HANS URS VON BALTHASAR
AND THE PRESS OF SPECULATIVE RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

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This study examines the sometimes explicit but also inchoate, coded, or anonymous complex of relations between the work and method of Hans Urs von Balthasar and modern Russian religious thought, specifically the work of Vladimir Soloviev, Nicholas Berdyaev, and Sergei Bulgakov. Thematic, theological, and methodological affinities between Balthasar and the Russians include a shared broad-mindedness toward navigating between the ancient Christian tradition and modern philosophical developments, a variously critical reception of German Idealism and Romanticism, and in focused treatment of the relation of God and world, immanence and transcendence, freedom and necessity, as well as kenoticism, eschatology, Trinity, history, pneumatology, cosmology, and aesthetics. It is the burden of this study to demonstrate, as evidenced by his critical excavation of the Russians, that Balthasar’s own
theological method can—contravening the opinion of some of his critics—be characterized as quintessentially non-nostalgic, structurally hospitable to non-theological categories, non-canonic sources, and modes of speculative thinking which probe, but do not exceed the elastic boundaries of tradition. This thesis shall be tested systematically through an analysis and assessment of the principles according to which Balthasar allows, repeats, or excludes elements in the functional test-cases of the Russians along the following sites of inquiry: (1) art and aesthetics, (2) the problems of myth, freedom, and evil, (3) “anthropocentric” eschatology, including death, judgment, and the postmortem state, and (4) “theocentric” eschatology, including figurations of the Antichrist and paschal trinitarianism. Because Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov critically appropriate German Idealism and Romanticism to varying degrees in their religious philosophies, F.W.J. Schelling serves throughout as a tertiary conversation partner and a primary catalyst for productively analyzing Balthasar’s process of adjudicating the value and reliability of philosophical and theological sources. Through constructing a dialogical space which keeps Balthasar, Schelling, and the Russians in conversation, this dissertation suggests that Balthasarian theological method operates fundamentally in a pneumatic register, grounded in orthodox commitments and structurally open to developments in theology.
To Jay, *sine qua non*
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments................................................................................................................................iv

Chapter One
“Der Seelen wunderliches Bergwerk”: On the Subterranean and the Speculative.........................1

Chapter Two
“Denn da ist keine Stelle, die dich nicht sieht”: Theological and Quasi-Theological
Aesthetics........................................................................................................................................33

Chapter Three
“Du Dunkelheit, aus der ich stamme”: Ontology, Evil, and Myth at the Root.........................96

Chapter Four
“Grün wirklicher Grüne, wirklicher Sonnenschein, wirklicher Wald”: Ta Esbata, Apocalyptic,
and the Logic of Resurrection........................................................................................................157

Chapter Five
“Ich will die Dinge so wie keiner lieben, bis sie dir alle würdig sind und weit”: The Theocentric
Horizon........................................................................................................................................215

Conclusion........................................................................................................................................271

Selected Bibliography....................................................................................................................277
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Jennifer Newsome Martin
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CHAPTER ONE

“DER SEELEN WUNDERLICHES BERGWERK”¹:

ON THE SUBTERRANEAN AND THE SPECULATIVE

Rainer Maria Rilke’s great mythological poem “Orpheus. Euridice. Hermes,” from which our title is drawn, conjures a ghostly scene of the abortive attempt to lead Euridice through the liminal space between the underworld and the world of the living. As the myth goes, of course, Orpheus cannot contain himself and casts a forbidden backward glance toward the two “light-footed” travelers tracking him, and his beloved Euridice must return with Hermes to Hades. Our conjugation of Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) with several, far from homogenous figures of the nineteenth-century Orthodox Christian “Russian school,”² specifically Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900), Nicholas Berdyaev (1874-1948), and Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944) and their primary German Romantic interlocutor F.W.J Schelling (1775-1859), constitutes something of a subterranean excavation of its own, albeit with hopes of greater success. As we shall see, resonant with Rilke’s poetic rendering of the

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes”: “It was the souls’ strange mine./Like silent silver ore they wandered/through its dark like veins. Between roots/the blood welled up that makes its way to men,/and it looked hard as porphyry in the dark./Nothing else was red…” (New Poems, trans. Edward Snow (New York: North Point Press, 2001), 140-1. For text of the full poem with English translation alongside, c.f. 140-147.

Orpheus myth, it is likewise an excavation that requires not only a certain degree of coaxing in order to draw out Balthasar’s un- or under-acknowledged lines of pedigree from these Russians, but also a delicacy in negotiating instances of the shadowy “in-between,” whether between form and content, finite and infinite, body and spirit, time and eternity, life and death, and so on. Nor is it totally irrelevant that the dense symbolic image of the Bergwerk or mine, with which Rilke opens this poem, has a long literary heritage in German Romanticism (not least in Novalis’ Henry von Ofterdingen, Hofmannsthal’s play Das Bergwerk zu Falun, or again in the tenth of Rilke’s Duino Elegies) invoking variously the darkness of the psychic unconscious, wisdom, sexuality, the knowledge of history, and the descent into the human soul. Finally, construing Balthasar as we hope to do, especially with respect to his interest in rehabilitating a sense of the suppleness and fluidity of tradition, demands a declared embargo on nostalgic antiquarianism and its death-dealing backward glance.

Our analysis is both descriptive and constructive. That is to say, we shall not only consider Balthasar’s explicit mentions of Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov, which are not actually overwhelming, but also constructively analyze “anonymous” or “subterranean” instances of thematic, theological, and philosophical affinities, filiations, or repetitions, as well as assess the principles according to which Balthasar adjudicates, allows, or excludes elements in them. This investigation into what is for Balthasar live and what is dead in the Russians shall be conducted along the following sites of inquiry: (1) aesthetics, (2) freedom, mythology, and evil, (3) thanatology and traditional eschatology, and (4) apocalyptic trinitarianism, what Balthasar calls the “theocentric

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horizon. While it may very well have been more straightforward to traverse seriatim the thought of each Russian thinker in relation to Balthasar, the decision to enumerate the chapters thematically was made on both aesthetic and substantive grounds. The thought of Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov is intricately related one to the other: quite simply, our method of analysis provides the most elegant means not only of presenting a thick cross-section of inquiry, but also of indicating at least a provisional genealogy. It is usually the case that any comparative study such as this one swerves too nearly toward an over-emphasis either of affinity or difference. This study aims not to serve simply as catalogue of either, but will rather comprise an examination of how these modes of intersection are modulated, received, changed, corrected, and so on. It is our working assumption that, especially for the later Balthasar, Berdyaev almost certainly is post-mortem; Soloviev possesses only a relative vitality; and it is Bulgakov—whose presence in Balthasar’s theology is often undocumented but is in some instances nearly isomorphic—who remains fully viable.4

Despite the mining operations which may be required textually, the warrant to investigate the actual, cryptic, and potential dialogue between Balthasar and the thinkers of the Russian school is actually writ quite large, not only in a shared broadmindedness toward navigating between modern cultural and philosophical data and the ancient Christian tradition, but also in the preeminent location in their work of the questions of

4 Of course, Balthasar’s position on the Russians—even Soloviev and Bulgakov, whom he later seems to affirm quite heartily—is not univocally enthusiastic. He is, for instance, much more dubious of the Russians in his early monograph Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor, trans. Brian E. Daley, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003) than he is in volumes of the later Theo-Drama. Also see Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), in which he asserts that Nyssan “prepares the ground in some ways for that Gnostic dynamism of the Byzantine philosophies, which end up logically in the gnosis of Dostoevsky, Soloviev and Berdyaev” (118-9 n.46).
immanence and transcendence, the relation of God and world, themes of freedom and necessity, kenoticism, eschatology, Trinity, history, pneumatology, cosmology, and aesthetics, and, centrally important, in a variously critical reception of German Idealism and Romanticism. Indeed, Balthasar’s negotiation between the Western philosophical tradition and classical theological sources has its strong analogue in the Russian school, which resuscitated and engaged Romanticism as what they considered to be the premier instance of modern intellectualism.  

Why Schelling?

The rehabilitation of Romanticism, and, more particularly, the Schellingian strand of concrete Idealism (as the explicit alternative to Hegel) as a hugely influential philosophical source characterized by freedom, spirit, wholeness, subjectivity, organicity, process, imagination, and life proved a natural fit both for our Slavic thinkers intent on opposing Western positivism and rationalism as well as their Catholic counterparts—to whom we shall return—particularly Johann Sebastian Drey (1777-1853) and his student Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) of the Tübingen school, who likewise engaged Romanticism with Catholic thinking in the early nineteenth century.  

Indeed, an anecdote is reported with respect to literary critic and Slavophile Ivan Kireevsky (1806-

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1856), who studied with Schelling in Munich, that upon his return to Russia, his wife related to him that the philosophical ideas of Schelling “had long been familiar to her from the works of the Church Fathers,” prompting Kireevsky to rediscover Orthodoxy. That is to say, Schelling’s philosophical profile as visionary, dynamic, and organic is attractive to theological discourse not least because it contravenes the dryness of purely rationalistic systems.

Schelling—who, like Balthasar and the Russians, had much to say with respect to art, time and eternity, nature, history, freedom and necessity, evil, myth, and eschatology—operates therefore as something of a hidden premise for our project. Of course, as Schelling was constantly reinventing his philosophy throughout his career, there are many Schellings with whom we shall contend in the subsequent pages. Nonetheless, for Balthasar, it is Schelling rather than Hegel who represents the culmination of German Idealism. He is not just a stepping-stone on the way from Fichte to Hegel. He functions arguably as the “bridge” between Idealism and Catholicism, as well as the “the gateway from the Romantic view of art to the Catholic tradition of mysticism and symbol.” More than these, however, given the complex of relations of influence that obtain from Schelling to the Russians and the Russians to Balthasar (and even Schelling to Balthasar), Schelling serves current purposes as a

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catalyst for productive analysis of Balthasar’s process of adjudicating the value and reliability of philosophical and theological sources.

Our interest in inviting Schelling to the theological table and allowing his legacy, albeit greatly domesticated, to stay on (largely under the hospitality of the Russians) requires qualification, as he—both before and after his late-coming theological turn—can be something of an unruly guest. Schelling’s thought contains unequivocally and irremediably dark seeds that run counter to the mainline theological project, not least of which is a deeply rooted materialism\(^{11}\) and the inheritance of Jakob Böhme’s irrational, ungrounded abyss of an originary will.\(^{12}\) His philosophical aesthetics can in no uncertain terms be thought otherwise than a secular “aesthetic theology” which cannot be welcomed as it stands as an authentic (and thoroughly Balthasarian) theological aesthetics of “glory.” Moreover, as Cyril O’Regan notes, German Idealism and Romanticism (genetically bound to Böhme) are thoroughly implicated by Balthasar with respect to their latent Gnosticism in his *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*.\(^{13}\) Balthasar mines German Idealism and Romanticism for possible precious stones (though the rocks fall

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\(^{13}\) Cyril O’Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (New York: SUNY University Press, 2001), 33. O’Regan also indicates here that Soloviev and Berdiaev’s dependence on Schelling and Böhme, along with a “sense of the necessity of a narrative ontotheology with the suffering of the cross at the center” suggests that the Russians we are considering “are prime candidates for analysis [of some ascription of Gnostic return], given their complex weave of myth, Idealism and the Eastern orthodox tradition” (35-6). We do not presume to continue O’Regan’s project by demonstrating a full-fledged Gnostic haunting of these modern Russian discourses by their association with German Idealism and Romanticism, Böhme, or Schelling. Our interest, again, lies more with the analysis of the way these Russian narratives are evaluated explicitly in Balthasar’s theology, with the suggestion that for Balthasar, Soloviev and Bulgakov supply successive sites of sanitization of Schelling’s and Böhme’s potentially corrosive influence.
where they may), and, yet as we shall see, he also mimes aspects of it: yet his miming is far from an unsophisticated mimicry or borrowing. As we shall attempt to demonstrate throughout, when Balthasar repeats or appears to repeat suspect elements of Schelling or Hegel, he self-consciously subverts them, ever dutifully maintaining a crucial corrective distance. Balthasar, acknowledging the seductive appeal of these discourses, both allows them to contribute positively to his theological project while insisting that their content be thoroughly vetted.

Balthasar’s recognition of the dangers implicit and explicit in Schelling’s thinking—considered in more detail in the following chapters—comes through perspicuously. He is absolutely resistant to the temptation of Romantic thought toward philosophical monism as well as pantheistic speculation. Schelling’s philosophy is criticized sharply (along with Fichte’s and Hegel’s) as Promethean and Titanic, glorifying human being as the center of the philosophical absolute, claiming equality with the divine:

While Kant and Schiller stop short at the finiteness of the human spirit in a way that might be judged to be more ‘modern’, the three Titans Fichte, Schelling and Hegel want to conceive of man within the wholeness of the Absolute, as its centre. This expressly demands that all philosophy, above all that of antiquity, should be fulfilled and transcended through the philosophical appropriation of the Christian revelation… The ‘retreat to the man as the centre’ is in no way retracted; for the first time it is ‘Titanically’ pressed home, and is so with an appeal to Christianity as the point of the turning of the world to subjectivity. But this means that even when the idealist systems are at their closest to Plotinus (as the final figure of the classical age), the situation with regard to the open and Advent-like decision, which predominates in Plotinus, does not return; rather,“


everything is finally decided through the determination to conceive Christianity (in a post-Christian manner) as pure philosophy and ultimately as the potentiality of man, history and culture...The die is cast...Man is himself the manifest God.\textsuperscript{16}

Berdyaev, Soloviev, and Bulgakov all engage with and assimilate Schellingian Idealism to varying degrees and with varying degrees of critical distance.\textsuperscript{17} The presence of Schelling in Berdyaev, rather more than the others, is devastatingly qualified by a heavy inscription not only of Schelling but also of certain Behemistic elements that are transmitted genetically through Schelling. Soloviev’s aesthetics in particular (enthusiastically received by Balthasar) relies heavily upon Schelling, although he does supply Schellingian philosophical concepts with a decidedly Christological specificity\textsuperscript{18} not present in the latter, even after the so-called ‘theological turn’ of the later Schelling.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, as we shall soon see, although Soloviev may repeat in certain ways the vocabulary of the Idealists of the philosophical absolute, Soloviev’s Absolute is accorded


\textsuperscript{17} The ecclesiological similarities between Schelling and the Russians, though beyond the scope of the present study, are worth exploring. Soloviev’s \textit{Three Dialogues}, especially the “Short Story of the Antichrist”, ultimately suggests an idealized, ecumenical version of Christianity—the Petrine (Roman Catholics), Pauline (Protestants), and Johannine (Russian Orthodox). According to Paul Valliere, “Soloviev’s threefold scheme derives partly from the end of Schelling’s \textit{Philosophy of Revelation}, where Schelling envisions an ecumenical church of the future incorporating Petrine, Pauline and Johannine principles. Schelling does not figure Orthodoxy into the equation, however. His Johannine church is pure futurity, the ideal synthesis of Roman Catholic, Protestant and philosophic principles. See F.W.J. Schelling, \textit{Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42}, Paulus Nachschrift, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), pp. 314-25” (Valliere, 217-8n36). Balthasar’s ecclesiology uses the same categories, with the addition of the Marian.


determinate theological content: it is, rather than a postulate, the “living God.” Finally, in his *Philosophy of Economy* Bulgakov appeals to elements of Schelling’s concrete Idealism—especially the identification of subject and object and the notion of nature as dynamic organism (that reappears in Soloviev)—as somewhat analogous to the Christian notion of the human being as incarnate spirit in the world: human beings are embodied in nature and enjoy a creative, dynamic, free, and mutually dependent relation with it.\(^\text{21}\)

Neither is Balthasar’s evaluation of Schelling, though critical, tantamount to a straightforward and total denunciation. Though his critiques may seem to wound Schelling beyond any kind of theological serviceability, we suggest that Balthasar’s blows ought not be taken as totally fatal for Schelling. Indeed, in his early *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, Balthasar characterizes Schelling tantalizingly as

an apocalyptic figure for whom all is arranged around revelation, around the disclosure of mystery, around breakthrough into the mysteries of God. From this magical and visionary style, so different from the ascetical Fichte and the cool Hegel, emerges the fact that he is a prophet and a poet.\(^\text{22}\)

The value of this philosophical discourse for Balthasar is not simply that it functions as a foil for the proper mode of theologizing responsibly: German Idealism and Romanticism—though far from blameless—have value in themselves particularly insofar

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\(^{20}\) Vladimir Soloviev, “Lecture Five,” *Lectures on Divine Humanity*, ed. Boris Jakim (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995), 64. Also see “Lecture Four” of the same volume: “For the all to be the content of the absolute principle this all must have determinate content” (51; italics original).

\(^{21}\) C.f. Sergei Bulgakov, *The Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. and ed. Catherine Evtuhov (Yale University Press, 2000), 93. Bulgakov is quick to note, however, that his creative adaptation of Schelling for a philosophy of economy is not wholesale; it “must be free of any Schellingian dogmatism” (93). For a relatively sustained treatment of Schelling’s philosophy of identity by Bulgakov in this volume, c.f. 85-94. For these and other points of influence from Schelling to Bulgakov, c.f. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 257, 260-1, 265-6, 270n.41, 274, 295-6. This notable presence of Schelling in the economic philosophy lessens in Bulgakov’s properly theological reflections in later years.

as they act as religious counterpoints to the predominating rationalism of the (post-) Enlightenment project.

For instance, Balthasar lauds the “religious force” of a German Idealism that maintains the unity of the beautiful and the religious, a force weighted against Kierkegaard’s rejection of aesthetics epitomized in Either/Or. Soloviev, with several others, is mentioned approvingly in this context as being representative of the same impulse:

The spirituality of the Christian artists and esthetic philosophers of the last century (from 1860 to the present) is strongly brought out by their preserving a sense of the unity of beauty and religion, art and religion, when they had hardly any support from theology, and notwithstanding the breakdown of the old tradition and the prevalence of materialistic and psychological views incompatible with theirs. In this they were in accord with the original tradition of the West, as well as with the sentiment of the learned in various countries. For behind them lay, despite the solvent effect of Kierkegaard, the religious force of German idealism, of Goethe, Schelling and Novalis, and this exerted its influence on the England of Coleridge, Newman, Thompson and Hopkins, which in turn was connected by hidden but strong ties with the France of Péguy…Soloviev in Russia…maintain[s] the same general outlook.  

Further, both Schelling and Böhme are named alongside Dante, Nicholas of Cusa, Erasmus, Luther, Pascal, Hamann, Kierkegaard, Péguy, Bloy, Bernanos, Soloviev, Hopkins, and Newman, among others, as belonging to the company of those who are representative of a valuable “opposition” movement which demands “an understanding of revelation in the context of the history of the world and the actual present.”

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A Fundamentally Methodological Claim

Though content-rich with respect both to the thinkers of the Russian school as well as Schelling, the gravamen of this dissertation is a study of and apologia for Balthasar’s own theological method, a task which perhaps ought to be held lightly in keeping with the Balthasarian ethos:

…[I]t is not our concern to get a secure place to stand, but rather to get sight of what cannot be securely grasped, and this must remain the event of Jesus Christ; woe to the Christian who would not stand daily speechless before this event! If this event truly is what the church believes, then it can be mastered through no methodology…”

Acknowledging with Balthasar that theology ought well resist the mode of the “exact sciences” which could only feign to circumscribe its object, we venture to characterize Balthasar’s method as constitutively orthodox, but thoroughly probative, phenomenological, literary-critical, aesthetic-hermeneutic, and—despite his perhaps unjustly earned reputation as arch-conservateur—quintessentially non-nostalgic. Balthasar may indeed be operating in a mode of retrieval, but he is a visionary, innovative theologian who is far from retrograde. It is thus the definitive burden of our exercise to demonstrate, as evidenced by the critical excavation of the Russians, that Balthasar’s method is in point of fact fundamentally daring and experimental, structurally hospitable to expressly non-theological categories, non-canonic sources, and modes of speculative thinking which probe, but under Balthasar’s scrupulous watch and sense of moderation, do not in fact exceed the boundaries of tradition, however elastic, all to decidedly felicitous theological results.

Of course, our judgment of felicitousness with respect to Balthasar’s theological method is by no means the universal opinion. Indeed, instances approaching hagiography notwithstanding, the general reception of Balthasar in the theological academy has been somewhat tepid, prompting Balthasar himself to lament: “So be it; if I have been cast aside as a hopeless conservative by the tribe of the left, then I now know what sort of dung-heap I have been dumped upon by the right.”

The factors behind Balthasar’s reception in the Catholic theological academy as a “conservative,” “traditionalist,” “restorationist,” or “fideist” theologian have been rehearsed elsewhere. It is not of course for nothing, given not only his stance on certain more progressive causes, but also the fact that—even at the time of his death in 1988—the balance of his longer, more complex theological works (including the majority of the trilogy) remained untranslated while shorter, controversial, sometimes downright acerbic pieces were available in English and thus more widely read. While Balthasar’s theology is judged by some to be “hopelessly conservative,” other evaluations (the most notable of which may be Alyssa Lyra Pitstick’s rather prosecutorial *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and The Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell*) find his more speculative works so eccentric to traditional Catholicism that they in point of fact enjoin “a de facto rejection of the Catholic Tradition and its authority.” It is not only the case that neither means of characterizing a theologian of such sophistication and subtlety as Balthasar is particularly

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constructive, though that is indeed true, but also perhaps that those projects that concern themselves largely with such rigid classifications are both spent and misspent.

Balthasar’s provocative theological methodology, hospitable to engagement not only with non-theological but also non-Catholic sources, cannot, of course, be thought without reference to Neo-Scholasticism, which according to Balthasar and other proponents of la nouvelle théologie, was a distortion of the legitimate method of Thomas, characterized by brittleness, dry syllogisms, and a narrow intellectualism that employed an impoverished reductive, “closed-circle” logic that diminished the glory and mystery of revelation to rationalistic categories.29 His quite visceral reaction against this Neo-Scholastic conceptual rationalism decries the tendency to proceed theologically through an appeal to neutral, abstracted categories rather than the existing biblical, liturgical, mystical and sacramental data of the living tradition. His intervention is far from shy: “In the end, [the hyperbolic rationalism of Neo-Scholasticism] leads to Hegel’s God, who is without all mystery: behold the door to atheism.”30 The problem with Neo-Scholasticism was that it had lost the shining sense of glory and mystery, the “sensorium for the glory of Creation”31 which had enlivened the patristics and the theology of the early and high Middle Ages.

Balthasar should hence be broadly landscaped as a certain type of nouvelle théologie theologian, informed deeply by Henri de Lubac and Erich Przywara, who provide the antidotes to Neo-Scholasticism respectively by rehabilitating the plurivision of patristic

29 Balthasar, GL V, 26-7.


31 Balthasar, GL V, 26-7.
theology and deepening the concept of the *analogia entis*. Balthasar’s theological style, consonant with *nouvelle théologie* thinkers and the proponents of the Catholic Tübingen school who influenced them (Möhler’s *Einheit in der Kirche* in particular) insists that theological speculation and the tradition must be organically integral one with the other. It is arguable that it is precisely the fact Drey and Möhler—as well indeed as the Russians—articulated their theology against a backdrop of Romantic philosophy that funds and supports the notion of a living, dynamic tradition which can admit developments without loss of integrity. The crucial role of the language of the “positive” in Schelling suggests not a reiteration from the archives of the past as a static deposit, but—consonant with the model of the Romantic Catholic Tübingen school—the ongoing and dynamic negotiation between old and new that motivates imaginative theological construction rather than reiterative representation alone. This “positive” contribution is exactly and explicitly what occurs, in our view, both in Bulgakov’s speculative parsing of the traditional creedal concept of *ousia* as “Sophia” or Balthasar’s startling and original interpretation of the harrowing of hell.

In the theological appropriation of Romanticism, this negotiation takes place between traditional religious ideas and the ongoing generative force which animates them: thus, religious data, given their peculiarly thick character in terms both of history as well as existential significance, resist exhaustive logical analysis. As Paul Valliere rightly notes, of course, the Schellingian philosophical tradition can veer too easily into

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32 John Thiel, *Imagination and Authority*, which suggests that the Romantic paradigm of doing theology is characterized precisely in these terms: that is, it is not mimetic, but a creative construction that, while faithful to the classical understanding of God as divine Author, relies in large part upon the individual theologian’s talent, authority, and authorship, especially 20-24.

“a mysticism which dissolves the multiplicity of positivities into a singular Positive [which] defeats the program of positive philosophy of surely as Hegelian rationalism,” an ill that can be remedied only by “honoring the concrete idiom in which faith expresses itself, thereby limiting the degree to which dogma can be rationalized.” To translate this principle into analogous theological terms, we might turn to the notion—associated perhaps primarily with John Henry Newman, but appearing earlier and significantly in the work of Drey—of the organic development of doctrine, which allows for the pneumatologically inspired and Christologically constrained evolution of new contributions to established theological concepts.

In Drey’s articulation of the historicity of revelation and the development of doctrine, the authentically living tradition has both a “fixed” aspect as well as a “mobile” aspect, and both must be attended with care: to neglect the former is a speculation unmoored and susceptible to heterodoxy, and to neglect the latter is by “hyperorthodoxy” to hazard the hypertrophy of tradition, the hardening of what is genuinely bedrock into slag. It is clear that Balthasar as well as Bulgakov at least peripherally shared Drey’s concerns with respect to the mummification or absolutizing

34 Ibid., 296.
35 Ibid.
37 Drey, §260, 173.
38 For a concise, elegant statement of Bulgakov’s own perspective with respect to the decidedly non-archeological, organic elasticity of ecclesial tradition, c.f. Sergei Bulgakov, “The Church as Tradition,” in The Orthodox Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 9-35.
of (particularly specific historical or cultural iterations of) the tradition. Creative fidelity to tradition for Balthasar is precisely that: creative, even audaciously so. On his own telling,

Being faithful to tradition most definitely does not consist...of a literal repetition and transmission of the philosophical and theological theses that one imagines lie hidden in time and in the contingencies of history. Rather, being faithful to tradition consists much more of imitating our Fathers in the faith with respect to their attitude of intimate reflection and their effort of audacious creation, which are the necessary preludes to true spiritual fidelity. If we study the past, it is not in the hope drawing from it formulas doomed in advance to sterility or with the intention of readapting out-of-date solutions. We are asking history to teach us the acts and deeds of the Church, who presents her treasure of divine revelation, ever new and every unexpected, to every generation, and who knows how, in the face of every new problem, to turn the fecundity of the problem to good account with a rigor that never grows weary and a spiritual agility that is never dulled.

(Re-) Configuring the Patristic Genealogy: Origen as Methodological Type

In his monograph The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval, Kevin Mongrain indicates that Balthasar, in keeping with his privileging of Irenaeus as theological archetype, “a quintessentially antispeculative theologian, who rigorously maintains that humans cannot form a concept of God because there is an ontological difference between God and creation,” is himself also essentially antispeculative. While it may well be the case, as Mongrain has serviceably demonstrated, that it is Irenaeus who serves as Balthasar’s primary patristic source for his theological architectonics, it is especially with respect to method too univocal a claim.

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40 Balthasar, Presence and Thought, 12.

41 Mongrain, 36.
We submit that the appeal to the Irenaean principle cannot fully account for the trajectory of Balthasar’s work, since the tendency for Irenaeus is indeed to eschew the speculative. According to Mongrain, on the Irenaean model, “true gnosis is to know the limits of theory, abstraction, and speculation in theology; for Irenaeus, to know less is to know more.”

Balthasar himself, however, makes a finer distinction between true, or ‘biblical’ gnosis and false gnosis, which is to say, between legitimate and illegitimate modes of speculation. He avails himself of Alexandrian theology, namely Clement and Origen, to sketch a profile of the “Christian gnostic”: that is, one who comes to an interior and authentic understanding of the faith—this is “not a luxury for the intellectually gifted” but rather that which surpasses a purely extrinsic relation to faith which is in terms only of obeying ecclesial authority—which enables the believer to behold “the essential content of faith unfold before his [or her] vision (θεωρία).” In this clarity of vision enabled by the Logos as revealed in the kerygma, the Christian gnostic sees contemplatively:

To say that for the Gnostic the earthly veil enveloping revelation has become transparent means equally that in the letter he sees the Spirit, in the Old he sees the New Testament, and in the latter the promised eternity; in Jesus’ humanity he sees his divinity, and in the Son, through the Spirit, he sees the Father.

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42 Mongrain, of course, does make the caveat that his “asserting the presence of a massive Irenaean influence on von Balthasar is not meant to eclipse the importance of…other figures on his thought,” including Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Dionysius, Maximus, and Origen (28). The claim, however, that these other patristic thinkers “are for [Balthasar] only moons to Irenaeus’s sun” (27) seems somewhat overstated.

43 Ibid., 30.

44 Balthasar, GL I, 137.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.
Mongrain’s genealogy of Balthasar’s thought must therefore broaden to include the strong presence of Origen, who himself pioneers the cartography of speculative theological frontiers, as a more proximate methodological type than is Irenaeus.\footnote{This claim is strengthened by a rather late interview in which Balthasar says that “Origen remains for me the most inspired, the most wide-ranging interpreter and lover of the Word of God. I never feel so at home elsewhere as I do with him” (“Geist und Feuer: Ein Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar,” \textit{Herder Korrespondenz} 30 (1976): 72-82.}

\textit{The Specter of “Speculation”: Illegitimate and Legitimate Modes}

In his \textit{Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith}, John Thiel notes that the coincidence in Balthasar’s work of a “valorization of tradition’s literal sense even as it engages in mystical speculation” constitutes his “particularly Catholic genius.”\footnote{John Thiel, \textit{Senses of Tradition}, 197.} In keeping with the sense of balance required to maintain simultaneously the “fixed” and “mobile” aspects of a living Church tradition, it ought be recognized that Balthasar does guard vigorously against illicit modes of speculative theologizing. First, his theology is scrupulously grounded in biblical exegesis, a commitment that is prior—both dispositionally and structurally in his treatment of particular issues—to the examination of the more speculative questions.\footnote{For example, consider his treatment of the ‘dyad’ of Son and Spirit in the act of revelation (which, not unincidentally, is informed not only by Irenaeus’ expressive notion of “the Father’s two hands,” but also deeply by Sergei Bulgakov’s \textit{The Comforter}, trans. Boris Jakim [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004]) in Balthasar’s \textit{TL III}, which prioritizes the “biblical aspect” over the “speculative aspect,” 167-184.} Secondly, and relatedly, Balthasar’s speculative theological moves begin with and are constrained by what is given in sacred revelation.\footnote{See, for instance, Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume V: The Last Act}, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 13-4, which asserts Balthasar’s intent to construct theological claims first on the articles of the faith, and not vice versa. The upper}
…it is only on the basis of Jesus Christ’s own behavior and attitude that we can distinguish…plurality in God. Only in him is the Trinity opened up and made accessible…We know about the Father, Son and Spirit as divine ‘Persons’ only through the figure and disposition of Jesus Christ. Thus we can agree with the principle, often enunciated today, that it is only on the basis of the economic Trinity that we can have knowledge of the immanent Trinity and dare to make statements about it.  

Thirdly, received theological truths cannot be denatured by forcing them violently to lie upon the Procrustean bed of ahistorical, abstracted human constructions of, say, natural religion or philosophies of history: with no apologies to Hegel, “neither Good Friday nor Easter nor Pentecost can be turned into a speculative principle.” For Balthasar, the hard data of Christianity ought never be circumvented or manipulated. Such a thing is inexcusable Titanism: “And in what concerns the knowledge of the heart of God’s mysteries here too Christianity offers the only approach. Whoever violently breaks through the doors, finds the treasuries bare…” Finally, as we have seen and shall see subsequently, Balthasar objects to those formal philosophical discourses which concern what he terms (technically) the “speculative doctrine of God,” marked by making coincident God and creation and thus contributing in no small part to the tragic waning of the sensibility of glory in the modern world.

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52 Balthasar, TL. III, 429. Also cf. TD II, 419.

53 Balthasar, GL. V, 248.

54 Ibid., 207-9; italics original.

55 In Balthasar’s narrative it is Meister Eckhart who, unbeknownst to himself as a sympathetic ‘friend of God,’ sounds the terrible gong of identity between divine and human, the ‘infinite’ I and the ‘finite’ I, a sound which reverberates out to Hegel’s own speculative Idealism. C.f. GL. V, 44-50.
Our suggestion that Balthasar has significant speculative Tendenz considers seriously these caveats, and has got to do more precisely with the relation of excess between the theological subject of inquiry—nothing less than the “absolute Trinitarian love of God, which discloses itself and offers itself in Jesus Christ”\(^{56}\)—and the method employed for its study. As we have seen, Balthasar strenuously resists “exact science,” in which the method is exactly correlative to its object as inadequate for the mysterious task of theology, insofar as it only counterfeits scientific precision and the full comprehensive competence of a closed system.\(^{57}\) On Balthasar’s own telling, authentic speculation takes into account the fact that “…while it is in God that the perfect reality and therefore exactness, precision (praecisio) consist, the derivatory thought can only be inexact, approximate, supposition, parabolic, and in the true sense of the word, ‘reflective,’ speculative.”\(^{58}\) The truly speculative, contemplative, and often quite daring method of theologizing is performed always in reference to and within the bounds of the faith of the church,\(^{59}\) and, indeed, in reference to the personal faith commitments of the theologian herself:

\(^{56}\) GL VII, 15. Correlatively, Soloviev argues that it is the Trinity which is “the basic speculative principle of Christianity” (Lectures on Divine Humanity, 77).


\(^{58}\) GL V, 228.

\(^{59}\) Hans Urs von Balthasar, A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 54. Balthasar’s mode of theologizing seems very much in the spirit of John Paul II’s 1998 encyclical Fides et Ratio, which cautions against a “latent fideism” that can “appear in the scant consideration accorded to speculative theology, and in disdain for the classical philosophy from which the terms of both the understanding of faith and the actual formulation of dogma have been drawn” (55). The language and methods of philosophy—submitted in humility to the regula fidei—are of great value for addressing “the use of language to speak about God, the personal relations within the Trinity, God’s creative activity in the world, the relationship between God and man, or Christ’s identity as true God and true man…It is necessary therefore that the mind of the believer acquire a natural, consistent and true knowledge of created realities—the world and man himself—which are also the object of divine Revelation. Still more, reason must be able to articulate this knowledge in concept and argument. Speculative dogmatic theology thus presupposes and implies a philosophy of the human being, the world.
It follows that for the internal development of theology that [the light of faith], and no other, must control and give evidence of itself in every branch of theological speculation no matter how detailed. This is possible only so long as the Christian thinker continually renews, in a living way, his own primal act of a priori faith—that obedient surrender to the radiant light in which alone by faith and not by vision he partakes in the wisdom of the self-revealing God.\(^\text{60}\)

\textit{A Corrective Reduplication}

Being ever-mindful of the perils of engagement and assimilation of non-theological discourse, the Russian and Balthasarian reception of Schelling proves absolutely fundamental to our discussion in two important ways, both in terms of justification for our selection of thematic content, as well as in terms of our advocacy of a theological method both constrained by creative fidelity to the tradition and marked by inventiveness and development. First, these categories of aesthetics, myth, eschatology and apocalyptic are not arbitrary, but are instances of potential and actual discourse between Schelling and the theologians. In effect, these categories function as synecdochic indices of the relation between infinite and finite and will on our telling provide a litmus test for the appropriate theological construal of the relationship of God and world. Secondly, the complex of relations of influence from German Idealism and Romanticism to Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov supplies the content for the investigation of our central methodological question: what is it precisely that occurs in the mechanics both of the Russian reduplication of Romantic philosophy and of Balthasar’s retelling of the respective thought of the Russian school that allows him to maintain simultaneously a general (and generally vociferous) opposition to certain

\(^{60}\) Balthasar, \textit{GL I}, 165.
aspects of Schelling’s thought and a (tentatively qualified) affirmation of Soloviev and Bulgakov, who depend variously upon him? As we suggested above, Berdyaev’s particular importation of Schelling and Böhme makes him something of a terminal case.61

In this comparative study, then, Schelling constellates a point of triangulation between Balthasar and the Russians, which permits not only a location of Balthasar’s speculative method regarding the relative nearness to or distance from each point, but also the demonstration of our secondary thesis that, for Balthasar, the Russians who rely upon the thought of Schelling operate as successively successful antidotes—from Berdyaev to Soloviev to Bulgakov—and sites of the latter’s sanitization. Lastly, Schelling remains a natural dialogue partner for both Balthasar and the Russian school not only on the more specified aesthetic, mythic, historical, and eschatological grounds which will be discussed in great detail in subsequent chapters, but also in the following general, though certainly non-trivial ways: (1) a near obsession with ‘wholeness’; (2) a thoroughly (though thoroughly deformed) Johannine register; and (3) a fundamentally aesthetic negotiation of the infinite in the finite, which suggests the more properly theological concern of the relationship between God and world.

The first, perhaps immediately apparent point of convergence with Schelling, Balthasar, and our Russian religious philosophers—particularly post-Soloviev, whose spirited advocacy of “all-unity” as the single, indivisible point of integration for all human knowledge and experience deeply influenced Berdyaev and Bulgakov and was

61 This claim may be somewhat ironic in light of the critique that Berdyaev offers of Soloviev in Nicolas Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End: Essay on Eschatological Metaphysics (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952) that his “doctrine of Godmanhood assumed too evolutionary and optimistic a character and was not sufficiently free from the influence of Hegel and Schelling” (26).
affirmed heartily by Balthasar—is an appeal to the truth of the whole, or the unity of all things (vseединство for the Russians; Alleinheit for Schelling), an appeal incentivized in no small measure by a shared and determined resistance to the deficiencies of an overly rationalistic and abstracted mode of thinking philosophy or theology. The notion of vseединство appears centrally in Soloviev’s doctoral dissertation A Critique of Abstract Principles (1880), which argues precisely that because abstract principles are, shall we say, “abstracted” from this whole, they have a false character, and require an infusion of the unifying divine ground of all being. Likewise Bulgakov resists abstraction: “Our thought and knowledge always fragment their object, abstract from it its separate sides and thus inevitably take the part for the whole.” Berdyaev, though far from affirming Solovievian all-unity full stop, locates multiplicity and division in the (doomed) realm of objectified nature; personal (not monistic) wholeness and integration are the mark of the realm of the spirit.

To suggest that Balthasar is interested in a vision of the whole, while certainly true, is not, however, to submit to an oft-heard critique of Balthasar that he operates according to a kind of naïve, totalizing impulse of systematization run amok. His interest in an organic wholeness is absolutely not of a piece with a (Hegelian) rationalistic


64 Sergei Bulgakov, The Lamb of God (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 321. He argues, for instance, that the divine nature (ousia/Sophia) not only funds all of life but also is “the absolute content of absolute life with all its ‘properties,’ the property of all properties. It is proper for this content to include All, for no limitations are applicable to Divinity; furthermore, this All should be understood not as an aggregate or series of an infinite number of elements of the All but as their organic inner integrity, as integral wisdom in union. This is the All as unity and unity as All, All-unity” (102). Also c.f. 104, 107-8 of the same volume.
philosophy which attempts to fit every element of human experience into a logically necessary grand system. As was evident in his rejection of Neo-Scholasticism, Balthasar’s project of recovering beauty as a theological category is similarly motivated by his conviction that the “exact sciences” are not at all the appropriate mode of theological reflection. Rather, it is necessary to prescind from the specificity of ‘exact’ discourse, “which can only pertain to one particular sector of reality, in order to bring the truth of the whole again into view—truth as a transcendental property of Being, truth which is no abstraction, rather the living bond between God and world.”65 For Balthasar, apart from a consideration of the totality of the whole, analysis becomes only a forensic affair. As he puts it rather colorfully,

…we can never again recapture the living totality of form once it has been dissected and sawed into pieces, no matter how informative the conclusions which this anatomy may bring to light. Anatomy can be practiced only on a dead body, since it is opposed to the movement of life and seeks to pass from the whole to its parts and elements.66

Similarly, Balthasar remarks that “there is simply no way to do theology except by repeatedly circling around what is, in fact, always the same totality looked at from different angles. To parcel up theology into isolated tracts is by definition to destroy it.”67

The second introductory point that is especially material is the fundamental feature that Balthasar (whose Johannine disposition—especially the missio Christology of the Son’s “coming-from-God” as One Sent by the Father—hardly needs

65 Balthasasr, GL I, 18, italics added.
66 Ibid., 31.
documentation), Schelling, Hegel, and at least Soloviev and Bulgakov are operating to some degree in a Johannine register, that is, according to a sensibility that is more mystical than not, Trinitarian, and concerned with the theme of love, the trope of light and darkness, a strong understanding of God as Spirit (John 4:24), the kenotic self-sacrifice of the death of Christ which is linked to the advent of the Holy Spirit, the reconciliation of time and eternity, an eschatological orientation, and so on. Balthasar characterizes Schelling (and Hegel) as such in the context of an analysis of Hölderlin’s successive drafts of “The Death of Empedocles.” In the third draft, which accords “a social and eschatological dimension” to the death, there

is the Johannine Christianity emerging, as in the late Fichte, the old Schelling, and the young Hegel, as the alpha and omega of Idealistic thinking. The eternal Logos, in the world in the form of poverty and humility, glorifying himself through suffering and death, then to ascend back whence he came; declaring his mission and all-embracing love in great parting speeches, consoling even as he withdraws, promising the Spirit and a second coming—there is correspondence everywhere…

This specifically Johannine hermeneutic stands, but according to Balthasar, in Schelling (and Hegel70) it is thoroughly deformed, insofar as it rejects the theophanous content of the Old Testament, “which is the site of emergent glory [in favor of] the Johannine final form of the New Testament, disassociated from Paul and the synoptics, in order to be able to reinterpret agape directly and freely in the direction of gnosis,”71 that is, for

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68 See, for example, Balthasar, TD III, “Mission as a Basic Concept,” 149-163, especially 153. This Johannine register undergirds all of Balthasar’s theology, including its cosmic scope. Correlatively, “there can be no cosmic return without this very specific ‘I am the way…, no one comes to the Father except by me’” (Jn 14:6). If the world is to return to its origin, the trail must be blazed by him who has already completed, emphatically and archetypically, the circle of coming forth and return…” (TL III, 436-7).

69 Balthasar, GL V, 331.

70 Balthasar, TD II, 423.

Schelling and Hegel *agape* is no longer rendered in terms of Christ’s likeness but placed in a wholly human manifold which redefines it as a salvific way of knowing.

Thirdly, our triangulation of Schelling, the Russian school, and Hans Urs von Balthasar can be parsed ultimately in terms of a (properly aesthetic) negotiation between the finite and infinite, which approximates but is not identical with the problem of the proper relation that obtains between God and world. The early Schelling—far more a philosopher than a theologian—does not avail himself of this kind of terminology, although the major problematic that exercises him throughout his career is the negotiation between the real and ideal, the actual and the potential, language which Soloviev does employ. Of course, Schelling’s system is essentially monistic, and for Balthasar’s quintessentially Christian theology, it is the case that God is wholly other than the world, not part of a mundane structure of real and ideal.

Russian cultural and religious history, too, has long been occupied with the problem of the finite and infinite. The doctrine of Divine Sophia, which will unfortunately get short shrift in the following pages, is invoked in Russian religious philosophy at least in part as a mediating solution (though not a philosophical abstraction) for bridging the ontological frontier, the metaxic space between the divine world and the phenomenal world. For certain of our thinkers, this Sophia, or holy wisdom, is *bogochelovechestvo*, an abstract noun translated variously as the “humanity of God,” “Divine-Humanity,” or “Godmanhood,” a concept which appears notably in Schelling’s philosophy of mythology and revelation, and which is absolutely decisive for the religious philosophy of Soloviev’s successors. The doctrine bears conceptual relation

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72 See especially Balthasar’s discussion in “Revelation and the Beautiful,” where he presents the world as locus of the mystery of God revealed, 120.
to the theological notion of deification and linguistic relation to the Greek *theandria*, and, as a derivation of *Bogochelovek*, or God-human, is certainly evocative of Christological claims. As we shall see, Berdyaev and Bulgakov are both respectively Solovievian heirs who proceed under the Sophianic mantle, though in disparate Christological metrics.

For Balthasar, this relationship between finite and infinite is one that must be governed strictly by the *analogia entis*—“the ever great dissimilarity to God no matter how great the similarity to Him”73 rather than the *identitas entis* which runs rampant in the German Idealist tradition.74 Both the similarity to and the dissimilarity from the being of God and the being of humans must be scrupulously maintained: on the one hand, if the proportion of finite to infinite is over-emphasized, infinite and finite being are identified, and God is domesticated (the so-called human “I” in a loud voice); on the other hand, if the disproportion is over-emphasized, there is no commerce at all between finite and infinite, and we edge toward Gnosticism. When identity rather than analogy provides the starting point for philosophical or theological reflection, conceptual pairs that are collated become purely dialectical, and God is absorbed or evacuated into an infinite I of a Fichte or a Schelling, or the mechanistic process of Spirit’s gradual unfolding in Hegel, and there is no longer any space for the operation of divine freedom, a curtailing that entails the contraction of the “advent-like openness of the coming of something greater.”75 The ever-greater dissimilarity is required not only to preserve the integrity of

73 Balthasar, *GL V*, 548, 627. As is well known, it is here especially that the influence of Erich Przywara is felt.

74 The failure of German Idealism’s metaphysics of identity for a theological aesthetics that has “glory” rather than a philosophy of art at the root of it will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

the infinite, but also, in its spacious act of ‘letting-be,’ the finite is perfectly itself, as simultaneously poverty and fullness, in the image and likeness of the infinite. This ecstatic mode is the miracle of being itself, as God is “the act of Being which is given out, which as gift delivers itself without defence…to the finite entities.”

Balthasar, for whom the infinite and the finite, the divine and human, God and world must be continuous but separated by an absolute ontological gap, has a strong allergy to those epical systems that collapse God and world, or dissolve everything pantheistically or monistically into the All, mistakenly absolutizing one aspect at the expense of the other. For example, Balthasar’s *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, which elaborates upon the three primary features of German literature as (1) Promethean, (2) Dionysian, and (3) *Götterdämmerung* (twilight of the gods) indicates that all three constitute a denial of this analogous relation between God and world, which lead either to the world’s deification or to nihilism. For Balthasar, it is and must be Christ who capacitates the temporal for the eternal, the human for the divine, and so on. The solution to the reconciliation between God and world, then, must for Balthasar always be Christological, which is to say, always in an idiom which is historical, concrete, and particular. Christology must include more than an abstract or merely formal philosophical premise. In Idealism, according to Balthasar,

> Christology becomes the inner form of the philosophical theory of ‘creation’ (and will necessarily remain so even with Schelling and Hegel.) Thus what began with Eckhart has become definitive: the assimilation of the God-man relation back into the inner-divine generation process, which as such is called upon to give formal expression to the God-world relation, or to the schematism of philosophy. Christ is only our elder brother, and we are all capable by virtue of our human nature of standing in his place.

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The absolutely fundamental means, then, of Balthasar’s adjudication of the relative adequacy of the Russians is if the Idealistic forms which are borrowed from Schelling and Hegel are fleshed out (quite literally) with authentically Christian content.

Looking Forward

The remaining chapters of this work provide a substantial enactment of what is here by way of anticipation only an introductory sketch, examining by turns the aesthetic, mythic, eschatological, and apocalyptic confluences and departures that obtain between the three thinkers of the Russian school and Balthasar, with Schelling playing the tertium quid. Again, by way of excavating subterranean instances of homologous content and analyzing how Balthasar judges the relative adequacy of the Russian thinkers on these issues, the primary aim is to provide a reasonable Gestalt of Balthasar as a theologian who engages modes of speculative thought but does not permit it to run roughshod over tradition. The second chapter, “Denn da ist keine Stelle, die dich nicht sieht.” Theological and Quasi-Theological Aesthetics,” examines the way in which the aesthetic discourse of Schelling, Soloviev, Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Balthasar can be plotted along the axes of several binary terms, including the real and the ideal, freedom and necessity, and matter and s/Spirit, with particular attention to the decisively Schellingian function of art or the beautiful as the necessary mediating principle between the “two realms.” Soloviev’s eschatological aesthetics of the concrete actualization of the ideal, which is formally similar to Schelling’s own aesthetic theory, Berdyaev’s fundamentally destructive meaning of the creative act, and Bulgakov’s pneumatologically inflected understanding of beauty are weighed in turn against the balance of a thoroughly Christological Balthasarian theological aesthetics of glory which is regulated by the concepts of ‘form’ and ‘splendor.’
Chapter three, “‘Du Dunkelheit, aus der ich Stamme’: Ontology, Evil, and Myth at the Root” begins with an excavation of the assimilations of theogonic speculative ontology of Jacob Böhme in Schelling, Berdyaev, and Soloviev, particularly as it informs their respective theologies/philosophies of freedom, evil, and the relation of myth to history. Though Balthasar’s evaluation recognizes the worth of these discourses insofar as they rehabilitate myth, value freedom, and take evil seriously in the face of a conceptual rationalism which does no such thing, he finds their Behemistic heritage to be extremely problematic. Berdyaev is indicted far more severely than Soloviev, who with his Christological commitments manages for the most part to escape the gravitational pull of the Böhme-Schelling-Berdyaev line.

Chapters four and five, “‘Grün wirklicher Grüne, wirklicher Sonnenschein, wirklicher Wald’: Ta Eschata, Apocalyptic, and the Logic of Resurrection,” and “Ich will die Dinge so wie keiner lieben, bis sie dir alle würdig sind und weif’: The Theocentric Horizon,” are a bit of a pair, in that both consider the last things. Following the trajectory of German idealism, the Russians each locate the discourse of ta eschata at the forefront of their respective theological reflection. Our treatment in these two chapters follows Balthasar’s distinction of “anthropocentric” and “theocentric” eschatology, with chapter four considering that which falls under the ambit of more traditional eschatology: death, judgment, hell, and salvation. It undertakes an investigation of each thinker’s theology of human death, which of course entails some reflection on questions proper to theological anthropology, the nature of hell, particularly as an auto-contraction of human being, and the prospect of universal salvation. Again, Berdyaev is over-determined by Schelling’s philosophy and its dependence on Böhme; the ambivalence of Schelling on human finitude reasserts itself fatally in Berdyaev, engendering an ‘other-worldliness’
which Balthasar cannot abide. With respect to the question of universal salvation, we shall see that Balthasar’s experimental theologizing remains in the optative, while Bulgakov’s indicative regarding the Alexandrian theorem of *apokatastasis* is thought to be overly assertive. Chapter five, “The Theocentric Horizon,” attends to the broader, Trinitarian context of Balthasar’s eschatology, including further reflections on the shared Johannine register between Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar, figurations of the Antichrist particularly as the instance of religious counterfeiting or imposture, and finally, paschal trinitarianism, the site of the most explicit and fecund of Balthasar’s borrowing from Bulgakov on *Ur-kenosis*.

The final remarks review the suggestion of Origen as methodological type for Balthasar, distilling principles for theological method based upon our analysis of the functional test cases of Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov. First, there is a direct rather than inverse relation between fidelity to tradition and the capacity for creative, speculative thought. It is Christ who provides the necessary ballast from which liminal theological “play” might take place. Second, theologians ought exercise a lack of neurosis and scrupulosity with respect to contamination by ‘impure’ sources, and desist from condemning a thinker with guilt by simple association: engagement is not, after all, tantamount to uncritical approval. Indeed, there is much to be gained theologically from entertaining non-canonic sources, from which the admixture of wheat and chaff must be carefully sifted. Consider Balthasar’s own assessment of Origen, which is constitutively patient of ambiguity: the “colossus of Daniel,” he recalls, “consisted of different metals and stood on clay feet; this did not keep it from being a colossus.”

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Third, and related, is the principle of undecidability and a resistance to full closure: often withholding judgment might be more theologically fruitful than classifying and dismissing as ‘heterodox.’ Fourth, and finally, method must always be appropriate to the “object,” or in this case, the subject of inquiry, which in the case of theology, means excess, plurality, mystery, even auspicious vision.
CHAPTER TWO

“DENN DA IST KEINE STELLE, DIE DICH NICHT SIEHT”\textsuperscript{79}:

THEOLOGICAL AND QUASI-THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

It is a commonplace to assert that it is the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar which springs to mind first in connection with the project of theological aesthetics in the twentieth century. It is not our present task, however, to present a systematic introduction to his thinking on the matter, which is best left to others.\textsuperscript{80} Nor do we intend to embark on an exhaustive survey of philosophical aesthetics, even that which has been through the centuries theologically inflected. The convergence of art and religion, of course, has a long pedigree among the ancients, the medievals, the moderns, and the post-moderns, but we shall focus our inquiry primarily upon Balthasarian and Russian engagement with, responses to, reliance upon, and departures from modern articulations of aesthetics, particular Schelling’s. Nor shall we simply catalogue seriatim

\textsuperscript{79} R.M. Rilke, “Archaic Torso of Apollo”: “We did not know his legendary head,/in which the eyeballs ripened. But/his torso still glows like a candelabrum/in which his gaze, only turned low,/holds and gleams. Else could not the curve/of the breast blind you, nor in the slight turn/of the loins could a smile be running/to that middle, which carried procreation./Else would this stone be standing maimed and short/under the shoulders’ translucent plunge/nor flimmering like the fell of beasts of prey/nor breaking out of all its contours/like a star: for there is no place/that does not see you. You must change your life” (Translations from the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. M.D. Herter Norton (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1938), 180-1.

the deeply aesthetic proclivities of our philosophers who set in motion a new stage of Russian religious aesthetics, beginning with Soloviev (1853-1900), continuing in Berdyaev (1874-1948) and cresting in Bulgakov (1871-1944), who both maintain and develop the Solovievian aesthetic legacy.\(^81\)

Though Soloviev’s work did not include the completion of a robust aesthetic, the conclusion of his doctoral dissertation at St. Petersburg University (“A Critique of Abstract Principles,” 1880) does indicate a provisional outline for a proposed treatment of a full aesthetic program. Despite this early turn toward aesthetics, it is in approximately the last decade of his life that most of the more properly aesthetic

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\(^81\) C.f. Victor V. Bychkov and Oleg K. Bychkov, “Russian Aesthetics: Religious Aesthetics,” *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 199. Pavel Florensky, whose interest in icons and on the central mystery of the hypostatic union brings theological content to an essentially antinomial perspective, is on the short list of those figures immediately following Soloviev who also contributed to modern Russian religious aesthetics associated with Neo-Orthodoxy, especially insofar as his thinking may influence Bulgakov. Indeed, it has been suggested that Bulgakov “largely continues Florensky’s tradition in aesthetics” (*Ibid.*, 200). Furthermore, it is impossible to think Solovievian aesthetics without at least some acknowledgement of his relationship with Fyodor Dostoevsky. Soloviev and Dostoevsky, both of whom proffer an aesthetic system which emerges from German Romantic Idealism with a Christologically specified foundation, enjoyed a productive friendship that mutually influenced each other’s work. On this complicated relationship of influence, see Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), especially 209-10, which is somewhat skeptical of Soloviev’s influence on Dostoevsky. According to Marina Kostalevsky’s book *Dostoevsky and Soloviev: The Art of Integral Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), although it is the case that there is much textual evidence of Soloviev in Dostoevsky’s great novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, “the nature of their affinity for each other cannot be grasped simply by studying the text of Dostoevsky’s last novel; it has to be viewed within the context of the entire legacy of both writers and the historical and philosophical ambience of the times” (2). As is true of Soloviev’s aesthetics, Dostoevsky was deeply influenced by German Romantic aesthetics through the mediation of his teacher I.I. Davydov. The influence of both Schelling and Schiller on Dostoevsky is documented in the literature: c.f. K.A. Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia, “Aesthetics;* Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. 35; Heinrich Stammmer, “Dostoevsky’s Aesthetics and Schelling’s Philosophy of Art,” *Comparative Literature* 7:4 (Autumn 1955): 313-23; Donna Tussing Orwin, *Consequences of Consciousness: Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy* (Stanford University Press, 2007), esp. 51. For Dostoevsky on icons, c.f. Sophie Ollivier, “Icons in Dostoevsky’s Works,” in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 51-68. For a more programmatic rather than novelistic treatment of aesthetic themes in Dostoevsky, see “Mr. ---bov and the Question of Art,” *Dostoevsky’s Occasional Writings*, ed. and trans. by David Magarshack (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 86-137. For Balthasar’s explicit linking of Dostoevsky and Soloviev, c.f. *GL III*, 294-6. For Balthasar’s recurrence to his treatment of Dostoevsky in *Apokalypse II*, see *GL IVII*, 72-4. For a nice treatment of Dostoevskian aesthetics in the context of the literary phenomenon of the “holy fool,” c.f. *GL V*, 188-201.
essays—“Three Addresses in Memory of Dostoevsky” (published together for the first time in 1884, though composed a bit earlier), “Beauty in Nature” (1889), “The Universal Meaning of Art” (1890), “The Meaning of Love” (1892-4), and “A First Step toward a Positive Aesthetic” (1894) were written. Despite the thinness, provisionality, and scattered nature of material that speaks directly to Soloviev’s aesthetic theory, Balthasar suggests (we believe rightly) that “everything” in Soloviev’s system is oriented toward and supplements his aesthetics.82

The chapter must rather be circumscribed by our more narrow business: to provide a strong demonstration of affinities, parallels, or repetitions between Balthasar and the Russians—again, not only a vocabulary which catalogues the what, but rather more like a grammar which indexes the mechanics of use, that is, the how—with an eye toward advancing the thesis that Balthasar’s mode of theologizing is both constrained by tradition and at the same time fundamentally experimental. What is permitted and what is eschewed? How does Balthasar repeat the Russians, albeit in his own peculiar theological voice? How does he critique and correct them? Perhaps more interestingly, how does he ‘rhyme’ them, but, shall we say, only ‘slantwise’? In this chapter, our thesis will be tested systematically through an analysis and assessment of the principles according to which Balthasar adjudicates, allows, or excludes certain aesthetic elements in Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov, particularly as they have been inspired by or mediated through Schelling.

Balthasar’s position toward Schelling, is, though on balance negative, actually fairly ambivalent: although he remains relentlessly critical, there are parts of Schelling’s

82 Balthasar, GL III, 299.
aesthetic theory that Balthasar finds compelling and which inform—in excess of his own
telling—his project of theological aesthetics. It may well be the case for both Balthasar
and the Russians who make use of Schelling, that they are reading his early aesthetics
through the late Schelling of the *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation*. It is certainly worth
asking whether Balthasar is indebted to Schelling rather more than he admits, particularly
given his commendation of myth as disclosive of being which finds its true realization in
Christian revelation. These issues will be revisited in the next chapter. The interesting
thing generally here is not simply that Balthasar makes use of Romantic and Idealist
aesthetics—as well as soundly ratifies the aesthetics of Soloviev, which is deeply
influenced by Schelling in particular and which in turn deeply influences his followers
Berdyaev and Bulgakov—but rather the means by which Balthasar as well as Soloviev,
Berdyaev, and Bulgakov attempt to salvage a secularized aesthetics for theology: how do
our thinkers either duplicate or correctively re-duplicate Schellingian aesthetics?

It is interesting that though Schelling’s aesthetic theory—as monist, Promethean,
and complicit in the “eclipse of glory”—is ultimately unsatisfactory (though not
absolutely uninformative) for Balthasar, Soloviev’s purification of him in his articulation

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84 Schelling’s influence is neither total nor exclusive, of course. Soloviev’s aesthetic theory bears
the imprint of a diverse cloud of witnesses including both Platonic and German Idealism, Neoplatonism,
Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Darwin, and Dostoevsky. See Vladimir Wozniuk, Introduction to Vladimir
Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality: Essays on Beauty, Love, and Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre
Dame Press, 2003), xi, xiii, xiv. Nor is Hegel absent (c.f. *GL III*, 283-4). Christopher Bamford also
associates Paracelsus, Böhme, Gichtel, Pordage, Jane Leade, Gottfried Arnold, Emmanuel Swedenborg,
Franz von Baader, as well as Valentinus in Soloviev’s intellectual genealogy, and has the line go forth both
theologically and poetically in Blok, Beli, Trubetskoy, Pavel Florensky, and, of course, Bulgakov. C.f. Paul
of a “universal theological aesthetics—a vision of God’s coming to be in the world”—is affirmed. Indeed, Balthasar proposes, perhaps hyperbolically, that

Soloviev’s skill in the technique of integrating all partial truths in one vision makes him perhaps second only to Thomas Aquinas as the greatest artist of order and organization in the history of thought. There is no system [including, presumably, Schelling’s] that fails to furnish him with substantial building material, once he has stripped and emptied it of the poison of its negative aspects.86

Balthasar characterizes Soloviev as a religious thinker “of universal genius” who is capable of bringing valuable concepts from Idealist philosophy into the Christian fold, as he engages sources from the Eastern patristic tradition through to Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Leontiev.87

Importantly, Balthasar puts Soloviev directly in the genealogical line of the cosmic liturgy of Maximus Confessor (preceded, it must be noted, by Origen), who, according to Balthasar, permits simultaneously speculation and a mooring to traditional resources. For Balthasar, it is Maximus who is Soloviev’s “true starting point,” especially insofar as the Chalcedonian dogma of the hypostatic union of divine and human in Christ (Soloviev’s Bogochelovechestvo, Godmanhood, or “Divine-humanity”) provides “the foundation upon which the entire structure of natural and supernatural reality in the world is erected”88 to which the (here, salutary89) dynamism of German Idealism is

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88 Balthasar, *GL III*, 287. Also c.f. *GL II*, where Balthasar profiles Soloviev (along with Maximus, Nicholas of Cusa, and “in all essentials” Thomas Aquinas) as a theologian who considers God “the one who has found the culmination of his self-being in the other, in man, in Jesus Christ” (23).
89 Balthasar also comments upon the constructive influence of Hegel’s universalism which would contravene a kind of nationalistic Russian particularism: “Hegel’s all-embracing intellectual structure in its
added. The Maximian influence on Soloviev is certainly textually supported by Soloviev’s article on Maximus in the Russian *Brockhaus-Ephron* encyclopedia (published between 1890-1906) in which Soloviev suggests that Maximus is “the most significant philosophical spirit in the Christian East after Origen, the only significant philosopher of that era in the whole Christian world, the link between Hellenic Christian theosophy and the mediaeval philosophy of the West.”

It is likewise important that Balthasar suggests in his *Cosmic Liturgy* that Maximus anachronistically is the Christian antidote to Hegel, a point which Soloviev speaks to as well in his article. As Balthasar notes, the entirely theological starting point of Maximus, even as he engages with philosophical thought, is “luminously open” insofar as his ontological and cosmological speculations extend directly from his Christology, “in that the synthesis of Christ’s concrete person is not only God’s final thought for the world but also his original plan.”

According to Balthasar, then, Soloviev’s antidote takes effect in remedies Christological, Chalcedonian, and Maximian. Indeed, the agreement between Balthasar and the Russians is facilitated in no small part by a common acceptance of Maximus.

Our treatment is inclusive of several complex and disparate thinkers; thus, analyzing repetitions and departures within our constructed triangulation of Schelling, the Russian theologians, and Balthasar on the question of overlapping aesthetic

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93 Of course there are others, not least of which are Denys and John Damascene.
commitments is a complicated endeavor which does not pretend in the least to be comprehensive. As suggested in the introduction, each respective category of our investigation—aesthetics, speculative ontology, myth, the problem of evil and freedom, eschatology—provides an index of thinking “the dialectic between God and world, between the One and what is Other (the Many).” Following a general introduction and an apologia both for the parity and equal insufficiency of Classical and (certain kinds of) Romantic forms for Balthasar’s theological aesthetics of glory, we will proceed by a presentation and analysis of our thinkers’ respective understandings of the relation of aesthetics to the following broadly construed, purportedly dialectical pairs: (1) real and ideal/finite and infinite; (2) freedom and necessity, and (3) matter and s/Spirit, with special attention to both the function of art or aesthetics as such for negotiating between the two realms, the degree to which each (quasi- or actually theological) system of aesthetics can be said to be authentically revelatory. Throughout, we shall also address several other more narrowly aesthetic elements which variously put Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar in dialogue, including the potential ambiguity of beauty, that is, the phenomena of ugliness, evil, and the non-ideal, thinking aesthetics “theurgically” (what we are here calling “The Rilkean Clause,” from the last line of his poem The Archaic Torso of Apollo), and the strong correlation in our thinkers between aesthetics and ta eschata.

This approach, even leaving aside the sheer bulk of material which must be taken into account, is not without its share of difficulties. First, generally speaking,

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94 Balthasar, GL I, 506.

95 This discussion is complicated and not maximally philosophically precise insofar as certain of these conceptual pairs—for instance, real and ideal, transcendent and immanent, finite and infinite, God and world, ought not really be used cotermiously.
though unavoidable, it is somewhat alien to the spirit of Balthasar’s own intentions to set off ‘aesthetics’ as a discrete chapter which might suggest a determinate beginning and end of his aesthetic allegiances, as aesthetic categories and analogies both motivate and saturate Balthasar’s systematic theology throughout. Beauty is, for Balthasar, not at all ornamental, but the very “blazing forth of the primal, protological and eschatological splendour of creation…in which redeemed man is admitted to participation in God’s act of praising himself in his creation.”

Secondly, especially in an attempt to do justice to our wide cross-section of thinkers in a field that can invoke not only the study of the beautiful (in art or nature), but also notions of fittingness (which may be inflected morally) and various other modes of expression, signification, valuation, or judgment, there is an implicit vagueness of naming our category —what, indeed, do we intend to suggest by “aesthetic”?—which must be addressed outright. The modern discipline of aesthetics (Baumgarten and Kant forward) is of course much more narrowly circumscribed than the premodern, indicating quite literally that which has got to do with sense perception (αισθητική)\(^\text{97}\): this is the meaning of the term that will at least loosely govern our analysis, though with the

\(^{96}\) Balthasar, GL I, 68.

\(^{97}\) Oleg Bychkov’s working definition of aesthetics in Aesthetic Revelation: Reading Ancient and Medieval Texts after Hans Urs von Balthasar (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), as “transcendental sensibility” is helpful here, which he outlines as “something that involves the senses or analogies with the senses, but at the same time has an ‘elevating’ or ‘advancing’ function of going beyond the senses or even human cognitive powers. Aesthetic experience thus understood is (1) sensing, or making us aware of, some hidden principles of reality and therefore (2) orienting us toward higher spiritual, intellectual, or moral goals” (324). However, “not all sensory (aesthetic) experiences are revelatory and not all revelatory experiences are sensory (aesthetic)” (326). This dual sense of the scope of the field helps not only to narrow the designation “aesthetics” by restricting it to that which is revelatory (and not just surface-level sensual pleasure) but also make sense of what may seem at first blush to be inconsistencies in the ancient philosophical aesthetic tradition (for instance, that Plato, for whom beauty is so central, banishes “artists” or “poets” from the ideal polis; on this, c.f. Bychkov, 169-174, who suggests the possibility that “artists” here ought be taken as “craftsmen” only, producing art that does not contribute toward or point ‘beyond’ to τό καλόν, thus failing the second criteria for authentic aesthetic experience).
recognition that Balthasar mourned the rationalism and the divorce from metaphysics that these thinkers engender. Our narrowing of the field is justified textually insofar as in the thinkers of the Russian School and in Balthasar, the “aesthetic” indicates by and large the diptych of form and matter, and the concrete, actual expression of the former in the latter. For instance, in the foreword to his introductory volume of *Herrlichkeit*, Balthasar invokes both Thomas Aquinas and Kant, suggesting that the category of sensible perception, or “beholding and perceiving”\(^98\) governs his view of the aesthetic as marked by an immediate vision. The Balthasarian concept of *Gestalt*, which, as we shall see rhymes with the particular sort of Romanticism of Goethe, functions as a signpost of the numinous; it has an ontological, pointing function. Beauty for Balthasar is “the inexplicable active irradiation of the center of being into the expressive surface of the image, an irradiation that reflects itself in the image and confers upon it a unity, fullness, and depth surpassing what the image as such contains.”\(^99\) Indeed, the appearance of form only has currency as a beautiful thing because it is the reflection of that which *is*, an expression of reality itself, and “this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibility valuable and fascinating.”\(^100\) The form is a participation in the totality of being, in infinitude itself.

In his foreword to the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar indicates, following medieval Neoplatonism, that beauty is objectively located at the complementary junction of *species* and *lumen*, or “form” and “splendor,” and that this happy meeting is characterized by the simultaneous moments of beholding and being


enraptured, both of which are conditions of the possibility for the other.101 This form and splendor aesthetic, recurring in some sense in Goethe’s elaboration of the Urphänomen, has great precedence in medieval aesthetics rooted in Christian Neoplatonism, and particularly in Bonaventure’s notion of “expression.”102 For Balthasar, the complementary relationship between form and splendor, or interior luminosity, is evident insofar as in the perception of beauty the perceiver encounters coincidently the Gestalt/Gebilde and “that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a love-worthy thing.”103 It is precisely the fact that this luminosity is expressed organically from within the interior of the form, and not from without or from above that mediates against dualism between species and lumen.

Now Balthasar’s commitment to a direct “seeing” that reveals the transcendent invisible locates his aesthetics also within the purview of the essentially modern, having—if somewhat disinherited—a strong family resemblance to the aesthetic project of German Idealism. The genetics are complex, though, given that Balthasar locates the origins of German Idealism in Christian theology, particularly insofar as “reason cannot catch up with the deepest layer of [the human], be it act or will or drive; what is ultimate in [human being] is so absolute that it cannot be mastered by the categories of reason.”104 Though for Balthasar expressive form is theologically conditioned in a way that departs ultimately from German Idealism and Romanticism, the way these discourses actually

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101 Balthasar, GL I, Foreword.


103 Balthasar, GL I, 20.

104 Balthasar, TD II, 422.
operate in Balthasar’s thought reveals at least implicitly that they admit of degrees of theological serviceability and influence. Certainly the preference is for a Schellingian form of idealism, whose register is not primarily epistemological, that is more easily than the rationalistic Hegelian appropriated critically by theology. All the caveats hence and forth stand—yes, Schelling and Hegel are often lumped together in Balthasar as illicitly speculative thinkers who introduce process in the self-becoming of God, and whose failures are generally spectacular—but Balthasar’s fundamental priority on ontological disclosure finds resonances with Schellingian aesthetics, which, at least in the early System of Transcendental Idealism of 1800, considered art to be the revelation of divinity. As chapter one indicated, it is also the case that by and large the Russians’ preferential option is for Schelling over either Kant or Hegel, largely because the trajectory of his career prioritizes categories other than the strictly rational and epistemological.

In Balthasar’s case, theological aesthetics is supremely content-rich: it is the perception of the revealed form of Christ who is the primary object of vision, and not necessarily artistic production as such: thus, Balthasar’s system of aesthetics is in the theological sense decisively revelatory.\textsuperscript{105} The sense in which aesthetics can be reputed to be revelatory, however, possessing what Balthasar calls a “theological a\textit{ priori},”\textsuperscript{106} is not simply restricted to explicitly Christian data of revelation, but extended to Antiquity, in

\textsuperscript{105} Oleg Bychkov notes this commitment elegantly, placing Balthasar in line with Gadamer and Heidegger among others, 51-77.

\textsuperscript{106} C.f. Balthasar’s important essay “The theological a\textit{ priori} of the philosophy of beauty,” \textit{GL IV}, 317-412, in which he treats such figures as Boethius, Cassiodorus, Benedict, Gregory the Great, John Erigena, the Victorines (Hugh and Richard), the School of Chartres (Alan de Lille, Gilbert de la Porrée, Robert Grosseteste), Francis of Assisi, Alexander de Hales, Albert, Ulrich of Strasbourg, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and, finally Thomas Aquinas. Of course, Bonaventure is extremely important for Balthasar. Interestingly, Balthasar notes also that Grosseteste’s reflections on optics and light as ‘self-begetting’ prefigures the line of Schelling, Soloviev and Teilhard (\textit{GL IV}, 369). For more on Grosseteste’s notion of light as a creative potency, and for similarities on this front with Bonaventure, cf. Eco, 108-111.
which for Balthasar “all the mythical, philosophical and religious knowledge that Antiquity had of God was always itself theological” insofar as God “was always truly revealed in the cosmos, and the fundamental resolution of human existence was to be found in its transcendence in God as the ground in the transcendence in God as the ground, form and goal of human existence.”

In short, the antique world got the relation between God and world, transcendence and immanence at least formally right, and, in an (or the) instance of spolia aegyptiorum, provided the conceptual framework for Christianity’s own articulation of faith.

According to Balthasar, “the biblical revelation can and must enter into dialogue with such transcendental aesthetics; by the same token it can have no interest in a partial aesthetics that is confined within the boundaries of this world.”

However, the double threat of the Renaissance, which threatened the element of a specifically Christian glory, and the Reformation, which by a focus on the particularity of biblical glory alone threatened the munificent sense of all-cosmic beauty, effected a crisis for the organicity of the relation between beauty and glory. According to Balthasar’s narrative, this interest in reconciling or even identifying (a by now deeply self-conscious) aesthetic theory and Christian revelation reemerges in German Idealism and Romanticism and at the very least instigates a krisis, which poses the question of

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107 Ibid., 317.

108 Ibid., 318, 320. Balthasar elaborates upon three fundamental themes of the classical world which cross the threshold almost without alteration into the Christian vocabulary: (1) the pattern of egressus-regressus, of creatures from God and back to God, which appears, for instance, in Origen, Aquinas, and the Johannine literature; (2) the eros of the finite entity for the infinite, transcendent divine (recurring, for example, in Gregory of Nyssa’s epektasis, Augustine’s unquiet heart of the Confessions, in Bernard, William of St. Thierry, Richard of St. Victor, and more broadly in Dante, Petrarch, Ficino, and Michelangelo; (3) the phenomenon of the beauty of the spiritual soul which culminates in an eschatological wedding (a concept originating in Plato and Plotinus, and continuing in the Song of Songs, for example) (GL IV, 321-324).

whether the aesthetic element, which in Idealism and Romanticism appears as wholly secularized, could not be purified and salvaged by a consideration of its historical origins, or: whether now the only alternative left is to abandon the aesthetic totally, a way which we have investigated in the previous sections on the elimination of aesthetics from theology. That a theology deprived of aesthetics is far from satisfactory should have become obvious by now.\

Needless to say, Balthasar does not abandon aesthetics. The theological a priori (though much less determinate) is for Balthasar actually common both to Antiquity (steeped in the epiphanous) and to the “speculative aesthetics from Kant, through Schiller, Goethe, and Hölderlin to Schelling, to Romanticism and to Hegel and the variety of post-Hegelian hangers-on.” It will, however, prove necessary throughout to acknowledge the important distinction between revelatory (of an unspecified transcendent) and, say, “Revelatory” (of, for instance, Christ or the Trinity) and to ask with Balthasar whether or not with respect to “speculative aesthetics”:

…such philosophical aesthetics [can] be justified in the face of the theological a priori of Antiquity, to which it still for the most part appeals (in part against Christianity)? Further: can this aesthetics recover the fundamental presupposition, common to Antiquity and Christianity, that reality as such, being itself, is καλόν, radiant goodness, glory endlessly to be affirmed? And if it no longer has the power, what can such an aesthetics have to say? If the transcendental καλόν is to be removed from being, why then is being any better than non-being? If we have come to a period which no longer has any answer to this question, then the beauty that we meet with within the world will sooner or later be stripped of its radiance and worth; and even where it is still perceived it will simply be classified pleasant, as a mere quality of nature, to which one has no sooner succumbed, than in that very moment on has seen through it. Aesthetics then becomes an epiphenomenon of psychology and relinquishes any claim to being a philosophical discipline.\

110 Balthasar, GL, I, 79-80, italics added.

111 Ibid.

112 Balthasar, GL IV, 323-4. Interestingly, Oleg Bychkov’s recent analysis of antique and medieval aesthetic texts in dialogue with von Balthasar indicates that “there is no gap…but an essential continuity between ancient and modern revelatory or ‘transcendental’ aesthetics…Revelatory aesthetics can therefore be considered a fundamental feature of Western European thought” (323).
Balthasar’s *Herrlichkeit* is, then, a complex tale of mourning for metaphysical aesthetics in which widespread indictments are made, a lament that elegizes beauty and, more importantly for Balthasar, its theological analogue of glory, as steadily declining entities, and calls for the rehabilitation of theology to beauty, an intervention purposed to restore theology to the “main artery which it has abandoned.” For Balthasar, the classical and early medieval experience of understanding the world as potentially expressive of the divine, and, with that, an interpretation of salvation history within a larger, cosmic context permitted the antique conception of beauty to function as the language in which the revelation of God could be expressed. According to Balthasar, Aquinas, as one instance of the larger medieval aesthetic of form and splendor, was the last to achieve that fragile balance in which the relation between infinite and finite, God and world, is properly construed and the transcendentals of the true, the good, and the beautiful are maintained in proper relation to being. This situation, however, rapidly destabilized first with Scotus’ ontotheological articulation of Being as univocal and thus open to purely rationalistic constructions or interpretations that would exclude transcendental beauty (extending from Ockham through Suarez, to 20th century rationalism and scientism), and then again (differently, but no less devastatingly) with

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113 Balthasar’s *GL. V* attends to the specifically classical experience of glory, whereas treatment of Biblical doxa is reserved for volumes *VI-VII*.


115 Balthasar, *GL. V*, 12. Also c.f. *GL. IV*, where Balthasar lauds Aquinas for establishing God over being (and thus contravening pantheism), “secur[ing] at the same time for the concept of glory a place in metaphysics” (375). For Thomas, the primary aesthetic conception is one of proportionality between comparative relations: “…all order in the cosmos…is at once immanent and transcendent…” (*GL. IV*, 409).


Eckhart’s identification of Being with God (inverting Aquinas’ formula), which not only forecloses the possibility of any “remaining space in which and through which [the Absolute] can become manifest,” 118 but also, especially when a posture of religious devotion is exchanged for one of illicit speculation, enjoins the declining of glory. 119

The disconnection of the transcendentals from being opens the way for an understanding of aesthetics as being nothing more than pure sensory epiphenomenalism, and the tensions in the dialectical process collapse into identity, as in Mark C. Taylor’s *Hiding*:

In the end, it all comes down to a question of skin. And bones. The question of skin and bones is the question of hiding and seeking. And the question of hiding and seeking is the question of detection. Is detection any longer possible? Who is the detective? What is detected? Is there anything left to hide? Is there any longer a place to hide? Can anyone continue to hide? Does skin hide anything or is everything nothing but skin? “Skin rubbing at skin, skin, skin, skin, skin…” 120

The rupture of the transcendentals from being initiates the immane

tization and consequent ghettoization of modern aesthetics to a separate, rationalistic discipline, “a science confined to a particular area of knowledge” 121 rather than being expressive of the whole, which becomes aestheticism. This bereavement of a metaphysics, which had once maintained a dynamic and organic unity between the immanent sciences and the transcendence of Christian revelation, leads to an unbalanced state of affairs in which the

118 Ibid., 12-3. As we noted in the introduction, for Balthasar, in this respect Eckhart—despite his best intentions and own deeply religious commitments—functions as the gatekeeper for Idealism, whose legacy includes “Luther, but also Nicholas of Cusa, Spinoza, Böhme, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel” (GL V, 30; C.f. 45.). For a lengthier treatment of Eckhart, see the section “Being as God,” GL V, 29-47.

119 Ibid., 46.

120 Mark C. Taylor, *Hiding* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 11. For Balthasar’s profile of the aesthete who dispenses with the depth of meaning for the play of images alone, see TL I, 143-145.

121 Balthasar, GL IV, 19; C.f. GL I, 22.
sciences gain an exclusive superiority and absolutely replace the metaphysical.\textsuperscript{122}

Balthasar, the Russians, and the Romantics share in common this distaste for a formal, scientific “exact aesthetics,” unable to account for what exceeds that which is observable empirically, and which is thus an incomplete picture, seeing “only a fragment and an aspect of the total object for which worldly beauty is only a ‘part’, and can thus necessarily offer only ‘fragments’ and ‘aspects’ that cannot become a whole.”\textsuperscript{123}

Following after Baumgarten’s \textit{Aestethica} (1750-58), Balthasar flags Kantian aesthetics as guilty of restricting aesthetics to the finite and immanent, disconnecting it from its proper ontological depth, a philosophy according to which

reason, taken in its purity, \textit{bovers indeterminately} in its finitude (as interrelationship of finite perception and finite concept) and loses every anchorage in in-finite \textit{esse}. Therefore beauty, whose essence is the pure interrelationship of the powers of the subject (an interrelationship which prescinds from the true and the good), possesses exactly the same indefinite character of the finite in itself which, when the rigour of the ethical imperative wanes and is no longer seen, can at some point lead to the pure play of finite existence in nothingness with itself, a play which is not only disinterested and without purpose (\textit{l’art pour l’art}) but also ultimately lacking in meaning.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} See, for instance, Balthasar, “Revelation and the Beautiful,” 96; \textit{GL I}, 18; \textit{GL IV}, 35; \textit{GL V}, 598-9, 609. The question of how Balthasar diagnoses when and how aesthetics became a ghettoized, autonomous discipline (and hence unsuitable for theology) is not unimportant. Balthasar asserts that this view is fully formed in Schopenhauer (and later in Nietzsche, of course) “after early moves in this direction by Schiller, Schelling, Goethe, and by early German and classical English Romanticism” (\textit{GL I} 50). Insofar as Schleiermacher, Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer, and others of their sort uncoupled beauty from the true and the good is the extent to which the “perilous” door is opened for “the beginning of an ‘estheticization’ of the beautiful” (“Revelation and the Beautiful,” 95-6). Oleg Bychkov, however, asserts that for Kant, Schelling, and others, that aesthetics was always considered in the service of something else, even if for only practicality, logistics, or reasons of convenience. For Bychkov, even Kant does not actually advocate the notion of aesthetics as purely autonomous and ‘disinterested,’ though he uses that language, which Bychkov suggests ought to be interpreted as “in the sense of having no immediate practical interest” since Kant himself “assigns to it an important role of ‘linking up’ all areas of human experience by providing a ‘transcendental’ insight into the nature of reality” (324; Also c.f. 163-4, n.80).

\textsuperscript{123} Balthasar, \textit{GL V}, 598.

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid.}, 507. C.f. also \textit{TD II}, 29-30.
There is a native ambiguity of beauty when it is disconnected from the true and the good, when it is not weighed symbolically to the finite, the material; beauty which is either only natural or else disincarnate can be an awful, devilish thing. Balthasar knows this (“…no *transcendentale* is more demonic than the *καλόν*”) as did Soloviev, Bulgakov, and Dostoevsky. In *The Idiot*, for instance, Dostoevsky has Prince Myshkin in the awkward position of deciding between two beautiful women, to which he replies, “It is difficult to pass judgment on beauty. I’m afraid I am not ready yet. Beauty is a riddle.” Balthasar glosses this passage by suggesting that “beauty is in no way a straightforward transparency for the divine: it can just as easily be a mask and sacrament of the devil,” a gloss which echoes Dmitri Karamazov’s judgment on the terrible, mysterious nature of beauty, the very site upon which God fights with the devil in which the human heart is the battlefield.

Preserving the transcendentals in a balanced relationship with Being is particularly highly valued by Vladimir Soloviev as well, who likewise rehabilitates the common Christian Neoplatonic inheritance of both East and West, an aesthetic commitment to the ontology of symbol—even an entire symbolic economy—while taking into account German Idealist philosophy. Soloviev, like Balthasar, rejects “l’art pour l’art,” or the “pure art” movement as a “playful game” devoid of objective

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125 Balthasar, *GL IV*, 38.

126 C.f. Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 204-5, for the possibility of even the beauty of nature itself becoming through the corrupt exercise of human freedom in Bulgakov, a “coefficient” of evil, see *The Comforter*, 203.


128 Vladimir Wozniuk, Introduction, *The Heart of Reality*, xiii, who also refers to the formative influence of Aquinas on Soloviev on xi, xiv, and xv.

significance, which radicalizes the claim of aesthetics as autonomous, breeding a destructive, insular “aesthetic separatism” in which the following conclusion is reached: “Let the artist be only an artist, think only about excellence aesthetically, about the beauty of form, and let nothing consequential exist for him in the world besides this form.” Further, Soloviev lauds Dostoevsky’s artistic and religious conviction that the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty must be preserved as “three inseparable forms of one absolute Idea,” a commitment that funds Dostoevsky’s famous line that it is beauty that will save the world. The self-evaluation of the work of many Russian artists from icon writer Andrei Rublev to Wassily Kandinsky as possessing a religious sensibility, or dukhovnost, “meaning that this art was ‘lofty,’ ‘elevated,’ having to do with higher rungs of reality,” is pertinent here not only in resistance to “art for art’s sake” as unspiritual or bezdukhovnoe, but also insofar as this quality provides in its transcendentality a living link between art and religion.

Classical or Romantic Aesthetics? A “Mock-Battle”

In his judgment that both the classical aesthetics of Antiquity and that of the 18th-19th centuries is both concerned with beauty and which is in some degree revelatory

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130 Soloviev, “A First Step towards a Positive Aesthetic,” 137.

131 Soloviev, “Three Addresses in Memory of Dostoevsky,” 16. For the coincidence of the transcendentals in Soloviev, also see “Beauty in Nature,” 39–40, and “The Universal Meaning of Art,” where he writes straightforwardly that “beauty is only an embodiment in sensory forms of the same ideal content that, up until the time of such an embodiment, is called truth and the good…” (68).

132 Bychkov, 328.


134 Balthasar, GL V, 249.
of the divine (but, as we shall see, both deficient vis-à-vis authentically Christian revelation), Balthasar appeals twingly to forms of the antique world and those of the nineteenth century, the latter of which, in an image borrowed from Goethe, has retained “the fleeing garments of beauty, which are the contours of the ancient world as it dissolves,” in order to revitalize a robust conception of beauty and restore it to its rightful, original place at the creative center of theological reflection. It is certainly true—as Kevin Mongrain suggests—that Balthasar prioritizes classical aesthetics as the more natural companion to theology, since, in insofar as it is cosmocentric and other-centered (that is, on the gods) rather than anthropocentric and self-centered (that is, on the human being as god, or as god-maker), it is more amenable to Christian thinking.

Certainly, the failures of Romanticism in general and Schelling in particular are well documented in Balthasar’s relentless analysis of the disastrous waning of the category of glory in the twentieth century. In the context of analyzing Herder’s works, Balthasar speaks of “the great amphiboly between pantheism and Christianity that pervades the whole age, from Fichte and Schelling to Hegel: the fluid identification of the natural and the supernatural which both ‘humanized’ Christianity and failed to hear its true message.” Further, in his critique of Catholic Romantic Alois Gügler’s Die heilige Kunst, Balthasar identifies two hazards—monistic identity thinking and the mistaken equation of nature and spirit with nature and grace—that are both Gügler’s own and which belong pervasively to his age (1782-1827), and especially to Fichte and

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135 Balthasar, GL I, 18.
136 Mongrain, 61-2, 90.
137 Balthasar, GL I, 90.
Further, though Gügler’s theological reflections on art ought be counted among “the most significant achievements of Catholic Romanticism,” he failed to communicate adequately the analogous nature of his reflections. This muddying of the distinction between creation and revelation constitutes for Balthasar “a deep theological inadequacy” and the fundamental failure of Romantic theology, however well meaning.

The assertion that classical aesthetics is Balthasar’s “primary dialogue partner,” however, is not fully adequate. Indeed, German Idealist and Romantic aesthetics—in part undiluted and in part filtered through the Russians—is quite operative in Balthasar’s own formulation and performance of his theological aesthetics, though never does Balthasar capitulate to the titanism of the Romantics. First, both Classical forms and Romantic forms fail. Secondly, Balthasar elaborates a more receptive version of Romanticism illustrated especially by the figure of Goethe, who is capable of mediating between antiquity and modernity, and—partially, but not totally—contravening the Promethean hubris of someone like a Schelling.

First, a strong dichotomy between Classicism and Romanticism that suggests a privileging of one at the expense of the other is a false dichotomy, as they are far from competing sources. Nicolas Berdyaev likewise considers the distinction between Classicism and Romanticism to be “a wrongly-stated and, indeed, an imaginary

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138 Ibid., 102-3.
139 Ibid., 103.
140 Ibid., 104. It was Matthias Scheebeen, particularly in his distinction between nature and supernature, who for Balthasar serves as the turning point from aesthetic theology to theological aesthetics (though he does not escape critique). C.f. GL. I, 105-110.
141 Mongrain, 62.
problem.” Balthasar’s simultaneous commitment to (and simultaneous ambivalence toward) Classical forms and Romantic forms indicates that strong claims regarding valuations of their respective divergences are misguided. Balthasar simply does not decide between them. He writes:

In different periods of intellectual history...one or the other...aspects may be emphasized: on the one hand, classical perfection (Vollendung: the form which contains the depths), on the other, Romantic boundlessness, infinity (Unendlichkeit: the form that transcends itself by pointing beyond to the depths). Be this as it may, however, both aspects are inseparable from one another, and together they constitute the fundamental configuration of Being.

As is evident from the above passage, Balthasar explicitly connects the inseparability of these features of Classicism and Romanticism to the (similarly non-competitive) fundamental concepts of “form” and “splendour,” a dual commitment of Balthasar’s that ensures both approaches and forms are kept in play.


143 C.f. T. E. Hulme, “Romanticism and Classicism,” *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Herbert Read (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1924), 111-140, for a classic take on the differences between Classicism and Romanticism, in which Classicism is “absolutely identical with the normal religious attitude” (117), while Romanticism is likened to an upturned container of (overly emotive and very sticky) treacle: in his words, “spilt religion” (118). According to Hulme, Romanticism is concerned with the infinite and the human capacity for infinitude, but the classical poet “never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth” (120). For a nice treatment of Hegel’s distinctions between symbolic, classical, and romantic art forms (Hegel who finds Romantic art superior to Classical), c.f. Terry Pinkard, “Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic Art,” *Hegel and the Arts*, 3-28. Schelling, though he does distinguish between Classical and Romantic, ultimately “dissolve[s] the distinction into a single continuum, the growth toward the revelation of the absolute...The ancient and the modern, Classical and Romantic art, participate in the same dialectic toward a synthesis as do the ideal and real, and universal and particular. Absolute beauty must be found in a synthesis of the two, one which has yet to be achieved” (Hendrix, 52).

144 Balthasar, *GL I*, 118-9; italics added.
For instance, Balthasar’s serious reservations regarding the Promethean humanism of Romanticism do not preclude him from emphasizing the particular triumphs of Goethe (among others, Hölderlin included), whose singular version of Romantic aesthetics, itself uncomfortable with the excesses of idealism, informed Balthasar’s own project.\(^{145}\) According to Balthasar, Goethe offers a “double front” against Kant and Schiller on the one hand, and Schelling on the other, tempering (though not totally absolving) the titanism that generally characterizes Romanticism, by limiting the power of human being with respect to nature.\(^{146}\) Particularly his elaboration of the *Urphänomen*, or the luminous, originary, primordial phenomenon of being evident in finite forms, is amenable to Balthasar’s recuperation of the medieval form-splendor aesthetic. Balthasar’s affirmation of Goethe provides another instance of the easy freedom he employs vis-à-vis cultural sources. He will not, of course, affirm Goethe’s ultimately humanist allegiances against Christianity, but there is much in Goethe’s ontology that recommends itself, including a high valuation of concrete phenomena, the sense that finite beings exist ec-statically, openness to mystery and being, and Balthasar is not embarrassed to say so.

All this notwithstanding, Balthasar finds both Classicism and Romanticism fundamentally wanting with respect to his own theological project in which the moment of the beautiful ought function first and foremost as *der Verweis* to the Christ event: “It

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goes without saying that there can be no simple recipe for getting this right. Neither
distortion nor elegance, neither Romanticism nor Classicism…can claim a fundamental
pre-eminence."\(^{147}\) Again,

…the ‘battle between the ancients and the moderns’ is a mock-battle, which
obscures the real intellectual and historical points of engagement. The decision
falls uniquely—and the history of the modern period has no clearer result—for
or against the Glory of Being, and history has fashioned the Either-Or so simply
that it has become a decision between Christianity and nihilism. The ‘gods’, the
‘divine’ hold sway still only where God’s personal love in the Son of God is
recognized and acknowledged, and the storming-ahead of metaphysical
speculation is bridled only where thought—in the same epiphany—confronts the
not-to-be-mastered majestic freedom of the God of love.\(^{148}\)

Classicism gives undue pride of place to the cosmos; Romanticism to the human being.

Thus, neither Classicism nor Romanticism is more or less adequate to the theological
task.

Our thesis of compatibility and resonance between Balthasar and the Russians is
strengthened at least obliquely by the fact that Balthasar’s tertium quid—and the
culmination of his theological aesthetics—offered beyond Classicism and Romanticism,
those two “great attempts in the modern age to reduce glory to beauty,”\(^{149}\) is the
phenomenon, which arguably reached its apogee in Russian literature and religious
culture, of the holy fool, found according to Balthasar in its most perfect elaboration in
Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* (1868). Neither Classicism nor Romanticism has the

\(^{147}\) Balthasar, *GL I*, 65. The revisiting of classicism could have only been a successful
rehabilitation, according to von Balthasar, “if antiquity had been understood as an Advent-like openness
looking to Christianity, not as a comprehensive (‘cosmic-religious’) form in which Christianity was
embedded as a potentiality” (*GL V*, 451). See also *GL I*, 514.

\(^{148}\) Balthasar, *GL V*, 249. Similarly, Balthasar notes that “classicism provided the images, while
idealistic Romanticism—the real creator of modern aesthetics—constructed the theory. However, once
Marx and Tchernischevsky (1855) have left behind Hegel’s philosophy and aesthetics, once God and the
spiritual have been banished from the universe and its laws, the only choice left is between materialistic
and atheistic aesthetics” (*GL V*, 189).

\(^{149}\) *Ibid.*, 189.
natural advantage, but it is pre-eminently the Russian Dostoevsky who gestures toward and even achieves literarily a (partial) corrective, though even the “thrown-ness of the fool” is not enough to “claim to conquer as a whole the world and existence therein.”

In the post-sacred world, Balthasar suggests that the metaphysics of the saints in their often radical self-abandonment to God (Gelassenheit) cannot be communicated adequately (in art or literature) as the “canonical image” of human being because “the heart of sanctity, abandonment in transcendence to the open will of God, cannot be put into epic or dramatic form.” It is rather, those foolish, preposterous tropes of buffoonery in literature like Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival, Erasmus’ The Praise of Folly, Cervantes’ Don Quixote, Grimmelshausen’s Simplicissimus, and, climatically and vitally in Dostoevsky’s Prince Myshkin of The Idiot that capture more adequately the Christian experience, and point definitively to “the night of God’s Wisdom broken in folly on the cross.”

150 Ibid., 205.
151 Ibid., 141.
152 Ibid., 152-164.
153 Ibid., 164-168.
154 Ibid., 169-180.
155 Ibid., 180-188.
156 Ibid., 188-201.
157 Ibid., 81. Also c.f. GL V: “…there is a gleam of unconscious, unintended sanctity about the real fool. He is the unprotected man, essentially transcendent, open to what is above him. In the post-Christian era ‘classical man’ in his beauty is always somewhat melancholy. The real fool never is. Since he is never quite ‘in his right mind’, never quite ‘all there’, he lacks the ponderousness that would tie him down to earth. He stands nearest to the saint, often nearer than the morally successful man preoccupied with his perfection. The Russians knew that the fool belongs to God, has his own guardian angel, and is worthy of veneration” (143).
Cruciform love, as the form of Trinitarian existence, is, of course, absolutely central to Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, a feature which departs decisively especially from the aesthetic theology of Idealism and Romanticism. Georges de Schrijver’s following comments are apropos. With respect to the aesthetics of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Nietzsche, Balthasar assesses their understanding of beauty as both too tragic, and also too artificial, to be the revelation of the moving beauty of the God who is Love who, under the deformed traits of his Suffering Servant, comes to share human misery. Neither the high and mighty status of Prometheus the ravisher nor the tragic personality of Dionysius broken by his rapture, bears comparison with the divine-human figure in whom the unnamed God speaks his name, by way of the radiance of his grace and glory of his kenosis.¹⁵⁸

Balthasar’s theological aesthetics has been criticized for “an unacceptable exalted character since it pays no attention to ugliness,”¹⁵⁹ but this judgment is simply not accurate. How else could it be, for an aesthetic with the dark kernel of the cross of Christ at its center, which becomes for Balthasar, not the exception but the very model for aesthetics? The Christian aesthetic of glory is certainly not identical to cultural beauty, but is counterintuitive, capable of embracing “the most abysmal ugliness of sin and hell by virtue of the condescension of divine love, which has brought even sin and hell into that divine art for which there is no human analogue.”¹⁶⁰ The nocturnal elements of suffering and cross are transfigured to become “precisely the critical touchstones of love and glory…”¹⁶¹ To ignore the tragic and nocturnal elements of life is to operate


¹⁶⁰ Balthasar, GL I, 124.

¹⁶¹ Balthasar, GL V, 648.
according to principle of “aestheticism” which attempts to systematize and explain away that which is patently unsystematic and explainable. According to Balthasar, it is the trope of the holy fool, particularly Dostoevsky’s Prince Myshkin, which best anticipates but is far superseded by Jesus, the “gentle divine Idiot on the cross [who] silently contains everything in himself and imprints on everything His form, the form of the divine mercy, for which it is a matter of sublime indifference whether its glory is manifested invisibly in earthly beauty or in ugliness.”

Even though it is the case that for Balthasar neither Classicism nor Romanticism has the advantage, it serves our purposes here to prioritize Romantic, particularly Schellingian aesthetics because Schelling serves as the point of contact which both unifies and distinguishes Balthasar from the Russians we are considering. Indeed, as we suggested in the introduction, the repetitions of the philosophy of Schelling in Berdayev, Soloviev, and Bulgakov are understood by Balthasar to be as successive loci of Schelling’s purification, illustrating at the same time Balthasar’s abiding willingness to give play to modes of thought which have deep roots in the non-theological. Again, our emphasis on Schelling, however, is not to suggest that Balthasar is actually—despite his own explicit protestations to the contrary—participating in the same kind of project as secular philosophical aesthetics, or that he is only ‘adding on’ the Christological proviso to strengthen a wobbly philosophical foundation. It must be made perfectly clear at the outset that Balthasar’s theological aesthetics begins and ends with “the transfigured, blood-stained features of Jesus Christ where the glory of God streams forth as the


163 Balthasar, GL V, 204.
beauty of the love that will save the world." Thus, it is precisely glory—the properly theological analogue of beauty—that is for Balthasar the premier concern. Though Balthasar certain avails himself of more subsidiary forms (the beauty of nature, human culture, human institutions [marriage, primarily], the saints $^{165}$), he is concerned most particularly with Jesus Christ as the Ur-form.

Moreover, Balthasar is hardly demure when it comes to distancing his project of a decidedly theological aesthetics from that of secular philosophical aesthetics. For Balthasar, it is a dangerous and ill-advised game to qualify or quantify revelation in terms of pre-existing philosophical categories: theological aesthetics is governed by God’s sovereign freedom, not philosophical abstraction; it never “descend[s] to the level of an inner-worldly aesthetics.”$^{166}$ For Balthasar, theological aesthetics, in nuce, is a theology which does not avail itself of “extra-theological categories of a worldly philosophical aesthetics (above all poetry), but which develops its theory of beauty from the data of revelation itself with genuinely theological methods.”$^{167}$

$^{164}$ Nichols, The Word Has Been Abroad, vii.


$^{166}$ Balthasar, GL I, 417. Also c.f. GL I, 37: “…it appears impossible to deny that there exists an analogy between God’s work of formation and the shaping forces of nature and of man as they generate and give birth. We can post as many question marks and warning signs as we will all along the length and breadth of this analogy, but they will only apply to the ever-present possibility of misusing the analogy, and not to its rightful use. Misuse of the analogy consists in simply subjugating and subordinating God’s revelation with its own form, to the laws not only of metaphysics and of private, social, and sociological ethics but also of this-worldly aesthetics, instead of respecting the sovereignty which is manifested clearly enough in God’s work” (GL I, 37; italics added).

$^{167}$ Balthasar, GL I, 117.
Brief Overview of Schelling’s Aesthetics

With an acknowledgement of the fact that Schelling’s specific aesthetic commitments are parsed somewhat differently through his career, and that the status of art in his philosophy was knocked eventually (post 1807) from its high perch of the System of Transcendental Idealism (1800) (though art does enjoy unique privilege throughout his career) we shall proceed perhaps incautiously to characterize the general contours of a Schellingian aesthetic, providing an impressionistic sketch (somewhat in the manner of Balthasar himself) without concerning ourselves overmuch with successive shades of development. The works in Schelling’s oeuvre most material to his mainly theoretical philosophical aesthetics are perhaps the early System of Transcendental Idealism (1800), especially the concluding section, “Deduction of a Universal Organ of Philosophy, or: Essentials of the Philosophy of Art according to the Principles of Transcendental Idealism,” the dialogue Bruno (1802), and The Philosophy of Art (1859), a text based upon lectures given at the University of Jena in 1802-1803. As noted, there are internal developments in his aesthetic system involving (for instance) the mechanics of artistic production, but they cannot be catalogued in full here. In nuce, following after Kant,


170 For a more detailed analysis of each of Schelling’s aesthetic works in sequence, c.f. John Shannon Hendrix, Aesthetics & the Philosophy of Spirit: From Plato to Schelling and Hegel (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 36-121. Also see Stephen van Erp, The Art of Theology, 201-15.

171 According to Balthasar, “…what Kant takes in with his philosophical mother’s milk, he passes on to the generation of Schiller and Fichte, Hegel and Schelling, whose views of the world culminate
Schelling’s aesthetics is something of a dialectical project, emerging from the negotiation between finite and infinite, subject and object, human consciousness and unconsciousness, the real and the ideal, the visible and the invisible, as he attempts to locate in the *System* a principle that can fund his transcendental philosophy, address the Kantian distinction between nature and spirit, and make sense of the whole of cognitive processes. Of course, unlike Kant, who assumes an inaccessible transcendent realm in addition to the phenomenal, Schelling’s talk of “two realms” as a philosophical monist is essentially artifice. Any separation between real and ideal does not comprise an actual problem which would require transcendental mediation, but, as Oleg Bychkov notes, this fact can be bracketed for the sake of argument: it is enough that phenomenologically, the aesthetic experience of human beings is felt to be revelatory of a “deeper” reality. This dialectical characterization sets the stage and provides the framework for a way of managing our analysis of the aesthetics of Balthasar, Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov.

We shall thus examine the aesthetic theories of our thinkers according to commonalities and departures with respect to the following binary terms: (1) real and ideal/finite and infinite; (2) freedom and necessity; and (3) matter and s/Spirit, and consider how

always in a form of aestheticism in one way or another, in a radiant, eschatological ‘world of spirits’ (*GL. V.*, 482). Although Kant’s successors (with Schelling as first among equals) do not add anything terribly substantial to Kantian aesthetics, there are some modifications, particularly that Schelling carries on neither the polarity between beautiful and sublime nor the strong link between aesthetics and ethics (Bychkov, *Aesthetic Revelation*, 27n.31.) Both Kant and Schelling, while certainly departing from Baumgarten’s notion of aesthetics as a specifically rational faculty) nevertheless consider it to be a “quasi-cognitive domain” (Michael G. Vater, “Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von (1775-1854),” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 220-224.) Kant, of course, particularly in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), is less interested in the work of art as such than in an appeal to the aesthetic faculty to ensure the unity of pure reason and practical reason and facilitate mediation between sense and cognition (K. Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.)

172 Bychkov, 29. Bychkov indicates here that for Balthasar, Schelling “can support a theological aesthetics no better than the systems of other ‘monists’ such Hegel” (29 n.36). While ultimately Schelling’s thought ultimately is determined to be insufficient for a theological aesthetics, we submit again that that Schelling, especially when his philosophy of mythology and revelation is read retroactively into his early aesthetics, is far more amenable to Balthasar than is Hegel, though he never crosses the threshold into authentic Christianity.
Balthasar specifies such binaries for a theological mode either Christologically, pneumatologically, ecclesiologically, or Trinitarian-ly.

A fundamental Balthasarian *desideratum* for the success of a theological aesthetics of glory is a commitment to the *analogia entis* (Erich Przywara, of course, being a great influence here), in language that both reflects his Ignatian principle of *Deus semper maior* and borrows from the fourth Lateran council of 1215, “the ever great dissimilarity to God no matter how great the similarity to Him.”

A proper understanding of the *analogia entis*—and translated to our analysis, the following “dialectical” pairs—requires as a general hermeneutical principle a simultaneous obligation both to sameness and to difference, and to a sense of dynamic proportion between the similar and the dissimilar in order to preserve with integrity the infinite and finite, God and world, immanence and transcendence, and so on. Identity thinking characteristic of German Idealism (for instance, Fichte’s *Ich*, Schelling’s *Identitätsphilosophie*, or Hegel’s *Geist*) proceeds from the *identitas entis* rather than the *analogia entis*. It appropriates all things—God, the human subject, creation—to a formula of the absolute, divine “I,” and *Herrlichkeit* denigrates to *Selbstherrlichkeit*.

There is no longer space for the manifestation of divine glory and

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174 Or, in John Betz’s analysis, the preservation of both the beautiful and the sublime, in a non-competitive relation: “For it is analogy alone, I would argue, in the fullest sense of the word, that guarantees not only the determinate actuality of the creature (the beautiful), but a real infinite and a real transcendence (the sublime). Indeed, it turns out that analogy, rather than compromising difference, actually makes it possible; and that the sublime, rather than overturning the analogy of being, in fact demands it” (376).

175 Balthasar, *GL V*, 453. C.f. also *GL I* for Balthasar’s explanation of the means by which aesthetics can be divorced from theology “by means of a ‘dialectical system’ which would conceive of God as exteriorizing himself in nothingness and in that which is his opposite, a God who, therefore, contains
thus for an authentic maximally Christian aesthetics: only the possibility of an ever-immanent philosophy of beauty, “aesthetics as science” remains.\textsuperscript{176} Out of the gates, in our construction of a direct tête-à-tête between Balthasar and the Russians on these issues, we find the former very much at odds with Nicholas Berdyaev on this point. In keeping with his existentialist commitments and the strong Kantian distinction that he maintains between phenomenal and noumenal, Berdyaev lauds German ego philosophy as an essentially \textit{Christian} phenomenon, harshly critiquing systems which suggest a “dependence of man upon the object and upon the world.”\textsuperscript{177}

\textit{Real and Ideal/Finite and Infinite}

As we have said, both Kantian and Schellingian aesthetics have a more theoretical, epistemological inflection than an interest in critically analyzing particular works of art, and both are intent on seeking (what turn out to be aesthetic) solutions that negotiate between the “two realms” of real and ideal. Though Schelling’s primary interests evolved from his early critiques of the ego philosophy of Fichte, through philosophies of nature, identity, art, freedom, and finally mythology and revelation, it is absolutely the case that the unifying theme which resounds throughout is the relationship between real and ideal, between the finite and the infinite.\textsuperscript{178} The problem

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid.}, 549. Also c.f. “Aesthetics as Science,” \textit{GL V}, 597-610. For Balthasar, the philosophical premise for aesthetics to be understood strictly as a science is nilism, where the beauty of the world is in the manner of Nietzsche’s radicalized aesthetics, a violent, totalizing despotism which is for him the \textit{only} grounds for philosophizing—a deception for blind will-to-power. Schopenhauer, Wagner, Eduard von Hartmann, Thomas Mann, Scheler, early Heidegger, and Sartre are implicated as well (\textit{GL V}, 598). Also c.f. \textit{GL V}, 415.

\textsuperscript{177} Berdyaev, \textit{The Beginning and the End}, 12.

\textsuperscript{178} F. C. Copleston, SJ., \textit{A History of Philosophy, VII. Fichte to Nietzsche} (London 1968), 99. It is precisely in this consistent theme of the negotiation (however unsuccessful) the \textit{aporia} between real and
that Schelling calls aesthetics in to solve (echoing Schiller’s Lectures on the Aesthetic Education of Humanity) is mediation between theoretical philosophy (the rule of knowledge/objectivity/nature) and practical philosophy (the rule of human choice/subjectivity/freedom). Schelling’s early appeal to “intellectual intuition” is quite important in this context, understood in general terms as “the capacity to see the universal in the particular, the infinite and the finite, and indeed to unite both in a living unity.” This “seeing” is, of course, not a mechanical conceptualization, but rather is an immediate (though non-mystical) insight into the whole of things, into the fundamental unity of the universal and the particular, an insight which firmly resists conceptual explanation.

In his System of Transcendental Idealism, Schelling suggests that there are two convictions regarding human knowing which lead to contradiction: first, there is a world ‘out there’ that is independent of human beings but nonetheless allows “that our ideal, finite and infinite that Balthasar judges the mechanics of Schelling’s philosophy as a whole to be aesthetic: “Thus within absolute identity distinction is nevertheless postulated and, being transcended (aufgehoben) in its very postulation, if ‘transfigured’: the Infinite appears in the ‘form’, while the latter is interpreted and understood with reference to the Infinite. But that is the form of the beautiful. More so than any other modern philosophy, the philosophy of Schelling, as a philosophy of the balance between the Infinite and the finite, is an aesthetic one” (GL V 565; italics added).

179 Of course, Schelling is not the first or the only philosopher to invoke “intellectual intuition” (against Kant) for undergirding metaphysical systems and capacitating philosophy as a discipline. Fichte, Hegel, Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schlegel also appeal to this faculty: although they may preserve the terminology of intelletuelle Anschauung, it is understood quite differently. For a reliable account of intellectual intuition in Fichte, who developed the concept first in his Eigene Meditatione uber Elementarphilosophie, c.f Frederick C. Beiser, German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 294-301; in Hölderlin, c.f. 392-7; in Novalis, c.f. 413; in Schelling, 580-4; in Schlegel, c.f. 451-2, 457. C.f. Schelling, System of Transcendental Idealism, 72-82. Schelling eventually abandoned the language of “intellectual intuition,” but retained the sense that intuition is a more sophisticated mode of thought than discursive reason. It is especially significant to note Soloviev’s appeal to intelletuelle Anschauung as “the primordial form of true knowledge, a form that is clearly distinguished from sense perception and experience, as well as from rational, or abstract thinking” (Vladimir Soloviev, “Lecture Five,” Lectures on Divine Humanity, trans. Peter Zouboff, ed. Boris Jakim [Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995], 60. It is no less significant that he appeals in this context to the process of artistic creation, and to the superiority of artistic forms which “necessarily requires an inner union of perfect individuality with complete generality or universality” (62).

180 Schelling (and officially Hegel), Fernere Darstellungen, Werke, IV, 362, quoted in Beiser, 580.
presentations are so far coincident with it that there is *nothing* else in things save what we attribute to them;” in short, that there is a reliable coincidence between appearance and reality, which suggests an unalterability or (over-) determination of things in reality and as they are perceived and known by human beings. According to Schelling, the second conviction appears to contravene the first particularly with respect to this question of determination: namely, that “presentations, arising freely and without necessity in us, pass over from the world of thought into the real world, and can attain objective reality.”

To put it another way, the first conviction indicates “a dominance of thought (the ideal) over the world of sense; but how is this conceivable [when according to the first conviction] the presentation is in origin already the mere slave of the objective?”

This is the central problematic and the “highest task” of Schelling’s transcendental philosophy. He argues that the only way that commerce between the objective world and the subjective human experience and presentation of it is intelligible is to posit a “predetermined harmony” between real and ideal, a notion possible only if there is an identity relationship between that which is produced and that which is expressed volitionally. He writes,

Now it is certainly a *productive* activity that finds expression in willing; all free action is productive, albeit *consciously* productive. If we now suppose, since the two activities have only to be one in principle, that the same activity which is *consciously* productive in free action, is productive *without consciousness* in bringing about the world then our predetermined harmony is real, and the contradiction resolved.

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This resolution is not effected by moral or philosophical means, but rather means aesthetic: the “producing” activity is *artistic* production. He needs to appeal to an activity in the self that is both conscious and non-conscious, and, for him, the only possibility is the aesthetic: “The ideal world of art and the real world of objects are therefore products of one and the same activity; the concurrence of the two (the conscious and the nonconscious) without consciousness yields the real and with consciousness the aesthetic world.”

Thus, in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* the appeal to art is not as a subsidiary or simply decorative element of his transcendental philosophy, but as the fundamental, undergirding principle of it: “the universal organon of philosophy—and the keystone of its entire arch.” It is the express function of the work of art (and, at this stage of his thinking, only the work of art) to disclose the ideal in the real, the infinite in the finite, and thus to indicate the ultimate union of spirit and nature. It is in this sense, perhaps, that despite its fundamental monism, Schellingian aesthetics can be said to be revelatory, that is, it functions to alert the Self to some originary unity between real and ideal to which its attention would otherwise not be drawn.

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184 *Ibid.*, 12; italics original. C.f. 67: “This third activity, at once both ideal and real, is undoubtedly this producing activity inferred in section I, wherein activity and passivity were to be reciprocally conditioned by each other.”


186 *Ibid.* For a similar passage, c.f. 231: “…it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and it original identity with the conscious.”

187 C.f. Schelling, *System*: “An intuition must therefore be exhibitable in the intelligence itself, whereby in *one and the same* appearance the self is at once conscious and unconscious *for itself*, and it is by means of such an intuition that we first bring forth the intelligence, as it were, entirely out of itself; by such an intuition, therefore, that we also first resolve the entire [the supreme] problem of transcendental philosophy (that of explaining the congruence between subjective and objective)” (217-8).
Both Schelling’s *Bruno*, or *On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things* (1802) and *The Philosophy of Art* (1859) speak directly to the mediating function that beauty has as the intersection of the real and the ideal, and to the necessity of both sensible/phenomenal/particular and intelligible/noumenal/universal elements for beauty to exist. Again, it is art alone which has the capacity to combine real and ideal, sensible and intelligible (although in these later works philosophy ultimately knocks art from its premier place in the *System*.) Even though art manifests philosophy in the real realm, it is not philosophy because it has phenomenal form. In his summation of the *Bruno*’s concluding pages, John Hendrix writes that

> Beauty is the synthesis of the dialectic, the combination of the two extremes, which are codependent. The task of art is not just to conceive the union of the ideal and real, but then to re-conceive the ideal and real out of that union, to separate them out and differentiate them, to represent eternal beauty and sensible beauty in relation to their union. To do this the artist must represent the infinite and the finite, the eternal and temporal, the actual and possible, and then ‘we shall grasp how that simple ray of light that shines forth from the absolute and which is the absolute itself appears divided into difference and indifference, into the finite and the infinite.’

*The Philosophy of Art* details the mechanisms of the negotiation of real and ideal according to three *potences* in the real: (1) matter (in the main, the real, being; neither universal nor particular); (2) light (the ideal, activity); and (3) the essence of the real, organism, or “natural form” which “contains the indifference of the real and ideal.”

For Schelling, these three *potences* of matter, light, and organism have their analogues in the transcendentalts of *veritas*, *bonitas*, and *pulchritudo*, respectively. In Schelling’s own language, “matter, viewed according to its corporeal appearance rather than in itself, is

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188 Hendrix, 44; c.f. 328.

189 *Ibid.*, 52, 74. We shall address the potencies further in chapter three.

not substance but rather merely *accidens* (form) with which the essence or the universal within light is juxtaposed.”¹⁹¹ Beautiful forms in art (and, derivatively, in nature) are the result of “the same informing of infinite ideality into the real,”¹⁹² an *Einbildungskraft*.

Solovievian aesthetics is formally quite similar to Schelling’s. For Balthasar, Schelling’s influence on Soloviev is beneficial insofar as his version of Idealism expanded the latter’s universal vision beyond narrowly specified forms exclusive to Eastern Christianity.¹⁹³ First, his aesthetics is motivated and underwritten by broader philosophical concerns regarding the organic unity of all reality, which is borne only in the whole. The dynamic principle of his aesthetic theory is the notion of *vseedinstvo*, variously translated as “pan-unity,” “total-unity,” “all-unity,” “unity of everything,” and the like, a theory which unifies all universal forces, both spiritual and material. It is actualized in three spheres: (1) the material (technical, applied art); (2) the formal (fine arts) and (3) the absolute (mysticism), which unite theurgically in a “single, mystical creative process.”¹⁹⁴

This *vseedinstvo* provides the express content for his understanding of *Idea*/ideality, which in turn funds the quite “formal and specific” meaning of beauty, non-reducible to either the material phenomenon or subjective evaluation.¹⁹⁵ Beauty is the “*embodiment of Idea,*”¹⁹⁶ where “Idea” restricts the content to “that which in itself is

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¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38; italics original.
worthy of existence.”

Idea, formally defined as “the absolute freedom of constituent parts in a perfected unified whole,” thus has three conditions which must be met for ideality to be realized: “(1) the freedom or autonomy of existence; (2) the plenitude of content, or meaning; and (3) the perfection of expression, or form,” which map roughly upon the transcendentals of true, good, and beautiful. The Idea is neither abstract-universal nor incidental-particular, but the expression of both together, and, relatedly, is the result of the mutual action and mutual penetration of ideal and material principles. The consistent concrete example that Soloviev supplies to illustrate this fundamental aesthetic principle is the example of the diamond, which, as a crystallized carbon, materially has the same constitution as ordinary, run of the mill coal. The difference is lucidity, light, in this case “a supra-material, ideal agent,” which interacts with the carbon in such a way that “the ideal principle takes possession of the material fact and is embodied in it; and for its part, the material element, embodying in itself ideal content, is transformed and becomes resplendent.” Beauty is located neither in the chemical composition of the diamond nor in the light refracted through it, but is rather the

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200 *Ibid.*, 44.


202 *Ibid.*, 36. For Schelling on light as “the essence of the absolute…the source of the indifference of the real and ideal in the real” (Hendrix, 82), especially as demonstrated in chiaroscuro in painting (with Correggio as the obvious master, particularly *Holy Night (Adoration of the Shepherds)*), see Hendrix, 82-92. It would be an interesting exercise to investigate convergences of Schelling and Soloviev with the aesthetic/optic theory of Robert Grosseteste.

203 *Ibid.*, 37. Light, as in Schelling, is an important aesthetic principle for Soloviev. It is the first principle of beauty in nature and the signifier of universal pan-unity. Also c.f. “Beauty in Nature,” 44.
product of their interaction: it is “the transformation of matter through the embodiment in it of another, supra-material principle.”

The Christological Prerviso: Flesh-taking

What separates Soloviev from Schelling for Balthasar, is, of course, the central position of the incarnation of Christ for aesthetics, particularly as controlled by Chalcedonian dogma. Christ is the ben-kai-pan, and the “opening up…of the limited, finite spirit to…total plentitude.” According to Balthasar, this syzygy between real and ideal in Christ, “the encounter between a divine reality, understood in its maximal, most concrete fullness, and a human and worldly reality, taken equally in its maximal concrete fullness,” is what motivates and constrains Soloviev’s aesthetics, a theological obligation with which Balthasar has much sympathy. This commitment to the fact that the ideal “is always [God’s] own reality, and it is this reality that draws the still imperfect creation, existing for itself alone, home to himself,” exempts Soloviev from solving the aporia of whether the Beautiful is located in the ideal realm or whether “ideality eternally

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204 Ibid., 36; italics original.


207 Here being an appropriation of a Gnostic concept. For a feminist perspective that is more linguistically inclined, see Edith W. Clowes, “The Limits of Discourse: Solov’ev’s Language of Syzygy and the Project of Thinking Total-Unity,” Slavic Review 55:3 (Autumn, 1996), 552-566.

208 Balthasar, GL III, 291.

209 Ibid., 308.
include[s] reality in itself.” In Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, too, it is necessary that the coincidence of ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ be concretized in the archetype of Christ.

If this is the Logos that comes to us from God, in which and for which we have been created, then its contemplation in us can only be infinite. Now, it is always this unity which is revealed to us in every intellectual act of opening and ‘breaking the bread’ of the Logos (Origen)—not a purely divine or a purely human unity, but always a human-and-divine unity. Thus, Christian contemplation becomes an ever deeper and richer living from Christ and into Christ, and progressively both the living triune God and the whole of creation as recapitulated in Christ enter into this life, not, however, in the rarefied space where ideal contents are beheld in abstract purity, but within the shaping (Einbildung) of the image (Bild) of Christ in the contemplative subject. For the theological imagination (Einbildungskraft = ‘power to shape an image’) lies with Christ, who is at once the image (Bild) and the power (Kraft) of God.

Schelling’s deep identification of subject and object can only be resolved in the person of Christ, who is for Balthasar the concrete analogia entis, the “bridge between infinite and finite, between absolute glory and absolute adoration, the mediator of the religious act. Ontologically and psychologically, He is the full reality of analogy.”

Here again, analogy must govern, not identity, the latter perspective of which would render Christ, as coincident with “the philosophical relationship between God and man, indeed between the Infinite and the finite,” transposable with, as Balthasar wryly notes, Schiller’s Deutsche Größe. Christ is for Balthasar not only the “unique, hypostatic union between archetype and image,” but also (in Bonaventuran turn of phrase) “he is God

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210 Ibid., 307-8.

211 Balthasar, GL I, 490, although this is not in direct reference to Soloviev.

212 Balthasar, GL V, 120, in the context of his assessment of Bérulle. Further, “The pantheistic Tat tvam asi [‘This art thou’]…can be resolved only by virtue of the unity between God and man in the Son, who is both the ars divina mundi and the quintessence of actual creation…and by virtue of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from this incarnate Son in his unity with the Father” (GL I, 195).

213 Balthasar, GL V, 569.

214 Balthasar, GL I, 432.
as expression, that is, as truth, and therefore he is the principle of the fact that the things in creation have been expressed and of the fact that they express themselves as created essences.\textsuperscript{215} The genuine union of finite and infinite that exceeds self-abolishing dialectical process is possible only when God (impossibly!) reveals God’s Self as Trinity in the visible form of Christ. In the light of faith, Schelling’s attempt to synthesize real and ideal, finite and infinite with rationalistic, simply logical speculation is insufficient.\textsuperscript{216} For Soloviev (as well as Dostoevsky\textsuperscript{217}), Christ as incarnate beauty is the absolutely foundational premise. As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, it is the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection of the dead which preserves and protects the finite from a totalizing absorption into the infinite.\textsuperscript{218}

\textit{Freedom and Necessity}

The form of revelation in salvation history is the presentation of the depths of God; it could not have been invented or predicted, nor could the tiniest element be altered. Indeed, “the weights have been poised in such a way that their balance extends

\textsuperscript{215} Balthasar, \textit{GL II}, 290.

\textsuperscript{216} Heinrich Stammler, “Dostoevsky’s Aesthetics and Schelling’s Philosophy of Art.” \textit{Comparative Literature} 7 (Winter 1955), 317. He goes on to note that it is only with this Christological proviso (which Dostoevsky provides) that it is “possible for man to see nature in her innermost reality, not merely as a system of mathematically established relationships, but as transfigured by the infusion of God’s infinite ideality into reality, as Schelling had described it” (319). Balthasar recognizes that Schelling’s late systems of mythology and revelation come much closer to affirming the historical quality of Christ, which we shall address in chapter three.

\textsuperscript{217} Balthasar draws attention approvingly to the profound Christological commitment in Dostoevsky, quoting a passage from \textit{Raskolnikov’s Diary}, ed. Fülop-Miller (1928), in which he offers that “there is really only one positively beautiful figure: Christ” (168). C.f. \textit{GL I}, 190.

\textsuperscript{218} C.f. Balthasar, \textit{GL I}, 155. Also \textit{GL III}: “Only in the resurrection of the body is the inwardly necessary goal of the world process achieved, the resurrection as the complete illumination of chaotic matter by the loving spirit; but only God can bring this to perfection” (346). Also see Bulgakov, \textit{The Unfading Light}, in Williams, “The Meaning of Bodily Existence,” and “The Destiny of the Body,” 141-149.
to infinity, and they resist any displacement.”

It should thereby be instructive to compare the mechanics of the construal of the unity of necessity and freedom in Schelling, for whom the coincidence is within a thoroughly aesthetic register, to that in Balthasar, who owes far more to Irenaeus and Anselm than to Schelling. According to Schelling, the artist unconsciously or subconsciously produces art products that are in excess of what he or she knows consciously, and it is this product—the work of art itself—which is of premier importance to Schelling, more even than the artist as producer of it. In the art product is reflected the identity of conscious and unconscious, a “synthesis of nature and freedom,” insofar as though the artist may begin with a conscious idea, there is always some mysterious element in artistic production which cannot be predicted or even explained by the artist. Thus, fine/high artwork is the product of the coincidence of freedom and necessity. This aesthetic coincidence of freedom and necessity in the real reappears in The Philosophy of Art (§16ff). Artistic or natural forms are beautiful at the meeting of greatest maximals of subjective freedom.

219 Balthasar, GL I, 172.

220 In a kind of reprisal of Schelling’s Naturphilosophie, Bulgakov also draws attention to the synthesis of freedom and necessity, but his parsing of it is more economic than aesthetic. C.f. Bulgakov, “Economy as a Synthesis of Freedom and Necessity,” Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 196-222. For Soloviev’s claim that “freedom is but one of the species of necessity,” c.f. Lecture Two of Lectures on Divine Humanity, especially 20-22.

221 Schelling, System, §2, 225.

222 “…for art this opposition is an infinite one in regard to every single object, and infinity is exhibited in every one of its products. For if aesthetic production proceeds from freedom, and if it is precisely for freedom that this opposition of conscious and unconscious activities is an absolute one, there is properly speaking but one absolute work of art, which may indeed exist in altogether different versions, yet is still only one, even though it should not yet exist in its most ultimate form…Nothing is a work of art which does not exhibit an infinite, either directly, or at least by reflection” (System, 231).
(creativity, imagination, and so on) and objective necessity (order, custom), “when the
dialectic is visible but the ideal predominates over the real.”\textsuperscript{223} In Schelling’s own words,
since only in the ideal world does the antithesis of the universal and the
particular, the ideal and the real manifest itself specifically as that between
necessity and freedom, the organic product represents that same antithesis still
unresolved (because it is not yet developed) that the work of art represents as
suspended (in both the same identity).\textsuperscript{224}

The artistic excess of meaning evident in art products—which is indicative of the
fact that art presents the infinite in finite form—is discovered through the phenomenon
of infinitely or indefinitely multivalent interpretations of (true, non-derivative) works of
art (he uses Greek mythology as his example). A work of this caliber is “capable of
being expounded \textit{ad infinitum}, as though it contained an infinity of purposes, while yet
one is never able to say whether this infinity has lain within the artist himself, or resides
only in the work of art.”\textsuperscript{225} Art, which proceeds from characteristics from both nature
and freedom, is a phenomenal (finite) symbol and expression of the infinite Absolute,
the means of human coming to awareness of the underlying totality and identity of all
things, a function which opens up “the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and
original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder.”\textsuperscript{226}

This sort of religious, virtually evangelical language appears in an earlier passage in the
same text, and in the same context of the realization of the coincidence of freedom and
necessity:

\begin{quote}
The intelligence will therefore end with a complete recognition of the identity
expressed in the product as a identity whose principle lies in the intelligence
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{223} Hendrix, 56.

\textsuperscript{224} Schelling, \textit{Philosophy of Art}, §18; C.f. §63.

\textsuperscript{225} Schelling, \textit{System}, 225.

\textsuperscript{226} \textit{Ibid.}, 231.
itself; it will end, that is, in a complete intuiting of itself. Now since it was the free tendency to self-intuition in that identity which originally divided the intelligence from itself, the feeling accompanying this intuition will be that of infinite tranquility. With the completion of the product, all urge to produce is halted, all contradictions are eliminated, all riddles resolved. Since production set out from freedom, that is, from an unceasing opposition of the two activities, the intelligence will be unable to attribute this absolute union of the two, in which production ends, to freedom, so as soon as the product is completed, all appearance of freedom is removed. The intelligence will feel itself astonished and blessed by this union, will regard it, that is, in the light of a bounty freely granted by a higher nature, by whose aid the impossible has been made possible.  

Balthasar’s generous account of the pervasiveness of the light of God’s self-manifestation which falls upon all human beings certainly does not exclude that this moment is indeed suffused with a kind of grace, even, perhaps that this sort of exalted artistic production “more or less explicitly indicate[s] an attitude of obedience toward the light of the self-revealing God.” This hidden truth, however, does not militate against the constitutive titanism of Schelling’s aesthetics, for at the very moment of what ought to be a self-abandonment to God, “the place of redemption by God is taken by a titanic kind of self-redemption.”

Balthasar has likewise commented extensively upon the aesthetic phenomenon of the coincidence of freedom and necessity insofar as the best fine art products express both maximal necessity in the finest details, as well as a deep artistic freedom that the existence of the work itself need not have been at all. Any classic artistic piece is by definition irreproachable, utterly unique; as a whole and in the composition of its parts it is marked by “strict givenness”:

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227 Ibid., 221; italics added.

228 Balthasar, GL I, 168.

229 Ibid., 170.
With a certain contrast to the forms of expression of the beauty of nature, the element of freedom holds sway in human expression, and therefore in all beauty of art. Certainly the forms of nature in their inscrutable emergence from the ground of life are never simply released by a mechanical necessity; they too are “freedom manifesting itself” (erscheinende Freiheit—Schiller). In human self-expression, in its highest form in the work of art, the will to express itself not only freely creates suitable form; it incarnates in this very form its freedom. It is only that which gives to the form the radiance from the depths. The more given and established the form, the weaker the creative breaking-forth of freedom accomplished in it; the power of expression can therefore be greater where technique does not yet rule completely, but is rather achieved piecemeal in the process of creation, then where it can be learnt from the masters: greater then with Masaccio and Uccello then in the refinement of the Baroque. The true artist is not so subject to the necessity of creating that he does not preserve sovereign freedom in the choice of form. Goethe could write his Iphigenie both in prose and in verse, and no-one can know whether he could not have made of his Werther just as good a play, or whether the fashioning of Hyperion in verse would not have produced a wholly effective work. What a sovereign freedom in the use of individual themes, individual harmonies, even of complete pieces there is in Bach and Mozart! Wagner’s Leitmotive are expressive and appropriate, but no-one can prove that they could not have sounded differently. In the case of the beautiful it is not primarily the immanent harmony of number and proportion that is enjoyed, but the considered freedom which is manifested in it and is ‘necessitated.’

Structurally speaking (that is, if we may bracket only momentarily his faith commitments to a theologically rich content from Scripture and tradition) Balthasar’s aesthetic theory—infinite mediated through the finite in a manner which not only elicits wonder, but is likewise characterized by the synthesis of freedom and necessity—is not terribly far from the Romantic articulation of the processes by which the aesthetic is experienced. The glory of God (Herrlichkeit) is described precisely as “the divinity of

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230 Balthasar, GL II, 26-7; italics added. C.f. GL I, 164.

231 Oleg Bychkov makes this point as well, suggesting in a footnote that “…Schelling’s phenomenological description of aesthetic experience is precisely that upon which theological aesthetics after the fashion of von Balthasar draws…” (31, n. 43). Later in the text Bychkov similarly comments that the phrasing of Balthasar’s assertion in the section on Augustine that “only the one who loves the finite form as revelation of the infinite is both ‘mystic’ and ‘aesthete’” (GL II, 114) has the ring of 19th century Romantic aesthetic theories (217).
the Invisible, which radiates in the visibleness of Being of the world.” For Balthasar, the aesthetic as the concrete expression of spirit in the world is that which mediates between infinite and finite, immanent and transcendent. Despite what appear to be structural similarities (along with the elements in Schelling’s thought to which Balthasar would be sympathetic, namely, understanding the beautiful in light of the totality of things, a coincidence of the transcendentals, a sense of wonder elicited from the experience of the Absolute and so on) Balthasar is absolutely uncompromising in his judgment that Schelling operates from first to last according to the identitas entis; the gap closes between infinite/Absolute “I” and human being, and “the world and man can in the end be nothing more than the goal of its Odyssean voyage of self-discovery.”

Furthermore, unlike Schelling, Balthasar translates the phenomenon of the aesthetic synthesis of the maximally free and the maximally necessary into decisively theological terms: in short, to revelation. As suggested above, Balthasar’s account owes much to the traditional theological idea of aesthetic verisimilitude articulated, for

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232 Balthasar, GL I, 431. C.f. GL I: “Visible form not only ‘points’ to an invisible, unfathomable mystery; form is the apparition of this mystery, and reveals it while, naturally, at the same time protecting and veiling it. Both natural and artistic form has an exterior which appears and an interior depth, both of which, however, are not separable in the form itself. The content (Gehalt) does not lie behind the form (Gestalt), but within it” (151).

233 Ibid., 34.


235 Balthasar, GL V, 557, 559-60.

instance, in the Anselmian notion of concordance, proportionality, and fittingness.237

The givenness of revelation, with an elegance that far exceeds the mundane instances of high art or mathematical principles, is the personal self-disclosure of the Trinitarian being of God, expressions of inexhaustible divine freedom which could not have been predicted but which, by their perfect harmony, simply must be so. The vision of divine revelation is such that “what it can perceive of necessity within it is only a fragment which nevertheless clearly contains within itself a guarantee of the meaning of the whole.”238 The quality of the whole, however, cannot be reconstituted simply by adding the parts together; contemplating the mystery of Christ “traces a course back into the very mystery of God, who manifests his ‘mystery, more dazzling than the light’ by this stroke of ‘christological genius.’”239 In the same respect as in a classic work of art, God’s free movement in human history could not have been otherwise:

In the last analysis, this is not a vague ‘appropriateness’ which would also leave room for other diametrically opposed solutions; rather, it is the recognition that in the apparently non-necessary elements of revelation’s historical data there is also revealed the rightness of the divine dispositions and decisions as the expression of the divine Being itself. Leaving open other possibilities, which are always God’s prerogative de potentia absoluta, is in this context but faith’s act of homage to the divine freedom, which is manifested together with the divine necessity; but such openness is in no way a calling into question of the theological necessity. This state of things is best explained by analogy with aesthetic judgment which registers with admiration the aesthetic necessity in the free creations of art: that they must be just so and not otherwise.240

Though not strictly in aesthetic terms, Balthasar exempts Soloviev’s theosophical religious philosophy from the destructive elements of German Idealism due in no small

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part to the way in which he parses the relation between freedom and necessity with respect to Christian revelation. Because for Soloviev the interventions of God in human history are supremely free and comprise “a revelation of the highest kind of rationality surpassed by nothing else,” the witness of revelation—naturally, historically, and even protologically—is fully intelligible and ‘must’ be exactly as it is, in the Anselmian version of *necessitates*.

Hand in hand with this givenness, of course, is a multiplicity, even a playfulness, a child’s game of a plenitude of expressive forms, as in the multiple, nowhere near inevitable genres of the witness of the Scriptures—prose, poetry, hymn, prayer, law, wisdom literature, and so on—a game which “in no way expresses contempt on the part of the divine spirit for the limitations of secular forms of expression,” for the Word incarnate “proves the opposite: an absolute acknowledgement and sanctioning of the created vessels of expression, a total harmonization of content and form, and this precisely in the making manifest of the divine freedom.” For Balthasar (and, as we shall see, for Bulgakov) the creative agency of the Holy Spirit cannot be contained:

- It knows no slavish cleaving to the *littera* and shows its own freedom at the same time the vitality of the word of God itself, which from the beginning is more than the letter and, therefore, cannot be imprisoned in any book, even an inspired one (John 20, 30; 21, 25). The same Spirit, however, which reveals the inner connections of the word of revelation and by comparing the spiritual with the spiritual (“*spiritualibus spiritualia comparantes*” 1 Cor. 2, 13, for Origen the basic concern of theological investigation) produces new spirit, shows in that its freedom and inexhaustibility.

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241 Balthasar, *GL III*, 293.

242 Balthasar, *GL II*, 27. C.f. also *GL I*: “Christ’s particular kind of unity requires a glance that traces a course back into the very mystery of God, who manifests his ‘mystery, more dazzling than the light’, by this stroke of ‘christological genius’: he is both himself and yet also another; he is both triune and hypostatic. This is a mystery of the divine freedom, which, as in the work of art, coincides with supreme necessity” (488).

This profound plurality of forms—underwritten pneumatologically—is repeated in the generosity of twelve “styles” according to which the theological representatives that Balthasar selects (and treats serially in *GL II* and *III*) articulate the glory of divine revelation. Their—and other individual theologians’—modes of theologizing have different formal objects including “God in himself,” “God’s revelation,” the “synthesis of God and the world,” and finally and most germanely for what is to follow, a formal object which capacitates the human mediator to be transparent to the Holy Spirit: “then the engagement of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man in the Spirit of Christ is what ultimately bestows form,” as in Joachim de Fiore, Hegel, Schleiermacher, early Möhler, and “a number of Russians…”

*Matter and s/Spirit: A “Hylopneumic” Analysis*

We have addressed in the foregoing material the binary terms of real-ideal, finite-infinite, transcendent-immanent. Related but non-identical is the polarity between matter and spirit. This polarity is radicalized in Nicholas Berdyaev’s oppositional relation (based on the Kantian distinction between phenomenal and noumenal) between the realm of matter and the realm of spirit. For him, the realm of spirit is marked by love, creativity, dynamism, personality, freedom, experience, whereas the realm of nature is characterized by object-ness, necessity, passivity, determination, immobility, disintegration into temporal/spatial divisions, and separation from the divine. It is the

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245 Ibid.

246 In his *The Beginning and the End*, Berdyaev rhapsodizes Kant’s dualism as “the greatest merit of his philosophy” (9). Unlike Kant, however, Berdyaev understands both realms to be both ontologically real and accessible.
realm of spirit which is concretely real, non-abstract. For Berdyaev, the primary impediment to the human being’s return to God is this “thingification” of the spirit that occurs on the fallen (that is, phenomenal) world, in which “the living spirit and its living creative cognition must be ‘chilled down’—congealed—coagulated, for the purposes of day-to-day commerce and administration according to established custom.” The means by which commerce can take place between the two realms is, similar to Schelling’s aesthetic theory, through an artistic, or creative act, an act which “signifies an ek-stasis, a breaking through to eternity.” The creative act itself is not specifically Christian, but is “beyond Christianity.” Though the creative act of itself belongs to the noumenal realm, the art-product in its finite circumscribed form belongs to the phenomenal, and is therefore, a failure. Unlike in Schelling, however, these two realms remain in an antagonistic relationship: “art is always a victory over the heaviness of ‘the world,’” a world which is for Berdyaev “deformed, it is not cosmic, beauty is not in it.”

In stark contrast, for Balthasar there is no dualism or competitive relation between matter and spirit. The originary “primal phenomenon” of beauty is exhibited neither in “a disembodied spirit which looks about for a field of expression and, finding

247 Ibid., 96.
248 Ibid., 58-9.
249 Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 209.
one, adjusts it to its own purposes as one would set up a typewriter and begin typing, afterwards to abandon it.”\textsuperscript{253} Nor is beauty simply a collection or collocation of material forces without spirit. Much as in the case with the Idealists and Romantics to whom Balthasar (and the Russians) owe no small debt, “spirit” in Balthasar’s aesthetics ever seeks expression in the material. Preserving the typewriter analogy, Balthasar continues in this way:

The freedom of the spirit that is at home in itself, therefore, is simultaneous with the ‘keyboard’, which it has appropriated and which allows the spirit self-expression. Such simultaneity is possible because \textit{it is the spirit’s native condition always to have gone outside itself in order to be with another}. This ability can only exist in a tension between deliberate choice and spontaneity between a firm rootedness in its own particular field of expression and despite this the spontaneous ability to emerge from the inner depths and to appear in the windows of the specific, individual response. As we proceed from plant to animal to man, we witness a deepening of this interiority, and, at the same time, along with the continuing organic bonds to a body, a deepening in the freedom of the expressive play of forms.\textsuperscript{254}

Both the simultaneous commitment to spirit and matter as well as the gradual, teleological embodiment of spirit/Idea in progressively advanced finite forms evident in this passage sound both profoundly Schellingian and Solovievian.\textsuperscript{255} For Soloviev, “an

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\item Balthasar, \textit{GL I}, 20.
\item Balthasar, \textit{GL I}, 21. Also c.f. Balthasar’s “Revelation and the Beautiful”: “The beauty inherent in things is susceptible of degrees from the lower to the higher, from the purely material and functional to the organic and sensible, and so from that of symmetry, proportion and harmony to that shown in vital tension and power, in the alternation of disclosure and concealment, in all the forms of interaction both inside and outside the erotic with its beguiling qualities…” (105). Also see \textit{GL I}: “…we ourselves are spirit in nature, and because all the expressive laws of the macrocosm are at work in ourselves” (444), a phrasing which certainly evokes a Romantic (and Russian) ethos.
\item And, as we shall see in a subsequent section, Bulgakovian as well. For Bulgakov, human sensation is not at all antithetical to the spirit: “On the contrary, it belongs to the spirit as one of the forms of its life, although one that does not exhaust this life. To deprive the spirit of sensation would be to disincarnate it, that is, to abolish man’s very essence…The spirit is not opposed to man’s psychical and corporeal life; rather, it lives in the psychical and the corporeal, determining them and being determined by them. Matter melts, as it were, losing its inertia and impenetrability; it becomes transparent for the spirit and spirit-bearing...it is brought into the life of the spirit, which ‘conquers’ nature. This, the life of the spirit slumbers in nature, and it must be awakened” (\textit{The Comforter}, 346). Further, “at the very threshold of
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abstract embodiment of spirit incapable of creation and a spiritless matter incapable of animation are both incompatible with ideal or worthy existence, and both carry upon themselves the manifest sign of their unworthiness in the fact that neither one nor the other can be beautiful.”

What is required for a “plentitude” of beauty is first that the spiritual essence be directly materialized, secondly that the material element is completely animated, and finally, in the absolutely mutual penetration of matter and spirit, the material phenomenon authentically “become[s] beautiful, that is, really having embodied in itself Idea, it should become in the very same way as abiding and immortal as Idea itself.”

In this way the finite must truly—not only transitorily—have a share in the infinite, and both can retain integrity. The ultimate aim is the aesthetic transfiguration of the material world—an interest which safeguards against the denigration of matter and sense perception, a charge which has been leveled against him.

Further in Soloviev, beginning with the natural (even the inorganic), Idea/spirit generates a hierarchy of forms which gain in complexity and ideality through kingdoms Plantae through Animalia, culminating in the form of human being. Soloviev, in his essay “Beauty in Nature,”—revealing well his Darwinian influence—addresses the beauty of sky (solar, lunar, and astral, as well as clouds, rainbows) the water of the sea, soil, noble

the creation of the world, there is manifested the express relation of the Holy Spirit to what is usually considered to be diametrically opposite to him—His relation to matter” (The Comforter, 194).

Soloviev, “The Universal Meaning of Art,” 73.

Ibid., 73-4. Soloviev goes on to explain that it is this feature which distances his own aesthetic theory—in which essence exceeds the discrete phenomena and gives rise to ever greater actualizations of essence—from Hegelian aesthetics. Balthasar affirms Soloviev’s distance from Hegel (though lauds his thinking as on the “same level” as Hegel’s, GL III, 281) insofar as Hegel’s (“Protestant”) negative dialectic is replaced with the “catholic integration” of all partial points of view and forms of actualization into an organic totality that annuls and uplifts (aufhebt) all things in a manner that preserves that which is transcended far more successfully than in Hegel” (GL III, 283-4).

See, for instance, Edith Clowes’ analysis of certain of Soloviev’s poems, which on her reading suggest that the material world is something to be escaped, more so than his essays indicate. C.f. “The Limits of Discourse,” 566.
metals, precious stones, thunderstorms, plants, including flowers and the algae and mosses of *cryptogamae*, invertebrates (with extended commentary on the lowly worm and the “monstrous phenomenon” of the nematode), fish, birds, mammals, culminating in the human being, who, unlike the animals, can realize the goal of the beauty, or the embodiment of Idea self-consciously and, “consequently, labor[-] over its achievement freely and intelligently.”

The purpose of the reduplication of beautiful natural forms in art is, according to Soloviev, not a repetition of nature, but rather an extension of the gradual embodiment of spirit begun in the natural world, but unable to be completed in biological forms.

Bulgakov, too, comments on the sophiological phenomenon of the beauty of natural forms, forms which, like in his intellectual predecessor Soloviev, await their eventual actualization, or ‘humanization’ brought about by “spirit-bearing” human being. Nature itself, however, even prior to this transformation, is spirit-bearing itself (Psalm 19:1), having been infused with the “sophianicity” of the Holy Spirit, and as spirit-bearing, “nature is also, in this sense, God-bearing—and it is such not only by its boundless content but also by that ineffable and rationally unfathomable beauty which delights, nourishes, freshens, and fills the soul.”

For him, there is no such thing as a ‘dead nature’ that would resist or be naturally uncongenial to the possibility of material spiritualization, sanctification, the unification of matter and spirit. The human being,

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after all, is an incarnate spirit in the world, defying any attempt to oppose spirit and matter as competitive principles.\textsuperscript{263}

For Soloviev, the teleological (anthropological) end of these natural processes\textsuperscript{264} is that the human being as a conscious agent of this universal process, can achieve her “ideal goal—a complete, mutual permeation and liberated solidarity of the spiritual and the material, the ideal and the real, the subjective and the objective.”\textsuperscript{265} The unfulfilled task must needs be taken up deliberately, in the creative, artistic work of human beings, insofar as they are participating in the highest task of art: the spiritualization of matter, the “perfected incarnation of…spiritual fullness in our reality, a realization in it of absolute beauty.”\textsuperscript{266} This perfection, however, can be realized only eschatologically, a feature of Soloviev’s thinking which Balthasar affirms enthusiastically.\textsuperscript{267} Art, then, functions prophetically, non-didactically: it is a sign of contradiction in the world, a grasping after the infinite and a prophetic anticipation of the life which is to come.\textsuperscript{268}

According to Soloviev, the definition of “real art in its essence” is as follows: “\textit{every tangible representation of any object and phenomenon from the point of view of its final, definitive status,}”\textsuperscript{269}

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\item \textsuperscript{263} Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, 343-4. Also see Bulgakov, “The Meaning of Bodily Existence,” \textit{The Unfading Light}, 141-146, and “The Destiny of the Body,” 146-149.
\item \textsuperscript{264} The fact that Soloviev recognizes beauty in nature, and even considers it to be a precursor to a philosophy of art insofar as nature is “more extensive according to capacity, more simple according to content, and naturally, in the order of existence) precedes the other” (“Beauty in Nature,” 31), constitutes a departure from Schelling, who considers the forms of nature to be only derivative. On this point, see Hendrix’s analysis of \textit{Bruno}, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{265} Soloviev, “The Universal Meaning of Art,” 68.
\item \textsuperscript{266} \textit{Ibid.}, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{267} On the coincidence of aesthetics and eschatology in Soloviev, c.f. \textit{GL III}, 284, 296, 341.
\item \textsuperscript{268} “…beautiful reality, or this realized beauty, constitutes only a very insignificant and feeble part of all our far-from-beautiful reality. In human life artistic beauty is only a symbol of a better hope, a momentary rainbow against the dark background of our chaotic experience” (Soloviev, “Beauty in Nature,” 30).
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or in light of the world to come, is artistic work.”

This articulation is not far from the ‘final form’ of Schelling’s philosophy of art, which according to Balthasar, is “beauty as the eschatological ideal of the history of the world and of [human]kind…” And in Bulgakov there is the same notion, as he suggests in his essay “Religion and Art,” that “the world…has remained as if covered by an outward shell through which art penetrates as if foreseeing the coming transfiguration of the world…” Of course, this is Balthasar’s own view of truly great art: it is fundamentally eschatological and anticipatory, the “proleptic appearance of what is ideal, in reality, of ‘heaven’ on ‘earth,’ of the fulfillment in the promise,” which facilitates a sense of yearning for that which is coming and becoming.

In the realm of the beautiful, the interaction of matter and idea is fulfilled by the creator of works of art, who participates as the mediator in what is for Soloviev a divine-human cooperation toward the perfection of the world. In Balthasar’s estimation, the fundamental theme of Solovievian aesthetic theory is

the progressive eschatological embodiment of the Divine Idea in worldly reality; or (since the Divine Spirit is indeed in and for itself the highest reality, while the material being of the world is in itself no more than indeterminacy, an eternal pressure toward and yearning after form) the impress of the limitless fullness and determinacy of God upon the abyss of cosmic potentiality.

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269 Ibid., 76; italics original.

270 Balthasar, GL V, 528.


273 This evocation of eroticism and its relationship to the aesthetic in both Balthasar and the Russians is certainly a theme worth exploring elsewhere. Consider for instance, parallels between Balthasar’s appeal to marriage as a form which makes real the ideal (GL I, 27) and Soloviev’s essay “The Meaning of Love” (also GL III, 347-349). Further, Balthasar references Soloviev (along with Teilhard, for whom Soloviev functions as a corrective, c.f. GL III, 290, 296) as a theologian who exemplifies the movement from chaos to eros to cosmos (GL V, 254-5, n. 23). On the limits of Platonic eros for Soloviev, c.f. GL III, 286. On the coincidence of eros and agape in Soloviev, c.f. Balthasar, GL III, 345 and TD IV,
Similarly, the creative act is a profoundly eschatological act for Berdyaev as well, although, in keeping with his strict dualism between spirit and nature, his eschatological reflections seem less about transfiguration of the material world and more about its destruction. For him, the “crowning point of world creation is the end of this world…[which] must be dissolved in creative ecstasy.”

Analogously, as Berdyaev does not seem to recognize a synthetic or balanced relationship between finite and infinite, spirit and nature, he asserts (showing his debt perhaps to Joachim de Fiore) that “ontology should be replaced by pneumatology.”

*But Whose Spirit? Sergei Bulgakov on the Holy Spirit as “Artist of the World”*

In the negotiation between spirit and matter, it is dearly important to Balthasar not only to protect the integrity of each, but, where appropriate, to specify a distinction between the divine, personal being of the Holy Spirit and what is only the “empty impersonal transcendence of one’s own spirit.” The preeminent Russian representative of a pneumatological perspective in our analysis, particularly one which is 114. See too in Balthasar “Eros: The Glory of Melancholy,” (*GL V*, 264-284) and the discussion of the aesthetic meaning of metaphysical *erōs* in *GL V*, 608-610, as well as *erōs* as the first fundamental energy of historical forces (*TD IV*, 106-7). For the notion of creative activity as the result of erotic longing see both *The Comforter* and excerpts from *The Unfading Light*. For instance, “*Methexis*, the participation of matter in ideal form, is also *erōs*, the desire of ‘earth’ for ‘heaven’. The ideal form or entelechy is at once both a datum, the ‘root’ of being, so to speak, and a project, a reaching forward towards the limits of realization. It is a painful struggle, the individual thing seeking its own ideal and eternal essence, a self-creation and self-generation. The soul goes in search of itself, like the Shulamite [in the Song of Songs] wandering through the streets of the city in search of her beloved…” (*Unfading Light*, 137). Also consult Bulgakov’s “The Meaning of Bodily Existence,” *The Unfading Light*, 141-6; and his exploration of erotic love in *The Comforter*, 321-341.


inflected aesthetically,\textsuperscript{278} is clearly Sergei Bulgakov, with whom Balthasar shares a great deal. It is striking, indeed to compare Bulgakov’s \textit{The Comforter} side by side with Balthasar’s third volume of the \textit{Theo-Logic, The Spirit of Truth}, whose treatment of common themes—for instance, the Irenaean “dyad” of Son and Spirit,\textsuperscript{279} the (rather conciliatory take on the) \textit{filioque, kenosis}, and most germanely here, an identification of the Holy Spirit with beauty—suggest that though Balthasar references Bulgakov by name only six times in the volume, his influence is in point of fact far more pervasive than not.\textsuperscript{280}

For Bulgakov, the entire creative process is parsed pneumatologically: as the only source of creativity, the Holy Spirit has been long at work in the pagan articulations of poetry and beauty.\textsuperscript{281} The Holy Spirit, almost rhapsodically, is “the Artist of the world, the Principle of form and the Form of forms…The beauty of the world is an effect of

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\textsuperscript{279} Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, 177-218; Balthasar, \textit{TL III}, 165-218.
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\textsuperscript{280} Also see Balthasar, \textit{TL III}, 53 on the development of a “Catholic Spirit Christology” and a linking of Schelling and the Russians, citing Louis Bouyer, \textit{Le Consolateur: Esprit Saint et Vie de grace}. “…two themes emerge: the first is a kind of transposition into theological terms of Schelling’s later philosophy concerning mythology and revelation and of certain of his Russian followers (Soloviev, Bulgakov). According to him, in world history and salvation history we discern the operation of Irenaeus’ ‘two hands of God the Father’—Logos and Spirit—an operation that is common to them, yet distinct in each case, and that is moving toward a point of convergence. The pagans had ‘intimations of the Spirit’ in myth, poetry, and inspiration, which constituted a confused and obscure premonition of the Logos; in the Old Testament this mythology is clarified and becomes genuine prophecy in the Spirit of wisdom, in which the divine Word comes close and exercises its purification, right up to the point where both of them meet in the Virgin Mary, who, as the highest flowering of the Spirit’s wisdom, is ready to receive into herself the Word who is drawing near” (\textit{TL III}, 53; c.f. 60).
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\textsuperscript{281} Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, 233-243. He writes, “all that is creative in human life is accomplished by natural inspiration, which is sophianic by its essence. And all great creators have in their sophianicity this creative force from the Spirit, for the very capacity for inspiration is already a sophianic spirituality, and there is simply no other source of creative life” (243). Also c.f. \textit{The Comforter}, 341. For more on human creativity and the sophianic principle in Sergei Bulgakov, particularly with an apocalyptic cast, c.f. \textit{Sophia: The Wisdom of God}, 141-3.
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the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Beauty; and Beauty is Joy, the joy of being… Balthasar likewise relates the Holy Spirit to beauty, citing Nicholas of Cusa approvingly with respect to the belief that beauty “is the intradivine glory whose authentic place is the Holy Spirit,” although it is the Son, or, sometimes, the entire Trinitarian economy, who seems in Balthasar’s account—which has a Christological center and a Trinitarian horizon—to undergird theological aesthetics. For Balthasar, the primary aesthetic role of the Holy Spirit is to assist the perceiver/believer in authentically seeing—after all, “it is the Spirit who gives believers eyes to discern God’s revelation as an integral, organically differentiated form”—the beauty of the mystery of the Christ-form. For Bulgakov, too, more than capacitating natural or artistic beauty, the Trinitarian role of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the Father not as content (which is for the Son), but the mode of actualizing the content of the Word of God precisely as beauty.

Furthermore, as was the case with Soloviev, material forms are for Bulgakov ever in the process of being spiritualized by the Holy Spirit through the (sacramental or otherwise) sanctification of “cosmic matter.” In his reflective piece “The Holy Grail”

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282 Ibid., 201. It is not unimportant here that Bulgakov supplements his point by quoting a line of Schiller’s poetry, demonstrating an affinity for the Romantics shared with both Balthasar and Soloviev.

283 Balthasar, GL V, 218.

284 Balthasar, TL III, 203.


287 Ibid., 343. It is very suggestive that in another context of addressing the Spirit’s pervasive presence in the material world that Bulgakov cops without embarrassment to panentheism, what he terms “a pantheism, but an entirely pious one” (The Comforter, 199). C.f. The Bride of the Lamb, 44. Compare this to Balthasar’s provocative early statement in “Katholische Religion und Kunst” Schweizerische Rundschau 27 (1927), 44-54, that “aesthetic panentheism” is fully capable of being brought into the Catholic fold. C.f. Balthasar, TL III, “There have been numerous attempts to recognize, in this One that sustains the Many, the final, all-embracing reality…We should not be too quick to dismiss these attempts at ‘pantheism’. In
Bulgakov renders beautifully the moment at which Christ’s side is pierced, the moment at which the earth itself becomes the Holy Grail, for it has received into itself and contains Christ’s precious blood and water. The whole world is the chalice of Christ’s blood and water; the whole world partook of them in communion at the hour of Christ’s death…One can say that the world that has received Christ into itself, that has received Christ’s body and carries him within itself, has retained within itself his corporeality after his death and Resurrection with Ascension. And this humanity of Christ’s invisibly lives in the world and is inwardly transfiguring the world toward a new heaven and a new earth.289

Again, for Bulgakov there is no real sense in which spirit and matter are opposed; rather, through the work of the Holy Spirit, matter itself is already a dynamic force capable of spiritualization (though this capacity does admit of degrees).290 It is, of course, the flesh of Christ which has transfigured the material of the world in a cooperative activity with the Spirit, continually ratified first through Christ’s sinlessness (permitting a complete transparence to the Spirit), the descent of the Spirit at baptism, on the mount of Transfiguration, and at the Resurrection.291 Through this and in participation in the sacraments, the human being receives this matter, this “substratum for divine life…[which] is integrated into the fullness of [human] essence, into…spiritual and corporeal being.”292

the end all these expressions are only the different facets of an ultimate drive on the part of world being in its thought process [des denkenden Weltseins], unable to envisage any higher goal than the unity of its origin—which by no means implies that the whole movement of coming forth and return (egressus-regressus) has been meaningless and nugatory” (434-5).


289 Bulgakov, The Holy Grail and the Eucharist, 44-5.

290 Bulgakov, The Comforter, 344-5. Also c.f Bulgakov, Die Tragödie der Philosophie (Darmstadt, 1928).


292 Ibid., 346.
The Rilkean Clause

This aesthetic-eschatological transfiguration of the world toward new heaven and new earth is hardly, however, for our Russian representatives who write under the mantle of Dostoevsky’s claim that it is beauty which must save the world, a one-sided affair. According to Bulgakov (Schelling, of course, is not far away) genuine art is something of a frontier, *metharios* phenomenon, lying on the boundary between two realms in its capacity for expressing in concrete terms its perception of what is a non-native beauty. First, beauty is rendered impotent if its sole purpose is to entertain the senses and not to transfigure the world: evoking Dostoevsky, “if beauty once saved the world, then art must prove itself an instrument of this salvation.”

In short, for Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov the artistic or creative process is and must be *theurgic*, that is, involving the cooperation of the divine and the human. The status of this cooperative endeavor for each thinker, however, is a bit different.

In his relatively early work *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877), Soloviev introduces the term in the context of the authentically mystical objective of genuine art and the creative process, which includes applied art, fine arts, and the religious, mystical sacralization of matter. In his essay “Art and ‘Theurgy,’” however, Bulgakov quibbles with the term as employed by Soloviev for (inadvertently) muddying the waters between the *work of God* or, say, human beings’ efforts toward a divine task.

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293 Bulgakov, “Art and ‘Theurgy,’” *The Unfading Light*, 153-4. C.f. Bulgakov’s essay “The Destiny of Creation”: “Beauty, as the unceasing force that strives within every being towards the realization of its own *logos*, its eternal life, is the inner law of the world, the force that forms the world, the demiurge of the cosmos. It holds the world in being, uniting both its static and its dynamic elements; and in the fullness of time its victory will be accomplished, and it will indeed ‘save the world’” (140). Also c.f. Bulgakov, “Religion and Art,” 191. See also Soloviev, “Beauty in Nature,” 29-30, for a statement on beauty’s transformative power to improve actual reality.

For Bulgakov, it is necessary to make a very clear distinction between God’s work in the world (a condescension, technically ‘theurgy’), and the human response (an ascent, what Bulgakov terms ‘sophiurgy’). Bulgakov’s worry is not without merit: Berdyaev, for instance, interprets the theme of theurgy in terms of the creative power of human beings as applied toward the absolute transformation of the world. Rather than the work of God, it is for Berdyaev “the answer of [the hu]man to the call of God.” More than this, for Berdyaev, it is God’s lack which requires cooperative activity with human beings: in his own words, “the need of God for the creative activity of man, could not be revealed to man by God, it had to be brought to light by the daring of man himself.”

According to Bulgakov, however,

theurgy is the action of God, the outpouring of his pardoning and saving grace upon humankind. As such, it depends not upon human beings but upon the will of God. In its essence, theurgy is inseparably connected with the incarnation, it is the incarnation itself extended in time and uninterruptedly in process of accomplishment, the unending action of Christ in humanity,

which is accomplished at Pentecost, “the ultimate foundation for Christian theurgy.”

Any art which attempts through its own Pelagian “technical artistic virtuosity or aestheticist magic” to accomplish the task will seriously err. This concern of misplaced power on a technique that can be mastered, of course, is a fundamental worry of

296 Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, 192.
297 Ibid.
298 Ibid., 193. C.f. 252.
299 Bulgakov, “Art and Theurgy,” 156.
300 Ibid.
301 Ibid., 157.
Balthasar’s, both in the early *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, as well as later articulations of aesthetics in the trilogy.

The famous last lines of Rilke’s poem “Archaic Torso of Apollo,”—“for there is no place/that does not see you. You must change your life”—couple together the aesthetic and the ethical in a marriage which loosely unites the Romantics (Schiller, especially), the Russians, and Balthasar. As we have just demonstrated, the quality of the Russian religious aesthetic, particularly in Soloviev, is both a vision and a task to incarnate ideal content in the real, for material beauty asymptotically to reflect eschatological promise. For Balthasar, there is likewise in the aesthetic a latent ethical or moral demand. Balthasar makes a double appeal to Origen and to Rilke for the moral quality of beauty in revelation:

For Origen, the moral meaning of revelation is not to be found alongside its mystical meaning: the spiritual light proceeding from revelation’s depths. For Origen, the ‘moral meaning’ refers to the urgency with which such light penetrates the beholder’s very heart, in a manner described by Rilke in his ‘The Archaic Torso of Apollo’: “there is no place in it which does not see you. You must change your life.”

Thus, the ethical is “beauty’s inner coordinate axis.” To be confronted with the beauty of God is to present the beholder with an urgent choice, a moral decision, a ‘Yes’ or a ‘No.’ In this way, as we shall suggest in a subsequent chapter, the enrapturing moment is also apocalyptic.

In the exercise of plotting the aesthetics of Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar roughly along the axes of finite and infinite, freedom and necessity, and matter and spirit, 

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we have observed Balthasar’s affirmation of a type of aesthetics, which are structurally
and formally similar to Schelling’s insofar as beauty has a mediating function between
real and ideal. What is categorically not affirmed, however, is an aesthetic of identity
between natural and supernatural, which leads either to materialism or to monism, either
subsuming the finite or making it absolute. This *identitas entis* represents the spectacular
failure of aesthetic theology to produce glory. Whereas Berdyaev’s aesthetics depreciates
the finite, Soloviev’s thoroughly Chalcedonian formulation and Bulgakov’s
pneumatological articulation accord Christ His rightful place as the genuine union
between infinite and finite, which indicates concretely the mystery of the Trinity, love,
being as such.

In Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, the enrapturing of the beholder is not simply
for the pleasure of the senses; rather, the aesthetic anticipates and requires the dramatic,
for “no one is enraptured without returning, from this encounter, with a personal
mission.”305 The internal, objective evidential power of the beautiful in revelation is
existentially transformative for human beings insofar as it communicates not only the
phenomena itself, but simultaneously the grace to see love rightly and the freedom to
answer in kind.306 For with Balthasar, “where a thing of beauty is really and radically
beheld, freedom too is radically opened up, and decision can take place.”307 This
capacity for a free response on the part of the human being assumes, of course, the
integrity of finite freedom and creatureliness (in short, a relation of analogy rather than
identity) that is not absorbed into the absoluteness of the appearing phenomenon. What

is primary for Balthasar, however, as the next chapter aims to demonstrate, is not the exercise of finite freedom itself, but “that I hand myself over to the deciding reality and thus am resolved, decided, to let myself be marked by the unique encounter offered me.”\textsuperscript{308}  

\textsuperscript{308} \textit{Ibid.}
CHAPTER THREE

“DU DUNKELHEIT, AUS DER ICH STAMME”309:

ONTOLOGY, EVIL, AND MYTH AT THE ROOT

Schelling, with Jacob Böhme behind him, receives in this chapter what might seem to be rather extravagant consideration. As we have indicated elsewhere, however, Böhme and Schelling provide a direct line of Western influence to Russian religious thinking,310 and Schelling’s Romanticism was incredibly influential for certain nineteenth century Roman Catholics of the Tübingen School, especially J.S. Drey.311 Schelling and Böhme are foregrounded because their respective configurations of dialectical

309 R.M. Rilke, “Du Dunkelheit, aus der ich stamme,” The Book of Hours: “You, darkness, of whom I am born—/I love you more than the flame/that limits the world/to the circle it illumines/and excludes all the rest./But the dark embraces everything: shapes and shadows, creatures and me/people, nations—just as they are./It lets me imagine/a great presence stirring beside me./I believe in the night.” Rilke’s Book of Hours: Love Poems to God, trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (Riverhead Trade, 2005), 57.

310 C.f. Zdenek V. David, “The Influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious Thought,” Slavic Review 21:1 (March 1962): 43-64, which attempted to highlight what he thought were neglected sources in Soloviev’s intellectual formation. Though David’s claim that Soloviev relied chiefly upon Western mystical and theosophical sources (Böhme, Swedenborg, Paracelsus), which were then translated to intellectual currents of pre-World War I Silver Age Russia, is a bit of an overstatement, the article helpfully traces the means of Böhme’s transmission in Russia as well as provides an overview of his fundamental teachings. David also downplays Schelling’s influence as primary for Soloviev (60). For the influence of Böhme on post-Kantian idealism, c.f. Kurt Leese, Von Jacob Boehme zu Schelling (Erfurt, 1927). Also c.f. Paola Mayer, Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature (Montreal, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999. For a more general account, see Ernst Benz, The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy, trans. Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1983). For Böhme himself, the classic source is Alexandre Koyré, La philosophie de Jacob Boehme (Paris, 1929).

311 C.f. Thomas Franklin O’Meara, O.P., Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians (University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).
metaphysics and theogonic process—which place division at the root of divinity and of being that ultimately produces the created world, mythology, and human history—deeply affect and determine particularly Berdyaev’s religious philosophy of freedom, evil, history, and myth, as well as his extra-confessional sophiological commitments, and, second, because the sites of Berdyaev’s influence by Böhme and Schelling are precisely the sites of Balthasar’s most vociferous objections to Berdyaev. Third, Schelling’s adoption of Böhme is important insofar as Soloviev assimilates a version of the Schellingian potencies in the Lectures on Divine Humanity though he supplements it with more determinately Christian content. Schelling, informed by Böhme, provides the generative grammar for this chapter, the means of tracing central convergences and departures between our thinkers on freedom, evil, temporality, and the relation of myth and history. The primary reason why investigating these discourses is significant is Balthasar’s mining and adjudication of these extra-confessional modes as they resurface in speculative Russian religious philosophy.

Why does Balthasar trouble himself at all with thinkers like Berdyaev and Soloviev? As suggested in the previous chapter, it is certainly true that Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar have a common adversary in the presumptions of modern rationalism. Alike they chafe at the overweening Enlightenment confidence in the power of reason to overcome myth, to derogate freedom, both human and divine, and to treat too casually the problem of evil. Indeed, part of the value of certain extra-confessional lines of thinking which Balthasar engages, particularly that of Böhme-Schelling-Berdyaev, is precisely that they serve as religious counter-points to the excesses of rationalistic modernity. While on this point Balthasar finds the Böhme-Schelling-Berdyaev response comprehensible insofar as it attempts to retain the mythic, preserve
human freedom, and take evil seriously, he absolutely does not countenance it. The speculative ontologies embedded in the discourses of this trio of thinkers is the deformative unmaking of an authentically Christian rendition of freedom, myth, and the problem of evil; the titanic humanism of Romanticism dooms itself. Though Soloviev takes his bearings from Schelling, especially with respect to articulating a version of the three “potencies” of God, his position decisively departs from this line insofar as it aligns far more nearly with the determinative content of Christian theology.

Balthasar has characterized Western philosophical history as a long attempt to differentiate that which is necessary, abstract, and universal from that which is contingent, particular, and singular, a discursive mode which follows the fault-lines of grandiose rational systems (Hegel looms large) and the dynamic historicity of empirical facts. According to Balthasar, in this negotiation the preference has been accorded emphatically to the former over the latter in terms of valuation and philosophical respectability, where particulars are interpreted always as illustrative or emblematic of the larger system of universal, abstract processes. The problem with this model, of course, is that the crushing historical process absolutely bowls over that which is individual and particular, jeopardizing human creativity, personality, and individual freedom.\footnote{Balthasar, \textit{A Theology of History}, 9-11.} This chapter, along with the others, can be understood in the broadest possible terms as a comparative examination of the various means by which our religious philosophers—German, Russian, and Swiss—attempted to meet the longstanding philosophical problem of negotiating the relationship between universals and particulars, infinite and
finite.\textsuperscript{313} For Balthasar, there are two choices for thinking this difference: either human beings can understand themselves to be defined by the distinction, that is, as finite existents (world) and the infinite Absolute (God); or they can attempt to eradicate the distinction by methodically ignoring the Absolute altogether and operating from a purely immanentist perspective in which possible meaning is restricted to the this-worldly.\textsuperscript{314}

The questions which emerge are entirely central for Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar: from whence comes the temporal, particular, historical, finite, and genuinely developmental existence of the actual world in relation to the oneness, simplicity, and eternity of God? How best ought we try to negotiate the finite and the infinite, the particular and the universal, time and eternity, multiplicity and unity, change and permanence? Does the absolute, infinite nature of God mitigate the existence and exercise of finite human freedom? How can the created order be said to be good if human beings freely choose themselves over against God? These are indeed what Balthasar calls the “most ancient questions” of human beings, questions which cannot blithely be set aside, “for we cannot deny that we are not nothing, any more than that we are not God; nor can we deny that there exist good and evil and hence created freedom too.”\textsuperscript{315}

It was this complex of concerns which served as provocation for Schelling to adopt a version of Böhme’s speculative ontology and posit theogonic process, a highly

\textsuperscript{313} This theme absolutely dominates the thought of Schelling. He identifies the “riddle of the world” \textit{[das Rätsel der Welt]} as this question: “How is the Absolute able to come out of itself and posit a world opposite itself?” C.f. F.W.J. Schelling, \textit{Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus} (Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism, 1795), in \textit{Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling’s Sämmliche Werke}, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta’scher Verlag 1856ff., vol. I, 310.

\textsuperscript{314} Balthasar, \textit{TD II}, 41.

\textsuperscript{315} \textit{Ibid.}, 63.
dynamistic doctrine of the origin or birth of God, at the door not only of his metaphysics but also his philosophy of mythology.\textsuperscript{316} Böhme’s theogonic myth—whose elements arise and function as explanatory principles with respect to creation, history, providence, human agency, time, freedom, and evil—resurfaces assertively in our genealogy, first in the speculative ontology of Schelling and then in the Russians, and particularly Berdyaev, but through Schelling also to Soloviev. Thus, the attention in this chapter is focused upon the ways Berdyaev and Soloviev negotiate this line, as well as Balthasar’s reception of it, leaving more sustained dialogue with Bulgakov to chapters four and five.\textsuperscript{317} Schelling’s Behemistic inheritance thus opens up several mutually implied discursive fields, including metaphysical voluntarism, the possibility of free will, the nature and origin of evil, mythology, progressive religious development, historicity, temporality, and, for the Russians at least, sophiology. We shall speak to each of these elements in turn, insofar as they are sites of maximally significant conjunctions and disjunctions between Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar, though some worthy themes (sophiology, for instance) must necessarily fall by the wayside.\textsuperscript{318}

\textsuperscript{316} Schelling, XII, 131. C.f. Beach, 62.

\textsuperscript{317} Bulgakov, like Balthasar, recognizes the dangers of this particular line of thinking. C.f. The Lamb of God, 97, 120, 134; The Comforter, 44, 59, 361, 392.

\textsuperscript{318} Sophiology, of course, is the rather difficult doctrine in the Silver Age of Russian religious thinking that has been put somewhat in the more mainstream theological limelight with John Milbank’s recent claim in his article, “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon,” that Russian sophiology is “perhaps the most significant theology of the two preceding centuries (145).” See John Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon,” in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), An Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World through the Word (Altershot: Ashgate, 2009). For a response to (an earlier version of) Milbank, see Brandon Gallaher, “Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Created Distinction in the Sophiologies of Soloviev, Bulgakov and Milbank,” Lago: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies, 47:1-2 (2006), 163-190. It is exceedingly difficult to present a clear, consistent picture of how “Sophia” is understood in the Russians, or even in the father of the discourse—Soloviev himself—who employed multi-layered presentations in poetry and philosophical prose in his attempt to articulate who or what Sophia is. A full evaluation of Russian sophiology is well beyond the scope of the present work, including an assessment of the pastiche of traditions which informs it, including the Christian Scriptures,
As we have already indicated elsewhere, there are many Schellings. Here the Schelling largely in play is that of the transitional middle period (1806-1820), including the essay on freedom (1809), the *Ages of the World* (1811-15), and the Berlin mythology lectures, although the 1804 essay *Philosophy and Religion* is significant insofar as it introduces the idea of the primordial Fall which Berdyaev adopts, and foreshadows the thematic of freedom and evil taken up more decisively in the 1809 *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*. It is during this middle period that Schelling’s Behemistic heritage (transmitted genetically and, for Balthasar, fatally, to Berdyaev) appears most evident. Though we will revisit *The Ages of the World* in

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319 For a nice study of the evolution of Schelling’s thought, see Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (State University of New York Press, 1996).


321 The tremendous influence of Böhme wanes in the late Schelling. With respect to the middle period, though, the enthusiastic reception of Böhme by Schelling (after Franz von Baader introduced the latter to his work) seems clear enough, despite the fact that, even in the 1809 essay on freedom which suggests a debt, Böhme is not acknowledged by name. Despite the rather spurious claims of Harald Holz, whose *Spekulation und Faktizität. Zum Freiheitsbegriff des mittleren und späten Schelling* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1970) attempts to contravene the far more widely held view that Schelling was indeed in Böhme’s debt, the...
chapter five, it deserves mention here insofar as it both ratifies and expounds upon that which he borrowed from Böhme in the freedom essay, and contains a nascent description of Schelling’s theory of the potencies. Schelling’s *Potenzlehre* draws upon Böhme’s notion of an originary contracting power of bare, free, indeterminate primitive will whose nisus is only ec-static manifestation, which is to say, a divine self-constitution. This triadic doctrine of the potencies also reappears more concretely in the late Berlin lectures on the philosophy of mythology, in which the potencies unfold in nature, in myth, and in history.

_Wollen ist Ursein_

parallels in their respective philosophical theories as well as Schelling’s own claims cannot be ignored. For treatment of Böhme’s influence on Schelling, see James Gutmann’s introduction to Schelling’s *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, xlv-lii, which provides a sense of Schelling’s high valuation of Böhme’s contributions—especially vis-à-vis St. Martin—as original, dynamic, even “a miracle in the history of humanity and especially in the history of the German mind” (xlvii). Also see Edward Beach, “Three Formative Influences on Schelling: Böhme, Baader, and Hegel,” *The Potencies of God(s)*, 69-91 and, of course, Robert Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809-1815* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1977). Also useful, especially with getting the lay of the land with respect to the various positions scholars have taken regarding Schelling’s debts to Böhme, the complex relation between Schelling and Neoplatonism, and the nature of evil, is Paola Mayer, “Idealism, Human Freedom and the Problem of Evil: F.W.J. Schelling,” in _Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiology, Literature_ (Montreal, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 179-221. Berdyaev also speak briefly to the convergences between Böhme and Schelling, especially in the latter’s _Philosophical Inquiry into the Essence of Human Freedom_, although according to Berdyaev Schelling “does not always understand Boehme exactly” (“Unground and Freedom,” xxvii.) This is not to exclude other sources, however, as Platonic and Neo-Platonic sources are also in the mix for Schelling. His work on the _Timaeus_ is especially notable, especially with respect to Plato’s theory of the relation of chaotic matter to God. See Schelling’s essay on the _Timaeus_ in *On the Spirit of Platonic Philosophy and On Human Freedom*, 35. C.f. also Werner Beierwaltes, “Plato’s _Timaeus_ in German Idealism: Schelling and Windischmann,” *Plato’s Timaeus as Cultural Icon*, ed. Gretchen J. Reydams-Schils (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 267-289. Plato is also extremely important for Vladimir Soloviev, who wrote in 1898 a long essay called *The Life Drama of Plato*. See Tatjana Kochetkova, “Vladimir Solov’ev’s Theory of Divine Humanity.” PhD diss., University of Nijmegen, 2001, as well as _The Search for Authentic Spirituality in Modern Russian Philosophy: The Perdurance of Solov’ev’s Ideal_ (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2007), by the same author. For the influence of Platonic and Neo-Platonic sources on Soloviev, also c.f Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, _Divine Sophia_, 39-48.

322 “In the non-natural, uncreaturely Godhead (*Gottheit*) there is nothing more than a single will, which is also called the One God, who wants nothing else except to find and grasp himself, to go out of himself, and by means of this outgoing to bring himself into visibility (*Beschaulichkeit*). This _Beschaulichkeit_ is to be understood as comprising the threefold character of the Godhead, as well as the mirror of his wisdom and the eye by which he sees” (Böhme, *On the Election to Grace*, vol. 4 of *The Works*, Law edition, paragraphs 10-13, pp. 155-6.) Quoted in Beach, 71. Also see Beach, 37, 72, 133, 267n.15, 277n.58.
The question of freedom—both human and divine—is at the very center of the religious philosophy of Schelling and the Russians, as well as the theo-dramatic theology of Balthasar. The question of the meaning of freedom, especially vis-à-vis history, was of particular significance to Schelling (who once wrote that “the beginning and end of all philosophy is—Freedom”\(^{323}\)) for what must the nature of history be if human beings—and God—had real agency to determine or change the course of it? Berdyaev shares this fundamental interest.\(^{324}\) And Balthasar’s theo-drama absolutely requires the preservation of both finite and infinite freedom, where the deep structures of freedom in the “noumenal life-form”\(^{325}\) of human being operate as a self-determination that admits of degrees. Human freedom operates on two dimensions, the first of which moves toward a definitive (and, as we shall suggest in chapter four, apocalyptic) determination of “Yes” or “No,” and the second “forms a vast, inexhaustible space within which these definite decisions fall.”\(^{326}\) Both dimensions operate on the premise that the individual form and the Absolute are not equated one with the other. Human relationships provide an analogy, though it limps: “When lovers hand themselves over to each other, they do not renounce the greater, inexhaustible realm of freedom: they simply anchor their mutual bond within it.”\(^{327}\) Thus, while the genealogical line of Böhme-Schelling-Berdyaev shares with Balthasar an interest in articulating the compossibility of infinite and finite freedom,


\(^{324}\) Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*.


\(^{326}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{327}\) Ibid.
the monological solution—and the speculative ontology embedded therein—offered by
the former is considered by the latter to be entirely bankrupt. Here Berdyaev is indicted,
of course, but not Soloviev. Moreover, as we shall see below, the discourse of freedom
becomes of a piece with that of the origin and nature of evil. Böhme and Schelling
likewise variously inform the Russians on the problem of evil.\textsuperscript{328}

In \textit{Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom} (1809), Schelling’s task is
first to demonstrate that his developing philosophy is capable of accommodating human
freedom (especially vis-à-vis charges of pantheism made by his former friend Friedrich
Schlegel, which, according to Schlegel, compromised freedom by its determinism).\textsuperscript{329}
Significantly, against the regnant philosophical idealism of his day, Schelling ultimately
defines authentic freedom as “a possibility of good and evil.”\textsuperscript{330} Freedom can only exist,
then, if the genuine possibility for evil is present. Thus, freedom cannot be thought
without reference to the brute facticity of evil. This definition naturally requires
Schelling to speculate upon the nature of evil, and upon the nature of the apparent
dilemma which emerges: if actual, real evil is admissible, it seems to jeopardize the
perfection of the Absolute; but if actual, real evil is inadmissible, the most robust sense
of human freedom is likewise jeopardized.\textsuperscript{331} How to account for the oneness of the
Absolute as well as the reality of evil? By this time Schelling has embraced the view,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{328} For Berdyaev’s comments on Böhme on evil, see “Unground and Freedom,” x-xi.
\item \textsuperscript{329} See Schlegel’s 1808 \textit{Uer Sprache und Weisheit der Indier (About the Language and the Wisdom of the
Indians)}. Indeed, Schelling’s own growing uneasiness was that absolute systems could not account for
genuine freedom and the unpredictability of the human personality. Berdyaev makes this point as well with
Balthasar, \textit{TD II}, “Infinite and Finite Freedom,” 189-334. Also see \textit{TD IV} 150, in his discussion of
Blondel and de Lubac.
\item \textsuperscript{331} Schelling, \textit{Of Human Freedom}, 26.
\end{itemize}
against major currents in idealism, that evil is an actual spiritual force, not—as in Hegel or even Augustine—simply a negation or privation of the good; he does not hold, however, the dualistic premise that evil is an oppositional force co-eternal with God, for everything that exists exists in God. But, even given this commitment, Schelling does not want to affirm that God wills evil.

It is in the face of this dilemma that Schelling relates the myth of origins, of that which is prior to being, which he borrows substantially from Jakob Böhme’s theogonic metaphysics of self-generating divinity, a process which suggests the creation of the world is a groundless act of absolute freedom. The practice of telling theogonic myths does not, of course, originate with Böhme; Balthasar places Böhme and Schelling (The Ages of the World gets special mention) in a line traced back through Lucretius, Plato’s Timeaus, and the Eleatic school to Hesiod’s Theogony, which like Böhme, coaxes the principle of light from that of darkness in a manner which cannot leave the light unsullied. Indeed, Böhme’s origin myth repeats a version of the ancient symbol of the self-eating serpent ouroboros, ever-consuming its own tail, symbolic of the perpetual cycle of becoming, of eternity, of primordial unity. Plato’s Timaeus details such a figure, of course, a great circular worm with no eyes and no ears, as there was nothing outside this creature at all to be beheld, and with no organs, “since there was nothing which went from him or came into him: for there was nothing beside him…his own waste provid[ed] his own food, and all that he did or suffered [took] place in and by

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332 Ibid., 28. Dualism, for Schelling, is “a system of self-destruction and the despair of reason” (28).

333 Balthasar, GL IV, 78-84.
himself.”334 The symbol of the ouroboros becomes a central image in gnostic, hermetic, and alchemical discourses, as well as particularly in the poetry of Western Romanticism.335

According to Böhme, prior to being, prior to divinity, prior to good and evil, prior to Divine Trinity, the Ungrund of bare nothingness, of uncreated freedom, stirs.336 The inchoate, undifferentiated will seeks self-expression by (necessarily) going out of itself into actuality, into the “revelation” of sensible media, in order not only to become self-actualized, but also to become self-aware. At the root of this movement is primal conflict, as the undifferentiated will meets opposition. This instability gives rise to a second will which seeks not eccentric actualization, but a return or contraction to primal unity, while maintaining the seeds of darkness. Unfulfilled longing begets suffering, which begets the dark fire of bitterness, or Grimmigkeit. According to Böhme, this Grimmigkeit is the first of three principles which emerge from this primordium, and that which can, as divine wrath, be identified with God the Father, the sharp, astringent principle of “No.” The second principle is divine love, or God the Son, the “Yes.” As these dialectical principles interact oppositionally, the creative process of the world begins and is sustained by the cooperative movement between “No” and “Yes,” between “Father” and “Son”: that is, the third principle of the Holy Spirit.337

334 Plato, Timaeus, 33. For Balthasar on Plato, see GL IV, 284ff.


336 The account that follows is more summative of his mature position, and of necessity flattens out some of the subtleties of the development of Böhme’s thought from Aurora to De Signatura Rerum and Mysterium Magnum.

337 Böhme, Works, 2:60; 3:16-17 See Beach, The Potencies of God(s), 72-3; Paola Meyer, 200ff.
stem from the divine nature. Jakob Böhme’s God is therefore Janus-faced: “He Himself is all Being, He is Evil and Good, heaven and hell, light and darkness, eternity and time, the beginning and the end; wherever His love becomes hidden in a being there appears His wrath.”

Schelling appropriates from Böhme much of this primordial cyclical process, particularly the dark fundament of irrationality at the root of being, which pre-forms the universe, and the primordial act of free will which brings the world into being. This dark ground is contained in God, but is not God: *das Dunkle* is God’s “nature” (*die Natur in Gott*), “inseparable from him, to be sure, but nevertheless distinguishable from him.”

All things have their basis in this bare will, this primordial hunger or desire for self-actualization—prior to divinity—which is the principle of becoming, of vitality and of dynamism:

> It is the longing which the eternal One feels to give birth to itself. This is not the One itself, but is co-eternal with it. This longing seeks to give birth to God, i.e. the unfathomable unity, but to this extent it has not yet the unity in its own self. Therefore, regarded in itself, it is also will; but a will within which there is no understanding, and thus not an independent and complete will, since understanding is actually the will in willing.


339 Whether this movement into the sense world ought actually to be understood as upward or downward—that is, victorious ascent or cosmic fall—may be debatable. The conventional reading of Schelling here, of course, is that the sense world is the product of a movement away from God, and that the exercise of freedom is tragic and antagonistic. Berdyaev certainly accepts this view, making the finite world the result of a cosmic fall. For the sense world as result of a primordial fall, see Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* 1, 6: 42. See Paola Mayer, 192, 194. Also see Fackenheim, 98, who more conventionally reads the originary act of freedom as a cosmic fall. Slavoj Žižek suggests, however, that this negative figuration is inadequate. He challenges the more standard interpretation that for Schelling the emergence of time was a “Fall”; rather, it ought be understood as a “triumphant ascent, the act of decision/differentiation by means of which the Absolute resolves the agonizing rotary motion of drives and breaks out of its vicious circle into temporal succession” (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 30).


From these early stirrings “there is born in God himself an inward, imaginative response” through which for the first time “God sees himself in his own image…[which]…is the first in which God, viewed absolutely, is realized, though only in himself; it is in the beginning in God, and is the God-begotten God himself,” who alone, as the existent God, abides in pure light. God, then, is the indissoluble identity of the binaries of darkness and light, the will to revelation and the will to love, with the darkness subdued by the light (the concept of the potencies of God is developed at much greater length in the philosophy of mythology). For Schelling’s dialectical metaphysics, and Böhme upon whom he relies, the bitter, dark (material) principle is absolutely necessary for God’s self-actualization, which, much like Hegel, requires a self-posted opposition in order to emerge (and eventually reunify the contrary principles). As Schelling writes, “If there were no division of the principles, then unity could not manifest its omnipotence; if there were no conflict then love could not become real.”

Darkness, for Schelling, is the “necessary heritage” of the created order. Thus, God undergoes development, and, in the face of this tremendous dark freedom, is not totally in control.

At the genesis of divinity, then, is the Unground, that indeterminate, dark premundane freedom invoked by Böhme to explain both the origins of the world and the origins of metaphysical evil, which is decidedly non-privative. Schelling’s appeal to

342 Ibid., 35.
343 Schelling likens it to the “surging billowing sea” of Platonic matter. C.f. Of Human Freedom, 35.
344 Ibid., 50. For a similar passage, see 54.
345 Ibid., 34.
Böhme’s theogonic conception of this originary self-propelling, self-creating process (later, in *The Ages of the World* fragments imaging it, as in Böhme, as “an unremitting wheel”\(^{346}\)) which ultimately produces God, the created world—and, with it, presumably, evil—thus permits him simultaneously to maintain the immanence of evil in God and the actuality of evil as a real force, and to exempt God from any responsibility thereof, since evil arises before God is, properly speaking, God. The impulse in Böhme and Schelling to identify darkness at the root of being—repeated decisively in Berdyaev and condemned just as decisively by Balthasar—is thus at the first an attempt at theodicy, a response to the pervasive problem of both evil and its origins.\(^{347}\) To be sure, Balthasar is opposed to this mode of explanatory theodicy.\(^{348}\)

**Ontology: Russian Repetitions**

This Behemistic and Schellingian heritage is evident particularly in Nicholas Berdyaev. Berdyaev assimilates and makes central to his own religious philosophy the notion that it is the intuitive, the mythic which is the most adequate mode of truth and

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\(^{346}\) From the third draft of the *Weltalter* (1815), with respect to the Potencies: “There is neither a veritable higher nor a veritable lower, since in turn one is the higher and the other is the lower. There is only an unremitting wheel, a rotary movement that never comes to a standstill and in which there is no differentiation. Even the concept of the beginning, as well as the concept of the end, again sublimates itself in this circulation” (*The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason Wirth, 76). As we shall see in chapter five, in the *Weltalter*, the binary principles of negation and affirmation are plotted along more rotary lines as contraction, expansion, and their reconciliation.

\(^{347}\) Berdyaev in particular sounds the theme of theodicy as a, if not the fundamental task of Christian theology. For instance, in his efforts to address the theodicy problem in “The Origin of Good and Evil,” Berdyaev appeals explicitly to Behemistic philosophy, asserting, “Out of the Divine Nothing, the *Gottheit* or the *Unground*, the Holy Trinity, God the Creator is born. The creation of the world by God the Creator is a secondary act…Freedom is not determined by God; it is part of the nothing out of which God created the world” (and, notably, out of which God arises as well) (*The Destiny of Man*, 25). Also c.f. *The Beginning and the End*, 151.

\(^{348}\) C.f. Jacob H. Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy: The Trinitarian Theology of von Balthasar and the Problem of Evil* (Burlington, VT; Ashgate, 2011). Balthasar’s eccentric interpretation of Christ’s descent into hell, which we shall speak to in subsequent chapters, helps alleviate the problem of theodicy, as it is indicative of the radical lengths God will go in response to the human abuses of the gift of freedom (c.f. Aiden Nichols’ introduction to Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 7).
perception. Indeed, Berdyaev praises the intuitive, the mystical, the theosophical modes according to which Böhme, the untrained Lutheran shoemaker, who privileged immediacy of access to the divine over external rituals, operates. He is, for Berdyaev, practiced in the sort of wisdom which employs myth, vision, and symbol rather than more strictly rational or discursive categories. He views Böhme as a myth-maker of remarkable originality, whose importance and ingenuity rests primarily in the fact that he introduced not only dynamism but also tragedy into God’s internal life.

Berdyaev enthusiastically repeats Böhme’s notion of a dark root of reality, the theogonic process, and a radical metaphysical voluntarism (some of which, of course, is owed to Kant, whom Berdyaev lauds for upholding freedom as the primary principle). Indeed, Berdyaev strongly asserts that “the denial of this theogonic process

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349 Nicholas Berdyaev, “Unground and Freedom,” introduction to Böhme, Six Theosophic Points, v. See also Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, 110, where he suggests that it is Böhme’s evocative use of symbol and myth which provides unique access to truth not available to discursive reason. As Cyril O’Regan has suggested, however, the profile of Böhme as unlettered aboriginal thinker is more a “Romantic fiction” than not (Gnostic Apocalypse, 4.) For an example of Schelling’s preference for unschooled divine intuition over more sophisticated but highly rational modes of discourse, see his defense of the so-called Schwärmer against Fichte’s critiques in the 1806 Exposition of the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Improved Fichtean Doctrine. It is notable, however, as Paola Mayer points out in Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme, that Schelling does not marshal this defense on behalf of Böhme but, rather, Kepler and Leibniz (195).


351 Berdyaev distinguishes Böhme’s recommendation of a theogonic process from Fichte and Hegel insofar as Böhme “did not mean…that God is born within a temporal process, but that God’s interior and eternal life manifests itself under the form of a dynamic process, of tragedy within eternity, of battle against the darkness of nonbeing” (“Unground and Freedom,” xviii.) Berdyaev’s essay “Unground and Freedom” also tends to conflates the concepts of the Unground with that of divine nature; for Böhme the Unground is actually prior to the generation of nature (the three powers). For a subtle and learned presentation of the theogonic narrative of Böhme, see Cyril O’Regan, Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme’s Haunted Narrative (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).

352 This said, however, Kant was certainly not beyond reproach for Berdyaev, who objected to Kant’s emphasis on universal law over the individual personality (c.f. The Destiny of Man, 81) as well as the sense that the universal law was always socialized and thus implicated fatally in the fallen world, the “realm of the herd-man, das Man” (The Destiny of Man, 92-3).
is a denial of the life of the Godhead."\textsuperscript{353} That the will in Böhme and in Schelling is primary to time, to history, to being itself sets a theme adopted self-consciously by Berdyaev to ensure dynamism: that of metaphysical voluntarism.\textsuperscript{354} In fact, Berdyaev’s adoption of Böhme’s notion of the irrational ground, an originary “meonic” freedom of non-being as pure potency prior to God is that which explicitly provides the condition of the possibility for his central metaphysical and eschatological claims, particularly pertaining to the phenomenon of becoming as such,\textsuperscript{355} the nature of God as life rather than static being,\textsuperscript{356} the manifestation of the physical world and the true nature of evil.\textsuperscript{357} Further, Berdyaev’s philosophy of history requires a version of Böhme’s shadowed ground, with preference to the principle of darkness over the principle of light. As he suggests in \textit{The Meaning of History}, sounding quite a lot like Schelling,

Historical reality implies the existence of an irrational principle which makes dynamism possible. Neither history nor true dynamism is possible without this principle, which is turbulent, mobile, and pliant, and which kindles the conflict between the opposing forces of light and darkness.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{353} Berdyaev, \textit{The Beginning and the End}, 105.

\textsuperscript{354} See, for instance, Berdyaev, “Unground and Freedom,” where Berdyaev lauds Böhme for being “the first man in the history of human thought to recognize that the foundations of being, prior to being, are unfathomable freedom” (xx). C.f. \textit{The Beginning and the End}, 105-117 for Berdyaev’s explicit affirmations of Böhme. Also c.f. Berdyaev, \textit{The Fate of Man in the Modern World} [1935] (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), where he describes the \textit{Ungrund} as “the pure potentiality of being, the negative ground essential for the realization of the novel, creative aspects of existence” (132).

\textsuperscript{355} “The process of becoming, and the dialectic of world development are possibilities only because non-being exists. If we concede being only, there will be no becoming or development of any sort” (Berdyaev, \textit{The Beginning and the End}, 161).

\textsuperscript{356} See Berdyaev, \textit{The Beginning and the End}, where he approvingly reports that for Schelling, God is not being but dynamic life (97). His eschatological metaphysics is meant to de-stabilize traditional ontological categories (99). He explicitly affirms freedom as the most fundamental category of reality (for example, see \textit{The Fate of Man in the Modern World}, 136-7).


\textsuperscript{358} Berdyaev, \textit{The Meaning of History}, 43.
As in Schelling, the primordial being unfolds in (the objectified, fallen realms of) nature and history, and these two modes of being are in Berdyaev associated with different modes of time, the former with cosmic time, and the latter with historical, linear time. According to Berdyaev, human beings must proceed through history in order to break eventually (eschatologically) out of the bonds of objectification.

A significant point of convergence between Schelling and the Russians is the former’s notion of a primordial fall into time and the phenomenal world, which Berdyaev takes up in his concept of “objectification.” In the early essay *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), Schelling suggests that the movement from Absolute to actual historical particulars and the sense world is not continuous. Rather, “the origin of the phenomenal world is conceivable only as a complete falling-away from absoluteness by means of a leap [Sprung].” This fall is a fall into the non-ideal, chaotic visible world; thus the fall is coincident with the moment of creation (an idea shared by Soloviev, though on this point Balthasar suggests Soloviev is more like Maximus the Confessor than he is like Schelling or Berdyaev).

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361 Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion*, 1804. This is an odd text, written in response to K.A. Eschenmayer’s *Die Philosophie in ihrem Übergang zur Nichtphilosophie*. It was hastily written and understood even by Schelling to be a transitional work between his so-called negative and positive philosophies (c.f. Dale Snow, 188). The so-called “positive philosophy” emerges from the doctrine of God as the primal origin of the universe in the potencies, proceeds through the philosophy of mythology and culminates in his philosophy of revelation. Balthasar as well writes that, especially vis-à-vis the Bruno, *Philosophy and Religion* “breathes a totally new atmosphere” (*TD I*, 570). As we shall see, the theme of the fall becomes important again for Schelling in the *Weltalter* (1811-15) in terms of articulating his somewhat esoteric metaphysics of time and eternity.

Berdyaev advanced a radically dualistic conception of reality which placed the realm of spirit and the realm of nature (rather like the Kantian conception of the noumenal and the phenomenal) in an absolutely oppositional relationship. Following Schelling, the Fall did not occur in the phenomenal world, but actually caused it, ejecting human beings from the divine, unified mode of spirit to an objectified realm of temporal, spatial, and historical division and chaos. The Fall was the very “process of exteriorization” itself. This fact gives the observable world an ambiguous, unreal cast:

The natural world of phenomena is symbolic in character. It is full of signs of another world and it is a symptom of division and alienation in the sphere of spirit. There is no natural objective world in the sense of a reality in itself; the only world there is is the world which is divinely and humanly free. The object world is enslavement and fall.

Now this conception of a primordial fall which Berdyaev adopts from Schelling is for Balthasar quite beyond the pale insofar as it diminishes the sense world altogether. Balthasar draws attention to this illusory character of human being in the created order which is necessitated by the appeal to the “multifarious theories of a ‘fall’ that threaten to devalue the dignity and uniqueness of earthly existence, seeing it as something ‘unreal.’” Though he does not mention Berdyaev explicitly in this context, it can be safely assumed that he (or at least Böhme, who forms Berdyaev’s thinking) is indeed in Balthasar’s sights here.

Balthasar likewise comments on Soloviev’s conception of the Fall, although his hermeneutic is here more nearly that of charity than not. In the Lectures on Divine Humanity, Soloviev writes,

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363 Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, 214.
364 Ibid., 59.
365 Balthasar, TD IV, 118. Also c.f. TD I, 570.
If our natural world, lying in evil, a land of curse and banishment, bringing forth thistles and thorns, is the inevitable consequence of sin and the fall, it is clear that the origin of sin and the fall lies not here but in that garden of God in which not only the tree of life but also the tree of knowledge of good and evil have their roots. In other words, the primordial origin of evil can lie only in the domain of the eternal, prenatural world.  

Likewise, he indicates in the same lecture that the phenomenal world and those entities which populate it are “only consequences or manifestations of evil.” In Lecture Ten, he says that the world resulted “in the chaotic being of the all constituting the primordial fact.” In Balthasar’s essay on Soloviev, however, he suggests that in order to avoid identifying the coming into reality of nature with the Fall, identifying separateness with egotism, we must stick to those texts that are quite clear in tracing the Fall back to a (transcendental) free decision, which establishes the form of fragmentation in cosmic life.

There is much, then, to recommend Cyril O’Regan’s observation that Balthasar reads Soloviev rather as if he were Bulgakov. It certainly seems to be the case that Balthasar criticizes Soloviev with a light hand because he is viewing the former through Bulgakov’s rather revisionist reading of him.

For Schelling (and here his Neoplatonic heritage—shared with Balthasar—shows as well), history follows a pattern of egressus and return. According to Schelling, history is an epic composed in the mind of God. It has two main parts: one depicting mankind’s egress from its center to its farthest point of displacement; the other, its return. The former is, as it were, history’s Iliad; the latter, its Odyssey. In the one, the direction is centrifugal; in the other, it becomes

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367 Ibid., 125.
368 Soloviev, Lecture Ten, 136.
369 Balthasar, GL III, 318.
370 What separates Schelling from Neoplatonism somewhat, however, is that the fall into finitude is depicted in Philosophy and Religion is contingent and sudden rather than gradual.
centripetal. In this way, the grand purpose of the phenomenal world reveals itself in history. The ideas, the spirits, must fall away from their center and insert themselves into the particularity of nature, the general realm of the falling-away, so that afterward, and as a particularities, they may return to indifference and, reconciled with it, may be able to abide in it without disturbing it.\textsuperscript{371}

History, then, is the narrative that traces the rehabilitation of human beings from this fall away from God back to rejoin the Absolute. The falling away is the necessary vehicle for the expression of the self-revelation of God, and thus, in a real sense, a \textit{felix culpa}. It is the principle of dark striving that motors the dynamic of history.\textsuperscript{372} For Schelling and for Berdyaev, however, the onus of return rests squarely upon human beings. For Berdyaev, for instance, God must await and is absolutely dependent upon human action to realize the coming of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{373} Distinguishing Soloviev from Schelling and Berdyaev is that the process of coming to perfection in history is accomplished by Christ, and not fundamentally by the work of human beings necessary to supplement the impotence of God.\textsuperscript{374}

What is especially apropos is the way Schelling’s Behemistic metaphysics—which, as we have seen, functions as rationale for the origin of evil and the character of human freedom—implicates and informs his philosophy of history. Even in Schelling’s understanding of history’s second “act,” the return to God, evil is not converted to

\textsuperscript{371} Schelling, \textit{Philosophy and Religion}, 44-5.

\textsuperscript{372} On the relation between the fall, history and myth, Emil Fackenheim has this to say: “Man’s existence after the fall is determined by his contradictory relation to God. His divine descent makes him an incomplete and therefore a god-seeking being. But by reason of the fall he cannot find God. This contradictory existence is mythological existence. Man has fallen under the domination of the cosmic powers which are not God but which he, as a god-seeking being, perforce deifies. This mythological existence is the universal fate of fallen man. If it remains unrelieved and unaltered, then man has no more a history than the rest of fallen creation” (Fackenheim, 104).

\textsuperscript{373} See, for instance, Berdyaev, \textit{The Beginning and the End}, 251-2.

\textsuperscript{374} See Balthasar, \textit{GL III}, 352.
good, but it only restored to its proper place of hidden potentiality. Recalling not only Schelling’s belief that the suffering and pain hidden in the depths of God is necessary, but also his understanding of the necessity of process for the actualization and subsequent personalization of the living (e.g. not static) God, we see that for Schelling “all history remains incomprehensible without the concept of a humanly suffering God.”

According to Schelling, God will continue to follow the course of development, following periods of progressive revelation, and will eventually be all in all. In the 1809 freedom essay, the myth of history begins in the first creation, or the naissance of light, which is the ideal principle that stands in opposition to the preceding dark principle; the light is “the creative Word which redeems the hidden life in the depths from non-being, raises it from potency to actuality.” The unifying principle of Spirit then arises, subordinating both light and dark “for the sake of realization and personality.” The dark principle of striving is required to draw out the good—and the God—to actuality. It is “the primal basis of existence insofar as it strives towards actualization in created beings.” In Schelling’s philosophy of history, the ultimate stage of the spirit of love is not revealed all at once, but—as permitted providentially by God—moves through a progressive historical series from a primeval golden age characterized by a certain naïveté regarding good and evil through the age of the gods, the rise and fall of high culture, to

375 Schelling, Of Human Freedom, 84.
376 Ibid.
377 Ibid.
378 Ibid., 55.
the point at which the light is manifest in human form in order to mediate between God and world.\textsuperscript{379}

\textit{The Center and the Periphery}

The binary structure of the principle of darkness and the principle of light that exists in Schelling’s doctrine of God is reflected, as in a mirror, in Schelling’s anthropology.\textsuperscript{380} That is, human beings inherit the opposition between darkness and light, where the darkness maps onto self-will and light onto reason, and the perversion of evil at the root of being becomes an actual possibility. Notably, the production of the light occurs only through the necessary power of the dark principle. As Schelling notes, the warring principles in human beings function as explanatory principles for the origin of evil in the world: “Therefore that unity which is indissoluble in God must be dissoluble in man—and this constitutes the possibility of good and evil.”\textsuperscript{381} This dissolution of principles not only indicates the possibility of evil, but also the nature of evil: it is a perverse disordering, an unbalancing of the proper distribution of the living nexus of human will(s). Therefore, human and divine personality is marked by a complex unity of opposing forces, the dark ground and the light of reason which keeps the dark ground chastened: “Personality is the perpetual actualization of selfhood; it is the conscious and purposive control of irrational underlying potentialities.”\textsuperscript{382} Following

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{379} Ib\textit{id.}, 56-7.
  \item \textsuperscript{380} For Balthasar’s critical recapitulation of the middle Schelling, with accents on Schelling’s anthropology which emerges in the main in the freedom essay, \textit{Clara}, and the \textit{Stuttgart Lectures}, c.f. \textit{TD I}, 566-577.
  \item \textsuperscript{381} Schelling, \textit{Of Human Freedom}, 39. C.f. also 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{382} Fackenheim, 98.
\end{itemize}
Schelling’s argument, if the dark self-will predominates, which desires to exalt and assert itself above the principle of light, it deviates from its proper place in the depths, upsetting the delicate balance of forces in what is a complex organism:

But hardly does self-will move from the center which is its station, than the nexus of forces is also dissolved; in its place a merely particular will rules which can no longer united the forces among themselves as before, but must therefore strive to form or compose a special and peculiar life out of the now separate forces, an insurgent host of desires and passions—since every individual force is also an obsession and passion. 383

In other words, when the latent dark principle of self-will perversely dominates in human being, the possibility of evil arises. Schelling’s account of evil, borrowed, of course, from Böhme, insists that it is something more than absence or privation: it is and must be an actual positive force of perversion, “founded [not only] on something inherently positive, but rather on the highest positive being which nature contains,” that is, the primordial will. 384 It is particularly notable for our purposes that Schelling explains this disordering which gives rise to evil by the analogous phenomenon of physical disease, the “true counterpart of evil and sin,” 385 which is understood likewise as an unsalutary, equilibrium-defying movement of that which ought to be in the center into the periphery. 386 Like evil, disease is certainly felt as a real force, but has a certain liminal

383 Schelling, Of Human Freedom, 41.


385 Schelling, Of Human Freedom, 41.

386 Ibid., 42. On this front Schelling found much to appreciate in Franz von Baader, whose account of evil was both sufficiently robust for Schelling’s thinking, and made use of the physical analogy of disease, as well as the sense of perverse disordering from center to periphery. He cites von Baader’s On the Assertion that there can be no bad use of Reason, in the Morgenblatt, 1807, No. 197; and Concerning Solids and Liquids, in the Annals of Medicine as Science, Vol. III, No. 2. C.f. Schelling, Of Human Freedom, 42-3, n.1; 53; n.1, which suggests some rationale for the association of evil and serpent, who is biologically a circle with no center: that is, the snake is only periphery.
status—“a swaying between being and non-being.”\textsuperscript{387} As we shall see directly, Soloviev and Berdyaev characterize the nature of evil in much the same way.

For Schelling, influenced both by Böhme and von Baader,\textsuperscript{388} evil is not merely privative, not merely physical, but a diabolical force which exists through a primordial act of freedom and woven into the fabric of reality and divinity itself.\textsuperscript{389} Importantly, however, Schelling’s construal of freedom as the genuine possibility to choose good or evil does not suggest that this is an arbitrary choice. Indeed, according to Schelling, who recurs to the well-worn example of Buridan’s ass which starves to death between two equally appealing piles of hay, “to be able to decide for A or –A without any motivating reasons would…only be a privilege to act entirely unreasonably.”\textsuperscript{390} In order to safeguard human freedom from external determinism without insinuating that human actions are radically contingent and only accidental, Schelling appeals to a higher conception of inner necessity, a fully free self-determination, a self-making (Fichte is not far away) in accordance with the laws of a given individual nature. Thus, a human act “can follow from its inner nature only in accordance with the law of identity, and with absolute necessity which is also the only absolute freedom.”\textsuperscript{391} Thus, freedom and necessity are coincident. This is possible only if the human being determines her own nature, a constitutional tendency towards good or towards evil, by her own free act. This

\textsuperscript{387} Schelling, \textit{Of Human Freedom}, 42.

\textsuperscript{388} For a brief introduction to the associations of Baader and Schelling, see Thomas O’Meara, \textit{Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism}, especially 79-84.

\textsuperscript{389} Schelling, \textit{Of Human Freedom}, 66-7. We shall remark below upon how Schelling’s understanding of freedom as self-determination evolves and deepens in the \textit{Weltalter} (1811-13), particularly in relation to conceptions of time and eternity as “proto-temporal.” C.f. Beach, 64-65.

\textsuperscript{390} Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 62. C.f. 70.
act, however, does not take place in time, but is, rather, a pre-conscious decision in eternity prior to corporealization and being itself.\textsuperscript{392} Given the freedom in play for self-determination, and the fact that when human beings from eternity prefer evil to good, darkness to light, it is not only a physical but a spiritual reality, Schelling, extending Kant, is able to denote this phenomenon as radical evil.\textsuperscript{393} Evil is not a lack; it is not caused by finitude, but is a free self-determination.

As Balthasar points out however, this proto-temporal self-making not only makes the actually experienced phenomenon of conversion difficult if not impossible to explain, but also jeopardizes the individual personality of those who choose the good.\textsuperscript{394} If, as Schelling maintains in the freedom essay, the dark principle is that of ego, of particularity, of differentiation, and the will of God is “to universalize everything, to lift it to unity with light,”\textsuperscript{395} how can those who choose the good be distinguished from one another? Any system which privileges the universal at the expense of the personal and particular, which flattens out individual freedom “signals the abdication of drama in favor of a narrative philosophy of history, an epic story of the Spirit or of mankind…”\textsuperscript{396}

\textsuperscript{392}\textit{Ibid.}, 63-5. This conception of freedom as pre-temporal self-determination implies a rather esoteric metaphysics of time and eternity, of fundamental concern in his \textit{Weltalter}, which brings the resources of the freedom essay to bear upon the question of time and history.


\textsuperscript{394}Balthasar, \textit{TD I}, 574. This sacrifice of the personality is, for Balthasar, a symptom of all forms of titanism, as the individual “burns to glowing ashes in the belly of the Moloch of the Absolute, be it the ‘will’ or ‘life’ or ‘death,’” or Hegel’s \textit{Geist} (\textit{TD II}, 423). Also c.f \textit{TD II}, 40-1.

\textsuperscript{395}Schelling, \textit{Of Human Freedom}, 58.

\textsuperscript{396}Balthasar, \textit{TD II}, 40. Here Balthasar particularly names Hegel, Marx, and Teilhard, but Schelling is not far away.
Further, Balthasar objects to the overweening absoluteness of finite freedom in Schelling’s philosophy: “Although we cannot deny that finite freedom has an absolute aspect, it has power over neither its own ground nor its own fulfillment. It does not possess itself, yet it is not its own gift to itself: it owes itself to some other origin.”

Balthasar worries with respect to Schelling that when human freedom becomes so incredibly important, even absolute, God (in Balthasar’s theatrical metaphor, the “Producer”) exists only insofar as the “play” of history is performed.

**Freedom and Evil: Russian Repetitions**

Significantly, Schelling’s understanding of evil as a positive spiritual force characterized by the aberrant inversion of principles recurs in Vladimir Soloviev. His final text *War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ* (1899-1900), is a rather fanciful dialogue which explores the manifestations of moral evil in the historical process. It aims, against Tolstoy, to demonstrate that evil is far more insidious than simple defect: it is a real force which must be reckoned with actively. More than this, the question of the nature of evil requires a turn to “a complete system of metaphysics.”

There are five characters who participate in the dialogue, including the General, the Politician, the Lady, the Tolstoyian Prince, and the absolutely religious Mr. Z., whose perspective accords most nearly to Soloviev’s own. The expressed aim of the dialogue is to present a tableau of three different perspectives upon

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397 Balthasar, *TD IV*, 139. For more on the giftedness of the self, see *TD II*, 285-291.
399 There is likely a direct line of influence from von Baader to Soloviev as well.
400 Soloviev, Author’s Preface to *War, Progress, and the End of History*, 15.
the issue of evil and the meaning of history: the traditionalist General, who represents the view of the past, the progressive Politician, who represents culture contemporary to Soloviev, and the enigmatic Mr. Z, who is identifiable most nearly with prophecy, newness, surprise, and the absolutely religious perspective of the future. 401 This Mr. Z describes the phenomenon of evil in this manner:

Evil really exists, and it finds its expression not only in the deficiency of good but in the positive resistance and predominance of the lower qualities over the higher ones in all spheres of being. There is an individual evil in the great majority of people. This occurs when the lower side of human beings, their animal and bestial passions, resist the better impulses of the soul, overpowering them. And there is a social evil, when the human crowd, individually enslaved by evil, resists the salutary efforts of the few better men and eventually overpowers them. There is, lastly, a physical evil in humanity, when the baser material constituents of the human body resist the living and enlightening power that binds them together into a beautiful form of organism and resist and break the form, destroying the real basis of the higher life. This is the extreme evil, called death. 402

Soloviev’s parallels with Schelling (and Böhme and von Baader behind him) on this point emerge perspicuously: that is, evil is nonprivative and essentially an unwarranted subordination of the higher principles to those lower. 403 This late view rhymes with Soloviev’s earlier reflections on the serious nature of evil. For instance, his 1883 address in memory of Dostoevsky lauds the great novelist for recognizing the


402 Ibid., 147-8; italics original.

403 The same logic is in play here as in his earlier aesthetics, when, for instances, the grounds of non-ideality or ugliness are precisely when, either in an artistic composition or in nature, a single part prevails over the others, matter dominates form, disrupting the proper unity. This disproportion is especially offensive in zoological ugliness when it represents a jarring disconnect between inner complexity and outward form. Soloviev identifies this type of regressive formlessness in slugs, snails, whales, and seals (c.f. “Beauty in Nature,” 58; also 37-8). It is likewise significant that these warring principles are delineated along the axes of light and life and its opposite, “the unrestrained manifestation of the chaotic principle, defeating or repressing again the ideal form, naturally produc[ing] an acute impression of ugliness” (“Beauty in Nature,” 37). Moreover, the primal chaotic principle is necessary for natural manifestations of beauty: for instance, “the aesthetic value of phenomena such as a stormy sea depends namely on the fact that beneath them stirs chaos” (45).
extent and the depths of the perversity of human nature; indeed a solution to this “dark basis of our nature—evil in its exclusive egoism and insane in its striving to realize this egoism, to relate everything to itself and to define everything by itself”⁴⁰⁴ must be aggressively sought. Further, and more striking especially in terms of an understanding of freedom as self-determination for good or evil, Soloviev’s Russia and the Universal Church details the moral self-determination of angels. According to Soloviev, because angels are spiritual beings and therefore remain undetermined by external material or temporal conditions, they are able to determine themselves immediately and with perfect knowledge by a single and irrevocable act of will.⁴⁰⁵ Those who choose against God are thusly determined, insofar as “No” to God “becomes the very nature or essence of the fallen angel…it is an infinite abyss into which the rebel spirit is immediately hurled and from which it can spread its rebellion throughout the material chaos, the physical creation, right to the confines of the divine world.”⁴⁰⁶ In the Lectures as well, Soloviev remarks that evil is radical egoism which pervades the nature of everything that lives,

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⁴⁰⁴ Soloviev, “Three Addresses in Memory of Dostoevsky,” Heart of Reality, 21. The third address, originally delivered in February 19, 1883, was published first in Rus’ no.6, 1883.

⁴⁰⁵ This irrevocability marks a point of departure between Soloviev and Bulgakov. While the latter admits the possibility of *apokatastasis* (language which makes Balthasar nervous), Soloviev in this context fingers Origen as having “but a poor conception of the essence of moral evil, a fact which incidentally he proved in another connexion [sic] by seeking deliverance from evil passions by means of a purely material and external process” (169).

⁴⁰⁶ Soloviev, Russia and the Universal Church, 169. Notably, this particular text is formed (though perhaps not deformed) in some respects by Behemistic and Schellingian cosmogonic speculation, as well as Platonic notions about the World-Soul, which functions to connect real and ideal as the “body” of Sophia. It was published in French initially, in 1889, as *La Russie et l’église universelle*, for fear of censorship, and translated to Russian in 1911, after his death. Soloviev is not consistent in his associations of Sophia with his reintroduced concept of World-Soul: it sometimes appears as if the World-Soul is the analogous concept to Sophia on the earthly plane. Sometimes a relationship of identity is indicated; other times a relation of opposition. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt suggests that “Sophia changes throughout Solovyov’s oeuvre—indeed, even within a single work—not because of an evolution of Sophia or a unidirectional development of Solovyov’s own thoughts on her, but because Solovyov casts about in different traditions for her best expression” (Divine Sophia, 48).
from blade of grass to human being, the “striving to set up one’s exclusive I in the place of everything else, to eliminate everything else;”\textsuperscript{407} it must have a metaphysical, not a physical origin.\textsuperscript{408}

Likewise, Berdyaev found Schelling’s 1809 freedom essay very compelling, not only because it affirmed the Behemistic axiom that uncreated freedom is the fundamental principle of reality, prior both to human beings \textit{and to} God, but also in its elaboration of freedom precisely as this capacity for good or for evil. For Berdyaev—responding, of course, to Ivan Karamazov’s “brilliant dialectic” in the Grand Inquisitor—it is far worse for human beings to be good automatons than it is for human beings to possess a real, often actualized, capacity for evil.\textsuperscript{409} He, like Schelling and Soloviev, also objected strenuously to what he considered the weak view of evil as privative, as absence or diminution (Augustine), a view he characterizes in the face of systemic suffering in no uncertain terms as “anti-Christian and unethical.”\textsuperscript{410} For Berdyaev it is only by explicit appeal to Böhme that a solution to the problem of evil can be had; everything depends on admitting the reality “not only of being, but also of non-being, of the dark abyss which precedes the very identification of being and the very distinction between good and evil.”\textsuperscript{411} In his panegyric to Böhme in \textit{The Beginning and the End}, Berdyaev highlights the fact that it is his vision of this primordial freedom which

\textsuperscript{407} Soloviev, \textit{Lecture Nine}, 123.

\textsuperscript{408} Ibid., 126.


\textsuperscript{410} Berdyaev, \textit{The Beginning and the End}, 142.

\textsuperscript{411} Ibid., 143; c.f. 144, where he appeals to Böhme directly.
functions to explain both the origin of being and that of evil. Certainly for Berdyaev, following Schelling, it is nearly impossible to separate what he considers to be the concomitant discourses of freedom and evil.

Balthasar considers the appeal to Böhme and Schelling on the longstanding problem of understanding creaturely freedom vis-à-vis divine freedom, and the possibility of evil to be absolutely untenable. Lambasting Berdyaev’s positing of the Behemistic Ungrund at the root of reality as a patently “absurd idea,” Balthasar notes that despite best intentions this move actually undercuts the integrity of finite freedom, since the freedom of human beings originates in a poisoned well. Because freedom no longer comes from a good and loving God whose gift of freedom is gracious and deliberate, the human being is no longer operating under a divine norm, but that of irrational nothingness.

Balthasar’s riposte to the problem of the compatibility between infinite and finite freedom which so exasperated the Böhme-Schelling-Berdyaev line of thinking is, of course, his theological dramatic theory, which, like any drama, requires the possibility of the play of genuine freedoms. Balthasar’s dramatics gives a necessary dimension of tension, of act, to the aesthetics discussed in the previous chapter. As we suggested in

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412 Ibid., 110. Also see his essay “Unground and Freedom,” in which he praises Böhme for his “particularly sharp and strong feeling for the evil in the life of the world…[seeing]…everywhere a pitched battle between contrary principles, between light and darkness” (ix).

413 Balthasar, TD IV, 149.

chapter two with reference to the “Rilkean clause,” the encounter with Beauty as such does not leave the beholder unchanged; rather,

where a thing of beauty is really and radically beheld, freedom too is radically opened up, and decision can take place. But what is ultimate here is not my decision but that I hand myself over to the deciding reality and thus am resolved, decided, to let myself be marked by the unique encounter offered me.\^\textsuperscript{415}

To behold rightly, then, is not a specular event. It is to be transformed, to accept a mission, to be made a witness, and all this freely.

The double question arises: first, how can finite freedom genuinely act with respect to infinite freedom without being engulfed by it, and, second, how can infinite freedom retain its infinitude if God makes a ‘space’ for the action of the finite? For Balthasar, the possibility of a genuine drama between God (as personal) and human beings depends absolutely upon a scrupulously maintained distinction between them, upon a dialogical movement of the characters which assumes their respective freedoms. Indeed, according to Balthasar the most climactic periods of religious theatre—Greek myth, the mystery plays, Shakespeare, Calderon—appear “where God was able to appear on Stage as a free Someone over against free worldly beings (Titans, humans, angelic powers).”\^\textsuperscript{416} In these dramas, God participates in finite existence in such a way that does not threaten the absoluteness of the divine nature. In Balthasar’s estimation, then, the blurring of distinction between “I’s” is a fatal weakness of Schelling: indeed, the radical self-determination that is finite freedom in Schelling expands to displace God (the play’s “Producer”) altogether.

\^\textsuperscript{415} Balthasar, \textit{TD II}, 31.

\^\textsuperscript{416} Ibid., 189.
Certainly the veracity and poignancy of the dramatic moment in ancient myth is precisely in the fact that it emerged, at its apex, after the waning of the sense that the numinous was only an occasion for fear but before it had been domesticated so thoroughly that the divine devolved into simply one aestheticized object among. In ancient cultic drama “the risky undertaking of a synthesis between the way man sees himself and his encounter with the divine myth as it manifests itself to him…takes place at the dangerous borderline where magic and revelation cannot be told apart.” This mythological sense of the not-entirely-safe numinous perdures in the best of dramatic forms. As Rilke suggests, “the beautiful is nothing else than the onset of the terrible, which we only just endure, and we admire it, because it calmly disdains to destroy us.” When God is conceived monologically, this beautiful danger, surprise, drama itself is simply not possible.

In the face of the problem of the compossibility of finite and infinite freedom, Balthasar does not turn to irrationalism, but rather insists that biblical and philosophical reflection ought and must be mutually informative. In due course, it shall come to light that for Balthasar the existence of finite freedom depends entirely upon its participation in infinite freedom, as the latter is both immanent in and transcendent beyond the former. An unexamined view of God often prevails, however, closer to the mythological than not, in which an anthropomorphized divine being exists in heaven simply as one parallel existent, albeit on a higher plane, among other existing beings. This prevailing

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418 Balthasar, TD I, 260.

view cannot account for the hard paradox that the existence and exercise of human freedom does not vitiate God’s freedom: “in fact, God shows his almighty power particularly by imparting authentic selfhood to his creatures.”

Balthasar’s doctrine of God, dovetailing with that articulated in the aesthetics, understands God to be not the “Other,” over against finite ‘others,’ but, as in Nicholas of Cusa’s language, the “Non-Other.” Balthasar’s biblically determined reflections insist on two philosophical postulates that make sense of the dramatic arc of the Biblical narrative: (1) the Absolute must be free, and (2) the Absolute as Non-alien, is able, from the source of this infinite freedom, deliberately to bring forth authentically free finite beings such that infinite and finite freedoms co-exist oppositionally.

Schelling’s Behemistic conception of the divine fails on both counts, since in his determined efforts to safeguard finite freedom, God is not able to give freedom to finite beings.

These philosophical postulates are radicalized by the biblical revelation of Christ: first, the opposition between finite and infinite freedom is actually deepened insofar as finitude has been compromised by sin, and second, the notion of ‘the Other as non-Other’ must be pushed toward more properly Trinitarian claim of alterity and otherness in one divine being. The concrete apex of these two dimensions, where God is “forsaken by God because of man’s godlessness,” where eternity breaks into time and history, is the event of the Cross of Christ. Christ is the mediator, not the mediating

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principle: Christ Himself is “indispensable and yet beyond all human calculation, in a pact with both warring parties and yet not a traitor to either; epitomizing the living drama in the very ‘composition’ of his being, torn asunder by his tragic situation and yet, thus torn, healing divisions.”

Christ “recapitulates” and thereby sublimates in his own person the conflict between the divine “everything” and the human “something.”

We shall speak to this and the ever-racheting drama more at length in chapter five when we turn to the “action” proper of Balthasar’s theo-drama, which appropriates Bulgakov’s apocalyptic and kenotic theology of the Lamb as though slain, but suffice it to say by way of anticipation that for Balthasar divine nature is coincident with but not emergent from this “action”:

Thus the dramatic level becomes ultimate, not to be surpassed; it does not point to some prior ‘wisdom’ or ‘teaching’ or ‘gnosis’ or ‘theology’ that could then be recounts in the epic mode: it remains at the center, as drama, as the action that takes place between God and man, undiminished in its contemporary relevance.

For Balthasar, then, the dramatic militates against thinking divine or human being in an abstracted manner; nature, essence, substance simply cannot be thought apart from action.

More ought be said about the character of finite and infinite freedom in Balthasar. First, it is important to note that the exercise of finite freedom occurs not in a solitary vacuum, but only in human community, in a social dimension, among inter-related finite freedoms.

First speaking purely philosophically, Balthasar argues that

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425 Ibid., 196.
426 Ibid., 195.
427 Ibid., 49.
428 Ibid., 203-206.
human beings experience a primordial self-presencing, a fundamental sense of the *cogito sum*, which indicates not only that “I” exist in absolutely incommunicable uniqueness, but also the great expanse of being as such: “it is precisely in the experience of being ‘I’ (and no one else) that I pass beyond all limiting knowledge of my nature and touch being (reality) in its uniqueness.” With my own self-knowledge comes the realization that there are others who possess being in the same (incommunicable) way. Thus, the mode of individual existence and the realization of universal being are always of a piece, always articulated together, as openness to Being in its totality reveals individual being as one among others. Analogously, all beings participate in God, whose self-communication in plenitude far exceeds the sum of those who participate therein. Human beings, in their finitude and uniqueness, make a ‘space’ for others to be, just as uniquely, and in this way image the divine nature as Trinity, “*in whom the incommunicability of the hypostases is one with the unity of ‘essence’ in each of them.*” Finite freedoms encounter one another every day without incorporation or appropriation; the freedom of the ‘other,’ then, is and must be a moment of self-disclosure.

This imaging suggests the dual structure of finite freedom itself, the first “pillar” of which is this freedom of self-possession, the *autecousion*, the vantage point of openness to being at the fundament, separate from conscious or unconscious motivations, “that enables us to affirm the value of things and reject their defects, to become involved with them or turn away from them.” According to Balthasar, this


constitutive freedom (which is given, received) is rather like Ignatian indifference. The second pillar of freedom emerges from the first and is the “freedom of autonomous motion,” or freedom of will, freedom to choose. Where the first pillar may be thought as self-possession, the second is self-realization, and the manner of this self-realization in the world—as human beings move from alienation toward relations of mutual openness under the aegis of divine freedom, providence and love—remains open and autonomous.\textsuperscript{433}

The operation of self-realization, if it is not to construe God and others simply as a means of its own self-enjoyment, is “the opportunity to hand itself over to infinite free Being, to the Being who is the Giver of this free openness.”\textsuperscript{434} Thus finite freedom originates and is fulfilled in infinite freedom, which self-discloses with infinite generosity (Balthasar employs the somewhat startling metaphor of an opening of the “womb of the Father’s divine freedom”\textsuperscript{435}). For Balthasar it is the Holy Spirit who frees the finite being to take on its own ultimate freedom through participation in infinite freedom, which is all beatitude.\textsuperscript{436} This is no reabsorption of the finite into the infinite, but an affirmation of human finitude, “down to the last detail.”\textsuperscript{437} As we shall see in our final chapter as well, the infinite freedom of God is a freedom to surrender God’s Self, as the Father,

\textsuperscript{433} Ibid., 216-227. Here Balthasar’s accent upon providence as divine pedagogy certainly demonstrates his Irenaean profile, which Kevin Mongrain has drawn to the fore in \textit{The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval} (New York, NY: Crossroads Publishing, 2002). Balthasar likewise appeals to the theme of the operation of finite freedom in the context of providence in Origen and in Gregory of Nyssa (217).

\textsuperscript{434} Ibid., 228.

\textsuperscript{435} Ibid., 229.

\textsuperscript{436} Ibid., 230.

\textsuperscript{437} Ibid., 254.
Son, and Spirit mutually give of themselves in absolute love. This Trinitarian law of love, of “letting-be,” which both characterizes and is the nature of infinite freedom, thereby safeguards the integrity of finite freedom.

Moving therefore to the problem of evil, though Balthasar certainly recognizes the complexity of the question, he insists on maintaining both that God as creator is unequivocally good and just, with no antagonistic principles within the divine essence, that human freedom is subordinate to God, and that evil ought to be understood as a privation of the good. 438 Balthasar is no naïf. He acknowledges that it is impossible for human beings in modernity to pull on those antiquarian “spectacles, lent to him by the Christian faith, through which the spectator once contemplated the world and saw it transfigured.”439 Answering the problem of evil, however, cannot be at the expense of a good God in a proper, oppositional yet non-competitive relation to human beings:

The emphasis changes when, in modern times, the darkness and fragmentation of creation is projected into the divine ground itself (Jakob Böhme) and speculation discovers the element of absoluteness in human freedom (Schelling in his middle years, continuing the idea of autonomy in Kant). Now it is God who bears the contradiction (including hell) in himself, and in the same breath man, with his contradiction, moves over into the realm of the absolute. Here, as an equal partner with God, he can accuse the world of being contradictory and existence of being meaningless.440

Moreover, the fact that on this model God’s omnipotence is compromised requires Berdyaev to “adopt a gnostic tone” insofar as he must insert tragedy into the inner life of

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438 Balthasar, TD I, 48.


440 Balthasar, TD I, 48-9; italics original.
The corrosive association of Böhme with Berdyaev is clear enough in Balthasar. A Behemistic ontology is for Balthasar quite outside the bounds of licit speculation. Though Balthasar sympathetically recognizes the tendency for human beings when faced with the tenacious problem of evil and prodigious human suffering to retroject the abyss onto God, thereby making it intelligible, this represents the sort of speculation which is dangerous, destructive, and entirely inimical to Christian thought.

Balthasar speaks directly against the Behemistic/Schellingian/Berdyevean line of thinking:

The many forms of post-Christian Titanism, which dare to regard man as originating in a divinity that has (demonically) split (Jakob Böhme and those who came after him, right up to the Romantics, to Baader, Schelling and the Russians) and destined ultimately to redeem this tragic God, are all inconceivable apart from their passage through Christianity. But they also lead to its total perversion.

This type of illicit speculation attempts violently to “get behind” what is the fundamental Christian mystery of Christ who was crucified freely, and in love. Further, once the

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441 We shall come back to this problematic in chapter five, when we address Balthasar’s borrowings from Bulgakov on the ‘powerless-ness’ of God through the primordial kenotic mode of the Trinitarian hypostases.

442 For Balthasar’s negative evaluation of Berdyaev, also c.f. Apokalypse 3, 424-30. Cyril O’Regan has neatly drawn out the associations of Böhme and Berdyaev in his recent The Anatomy of Misremembering, enumerating a quadrant of fundamental overlap including the theogonic process which is “predicated on an excess of potentiality in the divine over actuality,” (2) a principle of origin prior to immanent and economic Trinity, about which (3) it is not clear that it can be understood as tri-personal. Finally, the function of Sophia as a fourth is mediatory between God and world.


444 Ibid., 420.

445 Ibid., 419.
mysterious essence of God is broached, it almost always becomes commoditized as we have seen as a rationalistic means for explicating anthropology and cosmology.

_Time and Eternity_

As Edward Beach notes, Schelling was “deeply dissatisfied with the traditional metaphysics of time and eternity, which in his view either shipwrecked on the Scylla of static immutability or else fell headlong into the Charybdis of relativistic flux.”

One of the explicit programs of the *Weltalter* is Schelling’s original theory of temporality, which, insofar as the emergence of time from eternity itself is an eternally free act, is simultaneously a theory of freedom. As mentioned, the concerns of the freedom essay are still in play, not least of which is the doctrine of God as primordial will. For instance, Schelling writes that “God is itself and essentially a dormant will (which is pure freedom).” This unconditioned will that wills nothing which we saw in the _Freiheitsschrift_ is here connected with Schelling’s dialectical synthesis of time and eternity:

> Freedom or the will, insofar as it does not will anything actual, is the affirmative concept of absolute eternity. We can only imagine this as that which exceeds all time, as eternal immovability. Everything is aimed at this, everything yearns for this. All movement has only eternal immovability as its goal and all time, even that eternal time, is nothing but the constant obsession with eternity.

Schelling avails himself of an organic metaphor to speak to the nature of time: it is a living, primordial force, an organism which responds continually to the tension between itself and the latent, eternal ground of the past. According to Schelling’s theory of time, it is the rotary drive of equi-primordial potencies which themselves constitute

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448 Ibid., 24. See also Snow, 192-197.
temporality, as modes of eternity. Against Hegel, these dimensions do not ultimately sublate those preceding: the grounding both endures through and animates progressive development. What is distinctive about Schelling’s view, then, is that past, present, and future are substantive and not simply formal categories: that is, they are not empty sets through which the same content passes, but eternal dimensions which emerge from and constitute the theogonic struggle for actualization.

Here again we see Schelling struggling to articulate a version of the ancient paradox that so exercised him throughout his philosophical career: how can the emergence of temporality and change from a static, essentialized conception of eternity be adequately explained? His solution is to challenge the notion of eternity as timelessness by positing temporality at the core of his ontology: the eternal rotary drives themselves are temporalized as “God’s past” which did not become past: this past has always been past and shall ever be. For Schelling, time is not in an oppositional relation to eternity. Schelling was loathe to consider time and eternity as oppositional coordinates because this conception neither gave proper consideration to the way that the eternal unfolded in time nor was attentive to the problem of how time might arise from that which is properly timeless. For Schelling, then, eternity must contain within

\[449\] As Schelling puts it in the third draft of the Weltalter, “…past time is not sublimated time. What has past certainly cannot be as something present, but it must be as something past at the same time with the present. What is future is certainly not as something that has being now, but is a future being at the same time with the present, as something that is in the future. And it is equally inconsistent to think of past being, as well as future being, as utterly without being” (The Ages of the World, Wirth translation, 76).

\[450\] Ibid. “On account of the Godhead that has being, on account of that supernatural being of freedom, the primordial state of the contradiction, that wild fire, that life of obsession and craving, is posited as the past. But, because the Godhead, having being from eternity can never come to have being, that primordial state is posited as an eternal past, as a past that did not first become past, but which was the past from the primordial beginning and since all eternity” (38-9). Also c.f. 45-6.

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itself that which could provide the foundation for phenomenal time.\textsuperscript{451} Time is a

“succession of eternities.”\textsuperscript{452} Slavoj Žižek is helpful here:

One encounters here the first of Schelling’s many anti-Platonic ‘stings’: eternity prior to the Word is the timeless rotary motion, the divine madness, that is \textit{beneath} time, ‘less than time.’…For Schelling, eternity is not a modality of time; it is rather time itself that is a specific mode (or rather modification) of eternity: Schelling’s supreme effort is to \textit{deduce} time itself \textit{from the deadlock of eternity}. The Absolute ‘opens up time,’ it ‘represses’ the rotary motion into the past, in order to get rid of the antagonism in its heart that threatens to drag it into the abyss of madness. On the other hand…freedom is for Schelling the moment of ‘eternity in time,’ the point of groundless decision by means of which a free creature (man) breaks up, suspends, the temporal chain of reasons and, as it were, directly connects with the \textit{Unggrund} of the Absolute. This Schellingian notion of eternity and time…is therefore to be opposed to the standard notion of time as the finite/distorted reflection of the eternal Order, as well as to the modern notion of eternity as a specific mode of temporality: \textit{eternity itself begets time in order to resolve the deadlock it became entangled in}.\textsuperscript{445}

As we see, then, Schelling chafed at the Platonic view of time as a “moving image of eternity.”\textsuperscript{454}

Whereas Schelling elaborates upon Plato, Berdyaev defies the dictum outright. For Schelling, time preserves freedom, while for Berdyaev, objectified, fallen time is a nightmare, a torment, a deadly poison whose only antidote is the realization of eternity.\textsuperscript{455} Indeed, as he suggests rather hyperbolically, human beings are all “nailed to the cross of time with its tormenting contradictions.”\textsuperscript{456} This false time

\textsuperscript{451} Edward Beach is quite helpful here. See his \textit{The Potencies of God(s)}, 64-67; For an interesting take on Schelling’s theory of time and eternity which puts him profitably in conversation with Levinas, see Fiona Steinkamp, “Eternity and Time: Levinas Returns to Schelling,” \textit{Schelling Now}, 207-222.

\textsuperscript{452} Schelling, \textit{The Ages of the World}, Wirth translation, 76.

\textsuperscript{453} Slavoj Žižek, \textit{The Abyss of Freedom}, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{454} C.f. Plato, \textit{Timeaus}, 37d.


\textsuperscript{456} Berdyaev, \textit{The Beginning and the End}, 241; c.f. 244-247.
reveals an evil, deadly, and destructive principle. For the death of the past hurried on by each consecutive instant and its plunge into the darkness of nonbeing, implied in every progress of time, are the very principles of death itself. The future is the murderer of every past instant.457

In his autobiographical *Dream and Reality*, he observes that “the conquest of the deadly flux of time has always been the chief concern of my life.”458 Time for Berdyaev is pathology; it renders earthly activity a failure because the finite/temporal is altogether sacrificed for the infinite/eternal.

For Balthasar, however, time and eternity are far from antithetical. In his exposition of his theo-dramatic theory Balthasar avails himself of the notion of the chiffres, a kind of indecipherable cipher, which suggests that the temporal is a mysterious sign of the presence of the eternal.459 Indeed, after the incarnation of Christ, who “had already been the eternal made temporal [and is now] a temporal being made eternal,”460 there is always an analogy between time and eternity.461 They are coincident moments. Christ’s time thus becomes the universal norm—“He is universale in re, the supra-temporal in time, the universally valid in the here-and-now, necessary being in concrete fact…”462—and the means by which time is redeemed and preserved within the mode of eternity. For Balthasar, time is not meant to be destroyed or “skipped over” as is the case in Berdyaev’s disregard for time as a pathological phenomenon. For example, he suggests that “in this participation in eternal love, time, as the creature’s form of being, is


459 Balthasar, *TD II*, 44.


not annihilated but consummated and filled to overflowing with the eternal dimensions of divine life.” Balthasar understands human time in the theological terms of faith, hope, and love, theological modes which cannot be sundered one from the other. Again, contra Berdyaev, “if we think in terms of escaping from time, faith and hope will necessarily be reduced to preliminaries belonging to this world.”

Mythology and the Potenzenlehre

The speculative ontology of the divine potencies that was skeletal in Schelling’s Freiheitsschrift and the Weltalter rises up as the bones in Ezekiel’s valley and is clothed with tendon and flesh in the Berlin lectures on the philosophy of mythology, as, bone by bone, the content of ancient myth covers and animates that which was largely metaphysical and theoretical in the earlier texts. Schelling’s Potenzenlehre invoked in his understanding of myth is highly original, departing from Hegel particularly insofar as he gives myths real religious, historical, and ontological weight. For the later Schelling, classic myths were neither simply fictitious stories that had been composed by ancient singular geniuses nor codified superstition, nor primitive imagistic attempts to grapple with natural phenomena which exceeded ready explanation but were, rather,

463 Balthasar, A Theology of History, 46. C.f. TD V, in a passage interwoven with the voice of Adrienne von Speyr: “We are meant, not to ‘skip over temporality, but to live with [Christ] in time in such a way that it acquires an importance that the Father will not refuse to acknowledge” (136).

464 Ibid., 47.

465 Žižek is not impressed, insofar as he thinks the late Schelling is over-determined and too rationalistic. C.f. The Abyss of Freedom, 36-7.

466 Beach indicates that though the young Schelling of the essay Über Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosopheme der ältesten Welt (1793) had allowed both for the possibility of myths originating as hyperbolic, allegorical, and idealized descriptions of the lives and deeds of cultural heroes, as well as naïve attempts to explain natural phenomena in symbolic terms, by the time he systematically treated the status of myth in Philosophy of Revelation, he had effectively reversed his position on both fronts. See Beach, “Schelling’s Earlier Treatment of Mythology,” The Potencies of God(s), 30-34.
manifestations of the deepest structures of existence, expressive of the divine reality of
the Potencies. Thus, as Beach puts it succinctly, for Schelling “ontology was the core of
mythological thought, just as mythology, conversely, was a concrete embodiment of
ontology.”

According to Schelling, these deep ontological structures were repeated in the
deepest layers of human unconscious, which were “not at all the result of conscious
reflection, but sprang immediately and unbidden from the deepest regions of the
soul.” According to Beach, Schelling understood myths to be “concrete historical
phenomena, with a nature and morphology of their own” and therefore operating
according to a set of perceivable laws governed by the potencies. Myths and progressive
religious developments were indicative of an actual theogonic process among the various
divinities of various world religions. What is most important for present purposes,
however, is not so much the way Schelling handles the empirical data of ancient myth,
cross-identifying certain deities as Moloch, Set, Baal, or Brahma, or the way Persephone
and Demeter function as the interpretive key to all mythology, but rather the
theoretical framework of the Potenzenlehre that he offers to undergird his more empirical
claims.

Schelling’s theory of the three Potencies ($A^1$, $A^2$, $A^3$), or Potenzenlehre, is
remarkably similar to Böhme’s thesis of the primal triad of wills which emerges from the
primitive, undifferentiated will. Schelling repeats Böhme’s positing of an irrational

467 Beach, 95.
468 Ibid., 35.
469 Ibid., 5.
470 For this, c.f. Part Three, “Exemplification,” in Beach, The Potencies of God(s), 179-250.
ground in the structure of ontology that comes out in the symbolic or mythic register. In its purely conceptual, pre-actualized state, the first potency (signified as \(-A\) or \(A^1\)) is undifferentiated pure potentiality, “being-in-itself,” (das an sich Seiende, das sein Könnende).\(^{471}\) It is an unstructured and infinite totality, and thereby requires an ‘other’ to provide objective structure and determinate form. Here Schelling recurs to the language of ouk on and me on (language which Berdyaev also employs, as he places himself in the line of this meonic tradition) with the former indicating absolute nonbeing and the latter indicating only a relative nonbeing.

The second potency (+A or \(A^2\)) is the principle of pure objectivity and actuality that provides the required order and specific determination to the infinite potentiality of the first potency; it is eccentric being, das außer sich Seiende (das sein Müssende). Whereas \(A^1\) is subjunctive, \(A^2\) is indicative.\(^{472}\) Further, while the first potency is all will, the second potency has no will of its own, but “constantly strives to satisfy the indeterminate propensities of the first Potency.”\(^{473}\) Because \(A^1\) and \(A^2\) are essentially incompatible with one another, a third potency is required: +.A or \(A^3\), which mediates the subjectivity of the first potency and the objectivity of the second without (contra Hegel) sublating either term. This third potency is “being-with-itself” (das bei sich Seiende, das sein Sollende), which is the highest potency, the harmonization of the Subjekt-Objekt, which becomes the teleological goal of history as such. At his stage, these relations are ideal and merely formal.

\(^{471}\) Here and in what follows immediately I am relying heavily upon Beach’s account of Schelling’s Potenzenlehre, especially 116-146.

\(^{472}\) Beach, 121.

\(^{473}\) Ibid., 123.
According to Schelling, however, when the potencies become actualized and the visible universe comes into being, $\Lambda^1$ is violently con-/in-verted to a positive force of chaos and disorder (thereafter signified as “B”) in order to explain the chaotic, dark beginning of concrete existence. B operates antagonistically with respect to divine providence; it is a provisionally tolerated force which requires subduing through the processes of history which work to transform B back to its proper state as $\Lambda^1$. It is in these terms—as instantiations of primal conflict between the first and the second potencies—that Schelling suggests ancient mythological religions should best be understood. With respect to religious development, human beings must proceed from a primitive “relative” monotheism (where the first potency dominates) through polytheism to the absolute monotheism of the revealed religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

For Schelling, the submission of B occurs decisively only when mythology passes over into revelation, with the appearance of Christianity in human history, which points ahead to the third potency. The pagan instantiations of $\Lambda^2$ (including Melkart, Osiris, Shiva, Dionysus) are thus understood as precursors to Christ, who is the true manifestation of the actualized form of the second potency.

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474 Ibid., 131-136.

475 Ibid., 212. Also c.f. Paul Valliere, “Solov’ev and Schelling’s Philosophy of Revelation,” who explains that “mythological religion is the product of the second potency while still in the shadow of the first; it is the religion of irrational nature struggling for liberation” (122).


478 What is particularly unusual in Schelling’s account is his claim that the passion of Christ actually begins long before his incarnation, as the ec-statically posited second potency. Balthasar is none
Against Enlightenment rationalism and scientific functionalism, Schelling and Balthasar both take myth very seriously, and value it quite highly, though the latter thoroughly resists the embedded speculative ontology of the former. As we have just witnessed, Schelling devotes the last stages of his philosophical career to developing a philosophy of mythology (and then revelation); Balthasar gives the fourth volume of the aesthetics, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, over to Homer, Hesiod, Pinder, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Plato. It is certainly not the case, then, that Balthasar considered myth as such to be a theologically unusable category.  

Myth infuses brute facticity with mystery. Indeed, for Balthasar, metaphysics includes myth as revelatory of the meaning of being. Not only is the mythopoetic imagination valuable as a prefiguring of the relationship between God and the world, Biblical revelation “occurs in the same formal anthropological locus where the mythopoetic imagination designed its images of the eternal…[and] is “the fulfillment of [the human being’s] entire philosophical-mythological questioning.” Balthasar leaves open the possibility that the true light of God shines upon myths and speculative philosophy, however slant-wise, such that these figures can lead the seeker of truth to the God of revelation. Balthasar expresses his sympathy for and admiration of the Russian religious spirit in particular, which somewhat in the spirit of the mythological interests of the later Schelling, is not of

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479 Here to be distinguished from a pernicious brand of mythologizing that it extracts or abstracts ahistorical truths from events in history.


482 Balthasar, *GL I*, 156.
intolerant of an antique, pagan past.\textsuperscript{483} For Balthasar, it is not untoward to maintain that Christ “‘inherits’ the gods of paganism: that is to say, ‘inherits’ the splendour of the theophanies which now passes over to him, who is the sole Heir and the Wholly Other.”\textsuperscript{484} With respect to this rather generous posture, Balthasar says that “in what concerns Christ’s authentic heritage, Greek and Russian theology as a rule has a far better understanding than the West. Behind Alyosha and his \textit{starets} the tradition stretches out for a thousand years or more.”\textsuperscript{485} Christ is the fulfillment of myth, but by this fulfillment they are not totally vitiated.

Balthasar considers the value of Schelling’s philosophy of mythology in particular to be located not only in its “subtlety,”\textsuperscript{486} “sensitivity,”\textsuperscript{487} or “philosophical seriousness,”\textsuperscript{488} but also in a logic which contravenes the reigning trend of demythologization of biblical revelation. He speaks of a kind of brief flowering in the later Schelling, for whom

the \textit{logoi spermatikoi} of ultimate forms of human and worldly fate which lie scattered in the myth, could be gathered together into the definitive form of revelation of Jesus Christ. Thus genuine art (rooted in the myth) would enjoy a relaxed relationship to what is Christian, for there is no reason why an illuminating and directing light may not fall from the form of revelation upon the significant forms of art which refer to the whole.\textsuperscript{489}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{483} Ibid., 502.
\bibitem{484} Ibid., 501.
\bibitem{485} Ibid., 502.
\bibitem{486} Balthasar, \textit{TL II}, 261.
\bibitem{487} Ibid.
\bibitem{488} Ibid., 257.
\bibitem{489} Balthasar, \textit{GL IV}, 32.
\end{thebibliography}
Indeed, according to Balthasar’s assessment, the late Schelling “arrives at the very threshold of the gospel.”490 Though Schelling subsumes both pagan and Christian religion under the same category, Balthasar comments that his tendency to preserve the historical facticity of Christ is laudable.491 To be fair, the late Schelling of the philosophy of revelation does not interpret Christianity in mythological terms, but asserts, “The true content of Christianity is a history into which the divine enters…The historical element is not accidental to the doctrine, but the doctrine itself.”492 In Balthasar’s evaluation of Schelling’s late stance, “the Incarnation is the truth of the subjective images of myth; it fulfills myth in the act of transcending it.”493 The rationally conceived speculative system, not the historical facticity of Christ is, however, for Schelling the primary category.

Though it has much to recommend itself, Schelling’s philosophy of mythology does not for Balthasar ultimately cross over the threshold. First, it departs from traditional theology insofar as Schelling posits a Logos who kenotically “renounces this glory in order by his obedient sacrificial death to fulfill all the deaths suffered by the mythical gods and to reconcile the world with the Father.”494 It is only at this point of reconciliation that Christ becomes fully divine, a claim which is obviously theologically problematic for Balthasar. Secondly, according to Balthasar, Schelling’s system of mythology stipulates the necessity of paganism as the ground from which Christianity

490 Balthasar, TD I, 566-7.
491 Balthasar, TL II, 259.
493 Balthasar, TL II, 260.
494 Ibid.
develops.\textsuperscript{495} Third, the association of the Trinitarian \textit{hypostases} with the three Potencies gives rise to a modalistic understanding of Trinity, which becomes personal only over a long course of development.\textsuperscript{496} Fourth, while Balthasar permits that the late Schelling’s formulation of the philosophy of mythology breaks out of the philosophical to be nearly if not totally theological insofar as it constitutes a “lifting of the vision above the level of being,”\textsuperscript{497} he is worried that Schelling simply cannot escape Hegel’s gravitational pull toward a materialistic conception of being. Finally, Balthasar deeply resists as a pernicious kind of monism (elsewhere ascribed to Creuzer, though it could well be ascribed to Schelling, whose mythological research relied heavily upon Creuzer) that would assert an exact correspondence between theology and mythology. Such an identification risks both sacralizing art and aestheticizing religion.\textsuperscript{498} In no uncertain terms for Balthasar, there cannot be a continuous line extending without a break between mythology and revealed Christian faith. For Balthasar, Christian revelation is absolutely new; thus, the governing metaphor cannot be that of building up a tower from earth that reaches into heaven.

For Balthasar, the status of myth is that which can only intend toward actualization: myths are actually quite beautiful on their own merit but this aesthetic quality—\textit{contra} Schelling and Berdyaev—is never actualized in human history, making the myth a sort of unfinished gesture or movement which invites completion and which

\textsuperscript{495} As X. Tilliette has remarked, “One cannot help thinking that the preexisting subject—‘neither God nor man’—has been invented in order to produce an ingenious connection between pagan fantasy and Christianity” (Schelling, 2:467-68; quoted by Balthasar in TL II, 261.

\textsuperscript{496} Balthasar, \textit{TL II}, 261.

\textsuperscript{497} Balthasar, \textit{GL IV}, 301, n.354. Here is a gesture toward Schelling’s influence by Neoplatonism.

\textsuperscript{498} \textit{Ibid.}, 36
functions to indicate their own ‘incapacity to provide salvation.’\textsuperscript{499} The decisive answer to the ‘philosophical-mythological questioning’ of human beings is and must be the Word who became flesh, very God and very history.\textsuperscript{500} For Balthasar, Christ, as the concrete universal, attenuates classical mythology insofar as with the advent of he who is the one true savior “all the myths and fairytales become transparent to Him and consequently lose their weight.”\textsuperscript{501} By way of anticipation, it is particularly Balthasar’s appeal (through Bulgakov) to the Ur-image in Revelation of Christ as the Lamb as though slain which “must fulfill the inchoate yearnings of mythos and, at the same time, banish its uncertainties.”\textsuperscript{502}

\textit{Myth: Russian Repetitions}

Berdyaev weighs in positively on Schelling’s philosophy of mythology in \textit{The Meaning of History}, calling it an “ingenious theory according to which mythology represents the repetition in the human spirit and consciousness of the processes of nature.”\textsuperscript{503} Schelling thus becomes incredibly influential on Berdyaev’s claim that concrete mythology is the fundament and the originary basis of human history. As he suggests, mythology is “the opening page of a tale about man’s terrestrial destiny, which

\textsuperscript{499} Balthasar, \textit{A Theological Anthropology}, 53.

\textsuperscript{500} \textit{Ibid.}, 63-4, which indicates the fundamental difference between the mythical imagination and the Christological is precisely the resurrection of the dead, a theme to be resounded in our final chapter.

\textsuperscript{501} Balthasar, \textit{GL V}, 153. Also c.f. Balthasar, \textit{A Theological Anthropology} (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), in which Christ is said to be the fulfillment of the “aspirations of mysticism and of myth” (66), as well as \textit{TD II}, where Balthasar suggests that “the drama of Christ is the recapitulation and the end of Greek tragedy…” (49).

\textsuperscript{502} Balthasar, \textit{TD II}, 62.

\textsuperscript{503} Berdyaev, \textit{The Meaning of History}, 78.
succeeded his celestial one and the prologue which was enacted in heaven,”504 the prologue which is nothing other than the original freedom and fall into the natural, physical world. These deep structures of myth pre-exist discursive reason, imprinted as they are on the font of human nature itself.505 Myth for Berdyaev is not a “naïve or false contrivance,”506 but the mode in excess of discursive reason which conceals the very greatest mystery of humankind. For Berdyaev, then, a philosophy of history ought to be based on an identification of history with the mythological:

History is not an objective empirical datum; it is a myth. Myth is no fiction, but a reality; it is, however, one of a different order from that of the so-called objective empirical fact…[it] transcends the limits of the external objective world, revealing an ideal world…

As suggested above, though Balthasar does side with Schelling and Berdyaev insofar as myth countenances pernicious forces of demythologization, he is entirely unprepared to accept the speculative ontologies embedded in their mythological programs. While there is for Balthasar “a real analogy between revelation and the beautiful, both the natural revelation of mythology and the supernatural revelation,”508 he insists absolutely that the two cannot be collapsed.

Balthasar’s understanding of theo-drama requires acknowledgement that God, the director and producer of the ‘play,’ is unknowable mystery, eternal surprise, that which human thought cannot presume to master. It is not that theological reflection can

504 Ibid., 78-81.
505 Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, 176.
507 Ibid., 31.
say nothing, but rather that it must demonstrate epistemic reserve in the face of a divine presence whose plenitude exceeds and transcends all conceptual categories. The excess of the divine is mirrored in the Scriptures, which themselves are, insofar as the gramma points beyond itself to the pneuma, “a vessel that is too small” (John 21:25). Balthasar is especially resistant to a type of ‘epic-narrative’ theologizing which assumes an external, journalistic and disinterested perspective outside the drama that “will quite logically assume the role of judge over the events and their actualization.” The dramatic dimension which infuses Scripture and tradition, rather, draws all would-be spectators into the action.

With respect to Balthasar’s estimations, then, Schelling and Berdyaev do not fare well insofar as they depart too drastically from scripture and the theological tradition. It goes better for Soloviev, though not as well as it does for Bulgakov, who will be treated more at length in the following two chapters. Soloviev’s very early text The Mythological Process in Paganism (1873) certainly owes debts to Schelling’s own philosophy of mythology. Balthasar recognizes this, noting that the text “takes its bearings from Schelling.” We shall focus our attention mainly on the latter text. Schelling’s three potencies—being-in-itself (an sich Seiende), being-for-itself (für sich Seiende) and being-with-

510 Ibid., 56.
511 Ibid., 58.
512 C.f. Maxime Herman, Vie et œuvre de Vladimir Soloviev (Freibourg, 1995), 24, who identifies in this early work all the major themes which will develop over the course of Soloviev’s career, including in particularly the positing of a singular religious principle which operates as a basis for human history. Also c.f. Jonathan Sutton, The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment (New York, 1988), esp. 102-5. See Valliere, “Solov’ev and Schelling’s Philosophy of Revelation,” 123.
513 Balthasar, GL III, 297.
itself (das bei-sich-Seiende) resurface definitively in Soloviev’s doctrine of God in the
*Lectures on Divine Humanity*. 514 In this text Soloviev delineates his Trinitarian doctrine of
God, which he considers to be “a doctrine which is at once the crown of pre-Christian
religious wisdom and the basic speculative principle of Christianity.”515 Much like
Schelling, Soloviev identifies a conundrum at the heart of it: Brutely, God exists as such,
transcending any finite determination. The meaning of God as existent, however, must
simultaneously exceed the abstraction of being in general, since “*being* can be conceived
only as the relation of an existent to its objective essence or content, a relation in which it affirms,
posits, or manifests its content, its essence, in one way or another.”516 God possesses all
being, all determinate content. At the same time, however, God cannot simply be a
determinate thing among other things. Thus for Soloviev, as in Schelling and Böhme,
God is the Absolute, the super-subsistent All, though Soloviev understands this claim to
resist a devolution into naturalistic or idealistic pantheism:

…the only possible answer to the question, What is God? is the one already
known to us, namely, that God is the all, that is, that the all in the positive sense,
or the unity of all things, constitutes God’s own content, object, or objective
essence, and that God’s actual being is the assertion or positing of this content,
of this essence, and, in it, of the One who posits, the existent One. 517

514 For Soloviev on progressive religion development, c.f. *Lectures* 1-6, as well as *Lecture* 10, which
traces out three epochs of the astral, the solar, and the tellurian (145) and follows through early pagan
myths to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Also c.f. Paul Valliere, “Solov’ev and Schelling’s Philosophy of
Revelation,” *Vladimir Solov’ev: Reconciler and Polemicist*. Valliere also identifies the adoption of the
Schellingian triad in Soloviev’s philosophy of history articulated in *Russia and the Universal Church*, in which
the process of “universal history” is construed as the threefold “perfect woman, or divinized nature, the
perfect man or the God-man, and the perfect society of God with human beings—the definitive
quoted in Valliere, 123). For an excellent treatment of Soloviev’s adoption of Schellingian language of the
potencies to elaborate his own Christologically specified doctrine of Godmanhood, see Brandon Gallaher,


God is thus a subject/existent who possesses and manifests the All (that is, divine content or essence): the content of this All is “absolute love, that is, love that equally contains and responds to all…precisely that ideal all, that all-integrity that constitutes the proper content of the divine principle.”

This relation between God as existent and God’s essence is exemplified in three self-positings, which align for Soloviev determinatively with the Trinitarian hypostases. Adapting Schelling, the first positing (God in God’s Self) is God as potentiality, as non-differentiated immediacy, as absolute subject: here the content of God is not actualized but is at this stage only latent. Now, according to Soloviev, “for this universal essence to be actual, God not only must contain it in Himself, that is, He must affirm it as other, must manifest and actualize it as something distinct from Himself.” The second positing (God for God’s Self) draws out that which is latent and undifferentiated into objective actuality, expressing through God’s own free self-determination (e.g. not external necessity) the inner content of the first mode. The third positing (God with God’s Self), is, of course, the perfect union of the first two positings, a unity which is “already asserted, manifested, or mediated, having passed through its own opposite, through a differentiation, and it is thereby intensified (potentiated).”

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518 Soloviev, Lecture Four, 53.

519 But, maddeningly, hardly ever citing. While Soloviev distances himself from the early Schelling, he does explicitly recognize in Svet nevčernij (1917) affinities with Schelling’s positive philosophy (Valliere, Solov’ev and Schelling’s Philosophy of Revelation,” Vladimir Solov’ev: Reconciler and Polemicist, 120).

520 Soloviev, Lecture Six, 79.

521 Ibid., 83.
Soloviev’s debts to Schelling—here and elsewhere—are self-conscious and not simply accidental. Indeed, a jotting in one of his notebooks from 1875 is rather telling, indicating a self-styled alliance to a certain line of esoteric speculative thinking. The entry reads:

Kabbalah and Neoplatonism.
Boehme and Swedenborg.
Schelling and me.  

As Balthasar maintains, however, Soloviev’s quite original religious philosophy does not, however, guilelessly repeat Schelling, but rather seeks to broaden and enrich the boundaries of Orthodox thought by opening up the resources of Western philosophy.

Balthasar’s essay on Soloviev is remarkable in this respect insofar as it consistently provides an alibi—if not unjust, somewhat peculiar in its insistence—for Soloviev. Balthasar alibis him on several counts, first by putting the accent more on his patristic pedigree including Maximus, Augustine, and Thomas than on inheritances from German Idealism and Romanticism. As Balthasar’s gentle critique suggests, appeals to Schelling are mitigated by his deep formation by biblical texts, especially the Wisdom tradition, the Greek fathers (Maximus the Confessor in particular), and mystical literature.

Indeed, the departures between Soloviev and Schelling are enormously significant. First, unlike Berdyaev, Soloviev opposes Schelling’s understanding of darkness as a constitutive element of divinity. For instance, in *Russia and the Universal Church*, Soloviev avers that “the proper sphere of the Father is absolute light, light in

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itself, having no relation with darkness,” and further, “in God can be found no shadow of evil whatsoever.” Even in his triadic scheme in the Lectures which details the three sphere of primordial divinity, there is no shadowed ground, no bitterness or wrath; the divine being is in all modes “free from envy, from exclusiveness,” it is “all-one and all-good.” Secondly, Soloviev’s triadic scheme is more tightly determined by Trinitarian commitments. Soloviev’s conception of the Trinity in the Lectures has been described as a “curious hybrid of Hegelian dialectic, Schellingean Potenzenlehre, and classical Trinitarian theology of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries.” Significantly, Balthasar recognizes but is not terribly put off by Soloviev’s apparent debts to the esoteric tradition, including Böhme, Swedenborg, and von Baader, among others. No, according to Balthasar a process of purification takes place in Soloviev’s reading of dubious sources:

[He] fully appropriates them for himself, the muddy stream runs through him as if through a purifying agent and is distilled in crystal-clear, disinfected waters, answering the needs of his own philosophical spirit, which (in contrast to that of so many of his speculative compatriots) can live and breath only in an atmosphere of unqualified transparency and intelligibility.

523 Soloviev, Russia and the Universal Church, 168.
524 Ibid., 169.
525 Soloviev, Lecture Nine, 129.
526 Ibid., 130.
528 Balthasar, GL III, 292.
Balthasar’s hyperbolic assessment, while perhaps a bit too fulsome, is not terribly off the mark.\textsuperscript{520} Indeed, as we shall see in chapter five, Balthasar enthusiastically affirms the theology of Sergei Bulgakov, whose more careful work functions to filter out some of Soloviev’s excesses. Further, Soloviev’s conception of the All as essentially absolute love which freely flowers forth an-Other as well as the created order certainly informs Bulgakov’s plural understanding of \textit{kenosis} which Balthasar adopts without significant critique.\textsuperscript{530} In Balthasar’s assessment, though Soloviev shares quite a bit structurally with Schelling, he fills up the idealistic form with what he considers to be (and wants to be grasped as) Christian content. As the ground of all that is (\textit{quod est}, the subject), God is Father; as paradigm of existing reality (\textit{essential}, the object), he is Son; and as that which unites both (\textit{esse}, identity), he is Spirit or being.\textsuperscript{531}

Finally, Soloviev’s debts to Böhme and Schelling are displaced by what is the self-consciously central element of this thinking: the Jesus Christ of historic, revealed religion, who is not simply one case of divine humanity among many others, but its “unique and all-transcending peak.”\textsuperscript{532} What is primary for Soloviev is not—as in Schelling—system-building, wherein the particulars of Christianity must stretch to fit a Procrustean bed of speculative, abstract theologizing, but the historical fact of Christ as

\textsuperscript{520} Balthasar’s positive assessment of Soloviev is ultimately affirmed by Brandon Gallaher, who comments on the skill by which Soloviev is able to transfigure his sources. As he suggests in his article “The Christological Focus of Vladimir Solov’ev’s Sophiology,” “Unlike Hegel and Schelling, where Christ as the God-Man is either not intrinsic to the system (Hegel) or Christ as wholly God is completely denied (Schelling), in the case of Solov’ev, his system is founded principally on the notion of Godmanhood. Solov’ev, furthermore, is quite different from Boehme precisely because his system acknowledges the Chalcedonian definition as the matrix in which private metaphysical illumination must be interpreted and not vice-versa” (638).

\textsuperscript{530} We shall speak to this in chapter five. For Balthasar on Soloviev’s Christology as essentially kenotic, c.f. \textit{GL III}, 322-325.

\textsuperscript{531} Balthasar, \textit{GL III}, 305.

\textsuperscript{532} \textit{Ibid.}, 322.
the manifestation of divine-humanity. In the Lectures, Soloviev argues that “the originality of Christianity lies not in its general views but in positive facts, not in the speculative content of its idea but in its personal incarnation.”\textsuperscript{533} Balthasar certainly understands Soloviev to be a thoroughly Christological and Chalcedonian thinker, who, though he may take certain language or concepts or logic from idealism, is not fatally determined by these debts. As Balthasar suggests, Soloviev’s interest in ever-increasing integration “will be bound to take its aspect of formal absoluteness from rational idealism, but the real fullness of substantive historical content from empirical ‘materialism.’ In Christ, the real and the ideal have become archetypally one…”\textsuperscript{534} A careful analysis with respect to Soloviev indicates, then, if not a total innocence, a strongly Trinitarian and Christological mooring.

This emphasis on the fact of Christ is precisely that which exceeds the merely mythological. Very broadly speaking, of course, the moderns wanted to reinvigorate the (simply) historical with the mythic. We have seen that for Schelling mythology is the primordial history (\textit{Urgeschichte}) of human beings, a notion which Berdyaev takes up decisively. Though Balthasar recognizes the possibility of the disclosive, truth-giving power of myth and understands Christianity to be functionally hospitable to myth (particularly Greek and Roman), it is never at the expense of this most basic substance of Christian faith: Jesus Christ. Christ—as incarnate and resurrected flesh—is decisively an historical, not a mythical figure. Christianity may appear to be one variant among others,

\textsuperscript{533} Soloviev, \textit{Lecture Six}, 76.

\textsuperscript{534} Balthasar, \textit{GL. III}, 291.
a repetition of the ancient structures of myth, but history is the decisive difference. For
Balthasar, the flesh of Christ mitigates against the mythical:

All Christian teaching proceeds from the experience of the bodily Resurrection
of Christ, which is by no means mythical and speculative but sober and
historical; and this Resurrection illuminates the truth and the meaning of his
Cross and, behind it, of his entire Incarnation…In the face of this basic datum,
all the vestiges of mythical ideas, of mythical thinking and speaking in the New
Testament shrink to purely formal ways of expressing something that is
completely new and unique.  

This is no wise to say, of course, that for Balthasar extra-confessional discourses
like philosophy and myth are so undervalued that they have no place in a Christian
theology that places the historical Christ at its very center. Soloviev, for instance, points
out an “essential kinship” between Neo-Platonism and Christianity, but does not
consider these resonances to jeopardize the unique content of Christianity as a positive
revelation. Though the “same speculative theme, the self-revelation of the all-one
Divinity” is sounded, the metaphysical speculations of Alexandrian philosophy were
precisely that: speculation. And yet, according to Soloviev, Christians could recognize in
these theoretical abstractions that which they had experienced in Christ as “living
reality.” It is this living content of biblical revelation that makes the difference that
gives life to the dry bones of simply formal models.

Conclusion

This chapter was an exposition of the modes in which the cluster of themes
motivating the theogonic myth of Böhme—creation, theodicy, freedom, the existence of

535 Balthasar, TD V, 52; c.f. 53ff.
536 Soloviev, Lecture Six, 57-6.
time, the origin and nature of evil, myth—moved through the thought of Schelling, then
was creatively assimilated or repeated in Soloviev and Berdyaev. In his adjudicating
these discourses in the Russians, Balthasar considers Berdyaev’s repetitions of Böhme to
be too literal, more a dull echo than a pleasing riff; his acceptance of das Dunkle at the
heart of God fatally compromises his theological philosophy of human finitude and his
document of God. Soloviev’s repetitions, however, attenuate the Behemistic and
Schellingian heritage with accents on more traditional sources in the Fathers. It should
be perfectly clear from the foregoing, however, that even in his affirmations of a
traditional heritage, Balthasar is constitutively open to other conceptual fields. He has an
easy freedom with respect to the limited value of extra-confessional discourses, though
he couples this leniency with a capiously orthodox sensibility that insists upon
maintaining the integrity of both God and human being.
CHAPTER FOUR

"GRÜN WIRKLICHER GRÜNE, WIRKLICHER SONNENSCHEIN, WIRKLICHER WALD\textsuperscript{538}: ANTHROPOLOGICAL ESCHATA AND THE LOGIC OF RESURRECTION

In The Russian Idea, Berdyaev quite rightly characterizes Russian people as “a people of the end.”\textsuperscript{539} Both the penultimate and the final substantive chapters consider, appropriately, endings. The capacious frontiers of eschatology and apocalyptic, which both in their strangeness and beauty determine rather than bookend the theological task, bring many of our previous concerns to a point—both in time and of infinite density—and is thus the most fertile ground for examining the complex relation between Schelling, our Russian triumverate, and Balthasar, all of whom are eschatologically and apocalyptically disposed. Again, our task is not strictly to demonstrate a textual genealogy between Balthasar and the Russian Orthodox thinkers, although that is arguable: our stated purpose is to demonstrate homologous content and shared imagination.

\textsuperscript{538} R.M. Rilke, “Death Experienced,” New Poems, ed. Edward Snow (Macmillan, 2001): “We know nothing of this going-hence/that so excludes us. We have no grounds/for showing Death wonderment and love/or hate, since it wears that age-old mask/of tragedy that hopelessly contorts it./The world is full of roles—which we still act./As long as we keep striving for acclaim,/Death also acts a part—though always badly./But when you went, a streak of reality/broke in upon the stage through that fissure/where you left: green of real green, real sunshine, real forest./We go on acting. Fearful and reciting/things difficult to learn and now and then/inventing gestures; but your existence,/withdrawn from us and taken from our piece,/can sometimes come over us, like a knowledge/of that reality settling in,/so that for a while we act life/transported, not thinking of applause” (95).

Because eschatological concerns constitutively categorize all the thinkers considered, it will be necessary to narrow our field of inquiry to the loci of the most striking of convergences between Balthasar, Schelling, and the Russians: namely, (1) the meaning of death, resurrection, and the nature of postmortem existence, with particular attention to what is entailed by the anthropological category of *geistige Koerperlichkeit* (“spiritual corporeality”), (2) the nature of hell as imaginative space, (3) the possibility of universal salvation, (4) a shared Johannine register, (5) figurations of Antichrist as a function of religious counterfeiting, and finally, (6) the positive connection of paschal trinitarianism with the apocalyptic, the unveiling of which reveals that everything is taken in and contained eschatologically.

How best to begin to accomplish this daunting task? Within the purview of eschatology, Balthasar makes an important distinction between anthropological *eschata*, which includes death, judgment, hell and heaven—what is perhaps the most traditional understanding of what the category of eschatology considers—and the theocentric, which is the ultimate, and the ultimately determinative Trinitarian horizon. Though in the order of being the anthropological and the theocentric cannot be separated (indeed, Balthasar asserts that the anthropocentric can only be understood within the context of the theocentric) this chapter undertakes to examine the former; chapter five the latter, with attention to the deformative lineage of Böhme and Joachim in Schelling, which reappears in the Russians marginally in Soloviev and maximally in Berdiaev, who, like Joachim, parses time into three distinct epochs. The present chapter, however, will query human dying and rising, which naturally entails a discussion of theological anthropology, however skeletal, the nature of the final judgment, and the (perhaps
unfashionable) subject of hell, which leads us ultimately to the threshold of the possibility of universal salvation.

This chapter, like the others, recurs to our formula of imaginatively construing the theological speculation of Balthasar alongside that of both Schelling and the Russians (with Bulgakov again having pride of place), a construction which first and foremost is intended diagnostically to indicate the periphery of licit theological conjecture for confessional religious discourse. It is particularly in the context of eschatology, at the frontiers of that which can be known, that Balthasar explicitly recommends pursuing the more speculative questions—not at the cost of established doctrines, of course, but he leaves to future generations the creative exploration of eschatological questions which admit no pat answers so as to “develop from the core of truth…a more extensive and adequate body of speculation.”

Bulgakov likewise calls attention to the fact that, with respect to eschatology, there are no universally binding dogmatic definitions made by the Church, and thus developments in this area are somewhat provisional and open to “free theological investigation.”

We shall find that with respect to his speculative eschatology the general trend of Balthasar’s evaluation of Schelling—an uneasy mixture of attraction and repulsion—holds. He affirms philosophy’s unique contributions to human understanding which can and ought to be factored into the theological project, but these contributions always fall flat because they are disconnected from the dynamism (and humility) of a living relation to biblical revelation which authentic Christianity provides (and requires). The structural


homologies of Schelling’s philosophy with authentically Christian revelation, particularly the late adoption of a religious vocabulary which might suggest a greater degree of compatibility with Christian metaphysics than is actually possible given Schelling’s required elision of the genuinely historical to the ideal and the mythical, are actually far more insidious because of the similarities. As Balthasar writes in another context,

Tragically, the attempts that come closest to the truth are usually the most dangerous, because they are the most presumptuous (Icarus and his wings): precisely because they are so sure of success, they fail most fundamentally to grasp the humility of the God who humbles himself in taking the form of man. 542

In the first volume of his *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, Balthasar refers to Schelling as “*der wahre theoretische Eschatologe der Zeit,*”543 and “*der eigentliche Apokalyptiker,*”544 though for Balthasar Schelling’s apocalypse is more Enochian than not in its presumptive unveiling of mystery,545 a sure demerit given Balthasar’s trepidation with respect to intertestamental apocalyptic literature. This reserve is corroborated throughout the Baltharian corpus, but especially in *GL VI*,546 where Balthasar criticizes it for falling prey to an tendency toward unrestrained speculative inquiry: “In their inquisitiveness, they press forwards and break through, making inquiries about the heavenly realm *like tourists* and having angels lead them even to the throne of the glory


544 Ibid., 206.


It is this tourism-cum-voyeurism which Balthasar finds objectionable: when
eschatology is thought outside of an existential register it becomes a morbid spectator
sport which reconfigures revelation first as disproportionately
anthropocentric/morphic, and second, as overemphasizing the world to come at the
expense of the present earthly world, “forgetting that this is the good creation of God,
the place of his covenant and the abiding foundation of all the promises.” Notably
Berdyaev’s eschatology, aligned more nearly with the Enochian apocalyptic tradition
than the book of Revelation, suffers from the same defects.

While Schelling’s brand of speculative eschatology is deemed by Balthasar to be
insufficient, it is especially striking to compare Balthasar’s speculative eschatology in TD
V (The Final Act) with Bulgakov’s own, which, as we will address in the following
chapter, operates like (heretofore underestimated) subcutaneous musculature that
provides animating movement to Balthasar’s paschal trinitarianism. Furthermore, with
respect to the question of universal salvation, both unequivocally take a probative
position, though it turns out in (and about) the end that Balthasar is more modest than
Bulgakov. In a shared resistance to the Enochian brand of apocalyptic which presumes
to know too much, however, the governing interpretive principle invoked to constrain
speculation in Balthasar and Bulgakov is the fundamental mysteriousness of the end of
history, death, afterlife, and so on, though Bulgakov occasionally tends to use this
invocation as warrant for pressing further forward.

547 Balthasar, GL VI, 324, italics added.
548 Ibid., 330-338.
549 Ibid., 330.
Balthasar’s speculation is circumscribed by an epistemic humility, a tentativeness that dares only to suggest rough sketches or images but not to presuppose the certainty of a science. His tone is not over-confident, but is characterized by a modesty with respect to making definite claims. For instance, he opens one article on eschatology with the bald statement that “concerning the whereabouts and circumstances of the dead: we know nothing.” This epistemic inaccessibility, however, is not a demerit. Paradoxically, the more inaccessible ta eschata are to thought, the more actual they become; these are not just more ‘things’ continuous with the ‘things’ of the earth. From this posture of tentativeness, Balthasar and Bulgakov alike follow intramural indications latent in the boundaries of Scripture and tradition toward the speculative in their reflections on the postmortem state, reflections which are “nothing more than an astonished stammering as we circle around this mystery on the basis of particular luminous words and suggestions of Holy Scripture.”

A Note on Texts

Because all our thinkers have a constitutively eschatological orientation, it is not possible to supply a full-bodied treatment of their individual eschatologies as such. With respect to Schelling, these chapters will privilege the fragmentary dialogue Clara, or, On


553 Balthasar TD IV, 13. Consider a similar statement of Bulgakov’s, that postmortem existence “remains transcendent and largely unknowable for us (which is why excessive curiosity about it is spiritually unhealthy, sidetracking Christian thought into the domain of ‘spiritual gnosis’ or occultism. Nevertheless, we can establish essential features of this life which follow from the fundamental elements of our faith (Bride, 358).
Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World, as well as The Ages of the World, with limited attention to the more informal, popular level Stuttgart Lectures (which were left unpublished in his lifetime). Though Berdyaev’s entire orientation bears an eschatological stamp, here The Beginning and the End and The Destiny of Man will serve our purposes best. Soloviev’s War, Progress, and the End of History will likewise be sufficiently representative, as will Bulgakov’s The Bride of the Lamb, particularly the final section. In terms of Balthasar’s great triptych of Glory of the Lord, Theo-Drama, and Theo-Logic, from which many eschatological gems can easily be mined, we shall nevertheless privilege volumes IV and V of Theo-Drama where Balthasar’s generally uncomplicated profile as apocalyptic theologian—typified as paschal and trinitarian, ratified in Mysterium Paschale—emerges most perspicuously and whose argument, it is said, is underwritten by that of his early Apokalypse der deutschen Seele, which executes a massively wide-ranging critique of the apocalyptic timbre of German philosophy and literature from Idealism and Romanticism.

554 Clara will be more important here; we have dealt sufficiently with The Ages of the World in chapter three, though it will be important again in the next chapter. For an succinct presentation of the issues regarding situating one text to the other—whether or not, for instance, Clara should be understood as a preliminary sketch for The Ages of the World, c.f. Fiona Steinkamp’s introduction to her translation of Clara, or, On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World, trans. Fiona Steinkamp (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), particularly x-xiii. Many of Schelling’s texts were continually rewritten, edited, and deliberately left unfinished or fragmentary. For instance, though its publication was heralded on numerous occasions, The Ages of the World was redrafted ad nauseam, and ultimately left unfinished, as marginalia ambiguatted what had been already written. Soloviev’s thought, like Schelling’s, has also been characterized as continually self-revising. Even the fictitious manuscript of the “Short Story of the Antichrist” included in his War, Progress, and the End of History breaks off in medias res with the untimely death of Father Pansophius (191). For the phenomenon of Romantic apocalypses deliberately left unfinished or fragmentary, c.f. Alice A. Kuzniar, Delayed Endings: Nonclosure in Novalis and Hölderlin (University of Georgia Press, 2008).

555 A lamentable deficit in this study is that its author does not read Russian. Reliable translations of Bulgakov can be had thanks to the tireless work of Boris Jakim. But Bulgakov’s final book, a commentary on the book of Revelation titled Apokalips Ioanna: opyt dogmaticheskogo istolkovaniia (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1948) and published posthumously, has not yet been translated and, while certainly quite apropos, cannot be treated adequately.
onward. Of course, with respect to the question of universal salvation in Balthasar’s thought, the slim but provocative *Dare We Hope?* and *A Short Discourse on Hell* shall certainly come under discussion.

**Adrienne von Speyr as Biblical Commentator**

Surely, regarding their apocalyptic character, Balthasar’s apocalyptic “law of heightening” is reflected structurally in the texts of the *Theo-Drama;* after the *Prolegomena* comes the anthropological (*TD II*), the Christological (*TD III*), the soteriological (*TD IV*), and, finally, the trinitarian (*TD V*), which is the main vehicle for an exposition of his (thoroughly trinitarian) eschatology, informed not least by the biblical commentaries of Adrienne von Speyr. Our interest in drawing out Balthasar’s subterranean engagement with Russian, and specifically Bulgakovian eschatological themes is by no means to displace what can only be described as the wholly saturated presence of Adrienne von Speyr in Balthasar’s eschatology. Indeed, Balthasar’s decidedly eschatological *Theo-Drama IV* and *Theo-Drama V* are where von Speyr’s presence, particularly her commentaries on John and Revelation, are most felt. These texts are an exercise in intertextuality, with lengthy quotations interwoven into Balthasar’s own prose in order to indicate their speaking in *una voce.* In *TD IV* and *TD V* in particular he

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556 Balthasar, *Der deutsche Idealismus,* originally published under the title *Prometheus,* sets out the scope of the project and consists of individual analyses of Lessing, Herder, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Novalis, Hölderlin, Schiller, Goethe, Hegel, Jean Paul (otherwise known as novelist Johann Paul Friedrich Richter) and Wagner, among others. Volume II is *Im Zeichen Nietzsche,* and, most pertinent to our interests, contains a long comparison of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, 202-419. This structural and thematic juxtaposition of these “hostile brothers” appears not only in Henri de Lubac’s “Dostoevsky as Prophet,” *The Drama of Atheist Humanism,* trans. Edith M. Riley (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1963), 161-246, but also in all cases of our Russian religious philosophers (not to mention Lev Shestov and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii). Volume III, *Die Vergöttlichung des Todes,* takes aim in the main at Heidegger. For a wonderful summary *en bref* of this very intimidating work (Balthasar himself called it, half-jokingly, his ‘giant child’), c.f. Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Scattering the Seed: A Guide through Balthasar’s Early Writings on Philosophy and the Arts* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).
speaks as von Speyr, weaving his own narrative into quotes from her copious works in order deliberately to “show the fundamental consonance between her views and mine.”\textsuperscript{557} This self-understanding is further corroborated when Balthasar notes that “the greater part of so much of what I have written is a translation of what is present in more immediate, less technical fashion in the powerful work of Adrienne von Speyr.”\textsuperscript{558}

Despite the strangeness and uncanny nature of some of von Speyr’s reported mystical experiences which makes even ardent Balthasarians a little nervous, this kind of self-conscious announcement compounded by the performance of perhaps superfluous levels of quotation—meant explicitly to ratify von Speyr’s status as source and biblical commentator—really ought to be trusted. Other scholars are not so convinced, finding von Speyr’s work to be either un-informative or wholly de-formative to Balthasar’s theological enterprise. For instance, Kevin Mongrain suggests that though von Speyr is important for understanding Balthasar psychologically, her influence “was deforming rather than constructive, derived rather than original...[and] completely dispensable for theologically understanding him.”\textsuperscript{559} Given Balthasar’s own articulation of her positive influence as well as the abundant level of textual and thematic quotation, Mongrain’s claim seems difficult to sustain.\textsuperscript{560}

\textsuperscript{557} Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 13

\textsuperscript{558} Balthasar, \textit{My Work in Retrospect}, 105.

\textsuperscript{559} Mongrain, 11-2; italics added.

\textsuperscript{560} For a much more sympathetic interpretation of Speyrian influence, c.f. Michael P. Murphy, \textit{A Theology of Criticism}: “…it is Speyr—who had no formal training in theology—who served as Balthasar’s most influential teacher, a flesh-and-blood tutor in matters of mystical theology, ecclesiology, and, most vitally, prayer” (33). C.f. Cyril O’Regan, “I am Not What I Am Because Of…” \textit{How Balthasar Changed My Mind}, 155-6.
It is certainly fair at the very least to construe von Speyr’s biblical commentary on Revelation as complementary to Bulgakov’s with respect to informing Balthasar’s theological project. If Balthasar speaks with von Speyr in *una voce*, however, he speaks with Bulgakov *sotta voce*, and this studied lowering of the voice calls particular emphasis to what is an absolutely vital Russian source. One might theorize that, particularly in the densely Speryian passages in *TD V* (especially “The World is from the Trinity”), that Balthasar is *over*-performing, *over*-ratifying Adrienne as source, *over*-emphasizing for the very sake of normalizing and regulating her as source. To lower the voice, to speak in secret, hiddenly—in theatrical terms, as an aside—is perhaps to draw a special emphasis to what is said and to the method of delivery.

*The Thanatological and the Anthropological*

Following traditional accounts of eschatology, the first aspect that should be considered is death and the character of the postmortem state. Of course, to supply an account of human dying is at the same time to supply an account, however abbreviated, of theological anthropology and the relationship of body, soul, and spirit. For Balthasar, for whom death is both immanent and increasingly imminent, the heartrending riddle of human death is the clearest expression of the central existential paradox of life, the primary instance of expressing the absolute through the relative, the infinite through the finite. ⁵⁶¹ In the mortal condition of bodily existence, human beings “are constrained to inscribe things of absolute validity upon a time continuum that is running out.” ⁵⁶²

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Human beings are liminal, “centaurlike” creatures who constantly must negotiate the absolute in the transient, particularly in confronting their own certain death, which highlights their insoluble existential paradox. As we shall see, construing a theology of death in terms of the negotiation between finite and infinite elements is a major point of commonality—as well, perhaps, as the site of greatest distance with respect to the ultimate standing of finitude—between Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar.

In the first volume of *Apokalypse*, in which Balthasar treats the eschatological attitude of figures in German Idealism, his essay on Schelling indicates his own discomfort with a posture that is ambivalent at best to the experience of finitude. At the root of Schelling’s thought—the ambivalence of which transfers squarely to his eschatology—Balthasar identifies two competing aspects: the ecstatic mystical spiritualist aspect, which locates meaning wholly outside the finite (e.g. in its necessary dissolution of the particular within the infinite Absolute) and the organic-creative aspect, in which finite and Absolute work together to attain the creative realization of the All-Real. The first attitude, in which finite things are *non-esse*, indicates that the particular concrete thing is in the All insofar as it is imbued by and dissolved into the All, which comprises the genuine identity of finite and infinite. This identity of the finite with the infinite, however, requires that the finite cease to be so. Here, then, is an unmistakably ‘other-worldly’ stance. On the other hand, as Balthasar points out, is the more positive reading that finite beings have no *an-sich-sein* precisely because they are in God, and

565 Ibid., 218-9.
thereby participate in the potencies (A₁, A², A₃) of dynamic vitality which move toward Allsein.⁵⁶⁶ This indicates a radical immanence.

This paradoxical formula, in which the finite and all physical existence is both decried as non-being apart from its Auflösung in the Absolute, and at the same time valorized for its work in realizing Allsein, renders the existential attitude of human being as irredeemably ambiguous: both ex-stasis and en-stasis are at the same time recommended.⁵⁶⁷ For Schelling, the fundamental characteristic of the material is heaviness, gravity; it is eccentric to being, and synonymous with non-life.⁵⁶⁸ This puts human being in a doublebind; the human is created and destroyed in one and the same act.⁵⁶⁹ This anthropological ambivalence, again, seeps darkly into Schelling’s eschatology.

As has been suggested in previous chapters, the same ambivalence with respect to the finite is present in Berdyaev. Because of his express reliance upon the Behemistic cosmological myth which begins with a dark, irrational ‘meonic’ freedom prior to God and commitment to the simultaneity of the Fall and the actualization of the phenomenal world, the created order irradiates from its root and center a chaotic, poisoned core. As we saw in the last chapter, Berdyaev understands the Fall of humanity to be a fall, to put it in Kantian terms, from the freedom of the noumena into the objectified necessity of the phenomenal, that is, into the natural world, which is explicitly in an antagonistic relation to the world of spirit. For Berdyaev, spirit—characterized as an existence of freedom, love and personality beyond objective and subjective reality—is primary, and

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 219-220.
⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 223.
⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.
⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 230.
that which is actually concrete; the material world is secondary and derivative, only “an
epiphenomena of spirit.”

Though Berdyaev’s insistence on existential personalism does separate his view
from Schelling’s essential monism, human finitude really fares no better. Personality is a
spiritual, ethical category, not genetic or biological. Berdyaev tries to exempt the form of
the human body itself (“and the expression of the eyes”) as elements of the spiritual
personality rather than physical, and thus not in antagonistic relation to spirit, but this
gesture is weak. The thrust of his eschatology anticipates the destruction, not the
transformation of the world, effected by a final “creative” and cooperative act by God
and human beings together, where “the crowning point of world creation is the end of
the world…The world must be turned into an image of beauty, it must be dissolved in
creative ecstasy.”

Death Experienced: Schelling

Personally, F.W.J. Schelling was no stranger to death. The tragic losses of both
his wife Caroline as well as her daughter Auguste (reportedly due to his own peculiar
interventions in her medical care) were likely deeply formative in the composition of his
philosophical dialogue Clara, or On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World. This text, a
fictionalized and fragmentary narrative which begins, appropriately, on All Soul’s Day,
deals with the question of life after death and the possibility and form of the

571 Ibid., 104.
572 Ibid., 174.
573 For Balthasar’s explicit mention of the dialogue Clara, especially with respect to anthropology, c.f. TD I, 570, 576-7.
postmortem perdurance of the human being, which is, as in Augustine, holistic and tripartite; that is, the human being is a unity of body, spirit, and soul. The text reflects this anthropology in its three main characters: the doctor (nature/the body), the priest (spirit/mind) and, one of the only named characters, Clara (the soul/personality). For Schelling, this anthropology reflects his understanding of God as having three divine potencies: the real, the ideal, and their identity, which are correlative to body, spirit, and soul. As the divine is the identity of real and ideal, so too human existence can include the antinomial pairings of the corporeal and spiritual principles, with the soul providing the principle of absolute identity and the bond between body and spirit.

In an important piece of dialogical exposition between Clara and the priest, it comes to light that “the whole person” must be reunited after the separation of death, after which the body and the spirit are united through the power of the soul, which, sharing equally in the nature of both body and spirit, mediates between them. 574 The soul, then, is primary, “the most noble of the three, because it alone includes the other two within it.” 575 It is the “actual innermost germ of life.” 576 Yet, importantly, these elements of human being are not hermetically sealed one from the other, but all contain in themselves something latent of the other. Duality is here sublated. Thus, the body does not suddenly become spiritual at death: it is rather the case that “the spiritual side of the body that here [e.g. on earth] was hidden and subordinate becomes one that there [e.g. in the “spirit-world”] is manifest and dominant.” 577

574 Schelling, Clara, especially 33-50.
575 Ibid., 35, italics original.
576 Ibid., 36.
577 Ibid., 39. See also Schelling, Stuttgart Lectures, 475-6.
For Schelling, the spiritual always already has a corporeal element; the corporeal always already has a spiritual element, claims which according to Schelling provide the condition of the possibility for spectral reality: animal magnetism, the existence of ghosts, and so on.  This idea of geistige Koerperlichkeit, a shadowy in-between space, first emerges here in Clara and reappears later in the Stuttgart Lectures.  According at least to the first part of the dialogue (excluding the so-called “Spring Fragment”) Schelling is of the opinion that the body has both inner and outer elements; the former is what passes over to the spiritual world at death, while the latter is the natural, gross body of flesh.  Death then, at least theoretically, is no horror but “a positive transition into a spiritual condition,” and “the release of the inner form of life from the external one.

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578 For an interesting riff on Schelling’s spectral Real with respect to cinema, c.f. Slavoj Žižek, “Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Schelling (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock),” The New Schelling, ed. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 30-42.

579 It is likely, as Friedemann Horn has aptly demonstrated in Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism, that Schelling’s notion of spiritual corporeality has its origin in and draws heavily from the work of Swedenborg. Direct textual parallels can certainly be had with Swedenborg’s Heaven and Hell: “For when man enters the spiritual world or the life after death, he is in a body as he was in the world, with no apparent difference, since he neither sees nor feels any difference. But his body is then spiritual, and thus separated or purified from all that is earthly…” Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell ¶ 461; c.f. ¶ 433 also). Balthasar mentions Alois Dempf (presumably his Theoretische Anthropologie, 1950) as one who has successfully reappropriated this Romantic-idealist anthropology for Catholic metaphysics (“Some Points of Eschatology,” 276).

580 F. Horn makes a case that Schelling’s eschatology changes drastically in Clara II, marking a clean break from Swedenborg, whose eschatological reflections Schelling found to be too far outside the Christian fold. It is certainly the case that toward the end of the dialogue nature and the corporeal are afforded greater value (c.f. 76-81), and in the spring fragment (which does not appear with earlier versions), it is said that “the merely spiritual life [Geisterleben or Geistesleben, depending on the text consulted] doesn’t satisfy our heart…as the artist does not find peace in thinking about his work, but only when he has represented it physically, and as anyone fired by an ideal wants to find or reveal it in a physical-visible form, the goal of all longing is likewise the very perfection of corporeality as a reflection and mirror of perfect spirituality” (Clara, 80). Horn (95-114) indicates that the apparent shift in Schelling’s thinking in Clara (corroborated in the later Stuttgart Lectures) suggests a total abandonment of Swedenborgian influence (95).

581 Ibid., 37.
that keeps it suppressed.” As Clara herself puts it in the dialogue, “…to me death always seemed to be something that assembles rather than disperses…” For Schelling, the moment of death is a *transcensus* into another life with what was spiritual (*daimonic*) within the body, and the suppression of that which is merely natural:

Death is therefore not an absolute separation of the spirit from the body, but only a separation from that element of the body that is in opposition to the spirit...of the good from the evil, then, and of the evil from the good. This means that it is not just part of the person that is immortal, but rather the whole person in regard to the true essence—death is a reduction to the essential [*reductio ad essentiam*]. In order not to confuse it with the purely spiritual, we would like to give the name ‘the daimonic’ to the being that is not left behind in death (since what is left behind is a dead body [*caput mortuum*]) but becomes reconstructed, since it is neither simply spiritual nor simply physical but is the spiritual [dimension] of the physical and the physical [dimension] of the spiritual. So the immortal part of a person is the daimonic, not a negation of the physical but rather the physical reduced to its essence.

So the unity of body, soul, and spirit is maintained, though the body as Schelling understands it is an “essentification” of physicality, which strips it from all that is *non-esse* (and, though the philosopher doth protest too much, all that is personal).

Schelling’s anthropology is thus (at best) ambivalent with respect to the status of the

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583 *Ibid.*, 49. An echo of this line of thinking is found in Schelling’s personal correspondence as well. In a personal letter Schelling writes, “Even death, which may cause us to curse our dependence on nature and which fills a human soul’s first impression almost with horror against this merciless violence, and which destroys even the most beautiful and best without mercy when her laws demand it, even death, when grasped more deeply, opens up our eyes to the unity of the natural and the divine” (quoted in Steinkamp, xxx).


585 *Stuttgart Lectures*, 475.

586 One passage in *Clara* suggests that even complete unity with the divine would not require the sacrifice of particular identity: “For the drop in the ocean nevertheless always is this drop, even if it isn’t distinguished as such...” (52).
finite body, the “involuntary and inevitable opposite”\(^{587}\) of spirit, which, as Balthasar points out, always retains something negative even in its so-called transfiguration.\(^{588}\)

The sophiological legacy of Soloviev, of course, bears with it a notion of the spiritualization of matter as well, which goes on to feature prominently in Bulgakov’s understanding of human “sophianicity” and ultimately in his description of resurrected bodies. In Bulgakov’s anthropology, as in Schelling’s, human beings are tripartite composites of spirit, body, and soul, the latter two of which belong to the “earth,” or created nature.\(^{589}\) The spirit—which is from God and thus is both uncreated and created—has a “potency of immortality”\(^{590}\) which is communicated gradually (and ultimately, eschatologically) to the created nature of the body-soul complex.

As in Balthasar’s metaphysics of death, death is in Bulgakov’s thanatology an unnatural pathology, a horrific minus, an ontologically parasitic “open maw of non-being.”\(^{591}\) It is, in short, a state of contradiction. And yet it can only temporarily disrupt the tripartite composite of human beings, who are in their fullest potentiality by virtue of the divine origin of the spirit, “God-earth, an incarnate godlike spirit”\(^{592}\) which permits personal participation in the divine (not monistic dissolution into the divine, as is the case for Schelling). This is death as “dormition,” not annihilation.\(^{593}\) Because death is

\(^{587}\) Schelling, *Stuttgart Lectures*, 475.


\(^{589}\) Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 447.

\(^{590}\) Ibid., 351.

\(^{591}\) Ibid., 353.

\(^{592}\) Ibid., 352. C.f. also 355.

\(^{593}\) Ibid., 356. C.f. 360.
ontologically a negative—accidental rather than substantial—it can be comprehended only in the context and as a particular state of life.\footnote{Ibid., 350.}

In his explication of the dissolving power of death upon the union of the creaturely principles of soul and body from spirit, Bulgakov does not seem to be terribly far from Schelling’s notion of spiritual-corporeality at play in \textit{Clara}.

In the tripartite structure of man, death’s dividing sickle passes between the spirit and the soul...on the one hand and between the spirit and the body on the other. It is very important to take into account this indivisibility of the spirit and the soul in death, for it confirms the principle of creaturely immortality in the continuing connection with this world. The soul is an intermediate principle connecting the spirit with the creaturely world. \textit{The soul is creaturely, like the 'blood' that animates the body: The physical body dies and decomposes together with the body. But the supraphysical energy of life, whose substratum is the blood, abides (this can also be expressed by the esoteric notion of the 'etheric' or 'astral' body).}\footnote{Ibid., 354. C.f. \textit{The Lamb of God}, 385.}

Bulgakov, however, appeals to this somewhat peculiar analogue of the astral body in order to safeguard the integrity of human being from death’s final victory: if death were to cleave the creaturely principle entirely from the spiritual (the noncreaturely-creaturely), then it would triumph, and the human being “would fall apart into ontological dust.”\footnote{Ibid., 355.}

While perhaps speculatively brave, his speculations do not denigrate the finite. Quite the contrary, human persons are specified, concretized in the world of bodies, in the created order, and do not lose that connection at death, all in order \textit{not} to dehumanize human being:

The human hypostasis does not have a spiritual, supramundane being, nor, in this being, an immortality independent of incarnation. The human spirit is not created a fleshless spirit, like the angels. No human spirit can exist independently of the world. It therefore does not have abstract, nonhuman immortality. Its very being and, therefore, immortality (insofar as it possesses the latter) are
qualified by and inseparably connected with the world. This immortality is a human one, whose realization encompasses both death and resurrection. Both the one and the other, accomplished in Christ and, in Him and through Him, in all humankind, have, so to speak, their ontological place in human nature, fully assumed by the Lord in His incarnation.597

Christ’s death does not represent a disincarnation; rather, “the connection of His divine spirit with His body also remains, as the pledge of resurrection (this is the basis for the dogmatic doctrine of relics),”598 and the resurrected spiritual body retains its body-ness, having the property of a certain spatial extension.599

In his theology of resurrection, Bulgakov suggests that in human death corporeality is only potentialized, made dormant, until the seed flowers forth at resurrection. According to Bulgakov’s theology of resurrection, this germinative function, the “quickening power” actualizes that body which is proper for the soul, with material taken from the natural world, which indicates that resurrection is a restoration of what is already created rather than a new creation.600 This actualization of the body is in accordance with the ideal, artful image of the body rather than its literal reproduction, which sidesteps the question of what state (sickness, disfigurement, and so on) in which the individual may be raised. This body is incorruptible and, evoking a Nyssan anthropology, not bound by those functions which are most susceptible to the passions, that is, the alimentary and the sexual. In short, the spiritual body is the “icon of the spirit”—not made by hands!—with a perfected degree of transparency to the perfected

597 Ibid., 355.

598 Ibid.,. For more on relics, particularly as anticipations of the resurrected body, see Bride, 443. Also c.f. The Lamb of God, 378.

599 Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 393-4.

spiritual condition (“proto-image”\textsuperscript{601}) of the individual person. Ultimately, the spiritual body is adequate to the originary “proto-image”\textsuperscript{602} sketched divinely and thus “clothed in divine beauty…[and] resplendent.”\textsuperscript{603}

Thus though both Bulgakov and Schelling have a shared appeal to 1 Corinthians 15\textsuperscript{604} for their respective understandings of spiritual corporeality, Bulgakov’s more biblically faithful articulation of the resurrected body avoids denigrating the status of human finitude and creaturehood. (So too in Balthasar, who makes absolutely sure to indicate the perdurance of identity between the mortal and the spiritual body.\textsuperscript{605}) Even in the New Jerusalem, human being is far from removed from the natural world, but rather is “earth” as at the moment of creation from the dust of the ground.\textsuperscript{606} Bulgakov thus has an extremely high valuation of human finitude and creatureliness, even (especially) in an eschatological register, in which the created world is not abolished but saved and transformed by the power of resurrection; “heaven bends down to earth” rather than evacuating the latter.\textsuperscript{607} This positive theological value accorded to creatureliness (“not a denigration but the determination given to him by God”\textsuperscript{608}) is well

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{601} Ibid., 448.
\item \textsuperscript{602} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{603} Ibid., 452.
\item \textsuperscript{604} “So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, NRSV).
\item \textsuperscript{605} Balthasar, \textit{TD V’}, 359.
\item \textsuperscript{606} Bulgakov, \textit{The Bride of the Lamb}, 523.
\item \textsuperscript{607} Ibid., 519.
\item \textsuperscript{608} Ibid., 521.
\end{itemize}
in keeping with Bulgakov’s commitment to the sophianicity of creation. Because for
Bulgakov human death is underwritten by the death (and resurrection) of Christ, the very
natural dreadfulness of death has by grace been overcome supernaturally: that dread
mortal corridor has been already traversed and is thereby “suffused and illuminated by
the fiery tongues of the descent of the Holy Spirit into the world even through the
fetters of death.”609 Moreover, death opens up upon future resurrection, which indicates
a continuity of life before and after human death.

*Balthasar’s Theology of Death*

Balthasar’s theology of death and resurrection bears several striking similarities to
Bulgakov’s. As noted, both understand death to be ontologically parasitic. It is certainly
true also that the accent in both theologians falls upon eschatological victory, upon
resurrection. Indeed, Balthasar repeatedly affirms the very Johannine trope that in the
death of Christ—who in the book of Revelation holds the keys of Death and Hades
(1:18)—the Resurrection is already implicit.610 The pairing in the Gospel of John of
suffering with exaltation, death with resurrection, and all these as love indicates too that
the those who have died live already in the resurrected Lord: “For John, physical death
is almost an obsolete phenomenon, since the believer already lives in the Lord, who is
the resurrection.”611 This eschatological reality does not, however, lessen the horrors of
death: referring to the figure of the triumphant eschatological Christ of Revelation,

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609 *Ibid.*, 353. For the Christological transvaluation of death—since loving and voluntary—also
see Bulgakov’s sermon “Having Trampled on Death by Death,” *Ultimate Questions*, 307-9.


Balthasar notes, “Even if it be true…that the Son of Man holds ‘the keys of Death and Hades’ (Rev 1:18), he does so only because these things are realities.”

The implications that follow from thinking death too blithely (Hegel is also in Balthasar’s sights)—namely, a devaluation of creaturehood—is pervasive in the Balthasarian oeuvre. For instance, to recur, say, to an image of the chrysalis in which death happily releases the spirit from the heaviness of its earthly body is to trivialize “the whole tragic paradox of mortality by failing to give due weight to the positive aspect of finitude.” Yet certain positive effects can be felt. In rhyme with Heidegger, Balthasar’s theology of death stipulates that it is human mortality—my own unavoidable death—which provides meaning for existence, rescuing human beings from the bruteness of “everyday facticity.” According to Balthasar, death “is the most lonely encounter with my I-that-is-no-longer, and encounter that sheds a light of absolute seriousness on everything I am still able to experience in the time that remains to me.”

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612 Balthasar TD IV, 118. In something of a poetical turn, Balthasar writes also that “the only reason that hearts do not constantly rebel against the dark omnipotence of death is that its fateful wind has always bent the trees of the soul toward it, that the powers of infidelity, of injustice, of betrayal, of spiritual debility and physical illness and infirmity are familiar to us from childhood in all their destructive strength. They are forces that are not only above us, but in us, with whom we seem inexplicably to have made a compact, voluntarily, yet against our will, at a time and place we can no longer remember (A Theological Anthropology, 49).

613 Balthasar, TD V, 324. Also c.f. TD IV, 118 for materially the same point. The relentless affirmation of the theologically positive status of creaturehood and the finite is a central concern in Balthasar’s theology. For a reliable secondary account, c.f. Werner Löser, “Die Positivität des Endlichen,” Im Geiste des Origenes: Hans Urs von Balthasar als Interpret der Theologie der Kirchenväter (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1976).


615 Balthasar, TD V, 323.

616 Balthasar, TD IV, 122.
The positive and the negative characteristics of death are of a piece: in a post-lapsarian world, death is at best an ambiguous reality.\textsuperscript{617}

To be bodily, of course, is to be in a state of being-toward-death, and this feature of life human being cannot circumvent.\textsuperscript{618} And Balthasar, despite the commonly traded shibboleth that his theology is ‘other-worldly,’\textsuperscript{619} does not in point of fact diminish the body. Rather, “it is precisely the body (and with it, the world) that counts, for it is only together with the body that we are saved.”\textsuperscript{620} This concern with the bodily is especially present in his theology of death. On the issue of post-mortem existence, Balthasar underlines the reluctance of the human being to attribute survival only to the soul, for human beings desire to be “taken seriously” as flesh and blood.\textsuperscript{621} Post-mortem existence is a transformation that certainly cannot be ‘de-physicalizing’ but (for lack of a better term) can only be hinted at as ‘transfiguration’ or ‘incorruptibility’ or ‘the swallowing of death into life’. Redemption is not from finitude but is rather an assumption of the finite (and thus of the other) into the infinite, which must have within itself, in order to be the life of love, the Other as such (Word, Son) and that which is united with the One (Spirit).\textsuperscript{622}

\textsuperscript{617} According to Balthasar, after the Fall, “the positive and negative aspects of death cannot be unraveled” (\textit{TD I}, 324).


\textsuperscript{620} Balthasar, \textit{GL VII}, 513. C.f. \textit{A Theological Anthropology}: “…[N]o, reality is the place and the material within which the living God appears…” (66).

\textsuperscript{621} Balthasar, \textit{TD IV}, 130.

Thus, the decisively Christian solution to the constant negotiation between
infinite and finite, to the inscription of death upon the immortal human soul, and the
central tenet of Balthasar’s theology of death is simple: that human dying is undergirded
by the dying and rising of Christ, whose death and perfect self-surrender was perfectly
serious (a seriousness heightened by Balthasar’s somewhat eccentric understanding of
Christ’s non-victorious descent into hell, which also gives greater weight to Balthasar’s
non-dualistic presupposition that it is not only the body which suffers death, but the
body-soul complex in its totality). Balthasar’s anthropology and thanatology are above
all else underwritten Christologically. In the incarnation, the impossible indeed has
happened:

if the absolute not only irradiates finitude but actually becomes finite, something
unimaginable happens to existence: what is finite, as such, is drawn into what is
ultimate and eternal; what is finite in its temporal extension, in each one of its
moments and their interconnection, and not merely, for instance, in its final
result. The finite, because of its insight into the true and the good, was always
the recipient of radiance from the absolute; on the other hand, time kept running
on…

623 For Balthasar, Christ’s self-surrender is always in the context of the constitutive self-give of
trinitarian existence, which is absolute love between, in Johannine language, the One who sends and the
One sent (TD IV, 326). Much more on this point is to come in the following chapter.

624 Balthasar, TD IV, 130. Balthasar’s view of Christ’s descent into hell will be discussed in only
limited fashion in this chapter; a more lengthy discussion of this event with respect to the trinitarian
horizon will be deferred until the next.

625 One representative passage among many: “For every human being [death] is the brutal leveler,
the ravager of all things, and yet death itself inescapably confronts one with a mystery: God’s death, the
death He died out of love” (Balthasar, GL V, 147).

626 Balthasar, TD IV, 132.
Indeed, the person of Christ represents the perfect expression of a divinely ordained ‘equipoise’ between absolute and relative.\textsuperscript{627} According to Balthasar, the double-movement of the so-called “corporalization of the spirit, the spiritualization of the body,” hangs the human being in an ambiguous suspended middle, and must be ratified Christologically to be theologically (and anthropologically) satisfying:

The vertical dimension of man reaches without a break from the spirit through the soul and the living body down into matter, and ‘soul’ and ‘body’ are the stages and modes in which spirit takes root in matter, and matter blooms into spirit—a single, ultimate, dually moved life: corporalization of the spirit, spiritualization of the body, neither existing without the other. If the body strove one-sidedly to become spirit, without allowing the spirit correspondingly to penetrate the body and become one with it, then man would be striving away from himself into a chimerical self-alienation. But in this dual movement man is suspended in the middle, since neither the Dionysian drive back to the maternal origins, nor the Promethean drive to pure spirit brings him nearer to himself, and the two tendencies cannot be made into one. As a product of maternal earth and paternal heaven he has to turn his face toward both, without being able to see both at once. He cannot find his ground or take his rest in either, or in both at once, but only in him who has created heaven and earth, spirit and matter, day and night.\textsuperscript{628}

For Balthasar, the Christological transvaluation of human death is not symbolic, poetic, nor ludic: “he bores right through it to the bottom, to the chaotic formlessness of the death cry (Matt. 27:50) and the wordless silence of death on Holy Saturday,”\textsuperscript{629} an authentic death which demonstrates enormous solidarity with human beings both in death and in unredeemed separation from God.\textsuperscript{630} Indeed, perhaps the most controversial element of Balthasar’s theology\textsuperscript{631} is his interpretation of Christ’s descent

\footnote{627 Ibid., 110.}
\footnote{628 Balthasar, \textit{A Theological Anthropology}, 224.}
\footnote{629 Ibid., 242.}
\footnote{630 Balthasar, \textit{Mysterium Paschale}, 160-168. Note also Balthasar’s distinction between Hades and Hell, 177.}
into hell, which is not a glorious or triumphant descent but a sinking down in the absolute passivity of true death. This condition of being truly dead not only distinguishes Jesus from “all the other pilgrims into Hades, from Orpheus and Odysseus to Enoch, Jonah, Aeneas and Dante…” 632 but also—by actually bearing to the full extent an ignoble death in loving obedience to the Father, anticipating the theocentric dimension of eschatology treated more at length in the next chapter—transfigures it: “That the death of Jesus, like his Incarnation, was a function of his living, eternal love makes it that special death that ‘shatters to pieces the terrifying gates of hell.’” 633 Balthasar surely does not underestimate the seriousness and the reality of the fact that Christ was dead, and dead indeed, a death that, like all other human deaths described in the Sheol of the Old Testament, was marked by inactivity, inability, and profound loneliness, being neither in contact with other souls or with God. 634 It is this condition of true death that matters to Balthasar, especially insofar as it provides further ratification of Jesus’ perfect transparence and surrender to the Father. Bulgakov also emphasizes the authenticity of the death of Christ as a death similar to the death of any human being. Yet there is a distinction insofar as the death of Christ “was not accompanied and could not be accompanied by the definitive separation between the Divine Spirit and Christ’s body.” 635


633 Ibid., 411-12.

634 Ibid., 408.

635 Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 378.
What, ultimately, does Holy Saturday mean for Balthasar from an anthropocentric perspective? Fundamentally, there is no place or state where God is not, even the moment of absolute forsakeness of human choosing, for Christ has already gone down to hell: “…anyone who tries to choose complete forsakenness—in order to prove himself absolute vis-à-vis God—finds himself confronted by the figure of someone even ‘more absolutely’ forsaken than himself.”\textsuperscript{636} Here Balthasar makes explicit appeal to Dostoevsky, in this case the near conclusion of \textit{The Idiot}, when Prince Myshkin—as a type of Christ—spends a night in close quarters with a feverish Rogozhin in hiding after his murder of Natasha Philipovna, whose corpse remains in the same narrow room as they:

\begin{quote}
Meanwhile it had grown completely light; at last, he lay down on the cushion, as though now wholly in the grip of helplessness and despair, and pressed his face against Rogozhin’s pale and motionless face; tears streamed from his eyes on to Rogozhin’s cheeks…\textsuperscript{637}
\end{quote}

Myshkin is present alongside the murderer, just as in \textit{Crime and Punishment} Sonja’s presence in Siberia in solidarity with the convicted Raskolnikov begins at last to thaw what first appeared to be an irrevocably hardened heart.\textsuperscript{638} These literary examples are only remote metaphors for the unimaginable process whereby man, timelessly closed in upon himself, is opened up by the ineluctable presence of Another, who stands beside him, equally timelessly, and calls into question his apparent, pretended inaccessibility. Man’s shell is not hard enough, however, for it is formed of a contradiction. Perhaps the man whose shell can be broken open is not yet really in hell but only—in his rebellious attitude to God—turned toward it.\textsuperscript{639}


\textsuperscript{638} Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 313.

\textsuperscript{639} \textit{Ibid.}, 314.
Balthasar thus preserves hope. His conviction regarding the possibility of the salvation of all is deeply connected to his particular understanding of Christ’s radical solidarity with (all) the dead in his descent into hell, in which he was non-victorious, but rather “dead with the dead.”

A Northern Renaissance painting here further unites Balthasar with the Russians through Dostoevsky. Hans Holbein’s stark painting “The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb” (1521), an enormous work which realistically depicts the early stages of putrefaction, absolutely captivated Dostoevsky upon an 1867 visit the Kunstmuseum in Basel, Switzerland. Later he has his character Ippolit say in *The Idiot*,

I believe that painters are usually in the habit of depicting Christ, whether on the cross or taken from the cross, as still retaining a shade of extraordinary beauty on his face; that beauty they strive to preserve even in his moments of greatest agony. In Rogozhin’s picture there was no trace of beauty. It was a faithful representation of the dead body of a man who has undergone unbearable torments before the crucifixion, been wounded, tortured, beaten by the guards, beaten by the people, when he carried the cross and fell under its weight, and, at last, has suffered the agony of crucifixion, lasting for six hours (according to my calculation, at least) . . . I know that the Christian Church laid it down in the first few centuries of its existence that Christ really did suffer and that the Passion was not symbolical. His body on the cross was therefore fully and entirely subject to the laws of nature. In the picture the face is terribly smashed with blows, swollen, covered with terrible, swollen, and bloodstained bruises, the eyes open and squinting; the large, open whites of the eyes have a sort of dead and glassy glint.

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640 Balthasar, “The Descent Into Hell,” *Exp. IV*, 411. It is notable that for Schelling also hope is not abandoned in hell: “Yes, isn’t it conceivable that the more the spiritual breaks through in this external life, the less the underworld has power over the dead; or shall we consider even those words carried down from Christ about victory over the ancient kingdom of the dead as completely empty, general figures of speech…Only when He, through whom in the beginning all things were made, lowered Himself into that sunken and now mortal and transitory nature in order to become, once again, a tie between the spiritual and the natural life even within nature, only then did heaven or the true spirit world become open once more to everyone, and for the second time the bond between earth and heaven was sealed. As He died, the sole light left to man in external nature was extinguished as a sign of the greatest power that death had now exerted…the power of death had been overcome” (*Clara*, 61).

Balthasar highlights the actuality of Christ’s experience of human death also with reference to the Holbein piece: In it, the cadaver of Christ, on that “empty, wordless pause”\(^\text{643}\) of Holy Saturday, is lying horizontally, putrid blue. This is the death of Him who is priceless. His real death, not his apparent death. It is the victory of nature, which ‘as some huge engine of the latest design…has senselessly seized, cut to pieces, and swallowed up—impassively and unfeelingly—[this] great Being’; on the day when God Himself is dead, eternal life coincides with eternal death. For Dostoevsky this picture is the symbolic diacritical point between faith and unbelief, between Christianity and atheism: twinned to the point of identification in the most extreme differentiation.\(^\text{644}\)

Indeed, Christ’s true death and descent into Sheol on Holy Saturday is the moment at which a proleptic light of mercy now can shine redemptively, “soften[ing] the true lostness to something else.”\(^\text{645}\) It is the doublet of humiliation and glory both together, a traversal which for Balthasar is the condition of the possibility for the theological concept of purgatory.\(^\text{646}\)

In *The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov flags the notion of purgatory as a schematized (and in some cases concretely topographized\(^\text{647}\)) third place in addition to heaven and hell—a contaminated move “proper to Catholic rigorism”\(^\text{648}\) as a factor which identifies irreversibly the fate of individual persons before the universal judgment.

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\(^{645}\) Balthasar, *GL VII*, 231.


\(^{648}\) Ibid., 361.
Again, Balthasar does not readily fulfill the stereotype (nor, however, does he allow a
distinction between personal and universal judgment as Bulgakov does). In a text
absolutely informed by Adrienne von Speyr’s *Objektive Mystik*, Balthasar again situates the
doctrine of purgatory in Holy Saturday, such that mercy, love, and hope enter in to
temper the state of the ‘lost.’ Balthasar’s “dialectic of fire” drawn from Origen is fully
operative here, in which the purgative and the eschatological flames are one and the
same, and the fire of wrath becomes a purifying flame.

*Judgment, Hell & the Prospect of Final Damnation*

The issue of hell and the prospect of damnation loomed large for Balthasar, as well
as for all the Russians, but particularly Bulgakov. Balthasar discusses hell at length
especially in the final, eschatological volume of the *Theo-Drama*, and perhaps most (in-)
famously in *Dare We Hope*: “That All Men Be Saved?”, as well as in its epilogue, “A Short
Discourse on Hell.” Interestingly, long before the writing of *Dare We Hope?*, Balthasar
observed that, given the deep sense of community in which everyone is responsible for
all, the abhorrence of the doctrine of hell is actually a typically Russian phenomenon.
Certainly this observation holds true with respect to Berdiaev, who asserts colorfully
that “paradise is impossible for me if the people I love, my friends or relatives or mere

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650 Balthasar, *Apok. III*, 427. Also, in his monograph *Bernanos*, Balthasar lists the usual suspects:
“In the first place, Bernanos is concerned with making eternal damnation palpable to an existential faith
and to do this by means of the possible experiences of damnation and perdition to be found within the
temporal world. Here Bernanos is doing in the Christian camp the same thing as Sartre, Camus, and
Kafka (to name but three) are doing on the non-Christian side. He then undertakes to test the social
problematic of damnation critically and appropriate it, an endeavor in which he follows Péguy above all,
but also Dostoevsky and the Russians. Finally, Bernanos seeks to consider hell in the light of Christ’s
Cross, his descent into the netherworld, and his Resurrection; in other words, he puts the problem of hell
within a soteriological context, which is where it must be approached like all other mysteries of revelation
without exception” (*Bernanos*, 443).

186
acquaintances, will be in hell—if Boehme is in hell as a ‘heretic’, Nietzsche as ‘an
antichrist’, Goethe as a ‘pagan’ and Pushkin as a sinner.” 651 The speculative points with
regard to hell and final judgment of the highest degree of convergence between
Schelling, the Russians and Balthasar are as follows: (1) Hell can be conceived as an
imaginative (but not imaginary) state rather than a physical place; (2) Relatedly, the event
of final judgment as an “auto-contraction” of being is self-inflicted rather than divinely
inflicted, and (3) There is a qualitative distinction between “eternity” in heaven and
“eternity” in hell. These suggestions, most obviously in Bulgakov and Balthasar, operate
as preconditions for their proposal of the possibility of universal salvation for human
beings. It bears repeating that on these counts Balthasar walks more softly than
Bulgakov: while both claim to operate according to a principle of dogmatic minimalism,
having a tentativeness and epistemic reserve that recognizes such claims regarding the
essential mystery of the postmortem state are at best only approximations 652 insoluble in
the theologia viatorum, Bulgakov certainly sounds a surer tone.

First, common to all our religious thinkers is the idea that hell may be understood
as an imaginative condition rather than a local place, an internal closing in of the self by
the self. This is so despite Bulgakov’s recalcitrance in persisting in a gross
mischaracterization of a homogenized ‘Catholic’ reification of heaven, hell, and
purgatory to purely physical phenomena. In The Holy Grail and the Eucharist, Bulgakov
criticizes Catholicism unilaterally for the (“crude” and “superstitious”) view that heaven

651 Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, 276.

652 “It is obvious that all of this cannot be more than an essay and an approximation, for one
cannot speak ‘systematically’ about hell. We can only deal with aspects of it, as indeed revelation itself
does” (Balthasar, Bernanos, 443).
is an astronomical place, and later ascribes a corporeal sense of hell and purgatory as distinctly Catholic. This naïve “physicalization” of eschatological spaces does not, however, appear in Balthasar. To the contrary, he writes:

Not only must we discard, therefore, any localization of the eschatological ‘places’ (heaven, hell, purgatory, limbo) in the one world—since that means their transference from a theological cosmos, whose higher and lower regions are the divine and demonic, to a physical—but also cease to regard any ‘end of time’ (say, of the planet Earth) as an event relevant to theology. 

On the possibility of hell as an imaginative space or condition, a torture of the inner state more than of the body, Balthasar gestures toward a fascinating genealogy that not only filters Augustine’s De Genesi ad Litteram XII through the Platonic idealism of Porphyry, but also incorporates elements of Schellingian eschatology as well. Though Schelling’s Clara is not as concerned with the question of hell as his Stuttgart Lectures were, it is the more significant text for our purposes since Balthasar refers to it directly in this particular context. The mention is certainly cursory, but is by no means trivial. The relevant point in both Augustine and Schelling is that human being is tripartite, comprised of mind, imagination (pneuma, spiritus), and body. While the vision of highest heaven is a function of the mind, for Augustine, “the experience of hell is

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654 See The Bride of the Lamb, 374-5. Also c.f. 477n.55.


656 Balthasar also mentions John Scot Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa, and Marsilio Ficino in this capacity (Mysterium Paschale, 163).

657 Balthasar also notes a structural homology in the theological anthropology of Schelling and Augustine in Apokalypse I, though to make the comparison itself simultaneously indicates proximity and remoteness. According to Balthasar’s analysis, both Schelling and Augustine posit that it is the indwelling of the Spirit of God which enlivens and perfects the soul. For Schelling, however, for whom the finite and the infinite are mutually dependent, the soul is the necessary condition for the Spirit of God, “as it were, a vessel in which [God] rises” (Apok. I, 225), a claim which has obviously troubling implications theologically.
primarily one of the imagination, which suffers the impress of painful ‘material images’
(similitudines corporum). It is noteworthy here again that Schelling operates for
Balthasar as supplemental (but corrosively so) to Augustine. As in Augustine, Schelling’s
Clara indicates as well that hell is a function of the imagination rather than the body:

If the imagination is indeed generally the tool through which most people sin,
shouldn’t the imagination be that through which most people are punished—and
shouldn’t the tortures that await sinners in the other world consist primarily of
tortures of the imagination, whose subject would primarily be the previous
corporeal world?

Neither is such a condition homogenous, for “that invisible kingdom is not as simple as
many think it is; rather, if the saying holds true that each will be done by according to
how he thought and acted in his corporeal life, that kingdom must look quite
wonderfully diverse.”

It is probably the case, however, that on the point of hell as a (highly variable)
psychological condition Schelling is more nearly Swedenborgian than he is Augustinian.
That Schelling made use of the visionary Swedenborg is not in itself terribly surprising
given Romanticism’s interest in the spirit world. Emmanuel Swedenborg’s doctrine of
correspondences, in which the details of the natural world have precise correspondence
in the spiritual (in short, ‘as above, so below’) indicates that heaven and hell reproduce
the imaginative states which were experienced prior to death, constructed of the same
building blocks of sensory data perceived on earth. In the section “Of the
Appearance, Situation, and Plurality of the Hells,” Swedenborg describes his travels to

658 Balthasar, Dare We Hope, 127. C.f. Augustine, De Genesi ad litt. XII, 32, 61 (PD 34, 481).
660 Schelling, Clara, 58.
661 Ibid., 55.
hell with great gusto, describing such wide and varied hells as like unto caverns, the dens of animals, subterranean mines, hells like the ruins of houses after a devastating fire “in which the infernal spirits skulk,” rude cottages, streets and byways in which people quarrel and bicker, gloomy forests, barren deserts, and so on.

This detour into the peculiar mysticism of Swedenborg is significant because not only did Berdyaev and Soloviev identify Swedenborg as influential for their own thinking, there is also evidence suggesting Dostoevsky’s novelistic borrowings from Swedenborg, which is not at all insignificant with respect to the Russian ethos. In his essay “Dostoevsky and Swedenborg,” in which he endeavors to demonstrate a modest degree of influence of Swedenborg on Dostoevsky, Czeslaw Milosz connects Swedenborg’s catalogue of imaging the various hells as common alleys, dark streets, and so on, to a similar passage in Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment:

“I don’t believe in a future life,” said Raskolnikov.
Svidrigailov sat lost in thought.
“And what if there are only spiders there, or something of that sort,” he said suddenly.
“He is a madman,” thought Raskolnikov.
“We always imagine eternity as something beyond our conception, something vast, vast! But why must it be vast? Instead of all that, what if it’s one little room, like a bathhouse in the country, black and grimy and spiders in every corner, and that’s all eternity is? I sometimes fancy it like that.”
“Can it be you can imagine nothing juster and more comforting than that?” Raskolnikov cried, with a feeling of anguish.
“Juster? And how can we tell, perhaps that is just, and do you know it’s what I would certainly have made it,” answered Svidrigailov, with a vague smile.
This horrible answer sent a cold chill through Raskolnikov.

Likewise, for Bulgakov, there is a great plurality of possible hells as dark counterpoints to the “many mansions” of heaven: “…deformities, perversions,

663 Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, §586.
monstrosities…[characterized by] nakedness, the absence of a wedding garment, the
excruciating disharmony between what has been realized and what remains a task to be
realized…“665

There is homologous or at least analogous content in both Bulgakov’s and
Balthasar’s transposition of the radical spatial narrowing of hell666 to an ontological and a
temporal key: that is, hell is not a place but a state of timeless duration deprived of divine
eternity through a self-determined contraction of being. According to Balthasar, if the
human being chooses his or her own finite freedom over the infinite freedom of divine
reality as the absolute good, there results a state of absolutely devouring self-
contradiction as the hellish, infinite “I” presumes to expand—and therefore actually
contracts—exponentially: “the formal object that informs it—which is in fact absolute,
self-positing freedom—is in constant contradiction with finite freedom’s pretentious
claim to be infinite. This contradiction, if persisted in, is hell.”667 Notably, this set of
convictions appears in Berdyaev as well, who articulates the concept of hell in terms of
freedom and personality rather than justice. Here, in terms largely parallel to Balthasar
and Bulgakov, Berdyaev suggests that hell is a subjective, radical expression of human
freedom insofar as the self-containment and isolation is self-made, though he departs
insofar as he suggests it is the subterranean workings of a Behemistic “dark meonic


666 Balthasar quotes C.S. Lewis to further underscore the point:

“Do you mean then that Hell—all that infinite empty town—is down in some little crack like this?”

“Yes. All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world…For a damned soul is nearly nothing; it is
shrunken, shut up in itself…Their fists are clenched, their eyes fast shut.”

n.12.

667 Balthasar, *TD IV*, 301. See also *Dare We Hope*, 81.
freedom” which is to blame. For Balthasar (and Bulgakov) hell is neither a creation of God nor a condition to which God damns forever, but rather the act of human beings themselves, who labor strenuously to inure themselves against a God who is absolute love. This understanding, of course, is no new invention—in the patristic fathers and in the scholastics the idea of judgment as concomitant with beholding the light of divine truth appears to some degree in Origen, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose, Augustine, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas.

As we have seen, this sense that human beings are the primary agent of their own judgment is deeply embedded in the Russian ethos, and particularly in the novels of Dostoevsky. That hell is of our own doing is illustrated concretely in Dostoevsky’s parable of the onion, put in the mouth of the character of Grushenka in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and recounted by Balthasar in *Dare We Hope*.

Once upon a time there was a peasant woman and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deed of hers he could remember to tell to God; ‘She once pulled up an onion in her garden,’ said he, ‘and gave it to a beggar woman.’ And God answered: ‘You take that onion then, hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her

668 Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, 266-283, here 277.

669 Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 165. C.f. *Dare We Hope?*, 51-58, which indicates similar views in Chrysostom, Augustine, and Origen, as well as 90-2. For Bulgakov, c.f. *The Bride of the Lamb*. “Hell itself consists of unfulfilled love for God, which, because of spiritual limitation, is expressed in enmity toward Him, theomachy, or in spiritual sleep. The state of hell is, in essence, antinomic, because it combines the revelation of God and the abandonment by God; and it is this antinomic character that imparts to hell an eternal character. God Himself does not reject creation. It is creation that, in its desolate emptiness, rejects God” (487-8). Schelling’s *Clara* indicates in common with the theologians that hell is a self-made state, though the torture comes not with respect to facing the absolute love and holiness of God but rather the individual facing his own solitary self: “So, I said, how torturous must the impure person find his own presence, in now being alone with himself and reaping what he has sown, when he passes on to a similar condition after death, or at least to one approaching it. If every evil desire and endeavor can take on a kind of personality, and if every sinful deed carries on living within the person like an evil spirit, how sorely must the soul feel this impure retinue that the soul takes with it into that life!” (*Clara*, 59).

come to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, then the woman must stay where she is.' The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her. ‘Come,’ said he, ‘catch hold and I’ll pull you out.’ And he began cautiously pulling her out. He had just pulled her right out, when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn out, began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and she began kicking them. ‘I’m to be pulled out, not you. It’s my onion, not yours.’ As soon as she said that, the onion broke. And the woman fell into the lake and she is burning there to this day. So the angel wept and went away.

Bulgakov likewise understands (at least individual, preliminary) judgment in this manner.

The end of human life is met with a greater degree of self-consciousness in the presence of the absolute God, which manifests itself directly and existentially as “self-knowledge (‘trial and tribulation’), self-deepening, and self-verdict.”

Furthermore, for both Bulgakov and for Balthasar (both with appeal to Gregory of Nyssa, the latter with pedigree in Aquinas) heaven and hell are two instances of timeless duration, “which can become mutually opposed depending on whether there is a participation in, or a depriving of, divine eternity.” Eternity in heaven connotes participation and contemplation of the divine rather than, as it is perhaps usually understood, as a measure of infinite time. Hell, again, is the absolute narrowing of human being only to the timeless self, “characterized by a total withdrawal of any

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671 This theme reappears in The Brothers Karamazov, Balthasar notes, in Father Zossima’s excursus, “On Hell and Hellfire,” when he observes that there are also some in hell who remain proud and cruel despite their certain knowledge and the irrefutable truth before them. For these, hell is something voluntary and insatiable, and they are already martyrs by their own free choice.” (Dare We Hope?, 57).

672 Bulgakov, The Bride of the Lamb, 360.

673 Thomas Aquinas, S.Th. I, 10, 3 ad 1, ad 2. C.f. Balthasar, TD V’, 306, particularly notes 9-11. See also Dare We Hope?, 125: “In hell, there is no true eternity but rather time.”

674 Balthasar, TD V’, 306.

675 Nor is Franz von Baader absent from this genealogy. (“To suffer the torment of eternity is not the same as to suffer eternal torment,” written in a letter to Hoffmann, January 10, 1837. Werke 15:552.) C.f. Balthasar, TD V’, 561. Also, “We must be careful to distinguish duratio finita (time as objectively fixed), duratio indefinite and duratio infinita’: the first refers to purgatory, the second, hell, and the third, heaven” (Balthasar, TD V’, 307 n.13).
temporal dimension, by being tightly bound into the most constricted, airless and exitless now.\textsuperscript{676} Eternity in heaven is a fullness of participation in the beauty and vitality of the trinitarian relations; eternity in hell is a desiccated “now”, no more than a grimy country bathhouse with spiders. Berdyaev has something of a similar view insofar as he understands hell to seem to be an endless duration in time, a “bad infinity,” though it is not in fact eternal. For Berdyaev, “there can be no diabolical eternity—the only eternity is that of the Kingdom of God and there is no other reality on a level with it.”\textsuperscript{677}

The direct convergences of Balthasar with Bulgakov on these issues—with respect especially to eternity as having a qualitative rather than temporal quality, hell as self-made, the deep asymmetry between eternity in heaven and “eternity” in hell, even the so-called “dialectic of fire”—are striking:

\textit{Eternal} fire, \textit{eternal} torment, \textit{eternal} perdition and other synonymous expressions have no relation to \textit{time}. They are not temporal but qualitative determinations. They express the general idea of suffering before the face of God, in God, in God’s love. They have a sophianic significance in the sense that, having come to know himself in his sophianic \textit{form}, the glorified human being will thereby also know himself in his own \textit{deformity}, will be horrified by himself. And this deformation of his likeness in relation to his proto-image is for him the scourge of love, the burning fire of love.\textsuperscript{678}

Bulgakov is not shy in his resistance to naming hell as “eternal” in the same way that heaven is eternal. To do so, he believes, is to admit an ontological failure, and this failure is God’s, whose eternal kingdom has by dint of creaturely freedom a co-eternal competitor; the “antisophianicity” of hell seems to triumph over the goodness of the

\textsuperscript{676} Balthasar, \textit{Dare We Hope?}, 129; C.f. Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 306.

\textsuperscript{677} Berdyaev, \textit{The Destiny of Man}, 269.

\textsuperscript{678} Bulgakov, \textit{The Bride of the Lamb}, 487; italics original. C.f. Bulgakov, again: “Every person bears within himself the principle of gehennic burning, which is ignited by the power of the parousia of Christ in glory” (\textit{Bride}, 484).
Like Balthasar, it is simply not possible to allow the co-eternity of heaven and hell: baldly, “heaven and hell cannot be equally eternal,” for hell, like evil and death, is ontologically parasitic and self-exhausting, whereas heaven is a participation in the inexhaustible, ever-greater life of God.

Moreover, for Bulgakov, the language of hell and heaven, “the sheep and the goats,” refers not to a local division of the ultimate destinies of distinct groups of individuals, in which the condemned latter group is cut off from humanity, but rather indicates a line of division within each individual person, since there is no one without sin. Heaven and hell are thus qualitative measures which present in every human being to one degree or another, as in Origen, though God is a consuming fire, the straw is burned and the gold refined by one and the same flame. This “daring” idea that the human being under judgment simultaneously stands to the right and to the left of the judge appears also in Ambrose, and is referred to approvingly in Balthasar as he draws the “final act” to curtain.

Thus, both Bulgakov and Balthasar employ a recontextualized sense of eternity as something other than temporal infinity as a means of advancing the banner of some brand of soteriological universalism, though again Balthasar remains in the subjunctive rather than the indicative mood, and eschews affirming the Alexandrian postulate of

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679 Ibid., 483. Also c.f. 500-1.
680 Ibid., 490.
681 Ibid., 500, 515. C.f. 497.
682 Origen, In Jer. hom. XX (19) 3. Balthasar discusses this at length in Dare We Hope, 241-4.
apokatastasis panton. For Bulgakov, the existence of hell is the “inner limit of heaven:” heaven cannot be fully complete as long as hell—which affects all of humanity—exists. Balthasar, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov all resist the idea that once saved, the righteous can forget about the fate of their unsaved counterparts, since the theologians resist construing salvation as significant only for the individual. Moreover, authentically Christian hope does not warrant a laissez-faire, spectator approach to the question of eternal salvation: rather, to hope theologically is to bring “the world with it on its way to God…[by] creating conditions apt to promote it.”

An egotistic evaluation of salvation stands alien to the spirit of the Church’s teaching on redemption, and is according to Balthasar, “at bottom utterly bourgeois and capitalistic.” Not every theological position that suggests that the experience of paradise is lessened by the knowledge of hell gets a pass, however, since here, as everywhere, much rests upon motive. After tracing a genealogy of this line of thinking in Protestantism after Schleiermacher, from Alexander Schweizer to H.L. Martensen, Troeltsch, and Bonhoeffer, up to and including Karl Barth, Balthasar offers this critique:

…this whole wave of reaction against Augustinian, medieval and Reformation rigorism is largely the product of a humanistic recalcitrance, an anti-orthodox feeling, a craving for philosophical system or simply an optimism in the

684 For direct statements in which Balthasar rejects *apokatastasis*, c.f. *Dare We Hope*, 94, 154, 166, 197, 225-254; *TD I*, 269.


686 Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 169-70, 198-203, 211-3. Origen, of course, has made the same point: “But your full joy will only come when not one of your members is lacking. Wherefore you must wait for the others, just as others have waited for you. Surely, too if you who are a member have not perfect joy as long as a member is missing, how much more will he, our Lord and Savior, consider his joy incomplete while any member of his body is missing” (*Homilies on Leviticus*, 7.2).


Enlightenment manner; we hardly ever find it undergirded by a sufficiently deep, trinitarian theology.\(^{689}\)

Barth—and, we may presume, Bulgakov—is the exception to this rule. Fundamentally, though, for Balthasar, the dogma of hell serves precisely as a constraint on theological speculation, with the real prospect of eternal catastrophe having a kerygmatic, edifying function rather than cause for indulging in a kind of spectator theology which would presume too much.\(^{690}\)

While Bulgakov’s eschatological trinitarian theology is certainly robust enough for Balthasar (we again anticipate the next chapter), both he and Barth go too far toward affirming *apokatastasis* for Balthasar’s comfort. Interestingly, Berdyaev sides with Balthasar in discrediting the doctrine, but he does so not out of concern for observing theological constraints but because he considers it to be an overly rationalistic doctrine that undermines the exercise of human freedom.\(^{691}\) Bulgakov is almost certainly in Balthasar’s sights when in *Dare We Hope*, he makes an oblique reference to certain writers, “especially Russian ones and certain figures in Dostoevski” who “tried to enchant us” with visions of *apokatastasis*.\(^{692}\) This marks a significant point of departure between Balthasar and Bulgakov, a place Bulgakov travels which is for Balthasar too far to follow, especially insofar as the former argues not only for the fact of but also for the ontological necessity for the salvation of Satan. *Dare We Hope* is a book characterized in the main by an epistemological humility, a tentativeness that would not confuse hope

\(^{689}\) Balthasar, *TD V*, 319; italics added.


\(^{691}\) Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, 273, 280.

\(^{692}\) Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 94.
with a certain, secure knowledge. Further, while Balthasar famously defends a robust theological hope for all human beings—“...[C]ertainty cannot be attained, but hope can be justified”—to hope for the redemption of the satanic is for Balthasar simply beyond the pale.

With respect to the language of *apokatastasis*, Bulgakov notes that though the question itself is “dangerous,” especially because of the possibility of indulging in “false sentimentality under the pretext of love” that this so-called “limit to love” (recalling St. Isaac the Syrian’s “pitying heart”) may not be totally uncrossable eschatologically. As the argument goes, because demons are part of God’s creation, they have at their core an “indestructible power of being,” which remains even when the content of their lives is erased. Bulgakov continues:

Satan’s very being, his createdness by the omniscient God, is, so to speak, an *ontological proof of the inevitability of his future salvation*. Even Satan in his madness does not have the power to overcome the fact of his own being, its divine foundation, that is, the sophianicity of all creation, by virtue of which ‘God will be all in all.’

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Thus, Satan’s eventual conversion is really mostly a function of Bulgakov’s sophiology, which Balthasar does not take up and indeed seems largely to divest from his theological reappropriation of Bulgakov. 699

Resisting a dualistic ossification into rigid groups of the saved and the damned among human beings, however, is a distinct contribution of Balthasar’s anthropocentric eschatological theology, wherein salvation and judgment are simultaneously present. 700

There is, of course a complex biblical testimony with which Balthasar must contend, and he does so phenomenologically, presenting the texts in tension, as they appear “in all their deliberate starkness.” 701 With respect to the question of salvation, Balthasar notes two classes of texts in the New Testament, those which indicate threateningly the presence of hell fire, outer darkness, eternal punishment, unquenchable fire, and so on, 702 and those which indicate God’s will for universal redemption, that is, for “all,” 703 the former of which are largely attributed to the pre-Easter Jesus, while the latter generally are post-Easter assertions.

These texts, according to Balthasar cannot and must not be brought into an overall synthesis or easy systematization: the “cleft” between them that represents the possibility of “both ways” for human postmortem existence must ever be maintained:

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699 See, for instance, Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 35.

700 See also Balthasar, TD V, 194-203. This line of thinking is paralleled in the Apocalypse, which allows the juxtaposition of “pure penal justice and the vision of a reality transfigured,” liturgy and judgment both together. C.f. TD IV, 18-9, 36.

701 Balthasar, TD V, 279.


703 Ibid. Biblical texts which ought be classified among this sort, that is, those which privilege the salvation of “all,” are 1 Timothy 2:1-6; John 12:32; 17:2; Romans 5:12-21; 11:32. See also Balthasar, TD V, 279-282.
it is not for [the human being], who is under judgment, to construct syntheses here, and above all none of such a kind as to subsume one series of statements under the other, practically emasculating the universalist ones because he believes himself to have ‘certain knowledge’ of the potency of the first.  

Despite the very human urge to systematize, it is best for theologians to leave these texts unreconciled. This high premium placed on ambiguity also features prominently in his criticisms of inter-testamental apocalyptic literature, which by his estimation “hardens into a cosmological system in an apocalyptic gnosis about the double outcome of the final judgment.”

Balthasar’s careful withholding of judgment is a function of the ambiguity of the human condition, which is such that must act and exercise freedom in a state compromised by finitude and the horizon of death. As such, Balthasar’s position exemplifies a striking degree of compassion for the ambiguities of making one’s way in the world. In a reflection on Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Balthasar writes that

Ivan Karamazov refuses his entrance ticket to heaven so long as innocent children have to suffer in the world. Basically he is relatively unconcerned about the world beyond: what upsets him is the unbearable disorder on earth, for which he makes God responsible. Dostoyevsky implies that Karamazov is thereby entertaining satanic forces; but if we look back at the borderline situations of the world drama, can we really imagine that human beings, living in the impenetrable misery of this world, can be eventually divided into two clear categories—the eternally elect and the eternally damned? How should beings, existing in the contradiction between their attempts at ultimate meaning and the certainty of death, cut their way through the primeval forest toward absolute Good—which proves ever elusive—except by means of compromises? If man refuses, in the face of the world’s chaotic state, to find meaning (and hence Providence) and turns to the finite as what alone can be attained, should we brand this as ‘demonic’? Given the ever-increasing rationalization of the planet, which turns people’s attention more and more from an overarching meaning and toward the particular, fragmentary and

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705 Balthasar, GL VI, 339. See also Balthasar, TD V, 143-4.

706 Balthasar, TD V, 295.
precarious, is not a life decision for good or evil increasingly problematical? And in view of the shifts of consciousness that emerge in different historical periods, can the Church continue, in good conscience, to present the old judgment-eschatology of the New Testament in unchanged form without first submitting it to a thorough critique?\textsuperscript{707}

Ultimately, for Balthasar, the question of hell for others at bottom resists theoretical speculation from a spectator's perspective, because the question can be seriously entertained only with respect to one's own precarious spiritual condition.\textsuperscript{708} Berdyaev makes the same point: “I may create hell for myself and, alas, I do too much to create it. But I must not create hell for others, nor for a single living being. Let the ‘good’ cease being lofty, idealistic avengers.”\textsuperscript{709}

\textit{The Logic of Resurrection}

Despite the centrality of the Good Friday and Holy Saturday in Balthasar’s theology, it is truly Easter which provides the ballast. According to Balthasar, the message of the gospel is not the presentation of two symmetric parts, that is, cross and resurrection, “but is rather the dynamic transition whereby the former makes way for the latter,”\textsuperscript{710} thus in their union giving a forward trajectory and dynamism to the mode of Christian—and human—existence. The resurrection is absolutely for Balthasar “the core of the kerygma”\textsuperscript{711} and the starting-point for ecclesiology.\textsuperscript{712} It is not an overstatement to assert that it is the resurrected Christ who for Balthasar provides

\textsuperscript{707} Ibid., 192. C.f. TD I, 413-24.

\textsuperscript{708} Ibid., 299. Also Balthasar, \textit{Dare We Hope}, 248-251.

\textsuperscript{709} Berdyaev, \textit{The Destiny of Man}, 282; c.f. 276.

\textsuperscript{710} Balthasar, \textit{GL VII}, 493.

\textsuperscript{711} Balthasar, \textit{A Theological Anthropology}, 64.

\textsuperscript{712} Balthasar, \textit{Mysterium Paschale}, 191.
absolutely the meaning for everything: aesthetics, anthropology, history, the cosmic order, an answer to the mythic imagination, and so on, and it is Christ’s resurrection which capacitates the resurrection of human beings, whose finitude (impossibly!) now rests in the “lap” of divine eternity.  

With the bodily resurrection of Christ the transformative power of the Incarnation on human finitude is ratified and broadened by the dialectical movement whereby the conditioned form of Jesus’ human existence in space and in time is exchanged for the “eternal finitude” of Jesus’ resurrected flesh [whereby] all that is interior, invisible, spiritual and divine becomes accessible to human beings. Thus, it is not simply the immortal soul which is preserved, but the whole range of temporal, finite, embodied human existence. Further, this ratification of the “eternity-content and eternal dignity of an existence that is lived and died in bodily terms” is not deferred to the end of time, but rather “has this quality in the very midst of world time and perpendicular to it.” The fact of the resurrection of Christ is the only thing that can ultimately safeguard the value of the finite and flesh-and-blood bodies. Thus, the extent to which our religious philosophers, whether German, Swiss, or Russian, are successful in maintaining the value of finite human existence is directly related to their respective understandings of bodily resurrection, which defies absolutely the collapse of finite into infinite:

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716 Balthasar, *TD IV*, 134; italics original.
If there were no such thing as the resurrection of the flesh, then the truth would lie with Gnosticism and every form of idealism down to Schopenhauer and Hegel, for whom the finite must literally perish if it is to become spiritual and infinite. But the resurrection of the flesh vindicates the poets in a definitive sense; the aesthetic scheme of things, which allows us to possess the infinite with the finitude of form (however it is seen, understood or grasped spiritually) is right.\textsuperscript{717}

The incarnate Christ is no intermediary figure or \textit{daimon}. According to Balthasar, it is the bodily resurrection of Christ that affirms ultimately the goodness of creation, “of the body, of sex, of fellowship, of work. He brings all of this goodness into the ultimate freedom in the presence of God.”\textsuperscript{718}

As indicated in chapter three, for Schelling Christ’s resurrection is only a required theoretical postulate of the exoteric unfolding of the second potency; Christian orthodoxy is thereby only a supplement to a philosophical datum which does not sufficiently account for the “sober and historical fact” of Christ.\textsuperscript{719} And to the degree that Schelling fails on the question of resurrection, he fails on the body and finitude. Schelling’s (thin) version of human resurrection is a gradual, developmental process of spiritualization which begins even before death, as human beings “become more and more perfect, they eventually pass over into God completely, and finally they even disappear within Him.”\textsuperscript{720} At death, the “inner side” of the spiritual, “essentified” body

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\textsuperscript{717} Balthasar, \textit{GL}, I, 155.
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\textsuperscript{718} Balthasar, \textit{GL VII}, 519.
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\textsuperscript{719} Balthasar, \textit{TD IV}, “All Christian teaching proceeds from the experience of the bodily Resurrection of Christ, which is by no means mythical and speculative but sober and historical; and this Resurrection illumines the truth and the meaning of his Cross and, behind it, of his entire Incarnation” (52). Hegel fails spectacularly on the resurrection as well, insofar as on his view, the resurrection of Jesus is not actual and historical but only communal: “Jesus’ actual Resurrection takes place in the spirit of the community; all religion, seen as a mode of perception, is nothing but an inchoate form of absolute knowledge” (Balthasar, \textit{TD IV}, 128).
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\textsuperscript{720} Schelling, \textit{Clara}, 52.
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becomes more and more unified with the Absolute, and thus purer, more whole, while the physical, merely natural or external body is cast aside. The relation of the soul to the Absolute, then, is radically interior rather than in terms of the future,\textsuperscript{721} and—according to Balthasar’s early critique—the eschatological loses any teleological import to become nothing more than the axiological, the vertical “Now” and nothing more.\textsuperscript{722} This peculiar notion of resurrection results in the expressly non-Christian view of the incarnation of God in all of humanity. In Balthasar’s analysis of the 1810 \textit{Stuttgart Lectures} in \textit{Apokalypse I}, he indicates that on Schelling’s view, though human beings are ultimately united into the ideal, God cannot leave nature to ruin absolutely, since God is objectified in nature and seeks God’s Self there as in a mirror.\textsuperscript{723} Thus we come to Schelling’s notion of resurrection wherein the \textit{“lange Krankheit der Natur”}\textsuperscript{724} must come to an end, and God is all in all, and all is God. Thus, as Balthasar points out, what now only Christ is, then all human beings will be, expressive of the ultimate meaning of God as the “loving union of nature and spirit.”\textsuperscript{725} 

As it goes with Schelling’s paradoxical anthropology, so too it goes with his dialectical eschatology, which must balance between the tremendous mystery of the Absolute in all things, the concomitant sense that human beings eventually realize the eternity of the Absolute in themselves, with the requisite dissolution of the personality.

\textsuperscript{721} Balthasar, \textit{Apok I}, 231.

\textsuperscript{722} \textit{Ibid.}, 232. This critique is interesting with respect to Balthasar’s own parsing of eschatology as “realized,” an aspect of his thought which will be left until the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{723} \textit{Ibid.}, 245.

\textsuperscript{724} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{725} \textit{Ibid.}, 246.
As Schelling wrote in no uncertain terms to Hegel: “Our ultimate goal is the destruction of our personality, the transition into the absolute sphere of being.”

Those who hope to find the eternal ‘beyond the grave’ ought ratchet down expectation only to a continuation of the same, to the ‘immortality of the mortal,’ though as Balthasar argues later, such a prolongation—even if it were only of the pleasant elements of life—would be simply disastrous for human being, who is “like a piece of music which only makes sense in its finite extension; if it were drawn out into infinity it would be unbearable.”

Schelling’s eschatology threatens personal being so decisively such that Balthasar hears resounding echoes of a Stoic resignation at the loss of selfhood, though this is weak medicine when the modern philosophers of the experience of death (Heidegger, for instance) “portray death as the most powerful stimulant for utter finitude, enabling it to stand forth, unsupported and unadorned, in nothingness…[which] is seen as the true origin of freedom.”

Here the Russians and Balthasar (who is not far from Johannes Baptiste Metz on this point) are something of a united front against Schelling’s depersonalizing philosophy of death. All can rally around Ivan Karamazov’s resistance to the commoditization of the dead: “I don’t want my body, with its sufferings and its shortcomings, to serve simply as manure for the future harmony…” Indeed, Berdyaev rightfully deems this

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727 Ibid.
728 Balthasar, TD IV’, 130.
730 Balthasar, TD IV’, 125.
731 Quoted from The Brothers Karamazov in de Lubac, The Drama of Atheist Humanism, 202.
abiding interest in negotiating the conflict between the world processes and individual personality “very Russian.” Balthasar defies the trend that is true of both secular materialist views of death as well as those of idealist philosophy, that the individual ought be satisfied enough with having contributed in some small way to the ultimate destiny of the human race; rhyming with Schelling’s thanatology, the finite/individual surrenders itself to the good of the infinite/collective, which problematically economizes death and the dying. The individual cannot be exchanged for the sake of societal progress which would make her death generic or anonymous. Analogously, Balthasar’s gloss of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 stresses that it is the dead who are raised first, with the final generation living having no advantage over them. Rather, for Balthasar,

[when] history’s vanguard penetrates into the kingdom, this does not involve forgetting what it has been, as if this were ‘building materials’ now lost to sight. The solidarity that no form of socialism can know, can which is likewise forgotten or undervalued by an existential and a merely historical interpretation of Scripture, hopes first for those who belong hopelessly to the past, and only then for itself.

In the third volume of *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele: Die Vergöttlichung des Todes*, Balthasar draws attention to the fact that in Soloviev’s *War, Progress, and the End of History*, actual bodily resurrection is at the kerygmatic core of theological reflection. As we recall

\footnote{Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, 148. Also see the introduction to Soloviev’s *War, Progress, and the End of History*, in which C. Milosz offers that “…one certainty—death—was central to Solovyov’s thought. He did not agree with those who, wishing to assuage the cruelty of biological laws, invoked eternal rebirth in Nature; there is no rebirth in Nature because this particular ant, this particular bird, this particular flower lives only once and gives a new beginning not to itself but to other individuals. Death is sufficient proof of universal corruption, the stigma of the Devil in the universe. Man is confronted with one all-important either/or: either Christ was resurrected and thus victorious over the powers of Hell, or he was not resurrected” (23).}

\footnote{Balthasar, *TD IV*, 128.}

\footnote{C.f. Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 100-1.}

\footnote{Balthasar, *GL VII*, 508-9.}
from our discussion of evil and freedom in the previous chapter, Soloviev has his own
mouthpiece, the “absolutely religious” character Mr. Z., explain the phenomenon of evil
as not only the privation of good, but also “the positive resistance and predominance of
the lower qualities over the higher ones in all spheres of being.”\(^\text{736}\) This is the moment at
which individually the soul is overcome by the lower passions, or collectively individuals
engage in social or structural sin.

Most relevant to our present concern, however, is the way that Mr. Z. explains
that the final and most extreme manifestation of this phenomenon occurs on the
physical plane in death. Echoing Schelling’s thanatology, death in Soloviev is defined in
the course of the narrative as “when the baser material constituents of the human body
resist the living and enlightening power that binds them together into a beautiful form or
organism and resist and break the form, destroying the real basis of the higher life.”\(^\text{737}\)
According to Mr. Z, however, in this sustained diatribe against the Prince (a caricature of
Tolstoy), if death were simply the end of the story, then evil would triumph most
absurdly, and the positive acts of human beings would be all for naught. The only
remedy against the actual triumph of evil (either moral or physical) is singular: actual,
literal bodily resurrection.\(^\text{738}\) Mr. Z., again:

The Kingdom of God is the kingdom of life triumphing through resurrection—
in which life there lies the real, actual, and final good. In this rests all the power
and work of Christ, in this lies his real love toward us and our love toward him;
whereas all the other things are only the condition, the path, the preliminary
steps. Without faith in the accomplished resurrection of One, and without
cherishing the future resurrection of all, all talk of some Kingdom of God

\(^\text{736}\) Soloviev, \textit{War, Progress, and the End of History}, 147.

\(^\text{737}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 148.

\(^\text{738}\) \textit{Ibid.} C.f. 155.
remains nothing, but words while, in reality, one finds only the Kingdom of Death.\textsuperscript{739}

Balthasar, of course, affirms Soloviev’s solution to the eschatological problem of negotiating finite and infinite, which is “aimed straight at the point that Dostoevsky circled as the actual core of all eschatology: the resurrection of Christ as the ultimate synthesis of body and soul, idea and manifestation.”\textsuperscript{740} Balthasar likewise acknowledges that the resurrection of the dead was always the operative horizon for Soloviev, even at those points in his career that seemed unduly to privilege an unrestrained progress.\textsuperscript{741}

A personal letter of Soloviev to Tolstoy, dated August 2, 1984, corroborates this primary theme of Soloviev’s dialogue. In the letter, Soloviev persuasively argues that the rationale for hope in the Resurrection is already contained in three principles that Tolstoy already holds: first, that the world and the forms therein are progressively moving from a lower state to the higher; second, that there is a relation of interdependence between the inner condition of human being and the material condition; and third, that spiritual perfection is achieved to the extent that the spiritual controls and conditions the physical life. Again, death is put in terms of the eventual victory of the “alien material principle;” it is the victory of “non-sense over sense, of chaos over cosmos.”\textsuperscript{742} And again, for Soloviev, bodily resurrection is the only therapy:

If a struggle with chaos and death constitutes the heart of the world-process, in which the luminous, spiritual side ever tends to gain the upper hand, though slowly and gradually, then the Resurrection—the actual and final victory of a living being over death—is a necessary stage in this process.\textsuperscript{743}

\textsuperscript{739} Ibid., 149.

\textsuperscript{740} Balthasar, \textit{Apok. III}, 38; translation is my own.

\textsuperscript{741} Balthasar, \textit{GL. III}, 341.

\textsuperscript{742} “Vladimir Solovyov’s Letter to L. Tolstoy on the Resurrection of Christ,” 9.
Moreover, Christ’s spiritual power and perfection indicates that the spiritual principle in him simply cannot have been overtaken by the lower principle.\footnote{Ibid.}

Bulgakov’s thoroughly Chalcedonian explication of the resurrection of Christ, in which the finite and the infinite are co-existent, rhymes with Balthasar’s and Soloviev’s. Though we shall defer to the next chapter the discussion of the Trinitarian implications that emerge in his treatment of Christ’s resurrection as a continuation of the kenotic moment, suffice it to say by way of anticipation that Bulgakov parses resurrection in terms of a dual agency of Father and Son, thereby highlighting resurrection as a synergistic divine-human act.\footnote{Ibid., 10.} What is more apropos for our discussion on safeguarding human finitude is Bulgakov’s philosophical reflection concerning the possibility of corporeal form abiding in the Trinity. As noted above, despite its transparence to spirit, Christ’s resurrected flesh is precisely that—flesh—with spatial and corporeal properties; how then can it be said that the post-Ascension Christ now abides at the right hand of the Father, if God is incorporeal? Bulgakov presents the paradox:

\begin{quote}
[O]n the one hand, disincarnation is inconceivable, but on the other hand, there is no place for the body of flesh, even if glorified, in the kingdom of the pure absolute Spirit, which Divinity is. A body can only be spatial, but no spatiality is compatible with spiritual being. If we attempt to evade this aporia by referring to the spirituality of the glorified body, we must remember that even this spirituality of the body does not signify the revocation or total abolition of corporeality and thus of spatiality…We arrive at a \textit{contradictio in adjecto}, at a contradictory definition: a spiritual body understood as a \textit{noncorporeal} body, or simply as a \textit{nonbody}.\footnote{C.f. Bulgakov, \textit{The Lamb of God}, 379-388.}
\end{quote}
He attempts to make his way through this impasse by making a distinction between the state of the resurrected body of Christ as “supra-earthly” and, after the Ascension, “supramundane, although not extramundane”\(^{747}\) a state which is not heaven, but rather the summit of the world upon which there is “a ladder between earth and heaven that has been climbed down and up and has forever united heaven and earth.”\(^{748}\) Christ’s ascended body thereby exceeds the body present at the incarnation as its ideal image or energy. Here, of course, Bulgakov’s sophiology is very much at work:

In Christ, in His Divine-Humanity, the total sophianization of creation and, in this sense, the identification of the creaturely Sophia and the noncreaturely Sophia are attained…Thus, the ‘spiritual body’ in which Christ abides at the right hand of the Father is nothing other than this connection of identification of the Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia. And so, the spiritual body is the creaturely Image of the eternal Proto-Image in their identity, and this spiritual image can be realized in the flesh of the world…\(^{749}\)

Ultimately, then, the value of the ‘flesh of the world’ is scrupulously maintained, and, despite what may appear sophiologically as a heterodox innovation, is actually parsed in the quite traditional terms of ecclesiology and sacrament. Christ’s true spiritual body, the “Body of the body,” is present finally in the Church and in the Eucharistic elements.\(^{750}\)

\(^{747}\) Ibid., 395.

\(^{748}\) Ibid.

\(^{749}\) Ibid., 396. Also c.f. Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 346-7. The point that the resurrection of Christ decisively affects the whole of creation, including the natural world, is made more poetically and pastorally in Bulgakov’s 1938 sermon, “Meditations on the Joy of the Resurrection:” “The rays of the light of Christ’s Resurrection penetrate the whole of creation. For us, the departed too are alive in this world, and we send our Easter greetings to them, the news of the Resurrection which, each one in his own way, they already know. It is not only animate and rational creation which receives the power of resurrection, rather, the whole of creation rises in Christ’s Body, crying out exultantly with the joy of Easter…the unbridled joy of Easter is plain in nature even to the naked eye: the sun is ‘playing,’ the air, the water, and growing things are bathed in the rays of divine gladness. The human spirit—as it rises to life—can find no part of nature that is dead and not rising to life with it, and it summons all of nature to the Resurrection of Christ” (Bulgakov, “Meditations on the Joy of the Resurrection,” *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Alexander Sehmemann (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 302-3.

\(^{750}\) Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 396.
Moreover, for Bulgakov the resurrection of Christ has cosmic, universal efficacy irrespective of a personal relationship to or knowledge of Christ’s saving work: by this “universal resurrection” the world is transfigured,\(^{751}\) though in a qualitative rather than temporal interpretation of certain Scriptures,\(^{752}\) followers of Christ are resurrected differently than those who are not.

For all human beings, however, this universal resurrection is an ongoing synergistic “ripening” of individuals which—importantly for Bulgakov’s tendency towards universalism—continues in the afterlife.\(^{753}\) For Bulgakov, the state of the dead, even in hell, is not static, nor passive but is, rather, a “spiritual school” in which self-creative activity takes place: “Every individual must, in his own way, ripen spiritually to this resurrection and determine himself with finality both in good and in evil…”\(^{754}\) This rather probative point marks a perhaps surprising degree of convergence with Balthasar, who, although more tentative epistemically than Bulgakov, suggests something quite along these lines: namely, that the bodily resurrection of Christ is efficacious for ongoing perfection, a process operative both on earth and beyond it:

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\(^{751}\) Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 348.


\(^{753}\) Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 372-3. C.f. *The Lamb of God*: “Death is the entry into the spiritual world. It is not only a punishment but also God’s blessing on fallen humanity, for the afterlife of the soul is both initiation and catharsis, the mysterious night of life in which the soul matures for the immortal day” (375). Bulgakov later indicates that the separation of “sheep and goats” is only the beginning, only the first eschatological event, for both “the judgment and the separation must be understood not as a static unchangeability but as a dynamic striving beyond their limits, on the pathways to universal deification or salvation. Only deification is capable of justifying creation. It is the only theodicy” (*Bride*, 501).

\(^{754}\) Ibid., 363. Also “…even in the afterlife, human souls experience and acquire something new, each in its own way, in its freedom” (363). See also 365-6, 498. For Bulgakov, a permeable boundary between “heaven” and “hell” makes sense given the Orthodox belief in the efficacy of prayers for the dead. C.f. 367, 499.
...[T]he bodily risen Lord, precisely through his exaltation and as an expression of his glorification, has granted freedom and space for his members who remain on earth to continue their journey toward perfection. (Why should this not apply, by analogy, to other risen saints?)

This attitude coincides with Balthasar’s presupposition of a genuine theological hope for (and not certainty of) the universal power of the efficacious love of Christ, which on his accounting persisted in the East—Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus Confessor—far more vigorously than the West. It is the double logic of resurrection, as both final object and efficient cause, that guarantees true Christian hope: the seed of certainty is planted already with the Resurrection of Christ the Lord. Importantly, this expansiveness of hope—hearkening Balthasar’s muse Charles Péguy, the poetic champion par excellence of the Christian virtue of hope—is all that remains to the believer after the eventual failure of speculative systems.

Conclusion

This chapter has undertaken the task of tracking prominent nodes of connection between Schelling, the Russians, and Balthasar, specifically with respect to traditional eschatological questions posed from an anthropocentric perspective, namely, those dealing with the phenomenon of death, the nature of post-mortem existence, judgment, and (at least the hope of) universal salvation. Questions of eschatology and anthropology are also seen to be of a piece. We have observed that the poisoned heart of the speculative ontologies that mark the thought of Schelling and Berdyaev ultimately

757 *Ibid.*, 144-152.
malign the finite existence of human beings, while Soloviev and Bulgakov’s fundamental accent on the bodily resurrection of Christ, the very co-existence of finite and infinite, underwrites both the theological virtue to hope for the salvation of all human beings as well as the extraordinary goodness of creation. This extensive discussion has demonstrated Balthasar’s direct and constitutive affirmation of bodiliness, contravening a prevalent impression of Balthasarian theology as being absolutely “other-worldly,” or “up in the clouds.”

Furthermore, our construction highlighted those instances where Balthasar permits theological speculation, both in his assessment of the Russians as well as his own experimental theologizing, including hell as a self-made subjective state of the imagination, Christ’s radical solidarity with the dead, the efficacy of the resurrection of Christ for both the living and the dead, and the possibility of universal salvation, all of which accord with what has been called Balthasar’s “ontology of generosity.” It indicated as well the boundaries of theological speculation beyond which Balthasar refuses to go, including the theorem of apokatastasis and, particularly relevant with respect to anthropocentric eschatological matters, the de-evolution of the speculative into the spectatorial. The “last things” of human being, that ever-darkening horizon of life—the end of time, the immanence of dying, the resurrection of the body which breaks in as hard reality—as in Rilke’s poem “Death Experienced,” through a fissure which reveals the “green of real green, real sunshine, real forest,” are marked ultimately not by closure but rather by dis-/closure, by the constitutional openness of the book. Indeed, common to Balthasar, the Romantics, and the Russians is an openness, a

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receptivity toward that which is only potential, an expectant posture toward the not-yet-emergent, though it remains to be seen the degree to which in each thinker this future may become reified (perhaps in the manner of Joachim), whether it becomes something of the order of gnosis rather than the order of mystery and love. This presumptive tendency of peering into the internal life of God—with what Balthasar calls the “stony and incontestable gaze of the Sibyl”\textsuperscript{760}—is especially prevalent in Schelling and in Berdyaev, and anticipates the content of the next chapter, which widens eschatology from the anthropocentric purview to include the broader vista of the theocentric, properly trinitarian horizon.

\textsuperscript{760} Balthasar, \textit{Apok. I}, 240.
CHAPTER FIVE

“ICH WILL DIE DINGE SO WIE KEINER LIEBEN, BIS SIE DIR ALLE WÜRDIG SIND UND WEIT”.\(^{761}\) THE THEO-CENTRIC HORIZON

Ours, we recall, is ultimately an exercise in gauging proximity and distance: in particular, we attend to Balthasar’s mode of sifting out the proverbial wheat from the chaff with respect first to the salvageable contributions of modern German philosophy and secondly, his reading of speculative Russian religious philosophy which is formed, informed, or deformed by that lineage of thinking which includes Böhme, Joachim, Schelling, and Hegel. The Russian appropriation of extra-traditional sources and the way that these sources are adapted in each appropriation once again provides the heartiest grist for the mill; as we saw in chapter three, the degree to which the Russians corrosively adopt the legacies of Böhme, Joachim, Schelling, and Hegel is approximately the degree to which Balthasar indicts them as (illicitly) speculative. Berdyaev again takes dubious top honors. We shall see that Balthasar gives ultimately a positive reading of Soloviev’s apocalyptic theology, which is for him somehow inoculated against heterodox forms, and again both affirms and appropriates Bulgakov, particularly with respect to his

\(^{761}\) R.M. Rilke: “Give me time, but a little while still, to love each thing like no-one before, until/all my love is worthy of you and wide./Just seven days of freedom I need,/in which no hand has yet set word,/seven pages of solitude./And all who take them from you bow their back/over the leaves unless you undertake/holding them in your hands for a tool/to write the whole” The Book of Hours, trans. Susan Ranson and edited by Ben Hutchinson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), 82-83.
dramatic, eschatological trinitarianism which employs a robust form of *kenosis*, both Christological and Trinitarian.

While the last chapter attended largely to the anthropocentric eschatological horizon, that is, questions of death, judgment, and the resurrected body, this chapter turns our attention to the broader “theocentric” horizon, the necessary context in which the anthropocentric ought be understood. It is categorized in the main by trinitarian and thus more (licitly) speculative concerns. Here we shall treat (1) a shared Johannine register, which include variously such features as a “realized” eschatology, a dialectic of unveiling and concealment, the symbol of the slain lamb, and the polarizing apocalyptic doublet of light and darkness which necessitates from the human being a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’; (2) figurations of Antichrist as a function of religious counterfeiting, which puts Balthasar in proximity to Soloviev, and, finally (3) the positive connection of paschal trinitarianism with apocalyptic by Russian appropriations of Schellingian kenosis, which reappears in a more purified form in Balthasar through the radicalized and profoundly original *Ur*-kenoticism of Bulgakov.

It is on the point of apocalyptic trinitarianism where we see not only most clearly Balthasar’s borrowings from Bulgakov, but also the greatest distance from both Schelling’s rather ambivalent trinitarianism as well as Hegel’s thoroughly deformed trinitarianism. Vis-à-vis his Trinitarian discourse, Balthasar is both anti-Schelling, whose

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trinity is only thinly conceived, and anti-Hegel, for whom the immanent trinity is exhausted totally in the economic. The robust trinitarianism that characterizes Balthasar and Bulgakov’s apocalyptic theology is only spectrally present in Schelling’s wan trinity of Father (eternal), Son (finite) and Spirit (infinite), and not at all in Hegel. Balthasar and Bulgakov, informed as they are by the determinate content of Catholicism and Orthodoxy respectively, posit God as triadic being, but for them God is a “trihypostatic personality,” with each hypostatic center possessing a weight, a density that is absent in both Schelling and Hegel, whose conceptions of the trinity verge toward Sabellian modalism.

As we shall see, Balthasar explicitly borrows from Bulgakov the rhetorically rich concept of the primal drama operative between Father, Son and Spirit in the “drama of the ‘emptying’ of the Father’s heart, in the generation of the Son that contains and surpasses all possible drama between God and a world.” Balthasar’s (and Bulgakov’s) trinitarian theology and eschatology are of a piece: each is the condition of the possibility for the other. The theocentric mode of eschatology is a highly integrative discourse, drawing protology, cosmology, aesthetics, the mythical, a theology of history, thanatology, Christology, and Trinitarian discourse into its long reach.


765 See Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* for a book length treatment of Balthasar’s understanding of eschatology as being ultimately concerned with the Trinity and the very structure of being as one of Trinitarian love. On his own telling, “I will argue that the ultimate form of the end, and thus the measure of all that is meant by eschatology, is given in Christ’s Eucharistic and pneumatic gift of himself—a gift that simultaneously lays bare the mystery of God’s trinitarian life and enables Christ to ‘return’ to the Father in communion with the whole of creation. Insofar as Christ reveals the trinitarian life and the mystery of creation in their dramatic interplay, he establishes the form of eschatology as a participation in God’s engagement with the world. Under the sign of the Holy Spirit, Christian eschatology involves a sharing in Christ’s double movement into the world and, together with
An attraction to the Johannine—characterized broadly as that which is visionary, mystical, trinitarian, and paschal—unites Schelling, Balthasar, and the Russians, who all to some degree privilege textually the gospel of John and the Apocalypse. There is indeed an operative Johannine hermeneutic across the board, so much so that it is tempting to consider this chapter as something of an exercise in biblical hermeneutics in a decidedly Johannine key. As we have already noted, Balthasar views Schelling as fundamentally “an apocalyptic figure for whom all is arranged around revelation, around the disclosure of mystery, around breakthrough into the mysteries of God.”766 By both sins of commission and omission, however, the Schellingian Johannine hermeneutic is thoroughly warped, both by its Prometheanism and its replacement of the Gospel of Jesus with the gospel of the self. According to Balthasar, Schelling’s brand of apocalyptic actually stands “eye-to-eye” with that of John himself, save the most important element: in the choice of the “two gods,” Schelling fatally chooses Dionysius over Christ.767 That is to say, although Schelling does invoke Johannine visionary literature, especially in the Philosophy of Mythology and the Philosophy of Revelation, his version of “Dionysian,” theogonic apocalyptic fails to cross the threshold into the genuinely Christian insofar as it accords human beings a status which belongs properly only to God. Thus, unpacking the self-understanding of each thinker—Russian, German or Swiss—as Johannine hermeneut demands sober consideration.768

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the world, into God. For those who would follow Christ with eschatological definitiveness, the path back to God is into the heart of the world” (Healy, 3).

766 Balthasar, Apokalypsis I, 206.

767 Ibid.

218
First, Balthasar demonstrates a clear preference for a distinctively Johannine, that is “realized,” eschatology. Balthasar is careful, however, to qualify this designation of “realized” eschatology, underscoring the fact that it must be understood not from the anthropocentric perspective alone, but rather from the theocentric, which encompasses and conditions the former.\footnote{\textsuperscript{769} Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 56-7.} John’s eschatology is first a vertical irruption of Christ in the present before it is a horizontal process. Further, a choice for John is not a choice against the synoptics, as Balthasar considers Johannine eschatology to function, in Ireanean terms, recapitulatively, rather than oppositionally.\footnote{\textsuperscript{770} See Balthasar, \textit{GL VII}, which indicates a kind of Ireanean hermeneutic of the New Testament, especially 33-76. Balthasar is attempting to rescue John from marginalization vis-à-vis the synoptics, but wants always to understand the fourth gospel in relation to the others. This relationship can best be understood as summative and clarifying; in short, an appropriation of Irenaeus’ notion of recapitulation as an interpretive tool for understanding the New Testament.} For Balthasar, eschatology proper—from the theocentric view—does not indicate some class of events relegated to a far and distant future: it is \textit{now}, “now,”\footnote{\textsuperscript{771} C.f. Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 28-9.} “today,” in the expression of the co-location of time and eternity. Balthasar’s interpretation of the biblical sense of “today” requires a kind of temporal acrobatics that maintains the simultaneity of the historically pastness of the Christ-event with its eternal presence as well as an inbreaking on the horizon, an always-coming-toward.\footnote{\textsuperscript{772} \textit{Ibid.}, 147.} Hence, the present moment has a significance always that exceeds itself. It connotes simultaneously “the ‘eternal present’ of the ‘Lamb as though

\textsuperscript{768} For an elegant exposition of Balthasar as a reader of Revelation, c.f. Cyril O'Regan, \textit{Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic}, especially 46ff.

\textsuperscript{769} Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 56-7.

\textsuperscript{770} See Balthasar, \textit{GL VII}, which indicates a kind of Ireanean hermeneutic of the New Testament, especially 33-76. Balthasar is attempting to rescue John from marginalization vis-à-vis the synoptics, but wants always to understand the fourth gospel in relation to the others. This relationship can best be understood as summative and clarifying; in short, an appropriation of Irenaeus’ notion of recapitulation as an interpretive tool for understanding the New Testament.


\textsuperscript{772} \textit{Ibid.}, 147.
it had been slain’” as well as “the increasingly momentous irruption of the reality of time into that of eternity.”

In the gospel of John, which again for Balthasar does not contradict but rather develops the thought of the synoptics, “the Christ-event, which is always seen in its totality, is the vertical irruption of the fulfillment into horizontal time; such irruption does not leave this time—with its present, past and future—unchanged, but draws it into itself and thereby gives it a new character.” Christ’s entrance into time as an historical person who suffers and dies does not evacuate his person of the character of eternity; rather time and transience are affected by Christ’s eternity. Thus, the “I am” sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John, particularly the very present claim in the narrative of the raising of Lazarus that “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:24-5), contemporize a deferred hope to the theologically significant moment of Now. In this way, the “realized,” primarily vertical theo-drama especially in TD V ought be understood in a manner that is primarily Christological and therefore ultimately eschatological before it is anthropological.

The theocentric framework, both Christological and, more originary, the trinitarian, is the absolutely necessary context for understanding Johannine, and therefore Bulgakovian and Balthasarian, eschatology. As Balthasar points out, this “realized” eschatology is not in an antithetical relation to futurist eschatology, but a way

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774 Balthasar, TD V, 25.

775 C.f. Balthasar, A Theological Anthropology, 35.

of drawing the latter into the former by way of Christology and Trinitarian reflection.\textsuperscript{777}

Both present and future elements are present. As we suggested in chapter four, authentically Christian hope is a theological virtue that is possible based on what has already been done, in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and, underlying this, the life of the divine Trinity. It is precisely the relations between Father, Son, and Spirit which give Balthasar a stake in this modified “realized” eschatology; that is, his constitutively open/future orientation is possible because there is \textit{in the present moment} the promise of love which is parsed Christologically,\textsuperscript{778} pneumatologically, trinitarianly: “The gift of the Spirit creates open spaces for the one who believes, endowing him with powers that he can use and pour out with joy and surprise as love would have him do…By arriving, love creates a future—not an empty future, but one that continually fulfills itself and, in fulfilling, promises anew.”\textsuperscript{779} Following the marvelous poet Charles Péguy, Balthasar challenges the hegemony of the merely chronological future, opening up the vertical dimension, the now, to the eschatological horizon: as small children in their play...

\textsuperscript{777} Ibid., 26, 182.

\textsuperscript{778} Balthasar is adamant that emphasizing the explicitly Christological hub and rationale of eschatology is necessary to save eschatological discourse from being ghettoized to the domain of the obscure and the marginal. Far from being comprised of idle speculations, the fundamental thrust of Balthasar’s eschatology hearkens back to Augustine’s theme: \textit{Ipse [Deus] post istam vitam sit locus noster}. In the hereafter, God God’s Self is our place: “Gained, he is heaven; lost, he is hell; examining, he is judgment; purifying, he is purgatory. He it is to whom finite being dies, and through whom it rises to him, in him” (“Some Points of Eschatology,” 260). C.f Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 368. Thus, the eschatological is tantamount to the soteriological. Here Balthasar is not far from Barth, who asserted in his \textit{Epistle to the Romans} that “a Christianity which is not wholly eschatology and nothing but eschatology has nothing to do with Christ” (Karl Barth, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans}, 6\textsuperscript{th} ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 314.)

\textsuperscript{779} Balthasar, “Improvisation on Spirit and Future,” 166-7. See also Balthasar, \textit{A Theology of History}, 44-5.
tirelessly cover the same ground over and over again, the “earthly future is inserted into
an ever-new ‘now’ that is a gift of divine grace.”

Furthermore, both Bulgakov and Balthasar read the gospel of John in tandem
with Revelation, which is, according to Cyril O’Regan’s incisive analysis of Bulgakov’s
_Bride of the Lamb_, “complementary to rather than competitive with” Matthew 24-25 and
1 & 2 Thessalonians. To read Revelation properly is determinative, but not over-
determined or totalizing: the text is first and foremost “a book of vision, opening up
perspectives that, once opened, can never be shut.” Balthasar and Bulgakov both
understand the function of apocalyptic symbolism primarily as preventing the proverbial
door from closing all the way, resisting an interpretation which would univocally
concretize or historicize the violent images of Revelation. That is, there is no sense in
which it is appropriate in reading John’s _Apocalypse_ to assign particular historical
analogues to what is a highly imagistic literary figuration.

Indeed, the images themselves are an irreducible, mysterious “dogmatics” which are in place in no small measure to keep the reader from the sense that the
Christian faith is the sort of thing that might be mastered, interpretively or otherwise.

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780 Balthasar, _TD V_, 187. Péguy’s lines from his narrative poem, “The Portal of the Mystery of
Hope,” follow: “Children walk exactly like little puppies./ (Moreover, they play like puppies too)/When a
puppy goes for a walk with his masters/ He comes and he goes. He comes back, he leaves again. He goes
ahead, he returns./ He makes the trip twenty times./ Govers twenty times the distance./ It’s because as a
matter of fact he’s not going somewhere…What he’s interested in is precisely making the trip” (108).

781 Cyril O’Regan, “Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic,” 54.

782 Balthasar, _TD IV_, 19.

783 See, for instance, Balthasar, _TD IV_, 28, 38, 42; _A Theological Anthropology_, 144ff.

784 Balthasar, _TD IV_, 46.
The symbolic nature of the text gestures to God as the ever-greater “eternal surprise,” is suggestive of an infinite creative novelty that exceeds human knowledge and invites human participation in that which is always coming toward us. Given his dramatic orientation as well as a commitment to the absolute freedom of the divine, Balthasar places a high premium on the possibility of surprise. As he puts it,

…as one who loves, [the believer] does not ask at all how much of what is to come he perceives in advance, thanks to love, and how much he does not perceive. He allows himself to be surprised again and again by the divine love in such a way that, since he knows how God delights in surprising, he is ready to be surprised again in a definitive way and as it were for the very first time.

Certainly because of this element of the divine character, and particularly with respect to Spirit, human being is ever on the cusp of something; there is an openness and a promise and a hope that constitutively structures being: “everything that exists is a ‘not yet’ of what it can be, ought to be, perhaps will be.” The positive value of the ungraspable, the openness of all that exists, marks a departure from Berdyaev whose Schellingian and Joachimite heritage really shows insofar as he attempts to fill out the content of the “Age of the Spirit” with the certainty of a science.

Now, Balthasar is resolutely anti-Joachimite insofar as the inevitable ossification of the latter’s view simultaneously sunders and presumes to know too much about the Trinity, although he tempers his criticism of Joachim himself, who intended, in

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Balthasar’s reading, only to offer “homage” to the Spirit. Likewise there is in Schellingian eschatology, particularly The Ages of the World, a dangerous tendency toward presumptive and audacious gnostis, a presumption to know the “unbekannten’ Gott,” both of the present and of the future, a theme which is incurably repeated in Berdayev’s own temporal genealogy. As suggested in chapter three with respect to his acceptance of the Behemistic-Schellingian Ungrund, Berdyaev’s eschatological philosophy is simply too heavily determined by the outer limits of speculative heterodox apocalypse for Balthasar’s comfort. As Cyril O’Regan suggests, Joachim is one of Balthasar’s declared enemies. Balthasar endorses totally de Lubac’s genealogy in which Joachim is at the origin of the Reformation, its speculative translation, a presence in Romanticism and Idealism, which deepens the derailment of Christianity given in the Enlightenment in and by a Christian repackaging in which only what is marginal to the Christian theological tradition is allowed to speak.

It is striking that when Balthasar makes this genealogical point, tracing the history of effects from Joachim through the Franciscan Spirituals to Idealism, he also indicts certain “sophiological triadic systems of the philosophy of history.” It is almost certain, especially given the nature of Balthasar’s criticisms of Berdyaev as both Schellingian and Gnostic in Apokalypse, that he has him in mind again here.

Following Joachim’s general schematic, Berdyaev posits three epochs of divine revelation: the age of the Father, the age of the Son, the age of the Spirit. We can

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789 Ibid., 147. Elsewhere, Balthasar speaks in terms of Joachim’s “slight distortion” (A Theological Anthropology, 133).

790 Cyril O’Regan, Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic, 122-3.


792 Balthasar’s poor assessment of on Berdyaev, c.f. Apokalypse II, 344; Apok. III, 424-30, esp. 429. Also c.f. TD IV, where Balthasar indicates Berdyaev’s ‘gnostic tone’ insofar as he speaks in terms of tragedy within God (149).
conjecture that the general structure of Berdyaev’s temporal chronology is indeed borrowed from Joachim, although Berdyaev’s analysis is more developed than Joachim’s insofar as he also posits three principal temporal forms: the cosmic, historical, and existential. According to Berdyaev’s adaptation of Joachim, the Age of the Father is associated with the Old Testament/revelation in nature; the Age of the Son with the New Testament/revelation in history; and the Age of the Spirit with apocalyptic expectation. The Age of the Spirit is the third epoch of religious history marked by existential time, “which is akin to eternity…[in which] the eternal accomplishment of the mystery of spirit takes place.”

As in Böhme, Joachim and the Schelling of The Ages of the World (which pays its debts both to Böhme and to Joachim), the trinitarian complex of serial temporal existence is sundered one from the other. The notion of the Spirit as “free radical” apart from Father and Son is absolutely unacceptable both for Balthasar, whose pneumatology affirms precisely that “the medium in which the Spirit moves is the ‘We,’ the eternal dialogue between the Father and the Son,” and for Bulgakov, whose pneumatology is perhaps even more robust than Balthasar’s. There is no case in which the Spirit can surpass or move beyond or sever itself from Son and Father, for “there arrives only what already existed: nothing truly new is still to be awaited. We know the

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793 Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, 206.
794 Ibid., 207.
795 Cyril O’Regan, Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic, 57. Also c.f. 13.
Christ who comes, indeed, we already know his transfigured, risen form.” The Spirit does not surpass what is indicated at the cross. For both Balthasar and for Bulgakov, we know the Spirit precisely as the Spirit of Christ with whom, in the “dyad” of revelatory hypostases, makes the Father, or the revealed hypostasis, known to us.

Epistemic humility notwithstanding, the literal reading of apocalyptic (apokalypsis), of course, is “unveiling,” a disclosure of something. It is fair to assert that for Balthasar, as well as for Bulgakov, while it is far from comprehensive, this unveiling can be said in the main to be of a determinate content. For Bulgakov, all of human history is the apocalypse, or revelation, of Christ. For both Bulgakov and Balthasar, the principle that if Christological, so too Trinitarian more or less holds across the board. Apocalyptic is thus a disclosure of the Trinity, as much as an essential mystery can be said to be unveiled or disclosed. According to Balthasar, the elements of the faith which Revelation speaks to “are truly open, for, after all, what we are dealing with is apokalypsis, yet they remain only significant hieroglyphs that, however, legible, conceal their ultimate meaning in the mystery of God.”

This quality of dialectical veiling and unveiling in Balthasar and Bulgakov is a dark vision akin to that of Gregory of Nyssa; it does not proclaim certitude for itself. More than this, however, is the assertion that unresolved mystery and hiddenness is a category that is “theologically fundamental and therefore

798 Balthasar, “Improvisation on Spirit and Future,” 142; c.f. 156. See also TD IV: “…we are not expecting a ‘Third kingdom’ of the Spirit…” (66).

799 See, for instance, Balthasar, “Improvisation on Spirit and Future,” 151-154, 166 and Bulgakov, Lamb of God, 110. The similarities between Balthasar and Bulgakov are particularly striking in Balthasar’s analysis of the dyad of Son and Spirit in TL III, especially the section, “The Father’s Two Hands,” 167-218.


801 Balthasar, TD IV, 47.
essential.” In the passion and the resurrection of Jesus, he did not “emerge from his essential hiddenness: he leaves the άποκάλυψις of his enduring hiddenness to the Spirit and the Church, who can ‘reveal’ him, interpret him and make him known to the world later on only as the one who is hidden.” This union of hiddenness and revelation is most balanced, of course, in the gospel of John. This dramatic tension between revelation and hiddenness is, of course, a fundamentally eschatological tension between already and not-yet, between the present glory of Christ in the Church and the future glory of the kingdom.

Analogous to the tension between revelation and hiddenness is the further Johannine theme of light and darkness that thoroughly characterizes Balthasar’s reading of Revelation as operating according to the dramatic rhythm of a “law of heightened resistance.” The trope of ever-racheting stakes are present also in Schelling, as Balthasar observes. Certainly, the similarities with Schelling on this point are striking, particularly in the 1809 freedom essay:

Feeling, in advance, the coming of light, the gathering of the deep grows constantly more apparent, and at once draws all forces from indetermination to meet light in full opposition. As the thunderstorm is brought on by the

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802 Balthasar, GL VII, 219.
803 Ibid., 219.
804 Ibid., 220.
805 Balthasar understands this tension to engender movement, a dynamism that is concretely expressed in the Church, “which essentially is an institution that never rests for a single moment, but must always be breaking off and setting out” (GL VII, 485). See the section “Setting Out Towards God,” GL VII, 485-543.
806 C.f Balthasar, TD V', 56-8; 199-203.
mediation of the sun, but immediately through an opposing force of the Earth, so the spirit of evil...is aroused through the approach of the good, not by means of a participation but rather through a partition of forces. Thus it is only with the decisive coming of the good that evil too becomes manifest decisively and as such (not as though it only now arose, but because the contrast is only now given in which it can appear in its totality and as itself.  

According to Balthasar, the very presence of Jesus as the “disclosure of absolute, causeless love” provokes forces of evil and opposition to come out into the open; this opposition is not simply hostile to Christianity but its precise opposite, its anti-. Indeed, in the apocalyptic literature of Revelation, the “No” to God’s “Yes” intensifies: this is culmination of the riddle of evil, whereby human beings exercise freely the refusal of God.

*Figurations of Antichrist as Counterfeit*

This apocalyptic trope of the ever-racheting polarization between light and darkness in Balthasar is both suggestive of Soloviev’s pseudo- or counterfeit figurations of Antichrist as well as emphatic of the very Solovievian sense that apocalyptic disclosure is always the occasion for free human decision, self-determination, for ‘yes’ or for ‘no.’ Here we pick up the dangling thread from our discussion in chapter three, which examined Soloviev’s final text *War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ* (1899-1900) with respect to what bearing the phenomenon of moral evil has upon the meaning of history. In keeping with the

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epistemic reserve of Balthasar and Bulgakov is Soloviev’s ultimate genre modulation in *War, Progress, and the End of History* from what had theretofore been philosophical dialogue to a fantastical prophetic apocalypse which breaks off abruptly, indicating formally the impossibility of articulating with any certainty the end of history. Of course, as we have suggested in previous chapters, Soloviev’s theological perspective, characterized by great optimism concerning the ongoing progress of humanity toward the realization of the kingdom of God upon the earth, is ultimately an evolutionary one, which Balthasar elsewhere indicts as empty, infinite, and therefore hopeless.

What is different about Christianity is that it possesses a certain ‘explosiveness,’ having within its resources a breakthrough of God into the cosmos. Balthasar thereby denies any possibility of a “gradual realization of the eschaton.” He goes on to say decisively that “…all the evolution and work of the world will not suffice to bring in the kingdom of God.” Despite these reservations, Balthasar finds Soloviev’s turn to the apocalyptic in “A Short Story of the Antichrist” to be an implicit forfeiture of a thoroughly teleological theory of history and a “salutary counterpoise to his evolutionism” (especially vis-à-vis Teilhard).

812 Paul Valliere is very helpful here: “By appending such a fantastic story to a carefully constructed philosophical dialogue Soloviev implicitly concedes the limits of a teleological theory of history. An idea of the end of things is needed to orient human action, yet no theory of the end—Mr. Z.’s or anyone else’s—can be verified on the basis of present-day realities because the end by definition is not yet given. A teleology of history cannot be consummated in medias res except in visions, intimations, presentiments or parables of some kind. Accordingly Mr. Z.’s contribution to *Three Dialogues* ends not in reasoned dialectic but with a prophetic parable” (*Modern Russian Theology*, 214).


816 Balthasar, *GL* III, 290.
Balthasar is Soloviev’s apparent renunciation of the “idea that the process comes to perfection within history.”\textsuperscript{817} Thus, with respect to theologians like Soloviev whose theological project is characterized thoroughly by progress and development, the apocalyptic is a necessary capstone insofar as it interrupts a primarily evolutionary trajectory. Balthasar suggests that

[w]hoever takes the idea of the development of the spirit seriously, which cannot be anything other than increasing integration—as Vladimir Soloviev does, following Schelling and Hegel, must, if he is to go on thinking in a Christian way, reach the increasing apocalyptic alternative, which the ‘story of the Antichrist’ presents symbolically. The Christian fact within history is, through its existence, the cause of the fact that the ‘noosphere closing itself’ expressly places itself under the sign of ‘anti.’ The profundity of Christ’s words becomes clear when he says that when called by God a man is placed in an either-or situation.\textsuperscript{818}

For both Soloviev and Balthasar, then, the densely symbolic apocalyptic genre functions panoptically, as the manifold eyes of the cherubim turn their gaze upon the individual, threatening the safe distance of the spectator. For Balthasar, apocalyptic images both provoke decision and are themselves the enactment of decision:

The apocalyptic view of things offers the assurance that history as history (and not only as the sum of individual lives) has before God a completely clear and overwhelmingly magnificent sense. The translation of this sense into an aesthetic or symbolic view is the best way in which man, still struggling within history, can share in this vision…It can be accomplished only in images which do not have as their content the reporting of decisions, but are themselves, in their form, like the parables of the gospel, images of decisions: images, which from their latent presence, demand a yes or a no.\textsuperscript{819}

The main purpose of the third conversation in Soloviev’s final apocalyptic work, is meant in large part to bring to light the error of Tolstoyanism, represented by the Prince insofar as he is engaged in a kind of Harnackian project which would reduce the

\textsuperscript{817} Ibid., 352.

\textsuperscript{818} Balthasar, \textit{A Theological Anthropology}, 192.

\textsuperscript{819} Ibid., 144.
thickness of the Gospel down to the kernel of an ethical message apart from its
metaphysical basis. In Soloviev’s dialogue, this ethical reduction is not simply
objectionable from a Christian perspective; it is—perhaps worse—lethally boring. As
the General says, attributing this development to demonic forces: “Even in the past,
Christianity was unintelligible to some and hateful to others. But it remained to our time
to make it either repulsive or so dull that it bores people to death.”\footnote{Soloviev, \textit{War, Progress and the End of History}, 121-2. Balthasar also quotes this passage in \textit{GL III}, 350.}

In response to the Prince’s Tolstoyanism which resisted the idea that evil is a powerful, real force which
must be resisted actively, and, again, contravening a purely evolutionary reading of
history, Soloviev has his Mr. Z. relate the apocalyptic story of the Antichrist.\footnote{For Bulgakov on Antichrist, see \textit{The Bride of the Lamb}, 328-30; \textit{The Lamb of God}, xiv, 156, 419, 434. Also see O’Regan, \textit{Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic}: “Bulgakov’s conviction that vision is the issue of modernity helps to explain his distinctive interpretation of the Antichrist. Bulgakov thinks that Revelation (17.8) has advantages over other biblical texts such as Daniel and 2 Thessalonians (2.2-10) in thinking of the Antichrist as plural rather than singular (\textit{BL}, 30, 329-30), and in specifying as one of the characteristic behaviors of the Antichrist that of ‘false teaching’ or the ‘lie’ (\textit{BL}, 330) (59).}

Soloviev’s Antichrist represents not only a force inimical to Christianity, “not a mere infidelity to or a denial or Christianity, nor simply the triumph of materialism or
anything similar to it, but…a religious \textit{imposture}.\footnote{Soloviev, \textit{War, Progress, and the End of History}, 120. Also see Soloviev, “On Counterfeits,” \textit{Freedom, Faith, and Dogma}, 147-157.} With respect to the idea of
antichristianity as primarily a counterfeiting, corrosive force, Soloviev and Balthasar—
especially with respect to his tracing out of the “law of heightened resistance” in the
book of Revelation which draws out “a demonic trinity, namely, the primal devil, a
understanding of evil is at least an implicit critique of Hegel, not only as far as the latter considered evil to be a necessary element of the dialectical unfolding of history, but also insofar as he thought evil might in the process of sublation be overcome. This, of course, rhymes with Balthasar’s own criticisms of Hegel. With respect to Soloviev’s attenuation of evolutionary progress with the interrupting moment of the apocalyptic, Balthasar has this to say:

Here the total opposition between Hegel and Soloviev comes out into the open, between Hegel’s dialectic of absolute knowledge (which again first takes flight—as the ‘owl of Minerva’—in the twilight of the end of history) and Soloviev’s Christian programme of integration. For the former evil can be no more than Socratic ignorance; for the latter, it is a clearly acknowledged act of saying No to love. And this contradiction shatters any systematic clarity in the cosmic ‘process’; it explodes into a battle to the death, a battle of mounting intensity, that, in Soloviev’s eschatological consciousness, could not be other than directly imminent. And so it is into this fiery inferno [of apocalyptic] that his entire system flows.824

Whereas our discussion in chapter four engaged primarily with the first two ‘days’ of dialogue, featuring the General’s views on war on the first and the statesman’s views of ‘progress’/modernity on the second, the third and final day is given over to the enigmatic Mr. Z., who suggests the ultimate manifestation of evil in a figuration of the Anti-Christ in Soloviev’s original fantastical literary apocalypse.825 Here, then, our attentions center upon the “Third Conversation,” which includes Mr. Z’s reading of the

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fictitious manuscript of one Father Pansophius: namely, “A Short Story of the Anti-Christ.” The manuscript is set in the twenty-first century, where out of the democratic nations who had joined together as the “United States of Europe” there emerged a popular leader, a ‘super-man,’ a young man of thirty-three with ‘irreproachable morals and exceptional genius.’

Though he believed in God, “in the depths of his soul he involuntarily and unconsciously preferred himself,” coming to think of Christ only as a preliminary to himself, and indeed, himself as superior to Christ insofar as he was to be a peaceful benefactor rather than a divisive reformer, a leader who preferred distributive justice over the retributive. The thought that he, a super-man, might have to bow before Christ (“as some Russian peasant” or “old Polish woman”) filled him with such despair and rage and envy that he cried out: “It is I, it is I, and not he! He is dead—is and will ever be! He did not—no, did not rise! He is rotting in the grave, rotting as the lost…” On this evening he was met by a strange figure who likewise decried “that crucified begger,” telling the young man, “I have no other son but thee. Thou art the sole, the only begotten, the equal of myself. I love thee, and ask for nothing from thee. Thou art so beautiful, great, and mighty. Do thy work in thine own name, not mine.”

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826 It hardly needs to be noted here that Nietzschean hubris (Zarathustra and Ecce Homo come immediately to mind) is at the forefront of Soloviev’s consideration with this Antichrist figure, a “superman” tormented by a jealous, parodic rivalry of Christ. C.f. Balthasar, A Theological Anthropology, 51.


828 Ibid., 165.

829 Ibid., 167.

830 Ibid., 168.
From that day on, his work (particularly the book *The Open Way to Universal Peace and Prosperity*) was met with accolades and uncomplicated acceptance, and he—now known as “The Coming Man”—was elected president of the United States of Europe for life, and then Roman Emperor. This Superman Emperor was absolutely beyond reproach: highly connected with military circles, a wealthy philanthropist, a vegetarian, advocating a platform of peace, prosperity, and without much difficulty achieving a solution to all social and economic problems. These reforms were not all, however, as the Emperor also had it in mind to achieve final unity among the churches and settle the religious question once and for all. At an ecumenical council convened at his request, the Emperor inquires to a large delegation as to what is the most precious thing in Christianity, but when an answer is not immediately forthcoming, he makes his own suggestions (an exercise of freedom-limiting power which calls to mind Ivan Karamazov’s Grand Inquisitor parable). To the Catholics, he promises that the papacy be restored to Rome; to the Orthodox he promises a world museum in Constantinople which would house ancient religious artifacts of the Eastern church; to the Protestants he promises a well-funded institute for biblical research.

Most delegates accepted the terms; however, three delegates resist: from the Catholics, Pope Peter II; from the Protestants, Professor Ernst Pauli; and from the Orthodox, the peripatetic monk John. When asked what they desire, Elder John rises and quietly says,

> What we value most in Christianity is Christ himself—in his person. All comes from him, for we know that in him dwells as fullness of the Godhead bodily. We are ready, sire, to accept any gift from you, if only we recognize the holy hand of Christ in your generosity. Our candid answer to your question, what can you do for us, is this: Confess now and before us the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh, rose, and who will come again—Confess his
name, and we will accept you with love as the true forerunner of his second
glorious coming.\textsuperscript{831}

At this, the Emperor can barely contain his rage, and the monk John recognizes him for
what he is: “Little children, it is Anti-Christ!” This confession unleashes an epic battle
between the denizens of the Anti-Christ and the remnant of all the Christian faithful,
which culminates in a quiet unification of the churches under the cover of darkness.

Balthasar affirms the counterfeit figurations of evil that appear in Soloviev and in
Dostoevsky which culminate in the presentation of Antichrist as something of a great
humanist who perversely but plausibly counterfeits the good.\textsuperscript{832} This deformative parody
recalls Luca Signorelli’s painting \textit{Preaching of the Antichrist}, where Antichrist appears from a
distance to be the Christ in all respects except that his ear is inclined to the devil figure’s
whispers.\textsuperscript{833} According to Balthasar’s reading of Soloviev, the true identity of Antichrist
is hidden “under the last mask to be stripped away, the mask of what is good and what is
Christian.”\textsuperscript{834} Soloviev’s attractive Antichrist figure runs on a platform of social change,
reform, social justice, and economic and material betterment, which of course resonates
deeply both with Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor scene in \textit{The Brothers Karamazov}, as well
as Balthasar’s apocalyptic speculations that Antichrist will have earthly, political power.\textsuperscript{835}

This power, even if used for the good, is, as in Soloviev’s story, corrosive insofar as it

\textsuperscript{831} \textit{Ibid.}, 184.

\textsuperscript{832} C.f. O’Regan, “Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic”: “These Russian thinkers pose a
question that will have to be asked again and again, and which is taken up into Catholic thought by the
French poet Paul Claudel: can justice become the banner of the Antichrist?” (53).

\textsuperscript{833} Milosz, “Science Fiction and the Coming of Antichrist,” \textit{Emperor of the Earth}, 24.

\textsuperscript{834} Balthasar, \textit{GL III}, 296.

\textsuperscript{835} Balthasar, \textit{TD IV}, 449-50.
reconfigures positive aspects of Christianity (liberation, social reforms, community among human beings) as if they originated in and are totally the purview of human beings rather than an “insight into the heart of God.”

As we suggested above, the moment of apocalypse is for Balthasar that in which there are offered to human being two competing freedoms: the freedom of mundane self-determination which is alienation from God, and the Christomorphic freedom of self-gift in free obedience to the free self-disclosure of God. Again, this point of decision is for Balthasar the eschatological moment: “The Christian eschaton, glimpsed in anticipation, sheds such a light of decision on to history that from now on one can only say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to it.” To say ‘no’ is to buy in to the deceptive grab for a counterfeit power that refuses freedom and existence itself as gift. Here the power, such as it is, is restricted to the world, is indeed a servitude to the world; by this presumptive exercise of autonomy those who say ‘no’ are by their own decision robbed of the capacious freedom of participation in Trinitarian love. The assumption of absolute power represents for Balthasar the “complete Antichrist, endowed with total power, as the No to Christ’s total powerlessness.” The true power of the “yes” is actually that which appears to be a kind of powerlessness, to surrender the fiction of the absolute autonomy of finite freedom for self-determination.

For Balthasar, therefore, what is most provocative about the message of Christ vis-à-vis Antichrist is that what is revealed apocalyptically is the kenotic manifestation of

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836 Ibid., 446.
837 Balthasar, GL VII, 501.
839 Balthasar, TD IV, 447.
divine character, the appearance in Jesus of “the glory of divine power in lowliness, defenselessness and a self-surrender that goes to the lengths of the eucharistic Cross…[which] unveils a totally unexpected picture of God’s internal, Trinitarian defenselessness.” This principle, namely, that the mode of self-emptying present in Christ’s incarnation and death on the cross is expressive of the mutual self-emptying of the persons of the immanent Trinity is at the center, not the periphery, of Balthasar’s theocentric, trinitarian eschatology. Indeed, this notion of Trinitarian kenosis borrowed from Bulgakov, whose presupposition and grounding is the Ur-kenosis of the Father’s generation of the Son, becomes a fundamental organizing principle of his entire theological work.

Battling Meonic Ontology

For our purposes, a preliminary examination of Schelling’s understanding of God as dynamic and self-emptying is crucial for getting at the inter-related questions of divine immutability and kenosis, and for tracking the lineage from Böhme to Schelling to both the Russians as well as certain of the nineteenth century kenoticists with whom

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840 Ibid., 450.

841 For instance, Lucy Gardner and David Moss assert in “Something like Time; Something like the Sexes: An Essay in Reception,” *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999) that “if one were to speak of the ‘systematic impulse’ in Balthasar’s work, we should recognize that this does not reside in any riveting of ‘parts’ on to an empty frame, nor in any correlation of God to his creature, but rather in the ‘ever more deeply plumbed repetition’ yielding a formidable density of the same mystery: the kenosis of the Son prefigured in the Urkenosis of the Father” (72).

842 Schelling has a brief excursus on Wisdom/Sophia in *Ages of the World*, construed as “a playful pleasure at the beginning of the life of God…an unblemished mirror of divine force” (163). See 163-166. The lines of influence on this point from Schelling to the Russians (Soloviev and Bulgakov in particular) warrant further exploration. Of course, Böhme likewise has much to say about Wisdom. C.f. Cyril O’Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme’s Haunted Narrative*, esp. 67, 149, 152, 237-8 n.11, 245 n.25, 264 n.10.
Balthasar deals on the question of revising immutability. Of course, Schelling’s philosophy (as Hegel’s) has in its own way attempted to grapple with conceiving an eternal God vis-à-vis the temporal processes of nature, time, and history. Schelling’s fragmentary *Ages of the World* provides an example of an attempt, however, unsuccessful, to conceive *within* the figure of an eternal God a rationale for the gratuitous existence of the world. It is no accident that Schelling ultimately parses this relationship kenotically. Schelling’s potencies of the Absolute (which are replicated in all that which exists) includes the first force, that which is in itself, is met by that which strives toward eccentric existence, and is united by the third. This triad is not static but dynamic.

Recall the discussion from chapter three of Schelling’s formulation of the triad of potencies in which the second potency, the Son, is differentiated from the first potency through kenotically assuming determinate being. Of course, Bulgakov and then Balthasar make analogous moves (though only analogous, as their departures from Schelling function absolutely correctly).

Though not fully fleshed out until the Berlin mythology lectures, Schelling’s *Ages of the World* also provides a sketch of his ontology, that is, the theory of the triadic

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843 Robert F. Brown’s old but still quite serviceable article, “Schelling and Dorner on Divine Immutability,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LIII/2 (June 1985), 237-249, draws out the influence of Schelling’s philosophy on Isaac August Dorner (1809-1884), who was one of the most important critics of the kenoticists. Brown emphasizes the relation with Schelling especially with respect to Dorner’s reflections on modifying the ancient understanding of divine immutability by introducing “livingness” (*Lebendigkeit*) to a new notion of “ethical immutability.” Dorner recalls German Idealism in his understanding of infinity as “intensive,” that is, inclusive of otherness (Hegel); the primacy of the ethical over the ontological (Schleiermacher), and finally, in the rearticulation of the Fichtean “not-I” as originary to God’s being (Schelling). See Brown, 239-40. For Dorner, see Claude Welch, *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology: Thomasius, Dorner, Biedermann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), esp. 115-80; and Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. I, 1799-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972). For Bulgakov on the 19th century German kenoticists, see *The Lamb of God*, 220n.12.

potencies which Soloviev will eventually take up. This speculative ontology was treated at some length in chapter three. To review, however, the Potenzenlehre asserts that God contains within God’s own being the capacity to self-posit an ‘other’. In the Weltalter, Schelling postulates a God/Absolute whose being is comprised of the union of two oppositional forces, that which contracts, and that which expands. This conception, of course, is informed by Böhme’s positing of a dialectical relation between the negative potency and positive potency, “No” and “Yes,” Ungrund and Urgrund, a version of which, as we have seen, reappears decisively in Berdyaev’s own theogonic conception of the Trinity. It is only in the unconscious combination (but not sublation) of these contradictory forces in the theogonic process that God’s being as trinitarian emerges or actualizes. Undifferentiated non-being therefore passes into differentiated actuality. More importantly, neither pole dominates the other, such that there is in divine being no necessity. In Schelling’s rather convoluted prose,

the unconditioned can express itself as what-is and as being, and it can refrain from expressing itself as both; in other words, it can be both, or it can let both alone. Free will is just this ability to be something along with the ability to not-be it. But further, the Highest can be what-is, and it can be being; it can express itself as this thing-that-is, and as this being. That is, it can express itself or posit itself as existing. For existence [Existenz] is precisely the active unification of a definite thing-that-is with a definite being. Put most succinctly: the Highest can exist, and it can also not-exist; this is to say it has all conditions of existence in

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846 Schelling, Ages of the World, 126-135; 171.

847 Ibid., 172.
itself, but what matters is whether or not it draws upon these conditions, whether it uses them as conditions.\textsuperscript{848} This absolute freedom is operative in the creation of the world. Here Schelling is attempting to contravene Hegelian necessity. In this text, the creation of the world in Schelling—and this is important with respect to Bulgakov, as well as Balthasar's appropriation of Bulgakov—is the external expression, the finite replication in matter of the ontological structure of divine essence such that there is an internal coherence and not external necessity.\textsuperscript{849} Schelling rhapsodically describes the non-necessary interaction of these two forces, the eternal and the will, as the first pure joy of mutual finding and being found…[bound] only by the inexhaustible pleasure of having and feeling the presence of each other, [which] is the freest life, the life that plays with itself…filled with ceaseless excitement and bursting with its own renewed vitality.\textsuperscript{850}

While this dynamic vitality of Schelling’s quintessentially Romantic reflection on the divine may be an attractive feature both to the Russians and to Balthasar,\textsuperscript{851} the reception of his ontology is certainly more uneven. As we have seen, Berdyaev explicitly acknowledges his debts to Böhme not only vis-à-vis the necessity of a divine dark side, but also the theogonic process out of which God is born. Berdyaev requires an irrational freedom prior to God, in order to absolve God from responsibility for evil: “Out of the

\textsuperscript{848}Ibid., 131-3.

\textsuperscript{849}Ibid., 154. This does not invalidate Schelling’s concept, inherited from Böhme and discussed in chapter three, of the sense world as the product of a “Fall.”

\textsuperscript{850}Ibid., 145. Schelling’s designator “play” recalls Hegel’s dismissive comments about a God that does not suffer and thus is not “serious.”

\textsuperscript{851}It is important for his dramatic theory that Balthasar maintains a dynamism original to the immanent Trinity, a drama that is present regardless of the exigencies of the created world. Again, the primal drama is eternal, but not static or self-enclosed; it is eternal action in which all other temporal things take place. See Balthasar, TD IV, 326-7.
abyss, out of the Divine Nothing is born the Trinitary God and He is confronted with
meonic freedom.\footnote{Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, 25. Also c.f. Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, 18ff. Also consider passages like the following: “Primary life…is not pre-eminently intellectual in character…it is passion, which precedes the very distinction between good and evil” (The Beginning and the End, 69). This ‘primary life’ is prior to the immanent Trinity and certainly prior to the economic. As discussed in chapter three, Böhme’s Ungrund is prior to the generation of nature, or the triadic powers, out of which arises determinate freedom. Though he is massively dependent on Böhme, Berdyaev does tend to conflate two senses of ‘nothing,’ though both are considered meonic: the Ungrund so called, which is pure undifferentiated potentially, and the Eternal Nature as the ground of eternal freedom. For Böhme on this point, see Cyril O’Regan, Gnostic Apocalypse, especially 37-42. O’Regan notes the distinction in this way: “If both the Unground and Eternal Nature can be regarded as species of me on, the non-Parmenidean nothing of the Unground is that of possible, even potential being, whereas that of Eternal Nature represents the refusal of the relationality and spiritual completeness of being…Eternal Nature is an anti-aesthetic chaos, a chaos that is aggressively formless” (Gnostic Apocalypse, 37-8). Eternal Nature is thus not the most originary reality in Böhme. Further, it is Eternal Nature that introduces the possibility of (and perhaps even the reality of) evil into the divine.}

Crucially, Bulgakov does not accept this meonic ontology. Appealing again to
Johannine literature (“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” [1 John 1:5]),
Bulgakov underlines that in God there can be nothing unconscious, nothing impersonal,
“no meonal darkness, no nocturnal twilight of half-being”\footnote{Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 96.} prior to or above God.
This is in keeping with the Bulgakovian principle that in God, everything is
hypostasized.\footnote{Ibid.} That is, there is no nature outside the hypostases, and no hypostases outside
nature. Bulgakov, insofar as he is influenced by Schelling’s metaphysics of creation,\footnote{Gavriluk, “The Kenotic Theology of Bulgakov,” 254n.12.} does refer to the creation of the world as the material expression of divine being, but this
is not an exhaustive “inner self-positing of Divinity”\footnote{Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 128.} but a free work of a benevolent God
reflective of the ecstatic, absolutely free love which the Trinity itself is. As he puts it,

The creation of heaven and earth, as an act of God’s love flowing beyond the
limits of the proper divine life into the world, is, in relation to Divinity itself, a

\[\footnotesize{\text{References}}\]
voluntary self-diminution, a metaphysical kenosis: Alongside His absolute being, God establishes a relative being with which He enters into an interrelation, being God and Creator for this being. The creative ‘let there be,’ which is the command of God’s omnipotence, at the same time expresses the sacrifice of Divine love, of God’s love for the world, the love of the Absolute for the relative, in virtue of which the Absolute becomes the Absolute-Relative.  

For Bulgakov, this sense of creation as a kenotic act of God is bracketed within an all-encompassing kenotic trinitarianism. As suggested in chapter three, it is in no uncertain terms that Balthasar too rejects this entire meonic tradition which understands God to be exteriorizing God’s Self in that which is opposite.  

The central element of eschatological trinitarianism in Balthasar and Bulgakov’s shared visionary theological profile does not, as with Schelling and Hegel, compound the esoteric with the esoteric, the abstracted with the abstract: rather, the concrete relations between Father and Son and Spirit, and especially the relationship of obedience of Christ to the Father, are understood to be regulative of apocalyptic discourse. The regulating image that is at the center of this discourse for both the Russian and the Swiss theologian is the slain Lamb of John’s Apocalypse (Revelation 13:8), which provides an iconic shorthand of the enduring gift of love which is at the same time a freely kenotic gifting of the Father and a freely kenotic being given by the Son, a being given that is pure self-abandonment, the figure of hypostatic kenosis itself. For Balthasar, too, the dense symbol of the Lamb whose wounds do not heal both signifies and is God’s relation to the world, which is to say, a relation of beautiful, gracious, sacrificial love.

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857 Ibid. Also c.f. 223.

858 See, for instance, Balthasar, GL I, 49, 195.

859 C.f. Balthasar, GL I/II, 208, 226, 511. See also, for instance, Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 177, 344.

860 Balthasar, TD IV’, 52; TD V’, 151, 246.
The open wound, in contrast to the blasphemous “pseudo-miracle” of the healing of the beast’s wounds in Revelation, manifests “the truth of the defenseless nature of the divine, Trinitarian love.”861 The Johannine principle prevails that suffering and glory are of a piece, forming a single reality: “He who really was ‘dead’, yet now lives ‘for evermore’ (Rev. 1:18) takes his pierced heart with him to heaven; on God’s throne he is ‘the Lamb as it were slain.’”862 That the Lamb is slain and yet victorious indicates also that this form of love governs (and is) power; apocalyptic need not include gratuitous violence, and those who follow the Lamb can and must fashion their weapons into ploughshares,863 in an attempt to image the kenotic self-gift of Trinity.

For Balthasar, it is nearly impossible to separate the theological enterprise of articulating precisely what is meant by kenosis from a discussion of the close relation between the economic and the immanent Trinity. It is therefore no surprise that Balthasar’s primary interlocutors on the issue of kenosis are G.F.W. Hegel, Jürgen Moltmann, and Karl Rahner,864 all of whom treat the relation in their own distinct (and, according to Balthasar, variously unsuccessful) ways. In response to what Balthasar takes to be inadequate theological attempts to meet Lessing’s infamous question regarding the impossibility of continuity between contingent facts of history and necessary truths of reason (for instance, in the work of Bultmann or Schleiermacher that, on Balthasar’s


862 Balthasar, TD V, 151. C.f. also Mysterium Paschale, 206-8.


864 On Balthasar’s brief evaluation, Rahner’s “strangely formal” approach, (presumably including that of referring to the Trinitarian hypostases not as persons but as ‘distinct modes of subsistence’) does not adequately account for the distinctiveness of the immanent relations as an “I-Thou” communion of persons and hence is not adequate to the ‘self-squandering’ love revealed in salvation history (TD IV, 320-1).
interpretation, attenuates the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth), Balthasar was deeply concerned with maintaining a robust link between the concrete life of Jesus as attested in the Scriptures and the inner life of the Godhead. In this respect, then, Balthasar’s Christological starting point is decisively ‘from below,’ from the empirical data of salvation history, although he remains open to the probability that relevant data may well come ‘from above,’ that is, beyond the events of recorded salvation history. Balthasar is very concerned to relate the historical Jesus to the immanent Godhead, and so wants there to be an organic connection between economic and immanent. For Balthasar, it is only through that which is revealed in the economic—particularly the absolute love manifest in the cross of Jesus, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world—that it is possible to ‘feel our way back’ to claims about the nature of the immanent Trinity. It is “only on the basis of the economic Trinity that we can have knowledge of the immanent Trinity and dare to make statements about it.”865 The Son is the visible translation of the Trinity, a rendering in the language of the temporal and the corporeal the eternal relation with God the Father.866 It is especially in the cross, and, as we have seen, more radically, in the Son’s descent into hell that the “drastic counterposing of the divine Persons in the economy becomes visible”867 through the peculiar (theo)logic of identity in contradiction.

Balthasar, however, expresses no small degree of anxiety regarding the dangers implicit in an uncritical equation of the events of salvation history with the inner life of


866 Balthasar, *TD IV*, 120; c.f. 121.

867 Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 203; *TL II*, 35, 323; *A Theology of History*, 69. For more on Holy Saturday as a trinitarian event, see “Going to the Dead: Holy Saturday,” Mysterium Paschale, 148-188.
the Trinity. He does not want reductively to shrink the immanent Trinity down to the interplay of events on the plane of salvation history alone, or equate the immanent and the economic in a relation of strict identity. This notwithstanding, does not this economic involvement and suffering on the cross affect God? Coincident with the question of kenosis, and the fertile ground in which it often emerges, is thus that of divine immutability. With the Incarnation and the Cross-event, in what way(s) and to what degree can God be said to change, or, more to the point, to suffer? Can this change, particularly in the divine entry into the ebb and flow of human history, be effected without compromising God’s transcendence? What theologically responsible option—one that at the very least retains a transcendent element and does not succumb to an out and out ascription of mutability to God—remains to speak to a genuinely free self-divestiture (in creation, Incarnation, passion, or in the events of history) that is not tantamount to a thoroughly mythic ‘noughting’ of the Divine? In short, can there be a Gottlosigkeit that is not a Nought?

Engagement with Nineteenth Century Kenoticists

Both Balthasar and Bulgakov engage nineteenth century kenotic theory in German Lutheranism directly.868 These views, especially insofar as God must make God’s Self finite in nature and history in order to be actualized, were certainly influenced by the speculative idealism of Hegel (and whose premier critic, Dorner, was certainly influenced by Schelling).869 These kenoticists attempted to maintain in most cases a

868 See, for instance, Balthasar, TD V, 223-4; Mysterium Paschale, 31-2, 45-6 n.60, 178; Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 220.

semblance of fidelity to traditional Chalcedonian ‘two-nature’ Christology along with the thoroughly modern commitment to a psychological understanding of Jesus’ personality and historical experience. The primary representative of this group of thinkers is Gottfried Thomasius, whose *Christi Person und Werk*\(^{870}\) provided the first systematic strategy to account for continuity of the Logos and the historical person of Jesus (and, in so doing, to account for a strong relationship between economic and immanent, between the events of salvation history and the inner life of the Godhead). What differentiates modern thinkers such as Thomasius from patristic thought on kenosis is that in the traditional view, Christ took on the ‘veil’ of human flesh which masked his divine glory, and that the suffering he experienced whilst upon the earth was only *qua* human nature, leaving the Logos untouched.

The nineteenth century kenoticists, however, stringently resisted the distinction between the simple possession and use of divine properties, and attributed an actual diminution (of both possession and exercise of attributes) to the divine nature, to the Logos, a move which Balthasar deems helpful. The primary motivation for this brand of kenosis is to work out a scheme that could account for the presence of the divine in Jesus of Nazareth that would not vitiate his actual humanity, which must accord with our human nature at every point (except, of course, for sin). For example, the 19th century kenoticists found the notion of an infant Jesus being omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, with full knowledge of his status as divine, ruling the world from the

manger in Bethlehem, as a ridiculous claim, particularly insofar as it did violence to the integrity of Jesus’ real human nature, which must develop naturally, gradually, and, above all, humanly. In his effort to suss out the relation between immanent and economic, and stay faithful to robust claims about the preservation of Jesus’ genuine humanity, Thomasius made a distinction (which Balthasar evaluates as “wholly unworkable”) between relative and immanent/absolute divine attributes, the former being the category which was divested at the Incarnation. The relative attributes had to do with those qualities which had got to do with God’s relation to the world, namely, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. These would vitiate humanity if present in the psychical function of a person, and are not essential for God to be God. The absolute attributes are absolute holiness, truth, and love, do not vitiate true humanity, and are essential for God to be God. These attributes were retained by Jesus at the Incarnation.

The most radical 19th century kenoticist, Wolfgang Gess, goes quite beyond the pale (to what one commentator humorously referred to as a total ‘kenosis of reason’) in his suggestion that the Logos was first divine, then human, that is, that the Christ on earth was not in any way divine, and that in his ‘absence’ from heaven the Father gave his administrative, world-ruling duties to the Spirit. More bizarrely, for Gess, during the time of the Incarnation, the Spirit ceased to proceed from the Father and the Son, and proceeded from the Father alone. The *filioque* disagreement notwithstanding, Bulgakov too weighs in on Gess’ theory as “compromisingly absurd, since such a supposition would signify nothing other than the total self-abolition of the Second hypostasis (as well

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This move, while certainly preserving Christ’s humanity, does great violence to Trinitarian claims. Although Balthasar, himself uncomfortable with the idea that kenosis is only qua human nature, certainly does appreciate the impulse that leads these thinkers to claim some kenosis of the Logos itself, a kenosis that does indicate some event, or change of state or condition in the Trinity, the various solutions of the 19th century kenoticists—who, despite their best intentions were not able to break the Hegelian logic of kenosis—are for Balthasar wholly inadequate to cogent Trinitarian thinking.

For Balthasar, “the paradox must be allowed to stand: in the undiminished humanity of Jesus, the whole power and glory of God are made present to us.” The desiderata for an adequate solution would thereby include the preservation of robust Trinitarian claims to equi-divinity, not divide God’s attributes into ‘parts’, not implicate the Incarnation as an alien imposition, not attribute pain to the divine, and ultimately preserve the absolute freedom of God. Moreover, one must be able to claim that God has grounded the world process, but in perfect liberty, freedom, and sovereignty. Further, there can be no sense of process or the need for actualization in God. In the preface to the second edition of Mysterium Paschale, Balthasar calls for a negotiation between what he sees as these twin dangers inherent in kenotic thought with regard to the relation between the immanent and the economic. Balthasar sets out what he understands to be problematic tendencies in the history of kenotic reflection that either seem to swerve dangerously toward some variant of theopaschism—for instance, the

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873 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 33.
“crucified God” of Jürgen Moltmann, who accepts Hegel’s premise that suffering is necessary to ratify the seriousness of divine love—and those which strive to maintain (largely by the assertion that kenosis ought to be circumscribed only to Christ’s assumption of human nature) a traditional divine immutability in which the divine nature remains wholly transcendent and impervious to human suffering. For Balthasar, the former implicates God as dependent upon the world processes as necessary rather than contingent, and the latter is adequate neither to biblical data nor to human experience.

With respect to the first undesirable, theopaschism, Balthasar resists the claim that there is pain or suffering in God, indeed, as in Hegel’s speculative trinitarianism, that one must ascribe pain to God for God to be God, to account for becoming as such as well as the seriousness of the immanent Trinity. On this point, Balthasar indicts Berdyaev in the same breath as he does Hegel: “Over and over, down to Hegel and Berdyaev, this speciously deep thought was to haunt Christian metaphysics: that love without pain and guilt remains simple a joke, a game.” Certainly, Balthasar’s opposition to those regimes in which a tragic God must necessarily and without remainder enter exhaustively into the processes of the world as fully and exhaustively

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876 Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy, 130. For one example of Berdyaev’s stipulating the necessity of tragedy in the inner life of God, see The Destiny of Man, 28-30. Also see Berdyaev, Studies in Boehme (in Russian), Put No. 20, reference in The Destiny of Man, 29n.1.
immanentized (those in which “the mystery of the Cross [is converted] into a piece of philosophy”) comes through perspicuously. Balthasar objects strenuously to Hegel’s inscription of the pain and suffering of God in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as a *necessary* postulate in order for this love to become “serious”:

…it is quite possible to regard the life of God and the divine knowledge as love playing with itself; but this idea, deprived of the gravity, the pain, the patience and the agonizing of the negative within it, sinks to the level of tasteless pious sentiment.

This positing that without pain and suffering of God love is only insipid, sportive play is objectionable to Balthasar in part because God is absolute and self-sufficient; on Hegel’s view, God would need the world as a kind of proving ground, upon which God is required to act out a tragedy in order to demonstrate concretely and materially the solemn depths of divine love. Hegel’s trinitarian speculation proceeds according to a principle of lack in which the immanent Trinity is immediately sublated and exhausted (and thus erased) insofar as it is expressed completely in the finitude of nature, time, and history.

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878 Hegel, *Werke II*, 1832, #19; here as quoted by Balthasar in *TD V*, 225. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), 10. Also see #32 of the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “…the life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being” (19).


Jürgen Moltmann’s attempt to identify the immanent and the economic Trinity is also disqualified on Balthasarian grounds because it is marked by Hegelianism and Whiteheadian process thought that effectively collapses the distinction between the immanent and economic, making creation functionally or ontologically necessary for God to be God. Moltmann is indicted insofar as his view considers the Cross as not only the moment of the highest self-revelation of the Trinity, but the moment of its very self-actualization or realization. According to Balthasar, Moltmann’s construal of God as participating in the cross-event to the degree that even the Father dies and is forsaken ‘entangles’ God in the world, making God ‘tragic’ and ‘mythological.’

With respect to traditional divine immutability, Balthasar resists the claim that the Incarnation of the second hypostasis did not in any way affect the immanent Trinity (or, for that matter, the divine nature of Christ). In order to be sufficiently dramatic, there must be the possibility for a genuine interplay between the freedom of God and that of human beings. God “cannot function…as a mere Spectator,” presiding but unmoved over a world full of suffering. Though Balthasar wants to claim some kind of event in God, he does not, however, wish to suggest that there was a substantial change in God as such. In short, Balthasar wishes to retain the traditional language of immutability, but complexifies it with a Trinitarian and kenotic inflection borrowed directly from Bulgakov.

883 Balthasar does suggest that the patristic understanding of immutability was a bit more nuanced than not, and that the strong claims to divine immutability involved the resistance to the Greek notion of *pathos* as (1) being subject to some external force or (2) having to do with sin, notions which are obviously to be resisted with respect to claims about the divine (*TD IV*, 218-9).
Ur-kenosis and Pascal Trinitarianism: The Slain Lamb of the Apocalypse

Balthasar, galvanized as he is by an interest in protecting the integrity of the relation between the immanent and the economic without dissolution and permitting the immanent Trinity to be understood as gratuitously grounding the world process in the mode of absolute love without being mired necessarily within it, wants to chart a middle way. It is constituted by an appropriation of Bulgakov’s expansive reading of *kenosis* as a pan-Trinitarian event particularly as formulated in the 1943 *Le Verbe Incarné: Agnus Dei*. Again, the symbol of the Lamb “slain before the foundation of the world” regulates the discourse. The figure of the slain Lamb indicates that the “‘slaying’ is in no sense conceived in a Gnostic manner, as a heavenly sacrifice independent of that of Golgotha, [but]…rather, the eternal aspect of the historic and bloody sacrifice of the Cross.”

This figuration of the cross does provide an occasion for Balthasar to register a bit of nervousness with respect to Bulgakov’s perceived drift toward Gnosticism. In *Lamb of God*, Bulgakov writes that the incarnation is the “*metaphysical* Golgotha of the self-crucifixion of the Logos in time. The *historical* Golgotha was only a consequence of the metaphysical one” an ascription that Balthasar suggests is gnostic in *Mysterium Paschale* (1970). A decade later, however, at the writing of the *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar is much less nervous about Bulgakov. In several major texts, Balthasar explicitly calls upon

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886 Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 232. Berdyaev, of course, would not be terribly anxious about this formulation.

Bulgakov’s kenotic theory, although he distances himself from the “excesses” of his sophiology:

It is therefore preferable to be guided by some of Bulgakov’s fundamental ideas (while avoiding his sophiological excesses), and to take the ‘selflessness’ of the divine persons, as of pure relations in the love within the Godhead, as the basis of everything: this selflessness is the basis of a first form of kenosis, that lies in creation (especially in the creation of man who is free), for the creator here gives up a part of his freedom to the creature, in the act of creating; but this he can dare to do only in virtue of his foreseeing and taking into account the second and truest kenosis, that of the Cross, in which he makes good the uttermost consequences of creation’s freedom, and goes beyond them. In this, kenosis—as the surrender of the ‘form of God’—becomes the decisive act of the love of the Son, who translates his being begotten by the Father (and in this, his dependence on him) into the expressive form of creaturely obedience, but the whole Trinity remains involved in this act, the Father by sending out the Son and abandoning him on the Cross, and the Spirit by uniting them no only in the expressive form of the separation.

For Bulgakov, then, kenosis is primordially and originarily the eternal divine processions within the self-donative life of the immanent Trinity, in which the Father gives himself ecstatically and fully in the generation of the Son as consubstantial, uncreated Other, in the ‘receptivity’ and ‘thanksgiving’ of the Son’s own emptying, and the bond of the Holy Spirit who is absolute love. In God, the divine hypostases are eternally co-posited (never posited alone, which would, of course, be tri-theism), each in

888 In Mysterium Paschale, Balthasar finds fault with Bulgakov’s positing of Sophia, “as both uncreated and created reality, a ‘condition of possibility’ for the union of the two natures in Christ, and thus, so to speak, a suprachristological scheme for Christology” (46n.69). A more sympathetic reading might recall Bulgakov’s own intention that Sophia be understood as no more than a way of naming divine substance, or ousia, in a manner that prescinds from the understanding of ousia as a deposit antecedent to personhood, an abstracted category which metaphysically funds the persons. Though it is possible to discuss Bulgakov’s kenotic theory apart from reference to sophiology as we are doing in this chapter, we must bear in mind that for him Sophia is the very substrate of the kenotic activity, and the reason the created order bears a ‘sophianic’ character.

889 Balthasar, GL VII, 213-4. For a similar passage, see Mysterium Paschale, 35. Also see TD IV, 323, as well as TL II, 177-8.

890 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, viii-ix; TD IV, 323-3. See also Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 226. Nadejda Gorodetzky’s section on Bulgakov in The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought is a concise and articulate summary of his highly original perspective.
the other, in a mode that is ecstatic, sacrificial, and free. For Bulgakov, the generation of the Son leads almost automatically to Trinitarian kenosis, as there can be no consubstantiality without the Father, no “We” without the Spirit. The only (eternal) mode in which the Father possesses the divine nature is in this dis- possession. The Son meets this perfectly free and perfectly self-squandering love with the mode of receptivity and thanksgiving, permitting himself to be generated. The Son possesses the divine nature always already in a mode of self-sacrificial kenosis. The Spirit, whose kenosis consists in not possessing any content of its own, bears witness to the love and the self-sacrificial joy between the Father and the Son. 891

Although he is constitutionally opposed to causal origination in the Trinity, Bulgakov does assert that there is a hierarchy in the Trinity. This claim is not to be thought of in terms of cause or origination, but rather in terms of taxis, or (logical, but non-chronological) ordering. 892 In his system, the Father is the source, the font, and the subject of revelation. The reason that the Father is the subject and thus the ‘first’ is precisely that the Father does not reveal the other hypostases, but only ‘himself’: the Father is properly the revealed hypostasis, whereas the dyad of Son and Spirit are the revealing hypostases, God’s “two hands,” as it were, to borrow from St. Irenaeus. The Father is not hypostatically revealed in the world; the Father is revealed only through the Son and the Spirit, who go into the world, revealing not only themselves but the Father (principally) as well. Though it can be said in the Bulgakovian system that the Father is ‘first’, and that the Son and the Spirit are ‘not the first,’ there is no further hierarchical

891 Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 114.
892 Bulgakov, The Comforter, 68ff.
relation between Son and Spirit. In fact, as we see with Bulgakov’s “trinitarian inversion”
taken over by Balthasar, there is rather an instability, an openness to reversal with respect
to ordering the Son and Spirit insofar as in the immanent Trinity, the Son is the
condition of the Spirit’s procession, and in the economy, it is the Spirit who gives power
to Christ. 893

Bulgakov continues his grammatical metaphor to speak to the revealing
hypostases of Son and Spirit. Whereas the Father is the subject of revelation, the Spirit
and the Son are the one “bi-une” revelation or dyad of the Father: they are, respectively,
the ‘copula’ and the ‘predicate’. 894 According to Bulgakov, the dyad of Son and Spirit
does not sunder the Trinity, protected as it is by the principle of the monarchy of the
Father. The Spirit is copula—emptied of content of its own in a kind of ‘hypostatic
annulment’—because it bears witness to the (free, ecstatic, joyful and sacrificial) love
shared between Father and Son.

So, if Fatherhood is essentially giving away what is proper to self (exhaustively)
to Son and Spirit, the Son is always already eternal kenosis, receptivity, thanksgiving, the
content or ‘what’ of revelation, and the Spirit is the union between them, absolute beauty,
the ‘how’ of revelation. There is no instance of Christ’s work in the world that does not
involve the Spirit, and the Spirit too is intimately related to acts of Christ in the world,
although these hypostases are absolutely non-reducible to one another. The Spirit is the
accomplishing hypostasis, completing the work of Father and Son. The dyad is the
predicate of the Father, the subject of revelation: they reveal God’s Self fully in the world
in revelation. The Word is the word of the Father, who is silent except to speak through

the dyad or bi-un predication of Son and Spirit.  

For Bulgakov, this so-called ‘first’ (ontological, not chronological), Ur-kenosis of the Trinitarian processions is the primal drama that prefigures and undergirds all ensuing kenotic modalities in the economy, including the Incarnation, the creation of the world, up to and including the Paschal mystery, Christ’s descent into hell and the silence of Holy Saturday. Following Bulgakov (and in keeping with the Scholastic premise that the inner-Trinitarian relations that obtain between the hypostases are in fact the condition of the possibility for creation), Balthasar understands creation to be a ‘second’ kenosis, and the events of Incarnation and Paschal mystery to follow (and to crown) this kenotic trajectory. These economic events are the “consequences” of the pure relations of the Trinity. Hence, on the Balthasarian-Bulgakovian model, kenosis is not a rigidly Christological doctrine, but has been transposed to a Trinitarian key with a plurality of referents which indicate the essential self-donation of the Persons.

When the Father generates the Son, the Father does not give that which he possesses, but rather gives that all he is, “for in God there is only being, not having.”

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896 Of course, Aquinas and others are also in the background with respect to creation originating in the Trinitarian processions. Balthasar acknowledges both Thomas and Bonaventure on this point. He quotes Thomas: “The temporal procession of creatures comes from the eternal procession of the Persons…the first procession is the cause and ground of all subsequent processions” (In sententiae, I, Proemium, c.f. TD V, 61ff.). Bonaventure is also helpful here: “God could not have brought forth the creation on the basis of his will if he had not already brought forth the Son on the basis of his nature” (Bonaventure, I, d 7, dub 2 (Quar. I, 144b), c.f. TD V, 64.

897 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 28.

898 Balthasar, TD IV, 331.

899 Balthasar, TD V, 84.
For Balthasar, then, the Father substantially and essentially is the *Hingebewegung*, the pure loving self-dispossession without remainder: God “is this movement of self-giving that holds nothing back.”

In Balthasar’s own deliberately provocative terms, the Father manifests a divine “Godlessness”—a privative that nevertheless does not connote self-extinction but rather is constitutive of divine personhood: there is no time at which the person of the Father existed apart from this movement of self-surrender; rather, the Father substantially is the kenotic dynamism of the generation of the Son as Other. Whatever ‘power’ the Father (dis-) possesses, then, is constituted by its paradoxical confluence with powerlessness: the Father’s eternal self-gift in the consubstantial generation of the Son demonstrates a “unity of omnipotence and powerlessness,” the ‘risks’ of God are “undergirded by, and enabled by, the power-less power of the divine self-giving.”

These relations presuppose the “letting-be” of a Trinitarian ontology, in which “each Hypostasis can only be itself insofar as it ‘lets’ the others ‘be’ in equal concreteness.” The risk factor is mitigated by an equal self-gift, even on the part of the Father. According to Balthasar’s understanding of pan-Trinitarian kenosis, personhood itself—human and, perhaps surprisingly, divine—is a gifted existence, an

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900 Balthasar, *TD IV*, 323.
901 Ibid., 324.
902 Ibid., 326. Also c.f. *Mysterium Paschale*, 34; *A Theological Anthropology*, 210-11; *Exp. IV*, 435.
903 Ibid., 327. See also *TD V*, 245-6.
904 Balthasar, *TD V*, 75; C.f. *TD IV*, 66, 73-4. C.f. *TD II*, 209ff, 238. The “power” thus takes the form of surrender: God “wishes to be almighty not solely by creating: by begetting and breathing forth, and allowing himself to be begotten and breathed forth, he hands over his power to the Other—whoever that Other may be—without ever seeking to take it back” (*TD V*, 66).
“incomprehensible having-been-gifted-ness”\textsuperscript{905} that is mutually constituted. It not a quality that can be possessed, but is “a unique and irreducible identity received in relations of love and freedom that can only be labeled as \textit{kenotic}.”\textsuperscript{906} Significantly, for Balthasar “Fatherhood” is also, then, in a manner of speaking, a received existence: “The Father, too, owes his Fatherhood to the Son who allows himself to be generated, and he also owes his power of ‘spiration’—of ‘breathing forth’ the Spirit—to the Spirit who allows himself to be breathed forth by Father and Son.”\textsuperscript{907}

Turning to Bulgakov specifically, this movement in love and self-gift toward ecstatic existence—begetting—is for him the very definition of Fatherhood itself, which is precisely the form of love in which the loving one desires to have himself not in himself but outside himself, in order to give his own to this other I, but an I identified with him…the Father actualizes \textit{His own}, His own hypostatically transparent nature.\textsuperscript{908}

Sonship is for Bulgakov a self-depletion on behalf of the Father, a being-begotten, “already \textit{eternal kenosis},”\textsuperscript{909} “hypostatic obedience to the commands of the Father.”\textsuperscript{910} Apart from the Spirit these mutual relations of self-depletion would be tragic. Yet it is the Spirit who is “the \textit{joy} of sacrificial love, the bliss and actualization of this love,”\textsuperscript{911}


\textsuperscript{907} Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 245.

\textsuperscript{908} Bulgakov, \textit{The Lamb of God}, 98; italics original. C.f. also 128-9.

\textsuperscript{909} \textit{Ibid.}, 99.

\textsuperscript{910} \textit{Ibid.}, 225.

\textsuperscript{911} \textit{Ibid.}
which identifies the Father and Son as the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. The lack of particular content of the Spirit is the fact of the Spirit’s kenosis: “He is the Spirit of Truth, not Truth itself. In Him and through Him the depths of God become transparent as all-real Truth and Beauty.” For Bulgakov, the Trinity accomplishes the Incarnation and the paschal mystery, which is kenotic not only for the Son but also for the Father and the Spirit. Balthasar repeats this virtually without change or criticism.

How does the suggestion of Ur-kenosis provide an adequate solution to the question of the relation between the economic and the immanent? This mode of perfect, absolute, self-sacrificial and ecstatic love, which is constitutive for divine personhood, is that which substantially and essentially is divinity. God is love. Simply put, this is just the kind of God God is. For Bulgakov and Balthasar, kenosis takes place at the level of form (morphe), not eternal essence (ousia) (as is the case in Schelling, Hegel, and the nineteenth century kenoticists). Because both Bulgakov and Balthasar hold that this eternal self-donation is essential to the life of the Trinity, it becomes a defensible

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912 Ibid., 100-1.
913 Ibid., 313-16; 353-4; 370-2.
914 Balthasar, *TD IV*, 323-328. Others think differently. Celia Deane-Drummond, for example, believes that while Balthasar and Bulgakov do share demerits (both having patriarchal and monarchical portraits of God), Balthasar’s Trinitarian theology, which, according to her interpretation, veers dangerously toward tri-theism, far exceeds Bulgakov’s in terms of positing a separation between the hypostases, so their views are not actually coincident. Deane-Drummond writes that, contrary to Balthasar, Bulgakov “always insisted that kenosis did not equate with complete separation of the three persons” (“The Breath of Glory,” 51 n.27) because he stipulates that at death the Father receives the spirit of the Son, who has “abandoned His body” (*The Lamb of God*, 314). C.f. Celia Deane-Drummond, “The Breath of Glory: A Trinitarian Eschatology for the Earth through Critical Engagement with Hans Urs Von Balthasar,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12:1 (January 2010), 46-64. Yet Bulgakov does speak in terms of the Holy Spirit’s abandon of the Son insofar as the Spirit is the “palpable proximity of the Father” (*The Lamb of God*, 314). It is difficult also to attenuate such statements from Bulgakov as “the Son is orphaned, and the Father is alone…the Son no longer lives in union with the Father, just as the Father no longer lives in union with the Son” (*The Lamb of God*, 353). Also see Rowan Williams, “Balthasar and the Trinity,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 37-50.
premise that Incarnation and death of Christ on the cross does not represent a change in God from earth to heaven, time to eternity, but is rather a continuation of the substantial modality of self-giving love at the core of divine being which is ordered toward human salvation. As Bulgakov has it, “Christ’s cross is inscribed in creation at its very origin, and in its initial act the world is already called to received Divinity into its depths.”915

There is thus no measurable change in God, and therefore no relative separation between immanent and economic. Though there is no measurable change, this does not indicate that there is no vitality or dynamism in God. Rather, according to Balthasar,

> Within God himself there is the original of that of which man’s relationship to God is a copy: room for love between Father and Son—for God in the mode of creative giving and for God in the mode of created receiving and giving back in full measure—in the unity of the Spirit of love which alone emerges from the double fount of love and, as the eternal fruit of love, unites and distinguishes the Father and the Son. These unplumbable depths of the springs of life in the eternal God are seen as the only sufficient condition for the historical appearance of the Son of God and of Man… 916

The economic is latent in the immanent; the (very real, not Gnostic, bloodless, or heavenly) sacrifice of Christ on the cross is a concrete expression of the same mode of kenotic love, which, as it turns out, is the only (free) ‘necessity’ in God. The apparent ‘powerlessness’ of God is in fact a display of great omnipotence, because nothing is more powerful than gift. The creation of the world is the same expression of this substantially kenotic love.

Even the horrors of the cross, and the ultimate distance of the descent into hell on Holy Saturday, where Jesus was ‘dead with the dead’ are moments of revelation of

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this perfect obedience and self-squandering love.\textsuperscript{917} Here, too, Balthasar is in Bulgakov’s debt for centralizing the descent into hell motif, especially in connection with respect to a more expansive reading of kenosis. In \textit{The Lamb of God}, Bulgakov suggests that the descent unto the dead in hell continues the kenotic trajectory in solidarity with the deceased “in order that He might continue to serve men even beyond the grave.”\textsuperscript{918} For Bulgakov, like in Balthasar, the three days in the grave when Christ was in the afterlife state is a silence, “the extreme of self-devastation…[in which] only receptive passivity remains.”\textsuperscript{919} Bulgakov understands the so-called “preaching in hell” as a symbolic way of designating Christ’s mysterious presence in the afterlife state, which is, significantly, part of the kenotic sacrifice of the high priestly ministry rather than the more triumphant royal ministry.\textsuperscript{920} Likewise for Balthasar the mode of proclamation is the very absence of speech.

According to this model, the horrors of death and hell do not contradict the nature of God but is, rather, “the revelation of the highest posivitity of trinitarian love.”\textsuperscript{921} Indeed, the “doctrine of the Trinity [i]s the ever-present, inner presupposition


\textsuperscript{918} Bulgakov, \textit{The Lamb of God}, 315-6.

\textsuperscript{919} \textit{Ibid.}, 316.

\textsuperscript{920} \textit{Ibid.}, 372-379.

\textsuperscript{921} Balthasar, \textit{TD V}, 517, 123.
of the doctrine of the Cross. 

Rather than being an aberration, the cross of Christ and the silence of Holy Saturday is for Balthasar a moment of genuine apocalypse, that is, however, stark, it is the unveiling of the logic of Trinitarian relations in both difference and sameness, identity in non-identity. Indeed, the cross becomes the greatest, most poignant revelation of the interior life of the Godhead, as it demonstrates both the distinction between persons as well as their unity (capacitated by the Spirit, who maintains their unity without destroying their separation). For Balthasar, moreover, the eternal relation of free obedience of the Son to the Father is exposed, which can rightly be called ‘the obedience of a corpse’. In Christ’s 

being dead with the dead, the attitude and stance of the divine Logos has been stripped away, as it were. For it was in the extremities of this death that the Logos found the adequate expression of this divine stance: letting himself remain available for the Father in everything, even in the ultimate alienation. The stripping away of the man Jesus is the laying bare not only of Sheol but also of the Trinitarian relationship in which the Son is entirely the one who springs forth from the Father.

Indeed, the first order of this pan-trinitarian Ur-kenosis highlights the difference, the distance between the hypostases, which is then the condition of the possibility not only for every other instance of ‘distance’—up to and including the cross and the ‘silence’ (which is the last resounding word!) of Holy Saturday—but the condition of the

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924 C. Deane-Drummond finds the claim that the spirit provides the bond of unity during the abandonment on the cross to be “strained beyond measure” (“The Breadth of Glory,” 50), calling the Spirit in this context “a macabre figure in the form of an executioner…” (50). Matthew Levering also critiques Balthasar on this point in his *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 132.

possibility of absolute love. This notion of an absolute, infinite (analogical but non-ontological) distance or ‘hiatus’ between the hypostases, a ‘separation’ of God from God in the consubstantial generation of the Son from the Father

ought not to be taken over-literally in a manner that would compromise the unity of the divine nature. Rather, Balthasar’s understanding—and rhetorical performance—of inter-Trinitarian difference is the condition of the possibility for absolute love.

As the Father generates the Son as a consubstantial, co-eternal “Other,” introducing the precondition for loving communion, so too does this diastasis function as precondition for the ‘drama’ between creature and Creator and as presupposition for finite, human ‘others.’ This ‘hiatus’ within God is a set of brackets wherein “‘kenotic’ space is made for the recognition of the ‘other’ as other,” the condition of the possibility for the created order itself, even for physical bodies interacting in the world.

A robust doctrine of kenosis thus undergirds the importance of the materiality and the historicity of bodies in the world, while at the same time undermining docetic tendencies in Christology. In this kenotic act, human bodies and natures as a whole are transformed with the Incarnation of the Logos “because we are a totality of individuals who are established in material unity.”

To revisit a theme sounded in chapter three, Balthasar’s valuation of alterity as an absolute good reaffirms the finite, which is a notable element missing from Berdyaev, where alterity and otherness are an

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926 Balthasar, TD IV, 323. See also A Theological Anthropology, 71.


unfortunate result of the Fall. Berdyaev’s unremitting apocalypticism both implicates and seeks to extinguish time—and all that is ‘nailed to the cross of time,’” including contingency, the phenomenal world, language, progress, and ontology—as a fundamental disruption and ‘objectification’ of the primordial spiritual unity of human beings. Contra Berdyaev, Balthasar suggests that the “‘otherness’ of the new aeon is a making other, a making new, of the old; it is not a matter of throwing over the created world and making another, quite different one in its place.”931 Further, for Balthasar, the enormous difference between God and the world is

neither a fated ‘defection’ nor (what would be the same thing) an ‘out-flow’ of God, both of which would stamp the world in its deepest reality as a region of doom and mere physical laws. Rather, the world’s position has been freely willed and is one that gives to the world its inner stamp of freedom. Thus the finite is meant to exist through infinite freedom so that it might have the freedom for infinite freedom.932

For Balthasar, “all the contingent ‘abasements’ of God in the economy of salvation are forever included and outstripped in the eternal event of Love.”933 This feature is consonant with the Balthasarian conviction that the mutual, free self-donation of hypostases within the Trinity is first and foremost a soteriological doctrine.934 In Balthasar’s theology, everything comes down to love: thus, the love that substantially is the Trinity must always function as the hermeneutical key to the cross-event. God as


933 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, ix.

934 For instance, see Balthasar, TD III: “In the Trinity as revealed by Christ, the two things are proclaimed simultaneously: it is as Father, Son and Spirit that God is involved with the world, for its salvation—for the doctrine of the Trinity has a profoundly soteriological significance; but it as God that he is thus involved. He does not become ‘love’ by having the world as his ‘thou’ and ‘partner’…he ‘is love’ already” (509).
self-surrendering *Ungrund* is the ‘gulf’ of absolute love into which even the horrific, broken ‘distances’ of the sinful world—up to and including the cross of Christ—can be taken.\(^{935}\) This suggestion is not wholly different from the Hegelian ascription of distance, death, and suffering in the Godhead (reappearing in Moltmann\(^ {936}\)), but the conscious framing of it in terms of gratuity, non-necessity, love, and identity preserves the freedom of God, challenging Hegel directly.\(^ {937}\)

The event of the cross is an event that affects the inner life of God—at least insofar as there is some element in God which can “develop” into suffering,\(^ {938}\) for instance, when the absolute love is met with the creaturely ‘no’ of a calculated self-preservation—yet he does not speak like Moltmann or Hegel in the language of pain or suffering in or as constitutive of God. The Cross-event as a moment in the economy of salvation does indicate a distance between the Father and the Son, but this distance is not original to the cross: it actually indicates a *pre-existent* distance within the immanent Trinity. Because both Bulgakov and Balthasar hold that eternal self-donation is essential to the nature of the Trinitarian relations, the Incarnation and death of Christ on the cross does not represent a change in God or a contradiction of the divine nature, but is rather a continuation and continuous ratification of the substantial modality of inscrutable self-giving love which remains ever at the core of divine being.

Even though Balthasar asserts that the kenotic modes in the economy are revelatory of the inner nature of the Trinity, indeed, that they provide the fundamental

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\(^{936}\) For Balthasar’s articulation of Moltmann as Hegelian on this point, c.f. *TD IV*, 227.

\(^{937}\) Balthasar, *TD IV*, 245.

\(^{938}\) Balthasar, *TD IV*, 328.
instance of the un-veiling or “apocalypse” of the Father’s originary love, this principle cannot be deduced in advance or considered to be a necessary premise: “no necessity, no philosophical law of the structure of the created world, empowers us either to deduce the sovereign freedom of the decision of grace that is the kenosis of God, or to extend it to become a universal law.” To universalize the principle as necessary is to render it gnostically or idealistically: this is never adequate to the radical freedom of the love of God.

Balthasar’s elaboration of the different forms of pan-Trinitarian kenosis borrowed from Bulgakov—and the symbol of Ur-kenosis in particular—enables him to maintain a unitive (non-reductive) account of the relation between economic and immanent, without succumbing either to problematic ascriptions of Hegelian necessity or Schellingian (Behemistic) seeds of darkness in God or to claims (as in the 19th century kenoticists) which compromise the integrity of Trinitarian persons. In Balthasar’s critical reappropriation of Hegel, God is all fullness and all plentitude: there is no lack. No actualization or process takes place, because all is love and self-gift. The hypostases are thoroughly ‘themselves’ in the kenotic mode of free, ecstatic love, not simply moments in the Hegelian actualization of Geist. The economy is all gift of love, and an expression of the same mode of love which characterizes essentially the immanent Trinity.

The Capacious Horizon of Eschatology

Both Bulgakovian and Balthasarian eschatology is thus characterized by a dramatic soteriological kenoticism which requires a Trinitarian grounding. In his scriptural interpretation, Bulgakov connects explicitly the prologue to the gospel of John

939 Balthasar, GL VII, 214. c.f. 221 of the same volume.
with the fundamental kenosis text of Philippians 2. On his (typically Russian) antinomial reading, when the “Word was made flesh” (John 1:14), the Word-God became “not God” without ceasing to be both Word and God.940 The absolute Creator enters into creatureliness, assuming creaturely being as a voluntary self-humiliation, the meaning of which exceeds Incarnation and ignominious death but also indicates the relations of the Trinity. For Bulgakov, Philippians 2 is a text which “talks not only about an earthly event occurring within the limits of human life but also about a heavenly event occurring in the depths of Divinity itself: the kenosis of God the Word.”941 As is the case in Balthasar, too, the kenoticism of the cross opens up upon and is itself a kind of glory; this union of suffering and exaltation is of course deeply Johannine.

With this more expansive assessment of the eschatological, there is no sense in which eschatology can be disconnected from protology; according to Balthasar’s organic metaphors, eschatology proper is no more than the long ripening of protology, “the way protology blossoms out,”942 “the estuary into which protology flows.”943 This understanding of eschatology is also the reason why the anthropocentric horizon is only intelligible in the context of the theocentric. Being itself is structurally conditioned by gratuitous Trinitarian love, and the whole of eschatology can be distilled into the originary principle of the divine decision “to nestle the created world, with [human beings] at its center, in [the Trinity’s] own endless inner life at the world’s ‘end.’”944 For

940 Bulgakov, The Lamb of God, 213.
941 Ibid., 215.
943 Ibid.
944 Ibid., 457. Also c.f. TD V, 66-85.
Balthasar the ultimate goal of eschatology is the “participation in the very surging life of God,” an initiation into the self-giving dynamism of the depths of the Trinitarian mystery to which we are already introduced proleptically. At bottom, “the mutual gifts of the Trinity are the creature’s place and home.” For Balthasar (also Bulgakov) eschatology, soteriology, and Christology cannot be separated: “God is the ‘last thing’ of the creature. This he is, however, as he presents himself to the world, that is, in his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God and, therefore, the whole essence of the last things…eschatology is, almost more even than any other locus theologicus, entirely a doctrine of salvation.”

The Trinity is thus for Balthasar the last horizon of eschatology, as well as its beginning, and the true name of Being itself:

The real ‘last thing’ is the triune life of God disclosed in Jesus Christ. Naturally this Omega also implies the Alpha; it is what is present, first and last, in every ‘now’. And what is this but Being itself? For apart from Being there is ‘only nothing’, while within it there is that mysterious vitality disclosed through Christological revelation, so that everything that comes from absolute Being must bear its seal, with revelation giving us access to the fount of God’s life.

This Trinitarian ontological principle operates doubly: it is both the beginning and the end of all things, the Alpha and the Omega, providing the fertile ground of possibility for the kenotic movement of the divine in creation, incarnation and cross. It is at the deepest heart of Balthasar’s theocentric eschatology wherein the principle of Trinitarian love which is the substance of Being itself is visible in Jesus Christ, and the most explicit

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945 Balthasar, “Eschatology in Outline,” Exp. IV, 442.
946 Balthasar, GL VII, 516. C.f. TD V, 112.
948 Balthasar, TD V, 57. Also c.f. GL I, 158; TL III, 35ff, 438.
of Balthasar’s borrowing from Bulgakov. This Johannine structure of the Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8, 18; 22:13; John 1) expressed eschatologically and trinitarianly rhymes well with Balthasar’s theology of history, in which Christ provides the framework for, the bracketing of the entire drama of history and the end of history. Indeed, as we suggested in chapter four, this Johannine principle of beginning and end is the condition of the possibility for there being a theology of history at all. Within these Trinitarian brackets is also inscribed an invitation for human beings to participate in the ever-greater, ever-deeper, ever-new event of the mystery of Trinitarian love, whatever comes.

Conclusion

In keeping with our original hypothesis, we see that in the test-cases of the Russians, Balthasar can and does tolerate as well as enact an experimental, probative mode of theologizing, but, like Bulgakov, it is his profound devotion to and respect for the tradition which allows him to do so. His speculative Tendenz is indicated perhaps nowhere more clearly than his adoption of the Russian kenotic hypothesis which, as it appears in Bulgakov, is shorn of its Behemistic, Schellingian, and Hegelian excesses, but which also, in an effort to preserve God’s capacious trintarian freedom, ambiguates the classical conception of divine immutability. This liveliness in God that Bulgakov and Balthasar affirm is all dynamism, movement, surprise, openness, the “livingness” of the divine rather like that propounded by the Romantics. This openness and dynamism, even playfulness, informs their shared allegiance to a zhivoе предание, or “living tradition,”

949 Balthasar, TD IV, 44.
950 Ibid., 46.
951 Balthasar, TD II, 280.
which permits—nay, requires—the adoption of the same “audacious creativity” in the mode of the Spirit which characterized and enlivened the early Fathers. Theological discourse thus becomes

the expression of an expression, on the one hand an obedient repetition of the expression of revelation imprinted on the believer, and, on the other a creative, childlike, free sharing in the bringing-to-expression in the Holy Spirit—who is the Spirit of Christ, of the Church and of the believer—of the mystery which expresses itself.\textsuperscript{952}

It is to the nature of this living tradition and the method it necessitates that we now turn.

\textsuperscript{952} Balthasar, \textit{GL II}, 28.
CONCLUSION

The truths that come into new prominence can never contradict the old, but nevertheless the Spirit can in every age blow where he will, and in every age can bring to the fore entirely new aspects of divine Revelation. What is entirely intolerable is the notion that the ‘progress of dogma’ gradually narrows down the unexplored area of divine truth, continually allowing less and less space to the free play of thought within the Faith, as though ‘progress’ consisted in first of all establishing the main outlines of the Faith, and then proceeding to the more and more detailed work required to complete the edifice until finally—shortly before the Last Judgment, perhaps?—the structure would stand there complete, consisting in all its aspects of fully ‘used up’, defined dogma. This dreary picture is the very opposite of the truth. The Spirit mocks all human attempts to delimit him. Upon those who are truly poor, who truly thirst after it, the Spirit pours out the consolation of his truth in such breathtaking, ever-increasing abundance that the very notion of ‘using it up’, if it ever occurred to them, could only strike them as ludicrous blasphemy…The Church’s knowledge, dogmatic knowledge…is subject to the paradox which applies to all Christian truth, that the content of what is given always overflows to an infinite degree the vessel into which it is poured.  

The foregoing chapters of this dissertation, in tracking Hans Urs von Balthasar’s engagement with the proximate discourses of three figures of the nineteenth century Russian School as well as Schelling, upon whom they rely, have endeavored to provide material proof for profiling the Balthasarian theological method as more experimental than nostalgic, with an under-acknowledged speculative Tendenz evocative of the patristic figure of Origen. The substantial analytic chapters, in their treatment of aesthetics, freedom, myth, evil, and eschatology, both anthropocentric and theocentric, have demonstrated not only the phenomenon of Balthasar’s unselfconscious ecumenical

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retrieval of non-Catholic, non-magisterial sources, but also the fact that he comes even
to the most dangerous extra-confessional discourses with an open hand.

The present work attended to Balthasar’s rich set of texts, from the early
_Apokalypse der deutschen Seele_ to the trilogy (aesthetics, dramatics, logic), to other more
occasional writings with an eye toward explicit or implicit convergences with Berdyaev,
Soloviev, and Bulgakov, and Schelling behind them. According to our analysis, Berdyaev
is convicted, Soloviev is alibied, and Bulgakov, though through a veil, is largely absolved.
For Balthasar, Berdyaev’s religious philosophy can be said to be valuable insofar as it
attempts to take myth, freedom, and evil seriously. Ultimately, however, it is determined
far too heavily by the illicitly speculative meonic line of Böhme-Schelling, which
becomes evident in his denigration of finitude and the created order, explanatory
theodicy, and presumptive gnostic importation of tragedy into the inner life of God.
These divergences between Berdyaev and Balthasar illustrate that which
outlies the boundaries of theological speculation. As Balthasar suggests in a different context, “the
Christian can know not only too little but also too much.”

Soloviev fares better because, although he uses the grammar of Idealism and
Romanticism, particularly Schelling, to articulate his own religious philosophy of
_Bogochełovechestwo_ , he is a genuinely Christological thinker informed more deeply by
Scripture and the Fathers, particularly Maximus Confessor. His apocalyptic shift at the
end of his career, informed by the bodily resurrection of Christ, moderates any tendency
toward unrestrained evolutionism. Finally, Balthasar finds much to appreciate in the
Russian enunciation of Antichrist as religious imposture epitomized in Soloviev’s short

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954 Balthasar, _GL V_, 478.
fiction, which rhymes thematically with Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor tale in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Bulgakov is absolutely formative in Balthasar’s pneumatology, original interpretation of Christ’s descent into hell, and paschal trinitarianism, with the greatest debt, of course, being his articulation of the symbol of *Ur-kenosis*, the dyadic action of Son and Spirit, and the centralizing theme of the Lamb as though slain. Bulgakov elicits high praise both explicitly and performatively, as Balthasar incorporates his reflections into the heart of own theology. Balthasar worries, however, that with respect to the universality of salvation Bulgakov speaks too assuredly, in a mood indicative rather than optative.

The results of this investigation indicate first in Balthasar perhaps a surprising latitude with respect to speculation. He allows the highest measure of potential contribution from all flanks, yet, in matters which are compromised, for example, by Promethean titanism, untoward presumptuous conjecture, or the conflation of natural and supernatural, Balthasar is as relentlessly uncompromising as he is generous. Secondly, the manner which Balthasar goes about his theologizing is far from monolithic. For him, the truth of God is “great enough to allow an infinity of approaches and entryways.”955 This feature is shown not least in his presentations of the twelve “styles” of theology in *GL II* and *III*, both clerical and lay, which accords Soloviev—an eccentric choice by all counts—a place alongside those pillars of Catholic tradition, including Irenaeus, Augustine, Denys, Anselm, and Bonaventure. This emphatic inclusion of Soloviev, as well as the presence of Bulgakov in Balthasar’s

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pneumatology and apocalyptic eschatology, is one witness to his constitutive affirmation of plurality.

Third, for Balthasar, there may be guilt, but there is no guilt by mere association. He is not prudish with respect to discursive purity in particular, and is untroubled by the critical approximation of “impure” sources. Of course, sources are not unimportant. The proximate source material of Berdyaev, for example, is Gnosticism, Schelling, Böhme, and Joachim, while that of Bulgakov, Balthasar’s authorized Russian, is Scripture and Orthodox tradition; Soloviev is a mixed bag with sources from quarters far and wide, ranging from Schelling to Darwin to Aquinas to Maximus. There is a myopic, insufficient brand of critique, however, which judges a thinker only by the company he keeps; this is not so with Balthasar. As has been shown, particularly with respect to Soloviev, reliance upon unstable philosophical discourses is not necessarily fatal, provided the proper Christological parsing has been effected.

Finally, Balthasar’s confidence in the Spirit’s authorship and inspiration of all things revealed constitutes his dynamic view of revelation and provides a secure mooring which capacitates the freedom of play. For Balthasar, in sum, the theological task is to be as capacious as the Spirit. It is structurally open, fundamentally creative, resolutely brave, and certainly not precious. This dissertation has aimed to exemplify concretely this mode of deeply pneumatic theologizing with what Balthasar calls “a living spirit.”

In this respect Balthasar’s view is fundamentally consonant with Bulgakov’s, whose lovely essay “The Church as Tradition,” articulates a dynamic vision of the

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tradition of the Church that eschews construing it statically as a “sort of archeology, which by its shadows connects the present with the past.” Analogous to J.S. Drey’s distinction between the ‘fixed’ and the ‘mobile’ aspects of Church tradition with which this dissertation began, Bulgakov distinguishes between elements of Church tradition, as “lex credenda or lex orandi, or lex canonica or lex ecclesiastica” that have been fixed, and those which have not been defined and which can admit further dogmatic development. Because the Church tradition is the expression of the one Spirit of God, it is always identical with itself, or, in Balthasar’s language, reflective of a “single entelechy which remains true to itself,” even vis-à-vis developments which are “gnoseologically new.”

What is recommended and what Balthasar has performed in his critical appropriations of the Russians is a daring theological creativity that operates in a Christological, pneumatic register. The Spirit blows where it will. As Bulgakov indicates, “there cannot be a ‘Philokalia’ for creative activity, for the latter is outside of law and regularity.” The depths of eternal, luminous mystery of God, of self-giving Trinitarian love concretely expressed on the Cross of Christ defies a systematic method; *methodos*, for Balthasar is at bottom “the pursuit of a way, and when One claims to be the way and we believe him, method could be translated as *sequela*, following.” If method is to be determined by the object of inquiry, the most important rule of engagement is that there

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958 Ibid., 26.

959 Ibid., 30; c.f. 32.


can be no closure, but only a following after an ever-greater God who is all exceeding glory.
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