguish in every object of our knowledge between the whatness [*Washeit*] in a something, and this something [*Etwas*] in itself, between an essence and its bearer. This something is the "whereat" [*Woran*] of the whatness. The empty "whereat" of the being of an existent in which being is in such a way that it is not for itself, that it is not present-to-itself, is prime matter. Matter is "the empty, undetermined 'whereat' of an existing reality."[120]

Moreover, matter can be the bearer of several possible whatnesses and is thus the cause of the "thisness" of a being. Reversely the same whatness can occur in different objects. Hence, matter is the principle of individuation in the sense that it is the cause of the multiple individuation of the same quiddity.[121] If matter is the principle of individuation, this means that human being, which is essentially material, is being one among many. "Because we are essentially material beings, we may be repeated in our quiddity…there may exist many human beings." To Henrich this meant the relativization of our uniqueness, as we have seen in 1.3.3., but to Rahner it implies that "we are actually human only in a humanity." It takes humanity as a whole "to make manifest what is essentially given to each of us single persons deep down in our possibilities, but only as possibilities."[122]

Human beings are finite spirits. We know of being as such only because and insofar as we know through the senses. "We penetrate into the world in order to reach being as such, which extends beyond the world."[123] We are the beings that as spirit are self-presence and as matter are presence-to-other (hence self-absence). We are material spirits or spirited matter. "Matter is the condition which makes possible the objective other that the world and human being are to

[120] SW 4, 192ff.

[121] As the principle of the possible repetition of the same, matter is also the principle of quantity. Since the repetition of the same within one and the same thing is nothing but its spatiality, matter also provides a particular being with an inner spatiality. In addition, it makes the material being intrinsically temporal. Since the determined quiddity that subsists in matter does not fill its whole potentiality, a material being is always "in motion" toward new realities of being. Since these possible determinations at least partially exclude each other, their realization is not possible simultaneously but only in time (see SW 4, 196ff.).

[122] SW 4, 200.

[123] SW 4, 214.

themselves."[124] It is the condition for that otherness that alienates the human person from herself and precisely in doing so brings her to herself. "Our cognitive self-subsistence derives always and necessarily from a stepping out into the world, from the grasping of something, distinct from us."[125] Matter is what makes us spirit. And it is of the intrinsic nature of matter to develop towards spirit. The human being is "the existent in whom the basic tendency of matter to discover itself in spirit through self-transcendence reaches its definitive breakthrough."[126] Thanks to our make-up, we are both essentially material *and* essentially spiritual. We are open to pure being, even if we cannot achieve absolute knowledge. All knowledge of pure being is *a posteriori* in the sense that we only obtain it through the concepts and the things of the world. It is transcendental to the extent that the orientation towards pure being is a permanent existential of the human being.

So far, we have talked about being: the being of beings, human being, and pure being. To Rahner this pure being as the infinite horizon of all beings is not something neutral, an it; it is the God of Christianity.[127] Pure being, the whither of our transcendence, the infinite horizon against which all the knowable objects are profiled is God. Rahner goes as far as to state: "All knowing beings…implicitly know God in everything they know."[128] In all we know God is co-known. But the knowledge is implicit and unthematic; we hear "something." Our "*speaking* of God is the reflection which points to this more original, unthematic and unreflexive knowledge of God."[129] Let us now look at what Rahner thinks he can say about God explicitly.

6.2.2. *God as Mystery*

'God' is a difficult word, Rahner admits. Like every other term, it is influenced by each individual's private history and runs the risk of being misunderstood by others in other contexts. In addition, it has

[124] SW 26, 179.
[125] SW 4, 188.
[126] SW 26, 176.
[127] This God as experienced and expressed falteringly in the Christian tradition has certain characteristics such as his free personhood. The terms and the various interpretations given in his tradition are for Rahner, and for most modern theologians, the stimulus and not the conclusion of their thinking.
[128] SW 4, 102.
[129] SW 26, 56.

been handed to us through a common history in which it has been so frequently used that it is colored by quasi-objectivity; 'God' has become all too familiar a name. Finally, all names define, distinguish, and limit. Hence, the infinite horizon itself cannot be given a name. It is essentially wordless because every word receives its meaning and its limits within the field of other words. All this might tempt us to stop using the term 'God' altogether.[130]

However, there are several reasons to hold on to it. One is that we badly need a word that expresses our transcendence and its source. A word that "allows all the individual things we can name to disappear into the background." A word that expresses "the totality that grounds them all." A word that in its lack of contour reflects what it refers to; namely "the ineffable one, the nameless one." Rahner is convinced that we need such a word at least as a question in order for our humanity to survive. If it were to disappear from the face of the earth, humanity "would have forgotten the totality and its ground…would have forgotten that [it] had forgotten." In short, we would have ceased being. Surprisingly, the word that has come to us in the history of language, that is given to us, and in which we are embedded, or caught even, continues to exist almost against all odds. Even those who would like to see it eradicated, and call themselves atheists, are helping the word to survive, Rahner asserts. And since the term 'God' really says nothing about what it means – it "confronts us like a blank face" –, it might actually be a good name to use for a God who is a mystery.[131]

The philosophical conclusion that we do not and cannot know the infinite horizon of our transcendence permeates Rahner's image of God. We will never know God in the modern meaning of knowledge since "God is not an object among others in the realm of man's *a posteriori* knowledge but the fundamental ground and the absolute future of all reality."[132] Our notion of knowledge is based on a model in which an object is penetrated and mastered. It is a combination of

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[130] The similarity with Hölderlin's view of the stages of naming cannot escape us here. The namelessness of original Being and the wrong type of naming that deludes us into thinking that we know what we are talking about. Perhaps it is this type of quasi-knowledge that provokes naturalism.

[131] SW 26, 50ff.

[132] Schr 9, 34.

> the Greek desire of absolute gnosis and the modern understanding of knowledge as a process that leads to the mastery of an object come together, whether the mastery in question is conceived in terms of German idealism or of the natural sciences.[133]

If applied to God, we run the risk of turning ultimate knowledge of God "into a sublime gnosis in which once again a human being replaces God with self," Rahner maintains.[134]

If, in contrast, knowledge of God is no longer understood in terms of "seeing through" something but as a possible openness to mystery itself,

> the unlimited and transcendent nature of man... does not turn man into the event of the absolute spirit in the way envisaged by German idealism or similar philosophies; it directs him rather to the incomprehensible mystery, in relation to which the openness of transcendence is experienced.[135]

In such a conception of God I am no longer the dominant subject reaching for and attempting to grasp the Absolute, but the one "whose being is bestowed upon [me] by the mystery."[136] I realize that my capacity for transcendence is not something that I establish by my own power, and I do not control it. I am the subject whose origin and end remain hidden from me. Rahner states that we experience ourselves as grounded in an "abyss of ineffable mystery," a mysteriousness that has epistemological grounds.[137]

In Rahner's view, as we have seen, all conceptualization stems from our capacity for transcendence. Transcendence is the most basic and original in our knowledge. All the things that are familiar to us from everyday life and scientific knowledge are secondary and "deficient modes of that original relationship" to transcendence. And whatever term we want to use for the unobjectivated experience of transcendence; it is and ultimately remains a mystery. The main reason that mystery would be an appropriate designation is because it expresses that human knowledge always falls short essentially of its complete

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[133] Schr 16, 231.
[134] Schr 16, 239.
[135] Schr 16, 236.
[136] Ibid.
[137] SW 26, 46.

fulfillment, which is designated by the breadth of its *Vorgriff*.[138] The range of the *Vorgriff* may be absolute, but that does not imply that the *Vorgriff* provides us with positive knowledge of the Absolute. As the condition of possibility for all naming, the *Vorgriff* reaches out towards what is nameless. This is not another, better, reality next to or opposed to ours in the dualistic sense, but the horizon, the fulfillment, of the one and only reality, ours. Pure being or God is the horizon against which all beings can become known. In order to positively know, we would need a concept of this infinite horizon within which all positive knowledge necessarily takes place. But the horizon itself cannot be present within the horizon. The all-defining limit cannot be defined by a more ultimate limit yet. God, as the term of our transcendence, is always present as that which disposes but is absolutely beyond disposal. For this reason, God is a mystery.

The original transcendence, the fundamental experience of God, is the condition for the possibility of all knowledge. In metaphysical reflection, we only make explicit what we know implicitly in the depths of who we are.

> A person knows explicitly what is meant by 'God' only insofar as he allows his transcendence beyond everything objectively identifiable to enter into his consciousness, accepts it, and objectifies in reflection what is already present in his transcendentality.[139]

However, we should never forget that this reflexive and thematic knowledge of God that is conceptualized objectively is not the primary and most basic and original knowledge, nor can it replace the latter. Since our original transcendence always directs our attention back towards specific objects, these are "the mediation of and the point of departure for our knowledge of God."[140] This makes our knowledge of God ultimately *a posteriori* insofar that it is always mediated by the concrete reality of the world such as concrete objects, language, history, etc. This makes for the complicated situation that the most fundamental, our infinite horizon or God, can easily be overlooked. This again might evoke the suspicion that such a mysterious God is merely an idea, the creation of human thought. And indeed, giving theoretical proof for the existence of God is impossible since it would

[138] SW 2, 116f.
[139] SW 26, 48.
[140] SW 26, 74.

imply the grounding of the ground of all theory. Nevertheless, Rahner is convinced that transcendence is borne by God, and God is not its creation.[141]

This unknowability of God is *not* merely a *de facto* hiddenness that could be remedied in time as each person's natural end or by something like an intellectual intuition as assumed in German idealism, according to Rahner. God as mystery is *not* the as yet unmastered realm of the intelligible, not something to be grasped in the end. This rejection of the claim to absolute knowledge of German idealism Rahner shares with Henrich. A major difference is, of course, that for Rahner this unknowable ground is not I-less but the free and personal God of Christianity. Hence, the unknowability is not a symptom of obscurity but an expression of freedom and personhood. Moreover, with Hölderlin, Rahner asserts that the end of history will be "the absolute nearness to God."[142] We will get back to Rahner's views on this nearness and intellectual intuition in 6.2.5. We should now try to find out how this unknowable ground can be personal, free, and loving.

6.2.3. *A Personal God of Freedom and Love*

Christianity is not concerned with being or the Absolute; an "it" that can either be grasped in knowledge or a realm that can be proven to be beyond knowing. Precisely the aspect of hiddenness and mystery of pure being is Rahner's point of departure for thinking a personal God. He argues that being, to the extent that it is being, is "not only present-to-self, but also hidden, present-only-to-self."[143] Despite its openness, pure being is inscrutable, and the reason for this lies in its freedom. "Pure being is free being, hence it is not from the start and necessarily manifested to the finite being."[144] Being can freely express itself or keep silent.

> We do not stand before pure being, the final horizon of our *Vorgriff*, as if it were a lifeless [*unbeweglichen*] ideal which, always at rest, must always be available to our grasp; we stand before it as before a subject of free self-disposition.[145]

[141] SW 26, 65.
[142] Schr 5, 15.
[143] SW 4, 112.
[144] SW 4, 140.
[145] SW 4, 132.

Pure being is a "subject of free self-disposition," hence a personal God. We do not ascribe human features to pure being in a human need to anthropomorphize and then call it a personal God afterwards. Rather in the self-disclosure, in this opening up of self [*Sicheröffnen*] itself, being appears as a personal God. It is characteristic of free persons that they manifest of themselves only what they wish to manifest. Free decisions are taken by personal beings, not by things, and free persons only open up at their own free decision.

> The ground of our spiritual personhood, which in the transcendental structure of our spiritual self always discloses itself as the ground of our person and at the same time remains concealed, has thereby revealed itself as person.[146]

Pure being, the ground of (human) beings is personal.

This personal God can decide to reveal himself. If revelation is to be the self-manifestation of God to a finite human being, the possibility of revelation presupposes two things: First, a divine revelation "is possible only if we ourselves, the subjects to whom it is addressed, offer it an *a priori* horizon within which something like a revelation may occur." Human nature must possess openness for this utterance of ultimate being, or in typical Rahner terms: we must "have an open ear for every word that may proceed from the mouth of the eternal."[147] Since it belongs to our innermost nature to stand before God, no disclosure of pure being is excluded beforehand. The second condition for the possibility of revelation is the ultimate unity of being and knowing. Only if being and knowing fully correspond, if being is luminous, can it be communicated in words what pure being is. And, possibly in direct response to Schelling, Rahner adds,

> Only if these depths are not a dark urge, an abysmal night, a blind will, but eternal light (even though inaccessible to us left to our own devices) can the word be the bearer of... all reality.[148]

In Rahner's opinion, pure being cannot contain anything that, because of its absolute "irrationality," cannot be expressed in the word of a revelation. Pure being as such is intelligible, and it can be expressed: "being is luminous, it is *Logos*, and it may be revealed in the word."[149]

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[146] SW 26, 76.
[147] SW 4, 104.
[148] SW 4, 80.
[149] SW 4, 104.

These two suppositions, however, might as well be interpreted as arguments against an actual revelation. If being is intrinsic lucidity and necessarily means self-presence and if human beings have an absolute openness for being, then being should already always be manifest. There would be no need for revelation. Reaching complete knowledge of it would only be a matter of time, and if a revelation occurs, it is no more than provisional help that might speed up a process. However, it would not provide us with any knowledge that could not be deduced from our *a priori* human nature. Revelation would be superfluous "since divine light always already necessarily shines and illuminates every human person."[150] This is the idealistic position that Rahner rejects as non-Christian. The Christian God freely decides what to communicate and what to keep to himself. Whatever *is* known about this God is the result of this free self-disclosure. The Christian God is the free and personal God of revelation. Since free activity is always unpredictable in the sense that it does not flow from its ground in a way that can be deduced from the nature of this ground, revelation is not simply a continuation of our "natural" knowledge of God. It is "the actual opening up of God's hidden essence."[151] God may speak and may refrain from speaking. Only then can God's actual speaking to us, be understood for what it is: the unpredictable act of God's personal love.

This conclusion introduces a new aspect of transcendence: love. For Rahner our capacity for transcendence is not exclusively, or even primarily, the condition of possibility for knowing objects, for subjectivity as self-presence, for freedom as presence-only-to-self, but also for being present to other subjects. "For a subject who is present to himself to affirm freely vis-à-vis another subject means ultimately to love." Hence, there is more to transcendence that convinces Rahner that the infinite horizon must be personal. Transcendence is not limited to the realm of knowledge, (self-)consciousness, or freedom: it is also evident in the ability to love. In understanding transcendence not merely as an epistemological term, we are no longer talking about pure being, as mystery, as the unknowable, obscure ground, as Henrich envisions it. We are talking about the personal God of Christianity. In this respect, Rahner speaks of this personal God as *holy* mystery.

[150] SW 4, 110.
[151] SW 4, 138.

> To whom would the name 'holy' belong more basically and more originally than to this infinite term of love, which love in the presence of the incomprehensible and the ineffable necessarily becomes worship?[152]

A personal God is free and loving, and mystery is the very core of this God's personhood. Rahner "sees freedom and love as more descriptive of a person as such than, for example, substance or consciousness," I agree with Andrew Tallon.[153] This puts personhood, subjectivity, self-consciousness in a completely different light. I am no longer the 'I' that extends into infinity solely as the result of my capacity to think. I do not control this aspect of absoluteness that I intuit in my human way of being with my intellect. The point of connection is love. The Christian God is a free subject, not a substance or an Absolute that can be fathomed by human genius. This free God rather discloses himself in relationships of love. In Christianity each person is considered completely unique and of eternal value because of and in God's personal love. Love is the luminous will willing the person [*gelichtete Wille zur Person*] in his or her irreducible uniqueness. And "because and insofar as God loves the finite, it shares in the luminosity of pure being."[154] Let us now turn to this mystery of freedom and love in the human being.

6.2.4. *The Mystery of Human Freedom and Love*

As human beings, we necessarily affirm ourselves as being. Whether we like it or not, we simply cannot get around the bare fact that we are. Our being is not a matter of free decision on our part. In this necessary affirmation, we become aware of our thrownness [*Geworfenheit*], of our contingency [*Zufälligkeit*]. This makes the human way of being ambivalent. On the one hand, the contingent is basically unintelligible because something is intelligible only when it can be grasped as necessarily emerging from its ground. Our presence in the world cannot be explained in terms of necessity. On the other hand, every object of knowledge is already viewed under the general aspect of being as such, as we have seen in 6.2.1. This position within the horizon of pure being makes us intelligible. We are contingent and intelligible at the same time. Our self-affirmation is a necessity – we simply are. Our being is

[152] SW 26, 67f.
[153] Tallon 1971, 164.
[154] SW 4, 150.

given to us and our transcendence is not the result of our own efforts. However, the way we deal with this givenness is an act of human freedom – we decide who we are. Only in free activity, something unique can happen that cannot be deduced from a previous ground or understood from the application of some general (natural) law.

Rahner agrees with Henrich that freedom is not the power to do something provisional that can be revised whenever one feels like it, not the capacity to do whatever one pleases.

> Freedom is not the power to constantly change one's course of action, but rather the power to decide what is to be final and definitive in one's life, what cannot be superseded or replaced, the power to bring into being from one's own resources what must be, and must not pass away, the summons to a decision that is irrevocable.[155]

A free act is essentially the fulfillment of one's own nature, a taking possession of oneself, a coming to oneself. It is the power to decide about oneself and to actualize oneself once and for all. Our free decisions work back upon ourselves; they determine our being. "We do not simply perform good or bad actions: we ourselves become good or bad."[156] Ultimately, the free action is the agent itself. In real freedom, the subject ultimately "does not do *something*, but does *itself*."[157] Hence, freedom is the capacity of a subject to achieve her final and irrevocable self. "Although it exists in time and in history, freedom has a single, unique act, namely, the self-actualization of the single subject." A free decision is ultimately always a decision about and a molding of oneself as a person. The free agent might be unpredictable for the one who is present to the performance of the act, but this unpredictability does not imply randomness. Since freedom is the fulfillment of one's own essence, the act is luminous for the free agent performing it. This freedom cannot be escaped from. We are working towards such a self in all we do and do not. Freedom is first of all the subject's responsibility for herself, her accountability.

Since God as the source and the goal of freedom is the incomprehensible mystery, this freedom is a mystery itself. That empirical psychology is unable to affirm the freedom of the human individual is perfectly consistent with its method, also Rahner remarks. It can

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[155] Schr 7, 287.
[156] SW 4, 158.
[157] SW 26, 95f.

merely determine functional interconnections of individual facts and objectivities about who we are *within* the horizon of experience. Our responsibility and freedom, however, are not particular, empirical facts in human reality alongside all other data, and objectivation of the freedom in any act is impossible. Real transcendental freedom lies in the fact that we always experience ourselves as the subject that is given over to itself and that can never be turned into an object.

> It is only through this that I know that I am free and responsible for myself, even when I have doubts about it, raise questions about it, and cannot discover it as an individual datum of my categorical experience in time and space.[158]

This radical mysteriousness of freedom continues into all our free acts. We cannot objectify our subjectivity, likewise we cannot rise above our freedom, i.e. transcend our own transcendence. "An absolutely certain, propositionally objectified declaration about our exercise of freedom in a determined act located in space and time is basically impossible" with regard to ourselves and even more so to others.[159] The experience of freedom in our free acts can never be fully objectified. Moreover,

> the moment we experience that we come radically from God, that we are dependent on him to the last fiber of our being, then the realization that we also have freedom vis-à-vis God is truly…not all that self-evident.[160]

Human freedom is a mystery.

Freedom only exists because there is unlimited transcendence, and in that sense freedom always has a theological character. It is only "because this horizon of absolute transcendentality that we call 'God' is the source and the term of our spiritual movement, we are subjects at all, and hence free," Rahner asserts. Without this infinite horizon we would be locked up within ourselves, without freedom and unaware of the fact. We are "built" to freely receive what a free God can reveal to us. We are essentially the beings who, in our innermost nature, can hear the word of God and "every philosophy of religion is basically nothing but an attempt to say where humanity should wait for the encounter with God."[161] However, this does not imply that we are

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[158] SW 26, 41.
[159] Schr 6, 191f.
[160] SW 26, 84.
[161] SW 4, 166.

pre-programmed, unquestioned, and unquestioning listeners. Whether we are actually willing to listen is our own free choice. In Rahner's understanding of freedom, God is not only the condition of its possibility, its supporting horizon, but also one vis-à-vis whom we are free. Even though freedom is always exercised on concrete individuals or the individual things of experience, God is its proper object. As our knowledge is ultimately directed at pure being, likewise the horizon of transcendence is the condition for the possibility of our free subjectivity. We encounter God, wherever we turn or whatever we do, as a question to our freedom. And all our acts are an unthematic "yes" or "no" to this God himself. In saying "no," we would be affirming and denying our freedom simultaneously.[162]

Freedom, "as the capacity for the eternal," Rahner considers an extremely high value, higher than the material security of physical existence as such.[163] Therefore, a flight from freedom into the enclosure of a merely secure life is immoral, he asserts. Likewise, the attempt to make what is morally evil more or less completely impossible by coercion is ultimately a morally wrong attempt to eradicate the scope for freedom itself.[164] None of this implies some sort of untouchability of all we do. Freedom might come "naturally" with subjectivity, the capacity for transcendence; the capacity for self-actualization is obviously not unlimited and infallible. Freedom might be "free self-realization into finality. Yet in spite of its peculiarly creative character, it is a *created* freedom."[165] First, because it is borne by its absolute horizon, it does not make itself. Secondly, because people always exercise their original freedom within the world, it has to objectify itself in matter and thereby becomes alienated from itself. We have seen a similar movement in the case of our acts of knowledge. Thirdly and closely related, a person exercises her freedom in a common space of human existence and is unavoidably restricted by other human persons as a result. Human freedom is not totally unlimited. We should distinguish between absolute freedom, or "freedom in its origin," and "freedom in its concrete incarnation in the world" as two moments that form "the single unity of freedom."[166]

[162] SW 26, 98f.
[163] Schr 6, 186.
[164] Schr 2, 248f.
[165] Schr 6, 193.
[166] SW 26, 41.

We are free to listen for a word from a free and personal God. However, in Rahner's metaphysics the act of "hearing" or understanding this God, is not a purely intellectual undertaking. Knowledge is closely related to love. Any "positivism that places knowledge and love merely *de facto* beside one another in an unreconciled dualism must be excluded."[167] The way in which a person can understand her God is always also dependent upon her love. We do not acquire knowledge about God in an attitude of neutrality and then decide to love (or turn away from) this God afterwards. Such a neutrality of "objective" knowledge is a dangerous abstraction of philosophers, he asserts. He even goes as far as to state that

> [what is] co-affirmed [in metaphysical knowledge] can become the object of implicit knowledge only to the extent that this knowledge fits in the structure of the love for which one has opted in one's concrete conduct…Only one who, in spirit, lives in temples and cloisters, can be a philosopher.[168]

Metaphysics necessarily implies spirituality, religious commitment, and love of God. Both knowledge and love are placed within one and the same horizon of mystery.

> Mystery is not merely a way of saying that reason has not yet completed its victory. It is the goal where reason arrives when it attains its perfection by becoming love…[Love is] the perfection of knowledge itself.[169]

The free acts of a subject are luminous only for this subject itself. A free act can become luminous and understandable for another when the other co-performs [*mitvollzieht*] or co-enacts this act as free act; when the other loves it. By taking part [*nachvollziehen*] in the performance of this free act of another, it emerges, as it were, also from oneself and may be understood. This makes love the light of all knowledge. Only in identifying with or re-enacting God's free action it becomes luminous for us.[170]

There is another important, if only implicit, parallel between knowledge and love in Rahner's metaphysics. In his epistemological view of transcendence, the infinite horizon of being points our attention towards specific beings. We know being in beings. In his view of transcendence as love, love of God, as the transcendental opening out,

167 Schr 4, 42.
168 SW 4, 162.
169 Schr 4, 43f.
170 SW 4, 152ff.

requires "an intramundane Thou. The original relationship to God is…love of neighbor."[171] We love God in humans. Transcendence always directs us back towards the world. God is not available as such. Just as the infinite horizon of our being is not to be grasped in knowledge, a personal God is not to be loved in isolation of the world. The theory of Christian mysticism "has always been tempted…to let everything in the mystic act disappear in the face of God." But leaving creatures is only the first stage in finding God, Rahner maintains. The next would be service towards creatures, as is recognized in the first and second commandment: to love God and your neighbor as yourself. But there is a third stage: "to find the very creature itself, in its dependence and autonomy, *in* God."[172] This would be a point of view that does justice to both the unity of all that is and the freedom of the individual subject. "Love of God…is the ultimate reason for a love of man's neighbor that can be unconditional and yet remain free."[173]

Our capacity for transcendence is real, but it makes us neither unconditionally free, nor the Unconditioned itself. We are *finite* spirits who do not have absolute power or knowledge in Rahner's opinion. Nevertheless, we are free to keep an "open mind" for the eternal, spiritual aspects of our existence. Let us end the subject of freedom, love, and transcendence with Rahner's own eloquent summary:

> To be human is to be that being who stands in free love before the God of a possible revelation, to listen for God's word or God's silence to the extent that we open up in free love for this message of the word or of the silence of God. We hear this possible message of the free God when we have not, on account of a wrongly directed love, narrowed the absolute horizon of our openness for being as such, when we have not, in this way, made it impossible for the word of God to say what it might please God to say, to tell us under what guise God wishes to encounter us.[174]

We will not study Rahner's theology in more detail. We will skip over explicitly theological terms like grace and creation, and we will not discuss Rahner's Christology and his concept of Holy Trinity. These constitute a major portion of his thinking. For our present purpose, it suffices to have established his ideas about a real openness between

[171] Schr 6, 189.
[172] Schr 3, 42f.
[173] Rahner 1979, 19.
[174] SW 4, 162.

God and human being that permeates our capacity for knowledge, for freedom, and for love. There is only one topic left to discuss that is important regarding this openness between God and human being. After having spent the entire fifth chapter on the idealistic concept of intellectual intuition, we will now study Rahner's response.

6.2.5. *Intellectual Intuition and Beatific Vision*

In Rahner's view, the ungraspability of God is *not* merely a *de facto* hiddenness that can be remedied in time as each person's natural end, as we have seen. The mystery will never be eliminated, even if we come to meet God face to face in the beatific vision. "On the contrary, it is in the immediate present vision of God that the incomprehensible mystery of God is most forcibly evident."[175] Human openness for pure being is not some inborn capacity for divine knowledge. We do not, on account of our essence, possess any knowledge.[176] There is no such thing as intellectual intuition as assumed in German idealism, Rahner agrees with Kant. Intellectual intuition is "that knowledge that is precisely what human knowledge is not." "The essence of the human intellect is to be defined in light of its '*conjugi passibili corpori*' [being united with receptive corporeality]," he quotes Aquinas.[177] Human knowledge is receptive; "all our ideas derive from contact with the world of sense." There is no such thing as knowledge "in the spirit's pure interiority."[178]

> We know of being as such only because and insofar as we know through the senses... We penetrate into the world in order to reach being as such, which extends beyond the world... Hence for us as finite and receptive spirits there exists a luminosity of being as such only in the luminosity of material realities... We go out toward God [*Ausgang zu Gott*] only by entering into the world [*Eingang in die Welt*].[179]

Transcendence opens up in the perception of finite objects as the horizon against which they are profiled.

[175] Schr 4, 61.
[176] SW 4, 178.
[177] SW 2, 39.
[178] SW 4, 202; 164.
[179] SW 4, 214.

Nonetheless, Rahner seems to agree with Hölderlin in predicting an "absolute nearness to God" at the end of time.[180] Furthermore, he speaks freely of what the tradition calls the *visio beatifica*, or the mystical experience. In his book *Ignatius of Loyola*, he has Ignatius say,

> I had a direct encounter with God. This was the experience I longed to communicate to others... I truly encountered God, the living and true God... How it is at all possible to make such an experience comprehensible using human concepts is for you theologians to speculate.[181]

And that is precisely what Rahner's metaphysics attempts to do. He maintains, "Ignatius was really a mystic."[182] Apparently, he believes that at least some of us can come face to face with this unitary ground of all that is, this ungraspable horizon. So why reject intellectual intuition?

The important distinction between the intellectual intuition of German idealism and Rahner's conception of the *visio beatifica* is the fact that the very substance of this vision is the incomprehensibility of God, in Rahner's view. This vision means "grasping and being grasped by the mystery... its final assertion, its eternal and total immediacy."[183] It is overwhelming nearness of the mystery called God; it does not provide absolute knowledge. God as mystery is *not* the yet unmastered realm of the intelligible, not something to be fathomed in the end. The free and personal God is and remains a holy mystery, beyond the grasp of the I that tends to confuse its infinity with mastering all. Mystery excludes mastery.

> Divine revelation is not the unveiling of something previously hidden, which through this illumination leads to an awareness similar to that found in ordinary knowledge of the world. Rather it means that the '*deus absconditus*' becomes radically present as the abiding mystery.[184]

If the theoretical intellect is understood as the capacity for conceptual mastery and comprehension, then beatitude means that the theoretical intellect is set free to love the mystery, which lays total hold of us

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[180] Schr 5, 15.
[181] Rahner 1979, 11f.
[182] Schr 3, 280.
[183] Schr 4, 41.
[184] Schr 16, 238.

by its direct presence. Here we see how Rahner can speak of a unitary ground, the possibility of total intimacy of human beings and this ground while rejecting the idealistic attempt at grasping this Oneness in our subjectivity. Every Absolute we hope to engulf in mystical flight is ultimately merely "the infinity of dissatisfied finiteness, but not the blessed infinity of truly limitless fullness."[185] If the beatific vision does not provide knowledge of God but the absolute proximity of the mystery, this is a radical experience of the ultimate incomprehensibility. At this point, Rahner's metaphysics coincides with classical mystical theology. In the mystical experience all that we can ask for is faith to accept our limitedness and "the loving surrender to the enduring mystery…from which come love and salvation."[186] Such "blind" trust that we are safe and loved, without which we would be unable to endure, takes thorough preparation in line with the ascetic life style of saints, according to Rahner.

We might summarize all this as a threefold difference between Rahner's ideas concerning the awareness of the One in all that is and the idealistic view of intellectual intuition:

1. Rahner's God is personal and free, not a controllable Absolute at the mercy of the omnipotence of the human I. This God can freely manifest of himself whatever he wishes and whenever. There is a basic error in modernistic philosophy of religion's tendency to decide "from below." We cannot establish *a priori* laws for the possibilities of what is to be revealed since revelation is of its very nature "the unique gratuitous activity of a free agent."[187]
2. God is not to be grasped in the spiritual interior of a human being. Since a human person as a spirit is absolute openness for being, and since "to be human is to be spirit as a historical being [*Der Mensch ist als geschichtliches Wesen Geist*]," revelation necessarily takes place in history.[188] The way to God is not through the absoluteness of the I, but through the world that opens out for the I capable of transcendence.

[185] Schr 3, 43f.
[186] Schr 16, 238.
[187] SW 4, 240.
[188] SW 4, 172.

3. The type of perception that we are capable of with respect to the metaphysical is our hearing. "As long as we are not given the immediate vision of God, we have to listen for a 'word' of God in the sense of a vicarious sign of what is not given in itself."[189] Hence not in the immediate presentation of God's own self, but in a communication through a sign, a word. Even those who are blessed with the immediate vision do not come into the possession of absolute knowledge but into "immediate sight of the mystery itself."[190]

Let us return to our image of the Kantian fence once again and try to understand the way Rahner would relate to it. The first thing to note is that he does not really acknowledge a fence that blocks the view. There is a horizon that we cannot see beyond, but this horizon reaches into infinity. If we allow a fence in Rahner's panorama for now, we could think of it as follows. In Rahner's metaphysical anthropology, "the human person [is] the being who, in history, listens to a possible revelation of God."[191] Human beings are "hearer of the word." Human beings arise from God and are oriented towards God. To be human is to be capable of transcendence. In Rahner's view, this does not imply that we can climb over physical fences and conquer the metaphysical realm on the other side. We can have a transcendental understanding of God as the principle of all knowledge and reality, but

> on account of the finite character of our knowledge, and despite the absolute, limitless range of our transcendence, God remains forever the unknown one, so far as the actual knowledge of the human spirit is concerned.[192]

We cannot form an adequate, objective concept of God. God cannot and will not be grasped and mastered in human knowledge. In order to hear anything at all, a word must be spoken. Even if we can draw the conclusion that it would be entirely useless to speak in a context in which there are no listeners, the initiative ultimately lies with God. Rahner's metaphysics is ultimately theology. And even if this God chooses to reveal himself, this does not result in regular worldly knowledge.

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189 SW 4, 168.
190 Schr 4, 55.
191 SW 4, 38.
192 SW 4, 124.

> As long as we imagine that analytical, coordinating, deductive, and masterful reason is more and not less than experience of the divine incomprehensibility…we have understood nothing of the mystery and of the nature of grace and glory.[193]

We hear words of freedom and love "from the other side of the fence." These do not give us directions for a Beyond; they rather are the guidelines for responsible communication here and now.

6.3. From Here Onwards

The absolute ground versus God is the title of this chapter. The Absolute is a term that comes to be the keyword of German idealism, as we have seen. It is the God of reason, a God within reach of the human intellect, but also a God of immanence and a God of freedom. A God in me. An immanent God has the immense advantage of divinizing life on earth and God as (all) in all is indeed a biblical line of thinking. If my I-hood has an aspect of infinity, it has infinite worth. However, the infinity of the idealistic I is emphasized to the point where it thinks to be able to master God, claim its absoluteness as its own. Somehow, contingency as a reality of life and the element of a God who surpasses all that is (humanly possible) are lost. Nevertheless, both lines are indispensable in an analysis of the human way of being: there is transcendence in the way I am, but my I is always transcended by all that is, can be, and should be. This transcendence is not just a factual surplus over and above all that is; it constitutes an appeal to each and every I to transcend its egocentricity in order to realize peace, love, and unity. Even if they do not fit nicely into a rational system, it seems wrong to let go of either aspect, both in the description of I-hood and in the concept of God.

Perhaps that constitutes an important difference between theology and philosophy. Philosophy analyzes, it pulls apart, dissects, and attempts to provide a clear overview of all the elements of the system. But where the human way of being is concerned systems fail. Not as far as partial descriptions go – these are improving all the time – but somehow the complete picture escapes us. The young Rahner has been a student of Martin Heidegger from whom he says to have

[193] Schr 4, 56.

learned at least one thing: that everywhere and in everything "we can and must seek out that unutterable mystery which disposes over us, even though we can hardly name it with words." He continues to point out the difference between the philosopher Heidegger and himself as a theologian. "Heidegger himself abstains from speech about this mystery, speech which the theologian must utter."[194] Indeed theologians remain, or at least they should remain, faithful to the ineffable without resorting to the glorification of irrationality. Theologians cannot, and most no longer do, hide behind an inviolable faith. But neither can they, like Henrich as a philosopher, be satisfied with mere obscurity as the ground.

Theologians "must utter," even if it is no more than a stutter from time to time. This type of speech is not easily accepted in an academic setting. Theology is no longer in the happy circumstance that God and its own position are sacrosanct. Theology in the 21st century can no longer hide behind the solid walls of a tradition on unshakable philosophical foundations. Philosophy has stopped being *ancilla* to theology. The maid no longer needed her lord and master, her servitude had become an obstacle for her autonomy, and she threw him out. In the course of a few decades some two centuries ago, everything changes, and we are still in the process of getting used to it. Our thinking can no longer start with the Lord, and in the West, there are hardly any *ancillae* left. Ours is a culture where we all have to think for ourselves, lead our own lives. We only serve when we think it worthwhile, and we cannot do so without having to justify (also to ourselves) why we do. The I has become lord and master of life, or so we would like to believe. We know all too well that our control fails frequently; life tends to get out of hand. However, this is often considered a problem to be solved in time:...by us. After all, the land of reason is still young and developing. Give the I time and it will fathom and master the laws of all that is. Thanks to the powers of (neuro-)science, medicine, and technology, it will become clear that there is no beyond, and the stutterers will be silenced forever.

In this chapter, we have encountered two thinkers who are fully aware of modern developments and have integrated them in their theories. Both are convinced that contemporary metaphysics has to start with

[194] See Sheehan 1987, xif.

the experience of self, that no philosophy can ignore the human subject. Both have come to the philosophical conclusion that it takes more than the physical to explain our ability to say 'I,' to know about ourselves and to know that we know. Both take our capacity for transcendence very seriously, but they have been warned by the mistakes of German idealism. The namelessness of the source and final destination of transcendence should be emphasized and honored. "We have really understood this process of naming, only if we understand it as simply pointing to the silence of the transcendental experience," Rahner writes.[195] I believe Henrich would agree. Empirical I's are not absolute, they do not control their own transcendence; it comes to them from a source that is way beyond their grasp.

Another similarity between both authors is that they are convinced that all that is arises from one single ground. However, that is at the same time where we encounter profound differences. Henrich maintains that a unitary ground has to be assumed philosophically to explain human subjectivity. Unity may be the ultimate ground of our (self-)consciousness in his metaphysics; it is definitely not the way we experience life in his worldview. Everyday life is not characterized by unity; it takes place in the duality of the *Grundverhältnis* of conscious life. His concept of the human way of being emphasizes separation, being-apart, instead of togetherness. A person is an isolated individual [*Einzelne*] who is supposedly connected with other individuals in an unknowable ground but does not really live in an atmosphere of unity. Unity is a philosophical assumption; obscurity is the true depth of conscious life in Henrich's philosophy. Ultimate unity is the unreachable ground of an otherwise torn existence. Rahner, on the contrary, states that all our knowledge occurs within the unitary horizon of the *Vorgriff* towards pure unitary being. We are embedded in unity and we have "an infinitely profound yearning for unity."[196] Not to say that Rahner ignores the ambivalence of human existence, but in seeing unity as the horizon of all we know, do, and love, this unity is always present. We know because of this unitary horizon, we are free to act because of it, and we are able to love because of it. This horizon is God. "God alone remains the one true unity in the plurality that is

[195] SW 26, 64.
[196] Schr 6, 3.

the human being."[197] Even when this God is a mystery, he is the holy mystery that loves and wills our existence.

This brings us to the other fundamental difference between Henrich's and Rahner's view of the unitary ground. Both recognize that in the experience of transcendence we feel disquieted by its ineffability, and we find ourselves questioning. In becoming aware of the fact that we are not absolute as subjects, we understand ourselves as beings that receive being. However, for Rahner the Giver is a personal God with whom we may connect in a loving, personal relationship, whereas Henrich is keen on keeping everything metaphysical unpersonal, I-less. Even gratitude as the basis of the religious practice should be viewed as directed at something instead of someone, in his opinion. However, if the source of our being is obscurity, our being is ultimately characterized by uncertainty. If, in contrast, it is the result of a free decision, we can feel secure in the love of a personal God. Unfortunately, this is the point where the masters of suspicion, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, start whispering in our modern ear. The high level of abstraction of Henrich's thinking and his care to avoid the concepts of Christianity give his thinking a measure of plausibility. When the familiar image of a fatherly, loving God who gives life appears, the philosopher gets uncomfortable. Is this projection not the proof of psychological immaturity, or historical indoctrination perhaps?

The fear of anthropomorphism, Nietzsche's "human, all too human," characterizes Henrich's metaphysics, and modern thinking in general. A personal God is embarrassing to believe in. A personal God (over)rules. In German idealism, this God is set aside in favor of a philosophical Absolute that can be thought as the exponent of our subjectivity. But then we become confronted with a new kind of dictatorship; that of the absoluteness of reason. We become equipped with a scary I that results in a dangerous foundationalism destructive of any kind of otherness. It seems as if all human dreams of infinity need to be put in perspective to prevent disasters. We should not substitute the Lord of Christianity with the lordship of our own I. We should save each other and ourselves from the type of rulers that destroy the multiplicity of life.

The I of German idealism is fascinated by its own infinity, and thereby it lets itself be cut off from the experiences of daily, very con-

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[197] Schr 7, 18.

tingent, existence. In turning to the Absolute, idealists manage to forget about real life. Metaphysics should be aware of this danger and always direct the attention back to the world. Or in Rahner's theological language,

> Precisely this conditioned reality is what is loved unconditionally by the Unconditioned that therefore has a validity that makes it more than something merely provisional – something that dissolves in the face of God.[198]

Those who intuit more than the physical should attempt to interpret what it means for life here and now.

The value of daily, conscious life in the world is something that also Henrich emphasizes time and again. However, if metaphysics has to start with the categories of daily life, as he maintains, then it cannot ignore emotions, love, passion, intuition, contradiction, and even irrationality. As homage to the reality of life here and now, metaphysics should demand the freedom to allow other categories than rationality to play a role in its discourse. It should allow for a different sort of rationality. Like Hölderlin, the poet, also the metaphysicist should not be put off by the Kantian "no trespassing" sign while at the same time refusing to fall into the idealistic trap of absolute mastery of the metaphysical. Metaphysics should be the art of thinking beyond physics. This is not a plea for irrationality. However, thinking a unitary ground takes more than reason in the too limited sense of the scientific word. It has been Rahner's contribution to this chapter to point this out to us. By closely connecting love, freedom, and knowledge within the one horizon of our transcendence, he manages to develop a concept of All-Unity that exceeds Henrich's, in my view. His theology voices the type of receptiveness and openness that we need to do metaphysics. The initiative lies with our stuttered transcendence, the (intellectual) intuition concerning unity, the hope to transcend egocentricity.

Let us underline this by going back to Hölderlin's more poetical approach of the ground of consciousness. Perhaps the most remarkable contrast between Hölderlin and (the early) Schelling is in his motives for philosophizing. He is not out to unfold a theory, to build a system; he has the urge to express in an intelligent manner how life *feels*. As a result, passion is allowed to play a role in the theory itself. Hölderlin

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[198] Schr 3, 40f.

does not want to cut the Gordian knot of philosophy as Schelling does; he wants to understand the complexity of his feelings concerning the human way of being. He not only refuses to stop at the Kantian limits, as also his fellow student of the *Stift* does, he chooses to shake off the yoke of philosophy altogether. His turn towards poetry is not a token of philosophical incompetence. In *Grund im Bewusstsein* Henrich has shown conclusively that Hölderlin's thinking is independent and well-respected in Jena, the center of German philosophy at the time.[199] Neither is it a renunciation of thought altogether. Hölderlin merely understands the dangers of the route that his contemporaries are taking towards naming, pinning down, and thereby controlling the wondrous fact of our infinite openness beyond the empirical person who says 'I.' He chooses poetry as a more efficient means of voicing what philosophy cannot allow: human desires, even contradictory ones; passions, even when barely controlled; and intuitions, even when words fail to capture them. So does metaphysics at its best. And in this, it gives a more complete picture of what it means to be an I.

Hölderlin has been called the poet of philosophers, and he has intrigued many: Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Henrich, to name but a few. He has also fascinated theologians such as Guardini and Tillich. Is it not curious how philosophers and theologians alike adore those who dare to follow their heart – or should I say intuition? Those who will call out for God with the intelligence *and* the passion that are both inherent to the human way of being? A theoretical self-interpretation of conscious life is indeed valuable, but philosophy should not be blind to the fact that the meaning of life is not so much in theory as in feelings. For Hölderlin things are not unreal simply because we cannot master them in thought. If we love the "peace of all peace that is higher than all reason," if we long for it, it must be real somewhere, somehow.[200] It is this longing that Henrich, as a philosopher, cannot allow filtering into his texts, if he wants the scientific recognition that his intellectual capacities deserve. Nevertheless, I believe that it hampers his concept of the human way of being.

Our subjectivity in the sense of our experience of a self that is aware of its opposition to the rest of the world seems to be Henrich's starting-point. Being a person, being in the world, he sees as a relativization of

[199] See Henrich 1992a, 31–185.
[200] StA III, 236.

our uniqueness. All the I can do is make the best of its encounters with all the other I's, so it appears. Being an I, being an individual on earth, implies isolation. Hölderlin, on the other hand, departs from a painful awareness of the loss of unity. Whereas Henrich speaks of individual I's that search to explain their existence and look for meaning of this individual life, Hölderlin starts with the lost paradise of a pre-conscious togetherness and is focused on re-establishing unity on earth, the perfect unity of the end of time. Hölderlin would rather disappear as an individual but feels obliged to sit out his individuality in a sort of faithfulness to the divine need for thinking and feeling. Only the hope that this individuality is the inevitable road to a unity that is One and All, instead of One and Nothing, makes his life bearable. At the end of time, the contradictions of life will be resolved in a unity that is in no way harmed by individuality, in Hölderlin's view. Henrich, as a philosopher, is not concerned with eschatology. He has focused on Hölderlin's philosophical work in Jena in 1794–1795, whereas the latter's eschatology only plays a role in his mature poetry. Nevertheless, if we should start with what Henrich calls our primary rationality, our basic understanding of the world that guides conscious life, then we have to take feelings of hope seriously, even if they can only be uttered in verse that leads outside the philosophically safe arena of intellectuality.

Hölderlin survives in this world of lonely I-hood thanks to an intuition of All-unity. He claims flashes of insight into the peace and harmony of this unity, whereas Henrich rejects an awareness of a state that is prior to or beyond the duality of the *Grundverhältnis*. Intellectual intuition is rejected as a source of "knowledge" concerning the unitary ground by Henrich, Rahner, and Hölderlin alike. Intellectual intuition is not thinking; not discursive knowledge, but a non-discursive sensing, an awareness that is too volatile to put into concepts. The idealistic turn of an I swallowing the Absolute and thereby becoming absolute itself is rejected by all three authors. Nonetheless, both Hölderlin and Rahner allow for something like a mystical experience, brief moments of ecstasy in the literal sense of feeling placed outside the (empirical) I by flashes of insight into a totality of peace and harmony. Both do not allow "God to pale into an abstract postulate of the theoretical or practical reason."[201]

[201] Schr 3, 39f.

Perhaps metaphysics is by definition the land of art and theology. Not because the Kantian fence is an absolute limit for what we can know, but because living (and thinking) does not find its limits in knowing. We should not allow the riches of human life to be reduced to what we can think. No metaphysics can ignore rationality; but it should not be limited by it either. To paraphrase Hölderlin: philosophy is a tyrant whose force we should endure but never subject to by free choice.[202] The same is true for the natural sciences. We can be measured, weighed, counted, analyzed in physical systems of measurement. The possibilities and the limitations of our thinking can be determined philosophically and (neuro-)scientifically to a certain degree. But next to and beyond all that, we feel love and pain and longing, we get deeply involved with the other I's that we encounter, and we intuit a presence of divine unity in our lives that we may call God.

For Hölderlin religion is definitely not the answer to the question 'Who am I?' as Henrich maintains it to be, but the desire to rediscover the purity and the harmony of the unitary source here on earth. Hölderlin's search is for a unity that will do justice to his singular I-hood at the same time. To speak with Rahner: We are only human in humanity. Religion is not (only) about the question 'Who am I?'; the question 'How can we live together?' occupies it instead. Not only in the sense of ethics. Religion is an antidote to solipsism. It is about reconnecting what has somehow become severed. It is not only an attempt to cross a divide between God and the human way of being, the ideal and bitter reality. It also searches to reconnect I's who have individualized and absolutized to the point where they can only be at war. For Hölderlin and the religious person in general, a peaceful unity of infinitely valuable individuals is what we live for and hope to live towards.

All-Unity is an attempt to think freedom and individual worth in a setting of a unitary, divine ground. I believe that Hölderlin's philosophical insights concerning the interdependence of the I and its ground, the individual and a (divine) unity is an extremely valuable contribution to metaphysics that has been underestimated by many, including Henrich. We will elaborate on this in the next and final chapter.

[202] See StA VI, 202f.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD – BEYOND ME

Is there a chance of survival for a metaphysics in the 21st century that has I-hood as its point of departure? This question has been the focus of this research, and its ambiguous phrasing is deliberate. On the one hand, this research has concentrated on a specific type of metaphysics: that of Dieter Henrich and its German idealistic roots with I-hood as its explicit starting-point. On the other hand, this question refers to the present point in history, the first decade of the 21st century, in which the I has become the collective point of departure. As a Western culture, we are interested in ourselves to the point of obsession. Life is about an I that is to develop, to shape and model itself according to the ideal of an assertive, healthy, accomplished, and independent individual. The self-sufficiency that is thus expected weighs heavily on the shoulders of the, often fragile, I. Human existence is about more than developing the I, but we seem to have forgotten. Hence, both the central role of the I in the type of metaphysics studied and the egocentrism stimulated in Western culture in our day and age are questioned.

Therefore, in an attempt to shed some light on the modern question 'Who am I?' this study has started with Dieter Henrich's philosophy of subjectivity. It has been determined that the question about I-hood cannot be fully answered unless we allow for an aspect of infinity in our way of being. The I can be approached and studied from many different angles, and each will provide (important) information about certain aspects of the human way of being. However, with Karl Rahner it can be asserted that the I is the "*subiectum* of these multiple objectivities."[1] Even though the individual identifies with these "objectivities" to a certain extent, the I is more than its body, its brain, its psychology, its feelings, its activities, etc. The I is that ungraspable unity that knows of itself as surpassing all these qualities, and in this ability to be "beyond" them it discovers its infinity.

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[1] See 6.2.1.1.

The aspect of infinity in I-hood has led all of the authors involved in this research to the assumption of a unitary ground, one single source for all the I's of the world. The I has become philosophically connected to an Absolute that Henrich describes as obscurity. For the early Schelling it is absolute I, *Urgrund*, or *Ungrund*, but also God in the *Freiheitschrift*. Hölderlin calls it Being in his philosophy, but shifts to God, Father, and Father Ether in his poetry. Rahner likewise speaks of being in his metaphysics, but never denies that to him being is the Christian God. Hence the question about the connection between the I and this ego-less ground of Henrich and the Absolute (I) of the early Schelling can be phrased as 'Who am I to God?' in the metaphysics of Hölderlin and Rahner. All have attempted to approach the unitary ground of all that is through I-hood. The question has not only been whether these projects have succeeded, but also if they stand a chance of succeeding. Can the I as these authors have portrayed it find a sense of infinity and of the infinite worth of its life without trivializing the contingency that is inherent to the human way of being?

This leads to the title of this chapter: God – beyond me. There is a double criticism in this title. Firstly, it criticizes the idealistic search for a 'God' to be found through a pure I to be uncovered in isolation of the rest of the world. Both German idealism as a philosophical school and Henrich as a contemporary elaboration have the tendency to look for pure self-consciousness in an I that is liberated from its entwinement with other I's. Once this I has been pinpointed, it can supposedly start its search for absoluteness and for its connection with other I's, *Mitsein* in Henrich's terminology. Such an approach results in an I that has its private philosophical connection with a unitary ground that is by definition isolated, unrelated (i.e. absolute). In a metaphysics of this sort humankind can easily be understood as a mere innumerable and chaotic collection of I's in which the individual threatens to drown. In fierce competition with other I's it is to prove its unique worth by absolutizing its achievements. The consequence is a lonely I-hood that may reach into infinity as a philosophical conclusion and perhaps in its most private experience, but this I has lost all sense of being united with others in this one ground. It cannot find a real ground for togetherness.

This is not only a depressing metaphysical conclusion for an I in the world, but it does not form a realistic reflection of daily I-hood either. We do not become an I first and subsequently start dealing

with the rest of the world, or Infinity. Our I-hood develops in and never quite separates from the whole in which it comes to be. 'Who am I?' can never be answered apart from the question 'Who are we?' I am me because I am addressed as an individual; I am a hearer of words spoken to me (Rahner). Exactly this domain of relationality can and should form the basis for a concept of God. An I that can neither experience nor think a fundamental connection with other I's and with their common ground will have a hard time giving meaning to its life.

It is Hölderlin's metaphysics that attempts to circumvent such an isolated I as its point of departure; as such he forms a vivid criticism of this shortcoming of idealistic philosophies of subjectivity. The way to the infinite ground of I-hood is not through an enlargement of the self-consciousness of the empirical I to absurd absolute proportions; it is through the I's intuition of the unity from which it has arisen and its longing to restore this unity here and now. Such (re-)unification, however, should not be established at the expense of its attained individuality. Hence, Hölderlin's view of the connections between the I and its unitary ground is far more complicated, but also far more realistic. It recognizes and respects the singularity and the individuality of all I's, not just its own, and it emphasizes the human longing for intimacy and peaceful togetherness.

Closely related is the second criticism in the title of this chapter. The idea of German idealism that the infinite aspect of our I-hood would imply our ability to master Infinity as such, to be able to grasp God or the Absolute in thought, has failed. God is beyond me in the sense that by means of the route of thinking, the I will never understand what God is all about. There is no metaphysical knowledge; God is beyond the I's reflective powers. The metaphysics or the subject philosophies of the authors studied here, with the exception of Hölderlin (and Rahner to a certain extent), are focused on the I that thinks. Thinking places the I, the subject, over and against its objects. It takes place in the realm of arche-separation in which a more original unity has been torn apart, in Hölderlin's view. Thinking cannot bring the I the unity that it longs for, he maintains. The unitary ground of I-hood, of all I's, is beyond the thinkable. Nonetheless, Hölderlin refuses to conclude that any sense of the original unity is therefore impossible.

Rahner's approach shares this tendency to put the unitary ground beyond the human grasp but not entirely beyond all possible experience. As the infinite horizon of and the condition for thinking, being

is always there as the mystery to be known *of*, not to be mastered in knowledge. By allowing other categories than the strictly rational, such as (intellectual) intuition and love, to play a role, a metaphysics of unity that starts with the I might succeed. We are not just thinking subjects; the primary awareness of I-hood is characterized at least as much by the fact that the I feels, loves, and intuits.

The failure to claim knowledge about anything beyond the physical has tempted many, such as naturalists, to declare metaphysics a leftover from pre-scientific worldviews. Thereby they display a hubris comparable to German idealism: what is beyond me does not exist. What the human I cannot think, what does not fit within the categories that we control, is not there. Who or what are they declaring non-existent, however? They claim scientific grounds to reject transcendence. With disdain, they are declaring God dead. However, which God are they referring to exactly? The God of Christian dogma? But who is that? If the answer were as clear as naturalists maintain, theologians would have stopped disputing centuries ago. Spinoza's remark still stands that many who say that they doubt the existence of God may depart from a fictitious idea that does not accord with the true nature of God.[2]

The term 'God' may evoke a range of solidified truths that have perhaps become indigestible for modern Westerners. We might therefore need to let go of the term. However, why give in to misconceptions of those who have not taken the time to study the riches of the term in religious traditions? We will get back to this major issue of naming this ground in 7.5.

Five questions have formed the focus of this project. They were posed in the introduction, approached from the point of view of our different authors, and will be picked up again in this chapter. What has been learned about I-hood will be discussed in 7.1.: Who am I? We will then move on to the I's relation to its unitary ground: Who am I to God? (7.2.). Subsequently, the possibility of knowledge with respect to this ground will be discussed: Who is God to me? (7.3.). The issue of the possibility of the togetherness of I's will be studied next with the assistance of Hölderlin: Who are we? (7.4.). Finally, in 7.5., we will move on to a much-delayed question in this inquiry: Who is God? It is here

[2] See 2.2.

that the friction that has been ignored previously between the terms 'God' and 'unitary ground of I-hood' will be discussed.

7.1. Who am I?

"At every moment, throughout our whole life, we are always thinking I, I, I, and never anything else but I," Fichte writes in the 18th century.[3] Even if he is exaggerating, we can only agree that being an I is the 'natural' point of departure in modern life. Nonetheless, we do not know who this I is; not only as a philosophical enigma, also in daily, conscious life the I is confronted with seeming contradictions between its mind and body, thought and matter, infinity and mortality, etc. What makes one a dualist and another a monist appears to be rather a matter of accepting or rejecting the experienced opposition between these different aspects of life as ultimately different realms. However, the experience of the ambivalence inherent to being a worldly, self-conscious being seems beyond dispute. Most people have experienced the disturbing feeling of not knowing who or what they are from time to time, especially when confronted with (sometimes-unpleasant) surprises about their actions. "I am not myself today" is a not uncommon excuse, and when handicapped, ill, or in pain for prolonged periods of time, many have the tendency to view their bodies as something that they are dragging along, a burden for their real I. Being an I is being a strange mixture of certainty and insecurity, control and surrender, thinking and feeling, proud self-sufficient I-hood and the desire to belong to a larger whole.

A philosophy of I-hood that strives to be faithful to these types of experiences in life has to account for the contradictions that are inherent to self-conscious beings. If a dualistic divide between mind and body is accepted, such a philosophy is safe from naturalism. In suggesting that there is something *totaliter aliter*, something beyond matter and beyond science, the existence of a soul apart from the body, it thereby creates two separate realms: that of physics and reason versus that of religion and faith. However, either such metaphysics places itself outside the scientific community as a mere belief system, or it forces the philosopher to practice science during weekdays and religion on

[3] GA I, 4, 253.

Sunday. It takes a certain amount of courage nowadays to admit that one is willing to take all scientific results concerning the human way of being into account without letting go of the intuition that not all is said if the aspect of infinity in I-hood is left unmentioned. In this research, it has been concluded that there is more to the I than what naturalists claim and (neuro)scientists study. But how can this "more" be thought without retreating into the safe but archaic term "soul" and still protecting the mystery, the aspect of infinity, and the infinite worth of each individual I that it stands for? Who am I?

7.1.1. *Conscious of Being both in and "above" the World*

Dieter Henrich gives a thorough description of self-consciousness as the pre-reflective awareness of me as myself, a familiarity of the I with itself that cannot be learned or proven, that is not the result of reasoning but immediate, unmediated. He demonstrates conclusively that any form of reflection in the description of this I-hood leads to circularities. Self-consciousness is in the realization 'I am!', not in the 'I think.' Schelling's, "My I…produces itself by its own thinking" is circular and cannot be an adequate description of the origination of self-consciousness.[4] Henrich also provides a lucid explanation of the ambivalence of being a self-aware being in the world. I-hood is lived in the inevitable tension between being opposed to the world (subject) and being in the world (person). Experiences of the infinity of I-hood and of its contingency are both inherent in the human way of being an I. Hence, Henrich's two important contributions to a philosophical analysis of I-hood are that self-consciousness is pre-reflective and that the contradiction that is inherent in the human way of being cannot and should not be ignored.

However, there are several aspects to be criticized in Henrich's philosophy of I-hood. First, his concept of being a person. He views the person-aspect of I-hood as a relativization of the uniqueness of the subject-aspect. Hence, being *in* the world seems to decrease the infinite aspect, the unique worth of the I. This is a rather undesirable result since it reminds us of the old dualism of the eternal soul in the unworthy body now rephrased as the *Grundverhältnis* of the infinite subject and the person as contingent "world-thing." The person-aspect

[4] SW 1, 167.

of I-hood should rather open the possibility of relationality instead of sentencing the I to the isolation of being a world-thing drowning in a never-ending stream of other world-things. Being a person implies the capacity and the longing for communication and connection. Being a person is recognizing the infinite worth of other I's and of one's own I-hood in the eyes of other I's. Henrich has made a recent attempt at embedding the I in a community, in worldly togetherness [*Mitsein*], but it almost comes as an afterthought in his long career.[5]

In line with this lack of relationality in his view of personhood, the subject-side of being an I has problematic aspects in Henrich's interpretation as well. Subjecthood, the I's aspect of infinity that is coupled with its unique view, derives this unicity from its opposition to the rest of the world, to all that is and all who are not-I. Hence, also in the infinity of subjectivity the I ends up isolated. Even in the introduction of the term *Mitsein*, Henrich remains in a hurry to emphasize that *Mitsein* is never the cause of subjectivity. In his view, self-consciousness cannot arise merely as the result of being addressed as an individual. He may be right, but even if the awakening of (self-)consciousness is not under human control, healthy I-hood can only develop within a community of I's.

Hence, it can be concluded that interrelatedness, intersubjectivity as the togetherness of subjects, is underdeveloped in Henrich's theory of I-hood.[6] For Henrich the connection between I's in a unitary ground is a postulate, beyond experience and proof. His use of proprioception (being in the body) as a possible basis for connections between I's is rather vague. It is obviously not his area of expertise and feels like a half-hearted attempt to repair an obvious lacuna in his theory. He appears to be unaware of more promising indicators in contemporary neuroscientific research with regard to the flexibility of the boundaries of what we experience as 'I,' such as hemineglect and mirror

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[5] See 1.3.6.

[6] Because of this neglected relationality, Henrich's subject philosophy seems an illustration of what Sallie McFague considers characteristic for Western male development. It starts from a position of separation and works toward connection, whereas the female line "begins from a position of relationship and works towards independence" (McFague 1988, 12). Especially motherhood does indeed help to interpret I-hood as always and everywhere in intimate togetherness. We all start from a position of unconscious unity towards one of more or less independent I-hood without ever completing estranged from this unity. This I-hood needs other I's to develop both the awareness of what sets us apart as what unites us. See also 7.5.2.

neurons. A tool in my hand can become part of me, and mirror neurons allow me to 'participate' in someone else's activities or perhaps even feelings.[7] Even at the physical level the connection between I's is of much greater importance and takes place at a much deeper level than Henrich's philosophy has taken into account. My family, my friends, perhaps even those victims of war that I watch on the evening news become part of me, more than I care to realize and sometimes dare to realize. The human person, the embodied I, is not wholly separate and limited, even in its physicality.

Since Henrich views personhood as *Einzelheit*, isolated individuality, being a contingent "world-thing," his view of personhood becomes automatically associated with embodiment, it was said. This makes his theory vulnerable for attacks from naturalistic angles, and naturalism is indeed, sometimes explicitly but always implicitly, Henrich's major opponent. In the naturalist view, being an I means being a person, an integrated and complex piece of matter, indeed a "world-thing," and its so-called subjectivity, let's say 'its inherent infinity,' is considered merely a left-over from archaic philosophies that will be naturalized and eliminated in the course of time. We will return to the vulnerability of Henrich's metaphysics with respect to naturalism in 7.2.

The original insights of the two authors that we have studied from the era of German idealism in which Henrich's metaphysics is founded have served to qualify this view of being an I. The very early Schelling, first of all, seems to share Henrich's view of empirical I-hood's main occupation as self-preservation which means isolating itself from and opposing itself to all the not-I's that it has to compete with.[8] It seems, however, as if Schelling's I never experiences this as a shortcoming. In the young Schelling's metaphysics, the I's interest is limited to its absoluteness, its infinite self-power, and does not include its contingency, or what Heidegger (and Rahner with him) will later call its "thrownness" [*Geworfenheit*]. The early Schelling's I is not really in the world; it is 'above' it and in the process of becoming absolute I. This implies that it has to incorporate all that is in the absoluteness that it considers its own. Its main occupation appears to consist of engulfing the other I's, which are thus not respected, not even recognized, as real I's. The young Schelling has what we would now call a large

[7] See the discussion in 1.1.
[8] See 3.2.

ego, an I that is not to be relativized by anything or anyone. Hence, in that respect Henrich's theory of more modest I-hood is definitely an improvement.

I heartily support Henrich's attempts to bring the I 'down to earth' and to base a theory of I-hood on daily life's experiences. Furthermore, I can agree with Henrich when he asserts, "Conscious life is at once shaped and unbalanced by the basic conflicting tendencies orienting it."[9] Nonetheless, I-hood is about balancing, not only about being resigned to contradictions in the human way of being that can neither be ignored nor resolved. Two opposites that do not meet but merely serve as each other's counterbalance do not provide an integrated picture of I-hood. Two children on a seesaw are not a unity, but counterweights. In contrast, I-hood presupposes a sense of unity that precedes all dualism.

It is Hölderlin who provides a useful correction of idealistic views of I-hood. Henrich is right in noting that Hölderlin does not support the idealistic solution of self-absolutization. When Hyperion tries to take that approach by following Alabanda in his absolute I-hood, in the novel *Hyperion*, it turns out to be a nearly fatal mistake.[10] Hölderlin tries to break away from the idealistic egocentricity, but he does not achieve this by relativizing the I's unique individuality, and in that sense he also corrects Henrich's view of I-hood. With Henrich, he recognizes the sharp contradiction within I-hood and he is aware of the modern fear of losing oneself. However, for Hölderlin the threat is not in all the other I's per se.

Whereas for Henrich the contradiction of I-hood is in the unicity of the subject's infinity versus the self-relativization of contingent personhood in the world, for Hölderlin it is self-conscious I-hood versus unconscious unity. Hence, Henrich's conflicting drives are quite different from the ones that Hölderlin is struggling with. The ambiguity of Hölderlin's view of I-hood is not in its infinity versus its contingency: it is in being torn between the desire to unite with all other I's for whom he passionately longs and the I's duty to remain an isolated individual. If the I gives in to its most basic desire to unite with specific I's that it loves, this would constitute a premature unification. It would be a return to a pre-conscious state indistinguishable from death. The

[9] Henrich 1997b, 112.
[10] See 4.5.

I is aware of its divine task to endure the loneliness of I-hood and fight the desire of premature union in order to realize a universal, living unity of individual I's. Consequently, Hölderlin seeks a balance between unity and individuality here and now. In his metaphysics, he tries to think unification in daily life, and Henrich appears to have missed this part of Hölderlin's views on being an I.

In summary, Henrich's metaphysics is clearly based upon (the pitfalls of) idealistic foundations in which the Absolute becomes closely associated with I-hood. The problem with the philosophy of German idealism is that it tries to think an I apart from, or perhaps beyond, its entanglement with other I's or even its worldy reality as a whole. This does not work. The search for a pure I that first has to fathom itself and starts to relate afterwards is an unrealistic I. I believe that Henrich never really rose above this idealistic shortcoming. An I is born into a community; it becomes an I in and by relating to other I's. An I arises out of unity and never fully detaches itself therefrom. Daily life consists in balancing between individuality and unity, between self-centeredness and openness. Hölderlin understands this in the 18th century and, interestingly, this point of view is reflected in the metaphysics of Karl Rahner. The associated key term is love.

7.1.2. *Loving*

The novelist Moshin Hamid writes that

> [it is] not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is outside, and something of the outside is now within us.[11]

The character of Hamid's novel is referring to romantic love. This openness for another to the point where it becomes difficult to tell who is who from time to time is accepted as a not uncommon occurrence between lovers. Something similar, however, seems to be the case in human interactions in general as even neuroscientific research seems to suggest, as I have noted. It not only implies letting (something of) another I in, but also the I's stepping out of itself, hence transcendence.

[11] Hamid 2007, 174.

Love is the art of opening up for another and allowing boundaries between I's to blur both ways. Let us summarize what can be and has been said about love with the help of the thinkers of this study.

Henrich writes,

> Both love and selfhood must be conceived together, freed from their opposition, which seems hopeless – and this by means of a thought that neither denies nor robs either of its genuine sense by reducing it to a moment of the other.[12]

In Henrich's philosophy, love and I-hood appear to be opposites, and the task of thinking them together seems a "hopeless" one. This is another demonstration of his view of I-hood as isolation. An I that opens up risks losing itself. Love is indeed hard to integrate in his metaphysics.

Schelling also recognizes the tension between the two concepts. Love and selfhood are opposed, but from this pair of opposites arises life, not a situation of seeming "hopelessness." In Schelling's solution, I-hood (being-in-self) is viewed as the ground that is needed to prevent the I from flowing away in the other I's it encounters. Selfhood provides a mainstay from which the right type of togetherness, love, can flow. The paradox of love is that it unites what can exist in itself but cannot really be without the other. According to Schelling, love unites what is different and independent.[13]

Schelling's solution points at the limitations of a metaphysics that allows only rational categories.[14] As he puts it, "All life yearns to be raised from mute, ineffective unity into an expressed, effective one."[15] Remaining an I, an isolated self, is ineffective unity. It is unity because all not-I's are ignored. For a unity to be effective, it needs to be expressed, realized, as successful togetherness of I's. This going-out-of-self is a yearning of life itself. Yearning, desire, longing are perhaps not safe philosophical categories, but they are indeed part of the experiences of conscious life, which also Henrich agrees should be the basis of a metaphysics that is viable in this day and age. Yearning for an expressed, communicated, realized unity is what lures people out of their mute

[12] Henrich 1997b, 123.
[13] See 3.4.3.
[14] This issue will be returned to in 7.3.
[15] See 3.4.1.

self-sufficiency. By the time Schelling can write this, he is well into the *Freedom* essay of 1809 and moving away from the strictly rational concepts and the "absolute I-hood" of his earlier metaphysics.

Once again, it is Hölderlin who manages to mediate between seeming opposites. He is keenly aware of both the importance and the risk of love as it is commonly understood and finds expression in daily life. Love is an antidote for the curse of isolated I-hood. Love unites I's and unification is what Hölderlin longs for. In our daily reality of being literally torn between the drive to unite, or even merge, with others and to preserve self-conscious I-hood, love is the potential of a harmonious solution of what is unsolvable at our point in history. However, there is a risk involved in such love. Lovers indeed open up for each other in a profound way, but Hölderlin recognizes the exclusiveness of such a connection. The openness of the I should not be limited to a few selected I's that 'return the favor' and thereby confirm the I's unique worth. When he writes, "All is lost, when Unity, holy universal Love is lost," the key word is "universal."[16] Love must enable general unity, universal openness; not a one-on-one romantic union. Love is the principle that is to transcend the dichotomy of conscious I-hood and pre-conscious unity. Love is the image of the reality of All-Unity at the end of time, when "the law of love alone, the gently leveling, rules from here right up to Heaven."[17] In that respect, love is the I's universal duty, and it is not allowed to hide behind a private surrogate.

Hence in a metaphysics that takes the I as its point of departure, there need not be all that much opposition between love and selfhood as Henrich seems to believe. Only when the I's I-hood is viewed as something that can only be lived in isolation of other I's does it appear to be so. Being an I is good, but an I that is only directed at its own center is egocentric in the contemporary sense of the word. Only when this I opens up, flees its self-centeredness, there is love. From Schelling it can be learned that only this opening up leads to real life since selfhood is only the ground of being, not real existence itself. Love is not indifference in the sense of unifying independent entities into an amorphous mass, nor is it mutual dependence as a condition for survival of isolated I-hood. Love is where the combination of unity

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[16] StA VI, 419.

[17] BrA IX, 233. See 4.7.

and individuality succeeds. Love is where I-hood can exist within a unity without dissolving. Hölderlin adds to this view the notion that love's universality is the lifelong task of the I.

Rahner also recognizes the universality in the command to love your neighbor; not a selected few but those the I encounters everywhere in daily life. He makes the connection between love and subjectivity as two cases of the same capacity for transcendence of the I. Hence, the capacity for transcendence is not limited to the realm of consciousness but also of love. Love is transcendence towards another I, subjectivity is transcendence of the world of separate objects, both movements towards an infinite horizon. In the beings of the world, we reach for pure being; in loving the neighbor, we love God. Reversely, both acts of transcendence direct us back towards the world. He describes an act of love as a subject who is present-to-self and chooses to go out to another I, to open up for another. Hence, love constitutes the balance between independent I-hood and togetherness. However, Rahner goes even further than viewing love as the I's mere opening up. By loving one co-performs, takes part in, the acts of another. In love, we can shift perspective, so to say. In this sense, love is not only the 'natural' capacity of transcendence that comes with I-hood; love is also an expression of the I's freedom to transcend. An act of love is the I's free decision to move outside itself. For Rahner love and freedom are closely connected. Let us turn to the latter topic.

7.1.3. *Free*

Freedom is an illusion, naturalists tell us. We will stop talking about grounds once we finally understand all the causes of human behavior. Hence, the philosophy of freedom will be replaced by the physiology of decision-making.[18] There are no grounds for our acts and we do not make free decisions; we are merely caused to act this way or that by the laws of matter. These types of philosophical conclusions, even when in no way confirmed and agreed upon in the neuroscientific field, manage to get the attention of the general public because they are so upsetting in the contradiction to our primary understanding of ourselves. We do not live our personal life nor has society been organized as if people simply do what they cannot help doing. Human freedom is

[18] See Chapter 1.

not absolute and unlimited, that much is obvious. There is a degree of determinism, or unfreedom, in each of us. Nonetheless, if we look at the reality of life, some people make 'not altogether free' decisions that we qualify as wrong and others make 'not altogether free' decisions that we admire as heroic. I refuse to believe that we should organize our society with perfect indifference to both.

It is with freedom as it is with being an I: it is lived in the tension of an aspect of infinity and an aspect of being in the world, hence submitted to the laws of matter. It is the aspect of infinity that makes that neither self-consciousness nor freedom can be observed; it can only be experienced by the I itself. Others can merely deduce free I-hood from its activity. Therefore, being an I-sayer and being free are closely linked in that neither can be understood objectively by definition. If it fits in a system with laws, it is no longer free, and if it is objectifiable, it is no longer I-hood. Hence, naturalists reject both, as we have seen in the first chapter. Nonetheless, both the sense of being an I and being free (to a certain extent) to actualize this I-hood are assumed in daily life.

Both Rahner and Henrich confirm this link between freedom and I-hood. Only in free activity, something can happen that cannot be understood from a previous ground. Freedom is what allows the I to express its uniqueness and it constitutes its uniqueness at the same time. Henrich calls it self-determination and likewise Rahner sees freedom as the power to decide what is to be final and definitive in one's life.[19] Both agree that freedom is not about doing whatever comes to mind, but about realizing one's real being, real nature. In freedom, the subject does not do "something, but does itself." Freedom is of the utmost importance for an I to realize itself. In this self-actualization, it decides if and how its ground is realized.

This illustrates the two sides of freedom. I-hood needs free activity in order to determine the unique way in which a personal life unfolds. Only in free activity, something unique can happen that cannot be deduced from this ground. Hence, in the unfolding of its free activity the I is free vis-à-vis its ground. Therefore, the ground cannot determine the I's free acts even when transcendence and freedom are not the result of the I's own efforts: it is given to it. That makes this unitary ground dependent upon the self-determination that it has given to

[19] See 6.1.2. and 6.2.3. respectively.

these free I's. In freedom the I and its ground appear most clearly in their interdependence. Even though the I's freedom is exercised within the world, it is ultimately directed at this infinite ground.

In summary, the question 'Who am I?' can be answered as follows: In my ability to say 'I,' I become aware of an aspect of infinity in my I-hood. Somehow, I transcend my status of "world-thing" and become aware of both my capacity for unique individuality and for unity with others. In love, I am able to realize some of this togetherness here and now, and in my free activity I realize my unicity and become aware of the relationship of interdependence between me and the one ground of I-hood. Therefore, before returning to the topic of freedom in 7.2., we have to turn our attention to this unitary ground of I-hood as it can be interpreted with the help of the authors of this study.

7.2. Who am I to God?

The question of the relation of the I to its unitary ground, or phrased more theologically 'Who am I to God?' has been studied extensively in the course of this project.[20] Even though the philosophies differ considerably, all authors maintain that the diversity of the I's of the world arise from and remain within one unitary ground. Somehow, the human I never loses touch with this absolute ground. The immanence of this ground results in the self-absolutization of the idealistic I. It is an I that becomes so self-confident and grand in its own absoluteness that it ignores all otherness, and is no longer able to recognize and respect the infinite worth of all other I's. The not-I as my unconscious product, as Fichte states it, is undoubtedly a dangerous point of departure for the I's interactions with its world.[21] The aspect of infinity of the I leads to the absolutization of the I's power to control all that is, even to master its ground, as we have seen.

The merits of Henrich's attempts at facilitating a contemporary metaphysics starting with the infinite aspect of I-hood while avoiding the major pitfall of idealistic self-aggrandization, are considerable. However, he tries to counteract this dangerous development by positing the

[20] The undeniable friction between the metaphysical relation of the I to its ground and the theological relation of a human subject to God will be addressed in 7.5.

[21] See 5.1.

I's total ignorance concerning its metaphysical roots, which results in the somewhat frantic question 'Where do I come from?' In Henrich's metaphysics, precisely the infinite ground that has to be assumed in combination with its absolute unknowability, hence unavailability, is to keep the I from the deadly hubris of German idealism. Thanks to the obscurity of its ground, the I is chastised into feelings of gratitude for its existence rather than dreams of absolute self-power. However, is that not a rather fragile protection against 'I-hood getting out of hand'? Is this orphaned I, preoccupied with its identity and obsessed with self-preservation as a result of this insecurity concerning its ground, not the contemporary variety of Saint Augustine's *incurvatio in seipsum*, an I that is literally 'rolled up into itself' like a threatened hedgehog. Introverted, unable and unwilling to step out of the safe solitude of its I-hood in fear of being swallowed by other, more powerful I's, and thus disappearing altogether. The idealistic I may lack all modesty, but Henrich's attempts to relativize its absoluteness leave the I literally in the dark, which also seems an unsatisfactory condition for a being that he claims fit for *speculari*, circumspection.

The inaccessibility of the I's ground is problematic in yet another respect. When Henrich asserts that in his model of all-unity "individual beings are viewed as not *ultimately* isolated from each other," the question arises whether an unknowable, unitary ground that is merely a postulate can really be the basis of a satisfactory metaphysics. What is the use of postulating that the I's isolation is not ultimate, if unification merely takes place in a ground that is not only beyond knowledge but also beyond any kind of experience? If the unity of the ground is really immanent, the I needs to be 'in touch with it' somehow. It needs to be reflected and experienced in the reality of its everyday togetherness with other I's. It is the daily reminder and reality of ultimate togetherness that gives its life meaning. Henrich speaks of ultimate thoughts and thoughts of closure, but the I also longs for a sense of belonging here and now.

Another difficulty with Henrich's metaphysical attempt to circumvent idealistic self-absolutization – a real danger for a metaphysics emphasizing the aspect of infinity in I-hood – is that it brings his philosophy within the firing-range of naturalism. After all, naturalists agree on the fact that there is one ground to all that is. They even concede this ground to appear 'infinite' in the sheer vastness of the real and possible beings arising from it. However, from the naturalist point of view, this ground is not obscurity but matter. Since the

human race is becoming ever more adept at manipulating matter, it could provide a home for our still unanswered questions and justify the hope that with progressive scientific research this home can be modeled for life-long, if not eternal, happiness. In this light, obscurity is a rather meager alternative. Is there really an existential advantage to positing an infinite and obscure ground, which is once more a distant 'Great Beyond' like the Monarch in high heaven that German idealists attempted to bring down to earth?[22]

Perhaps there is one 'tangible' advantage that could make Henrich's metaphysics more attractive than naturalism to modern I's: his attempt to save the individual's uniqueness. After all, he claims the I's subjectivity and its inherent infinity next to and of equal importance as its contingent personhood. In that case, it would be necessary for the human person (the I in the world) to be able to realize or 'embody' something of that uniqueness. In order to accomplish this, the concept of freedom is indispensable. The I's real sense of freedom resists naturalistic theories that maintain that as soon as all of the components of the machine have been pinpointed and its input unveiled, there will be no room left for freedom either.[23] The individual's freedom, which still forms the backbone of Western societies even if popular, contemporary naturalistic theories can hardly support it, should therefore get more serious attention than Henrich's metaphysics grants it with.

Thus, we come back to the philosophical question concerning freedom once more. It is a major theme for the thinkers of the late 18th century who are enamored with the ideals of the French Revolution, at least for a while, as we have seen in Chapter 2. Freedom is also the one opening to the metaphysical after Kant has posited his strictly dualistic epistemology. However, freedom becomes a very complicated issue in a metaphysics of a unitary ground, as has been noted. How can this ground that enables and remains present in all beings allow for the freedom of these beings?

Of the authors discussed, only Schelling makes a serious attempt at explaining the possibility of individual freedom in combination with a unitary ground. There is one ground that can either keep to itself or flow out. Since the two contradictory forces, the centripetal one of selfhood and the centrifugal one of love, are equiprimordial in this

[22] We will return to the concept of God in the late 18th century in 7.5.1.
[23] See Swaab's statement in Chapter 1.

ground, the decision to bring forth is an expression of the unitary ground's freedom. The ground is free, is Schelling's conclusion, and only from a free ground free beings can arise. These forces, which are active in the ground, also work in the I. Therefore, both the capacity for selfhood and love, turning inward and flowing out, belong to the basic makeup of these beings. People are (to a certain extent) free to choose when to turn inward and when to open up. Turning inward is not a bad thing; it is necessary even, otherwise the I would simply dissolve. Selfhood is the ground of being, but too much focus on inwardness and self-preservation, hence egocentricity, is evil. Only when this selfhood serves as a foothold for an I that flows out, loves, real being is realized. Thus from a unitary ground that has no evil in it at all, beings arise that are free to be evil or good. This is a brilliant solution for a metaphysics of a unitary ground giving rise to independent I's.

But there is more, in Schelling's opinion. This freedom of beings is not merely the result of the free decision of this ground to create. It is also a necessity for this ground in order to unfold. If these beings open up, they contribute to the unfolding of the full potential of the ground; the *Deus implicitus* can develop into the *Deus explicitus*. In freedom, the I and its ground become mutually dependent. This is an extremely important conclusion for the I's proud sense of self-worth. Even though German idealistic philosophies tend to allow its I to rise above all things earthly and Henrich's attempts to bring it down to earth are justified, this philosophical conclusion of the interdependence of the I and its ground should not be trivialized. Hölderlin also emphasizes the dependence of the ground on self-conscious beings in order to "feel itself." Hölderlin speaks of the unitary ground that thus gains consciousness, Schelling of the ground that comes alive. Since also for Hölderlin consciousness means life – Being as unconscious unity is pure nothingness –, for both Schelling and Hölderlin the free, conscious activity of beings is literally a matter of life and death for this unitary ground.

Nonetheless, there is a fundamental difference between Hölderlin and Schelling. The latter is very concerned with explaining how real evil can exist in a world that arises from a unitary ground that has no evil in it whatsoever. He takes the freedom of human beings very seriously. Hölderlin, in contrast, tends to trivialize evil: "A mere nothing is evil."[24] Schelling would agree that in the end evil will be cast out as

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[24] See 4.7.

non-being, but that does not make it a "mere nothing" in our everyday existence, in his opinion. In line with this trivialization of evil, Hölderlin does not seem particularly interested in the subject of freedom. He is touched by the *égalité* and *fraternité* of the French Revolution rather than its *liberté*. In an early *Hymn to Freedom* (1793), in which the "Queen of Freedom" claims that the "world lives its holy life freely," freedom is only "beckoning in the distance."[25] Ultimately it is "the law of fate, that each shall know of all the others," it says in the *Celebration of Peace*.[26] Hölderlin sees a divine plan unfolding in which there is not all that much room for humans to have a say and change its course by their own free activity.

Schelling tends to exaggerate free and active I-hood. He writes, "Give man the awareness of what he is, and he will soon learn to be what he ought to be. Give him the theoretical self-respect and the practical will soon follow."[27] Whereas Schelling believes the I to be powerful enough to do the right thing once educated about the unitary ground of life, Hölderlin agrees that the principle of unity has been "the regulating basis of the history of mankind" from the beginning but he cannot or will not place the fate of this unity in the hands of human I's.[28] Freedom as a theme never really appeals to Hölderlin, and perhaps he feels that "the fearfully active" I of his idealistic fellow students is in the need of an antidote.[29] A small poem called *Wurzel alles Übels* [*The Root of All Evil*] says, "To be united, at one, is divine and good; wherefrom then comes the desire among people that only one person, one thing, only they?"[30] This could be a reference to the idealistic self-aggrandization that he renounces.

Hölderlin's metaphysics does not really allow for an active role for the free I, hampered as it is by its eagerness to give up the burden of isolated I-hood. Hölderlin's I appears too passive to do justice to the free activity that forms the I's real contribution to the realization of divine unity. The I might not be as powerful as Schelling pictures it, but by leaning over to the other extreme of total passivity Hölderlin might miss the opportunity to think the I's assistance of divine Being

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25 StA I, 157; 158; 161.

26 BrA IX, 234.

27 SW 1, 157.

28 StA I, 158.

29 StA II, 118; See 5.3.4.

30 "Einig zu seyn, ist göttlich und gut; woher ist die Sucht denn / Unter den Menschen, dass nur Einer und Eines nur sie?" (StA I, 305).

in coming alive, which is exactly what he desperately longs for. His I does not manage to break away from its melancholic sense of loss and seize a measure of control over itself. Only in the few short years as a productive poet, he allows for a proud role for the I, only to shrink away from the dangers of the idealistic hubris. We do indeed "stir and dispute where the Spirit is active" in Hölderlin's concept of the I, but ultimately the I is subjected to a divine plan that is unfolding.[31] Hence not a free subject that actively contributes, but a passive being subjected to infinite powers and desires. This seems in contradiction with Hölderlin's view of Being's dependence on human beings to really be.

The situation of the dependence of the ground on the I is a heresy in the eyes of late 18th century theology. It would be blasphemous to suggest that the Lord could be dependent upon His subjects. However, the attempts of our *Stiftler* to contribute a real role to the I's free actions in a divine plan seem logical, if human freedom is to be taken seriously. An almighty God no longer appeals to them, and such a God is going out of fashion in contemporary Western society as well. It is hard for humans to achieve a certain balance in free activity and passive receptiveness in life, as is illustrated so well by these two young thinkers. Nonetheless, both aspects of I-hood belong to the *condition humaine*. Is it all that farfetched to assume a degree of vulnerability in this ground that opened up and allowed the unfolding of its life, its realization, to depend upon free beings? And is there room for this type of question in a philosophical discourse? This topic will be returned to in the following sections.

In summary, the question 'Who am I to God?', the question about the I's participation in a unitary ground can be answered as follows: I am both embedded in and independent of the one ground of all beings. In my free activity, I can act in ways that are unique and cannot be explained from this ground. The freedom that I am endowed with as a consequence of my origins in a free ground create a situation of mutual dependence between me and this ground. I am grounded in a unity that allows me freedom to choose to either open up or remain self-centered. My choice, however, affects the ground's ability to unfold. To God I am a unique individual whose choices either assist or hinder

[31] BrA IX, 234.

God's universal life. It seems that with the latter statement the rational metaphysical discourse concerning the I's ground is coming closer to God-talk. This brings us to the next major issue in this study. This is the question concerning the I's ability to know or at least know *of* its metaphysical ground.

7.3. Who is God to Me?

With respect to the I's ability to know, or know of, its ground and the appropriate metaphysical discourse, the thinkers of this study disagree considerably.[32] Let us start with the latter. Henrich and the early Schelling use rational categories to discuss the infinite ground of the human way of being. The difficulties they encounter when remaining within the boundaries of philosophical reflection form an illustration of the problems of a metaphysics that endeavors to be rational according to scientific rules, the modern limits set by the (natural) sciences. In his *Freedom* essay, Schelling breaks with a narrowly rational discourse and comes to employ an entirely different language with categories that are no longer strictly philosophical.[33] Hölderlin switches to poetry in order to be able to express what the unity of this ground of I-hood is all about. Rahner takes the God of the Christian tradition as his point of reference and takes refuge in a theological discourse. Henrich, however, stays within modern Kantian limits and can do none of these things. Consequently, his ground is rational with almost clinical precision, and all it can thus be is obscurity. No life, no feelings, no relationality, only obscure 'it-ness' can be allowed in a ground that is supposed to be acceptable for a metaphysics that rejects any kind of explicit religiosity.

Let it be clear that this is in no way implies my rejection of the strictly rational method of the sciences. Its accomplishments should not be underestimated. There is no denying and no need to deny that human beings are (also) natural beings in the world. This we realize more and more as the natural sciences progress. Much has been achieved in terms of the protection of human beings from natural

[32] Please note, once again, that there is considerable friction between the metaphysical question concerning the I's ability to know its ground and the theologically phrased Who am I to God? This issue will be thematized explicitly in 7.5.

[33] See 3.4.1.

disaster, pain, and disease. Human thinking, human I-hood, cannot and should not be separated from the human brain. We have a lot in common with those "beings to which men deny souls," as Hölderlin remarks towards the end of the 18th century.[34] The methods of science seem very successful in clarifying important aspects of the materiality of human self-conscious life.

Nonetheless, it cannot be a turn for the better if we unleash the laws of nature on our I-hood and simplify it in order to eliminate the sense of ambivalence that comes with the human way of being. We might no longer be interested in using the word "soul," which perhaps served in the past to diminish the other, physical, aspect of I-hood. However, we should not deny the infinite aspect of I-hood and thereby the infinite worth of every human life. A metaphysics that degrades I's to no more than complex matter might just result in the same disrespect for human life that we have displayed towards nature in general. As we have felt, and often still feel, justified to exploit nature to death, humanity might perish at the mercy of those who deny "souls" even to themselves. Life is more than what is captured by the laws of nature. This assertion is something to defend, even if it makes for philosophical and existential complications. It is exactly this conviction and his tenacity in defending it in a philosophical setting that makes Henrich's metaphysics invaluable. However, it tries to solve purely rationally, what can perhaps only be intuited, felt, experienced pre-reflectively. The latter term is exactly the one Henrich uses for self-consciousness, but he does not extend this pre-reflective certainty to the metaphysics of its ground.

This inevitably brings us to a much-contested topic in the late 18th century circles of our authors. It concerns the question about what the I can really know about this infinite ground of I-hood. The answer causes a fundamental split in metaphysics. It can be maintained that it is an object of faith, hence the domain of religion. Radically opposed are endeavors such as the absolute idealism of Schelling's early years to obtain knowledge of the Absolute, to re-incorporate it in the domain of philosophy. In a Kantian context of knowledge as the categories of understanding in the mind of the subject combined with the raw material that the world of objects provides it with, Schelling never

[34] See 4.3.1.

succeeds, as we have seen in Chapter 3. Kant wins the debate, it could be said, an outcome still respected by philosophers, Henrich among them, more than two centuries later.

In contrast with Schelling, Hölderlin realizes almost from the beginning that it is impossible to think the unitary ground. Thinking is *Urtheilung*, arche-separation, and the realm of the *Urtheil* only tears the realm of unitary Being apart. Unity does not arise from and is not experienced in our ability to think. Hence, the I cannot think its unitary ground in Hölderlin's view, but neither does he want to ban this ground to the realm of faith. This would put a distance between him and his divine roots that he finds unacceptable and not in line with his basic intuitions. Hölderlin's I longs for togetherness, and this results in a metaphysics that seeks unity here and now. Intellectual intuition becomes the intermediate term between faith and knowledge that he desperately needs to explain these flashes of insight into the world as it is meant to be: a peaceful unity of independent I's, All-Unity.

Intellectual intuition becomes the term to indicate that the I cannot know but can know *of* its ground. The heated debate that rages when Hölderlin and Schelling develop their views on intellectual intuition soon comes to a conclusion: there is no room for it in philosophy. Nonetheless, novelists, poets, and mystics continue to hold on to the possibility of an 'experience' of some kind of the all-unitary ground, and the term leads a life of its own in romantic literature and religiosity. It has even survived into the 21st century. Not as *intellectual* intuition as such, but as intuition, sixth sense, inspiration, being in touch with the primal source, mystical experience, etc. The number of terms is almost inexhaustible, and its meaning is often just as vague as intellectual intuition is towards the end of the 18th century. In all cases, it refers to a category that is beyond a strict rationality. Intuition is not thinking, reflection. Intuition is not concerned with the opposition between the subject and its world, but with its unity.

Two centuries later, this problem still stands in metaphysics. Is the reference to revelation and faith the only possibility to get beyond the Kantian fence that sets the boundaries for the I's knowledge? Henrich respects Kant's limits of the knowable by speaking of ultimate thoughts as regulative ideas. These are thoughts of closure that summarize a life, make it understandable within a totality that is presented to us. Henrich calls All-Unity a postulate and the consequence is that all he can say about this one, infinite reality is that it is ultimate but shrouded in obscurity. Thus, he allows our most fundamental feelings

to be dictated by an artificial line that does not function as such in daily conscious life, which he claims to be the appropriate point of departure for a contemporary metaphysics. At one point in his career (around 1802), even Schelling concedes that the philosophical, the Kantian, concept of reason is far too narrow. Reason should be more than explanation in the sense of providing causes and deduction, i.e. deriving something from higher principles. It should also include contemplation, considering something in itself and not just in relation to other things; hence, intellectual intuition or perhaps what is called holistic thinking nowadays. The enterprise of metaphysics might be doomed to fail, if we do not accept a faculty of intuition in whatever form. But if we do, what distinguishes it from mere fantasy?

Even when Henrich shies away from pre-reflectivity when it comes to a metaphysics of the I's ground that is beyond knowledge, the solution might nonetheless be in the non-rational experiences of everyday conscious life. Let us test this criterion on our authors. In the *Freiheitschrift*, Schelling describes the urges in the *Urgrund* giving rise to creation. It might be characteristic of his foundationalism that he does this from the point of view of this Absolute. This might evoke a sense of deep recognition in those who can somehow go along with this sentiment. Nonetheless, in the reality of the here and now it implies taking an impossible viewpoint as the point of departure. We simply know nothing about possible urges in an *Urgrund*. Hölderlin's approach is radically different in that the I 'discovers' in the course of *Hyperion* that individual I-hood is needed in order to realize oneness, to make primordial unity come alive. It is not a metaphysical theory in the sense of claiming to know how creation must proceed; it is the experience of the I's conscious life that gives insight in a metaphysics of its unitary ground. These are crucial differences. Positing the oneness of reality is not a necessity for a metaphysical theory or its logical conclusion; it is what a living human being cannot help "divining," to use Hölderlin's poetic term, in the trials and tribulations of life.

Like Henrich, also Rahner respects the Kantian dual roots of knowledge and rejects the term intellectual intuition as precisely what human knowledge is not. He asserts that the problem is that in our times knowledge has become too much about mastery of an object by a subject. If applied to God, we risk turning knowing *of* God into grasping God, and "replacing God with I," Rahner maintains. Human openness for its unitary ground is not an inborn capacity for knowledge of God. All knowledge of pure being, God, is *a posteriori* in the sense

that we only obtain it by stepping out into the world of beings and transcendental to the extent that the orientation towards pure being is a permanent existential of the human being. Nonetheless, he asserts that we know *of* being and that the most general structure of being is co-known [*mitgewusst*] by us.

Rahner's rejection of the term intellectual intuition notwithstanding, I do not believe that he would object to Hölderlin's assertion that people can glimpse divine unity in poetry, nature, and relationships that succeed, as long as it does not result in the idealistic attempt of mastering the unitary ground and confining it within the bounds of human I-hood. In that respect, there is not very much disagreement between both thinkers. The major difference between Rahner and Hölderlin might be that the very substance of the *visio beatifica* is mystery for Rahner; whereas for Hölderlin we will fully know each other, the all-encompassing divine unity, and ourselves once we come to meet "the Father" face to face at the Celebration of peace.

Another difference, perhaps, is Rahner's great concern for the freedom of God – God is free to reveal what we may know of Him. And this God reveals in the openness of history. Rahner's refusal to make revelation into an inner experience is directly related to his fear that it will thus come within the grasp of the human I. He makes a plea for knowledge of God as openness to transcendence, hence to mystery. Mystery instead of mastery, and openness and wonder instead of the absoluteness of the I. However, also for Hölderlin true knowledge of the unitary ground, as opposed to an occasional flash of insight, is not within grasp of the individual human I. As it has been noted earlier, Hölderlin is not particularly preoccupied with protecting God's freedom since he does not view the I as powerful enough to get a hold of and thus manipulate the Divine. History is Being unfolding according to the Father's plan, and human knowledge of this divine process will not occur until the end of time. Nonetheless, Hölderlin seems overwhelmed by occasional insights here and now into the divine unity that is the I's ground. Even though Rahner does not admit to these openly, he has the founder of his order, Ignatius of Loyola, do this for him. In his *Theological Investigations*, he seems to retreat into the safety of the accepted term "pilgrim knowledge" for regular human "knowledge" of God versus the *visio* of the saints.[35] Perhaps thereby he

[35] See 6.2.5.

once again creates a distance between God and world that Hölderlin's mysticism seems to bridge occasionally and that Schelling strives to overcome in thought. He thus might make a mistake comparable to the idealists. In their case, the Absolute is available for the intellectual elite, for Rahner it is for the holy elite. It seems a difficult task to bring God to every I without exception.

Nonetheless, also for Rahner the ground of I-hood is not an obscure Great Beyond cut off from daily life. Love is the link. Metaphysics is not just about knowledge of the infinity of life; it necessarily implies love of God. To be human is to be a being standing "in free love" before God. We can hear this God when we "open up in free love" and "when we have not, on account of a wrongly directed love, narrowed the absolute horizon of our openness for being as such."[36] He views love as the perfection of knowledge itself. The inborn transcendence that forms the basis for and the horizon of our capacity to know comes naturally, so to say, but the transcendence in love is the result of a free decision. It is from this point of view that Rahner calls love the perfection of knowledge. Love of God is the decision to open up for this horizon. Once again the short-comings of a metaphysics that uses only rational categories becomes clear; it has to stop at the Kantian fence and be resigned to the unknowability of the ground. Love as a real aspect of conscious life knows no such limits.

It is in Rahner's metaphysics that another, unexpected, parallel between transcendence in knowledge and love is to be found. Our knowledge is possible because of the *Vorgriff* towards the infinity of being, it was said. The horizon of being cannot be known in itself, but it directs our capacity for transcendence back at beings in the world. In love, the I makes a parallel movement. If the I opens up in love of God, this transcendental opening out is also re-flected towards (human) beings. Transcendence towards God comes to be directed at the beings of the world, both in love and in knowledge. People do not find God by leaving the world. God is not to be known, loved, and related to in isolation of the world. However, limiting the world to things that can be pointed at, be it objects or human beings, will not do justice to the infinity of reality as a whole.

[36] See 6.2.4.

In summary, the authors of this study are in agreement (with the exception of the early Schelling) that the question 'Who is God to me?' cannot be answered within the realm of human reflection. We have no knowledge of the ground of I-hood. If we wish to prevent a huge divide between reason and faith, thinking and feeling, physics and meta-physics, non-reflective but very real categories from daily conscious life such as love and intuition are called for. It might be such self-transcending, non-rational experiences of conscious life that form the opening for a metaphysics that can succeed into the 21st century. The art of living might best be reflected in a metaphysics that is evocative and intuitive like art rather than rational like philosophy. Intellectual intuition, the mystical experience, or whichever term is affixed to the feeling that all is and all are somehow connected in a meaningful awe-inspiring way enabling the I to surpass itself, is not only for saints after prolonged periods of ascesis; it is an experience of the conscious life of many I's.

7.4. Who are We?

It has already been established that idealistic subject philosophies as the type of thinking that starts with a separate, independent I will not come to a satisfactory concept of the I's unitary ground. This lonely I that is I thanks to its opposition to the rest of the world is not a viable point of departure. Because of the concept of the I as isolated in its unique infinity, the unifying function of the Absolute is lost. If absoluteness is to be found inside or through the I, it does indeed extend beyond its lonely earthly I-hood, but only to claim its absoluteness in solitude. Instead of realizing it is always already embedded in a larger whole, this I goes out and searches for other isolated, 'absolute' I's. Of course, it has trouble finding these!

The major achievement of Hölderlin's metaphysics is that it provides a model of I-hood that does not view the human I as an independent entity capable of life in isolation of its surroundings and subsequently entering into relations. Being an I, a subject that is simultaneously *in* the world, implies seeking togetherness with other I's and not just preserving isolated I-hood. Being an I is striving for balance between unity and individuality. Self-consciousness is not only the ability to say 'I,' but also to be spoken to, to hear words from other I's, to recognize their I-hood, and experience a fundamental connection. Intersubjectivity

is not the cause of subjectivity, I agree with Henrich. However, our I-hood never fully detaches from the unity we emerge from and share with other I's, and human subjects are lost without other I's to share their subjectivity with. Therefore, we need a model in which the I arises in an already given unity that allows this I to discover itself in the sense of its own role in the whole, its unique contribution, its infinite worth. Hölderlin's view of the unitary ground is a good point of departure for what might be an acceptable metaphysics for the 21st century, in my opinion. It has non-rational and rational elements in combination with a fundamental religiosity. Let us see if we can take Hölderlin's insights one step further and into the 21st century.

Hölderlin's metaphysics ultimately tries to think the unity of the primordial ground in the here and now of fragmented and isolated I's. Let us review briefly: consciousness in the sense of a subject's opposition to objects suppresses our sense of unity. In looking at other things, other people, from the isolation of I-hood we tend to lose our more primary sense of togetherness. The arche-separation has destroyed the perfection of Being, pure unity, and there is no way back. Our longing for unity can no longer be satisfied merely by a return to what once was since it would imply the loss of I-hood and no more than the gain of Nothing-ness. The I suffers from its present state of solitude and strives for a new unity, a new harmony in which it not only co-exists with other I's but finds completion in this togetherness. A unity of I's that come to full bloom, or in Hölderlin's unrivaled words that "each attain their entire right, their entire measure of life," in peaceful co-existence, not alongside but complementing each other.[37]

Relationality and interdependence, to feel in the depths of our being that we are a unity in which our individuality is grounded, is the first step away from the individualism that mars the philosophies of German idealism and its prolongations into the 21st century towards a view of the unitary divinity of life here and now. The early Schelling is too preoccupied with the absoluteness of his I to be able to see the unitary aspect of the ground reflected in the world. Hölderlin emphasizes it repeatedly, but it has gone largely unnoticed in the general glorification of the absoluteness of I-hood in the metaphysics of his era. Even though Dieter Henrich is the one to bring the value of Hölderlin's

[37] See 4.3.2.

metaphysics to the attention of contemporary philosophy, his blind spot for Hölderlin's sense of unity and neglect of the (later) poems prevent him from doing full justice to the riches of Hölderlin's metaphysics of a new unity. This unity is not only the I's ground; it is what the I longs for, its source of hope in all daily experiences of fragmentation and isolation, and the contribution to its realization is the I's major challenge in life.

When Hölderlin's speaks of the "impossibility of an absolute separation and individualized isolation [*Vereinzelung*]," he concedes that isolated I-hood is a reality of adulthood but not the ultimate reality. Consciousness may be unique to every single individual, but consciousness can never reach into infinity, and it is in the infinity of the ground that unity originates. Hölderlin gives this fundamental insight in the incompatibility of unity and consciousness and in the I's existential need for togetherness as a reflection of the infinite unity of the ground. In a pre-reflective awareness of unity that is not entirely lost in I-hood it continues to strive for it. The arche-separation occurred so that we would "re-establish unity through ourselves."[38] For Hölderlin the amorphous, unconscious unity of Being is to develop into a conscious unity through ourselves.

Henrich considers the multitude of human beings to be a source of self-relativization to the I, as we have seen.[39] Karl Rahner, however, correctly points out that it forms the core of our humanity. In that respect, Rahner's thinking is much closer related to Hölderlin's. Rahner also tries to think the unitary infinity in and the infinite worth of life here and now without divinizing the empirical I. For Rahner being an I also means to "subsist in ourselves as subjects, as separates, as opposed to" the world of objects.[40] But even when the I sets itself apart in its acts of knowledge, at the same time it possesses an *a priori* power to reach beyond all separation towards the unitary, infinite horizon of being that opens it to the unitary ground of reality. The I always carries along its sense of being united within and by an infinite horizon. This inherent ability to transcend, which constitutes the foundation for our ability to think and to love, embeds the I in divine unity and makes it strive for loving togetherness, while retaining its individuality, both

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[38] See 4.3.
[39] See 1.3.3.
[40] See 6.2.1.1.

as limitation to its claims to absoluteness and as confirmation of its singularity.

Hence, with Hölderlin, we have now come to a view of the I as seeking a balance between individuality and unity. The I has the ability to intuitively grasp the unity that underlies all worldly differentiation since I-hood originates in and intuits the possibility of being lived in togetherness from the start. Thus, an entirely different model arises with unity as the essence of the human way of being, prior to individuality. Is such a unity of self-conscious I's that recognize their togetherness not a 'we'? This would imply that the point of departure should be we-hood instead of I-hood Whereas Fichte and Henrich speak of a pre-reflective awareness "I am," perhaps intellectual intuition is best conceived of as an experience of the interconnectedness of I's in a meaningful whole: the realization "We are." Hölderlin's 'we' is to be the perfect balance between unity and individuality. 'We' is Being come to life, primordial unity realized, a peaceful harmony of I's. Let us take a closer look at what such a togetherness of human I's that is called 'we' might amount to from a 'Hölderlinian' point of view.

"We" is not an amorphous mass in which the I's have merged, but it is more than a mere collection of individual I's or the sum total of I's. We-hood is constituted by the different I's involved that are somehow fundamentally united without the need to give up their independence. 'We' implies the recognition of the singularity of every I, both as a homage to the individual worth of its participants and as a necessity for the fullness of its we-hood. 'We' is a unity that is dependent upon individuality, preserves it, and even enhances it.

Furthermore, 'we' can always only be identified as such from the inner perspective. Only I's that participate in the unity, relate to the other participants, and confirm their belonging can speak of 'we.' The sense of we-hood fluctuates in different situations and with different individuals involved. Certain groups are more profoundly connected then others a group of peace activists at a demonstration more than the visitors of a shopping mall, families more than colleagues. Nonetheless, we-hood is always dependent upon recognition of the togetherness by the participating I's.

We-hood is also more than the connection that is established by communication from a specific I to another well-defined I. We-hood is not a distinct opening from one I to another I: 'we,' as it is understood here, is not 'me plus you.' 'We' is more than an I that reaches out to

or is appealed to by another I. We-hood requires a general openness for the totality of the individual I's that constitute the 'we.' This 'we' is beyond the grasp of each individual I. Real we-hood implies the I's willingness to relinquish control over the other I's and the interactions between the I's. We-hood even requires the I's willingness to sacrifice some of its self-sufficiency to the openness that is needed for a real 'we' to unfold. This general openness may feel as a threat to the I's independence and individuality to a certain degree. Hence, there is a tendency to close up, *incurvatio in seipsum*, and limit the general, inherent capacity for transcendence of I-hood to well-defined, controllable openings of one-on-one alliances that merely serve to confirm the I's unique I-hood. We-hood is not unaffected by the interactions between the individual I's, but these specific interactions do not constitute we-hood.

There is a mutual dependence between each I and the 'we.' The I can only be an I thanks to the 'we.' It takes a 'we' for the young I to unfold, to be nourished into mature I-hood that can balance between selfhood and unity, to open up for those I's surrounding it, and help realize community. Moreover, those who can say 'I' need to be addressed as an I in order for their I-hood to be a lived, self-conscious I-hood. I-hood always arises in a 'we.' 'We' is the common ground that encompasses and continues to nourish the individual I's and is a constant reminder of the infinity of possibilities of interaction between the I's. We-hood encompasses the I's and fills, so to say, the space that all the I's and their particular one-on-one connections leave open. We-hood forms the core of I-hood. The participation in the we-hood of humanity is what makes us human; it is the ground of I-hood.

Reversely, the 'we' needs I's for its existence. The 'we' is dependent upon the I to support its we-hood, for the I to understand and express in its individual, free actions that the success of the 'we' is the I's ultimate desire, that we-hood surpasses I-hood. Furthermore, the development of the 'we' cannot be independent of the development of the individual I's. Each I changes the 'we.' Each I that gets lost or hurt, refuses to open up, or sabotages the openness of the others diminishes the 'we.' In a 'we' every I has its own unique worth, and all I's share in the responsibility for the 'we' to succeed. In that sense, the 'we' is dependent upon the I. For a 'we' to become real, the I's have to realize themselves and their togetherness in acts of freedom.

In line with the previous, Hölderlin maintains that the arche-separation is also a necessity for Being, for pure, divine Oneness. Being is

unity, but a unity of nothingness. It longs for life, for consciousness, it longs to be a unity that can feel itself, that is conscious of its togetherness. Pure Being needs I's to come alive, for life on earth to become the Celebration of peace. Hence, the basic question of Hölderlin's metaphysics is not 'Who am I?' but 'Who are we?' or 'What makes a good unity, peace?' A peaceful 'we' can only be realized in I's who freely unite. This 'we' will do full justice to each I's individuality, and individuality will not form an obstacle for we-hood. It has been noted that whereas Schelling thinks in terms of overactive, all-determining I's, Hölderlin might lean too much towards the I's passive participation in a divine plan. If this new unity is thought as 'we,' free I-hood cannot remain a merely passive bystander. This observation may constitute a valuable correction of Hölderlin's metaphysics. Human beings may only be the guests at the Celebration of peace and not its hosts or organizers; however, without guests there is no celebration. As participants the I's of the world are indispensable for the realization of a living conscious unity.

In summary, a metaphysics of a unitary ground that respects daily conscious life only has a chance of succeeding when it does not start from an I that reaches into infinity but from the recognition that I's are grounded in and striving for infinite unity. If an earthly I is to discover unity ever, it cannot be in the link of its empirical I-hood with absoluteness. Claims of infinity can only be made in the modest recognition of all the other I's groundedness in one and the same infinite unity. The world as it has emerged, Macquarrie writes,

> seeks to return to its source, not in the sense of being swallowed up once more in the mystery from which it has emerged, but through forming a new and richer unity, a unity which necessarily includes distinctness.[41]

This, to me, seems the type of unity that Hölderlin has in mind for the Celebration of peace. This is also the core of a metaphysics of 'we.'

7.5. Who is God?

Four of the five questions of this study have now been discussed. What remains is the question 'Who is God?' This is not only the toughest

[41] Macquarrie 1984, 175.

one; it also implies that we have to deal with the fundamental difference between the terms ‘God’ and ‘unitary ground’ that have been interchanged with minimal explanation so far. Nonetheless, the unitary ground of I-hood and God are worlds apart in contemporary thought. The former belongs to the domain of philosophy and the latter to that of (monotheistic) religions. The choice of the term ‘God’ for this ground automatically puts the modern author on the ‘wrong’ side of the Kantian fence. In Henrich’s view, the metaphysical ground of I-hood is distinguished from the God of monotheistic traditions in that the latter is personal, which he characterizes as “equipped with reason, will, and commitment to people…opposed to the world.”[42] Such a God cannot be thought, only believed in, according to Henrich. Therefore he opts for a metaphysics of a non-personal, or I-less, unitary ground of (self-)consciousness, an ‘it’ that is beyond knowing, pure obscurity. However, is it really necessary to create such an unbridgeable divide between reason and faith, between philosophy and theology? Is there a chance for a metaphysics that follows Hölderlin in respecting the Christian tradition and drawing inspiration from it without restricting itself to its dogmatic discourse? Since the crucial difference between the terms ‘unitary ground’ and ‘God’ seems to be in God’s personhood, the first issue to be looked into is the personal or impersonal nature of this unitary ground.

7.5.1. *Impersonal or Personal Ground*

Sallie McFague asserts, “Sometimes the attempt to relate God and the world in more unified, interdependent ways is thought to require a sacrifice of the personal dimension of the divine.”[43] *Prima facie*, that seems right. At least, this is what appears to occur in the course of the metaphysics of German idealism that is usually labeled as pantheistic. Its ‘God’ differs considerably from the God preached in the 18th century Lutheran churches that constitute the religious background of Schelling and Hölderlin: God as a transcendent and personal being, a combination that tends to result in the image of the untouchable, high and mighty Monarch of blind faith and obedience. In the epoch of *liberté, egalité*, and *fraternité*, however, monarchs who rule from above have lost their popularity, their authority, and even their lives. At the

[42] See 6.1.3.
[43] McFague 1988, 18.

same time, a profound longing for religiosity in its most basic form of reconnecting with a (lost) Divinity is prominent especially in the more mystical setting of Württemberg pietism. Both elements form the backdrop for the enthusiastic revival of a concept of an immanent God who could be (all) in all here and now and who does not require a "*salto mortale*" into faith.[44]

The idealistic motivation to bring God 'down to earth' is not a desire to debase God; it is an attempt to elevate human I's and include them in this Divinity instead. The ultimate concern is to re-establish the infinite worth of the I, of the individual human life. The mighty tyrant who subjects subjects to His alien, unreasonable authority is to become the immanent Holiness that liberates and divinizes autonomous subjects. A God is thought who is in me, who is the depth of who I am, *interior intimo meo* to speak with Saint Augustine. This God is to raise the I into free and proud independence. This is achieved, more or less, by the metaphysics of German idealism. It succeeds in establishing a (tentative) line from the I to an Absolute in which all is grounded and united. This could be a God who is (all) in all and gives infinite worth to the I.

Then accidentally the roles reverse. The Absolute that holds me and all that is, becomes my absoluteness, the Absolute that I control in my (absolute) mind. Self-worth turns into arrogance, proud I-hood into hubris. The absolutization of the I not only results in a very lonely I; it also obscures the other aspect of God, the *superior summo meo* to quote Saint Augustine once again. There is simply no longer room, nor the desire, to think a God who is 'higher than me.' How could there be? If I can reach into infinity, what can be higher than I am? What can be superior to my own absoluteness? What, who, can be beyond me, face me, become my vis-à-vis? Such a metaphysics of absolute I-hood that is its own God has been largely condemned by philosophers and theologians alike. Nonetheless, it somehow continues to resonate in the modern Western self-image, and it appears to have become part of our culture.[45] The I has lost its *superior summo meo* but, and perhaps even worse, it has stopped seeing the sanctity of other I's. It finds itself in a society of Alabanda's, to use Hölderlin's character, who are creating bloody chaos. It appears to be difficult for the individual

[44] See Jacobi's statement in 2.4.
[45] See, for example, Groot 2007, 19.

human being but also for societies as a whole to find a balance in the two contradictory aspects of the human way of being that Henrich has analyzed as subject and person, infinity and contingency, self-worth and self-relativization.

However, even if an idealistic concept of a merely immanent God, God as my absolute I-hood, fails, Henrich's antidote of a metaphysics that results in pure obscurity is not satisfactory either. A concept of God is needed that does justice to the I's inherent infinity and puts it in perspective at the same time. It appears that the Christian tradition has a concept of God that corresponds with this fundamental ambivalence. It has two essential, but paradoxical lines that are not easily integrated. The God who is in me, who forms the ground of my very being – the immanent God – is simultaneously described as a personal and transcendent God. The personal God of the Bible *is* at the same time (all) in all. Even when there is little clarity on what God's personhood entails, it is acknowledged that God is more than my most interior me. God is also a vis-à-vis, one who transcends me, who challenges me to transcend my own egocentricity, my *incurvatio in seipsum*.

This desire to hold on to God's personhood might inevitability lead to philosophical difficulties. Fichte words the most obvious philosophical danger with respect to the personal concept of God strikingly:

> This being is supposed to be distinct from both you and the world. It is supposed to act efficaciously within the world, and it is supposed to do so in accordance with concepts. Accordingly, it must be capable of entertaining concepts; it must possess personality and consciousness. But what do you mean by 'personality' and 'consciousness' in this case? Are you talking about what you have discovered within yourself, about those aspects of yourself with which you have become familiar and have called 'personality' and 'consciousness'? By paying the least attention to how you construct such concepts, however, you could learn that you simply do not and cannot think of personality and consciousness apart from limitation and finitude. Hence, by ascribing these predicates to it, you make this being into a finite being similar to yourself, and thus you have not succeeded in thinking God at all – which is what you wished to do – but simply a magnified version of yourself.[46]

God's personhood cannot imply finite subjectivity with its daily limitations in time and space that we are familiar with. Individual, gendered

[46] GA I, 5, 355.

personhood cannot belong to God and extrapolation of earthly personhood into infinity does not work, that much is obvious.

However, as has been established in 7.3., instead of building a system in which logic dictates, we should perhaps be resigned to the fact that reason tends toward oversimplification and learn to live with a metaphysics that is as multifaceted and complex as conscious life itself. Such a metaphysics is not perfect clarity, but it sketches outlines, evokes intuitions of truth, like a work of art. This development from a strictly rational to a more evocative language is also what happens in Schelling's *Freiheitschrift*. Even though his metaphysical solution that personhood consists in the combination of an autonomous being with an independent ground that completely interpenetrate each other seems an inadequate and rather artificial way of thinking this ground as personal, his characterization of God's personhood as "having a life" that is subject to contradictory forces might serve to point in the right direction.

Hence, let us take another look at the two aspects of the God of the biblical stories and see where they correspond to the ambiguity inherent in conscious life. This God is (all) in all. The all-embracing totality, the 'all-ness,' provides a connection for all that is, and all who are, in a larger divine unitary ground that is more fundamental than experiences of isolation and opposition. To view all as ultimately one, grounded in divine unity, safeguards respect for every individual since all are somehow embedded in Divinity. It makes life here and now valuable, endowed with a touch of infinity. This aspect can be accommodated in a metaphysics of a unitary ground. However, conscious life is more than being comfortably embedded in divine unity. It also implies 'response-ability,' to be able to adequately respond to the challenge of free, individual I-hood. This is what the aspect of a personal God adds that is crucial, also for a metaphysics in the 21st century. It is the beyondness of God, the aspect of God's transcendence. God is a vis-à-vis, One who is beyond me, One who appeals to every I to transcend itself and make its own, free contribution to the realization of a loving togetherness. The biblical concept of God precisely reflects this complexity. On the one hand, people are assured of being embedded in God's own being. On the other hand, God is a God of dialogue, a vis-à-vis, One who addresses me, appeals to me, challenges me to live life in peaceful togetherness with my neighbor: a personal God. This is the One that I turn to in prayer. One, who is not merely my inner self, but an Other as well. Both lines are indispensable for a metaphysics

that wants to do justice to the complex relationship between the I and God.

Therefore, the next task of this project is to make a suggestion towards a concept of a personal God who is simultaneously (all) in all. The best place to start might be where we ended in the discussion of I-hood: Hölderlin's metaphysics that maintains that there is a need for a combination of individuality and unity: for we-hood.

7.5.2. *God as We?*

In the preceding chapters, we have come to a philosophical concept of an all-unitary ground, a ground that is a true unity but in which also differentiation is fundamental. In 7.4., the relation between human I-hood and we-hood was explained in depth. I-hood is always lived in togetherness, in a 'we,' it has been determined with Hölderlin. An I is born into, is nurtured, and survives in a community of I's. As it matures, it will make its own free and unique contribution to this 'we.' In addition, the God of the Bible is both the unitary ground in whom every human being lives and the personal God who addresses me in my free singularity. Can this dual perspective of the human *and* the divine way of being be combined? Can We-hood really lead to a concept of God as both unitary and personal ground and ideal of I-hood?

The first thing to note is that there is an unmistakable parallel in Hölderlin's view of I-hood as both unique individuality and striving for peaceful unity and the biblical view of human beings. Two striking examples are mentioned here. In the book Genesis where the human being is created, it is asserted that he does not find happiness in his solitary I-hood. Another is created, distinctly different but "flesh of my flesh" all the same.[47] I's are created to live in community. Humans are pictured as distinct, independent beings with fundamental openness, not merely for God but also for each other. Likewise, love of God as it is expressed in the first commandment is immediately connected to one's neighbor.[48] Biblical references to the relationship between the I and God are always accompanied by the other I's and the need for mutual openness. We are meant to transcend our individual

[47] Gen 2: 23.
[48] Mark 12: 29–31. See also the Song of Solomon.

I-hood both towards God and towards each other in one and the same movement. Transcendence is not the movement of the I away from the world but the I's openness towards an all-encompassing unity, a *communio* that is grounded in and striving towards a divine ideal. Human beings are created not merely an I, but a 'we.'

When the Judeo-Christian tradition states that people are created in God's image, could this lead to the startling conclusion that God's personhood is in some way constituted by We-hood? Could calling God 'We' be the point of departure for a metaphysics of a unitary *and* personal ground that is in line with a Christian concept of God? Let us once again elaborate on We-hood, but now in relation to God as the ground of all (human) beings. God's We-hood might be clarified with the metaphor of God's motherhood.

God is 'We' as a (pregnant) mother is a 'we.' She is one, a unity, but a unity already carrying the seed of differentiation inside. In motherhood-to-be lies the seed of independent, singular I-hood. (Pregnant) motherhood is a unity, a oneness that is internally differentiated. When the mother gives birth, the difference becomes more explicit. As soon as the umbilical cord is severed, the child that was until then an intimate part of the mother's body becomes a separate being. Even though there are two beings now, their unity continues to dominate for a while. The mother – (young) child relationship is a sort of symbiosis, a close relationship of mutual dependence. The child is fully dependent upon the mother for nourishment and care, if it is to stand a chance of survival. The mother's dependence may be less pronounced *prima facie*. It is not as obvious as the physical dependence of the infant, but rather seems to exist at the psychological or emotional level. However, her motherhood per se, her being a mother, is entirely dependent upon the child. She will only survive as a mother, if her child lives. Hence, her motherhood is more than a psychological need; being a mother is fully dependent upon the real being of children.[49]

As the child grows up, the differentiation becomes gradually more pronounced. The child starts to discover its own distinctness from its mother. From an early stage of greater physical independence, the

[49] One could argue that if the child dies a mother continues to be its mother. However, for full motherhood a child that develops a mature, independent life is necessary.

child evolves to independence of thoughts and feelings. In the course of this process, the mother's relationship to the child changes as well. The unquestioned, utter unity undergoes a gradual transformation in a process of separation. It is a mother's duty to equip her children for independent life without her constant care. She strives for independent I-hood in the child, for an existence that can proceed in her absence. Even though she cherishes the development of her children and takes great pride in their growing independent I-hood, most mothers find that this 'growing apart' can be painful and fraught with danger at times. Her love and her body are no longer enough to guarantee the well-being of the child. Nonetheless, her involvement with this independent being is far beyond a loving interest between two independent individuals. The child is her life.

This makes motherhood a vulnerable state of being that is challenged with each new pregnancy. The first reason is that motherhood, the existence as a mother, is no longer in her hands alone. The successful establishment of independent, unique I-hood in each and every one of her children is what makes the life of a mother succeed. As the child develops into independent, free I-hood with a life of its own, this unicity does not weaken the bond between mother and child in any way. On the contrary, the singularity, the unique development, is what fascinates the mother. The particular choices do not always delight, but the fact of independence forms the completion of motherhood. But this implies that her life has become inextricably intertwined with another, independent I. She can flourish only when the child does. Her being has become dependent upon the well-being of an independent I that she no longer has any control over.

Another, but related, reason that motherhood is a vulnerable state of being is concerned with its inherent quality of unity. The utter and unquestioned unity has to evolve into a different type of unity; a loving relationship between two independent I's. The umbilical cord that is the fundamental and everlasting basis of the relationship does not suffice for a mature mother-child bond. Sometimes, however, the only thing that seems to form the connection is the (indestructible) fact of this primordial one-ness. A mother will not stop being intimately involved with her child. However, she needs the mature child to willingly engage in the relationship. There is no longer a unity, if the child refuses to participate. Thereby the child's recognition of the mother becomes of greater importance as, with the potential for independent

life, the conscious, freely decided rejection of the mother becomes a possibility.

Mothers can have more than one child and in that sense motherhood does not depend upon each individual child. Nonetheless, the worth of the individual child for the mother is in no way lessened by the fact that others exist, nor does this fact threaten the child's uniqueness in her eyes. Each child has its own umbilical cord, so to say. No matter how many siblings exist, the singularity of each child is guaranteed for the mother. Furthermore, siblings are unified in sharing the same mother. Is this their only point of connection, or are they united in something other than a common parentage? If the mother is the image of successful togetherness from the beginning, they are not only bound in the simple fact of a shared descent. Their origin is in itself the image of unity that comes alive in differentiation.

At this point, several remarks are in order. First, God is not a subject who becomes pregnant. God is (pregnant) Motherhood, (to-be-realized) We-hood, from the start. It is important to conceive of God as this unitary ground of We-hood with the fundamental, essential possibility of differentiation otherwise the consequence is the philosophical difficulty as posed by Henrich. It would presuppose subjectivity in God with a type of consciousness that is fundamentally similar to ours and just as obscure concerning its origins.[50] God's personhood is not in a subjectivity that can bring forth other subjects; God's personhood is in We-hood. Secondly, I do not wish to call God "Mother." The term is too anthropomorphic, too explicitly gendered, too limited. God is not a subject who matures and becomes pregnant at some stage in Her life. God is 'We,' a personal, unitary ground carrying the potential for conscious, independent I-hood to arise. The unity and the differentiation are equiprimordial in God. Therefore, if all I's arise from a ground who is 'We,' both the potential for unity and for individuality is 'inborn' in each and every human being.[51] This implies that I-hood is always striving for successful togetherness, the ideal of We-hood.

Let me draw the parallel between Gods We-hood and the metaphor of motherhood as sketched more explicitly. God as 'We' is the personal ground for every individual I. As independent I-hood matures, the

[50] See 6.1.3.

[51] Please note the interesting parallel between Schelling's first phase of the life of God as the world of ideas that is not the real world yet and the concept of pregnancy. See 3.4.1.

difference between the I and its ground becomes more pronounced. The difference, the independence, is willed by this ground. God is 'We,' a personal unity in which individual I-hood is enhanced and nourished. Each I is singular in its own unique connection with this We-hood of God; each I 'stands out' in the 'We' of God. The I remains dependent upon this ground to affirm its singularity, its unique worth, its entire independent life. God, this ground of We-hood, needs the free activity of the mature I's that participate. The 'We' becomes more dependent upon the recognition of the I that We-hood is its ground as the I becomes more independent. Hence, each unique I has its own responsibility for the We-hood of God. Even when the I is grounded in the 'We' of God – hence can only arise in and survive thanks to it –, the We-hood of God is realized, lives, in the peaceful union of independent I's. Such We-hood is not a sum-total of I's; We-hood is the mysterious ground of unity and individuality that comes alive and strives towards perfection in each and every I of the world.

Before proceeding any further and elaborating on a metaphysics of 'We,' let it be emphasized, perhaps unnecessarily, that calling God 'We' does not imply that we are God. God is not to be identified with any earthly 'we.' God's We-hood surpasses the 'we' of any human group or category. God is not we-as-a-nation, we-as-a-specific-race, we-as-male, we-as-my-family, or we-as-believers, etc. God lives in all of the more or less successful 'we's' of the world, but none of these 'we's' are God.[52] God as 'We' is in the success of all the worldly 'we's.' Every successful togetherness offers a glimpse into the ideal 'We' of God. When Rahner writes that God is "the fundamental ground and the absolute future of all reality," it could be rephrased as "God is the ground of earthly we-hood and the ideal of We-hood."[53] God is the one ground of each individual I and of the togetherness of I's, and God

[52] In calling God "We," I seem to be only including human togetherness in God. We-hood definitely needs conscious I-hood to be. However, consciousness is not a characteristic that a being either possesses or does not possess. It is a gliding scale. Within the whole of the cosmos, certain beings are aware of themselves as individuals and their ability to interact with other beings. This gives them a special role and responsibility in the We-hood. Nonetheless, we recognize a whole range of possible contributions of human I's in terms of intellectual, emotional, and physical abilities and shortcomings. In the endless openness of God's ideal We-hood, there is room for an unlimited range of singular individuals. I am convinced that no life form is excluded from the divine Oneness.

[53] See 6.2.2.

challenges every earthly I to realize a peaceful unity that enhances each individual I, to strive for perfect We-hood, for a togetherness of free, independent I's who value their own and each other's singularity.[54]

7.5.3. *The One Infinite Reality of We-hood*

With the concept of We-hood in mind as it has been explained, let us return to our question about the feasibility of a metaphysics for the 21st century. We will follow Henrich first in taking metaphysics as the effort to seek agreement between an all-encompassing unity that is relative to nothing, hence absolute, and the human need for self-explanation. The ground of subjectivity and the whole of subjects need to be integrated in one single thought construction. Individuals in their independence need to be thought within a whole in relation to which individual subjects are not originally independent and in which individuals are not ultimately isolated.[55] We are to think a unity in which justice is done to each individual I and its unitary ground. Such a ground of self-consciousness cannot be thought separate from the subject. It must somehow be of such kind that it is an internal enabling of the subject's self-activity and spontaneity. This ground is not an individual cause for each subject separately; it is rather the communal, continuously enabling ground of all subjects. Its unitary presence that allows for individuality opens the possibility of a togetherness that also enables the I to enhance itself. Is this not in line with a metaphysics of We-hood?

Secondly, let us go along with Hölderlin who states that religion is about reconnecting what once was one, "to find One that gives us peace…as if the whole pain of our life consists in the separation of what belongs together."[56] Human beings long for a peaceful, harmonious togetherness, both in the world as a whole and in their own little microcosms. This peaceful unity implies that the singularity of their I-hood is recognized without being condemned to live life in the

[54] It should be noted that also according to the Christian tradition God's personhood should not be thought as an I that opposes other I's but is best described as togetherness of three persons, hence as 'We.' It would be interesting to study the connection between the concept of God as We and the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity. Likewise, the gospel of Saint John with its farewell speeches of Jesus Christ, in which the unity of the Father and the Son is emphasized, could be regarded in this light. Both topics are, however, beyond the scope of this research.

[55] See 6.1.2.; Henrich 2007, 265.

[56] See 4.5.

solitary confinement of the I. In Hölderlin's view, religion is about longing for a unification that is not contrary to I-hood. Hence, a term of successful unity is needed that is in line with the human way of being both an I and fundamentally together with other I's. Hölderlin uses a term like Father Ether to express the unitary and the personal aspects of the One simultaneously. In order to prevent anthropomorphism and to ensure the inclusion of every human being, it would be better to avoid attaching a term to this unity that refers to only one category of humanity and find a personal term that is abstract and familiar at the same time. Is not We-hood the concept that meets these requirements?

Thirdly, let us assume with Rahner that the medium in which God is experienced has shifted from the objective world to our subjectivity. The mystery "breaks out of our own being" as an experience of transcendence that is more original than and the basis of reflection about God.[57] Hence, the concept of God must be related to our subjectivity with its inherent ambiguity. Furthermore, it should somehow deal with what Rahner sees as "a fundamental problem for a contemporary understanding of Christianity," namely

> how God can really be God and not simply an element of the world, and how, nevertheless, in our religious relationship to the world we are to understand him as not remaining outside the world.[58]

Hence, a metaphysics that connects God and the I while doing justice to the singularity of both. Could it not be said that God is the ground and the ideal of We-hood?

A metaphysics of We-hood that flows from these requirements has several advantages. It respects the two lines in the Christian tradition of God's personhood and all-ness that are both important but seem terribly difficult to combine in our thinking. In this, it corrects an obvious simplification in which God is merely an immanent ground, and it opens the eschatological perspective. 'We' is a familiar and beautifully simple term that shifts the focus away from the I as such, which seems a necessary antidote for the self-centeredness of modern life. Nonetheless, 'We' is directly related to a philosophical concept of I-hood both as person and as subject. As person, an I is always in a particular

[57] See 6.1.1.
[58] SW 26, 88.

community, a 'we.' As subject, the I can relate to the one infinite reality of 'We' as a whole. Hence, the I is embedded in We-hood on the one hand, and the I's freedom vis-à-vis the 'We' makes We-hood the I's most elementary responsibility in life at the same time.

It is in line with the authors of the previous chapters to say, "All people relate to and participate in what we intuit as one and the same infinite reality that grounds and surpasses each individual participant." Let us see how this statement works out in a metaphysics of the one infinite reality of God as 'We.'

One infinite reality

The human mind seems to possess an *a priori*, an unthematic but inevitable, knowing of or intuition for the infinity of reality. This evokes a fundamental urge to know what reality is all about in its unitary totality. This one reality has physical aspects that can be studied by the methods of the (natural) sciences, but these sciences can neither enlighten us about the unitary totality as a whole in its oneness nor about the element of transcendence characteristic of and inherent in subjectivity. Calling this one reality infinite suggests that it cannot be fully captured in laws of nature, nor its development predicted from these laws. Hence, the human mind, that which belongs to an individual I, cannot control it nor learn to do so. We must concede, with Henrich, that such a ground of I-hood is unprovable within the limits of scientific knowledge, that therefore we can only start from our primary rationality, our basic understanding of (conscious) life.[59]

The difference between a metaphysics of 'We' and naturalism is that the former dares to live without concrete answers and without reassurance that, given enough time, humankind will never be confused and frightened by its own contingent existence again. This one reality is a mystery, precisely in its infinite oneness and its potential for free individual I-hood. It is not mystery in the sense of the yet unsolved, something to be overcome, but mystery as a real and lasting quality of a reality that is infinite. Another major difference between a metaphysics of 'We' and naturalism is the recognition of a measure of freedom in this one reality. It is not entirely ruled by the laws of nature, and neither is human activity. We are not merely machines that act in a

[59] See 6.1.2.

specific way because we are determined to do so by laws of matter. Metaphysics says by definition that there is an aspect of ungraspability in human reality, an aspect of infinity that cannot be ignored and constitutes a challenge to human freedom.

In calling this one infinite reality 'We,' subjectivity as a non-material quality of this reality is explicitly included and the mysterious ability of I's to unite is emphasized. 'We' expresses subjectivity, unity, and relationality. This makes 'We' as a term for this infinite reality preferable to Henrich's "All-Unity," which sounds too anonymous and impersonal and does not do justice to the real role of I's that are open to each other and to this reality as a whole. 'We' is the personal unity prior to the plurality of all different I's. It is the common ground of all I-hood. 'We' is the *subiectum* of the multiple, empirical I's, to paraphrase Rahner.[60] The infinite 'We' is also the horizon that directs each I back at the actual well-being of each participating I. The ideal of We-hood constitutes a challenge to every 'we' of the world.

Intuiting the one-ness of this infinite reality

We can inquire about the unity of reality as a whole, hence we know *of* it, Rahner asserts. We must inquire about it, hence it is not fully known. Metaphysics is not and cannot be like scientific knowledge. There are limits to what can be achieved and expressed by means of a limited rationality. The straitjacket of such rationality forces Hölderlin to give up on philosophy and concentrate on poetry instead. Nonetheless, even art needs interpretation, philosophical explanation, in order to prevent the 'infinity' that it 'embodies' to be reduced to everyone's private experience of absoluteness. Therefore, a tentative metaphysical language that uses intuitive terms is indispensable for the aspect of infinity to stay alive in a culture.

Calling this one infinite reality 'We,' and not an 'it' in whatever form, appeals to a human intuition of actively taking part in the success of this one reality. Moreover, the 'we's' of the world are the starting-point for our knowledge about the one infinite reality of We-hood. Grounded in God's We-hood, the I knows of, intuits ultimate We-hood, or ideal We-hood, in the 'we's' of the world. With Hölderlin, it can be asserted that people can catch glimpses of the ideal 'We' here

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[60] Rahner says that the human I is the *subiectum* of its multiple, empirical objectivities. See 6.2.1.1.

and now. Speaking of God as We-hood expresses the (eschatological) hope that the way in which I's succeed in living together is a reflection of a divine ideal of We-hood. The 'we's' of the world are an appeal to realize true We-hood. Furthermore, calling this one infinite reality 'We' implies the refusal to accept dualism as the ultimate. No absolute divide exists between heaven and earth, between the subject and the things of the world, between seemingly opposed I's, between me and God, between earthly we-hood and the ideal We-hood of God. This is not knowledge but a fundamental human intuition.

Both relating to and participating in this infinite reality
Relating and participating are two entirely different perspectives that are mysteriously combined in I-hood. The I is both subject and person in Henrich's (adapted) sense of the duality of the *Grundverhältnis*. Conceiving of all of reality as infinite 'We' does justice to both aspects of I-hood.

On the one hand, subjecthood is the ability to "*speculari*" and relate to reality as whole and thereby distinguish itself from it. The I has its own unique relation to the 'We,' its own unique perspective. It can look at the 'We,' make judgments about it, and the I is free (to a certain extent) to determine its role in it. The I has a say in this 'We' and its unique role is of importance for the 'We.' Thus full credit is given to each I's singularity. It also implies that I's are not in competition. I-hood, as the individual's capacity for infinity, and its singularity is not hampered by the unicity of other I's. I-hood is not a matter of obtaining the best perspective; it is, from the start, one's own best perspective, not to be interchanged, nor outdone by that of others. Furthermore, the I's subjectivity constitutes its freedom vis-à-vis this infinite reality of 'We' and its duty. This amounts to the I's individual responsibility to contribute to the ideal of We-hood. It can only do this in its ability to 'step out' and freely decide how to 'involve' itself.

An I is not merely the dependent party in the We-hood. If the ideal of We-hood is God, this means that the I is free vis-à-vis God. Contemporary religiosity is often focused on the religious experience, on perceiving, on feeling the Divine, hence on what the I receives. In the metaphor of God's We-hood as motherhood, this reflects an immature child-mother relationship with the mother as merely the giver. Ultimately, however, religiosity is about the power to engage one's (more or less handicapped) free I-hood to enhance the 'We.' This implies that God does not have full control over the 'We.' The 'We' has taken on

a life of its own, so to say. This means that God changes as the 'We' changes. Hence, to a degree God is dependent upon the free I's. This makes God a vulnerable God. God's We-hood is dependent upon the participating I's, not only in their freedom to develop themselves but also in their willingness to open up for and contribute towards the ideal of We-hood, a unity that does full justice to each individual.

On the other hand, as person the I always remains *in* the 'We.' Even though the I can look at the whole of reality and make judgments about it, hence surpasses the whole, it can never detach itself from this one reality. Personhood implies remaining within this reality, always. No matter how high the I rises above it in its 'tower of *speculari*,' it always 'takes this one reality with it.' This ability to look at the whole, to relate to it, is part of this one reality. Even in its infinite subjectivity, the I never surpasses the one infinite reality of We-hood. The I can never become the absoluteness of reality, even if it can experience glimpses of it in its subjectivity. The I always remains embedded in this unitary ground. Reality as a whole surpasses the I's surpassing of that reality.

A reality that grounds and surpasses each individual participant

This reality is the ground of earthly we-hood and its unity lives in every individual I as the desire for ultimate peaceful togetherness. A metaphysics of 'We' does not lead to a religiosity that requires the ultimate denial of our worldly state of being. Calling this one infinite reality 'We' ensures a sense of belonging in which each I affects this 'We' here and now. Each I participates in this infinite reality of 'We,' and the infinity of this reality is present and expressed in each and every 'we' of the world. The fact that all belong to this one reality called 'We' implies that there is no absolute divide between individual I's and particular 'we's' in this reality or between I's and 'we's' and the reality of 'We' as a whole. An I cannot prevent belonging to the 'We' of reality, nor can it be excluded from it. Nonetheless, calling this one reality 'We' emphasizes that it is impossible for an individual I to control this reality. The initiative in the 'We' cannot and does not lie with the I; it is the I's ground.

German idealism has linked the infinity of I-hood to the absoluteness in the ability to say I, in being a subject. Henrich endeavors to relativize the infinite aspect of the I by placing it in the multitude of I's in the world making the I a mere "world-thing." Self-relativization, however, is in the knowledge that even in the infinity of its I-hood the

I never gets beyond the reality of We-hood that is also the here and the now of its daily life. The infinite ground of We-hood enables the I to rise above reality without ever losing touch with this ground. Even in its aspect of infinity the I can never step out of this one, infinite 'We.' It enables the I's free relationship to the 'We' without ignoring the I's ultimate dependence on this personal, unitary ground. The I cannot establish the We-hood that it is grounded in and dependent upon for its survival. This implies that the ideal of We-hood must somehow come to it. The 'We' surpasses the I, not only as the incalculable multitude of other I's and their varying worldly degrees of togetherness, but also in the givenness of the ability to transcend, to open up both in knowledge and in love, to become 'We.'

This 'We,' God, is entirely beyond me, both in the infinite unknowability and in being given as my ground. Unknowable because this 'We' cannot be grasped with the methods of this reality itself. We have a capacity for transcendence but the absolute range of the *Vorgriff*, to use Rahner's term, does not imply the possibility of mastery of the 'We.' Ideal We-hood as the horizon of the human way of being is by definition beyond our grasp while at the same time brought into view as the ultimate perspective of earthly 'we's.' This one, infinite reality of We-hood in which I participate is at the same time my vis-à-vis. God as ideal We-hood appeals to me to involve myself, to realize We-on-earth. To God as this We-Mother-personal ground who wills my I-hood, my free ability to contribute to We-on-earth, I can appeal for strength to make my individual life succeed in togetherness and thus contribute to ideal of We-hood.

Let us return to Hölderlin one last time. He is fully aware of the problems associated with a monistic philosophy of a unitary ground. If the ground is *in* the I, I-hood can easily take on absolute proportions and overshadow the potential for unity among I's. Conscious I-hood can never reach into infinite unity because subjectivity can only be the result of an opposition (subject-object). This philosophical aporia is the death sentence over his philosophical career. He turns to poetry to express the personal God-Father Ether of Christian religiosity whom he intuits as his real ground but for whom seems to be no room in a rational discourse. It is also in verse that he tries to clarify the eminent role of Christ, *Der Einzige*, which he seems to recognize and cherish and which his philosophy cannot accommodate. Finally, his eschatol-

ogy of the new unity of I's as pictured in *Friedensfeier* never finds its counterpart in metaphysical prose.

Concerning the God-Father Ether who is both unitary and personal ground enough has been said in terms of God as the one infinite reality of We-hood, in my opinion. The second issue about the unique 'child' Jesus Christ, who has fully realized the ideal of the simultaneity of unity and individuality, is an extremely interesting topic for further research. It is, however, beyond the scope of this study. The third and final issue, the ideal We-hood that Hölderlin pictures in the Celebration of peace is worth returning to once more. Let us recall the image of the festive hall with the entire family gathering around the table, sharing the copious meal and the Mother's overflowing hospitality in this celebration of unity to which all have been invited. All the individual family members with their own lives and challenges, their own talents and shortcomings, their successes and failures, are present. Their individual presence is what makes the gathering possible; the liveliness of the Celebration is dependent upon its members. Can you imagine the Mother's tired, but intensely satisfied expression at this harmonious gathering of her mature offspring that She has been preparing all along? Her primordial unity has come alive in the togetherness of these intimately related individuals. All of us who have experienced family dinners both intuit the ideal of the event as pictured by Hölderlin, and we all know that it takes hard work from every, single family member present to even approach this ideal of We-hood.

APPENDIX A

WIE WENN AM FEIERTAGE (1799)

Wie wenn am Feiertage, das Feld zu sehn,
Ein Landmann geht, des Morgens, wenn
Aus heisser Nacht die kühlenden Blize fielen
Die ganze Zeit und fern noch tönet der Donner,
In sein Gestade wieder tritt der Strom,
Und frisch der Boden grünt
Und von des Himmels erfreuendem Reegen
Der Weinstok trauft und glänzend
In stiller Sonne stehn die Bäume des Haines:

So stehn sie unter günstiger Witterung
Sie die kein meister allein, die wunderbar
Allgegenwärtig erzieht in leichtem Umfangen
Die mächtige, die göttlichschöne Natur.
Drum wenn zu schlafen sie scheint zu Zeiten des Jahrs
Am Himmel oder unter den Pflanzen oder den Völkern
So trauert der Dichter Angesicht auch,
Sie scheinen allein zu seyn, doch ahnen sie immer.
Denn ahnend ruhet sie selbst auch.

Jezt aber tagts! Ich harrt und sah es kommen,
Und was ich sah, des Heilige sei mein Wort,
Denn sie, sie selbst, die älter denn die Zeiten
Und über die Götter des Abends und Orients ist,
Die Natur ist jezt mit Waffenklang erwacht,
Und hoch vom Aether bis zum Abgrund nieder
Nach vestem Gezeze, wie einst, aus heiligem Chaos gezeugt,
Fühlt neu die Begeisterung sich,
Die Allerschaffende wieder.

Und wie im Aug' ein Feuer dem Manne glänzt,
Wenn hohes er entwarf; so ist
Von neuem an den Zeichen, den Thaten der Welt jezt
Ein Feuer angezündet in Seelen der Dichter.
Und was zuvor geschah, doch kaum gefühlt,
Ist offenbar erst jezt,
Und die uns lächelnd den Aker gebauet,
In Knechtsgestalt, sie sind erkannt,
Die Allebendigen, die Kräfte der Götter.

Erfrägst du sie? im Liede wehet ihr Geist
Wenn es der Sonnen des Tags und warmer Erd
Entwächst, und Wettern, die in der Luft, und andern
Die vorbereiteter in Tiefen der Zeit,
Und deutungsvoller, und vernehmlicher uns
Hinwandeln zwischen Himmel und Erd und unter den Völkern.
Des gemeinsamen Geistes Gedanken sind,
Still endend in der Seele des Dichters,

Dass schnellbetroffen sie, Unendlichem
Bekannt seit langer Zeit, von Erinnerung
Erbebt, und ihr, von heilgem Stral entzündet,
Die Frucht in Liebe geboren, der Götter und Menschen Werk
Den Gesang, damit er beiden zeuge, glükt.
So fiel, wie Dichter sagen, da sie sichtbar
Den Gott zu sehen begehrte, sein Bliz auf Semeles Haus
Und die göttlichgetroffne gebahr,
Die Frucht des Gewitters, den heiligen Bacchus.

Und daher trinken himmlisches Feuer jezt
Die Erdensöhne ohne Gefahr.
Doch uns gebührt es, undter Gottes Gewittern,
Ihr Dichter! Mit entblösstem Haupte zu stehen
Des Vaters Stral, ihn selbst, mit eigner Hand
Zu fassen und dem Volk ins Lied
Gehüllt die himmlische Gaabe zu reichen.
Denn sind nur reinen Herzens,
Wie Kinder, wir, sind schuldlos unsere Hände,

Des Vaters Stral, der reine versengt es nicht
Und tieferschüttert, die Leiden des Stärkeren
Mitleidend, bleibt in den hochherstürzenden Stürmen
Des Gottes, wenn er nahet, das Herz doch fest.
Doch weh mir! Wenn von
[selbgeschlagener Wunde das Herz mir blutet, und tief-
verloren der Frieden ist, und freibescheidenes Genügen,
und die Unruh, und der Mangel mich treibt zum
Überflusse des Göttertisches, wenn rings um mich]
Weh mir!

Und sag ich gleich,
Ich sei genaht, die Himmlischen zu schauen,
Sie selbst, sie werfen mich tief unter die Lebenden
Den falschen Priester, ins Dunkel, dass ich
Das warnende Lied den Gelehrigen singe. Dort

APPENDIX B

NATUR UND KUNST (1801)

Du waltest hoch am Tag' und es blühet dein
Gesez, du hältst die Waage, Saturnus Sohn!
Und theilst die Loos' und ruhest froh im
Ruhm der unsterblichen Herrscherkünste.

Doch in den Abgrund, sagen die Sänger sich,
Habst du den heil'gen Vater, den eignen, einst
Verwiesen und es jammre drunten,
Da, wo die Wilden vor dir mit Recht sind,

Schuldlos der Gott der goldenen Zeit schon längst:
Einst mühelos, und grösser, wie du, wenn schon
Er kein Gebot aussprach und ihn der
Sterblichen keiner mit Nahmen nannte.

Herab denn! Oder schäme des Danks dich nicht!
Und willst du bleiben, diene dem Älteren,
Und gönn' es ihm, dass ihn vor Allen,
Göttern und Menschen, der Sänger nenne!

Denn, wie aus dem Gewölke dein Bliz, so kömmt
Von ihm, was dein ist, siehe! so zeugt von ihm,
Was du gebeutst, und aus Saturnus
Frieden ist jegliche Macht erwachsen.

Und hab' ich erst am Herzen Lebendiges
Gefühlt und dämmert, was du gestaltetest,
Und war in ihrer Wiege mir in
Wonne die wechselnde Zeit entschlummert:

Dann kenn' ich dich, Kronion! Dann hör' ich dich,
Den weisen Meister, welcher, wie wir, ein Sohn
Der Zeit, Geseze giebt und, was die
Heilige Dämmerung birgt, verkündet.

APPENDIX C

FRIEDENSFEIER (1802)

Ich bitte dieses Blatt nur gutmüthig zu lesen. So wird es sicher nicht unfaßlich, noch weniger anstößig seyn. Sollten aber dennoch einige eine solche Sprache zu wenig konventionell finden, so muß ich ihnen gestehen: ich kann nicht anders. An einem schönen Tage läßt sich ja fast jede Sangart hören, und die Natur, wovon es her ist, nimmts auch wieder.
Der Verfasser gedenkt dem Publikum eine ganze Sammlung von dergleichen Blättern vorzulegen, und dieses soll irgend eine Probe seyn davon.

Der himmlischen, still wiederklingenden,
Der ruhigwandelnden Töne voll,
Und gelüftet ist der altgebaute,
Seeliggewohnte Saal; um grüne Teppiche duftet
Die Freudenwolk' und weithinglänzend stehn,
Gereiftester Früchte voll und goldbekränzter Kelche,
Wohlangeordnet, eine prächtige Reihe,
Zur Seite da und dort aufsteigend über dem
Geebneten Boden die Tische.
Denn ferne kommend haben
Hieher, zur Abendstunde,
Sich liebende Gäste beschieden.

Und dämmernden Auges denk' ich schon,
Vom ernsten Tagwerk lächelnd,
Ihn selbst zu sehn, den Fürsten des Fests.
Doch wenn du schon dein Ausland gern verläugnest,
Und als vom langen Heldenzuge müd,
Dein Auge senkst, vergessen, leichtbeschattet,
Und Freundesgestalt annimmst, du Allbekannter, doch
Beugt fast die Knie das Hohe. Nichts vor dir,
Nur Eines weiß ich, Sterbliches bist du nicht.
Ein Weiser mag mir manches erhellen; wo aber
Ein Gott noch auch erscheint,
Da ist doch andere Klarheit.

Von heute aber nicht, nicht unverkündet ist er;
Und einer, der nicht Fluth noch Flamme gescheuet,

Erstaunet, da es stille worden, umsonst nicht, jezt,
Da Herrschaft nirgend ist zu sehn bei Geistern und Menschen.
Das ist, sie hören das Werk,
Längst vorbereitend, von Morgen nach Abend, jezt erst,
Denn unermeßlich braußt, in der Tiefe verhallend,
Des Donnerers Echo, das tausendjährige Wetter,
Zu schlafen, übertönt von Friedenslauten, hinunter.
Ihr aber, theuergewordne, o ihr Tage der Unschuld,
Ihr bringt auch heute das Fest, ihr Lieben! und es blüht
Rings abendlich der Geist in dieser Stille;
Und rathen muß ich, und wäre silbergrau
Die Loke, o ihr Freunde!
Für Kränze zu sorgen und Mahl, jezt ewigen Jünglingen ähnlich.

Und manchen möcht' ich laden, aber o du,
Der freundlichernst den Menschen zugethan,
Dort unter syrischer Palme,
Wo nahe lag die Stadt, am Brunnen gerne war;
Das Kornfeld rauschte rings, still athmete die Kühlung
Vom Schatten des geweiheten Gebirges,
Und die lieben Freunde, das treue Gewölk,
Umschatteten dich auch, damit der heiligkühne
Durch Wildniß mild dein Stral zu Menschen kam, o Jüngling!
Ach! aber dunkler umschattete, mitten im Wort, dich
Furchtbarentscheidend ein tödtlich Verhängniß. So ist schnell
Vergänglich alles Himmlische; aber umsonst nicht;

Denn schonend rührt des Maases allzeit kundig
Nur einen Augenblik die Wohnungen der Menschen
Ein Gott an, unversehn, und keiner weiß es, wenn?
Auch darf alsdann das Freche drüber gehn,
Und kommen muß zum heilgen Ort das Wilde
Von Enden fern, übt rauhbetastend den Wahn,
Und trift daran ein Schiksaal, aber Dank,
Nie folgt der gleich hernach dem gottgegebnen Geschenke;
Tiefprüfend ist es zu fassen.
Auch wär' uns, sparte der Gebende nicht
Schon längst vom Seegen des Heerds
Uns Gipfel und Boden entzündet.

Des Göttlichen aber empfiengen wir
Doch viel. Es ward die Flamm' uns
In die Hände gegeben, und Ufer und Meersfluth.
Viel mehr, denn menschlicher Weise
Sind jene mit uns, die fremden Kräfte, vertrauet.
Und es lehret Gestirn dich, das
Vor Augen dir ist, doch nimmer kannst du ihm gleichen.

Vom Alllebendigen aber, von dem
Viel Freuden sind und Gesänge,
Ist einer ein Sohn, ein Ruhigmächtiger ist er,
Und nun erkennen wir ihn,
Nun, da wir kennen den Vater
Und Feiertage zu halten
Der hohe, der Geist
Der Welt sich zu Menschen geneigt hat.

Denn längst war der zum Herrn der Zeit zu groß
Und weit aus reichte sein Feld, wann hats ihn aber erschöpfet?
Einmal mag aber ein Gott auch Tagewerk erwählen,
Gleich Sterblichen und theilen alles Schiksaal.
Schiksaalgesez ist diß, daß Alle sich erfahren,
Daß, wenn die Stille kehrt, auch eine Sprache sei.
Wo aber wirkt der Geist, sind wir auch mit, und streiten,
Was wohl das Beste sei. So dünkt mir jezt das Beste,
Wenn nun vollendet sein Bild und fertig ist der Meister,
Und selbst verklärt davon aus seiner Werkstatt tritt,
Der stille Gott der Zeit und nur der Liebe Gesez,
Das schönausgleichende gilt von hier an bis zum Himmel.

Viel hat von Morgen an,
Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander,
Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang.
Und das Zeitbild, das der große Geist entfaltet,
Ein Zeichen liegts vor uns, daß zwischen ihm und andern
Ein Bündniß zwischen ihm und andern Mächten ist.
Nicht er allein, die Unerzeugten, Ew'gen
Sind kennbar alle daran, gleichwie auch an den Pflanzen
Die Mutter Erde sich und Licht und Luft sich kennet.
Zulezt ist aber doch, ihr heiligen Mächte, für euch
Das Liebeszeichen, das Zeugniß
Daß ihrs noch seiet, der Festtag,

Der Allversammelnde, wo Himmlische nicht
Im Wunder offenbar, noch ungesehn im Wetter,
Wo aber bei Gesang gastfreundlich untereinander
In Chören gegenwärtig, eine heilige Zahl
Die Seeligen in jeglicher Weise
Beisammen sind, und ihr Geliebtestes auch,
An dem sie hängen, nicht fehlt; denn darum rief ich
Zum Gastmahl, das bereitet ist,
Dich, Unvergeßlicher, dich, zum Abend der Zeit,
O Jüngling, dich zum Fürsten des Festes; und eher legt
Sich schlafen unser Geschlecht nicht,
Bis ihr Verheißenen all,

All ihr Unsterblichen, uns
Von eurem Himmel zu sagen.
Da seid in unserem Hauße.

Leichtathmende Lüfte
Verkünden euch schon,
Euch kündet das rauchende Thal
Und der Boden, der vom Wetter noch dröhnet,
Doch Hoffnung röthet die Wangen,
Und vor der Thüre des Haußes
Sizt Mutter und Kind,
Und schauet den Frieden
Und wenige scheinen zu sterben
Es hält ein Ahnen die Seele,
Vom goldnen Lichte gesendet,
Hält ein Versprechen die Ältesten auf.

Wohl sind die Würze des Lebens,
Von oben bereitet und auch
Hinausgeführet, die Mühen.
Denn Alles gefällt jezt,
Einfältiges aber
Am meisten, denn die langgesuchte,
Die goldne Frucht,
Uraltem Stamm
In schütternden Stürmen entfallen,
Dann aber, als liebstes Gut, vom heiligen Schiksaal selbst,
Mit zärtlichen Waffen umschüzt,
Die Gestalt der Himmlischen ist es.

Wie die Löwin, hast du geklagt,
O Mutter, da du sie,
Natur, die Kinder verloren.
Denn es stahl sie, Allzuliebende, dir
Dein Feind, da du ihn fast
Wie die eigenen Söhne genommen,
Und Satyren die Götter gesellt hast.
So hast du manches gebaut,
Und manches begraben,
Denn es haßt dich, was
Du, vor der Zeit
Allkräftige, zum Lichte gezogen.
Nun kennest, nun lässest du diß;
Denn gerne fühllos ruht,
Bis daß es reift, furchtsamgeschäfftiges drunten.

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SAMENVATTING

Het eerste hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift gaat over het filosofische enigma van het zelfbewustzijn. Vanuit de subjectfilosofie van Dieter Henrich (1927), die haar wortels heeft in het gedachtegoed dat bekend staat als het Duits idealisme, wordt het ik-zijn nader bestudeerd. Henrich introduceert de term *Grundverhältnis* als de tweespalt tussen enerzijds het ik als subject, dat in een familiariteit met zichzelf altijd tegenover de wereld als geheel staat en zich uniek weet in die verhouding. Anderzijds is het ik als persoon altijd tegelijkertijd ook in de wereld; Henrich spreekt zelfs over *Weltding*. In zijn elementaire verhouding tot zichzelf en de wereld bevindt het ik zich onontkoombaar in de tegenstrijdige ervaring van in de wereld en boven de wereld, van contingentie en oneindigheid.

Als overgang naar de tijdsperiode waarop Henrich zijn theorie baseert, het Duits idealisme, wordt in het tweede hoofdstuk een filosofisch historische schets gegeven van de verhitte discussie die oplaait aan het einde van de 18de eeuw omtrent de kenbaarheid van de grond van het ik. Twee bekende namen uit de geschiedenis van de filosofie, Kant en Spinoza, vormen hiervoor het achtergronddecor. Immanuel Kant heeft met zijn *Kritik der reine Vernunft* een duidelijke grens getrokken voor de metafysica: voorbij het empirische is geen kennis mogelijk. In dit dualisme laat hij een duidelijke opening voor het transcendentale ik dat zich ergens op de grenslijn van twee gescheiden domeinen bevindt. Dit ik dat de mogelijkheid om het dualisme te overwinnen in zich lijkt te dragen wordt daarmee de focus van een nieuwe generatie denkers. Het is Baruch de Spinoza, al een eeuw dood en verguisd, die in een opleving van populariteit de jonge garde mogelijkheden biedt voor het denken van een eenheidsgrond die bereikbaar zou kunnen zijn voor het ik. Een intensieve filosofische zoektocht komt op gang naar een synthese tussen het autonome, transcendentale ik van Kant en de *Deus sive Natura* van Spinoza.

Na het Duitse filosofische landschap aan het einde van de 18de eeuw beschreven te hebben, wordt de aandacht in het derde hoofdstuk gericht op een van de jeugdige hoofdrolspelers: Friedrich Schelling. Hij is slechts vijftien jaar oud wanneer hij zijn academische opleiding begint. Hij is een wonderkind dat zichzelf in staat acht om alles te

denken: zelfs de absolute eenheidsgrond van al wat is. De producten van zijn ongebreidelde, ambitieuze schrijfdrift in de eerste tien tot vijftien jaar van zijn carrière vormen een prachtige illustratie van de filosofische uitdagingen, oplossingen en mislukkingen met betrekking tot het denken van een absolute grond, vaak betiteld als het absolute idealisme. Vanuit verschillende invalshoeken poogt hij het Absolute te koppelen aan het denkende ik. Deze periode culmineert in zijn bekende *Freiheitschrift* waarin hij kiest voor een meer evocatieve taal.

Studiegenoot en tegenhanger van Schelling is Friedrich Hölderlin wiens metafysica het onderwerp vormt van het vierde hoofdstuk. Al vroeg in zijn studie komt hij tot de conclusie dat de eenheidsgrond van het ik, dat hij het *Seyn* noemt, per definitie onbereikbaar is voor het bewustzijn dat altijd berust op een scheiding (*Urtheilung*), namelijk tussen subject en object. Niettemin gelooft hij dat de eenheid van het *Seyn* zich openbaart in het leven, in schoonheid, in jeugdige onschuld, in een intuïtie voor eenheid en vrede. Met name die laatste term is belangrijk in Hölderlin's filosofie. Niet zozeer de vraag naar het singuliere ik en zijn absolute grond houdt hem bezig, maar de vraag naar de wijze waarop die originele eenheid gestalte kan krijgen in een wereld van schijnbaar afgezonderde en met elkaar strijdige ikken. Hij keert de filosofie de rug toe en kiest de weg van de poëzie. In de intuïtieve benadering van het gedicht ziet hij de mogelijkheid om de eenheidsgrond binnen het bereik van het ik te brengen. Het betreft hier niet langer de cognitieve capaciteiten, het expliciete denkvermogen, maar eerder de religieuze, wellicht zelfs mystieke aanleg van het ik om niet geheel te vervreemden van de eenheid waaruit het is voortgekomen en ernaar terug te verlangen.

In dit verband circuleert er in de kringen van deze denkers een term, geïntroduceerd door Kant, *intellektuelle Anschauung* genaamd. Het vormt het onderwerp van het vijfde hoofdstuk. In korte tijd ondergaat de term een wezenlijke transformatie. Wat Kant reserveert voor God als de mogelijkheid om niet alleen de fenomenen maar juist de *Dingen-an-Sich* te kennen, wordt door Fichte, de mentor van de jonge denkers uit de voorafgaande hoofdstukken, in verband gebracht met het ik; het is de intuïtie "ik ben!". Schelling en Hölderlin interpreteren het vervolgens als een menselijk vermogen om "door te dringen" tot de eenheidsgrond van al wat is. Schelling ziet het als een filosofische handgreep om het Absolute te vatten, terwijl het voor Hölderlin eerder een intuïtie, een aanvoelen van de onderliggende, goddelijke eenheid is. Beiden beschouwen het echter als een mogelijkheid om de Kantiaanse kloof tussen het fysische en het metafysische, het ik en het Absolute, te overbruggen. De term verdwijnt al snel van het filosofi-

sche toneel in het begin van de 19de eeuw en daarmee lijkt de dood van de rationele metafysica in zicht. Het goddelijk is het domein van geloof en theologie, niet van het denken en de filosofie. Deze kloof domineert tot op heden de verhouding tussen filosofie en theologie.

Vandaar de tweedeling van het zesde hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift. De vraag of er in de 21ste eeuw nog ruimte is voor het metafysische denken kan door een filosoof weliswaar bevestigend beantwoord worden, volgens Henrich. Hij weigert zich neer te leggen bij het filosofische materialisme, het naturalisme, dat in de moderne filosofie hoogtij viert. Echter deze grond kan op geen enkele wijze invulling krijgen zijns inziens. Juist de onkenbaarheid van deze grond, die hij betitelt als *Dunkelheit*, de onbeantwoordbare vraag van het ik naar zijn grond, naar de eenheid onder of voorbij de tweespalt van het leven in de *Grundverhältnis*, vormt volgens Henrich de aanzet tot religie. Hij acht het echter onmogelijk om binnen de grenzen van de filosofie enige nadere invulling te geven aan deze duistere grond. Om die reden wordt in het tweede deel van dit hoofdstuk de metafysica bestudeerd van een theoloog: Karl Rahner. Ook Rahner spreekt van deze grond als mysterie, ongrijpbaar voor het menselijke intellect. Niettemin acht hij het ik, de *Hörer des Wortes*, in staat om iets op te vangen van het domein voorbij-de-fysica. Dit hoofdstuk loopt uit op de vraag: Wat is nu het verschil tussen de absolute eenheidsgrond van het Duitse idealisme en de God van het Christendom?

Het slothoofdstuk gaat van de antwoorden van de auteurs op de vraag “Wie ben ik?” via de wijze waarop de besproken auteurs het ik verbinden met een absolute eenheidsgrond naar de vraag “Wie is God?”. Van Hölderlin wordt een belangrijke tussenstap overgenomen. Niet de directe lijn van het ik naar een absolute grond is een filosofisch begaanbare weg, maar eerder de ervaring van de eenheid, de vrede, van die grond in een wereld van schijnbare tegenstrijdigheid. Niet de vraag “Wie ben ik?” is de belangrijkste, maar eerder de vraag “Wie zijn wij?”. De titel “God – Beyond Me”, wellicht het best te vertalen met “God – het ik te boven”, vormt een dubbele kritiek op de moderne subjectfilosofieën geworteld in het Duitse idealisme. Enerzijds is het een reactie op de arrogantie waarmee het absolute idealisme het goddelijke probeert te vangen binnen de grenzen van de menselijke cognitie. God gaat mij te boven. Anderzijds vormt het een afwijzing van het egocentrisme dat spreekt uit een filosofie die denkt dat een eenheidsgrond bereikt kan worden door of binnen een individueel ik met uitsluiting van een wereld van andere ikken. Een en ander resulteert in een metafysica van Wij-heid. De eenheidsgrond van het menselijke ik is een Wij. Als Wij is het goddelijke de wonderlijke aanzet tot zowel

unieke individualiteit als eenheid. Zulk een concept van God relativeert niettemin de pretenties van een ik dat zichzelf verabsoluteert. Dit Wij is een eenheid die niet ten koste gaat van het individu, maar het ik voedt en helpt te groeien in zijn of haar unieke individualiteit. God als Wij begiftigt ieder menselijk ik met het talent tot zowel eenheid als singulariteit. God als Wij is ook een oproep aan ieder wereld wij om de waarde van ieder participerend ik te respecteren.