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*Reason in Check.  
Philosophy of Religion in  
Classical German Philosophy*

Edited by Giulia Bernard  
and Barbara Santini

G. Bernard, L. Fonnesu, M. Glatzel, K. Hong,  
T. Mauri, B. Santini, S. Schick, M. Tangorra,  
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# FROM RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY TO PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION. A PATH IN SCHELLING'S LATE PHILOSOPHY

by Tommaso Mauri\*

**Abstract.** *The aim of the paper is to support the thesis that Schelling's late philosophy (1827-1854) progressively transforms from a religious philosophy to a philosophy of religion. Accordingly, (Christian) religion, initially taken as an auxiliary and guiding source of philosophical reflection, gradually becomes a specific object of philosophical speculation. The paper analyzes this change by identifying three phases of Schelling's Spätphilosophie. Finally, it offers an account of the epistemological framework within which Schelling's philosophy of religion fits and highlights its originality from those of his contemporaries.*

**Keywords.** *Schelling; Schelling's Late Philosophy; Religious Philosophy; Philosophy of Religion; Positive Philosophy*

In this paper, I intend to support the thesis that Schelling's late philosophy (1827-1854) progressively transforms from a religious philosophy to a philosophy of religion. Therefore, a preliminary epistemological clarification of the terms 'religious philosophy' and 'philosophy of religion' will be necessary. Subsequently, I will analyze the evolution of Schelling's late philosophy and show how we can recognize within it three distinct phases, which differ significantly from each other concerning the conception of the relationship between negative and positive philosophy. This transformation – here my thesis – entails a change in the conception of the relationship between philosophy and religion: from being an auxiliary and guiding source of philosophical reflection, religion gradually becomes more and more the specific object of positive philosophy. This, however, does not mean that positive philosophy (as philosophy of religion) can and should be understood as a 'second philosophy' for all intents and purposes, such as 'philosophy

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of science' or 'philosophy of law' etc... since it is «the last and highest [science]»<sup>1</sup>, namely, the only science which is ultimately able to adequately account for the reality in which we are situated.

In conclusion, I will briefly describe Schelling's late philosophy as a philosophy of religion that finds itself on the conditions of possibility and the reasonableness of its practice, and then I will highlight the originality of his epistemological framework.

### 1. *Preliminary Epistemological Remark: Philosophical Theology, Philosophy of Religion, Religious Philosophy*

The debate concerning the epistemological status of the philosophy of religion is a topical issue within the scholarly world. Indeed, the same expression, depending on whether it is uttered in the 'analytical' or 'continental' framework, takes on a significantly different meaning. The 'analytical' philosophy of religion presents itself mostly as a philosophical theology, which self-conceives itself as the heir to the classical tradition of rational or natural theology and therefore conceives of the problem of God in strictly philosophical terms. In contrast, the 'continental' philosophy of religion understands itself as an eminently modern discipline, which arose as a result of the Kantian dissolution of the scientific character of natural theology. While the object of the 'analytical' philosophy of religion remains to some extent God philosophically considered, the 'continental' direction turns to the investigation of the religious phenomenon in the variety of its facets, taking the investigation of the divine as an *intentio obliqua*. Certainly, a significant distinction between the two ways of practicing the discipline is the relationship to historicity: if the former understands itself in constitutively

<sup>1</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie oder Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, in Id., *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. by K.F.A. Schelling, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1856-1861 (from now on: SW), XI, p. 561; Eng. trans. by K. Bruff, *Schelling's Late Political Philosophy: Lectures 22-24 of the Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*, «Kabiri», II, 2020, pp. 93-135, p. 127.



ahistorical terms, the latter assumes history as the fundamental dimension of the manifestation of the religious phenomenon<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, it is not possible here either to linger further on the characterization of this distinction, which is in itself so fruitful and revelatory, or to place Schelling preliminarily in one or the other research horizons, since the duality of negative philosophy and positive philosophy allows him to reconfigure in a new way the relationship between them so that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Certainly, however, Schelling's thought, although not totally devoid of a philosophical theology elaborated within the framework of negative philosophy, contributes significantly to the rise of the 'continental' philosophy of religion.

In this regard, it is necessary to introduce another fundamental distinction, namely that between *religious philosophy* and *philosophy of religion*. By 'religious philosophy' we mean a philosophy that is already preliminarily guided, informed, and thus conditioned by personal adherence to a particular religious perspective, producing a form of sapiential knowledge in which the entanglement between religious content and philosophical elaboration is indissoluble. By 'philosophy of religion', on the other hand, one means an unprejudiced investigation of the religious phenomenon, one that takes a detached but not preliminarily reductionist attitude toward it. While religious philosophy is always linked to a particular religion

<sup>2</sup> It is precisely in the Anglo-American context that the expression 'continental philosophy of religion' arose to distinguish it from the philosophy of religion *simpliciter*, which is considered analytical. See C. Taliaferro, *Philosophy of Religion*, «The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2023 Edition)», ed. by E.N. Zalta and U. Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/philosophy-religion/>; W.J. Wainright (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of religion*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2005. In the 1970s, in the German context, a significant confrontation between these two perspectives took place in the persons of Wilhelm Weischedel and Wolfgang Trillhaas (see W. Trillhaas, W. Weischedel, *Religionsphilosophie oder Philosophische Theologie. Eine Kontroverse zwischen Wolfgang Trillhaas und Wilhelm Weischedel*, «Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie», XV, 1973, pp. 87-101, 117-131). For an *excursus* on the historical genesis of this distinction, see M.M. Olivetti, *Filosofia della religione*, in *La filosofia*, a cura di P. Rossi, I: *Le filosofie speciali*, Torino, UTET, 1995, pp. 137-220.

– in fact, one speaks of ‘Christian philosophy’, ‘Jewish philosophy’, or ‘Islamic philosophy’ – philosophy of religion aims to investigate the characters and structures of the religious phenomenon as such, asserting a critical instance against the content conveyed by specific religions themselves<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. *Schelling in Munich (1827): A Christian Philosophy?*

On November 26, 1827, Schelling took up his professorship at the University of Munich with the inaugural lecture of the new lecture cycle, significantly titled *System der Weltalter*<sup>4</sup>. He was eagerly sought by King Ludwig I, who paired him with Franz von Baader and Joseph Görres to contribute to the cultural revival of Bavaria by pursuing a Catholic-conservative political-religious project. Schelling, despite some hesitation about a situation that appeared to him to be «very delicate and dangerous»<sup>5</sup>, accepted the king’s call, describing it as a decisive turning point in his biographical and speculative life<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> For this reason, one can also speak of a philosophy of *religions*. For further discussion of an epistemological nature see A. Fabris, *Introduzione alla filosofia della religione*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996, pp. 32-47; Id., *Questioni epistemologiche in filosofia della religione, tra indifferenza e ritorno dei miti*, «Archivio di Filosofia», LXXIX (2), 2011, pp. 185-197; F. Rossi, *Lo statuto della filosofia della religione in alcune recenti pubblicazioni*, «Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica», XCVI (2-3), 2004, pp. 441-475.

<sup>4</sup> Of these lectures, we possess Schelling’s own manuscript, miraculously saved from the 1944 bombings, but have not yet succeeded in the task of deciphering it. Fortunately, Ernst von Lasaulx’s reliable *Nachschrift* was found and published. (see F.W.J. Schelling, *System der Weltalter: Münchener Vorlesung 1827/28*, ed. by S. Peetz, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1990). For a more in-depth account of Schelling’s call to Munich see H. Fuhrmans, *Schelling-Briefe aus Anlaß seiner Berufung nach München im Jahre 1827*, «Philosophisches Jahrbuch», LXIV, 1956, pp. 272-297; T. O’Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians*, London, Notre Dame University Press, 1982, pp. 111-115; X. Tilliette, *Vita di Schelling*, Milano, Bompiani, 2012, pp. 649-689.

<sup>5</sup> Fuhrmans, *Schelling-Briefe*, p. 293. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>6</sup> In a letter to King Ludwig, he expresses himself as follows: «To mark the beginning of my work as a turning point in my entire intellectual and scientific

Concerning our subject matter, Schelling's programmatic statement in his inaugural lecture, in which he designates his philosophy properly as Christian philosophy, is of considerable significance: «The actual decisive name for my philosophy is *Christian philosophy*»<sup>7</sup>. He sees Christianity not only as a privileged object of philosophical reflection («*Christianity in its literality and historicity must be the object of philosophy*»<sup>8</sup>), but also assigns Christianity a foundational role *vis-à-vis* philosophy as a whole: «so Christianity is the foundation [*Grundlage*] for philosophy»<sup>9</sup>.

Indeed, in the early years of the second Munich stay, Schelling's philosophy exhibits the greatest affinity with the doctrinal contents

life, I set out to present for the first time as early as next winter the contents of my long-awaited work with the title *The Ages of the Worlds* (Fuhrmans, *Schelling-Briefe*, p. 291). Further reasons for identifying a turning point in Schelling's thought in 1827 have been described by A. Hutter, *Schellings Neuanfang von 1827. Zur Bedeutung erstmals edierten Münchener Vorlesungen*, «*Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*», XLIX (1), 1995, pp. 131-137. A further reason is the tripartition of the works offered by Schelling himself in his testamentary dispositions, in which the Erlangen works are clearly separated from the Munich ones (see H. Fuhrmans, *Dokumente zur Schellingforschung IV. Schellings Verfügung über seinen literarischen Nachlaß*, «*Kant-Studien*», LI (1), 1960, pp. 14-26).

<sup>7</sup> Schelling, *System der Weltalter*, p. 9: «Der eigentlich entscheidende Name für meine Philosophie, ist *christliche Philosophie*». The question of the alleged or real 'Christianity' of Schelling's philosophy at various stages of its development has received different interpretations in the *Schellingforschung*. Among the scholars who have deemed the label 'Christian philosophy' appropriate is first and foremost Fuhrmans (see H. Fuhrmans, *Schellings letzte Philosophie. Die negative und positive Philosophie in Einsatz des Spätidealismus*, Berlin, Junker & Dünnhaupt, 1940, p. 241), as well as in more recent times, J. Laughland, *Schelling versus Hegel. From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, and N. Zunic, *Schelling on Truth and Person. The Meaning of Positive Philosophy*, London, Lexington, 2022. Although Schelling's philosophy has not been impervious to the Christian religion and has in turn influenced theological reflection (think of the so-called *Tübinger Schule*), it nevertheless seems to me inadequate to designate it with the name 'Christian philosophy', not only for the reasons I try to explain in this paper but also because the very notion of 'Christian philosophy' is intrinsically problematic.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*. «*Das Christentum in seiner Buchstäblichkeit und Geschichtlichkeit muß Gegenstand der Philosophie sein*».

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

of the Christian religion and their orthodox philosophical interpretation, especially concerning the doctrine of creation<sup>10</sup>. This affinity, however, does not result from the fortuitous *a posteriori* encounter between an autonomous philosophical inquiry and the content of the Christian religion, but presupposes an intimate connection between philosophy and Christianity already *ab initio*. Schelling explicitly states this entwinement, and it is interesting to examine the exact words in which he means it in the inaugural lecture of 1827, since already by the course of 1832 his conception will have slightly but significantly changed:

We are in the deepest ignorance about the true connection of things, and there it is said: stick to the revelation. I do not say this here as if revelation *alone* should guide philosophy and determine the nature of knowledge – no, philosophy asserts its independence, revelation itself belongs to its subject matter, Christianity itself belongs to its content. But *philosophy must strengthen and perfect itself on Christianity*<sup>11</sup>.

Three important considerations emerge from this: 1) our ability to understand the world in its depth is extremely limited, and revelation is taken as an authoritative source of teaching about all that we ignore; 2) Christianity is not the subject of a particular branch of philosophy, but of philosophy as a whole; 3) Christianity

<sup>10</sup> In the *Munich Lectures* (as much in those *On the history of modern philosophy* as in those on *Philosophical Empiricism*) Schelling strives for the absolute transcendence of God over the world. God creates *absque omni preexistente potentia* and maintains a relationship of absolute freedom with the world, which is no longer understood as the necessary locus of his self-realization but rather as a gratuitous manifestation of his love for creatures.

<sup>11</sup> Schelling, *System der Weltalter*, p. 13: «Über den wahren Zusammenhang der Dinge befinden wir uns in der tiefsten Unwissenheit und da heißt es denn: halte dich an die Offenbarung. Dies sage ich hier nicht als ob die Offenbarung *allein* die Philosophie leiten und bestimmen sollte über die Art des Wissens – nein, die Philosophie behauptet ihre Selbständigkeit, Offenbarung gehört selbst zum Gegenstande derselben, das Christentum gehört selbst zu ihrem Inhalte. Aber *die Philosophie muß am Christentum sich erstarken und vervollkommen*».

is not just an object that philosophy deals with, but is the source of the strengthening and enhancement of philosophy itself: a philosophy without Christianity would be less philosophy. In this threefold sense, then, Schelling understands his philosophy as 'Christian philosophy'. This approach, characteristic of a *religious philosophy*, which reveals a deep union and some subordination of philosophy to Christianity, will gradually be replaced by a *philosophy of religion* approach. This means that over time Schelling makes an increasingly shrewd and judicious distinction between philosophy and religion, which, while not lapsing into complete separation, avoids the risk of confusion present in the intermediate speculation (1809-1821) and early Munich period (1827-1837). It is as if Schelling, at that time, glimpsed in Christianity and 'Christian philosophy' a possible solution to the metaphysical problems that beset his earlier philosophy and assimilated that solution into his system without reckoning with the philosophical legitimacy of such an operation<sup>12</sup>. On the contrary, the reflections of the Berlin years will lead to a deeper epistemological awareness, which is expressed in the acknowledgement of the increasing autonomy of both philosophy and religion itself with respect to Christian revelation.

<sup>12</sup> This is confirmed by the letter written to Victor Cousin on Nov. 27, 1828 (roughly a year after he began teaching again at the University of Munich), in which Schelling boasts to his French colleague that he had philosophically expounded «tout ce que jusq'ici on a appelé Christianisme» (G.L. Plitt (ed.), *Aus Schellings Leben. In Briefen*, 3 Bände, Leipzig, Hirzel, 1869-1870, III, p. 40). It is significant to notice how, more than two decades later, Schelling noted in his personal diary that «Christian faith is philosophically incomprehensible [*unbegreiflich*]», thus downplaying philosophy's claims *vis-à-vis* (Christian) religion and thus distinguishing more sharply between the spheres. The reasons for this shift are to be found, in my opinion, in a renewed confrontation with purely rational philosophy, which ascertains its limitations and its intrinsic potential (see F.W.J. Schelling, *Das Tagebuch 1848. Rationale Philosophie und demokratische Revolution*, ed. by A. von Pechmann, H.J. Sandkühler and M. Schraven, Hamburg, Meiner, 1990, p. 188). It should also be noted that this passage was certainly written at a later date since reference is made to the 1849 diary. It is therefore likely that it was written after the lecture at the Berlin Academy of Sciences *Über die Quellen der ewigen Wahrheiten* delivered on January 17, 1850, which is of decisive significance in establishing the scope and limits of rationality and the relationship between reason and God.

Even in the very early years of the Munich stay, however, slight changes can be found within this epistemological framework. Although during this period the Munich establishment happily embraced the Christian system elaborated by Schelling and made no particular criticism of it, he likely felt the need to clarify his position regarding the relationship between philosophy and the Christian religion as a result of the proliferation of so-called ‘repeaters’ (*Anhänger*) including, in particular, Jacob Sengler and Friedrich Julius Stahl<sup>13</sup>, who unofficially disseminated his doctrines by placing him unhesitatingly within the strand of reactionary Christian philosophy<sup>14</sup>. Because of the spread of the *vulgata* that he had completely rejected his early philosophy and any kind of rational philosophy, Schelling worked more solicitously to assert the autonomy of philosophy from revelation, and thus of rational philosophy from positive philosophy. A comparison of the passage from the 1827 course quoted above with the revision made in 1832

<sup>13</sup> See J. Sengler, *Über das Wesen und die Bedeutung der speculativen Philosophie und Theologie in der gegenwärtigen Zeit, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Religionsphilosophie*, Kupferberg, Mainz, 1834-1837; F.J. Stahl, *Die Philosophie des Rechts nach geschichtlicher Ansicht*, Heidelberg, Mohr, 1830-1837. Schelling's condemnation of Sengler's and Stahl's interpretations, in addition to emerging between the lines in the *Preface to Cousin's writings* (1834), is most clearly expressed in his letters to Weisse, Bunsen, and Dorf Müller (see Plitt (ed.), *Aus Schellings Leben*, III, pp. 99, 131, 134-135, 157, 161). See also Schelling's assessment of Sengler, who had applied for a professorship at the University of Munich (see F.W.J. Schelling, *Schellingiana Rariora*, ed. by L. Pareyson, Torino, Bottega d'Erasmus, 1977, pp. 513-515), and an anonymous article that appeared as a *Beilage* to the «Allgemeine Zeitung» in 1841, in which Schelling's judgment of Stahl is reported (ivi, pp. 625-626).

<sup>14</sup> Particularly informative in this regard is the *Nachschrift* of Schelling's last Munich Lectures, in which he explicitly quotes Stahl as stating that although the latter had presented the second volume of his *Philosophie des Rechts* as an application of Schelling's latest doctrines to law and the state, he «wanted to have nothing to do with this philosophy», which misunderstood positive philosophy by presenting it as «a philosophy that rests on the authority of revelation and with it wishes to stifle reason [...] [a philosophy] that rests on a faith not penetrated by science» (F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie: Nachschrift der letzten Münchener Vorlesungen 1841*, ed. by A. Roser, H. Schulten, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 1996, p. 209).

is particularly instructive. Net of the transcriber's fidelity, the change appears evident:

One could say: about the true connection we find ourselves in the deepest ignorance. Therefore, philosophy should only adhere to divine revelation. Therewith all independence of philosophy would be lost. One has the right to ask me how philosophy could take possession of a historical content *independently* of revelation<sup>15</sup>.

The three considerations we made from the 1827 text lose their textual basis here: 1) the radical limitedness of our understanding of the world is called into question by the use of the conditional («one *could* say...») and 2) the same happens to the authority of revelation in the philosophical field («philosophy *should* adhere to divine revelation»); 3) the reference to Christianity as a source of strengthening and enhancement philosophy is expunged.

Now, one should not be misled either: when analyzing Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*, it is always better to keep programmatic statements distinct from the actual unfolding of the system since the latter does not always accord with the former. However, it is worth noting how, although the system does not immediately adapt to the change in approach, the movement of Schelling's thought already at this stage is driven by the need to transform religion from an auxiliary source to the object of philosophical speculation. For this need to become clearer and to be translated into an effective and efficient transformation of the overall system, it will be necessary to wait for a few years (and indeed, a first relevant change can be found only from the *Mittermair Nachschrift* dated 1838-39 onwards),

<sup>15</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie. Münchner Vorlesung WS 1832/33 und SS 1833*, ed. by H. Fuhrmans, Torino, Bottega d'Erasmus, 1972, p. 83: «Man könnte sagen: über den wahren Zusammenhang finden wir uns in der tiefsten Unwissenheit. Demnach habe sich die Philosophie bloss an die göttliche Offenbarung zu halten. Damit ginge alle Selbständigkeit der Philosophie verloren. Man hat das Recht, mich zu fragen, wie die Philosophie *unabhängig* von Offenbarung sich eines geschichtlichen Gehalts bemächtigen könne».

but nevertheless, it would be naïve not to grasp this direction of thought already in the early years of the second Munich stay<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. *Unity and Discontinuity of Schelling's Late Philosophy*

As previously mentioned, the *Spätphilosophie* can be divided into three phases, which, as I will try to show, are part of the single movement of transformation from a religious philosophy to a philosophy of religion, which is also visible – as shown in the comparison of the lectures of 1827 and those of 1832 – within each phase. This division has already been proposed by influential scholars<sup>17</sup> and has been motivated more by the relationship between negative and positive philosophy. This is correct. In the first phase (1827-1837) positive philosophy has absolute prevalence within the system; negative philosophy is thought of as regressive empiricism propaedeutical to positive philosophy, and the boundaries demarcating one from the other are unclear. In the second phase (1838-1845) Schelling reevaluates negative philosophy – which he now places alongside positive philosophy as endowed with equal dignity but still does not explicitly carry it out – and poses the problem of the transition from one to the other. In the third phase (1846-1854), negative philosophy is properly carried out in the *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie* and given epistemological priority: rational philosophy is the authentic *philosophia prima*, while positive

<sup>16</sup> The need to acknowledge a turning point in Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* in the last years of the Munich stay was recognized by Manfred Frank as early as 1977 (see M. Frank, *Einleitung* to F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. by M. Frank, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1977, pp. 45-46).

<sup>17</sup> See H. Fuhrmans, *Der Ausgangspunkt der Schellingschen Spätphilosophie*, «Kant-Studien», XLVIII, 1956-57, pp. 302-323; Id., *Dokumente zur Schellingforschung IV*; Id., *Einleitung* to Schelling, *Grundlegung*, pp. 11-63.; X. Tilliette, *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir*, 2 voll., Paris, Vrin, 1970, II, pp. 80-96; Id., *Attualità di Schelling*, ed. and trans. by N. De Sanctis, Milano, Mursia, 1974, pp. 62, 67-68; L. Pareyson, *Schelling. Presentazione e antologia*, Milano, Marzorati, 1971, pp. 79-83; F. Tomatis, *Kenosis del logos. Ragione e rivelazione nell'ultimo Schelling*, Roma, Città Nuova, 1994 (now in F.W.J. Schelling, *Sui principi sommi. Filosofia della rivelazione 1841/42*, Milano, Bompiani, 2016, pp. 15-448), pp. 72-75.



philosophy, albeit it remains the «last and highest science»<sup>18</sup>, becomes a «*particular science*»<sup>19</sup>, a *philosophia secunda*, comparable in fact – with some important distinctions – to the philosophy of religion.

We will now move on to analyze in more detail the shifts that took place. Before that, however, it should be made explicit at once that although the theoretical reasons that guided Schelling down this path are clearly identifiable, the historical-biographical conditions under which he found himself operating are not irrelevant either. In particular, as we mentioned earlier, it is most likely that Schelling was prompted to a first revision of his thought because of the misinterpretation made by Stahl, Sengler, and the *Spätidealisten*, while the second adjustment was plausibly provoked by the harsh criticism he received in Berlin from Hegelians not only on the Left (Ruge, Feuerbach, Engels), but also on the Right (Michelet, Marheineke, Rosenkranz).

### 3.1. The First Phase (1827-1837)

In the first phase (1827-1837) there is great unity between the introductory lectures and the ‘special’ ones, since not only do the former develop the opposition between logical and historical systems, provide a historical introduction, and systematically expose regressive empiricism, but also present a doctrine of God and creation, which paves the way for the philosophy of mythology and revelation. There is thus no need, in Schelling’s eyes, to practice a *philosophia specialis* to deliver a Christianly-oriented discourse on God and creation, but it is sufficient to reflect critically on man’s experience of the world. However, it can be argued that Schelling, at this stage of his thought, is not always loyally philosophical: by introducing an extra theoretical voluntaristic component into the very practice of philosophizing<sup>20</sup>, he does not justify his

<sup>18</sup> SW XI, p. 560; Eng. trans. p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 561; Eng. trans. p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> «Philosophy is not a blind science, which does not see its goal in advance. In its beginning there is already its end; it already wants at the beginning, and it wants the world as a willed and freely posited being» (F.W.J. Schelling, *Urfassung*

conclusions with cogency but rather enables philosophical speculation to surreptitiously reach where he from the beginning wanted to reach, namely, those Christian doctrines that appeared to him so suitable for solving the internal problems of his philosophy, particularly that of the relationship between the finite and the infinite.

Starting from the *Weltalter* Schelling develops an old-fashioned metaphysics that presents God as the principle and 'Lord of being' and then deduces the world's structures from it. However, all this is grounded in an act of will posited at the beginning of philosophy, within a sapiential conception of philosophy not so much as a scientific discipline but rather as a «free act of the spirit [*freie Geistesthat*]»<sup>21</sup> that desires a world in which there is an ultimate meaning, an ultimate meaningfulness that eliminates the possibility of the absurd. The decision on the existence of meaning has thus already been made, and philosophy comes only to prove *a posteriori* its correctness<sup>22</sup>. The problem with this conception of philosophy

*der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, ed. by W.E. Ehrhardt, 2 Volumes, Hamburg, Meiner, 1992, I, p. 73). Even sharper is the position in the version of the *Sämmtliche Werke*, which goes back partially to Munich manuscripts: «Philosophy does not announce itself as a science that begins at random, that is, without actually knowing what it wants, or even with the intention of blindly submitting to anything that results from a certain kind of connection of thoughts; rather, it announces itself as a science that has a definite purpose in mind, that wants to achieve something specific and is by no means willing to consider even that to be true and to be found right, to submit even to that which conflicts or even contradicts that determined will» (SW XIII, p. 199; see also Schelling, *Urfassung*, I, pp. 19-25; Id., *Grundlegung*, pp. 394-397). This volitional conception of philosophy is insisted upon, endorsed, and promoted by Zunic (see Zunic, *Schelling on Truth and Person*, pp. 23-25).

<sup>21</sup> SW IX, p. 228; AA II, 10, 2, p. 628; F.W.J. Schelling, *Initia philosophiae universae. Erlanger Vorlesung WS 1820/21*, ed. by H. Fuhrmans, Bonn, Bouvier, 1969, pp. 210-213.

<sup>22</sup> This is a typically Jacobian motif. He, in fact, locates the grounds for going beyond the philosophy of Spinoza or Fichte, which are perfectly self-sufficient on the purely rational level, in feeling and desire: «Just as this world of appearances, if it had all its truth in the appearances and no deeper meaning, if it had nothing to reveal apart from them, would become a ghastly phantom» (F.H. Jacobi, *Jacobi an Fichte*, in Id., *Werke. Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by K. Hammacher and W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 1998ss. (from now on: JW), II/1, p. 210; Eng.

is that it is ultimately based on an option that risks becoming purely arbitrary: «Whoever has no desire to think this way could not be persuaded by any arguments – in the age of post-Kantian thought – not even to consider this in any way relevant or important»<sup>23</sup>.

The question Schelling asks in the *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung* (1830/31) – «What right do I have to begin immediately with this perfect spirit?»<sup>24</sup> – remains ultimately unanswered in the first phase of the *Spätphilosophie*. Divine transcendence and creation are affirmed – once again – with a ‘shot of a gun’, not by some intellectual intuition but by relying on the assumption made explicit in the 1827 lectures that philosophy must be strengthened and perfected in Christianity and, where one is incapable of grasping the nature of things, one must stick to revelation<sup>25</sup>. This principle,

trans. by G. di Giovanni, *Jacobi to Fichte (1799)*, in F.H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, ed. by G. di Giovanni, Montréal-Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994, pp. 497-536, p. 515).

<sup>23</sup> T. Buchheim, *Barrieren der Beweisbarkeit Gottes und Schellings Umrundungsversuche*, in *Gottesbeweise als Herausforderung für die moderne Vernunft*, ed. by T. Buchheim, F. Hermanni, A. Hutter and C. Schwöbel, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2012, p. 139 (my translation). As Fuhrmans correctly notices: «This philosophy was intended to be religious philosophy, Christian philosophy. It is fueled by pathos and the faith that here lies at the center of all philosophizing, that creation, fall, and redemption are the center of history, and that the most important task of ‘positive’ philosophy is to show these fundamental facts, which according to Schelling are the fundamental facts of all history» (Fuhrmans, *Einleitung* to F.W.J. Schelling, *Grundlegung*, p. 49, my translation). The problem with this approach, as the young Hegelians were quick to point out, is precisely the *Vermischung* of philosophy and religious faith. Fuhrmans does not appreciate that in later years Schelling makes a major effort to delimit the realms more clearly, trying to transform his religious philosophy into a philosophy of religion.

<sup>24</sup> Schelling, *Urfassung*, I, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> Contextually, Schelling asserts that «all philosophy is the proof [*Erweis*] of this perfect spirit» and that «the perfect spirit is the principle of philosophy only insofar as it is its object. The principle of philosophy lies in its end» (F.W.J. Schelling, *Urfassung*, I, pp. 71-72). This, while mitigating the claim of aiming to begin with the perfect spirit (since the perfect spirit is obtained only at the end), confirms the fact that, in the volitional conception of philosophy to which we have referred, the notion of the perfect spirit guides the course of philosophizing from the very beginning.

which may well be valid in extraphilosophical contexts, undermines the very autonomy of philosophy, which does not tolerate being *ancilla* to any other knowledge nor being hetero-directed in its arguments<sup>26</sup>. What happened to Schelling, however, is not at all strange or unusual: as a pioneer of a new science – the philosophy of mythology and revelation – he tended to magnify its reach and significance, conceiving it as the philosophy *tout court*. This is the fate of every great discovery: to transcend the limits of its field of application and to rise to an overall *Weltanschauung*. Schelling's work in the following years, therefore, is to reflect on the epistemological status of the new science he inaugurated and place it correctly while avoiding undue transgressions.

So, the charge that Schelling's philosophy at this stage does not respect the critical limits imposed by Kant on the cognitive faculties<sup>27</sup>, while certainly legitimate and justified, comes only as a second line. Here, first and foremost, the autonomy of philosophy itself is at stake: a philosophical approach that does not exclude the possible contribution that other knowledge – other sciences, religion, art – can bring is certainly desirable, but it is essential to guarantee philosophy a relative autonomy from that given knowledge, without collaboration resulting in mixture or confusion. We can imagine Schelling's irritated reaction to Feuerbach's legitimate 1838 critique that «positive philosophy – wanting to be both, religion and philosophy, that is, religious philosophy (as it qualifies itself) – is *neither religion nor philosophy*»<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> This awareness comes to the surface after a long period in which the relationship between philosophy and Christianity remained unclear. The 1846 diary states: «Philosophy must come to Christianity by its own way. It would be very strange if she were to be left all freedom up to this point, but, as soon as she arrived here, she was henceforth left not free, but captive» (Id., *Philosophische Entwürfe und Tagebücher 1846. Philosophie der Mythologie und reinrationale Philosophie*, ed. by L. Knatz, H.J. Sandkühler and M. Schraven, Hamburg, Meiner, 1998, p. 32).

<sup>27</sup> See H.-J. Sandkühler, *Einleitung to Das Tagebuch 1848*, pp. LIII-LIV; F. Meier, *Transzendenz der Vernunft und Wirklichkeit Gottes. Eine Untersuchung zur Philosophischen Gotteslehre in F.W.J. Schellings Spätphilosophie*, Regensburg, Pustet, 2004, pp. 208-216.

<sup>28</sup> L. Feuerbach, *Zur Kritik der «positiven Philosophie»*, «Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst», 1838, pp. 2305-2340, pp. 2308-2309.

### 3.2. The Second Phase (1838-1846)

It is around 1838, in fact, that Schelling's first actual attempt to revise his system dates back. This is done by radically altering the structure of the introductory lectures to the cycle of positive philosophy. As attested by the *Mittermair Nachschrift*<sup>29</sup> (dated between 1837/38 and 1840)<sup>30</sup>, it consisted of 1) a general exposition of the theory of potencies, 2) the development of the philosophy of nature and 3) the philosophy of spirit and history, and finally 4) considerations on the relationship between negative and positive philosophy. Now, it is highly probable that the *Nachschrift* refers only to a part of the lectures actually delivered by Schelling in that semester; however, even in this hypothesis, a radical change from the previous introductions is undeniable: there is no trace of the polemic against logical systems or the long historical introduction, and above all, the doctrine of God and creation has completely disappeared. In the first two sections, we can still recognize the themes addressed in the *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus*, but the approach has radically changed, and the term 'empiricism' takes

Interestingly, in the *Berliner Einleitung*, after coming into contact with the Berlin Protestant milieu, which was more hostile to the idea of a naïve convergence of faith and reason, of philosophy and Christianity, Schelling emphasizes how the *Philosophy of Revelation* is only a «part», or an «application» (SW XIII, p. 140; Eng. trans. by B. Matthews, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy. The Berlin Lectures*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 188) of positive philosophy, which in turn is neither «religious philosophy» (*religiöse Philosophie*) (SW XIII, p. 134; Eng. trans. p. 183) nor «revealed philosophy» (*Offenbarungsphilosophie*) (SW XIII, p. 139; Eng. trans. p. 187).

<sup>29</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Über die höchsten Principien*, ed. by F. Tomatis, in Schelling, *Sui principii sommi*, pp. 472-679. Part of the manuscript had already been edited by A.M. Koktanek, *Schellings Seinslehre und Kierkegaard*, München, Oldenbourg, 1962, pp. 85-97.

<sup>30</sup> Tilliette and Fuhrmans lean toward the winter semester 1837/38 (see X. Tilliette, *Schelling*, II, pp. 19, 130-131, 250-251; Fuhrmans, *Einleitung* to Schelling, *Grundlegung*, pp. 38-40); Pareyson and Tomatis for the 1839 summer semester (see Pareyson, *Schelling*, pp. 70n., 94; Id., *La nuova edizione storico-critica di Schelling*, «Filosofia», XXX, 1979, pp. 84-85; F. Tomatis, *Nota editoriale* to Schelling, *Sui principii sommi*, pp. 461-462).

on a completely different meaning<sup>31</sup>. Rather, the considerations therein agreed with those of the *Darstellung des Naturprozesses*, a lecture series given in Berlin in the winter semester of 1843/44, whose title – *Über die höchsten Principien* – coincides significantly with that of the *Mittermair Nachschrift*<sup>32</sup>. The third section, moreover, represents an embryo of Lectures XVI-XX of the *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, while the last, which redefines the relationship between negative and positive philosophy, is the one that presents the most radical novelty. Here negative philosophy, far from being relegated to mere regressive empiricism and propaedeutic to positive philosophy, is designated as the «science of all sciences»<sup>33</sup>, and its epistemological priority over all other fields of knowledge (including positive philosophy) is thus affirmed.

The *Mittermair Nachschrift*, therefore, is to be identified as the first exposition of purely rational philosophy; it will not be expounded again in the *Berlin Lectures* (and the reasons for this decision are yet to be investigated), but it is certainly to this that Schelling refers when, in the introductions of 1841/42 and 1842/43, he discusses from a general point of view the relations between the two philosophies. With regard more strictly to our subject – that is, the gradual transition from a religious philosophy to a philosophy of religion – the *Mittermair Nachschrift* plays a key role: in it, it is stated that «philosophy has no purpose other than itself»<sup>34</sup> and that, «although we cannot penetrate the universal

<sup>31</sup> If in the *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus* the starting point of speculation is «the fact of the world» (*die Thatsache der Welt*) in the *Mittermair Nachschrift* we read the prodromes of what will become, in the *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, «the experience of thinking» (*die Erfahrung des Denkens*) (see SW XI, p. 326).

<sup>32</sup> The *Mittermair Nachschrift* is an extraordinarily little-studied text, partly because it has not received a German edition but only an Italian edition (with German parallel text). However, an in-depth study of this *Nachschrift* would be welcome to realize that some themes commonly thought to emerge only in Berlin were already present in Munich's later years. In particular, a comparison with the *Darstellung des Naturprozesses*, of which the *Mittermair Nachschrift* is most likely an earlier version, is highly desirable.

<sup>33</sup> Schelling, *Über die höchsten Principien*, p. 652.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, p. 474: «die Philosophie keinen Zweck habe als sich selbst».

connection, we can nevertheless tend toward it, we can love it and devote ourselves to it»<sup>35</sup>. If we add that the object of philosophy is no longer «Christianity in its literality and historicity», but «being in itself [*das Sein an sich*]»<sup>36</sup>, or rather «being [which] is in the idea», the complete reversal has now taken place: no longer God or Christianity, but being is the primary object of philosophy. The essential feature of philosophical knowledge is not belief in a revelation but doubt itself: «The existence of God is not an apodictic truth and cannot be proved apodictically»<sup>37</sup>. God, therefore, cannot be the principle of this science, which rather must seek to «understand the world as far as it is possible to understand it without God from reason»<sup>38</sup>. The theme of programmatic atheism of rational science appears here for the first time, which will later be found in *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*: «This science will realize its concept all the more perfectly, the more it keeps away from the goal, that is, from God, the more it strives to conceive everything, as far as possible, *without God*»<sup>39</sup>. This methodological atheism gives rational

<sup>35</sup> Ivi, p. 476: «Wenn wir auch den allgemeinen Zusammenhang nicht ergründen können, so können wir doch darnach streben, wir können ihn lieben und uns so damit abgeben».

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, p. 548: «Das Dasein Gottes ist nicht eine apodiktische Wahrheit und kann nie apodiktisch erwiesen werden».

<sup>38</sup> Ivi, p. 612: «[...] die Welt zu begreifen, so weit sie ohne Gott aus der Vernunft zu begreifen möglich ist».

<sup>39</sup> SW XI, p. 375. See also Schelling, *Philosophische Entwürfe und Tagebücher 1846*, p. 76. On this issue in particular Marcela García has focused in M. García, *Schellings 'reinrationale Philosophie' als Philosophie 'von der Endlichkeit aus'*, in *Das Problem der Endlichkeit in der Philosophie Schellings*, ed. by M. Galland-Szymkowiak, Berlin, LIT, 2011, pp. 312-335. The concern for the 'secularity' of rational science radicalizes Jacobi's observation in the *Letter to Fichte* that «Transcendental Philosophy cannot, as such, be *atheist* any more that can Geometry or Arithmetic. But for that same reason it cannot in any sense be *theist* either [...]. It would not be any reproach to Transcendental Philosophy that it does not know anything about God» (JW II/1, p. 193; Eng. trans. p. 500). Certainly, Schelling would disagree with Jacobi in stating that «God cannot be *known*, but only *believed in*» (*ibidem*), however, it is significant to note how, over the years, the Schellingian consideration of negative philosophy has come closer to what Jacobi thought philosophy *simpliciter* was.

philosophy the autonomy and freedom to unfold as pure transcendental reflection without external conditioning.

With the development in this direction of negative philosophy, a transformation also naturally takes place concerning the relationship between the two philosophies. If in the early years of Munich regressive empiricism, fulfilling a propaedeutic task, paved the way for positive philosophy, which was added to it as a natural extension, beginning with the *Mittermair Nachschrift* the transition implies – in Pareyson's words – a leap and a reversal, expressed in an incisive way in Berlin with the theme of the ecstasy of reason<sup>40</sup>. Reason, that is to say, does not proceed linearly and smoothly to affirm the existence of God as a free and creative cause (as was the case in the *Darstellung des philosophischen Empirismus*), but stops short of being, of effective actuality, of the unprethinkable (*Unvordenkliches*), of the pure *Daß* that cannot be grasped conceptually. It reaches only as far as the concept of the pure act, that is, the negative image – the 'silhouette'<sup>41</sup> – of that which is not conceptualizable. The transition from the dimension of idea to that of actual being is entrusted to an ἔκστασις, that is, to that movement by which reason stands outside itself and contemplates being itself in its aconceptual actuality.

Much has been written and discussed about such an 'ecstasy of reason'. Walter Schulz has seen in this device the fulfillment of German idealism, that is, the affirmation of the sovereignty of reason even in its self-alienation. Pareyson, while emphasizing more the element of rupture and discontinuity, reaffirms that «the concept of ecstasy is thus to be considered exquisitely philosophical: it is still an ecstasy of reason, and it is still reason that becomes ecstatic. [...] The leap and reversal required by the passage is reason

<sup>40</sup> See L. Pareyson, *Stupore della ragione e angoscia di fronte all'essere*, in Id., *Ontologia della libertà*, Torino, Einaudi, 1995, pp. 385-437, p. 387.

<sup>41</sup> The image of the silhouette was used – in our opinion, with metaphorical effectiveness – by García (see M. García, *Schelling's Late Negative Philosophy: Crisis and Critique of Pure Reason*, «Comparative and Continental Philosophy», III, 2011, pp. 141-164, p. 160; Ead., *Energieia vs Entelecheia. Schelling on Metaphysics Lambda and the Problem of the Pure Daß*, «Τόpicos. Revista de Filosofía», LI (2), 2016, pp. 113-137, pp. 131-132).



itself performing them: they consist precisely in the exit of reason from itself»<sup>42</sup>. This means that here reason not only demands but also accomplishes, albeit by ecstatically stepping outside itself, the transition to positive philosophy. What this might mean in concrete terms is frankly rather difficult to understand; certainly, however, one can see that Schelling is more careful to circumscribe the potentialities of reason and delimit its explanatory range with respect to the revealed datum.

### 3.3. The Third Phase (1846-1854)

This concern arises even more sharply in the *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, in which the role of reason is further restricted. In this work, rational science undergoes a twofold crisis, whereby both the I and God are expelled from the idea, that is, from the ideal and conceptual realms, thus leading to the destruction of the idea itself. Such crises, which eventually lead to the need for a God outside and above reason, find their origin in an extrarational, volitional, and desiring dimension, which Schelling also identifies with the «need for religion»<sup>43</sup>. The transition to positive philosophy, then, is neither required nor accomplished by reason, but is the outcome of a «practical impulse»<sup>44</sup> (*praktische Antrieb*), a «mere willing (analogous to Kant's postulate of practical reason, but with the difference that it is not reason, but the I, turned practical, which itself as personal demands personhood and says: *I am willing* that which is above being)»<sup>45</sup>. This is not to say that reason does not have a role to play in this transition, which is more complex than is normally thought and has little to do with a kind of philosophical mysticism; nonetheless, it is clear that in this latter phase, there is a heightened concern to distinguish more and more

<sup>42</sup> Pareyson, *Stupore della ragione*, p. 390 (my translation). For the criticism of Schulz see *ivi*, p. 435, n. 25.

<sup>43</sup> SW XI, p. 568; Eng. trans. p. 132.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, p. 565; Eng. trans. p. 130.

<sup>45</sup> Fuhrmans, *Dokumente zur Schellingforschung IV*, p. 16; Eng. trans. contained in T. Buchheim, *The Method and Structure of Schelling's Late Philosophy*, «Kabiri», II, 2020, pp. 1-14, p. 13.

sharply what pertains to *sola ratio* from what is the result of extrarational demands.

In this last phase, as also emerges from the essay *Über die Quellen der ewigen Wahrheiten*, Schelling no longer conceives of reason as something derived from God, as its immanent determination, but as completely autonomous: the fact that God is free with respect to reason is what underlies the latter's full autonomy. This is the ultimate theoretical root of the shift from religious philosophy to philosophy of religion: if reason is fully autonomous towards God, then philosophy is fully autonomous towards religion and Christianity. Philosophy is not 'more philosophy' as it strengthens and perfects itself in Christianity but is called to pursue its own intrinsic direction independently of religion. Whether then, acknowledging its own insufficiency concerning the practical-existential needs of the person, it should open up to the realm of religion and its content, this is by no means predetermined from the outset, but is an eventual outcome of philosophical research, which as such is radically unprejudiced.

#### 4. *Conclusions*

In conclusion, it is possible to view Schelling's last system as a philosophy of religion that founds itself in the conditions of possibility and the reasonableness of its practice. This means that it is divided into two main branches: on the one hand, the philosophy of religion proper (*Philosophie der Mythologie* and the special part of the *Philosophie der Offenbarung*) and on the other hand, the foundation of the conditions of possibility and reasonableness of its practice (the two *Einleitungen in die Philosophie der Mythologie* and *Der Monotheismus*). In this way, Schelling succeeds in elaborating an original epistemological framework for the philosophy of religion, placing himself in a middle position between Hegel and Jacobi.

In fact, on the one hand, he claims the specificity of the religious against the Hegelian subordination of religion to philosophy, regarded as that absolute knowledge that expresses in a conceptual form the same content that religion expresses through representations. For Schelling, religion has its own specificity that is

irreducible to philosophy, as evidenced also by the fundamental notion of *philosophical religion*, which is regarded by Schelling as the future apex of mankind's spiritual path<sup>46</sup>.

On the other hand, however, while borrowing decisive traits of Jacobi's philosophy (the methodological atheism of purely rational philosophy, the existentialist bent of philosophizing, the personal God, etc.), he seeks a way out of its *impasse*. In fact, Jacobi vindicated the reasons of the heart and feeling against a philosophy deemed to be necessarily rationalistic and atheistic, thus configuring a clear opposition between the two instances. Schelling, on the contrary, by demonstrating the insufficiency of purely rational philosophy, assures the ultimate reasonableness of the pursuit of existential demands, since they represent the only other possibility left for trying to make sense of individual experience.

The broadening of the concept of rationality, which is the distinctive feature of positive philosophy, enables Schelling to develop a new conceptualization of the relationship between philosophy and religion. Religion is not reducible to philosophy (*pace* Hegel), nor does it stand in total opposition to it (*pace* Jacobi, and later Kierkegaard), but religion and philosophy constitute two poles of an unsolvable and, for that very reason, fruitful tension in the spiritual development of both the individual and mankind as a whole. In this 'polar' view, positive philosophy, as an attempt to understand religions ideally (*ideell begreifen*), constitutes a remarkable extension of philosophical consciousness *qua talis*, since the content of religions allows it to offer an alternative solution to problems that rational philosophy by itself could not solve. In this sense, then, the philosophy of religion is not simply a *philosophia secunda*; for although it examines a specific area of human experience, its results affect the totality of experience.

<sup>46</sup> See T. Buchheim, *Was heißt 'philosophische Religion'? Acht Thesen zur Zielsetzung von Schellings unvollendetem System*, in *Religion und Religionen im deutschen Idealismus*, ed. by F. Hermanni, B. Nonnenmacher and F. Schick, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015, pp. 425-445. Concerning the irreducibility of religion to philosophy, the still little-known text of the *Vorwort zu H. Steffens nachgelassene Schriften* is crucial (see SW X, pp. 393-418).