

# God – Beyond Me

From the I's Absolute Ground in Hölderlin  
and Schelling to a Contemporary Model  
of a Personal God

*By*

Cia van Woezik



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON  
2010

## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1 I-hood .....	16
1.1. A Brief Phenomenology of I-hood .....	18
1.2. Two Models of Self-Consciousness in German Idealism .....	24
1.2.1. The Reflection Model of Self-Consciousness .....	25
1.2.2. Fichte's Attempts to Escape the Reflection Model .....	29
1.3. Henrich's Metaphysical Model of Self-Consciousness ...	32
1.3.1. Henrich's Defense of a Philosophy of Subjectivity .....	34
1.3.2. Three Classical Approaches to Self-Consciousness .....	39
1.3.2.1. The I Opposed to the World – The Kantian Angle .....	39
1.3.2.2. The I within the World – The Hegelian Angle .....	42
1.3.2.3. Self-Preservation – The Stoic Angle .....	44
1.3.3. The Basic Relation [ <i>Grundverhältnis</i> ] .....	46
1.3.4. Towards a Theory of Self-Consciousness .....	53
1.3.5. Analysis of Self-Consciousness Based on Fichte ...	60
1.3.6. The Subject's Being-With [ <i>Mitsein</i> ] .....	63
Excursus: A Naturalistic Model of I-hood .....	66
1.4. From Here Onwards .....	78
Chapter 2 From the I to the Absolute .....	84
2.1. Connecting Kant and Spinoza .....	84
2.2. Baruch de Spinoza .....	89
2.2.1. Substance or <i>Deus sive Natura</i> .....	92
2.2.2. Attributes and Modes of the One Substance .....	96
2.2.3. Free Will and Intention .....	101
2.2.4. The Role of Philosophy and Religion .....	106
2.3. The Early Reception of Spinoza's Philosophy .....	109
2.4. Pantheism Controversy .....	113
2.5. Merging the Absolute with the God of the Bible .....	119

2.6. The I and the Absolute .....	122
2.7. From Here Onwards .....	123
Chapter 3 Schelling: The I and its Ground .....	128
3.1. Philosophical Stages and Teachers .....	129
3.2. The Absolute as I in the Early Schelling .....	135
3.3. Attempts at Cutting the Gordian Knot of Philosophy ...	141
3.3.1. Philosophy of Nature .....	141
3.3.2. Transcendental Philosophy .....	146
3.3.3. System of Identity .....	151
3.4. Philosophy as the System of Freedom .....	155
3.4.1. The Absolute and God .....	158
3.4.2. God and World .....	168
3.4.3. World and Evil .....	174
3.4.4. Evil and God .....	177
3.5. From Here Onwards .....	181
Chapter 4 Hölderlin: The I and its Ground .....	189
4.1. Judgment and Being .....	192
4.2. Self-Consciousness .....	196
4.3. Worldly Echoes of Being .....	199
4.3.1. Being and the Innocent .....	201
4.3.2. Being and Nature .....	205
4.3.3. Being, Beauty, and the Poet .....	210
4.4. Religion .....	213
4.5. Life's Conflicting Tendencies .....	216
4.6. Being and History .....	223
4.7. The <i>Eschaton</i> and Celebration of Peace .....	231
4.7.1. Christ .....	238
4.7.2. The Father, Being, and All-Unity .....	247
4.8. From Here Onwards .....	250
Chapter 5 Intellectual Intuition and Metaphysics .....	259
5.1. Fichte .....	263
5.1.1. Intellectual Intuition in Line with Kant .....	264
5.1.2. Idealism versus Dogmatism .....	268
5.2. Schelling .....	273
5.2.1. From Fichte's Absolute I to Spinoza's Substance	273
5.2.2. <i>Schwärmerei</i> , Art, or Philosophy? .....	277

5.3. Hölderlin .....	286
5.3.1. Poetry and Philosophy .....	287
5.3.2. Grasping the Father's Ray... ..	290
5.3.3. ... and Wrapping it in Song .....	294
5.3.4. The Hubris of the Poet .....	299
5.4. From Here Onwards .....	303
Chapter 6 The Absolute Ground versus God .....	310
6.1. Henrich's Metaphysics .....	314
6.1.1. An Absolute and Obscure Ground .....	316
6.1.2. All-Unity and Freedom .....	321
6.1.3. The Philosopher about Religion .....	327
6.1.3.1. Explanation for the Variety of Religions .....	328
6.1.3.2. Gratitude as the Basis of Religious Praxis .....	332
6.2. Rahner's Metaphysics .....	337
6.2.1. Being and Beings .....	341
6.2.1.1. The Openness for Being .....	342
6.2.1.2. The Openness of Being .....	347
6.2.1.3. Human Being as Finite Spirit .....	350
6.2.2. God as Mystery .....	354
6.2.3. A Personal God of Freedom and Love .....	358
6.2.4. The Mystery of Human Freedom and Love .....	361
6.2.5. Intellectual Intuition and Beatific Vision .....	367
6.3. From Here Onwards .....	371
Chapter 7 God – Beyond Me .....	379
7.1. Who am I? .....	383
7.1.1. Conscious of Being both in and “above” the World .....	384
7.1.2. Loving .....	388
7.1.3. Free .....	391
7.2. Who am I to God? .....	393
7.3. Who is God to Me? .....	399
7.4. Who are We? .....	405
7.5. Who is God? .....	410
7.5.1. Impersonal or Personal Ground .....	411
7.5.2. God as We? .....	415
7.5.3. The One Infinite Reality of We-hood .....	420

Appendix A	Wie wenn am Feiertage (1799) .....	428
Appendix B	Natur und Kunst (1801) .....	430
Appendix C	Friedensfeier (1802) .....	431
Bibliography	.....	435
Index	.....	449

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

---

<sup>1</sup> Fichte, SW 1, 501. For this and the other references, see the bibliography and the specific chapters. Unless stated otherwise, translations are mine.

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

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

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

---

<sup>2</sup> Rahner, *Schr* 7, 15. See 6.2.

<sup>3</sup> See Flanagan 2002.

<sup>4</sup> De Regt, Dooremalen 2008. The original Dutch title is: *Wat een onzin!*

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

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

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

---

<sup>5</sup> The last title is *Endless Consciousness* in English. See Bibliography for all titles mentioned.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 6.



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

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

#### THE ROUTE OF THE PROJECT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>7</sup> Hölderlin, StA IV, 298; StA II, 119. See Chapter 4 and 5.3 for the references.

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

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

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

---

<sup>8</sup> Schr. 3, 40. Rahner makes this statement about Heidegger. See 6.3.

<sup>9</sup> The poem is *The Only One*. See 4.6.

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>10</sup> Strasser 2002, 191.

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

## THE CHOICES MADE

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

### *Chapter 1: I-hood*

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

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

### *Chapter 2: From the I to the Absolute*

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

### *Chapter 3: Schelling: The I and its Ground*

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

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

#### *Chapter 4: Hölderlin: The I and its Ground*

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

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



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

#### *Chapter 5: Intellectual Intuition and Metaphysics*

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

---

<sup>11</sup> See Tilliette 1995.

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

### *Chapter 6: The Absolute Ground versus God*

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

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

---

<sup>12</sup> Kant 1928, 398.

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

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

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

### *Chapter 7: God – Beyond Me*

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

---

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

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