

Schelling and Tillich on God's Relation to the World

Introduction

Tillich often acknowledged his debt to F.W.J. Schelling; the influence of the latter on Tillich is evident in many ways. Unfortunately, familiarity with Schelling's thought has never been extensive in the English-speaking world. In part this is a function of the unfinished nature of his work. Having produced no definitive statement of his system, he was eclipsed by G.W.F. Hegel and others. In part, it results from the fact that Schelling's thought never affected a mass audience as did Hegel's through its influence on Marxism. However, without an acquaintance with Schelling's thought and its influence on Tillich, Tillich's doctrine of God and of God's relation to the world cannot be rightly understood. In particular, the existential dimension of his theology will be interpreted humanistically, as though Tillich were primarily a theologian of human culture or religiosity. His doctrine of God will be largely ignored. Only when Tillich is seen in relation to Schelling will interpreters be likely to regard him as a theologian.

The purpose of this essay is to contribute to our understanding of Tillich's theology by demonstrating his indebtedness to Schelling, particularly with regard to the doctrine of God. I will first point out their similarities, then their differences. Finally, I will argue for the superiority, in certain respects, of Schelling's doctrine of God to Tillich's.

Before launching into the exposition, it may be helpful to indicate briefly why Tillich's and Schelling's doctrines of God are worthy of consideration. They deserve attention because theological discussion today is again focusing on matters to which they can contribute, notably God's relation to the world. The closing decades of this century have witnessed a burgeoning interest in theories of divine action, in the relation of science to religion, and in the prospects for a theology of nature. Each of these

issues presupposes an understanding of God's relation to the world. This is a subject to which Schelling, Tillich and the entire idealist tradition in which they stood devoted considerable attention. Too often in today's discussion about science and theology naive assumptions prevail, assumptions whose limitations have already been exposed by Tillich and others. This is not to claim that the idealist conception of God and of God's relation to the world is above reproach. This essay will exhibit some ways in which Tillich himself was highly critical of his idealist heritage. Nonetheless, this tradition possesses resources that can be profitably used today. At the very least, the questions that this tradition found pressing are still relevant today: What does it mean to declare that the existence of the universe is contingent? What does it mean to speak about God's freedom? Is there teleological development within the universe? Can Christian eschatology make any sense at all in today's scientific understanding of the universe?

Points of Agreement Between Schelling and Tillich

There are at least three important points of agreement between Schelling and Tillich. First, both God and world are constituted by a set of opposed principles and by the relations among them. Tillich referred to these principles as the ontological elements; Schelling called them potencies. Second, these qualities are found in God in perfect harmony and God's life is constituted by the harmonious dynamics of these qualities. God is living because God's nature combines the identity and difference of the qualities in an eternal harmony. Third, the world differs from God in that it is characterized by a disharmonious tension between the qualities. As a result, it is marked by brokenness. The world participates in God's being because it is constituted by the same qualities that constitute the divine life, but it does so in a distorted and fragmentary way.

The first point of similarity between Schelling and Tillich is that both God and world are constituted by a set of opposed principles and their relations. This introduces Schelling's doctrine of potencies. There are, he asserted, three powers within God's nature. One is the power of love. Schelling denoted this power with the symbol "A."¹

¹Schelling also called this potency A², to signify that this is God's nature raised to a higher power. For the same reason, he calls the third potency A³.

However, love, because it “does not seek what is its own,” cannot exist alone. It requires a ground, something to support it. Hence there is another power, the power of selfhood and subsistent being, symbolized by “B.” With these two powers, “the being which is love may subsist as independent and be for itself.”² However, although love requires the principle of selfhood, these two powers are opposed to one another. The power of love is “the outflowing, outspreading, self-giving essence” of God; the other power is the “eternal power of selfhood, of return unto self, of being-in-self.”³ By the power of love the divine nature is eccentric and outgoing; by the power of selfhood God’s nature is centered and self-grounding. Despite this opposition, God’s nature is not simply the eternal antithesis of these powers; it is also their eternal unity. “It is indeed one and the same [divine nature] which is the affirmation and the negation, the outspreading and the restraining.”⁴ We must, therefore, speak of a third power in God, the unity of the first two.⁵ This unity is the first two powers in their identity and their difference. It is their unity, but a unity that does not annul their distinctive properties. As a result, God’s nature is complex:

God’s nature is twofold: first, negating power (B), which forces back the affirming essence (A), secretes it inwardly as passive; second, expansive, self-communicating essence [A], which on the contrary suppresses in itself the negating power [B] and does not let it come to outward effect.⁶

Here is Tillich’s comment on Schelling’s view: Schelling

construed two or three principles in the ground of the divine, the unconscious or dark principle, the principle of will which is able to contradict itself [corresponding to B], on the one hand, and the principle of logos, or the principle of light, on the other hand [corresponding to A].⁷

²F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Frederick deWolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 96-97.

³*Ages*, 97.

⁴*Ages*, 98-99.

⁵Schelling went to great lengths to ensure that we do not understand this unity to be a dialectical one. In other words, the powers are original principles; none is derived from any other. *Ages*, 97-98.

⁶*Ages*, 101.

⁷Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 149.

These same principles are present in Tillich's theology. Schelling's first potency (B), the power of selfhood, becomes in Tillich's system the abyss in God, the principle of depth and power. This is the basis of God's being God. It is the ground and power of being of all that is.⁸ For both Tillich and Schelling this first power gives God substantial reality; it is that by which God eternally conquers non-being.⁹ The second potency (A) becomes in Tillich's thought the principle of meaning, designated by the term *logos*. It is the principle of structure, definition, creativity, and revelation.¹⁰ Schelling's third potency, the unity of the first two, appears in Tillich's theology as Spirit, which is the actualization and unity of the principles of power and meaning.¹¹ These principles of being recur, according to Tillich, in life. Life includes three elements: self-identity, self-alteration and return to one's self.¹² Here again we can see Schelling's three potencies. Self-identity corresponds to the power of selfhood [B]. Self-alteration corresponds to the outgoing power of love [A²]. Return to self corresponds to the unity of the first two potencies [A³]. This is why, according to Tillich, God may be called the living God. "He is the eternal process in which separation is posited and is overcome by reunion."¹³

Like God, the world is, for Schelling and Tillich, also structured according to these powers of being. For Schelling, both the physical universe and human history are governed by the relations of the potencies and by the sequence of their actualization

⁸Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:250-251.

⁹It may be helpful for the reader to note that Tillich's comments on non-being and negation within God are somewhat confusing. He described the element of depth in God (which corresponds with Schelling's first potency [B] as being the power of resisting non-being (1:250) and expressly linked this power with the "self" pole within God, including self-transcendent vitality (dynamics) (1:249). Yet he also identified the principle of form as that by which being has the power of resisting non-being (1:199). Further, in his comments on Schelling he identified Schelling's first potency with the principle of dynamics and as the aspect of non-being and negation within the divine life (1:189 and 1:246). So, the first principle (dynamics) is both the principle of non-being and also of the overcoming of non-being. This is confusing. So is his identifying first dynamics then form as the principle by which non-being is overcome.

¹⁰*Systematic Theology*, 1:251.

¹¹*Systematic Theology*, 1:249-251.

¹²*Systematic Theology*, 3:30-32. It should be noted that Tillich's exposition of self-transcendence does not make effective use of self-identity, self-alteration, and return to self.

¹³*Systematic Theology*, 1:242.

outside of God's nature.¹⁴ For Tillich, "God is the ground of the structure of being."¹⁵ All the polarities of being and the elements and functions of life that we find in the finite world are found primordially in God. In fact, it is best to say that God is this structure of being. For both Tillich and Schelling, the finite realm is grounded in God in the sense that there is a common ontological structure that both share. Or, more accurately, God is the ontological structure of powers in which the world participates.

The second point of similarity between Tillich and Schelling is that, in God, the powers are found in a perfect and eternal harmony. For Schelling, the potencies, each being the antithesis of the others, cannot co-exist without some mediation. In themselves, each strives to be and to assert itself and to negate the others. Without some resolution of the tension inherent in their conflicting striving, the divine nature would be wild and chaotic, without order. The resolution, which is an eternal one, takes the form of the establishing of a hierarchy of the potencies.¹⁶ In this hierarchy, the first power (B) assumes the lowest position, the second power (A²) takes the middle position and the third power (A³), the unity of the first two, takes the highest. This order of the powers is important because when, in the act of creation, the powers are set outside of God's nature, their hierarchical ordering determines the chronological course of development in the physical universe and in human history. In God's nature, however, there is an eternal hierarchy of powers that establishes a dynamically stable divine nature. Schelling did admit the bare possibility that the hierarchy could dissolve, with the potencies resolving back into a state of disharmonious contradiction. In fact, however, this is merely an abstract possibility for God. Such a condition has reality only as a something that God has eternally posited as past.¹⁷ Of course, this past is not a temporal moment in the past, for God transcends the passage of time. Instead, this past

¹⁴*Ages*, 199.

¹⁵*Systematic Theology*, 1:238.

¹⁶*Ages*, 128-130. Schelling's account is complicated by his opinion that this hierarchy is created by a sense of longing among the powers, a longing occasioned by the presence of something in God even higher than God's nature. This higher element is God's freedom.

¹⁷*Ages*, 142.

is conceived as a possible state that God eternally overcomes through an act of will.¹⁸ Consequently, this possible state of disharmony is not unimportant for Schelling. It is a reality for God, one that is eternally overcome. By an eternal act God resolves to maintain the dynamic stability of the divine nature.

Although Tillich concurred with Schelling on the main point, he did not go as far as Schelling on subsidiary matters. The main point is that the powers that constitute the divine life exist in God in eternal perfect harmony:

The polar character of the ontological elements is rooted in the divine life, but the divine life is not subject to this polarity. Within the divine life, every ontological element includes its polar element completely, without tension and without the threat of dissolution.¹⁹

But Tillich did not affirm some of Schelling's other theses. He betrayed no inclination to represent the polar elements within God in a hierarchical way. Whereas for Schelling the harmonious co-existence of the potencies depends on their being ordered in a hierarchy, for Tillich the co-existence of the polar elements "without the threat of dissolution" in the divine life is apparently without condition. He thus lacked Schelling's conviction that the eternal harmony of the powers in a hierarchy is, as it were, a contingent fact. Tillich did indeed allow for talk about God's eternal conquering of the negative within the divine being,²⁰ but the non-being in question relates to the element of dynamics--one of the polar elements--within God.²¹ The relation, within God, of being to non-being is the relation of the "world" pole of the ontological structure to the "self" pole, of meaning to power.²² While this relation is highly significant in Tillich's theology, it is quite different from Schelling's thesis. Schelling's

¹⁸*Ages*, 153-155.

¹⁹*Systematic Theology*, 1:243.

²⁰*Systematic Theology*, 3:404.

²¹Recall that Tillich understood the first potency in Schelling's philosophy to represent the dynamic element that is also a "negative element in the ground of being which is overcome as negative in the process of being-itself" (1:246). Tillich also expressly linked non-being and finitude to the "self" side of the ontological structure: "Selfhood, individuality, dynamics, and freedom all include manifoldness, definiteness, differentiation, and limitation. To be something is not to be something else" (1:190).

²²See *Systematic Theology*, 1:189 and 1:246, where Tillich interpreted Schelling's doctrine of the potencies in terms of the negative element within God. But Tillich never mentioned Schelling's concept of God's past, that disharmonious state of the powers that God eternally posits as past and overcome.

claim is that God's eternal act of overcoming is a matter of harmonizing the potencies by establishing them in a hierarchy. For Tillich, God's eternal act of overcoming consists in conquering the power of non-being, which is linked with the "self" pole of the ontological elements. As we will see later in this paper, this difference from Schelling has a large effect on Tillich's theology. It means that God's freedom is treated in very different ways by Tillich and Schelling.

The third point of agreement between Schelling and Tillich is that, in distinction from God, the world exhibits the ontological structure of the powers in a disharmonious form. According to Schelling, the creation of the world occurs when God, by a free although timeless decision, externalizes the potencies that constitute the divine nature and allows them to collapse out of their state of hierarchical harmony. In this collapsed state, they revert to their natural state of opposition to one another. They cannot co-exist in this state, for each contradicts the others as it strives to assert itself. Since they cannot co-exist, their respective strivings produce a history, first in the physical universe, then in human history, in which the potencies sequentially assert themselves and gain dominance.²³ This sequence of the potencies' self-expression in nature and history mirrors their hierarchical ordering in God's nature: first the dark power of self-hood (B), then the lucent power of love (A²), finally the third, unifying power (A³).²⁴ The result is that the course of cosmic history mirrors the nature of God, except that whereas the potencies exist in God in an eternal harmonious hierarchy, they exist in the world initially in a state of contradiction and sequential development. And yet, the eternal hierarchy functions as a telos for natural and human history, for the goal of this history is the establishing of a hierarchy of the potencies in the finite universe as it subsists eternally in the divine nature. The evolutionary development of organic being, culminating in the appearance of humanity, and the subsequent history of humanity are marked by the gradual triumph of the second power (love) over the first power (selfhood). At the end of history, when the second power has completely subordinated the first to itself, the third power (the perfect unity of the first two) will

²³*Ages*, 191.

²⁴*Ages*, 197.

become actualized in the world.²⁵ In this way, the powers will relate themselves to each other in the finite as they do eternally in the divine nature.

Tillich likewise held that the world reflects the powers of God's being but without the harmony that exists in God. Like God, the finite world includes an element of nonbeing. But whereas for God nonbeing is included only as something that is eternally overcome, in the world nonbeing constitutes a threat to being.²⁶ In the finite world being is limited by and opposed to nonbeing.²⁷ Likewise, life, under the conditions of finitude, is ambiguous: The unity of life "is threatened by existential estrangement, which drives life in one or the other direction. . . . Self-integration is countered by disintegration, self-creation is countered by destruction, self-transcendence is countered by profanization."²⁸ Tillich and Schelling are agreed, then, that the structures that are found in God without disruptive tension are found in the world in a tensed, separated way. However, as noted previously, Tillich did not see the harmony of the powers in God as a function of their hierarchical ordering. As a result Tillich had no interest in interpreting the course of cosmic and human history as a development of the dynamics inherent in the powers.

Tillich's Differences From Schelling

One important difference between Tillich and Schelling concerns their views of eschatology. Briefly put, Tillich did not share Schelling's eschatology as expounded in the latter's *Philosophy of Revelation*.

As noted above, Schelling understood the act of creation to consist in God's decision to externalize the potencies. By this I mean that the hierarchy of the potencies is allowed to dissolve and they are allowed to relapse back into a state of contradiction. Of course, this could not happen in God's eternal nature; instead it occurs outside of God. The potencies are given an existence independent of God's nature and apart from the harmony that subsists in God. In this way, a finite world comes about. In this

²⁵This is the subject of Schelling's lectures on mythology and revelation.

²⁶*Systematic Theology*, 1:246-247.

²⁷*Systematic Theology*, 1:189.

²⁸*Systematic Theology*, 3:32.

relapse into contradiction, the potencies lose their harmonious co-existence based on their placement in a hierarchy. But a problem arises, for each power strives to be. Since they contradict one another, this striving is equivalent to the attempt by each to subdue the others. Each wishes to be without restriction by the others. This tensed situation is impossible. But without the establishing of a hierarchy, the only way in which the contradictory powers can exist at all is for their manifestation to occur sequentially. One power will be followed chronologically by another, each in turn becoming dominant. But what is the sequence? It follows the hierarchical order of the powers in God. The eternal hierarchy orders the appearance of the powers in time. The first power (selfhood) asserts itself into being, followed by the second power seeking to gain dominance over the first. This process transpires first in the inorganic world. In the early history of the universe there is just inert matter, which represents the unchallenged dominance of the power of selfhood and the virtual exclusion of the eccentric power of love (A^2). Gradually, however, the second power (A^2) begins to overcome the first (B). The process of this overcoming is manifest in the rise of living forms. Its initial culmination occurs when human spirit first arises out of matter. In the emergence of spirit from matter, the outgoing power of love has gained a preliminary victory over the inward power of selfhood.

However, with the appearance of humanity, the process begins to repeat itself. At first selfhood dominates as humanity gives in to the power of selfhood, a fact pictured in the Biblical story of the fall into sin. Only gradually in the course of human history does the power of love gain ascendancy. Another provisional victory of the second power over the first occurs in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom the power of selfhood is voluntarily subordinated to love. This conscious abnegation of selfhood is, Schelling believed, the meaning of the Christian doctrine of the condescension and humiliating death of the Son. Jesus Christ therefore is the second power in its full historical development. But even this victory of the second power in Jesus Christ is still preliminary, for it must be actualized in all humanity. Eventually, this actualization will occur. When it does, the third power will have arrived at its full historical development. This will be the age of the Spirit, when the powers will again be established in a hierarchy, for the first will have been overcome (although not destroyed) by the second, allowing the third to come into historical being as the perfect identity and difference of

the first two. At that eschatological moment, the harmony of the potencies in the world will mirror the eternal hierarchy of the potencies in God.

We can see that Schelling's philosophy includes a vigorous eschatology. The sequence of the powers in their temporal development determines first the history of nature and then the history of humanity. This development is teleological. It aims at bringing the finite world to a state in which it mirrors God's own nature. This development is also Trinitarian. The Son and Holy Spirit, as persons, have a temporal becoming. Although grounded in the eternal nature of God, their existence as persons happens as a result of the dynamics of the powers. The Son's personhood comes about when in Jesus Christ the second power finally overcomes the first in the realm of human history. The Spirit's personhood awaits the eschatological moment when this triumph of the first power over the second is universal.

When we turn to Tillich's understanding of eschatology, we find a quite different view. For one thing, Tillich's idealism is of the chastised sort. He was hesitant to make sweeping claims, in the manner of Hegel and Schelling, about world history and its alleged progress.

The nature of trends . . . should prevent any attempt to establish historical laws. Such laws do not exist, because every moment in history is new in relation to all preceding moments. . . . The existence of chances, balancing the determining power of trends, is the decisive argument against all forms of historical determinism--naturalistic, dialectical, or predestinarian.²⁹

This quotation states clearly enough Tillich's sentiments. History has trends but not laws. The experience of novelty and chance militates against the idea of laws. But even if there are no laws of history, can there still be a teleological development of history? This is the crucial issue for Tillich's relation to Schelling. Schelling's philosophy does not make use of the concept of law. It is guided by the dynamics of the potencies, but there is nothing deterministic about this process. However, Schelling's system is unashamedly teleological. The cosmos is moving toward the day when the historical conflict of the potencies will be overcome. Specific moments in world history (e.g., the appearance of humanity and the existence of Jesus Christ) are interpreted as anticipations of the eventual victory of the second power over the first. However, for

²⁹*Systematic Theology*, 3:327. See also 3:328: "Because it is the character of historical causality to be creative and to use chances, it cannot be said that a universal structure of historical movement exists."

Tillich it seems that history is not in any sense teleological. He stated that “there is no progress where individual freedom is decisive.” For this reason, while there may be progress in the cultural side of human life, there can be none in the moral-religious side.³⁰ Even in the cultural sphere there can be no progress “beyond the classical expressions of man’s encounter with reality.”³¹ This is true all the more with respect to the revelatory experience. It “is always what it is, and . . . in this respect there is no more or less, no progress or obsolescence or regression,” although there can be progress in the “degrees of clarity and power with which the manifestation of the Spiritual is received.”³² It is evident, then, that history is not progressive for Tillich as it is for Schelling. Furthermore, Tillich eschewed any sort of historical eschatology in which there would be a final culmination and consummation of history. History does have a telos, but it is eternity and Tillich expressly denied that this eternity is a future state. “It is always present.”³³ For Tillich each moment stands as close to and also as far from the fulfillment of history as does any other. Just as Creation and Fall are not spatio-temporal events, so “there will be no utopia in the future.”³⁴

As a measure of Tillich’s difference from Schelling in particular and from idealism in general, we may consider his critique of Hegel. Tillich faulted Hegel’s essentialist thinking for asserting that “non-being has been conquered in the totality of the [Hegelian] system [and that] history has come to an end.”³⁵ For Tillich, eschatology is never fully realized. “Being is [always] finite, existence is [always] self-contradictory, and life [always] is ambiguous.”³⁶ Although revelation can bring a degree of healing and harmony to the disruption between essential being and existence, the ambiguity of life remains.

³⁰*Systematic Theology*, 3:333.

³¹*Systematic Theology*, 3:334.

³²*Systematic Theology*, 3:337.

³³*Systematic Theology*, 3:400.

³⁴*Systematic Theology*, 2:44.

³⁵*Systematic Theology*, 2:24.

³⁶*Systematic Theology*, 1:81.

As a further indication of Tillich's uneasiness with Schelling, we may note that he declined to embrace Schelling's notion of a historical becoming of the Trinitarian persons. Schelling's understanding of the Trinity depends on his belief that the potencies in history undergo a process of development. While Tillich, like Schelling, allowed that the finite world participates in the divine powers, he emphatically did not think of these powers, in their manifestation in the finite world, as developing or as having any telos. Instead, in Tillich's system they have a somewhat static character. He allowed that the powers have a certain order in God (since God as Spirit is the unity of the elements of abyss and logos and thus presupposes them) but as noted previously he did not relate this ordering to any teleological development in natural or human history. This strategy effectively distinguishes Tillich from Schelling, for whom the Son and Holy Spirit are the complete actualizations of the potencies in history.

Accordingly, Tillich also did not employ Schelling's conception of God's actualization in world history. For Schelling, the decision by God to create a world by externalizing the potencies and allowing them to relapse back into a state of contradiction means that something happens to God. God enters the sphere of actual being. Of course, Schelling also held that God did not need to create the world. The actualization of which he speaks is not a remedy of some deficiency in God. On the contrary, he insisted that God's being is full and complete in itself. He affirmed the possibility that God could have remained eternally in the fullness of the divine nature and freedom. As a result, the creation of the world was ascribed by him to an act of God's freedom. Nonetheless, once God freely decided to create the world, God does not remain unaffected by that decision, for the potencies that constitute the world are God's own potencies. Consequently, the history of nature and of humanity is the history of God's actualization, as the powers strive toward their eventual, teleological ordering in a hierarchy that mirrors God's eternal nature. Tillich, on the contrary, did not represent God as becoming actual through any process in the finite world. Although God is living and is "the eternal process in which separation is posited and is overcome by reunion,"³⁷ this process does not transpire teleologically in the finite world.

³⁷*Systematic Theology*, 3:242. Tillich did state of the "eternal identity of God with himself . . . [that it] does not contradict his going out from himself into the negativities of existence and the ambiguities of life" (3:405). This does suggest an idealist conception of God entering into the finite world and becoming in its processes. However,

Tillich did not describe God as, in the act of creation, passing over into the world and as depending (in any sense of the word) on the world. We must judge, then, that Tillich's theology, in comparison to Schelling's, is far less teleologically oriented and that his view of God is less historically oriented.

There is another important respect in which Tillich differs from Schelling. That is their respective views of God's freedom. Schelling was insistent on the distinction between God's nature and God's freedom. It forms the cornerstone of his positive philosophy, which he extolled as vigorously as he denigrated a merely negative philosophy of necessity. "Freedom and necessity are in God. . . . [Yet] the two are not the same. What a being is by nature and what it is by freedom are two quite different things."³⁸ God's freedom performs two functions in Schelling's system. First, it is responsible for the orderly hierarchy of the powers in God's eternal nature;³⁹ second, it is the ground of the creation of the world.⁴⁰ I wish to focus on this second function, for it will throw into clear relief Schelling's differences from Tillich. God's essence (God's necessary nature, consisting in the potencies, plus God's freedom) might have remained in itself, unrevealed. Schelling believed that this essence of God can be described philosophically; such a description forms the content of the negative philosophy, which is the knowledge that we can have about God by the exercise of human reason. However, God can also create and thus be revealed. This revelation introduces the possibility of the positive philosophy--the knowledge of God that is inaccessible to pure reason.

If life progresses from here on [i.e., beyond the necessity associated with God's essence], this progress is only by virtue of a free divine resolution. The godhead can persist peacefully in that equilibrium between attraction [B] and repulsion [A²]. Nothing compels it to annul that equilibrium, or to come forth from itself in the one way or in the other. Consequently, if the godhead took the part of being [i.e., by creating a world and coming to be through that world]. . . then the

Tillich had already consciously declared his interest in balancing this dynamic view of God with the medieval emphasis on the element of form in God (1:247-248). Hence the near total reluctance to ascribe any sort of becoming to God.

³⁸*Ages*, 95-96.

³⁹*Ages*, 127-128.

⁴⁰*Ages*, 96.

resolution for that could come only from the highest freedom.⁴¹

The creation of a world, then, as noted previously, results from God's freedom. Of course, this divine freedom is not to be thought of as just like human freedom. Yet it does bear a resemblance to human power of choice:

A being is free in that it does not have to reveal itself. To reveal one's self is to act, just as all acting is a self-revelation. The free, however, must be free [either] to halt at mere ability, or to pass over into act.⁴²

The point is that God is bound by no necessity to create the world. There is no deficiency in God's essence that requires the creation of a world. The act of creation by which God is revealed is an utterly free one. Of course, the actual content of this revelation is not arbitrary. It depends on God's nature, for as noted previously the revelatory course of natural and human history follows the sequence of the powers.⁴³ However, it is free, at least in the sense that it is not necessary. As a result, the existence of the finite world is radically contingent. It has no ground of existence in itself and its grounding in God's nature depends on an act of God's freedom.

The matter is far different for Tillich. For Tillich, freedom is one of the ontological elements of being, grounded in the fundamental structure of self and world. As has already been noted, Tillich held that in God the polarities of this structure are without tension. God's freedom is perfectly balanced by destiny:

The divine life is creative, actualizing itself in inexhaustible abundance. . . . Therefore it is meaningless to ask whether creation is a necessary or a contingent act of God. Nothing is necessary for God in the sense that he is dependent on a necessity above him. . . . Nor is [the activity of] creation contingent. It does not 'happen' to God, for it is identical with his life. Creation is not only God's freedom but also his destiny.⁴⁴

There is every reason to think that Schelling would agree with Tillich's view of creation as he described it here. For Schelling creation is neither necessary for God nor something that has happened accidentally to God. However, whereas for Tillich freedom

⁴¹*Ages*, 189.

⁴²*Ages*, 194.

⁴³*Ages*, 200.

⁴⁴*Systematic Theology*, 1:252.

is one of the polarities, balanced by destiny, for Schelling freedom is not part of God's nature at all. It is instead contrasted with God's nature and with the potencies in which it consists. God's freedom stands above God's nature as a sort of "supergodhead."⁴⁵ Whereas Tillich regarded freedom as part of God's nature (the polarities of being), Schelling distinguished God's freedom from God's nature (the potencies). Tillich accepted Schelling's general portrait of God's nature as the harmonious relation of opposed powers. However, he identified freedom with the "self" pole of the ontological elements,⁴⁶ thereby associating God's freedom with the first potency (B) of Schelling's philosophy. For Schelling, however, God's freedom is something over and above not only the first potency but all the potencies. Ironically, although Tillich credited Schelling with overcoming Hegel's essentialism⁴⁷ and with developing a positive philosophy, he himself diminished the importance of the chief anchor of the positive philosophy, the freedom of God. He did so by making freedom relative to destiny, whereas Schelling sought to make God's freedom absolute.

Tillich did occasionally approach Schelling's view that there is in God something beyond the ontological elements. For example:

As the actualization of the other two principles [power and meaning], the Spirit is the third principle. Both power and meaning are contained in it and united in it. The third principle is in a way the whole (God is Spirit), and in a way it is a special principle (God has the Spirit as he has the logos).⁴⁸

We can see here a distinction between 1) Spirit as a third ontological element alongside the first two and 2) Spirit as the totality of the ontological elements. But this is essentially the same as Schelling's view that the third potency (A³) is on the one hand one of the potencies and on the other the perfect unity of the first two. Even though Tillich thought of the Spirit as in some sense distinct from the ontological elements, he did not identify freedom as the essential feature of Spirit. God's freedom never transcends God's nature but is instead always in harmony with and relative to God's

⁴⁵*Ages*, 123.

⁴⁶*Systematic Theology*, 1:164.

⁴⁷*Systematic Theology*, 2:24.

⁴⁸*Systematic Theology*, 1:252.

destiny. As a result, God is far less spontaneous than in Schelling's system. Further, in Tillich's view the world loses the radical contingency that Schelling ascribed to it, because its existence does not seem to depend on an act of God's freedom.

Conclusion

Tillich's doctrine of God is highly influenced by Schelling's philosophy; however, it differs in two very important respects, eschatology and freedom. It is my opinion that it suffers because of his neglect of certain aspects of Schelling's thought that he was aware of but chose to ignore. In the remainder of this essay I would like to suggest why in these respects Schelling's view is to be preferred to Tillich's.

With regards to eschatology, I have noted that Tillich had a severely chastened eschatology, one in which there is no teleological movement of history. Eternity is always equally present to each moment of history. For Schelling, on the contrary, the doctrine of the powers explains the course of development in nature and in history. The initial dominance of the first power (B) over the second (A^2) accounts for the chronological priority of nature to humanity. The eventual triumph of the second power over the first yields, among other things, a Christology with a substantial content. Of course, it is possible to be too sanguine about the course of history. Tillich's restrained eschatology has much to recommend it. Yet we do not have to embrace the full measure of Schelling's eschatological triumphalism to acknowledge that his view of the potencies and their role in history makes better sense of Christology than does Tillich's theory of the polarities. In comparison with Schelling's Christology, Tillich's view appears static, idealistic and a-historical. "The Christ" seems to be an ideal type that Jesus fits into rather than a power in history that finally emerges in the person of Jesus Christ. Naturally, I am not endorsing Schelling's philosophy as providing in itself an adequate Christology. However, it does seem that Schelling's philosophy captures better the Christian sense of a struggle in history between opposing powers and the possibility of the triumph of one over the other. Schelling's attempt to interpret the history and characteristics of both nature and history in terms of the dynamics of the potencies is particularly impressive. Although a contemporary theological or philosophical interpretation of the natural world or of history would have to take into account a far more sophisticated level of scientific knowledge than was available to

Schelling, his thought contains resources that may be useful for any such interpretation.

I have also noted Schelling's assertion that the world results from a free decision of God. This freedom implies the radical contingency of the world. Although the general course of nature's evolution and of history's development is fully rational according to Schelling, the sheer existence of a finite world is not rational. It is not necessary. The created world might not have been. Tillich, on the contrary, acknowledged freedom and contingency within the world but seemed to hesitate on the contingency of the world. On the one hand, he wrote of the phenomenon of ontological shock, when we feel the force of the question, Why is there something and not nothing at all.⁴⁹ This shock seemingly points to the world's contingency. On the other hand, he did not expressly endorse Schelling's thesis that the world might not have been and that it rests on an act of God's will. To be sure, Tillich rejected Hegel's conception of the world's logical necessity; he discouraged any thought of the world being in any sense a necessary actualization of God. And as already noted, he denied that the act of creation is for God anything necessary or arbitrary. But his comment about the experience of ontological shock is revealing: "Thought must start with being; it cannot go behind it. . . . Thought is based on being, and it cannot leave this basis."⁵⁰ This statement tacitly denies what Schelling affirmed, namely that thought should and can go behind being and behind the necessary nature of God, for in addition to God's nature there is God's primordial will. Contrary to Tillich, Schelling suggested that we can ask the question, Why is there something instead of nothing? and receive an answer. Tillich, by confining thought to being, committed himself to the negative philosophy whose limitations Schelling sought to transcend. Schelling's confidence that an answer can be obtained is based on his conviction that God's freedom and decision to create must be taken into account. Hence, for Schelling, the question of the world's existence is not merely an index of our existential situation but also points us toward the freedom of God. Which of the two, Tillich and Schelling, should we follow in this matter? Each position has its own cogency. Tillich's purpose in balancing freedom and destiny is clear and reasonable. He wished to move beyond a simplistic dichotomy of contingency and

⁴⁹*Systematic Theology*, 1:163.

⁵⁰*Systematic Theology*, 1:163.

necessity and to argue that this dichotomy is resolved in God's perfect harmony between freedom and destiny. Schelling's motivation is also commendable. In the wake of Hegel he strove emphatically against any rationalistic view of creation that would locate the ground of creation in some sort of necessity or in God's nature. Understandably, he emphasized God's freedom. The question, then, is whether Tillich's or Schelling's conception is to be preferred, given contemporary theological and scientific commitments.

Current scientific cosmology does not settle the matter. One may, within the bounds of scientific theories, maintain the contingency of the universe, especially with cosmologists refusing to speculate on the state of things prior to the Big Bang. At the same time, contemporary cosmology also allows the possibility of multiple universes or of states of reality prior to the Big Bang, ideas that suggest the eternity and perhaps necessity of matter in some form. Contemporary science allows for but does not compel the judgment that the existence of the universe is contingent. Further, Christian doctrine does not fully settle the issue. Although clearly against the notion of any necessity of the world, theologians long ago recognized that the world is not the result of an arbitrary act of God's will. Any doctrine of freedom must take this into account as well.

Perhaps a more fruitful way of resolving the issue is to ask whether Tillich has preserved what Schelling regarded as the central insight of the positive philosophy--the transcendence of God's freedom. For Schelling, the freedom of God is something different from God's nature as embodied in the potencies. For Tillich, freedom is one of the polarities and accordingly is balanced by God's destiny. Both Schelling and Tillich grant that there is within God an element of freedom. The question is whether we prefer Schelling's view that this freedom transcends God's nature or Tillich's that freedom is a part of God's nature. Is freedom one of the ontological categories or does it transcend the categories?

In my judgment, Tillich may have failed to appreciate the need to distinguish freedom from nature. Although the distinction can certainly be overdone, it is a necessary distinction if the Christian doctrine of grace is to be preserved. The doctrine of grace declares that our existential standing before God means transcending (although not contradicting) our natural existence. Our life in God is to an extent discontinuous

with our everyday life in the world. Further, the Christian tradition has long maintained that entering into this relation with God is an exercise in true freedom in cooperation with grace. As a result, I think that we should side with Schelling and regard freedom as transcending nature and not as a part of nature. This is not to deny that there is a dynamic aspect of nature. On the contrary, nature has its own form of spontaneity. But it is to deny that our true freedom is simply a component of our natural being. Our true freedom transcends the spontaneity of our nature. And what is true of us must be true all the more of God, if indeed human being is grounded in God's being.

The strength of the tradition in which Schelling and Tillich stood is its attempt to make sense of God's relation to the world. It does so by regarding the world as structured by the same principles that constitute God. In this way, it avoids representing God as a being that is external to the world and who relates to the world as an external agent or cause relates to an effect. The way forward in contemporary attempts to discuss divine action and God's relation to the world can be hastened if theologians will attend to thoughts of Schelling, Tillich and others in this tradition. Although their thoughts cannot today be simply adopted without refinement or alteration, their general approach has much to recommend it. It may yet provide the best resources for theology's engagement with the natural sciences.