

## **The Self-Actualization of God through the Mythological Process**

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What is the purpose of creation? What is the purpose of the emergence of divisions in humanity? Why is the perfect not present from the beginning? It seems to me the only feasible answer, offered by Schelling in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, is that “God is a life, not merely a being.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the purpose of creation is the self-actualization of God. God is not fully actualized until He exists in all things, until He is “all in all.”<sup>2</sup> I would argue that God *is* in all things, but God is not fully actualized until conscious beings can conceptualize the divinity within themselves. Mythology, as a sequence of moments, rather than individual moments in themselves, represents the process of God’s self-actualization. As a process, it offers two approaches to conceptualizing God. In the first, insofar as it represents the idea of a sequence of gods (e.g., Uranus, Kronos, Zeus), it suggests the coming of a future god. In the second, the process suggests that the true God is openness itself, rather than something particular. Every time peoples make God something particular, another god emerges. The successive nature of polytheism in mythology implies that these particular gods are never adequate; they are not the *true* God and therefore are fated to be replaced. The true God is what cannot be particularized; it is what slips through our fingers every time we try to grasp it.

Ideally, both perspectives have the potential to reunify humanity. However, the first is too passive. It is unlikely that simply the anticipation of a future god will ever motivate all of humanity to truly treat each other as if they were all the “children of god,” because they can defer that responsibility to future generations. I put my faith in the second perspective. Recognizing God as openness is a more active approach, which

renders appreciating the divinity within us a present possibility, rather than the ideal of the future.

The mythological process provides a clear illustration of the movement towards the self-actualization of God, if and only if it is appreciated as a process. To understand the virtue of this perspective I find the analogy of a scavenger hunt to be very advantageous. When I was young, my mother created scavenger hunts on the first day of Spring. When I woke up, I was given the first clue, which directed me to the first of many destinations, arriving ultimately at the final objective; the basket filled with candy and trinkets. The mythological process is parallel to the Spring morning scavenger hunt in that the mythological process is composed of many moments that culminate in a goal. I will evaluate this by distinguishing two different moments in Schelling's text to make the comparison clear: (1) Every individual moment or polytheistic religion presented in mythology "is indeed false."<sup>3</sup> The falsehood or absence of truth, in each individual moment of mythology is analogous to the absence of candy at each destination preceding the final goal of the scavenger hunt. (2) "Polytheism considered in the entirety of its successive moments is the way to the truth," just as the destinations considered in the entirety of their successive moments are the way to the candy basket.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Empty Basket**

Any child who has done a scavenger hunt can appreciate the insignificance of the individual destinations, as individual destinations, for the simple reason that there is no candy at those locations. However, this realization has been more difficult for the followers of polytheistic religions throughout the course of history.

The origins of humanity were united in primordial monotheism, that is, an accidental primordial monotheism.<sup>5</sup> Initially, humanity looked to the sky. People had a sense that whatever was happening on Earth corresponded to what was happening in the heavens. The god of Heaven and Earth was the source of order, which manifested itself in the seasons. They looked to this god for rain in times of drought, and forage in times of famine. All that they needed, they believed, was granted by the sky and the Earth. Unfortunately, as different languages emerged, different names were given to this single divinity and consequently, peoples arose. These differing names transformed a once unified humanity into mortal chaos.

Mythology provides a vivid illustration of this transformation. In Greek mythology, Uranus is conceptualized as the god of primordial monotheism. However, he is not *the* God, but rather, the only god disclosed thus far in the history of mythology. His status as a finite god is revealed when a new god, his son Kronos, castrates him, usurping Uranus' divinity. In the wake of Kronos' destruction, other divinities emerge, resulting in the explosive emergence of polytheism.

Just as Uranus loses his divinity to Kronos, Elohim, the primordial divinity of the Semitic texts, loses his divinity in the Flood. Semitic religion turns to the worship of Jehovah. Just as the castration of Uranus is succeeded by the emergence of many gods, the event subsequent to the Flood is the Tower of Babel, in which different languages emerge. Different languages develop different names for the primordial sky god and consequently the common human worship of the sky god is supplanted by the worship of a multiplicity of gods. The sequence of events culminates in the emergence of nations, all founded on the worship of their own individual god.

Following the emergence of different languages, peoples of the world started a systematic particularization of all parts of their world. In the earthly realm, the once nomadic people of the world staked claim to their own plots of land. Within the genealogies presented in the Bible, post-Flood people are distinguished by their nation and their plot of land; e.g. Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus of Nazareth. The wanderers-and-foragers, who lived off the land looked to the sky for help and let the Earth be, were supplanted by farmers who cultivated and manipulated the Earth to meet their wishes. Simultaneously, they were particularizing the beings in the ethereal world, transforming the primordial god, whom they accepted as it was into various particular gods, whose characteristics they fashioned to their liking.

### **The Moment That is Divine**

As individual moments, these polytheistic religions are insufficient conduits through which one can attain the truth. As creations of God, humans certainly do not have the power to design the true God. These particular gods are delusions and by definition, delusions cannot lead us to the truth. Rather, it is in the mythological process, “in the uninterrupted interrelation, connection, coherence of its continual movement through all moments” that the truth is revealed.<sup>6</sup>

The revelations to Abraham represent the transformation of mythological process within the Bible.<sup>7</sup> In the book of Genesis, the story is told of an old man, Abraham, whose wife Sarah had borne him no children despite God’s promise that he would have as many descendents as the stars in the sky. Eventually, despite her advanced age, Sarah does conceive a child. The elderly couple cherishes their son Isaac as a miracle. However, Abraham’s love for God, or perhaps his fear for his own life, compels him to

sacrifice his only son at the command of God. One night God challenges Abraham's love, commanding Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering."<sup>8</sup> Abraham does as he is told without hesitation. However, as Abraham grasps the knife to slay his son, a manifestation of God appears to him commanding, "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him."<sup>9</sup> Instead, God provides a ram as a substitute burnt offering.

What makes this story particularly appropriate to the development of my thesis is the distinction between the god of the first and second revelation. In the original Hebrew, the god of the first revelation is identified as Elohim, the all-powerful and sublime god. This god remains detached, untouched by the calculating minds of humanity. At this point in the course of history, humanity still accepts this god as he is. On the other hand, the god that commands Abraham to stop the sacrifice is a manifestation of Elohim, Jehovah, a particular god. This is a god who has been cast in the image of the savior god, or whatever the people demand of him. Within this short passage of the Bible, it is clear that a movement is transpiring; the same movement that epitomizes the mythological process. In the history of religion, the rite of sacrifice has evolved from human to animal, to simulated sacrifice. The revolution of this sacrament is symbolic of the revolution of gods in the Bible and in mythology.

In the Bible, as in mythology, the movement through moments, the succession of gods, is perpetually moving towards a distant god who is able to deliver the Good. When we understand this movement of divinities, we retain the hope that in the future all is good; God embraces all things and shows Himself in all things. All my life I have been taught to believe in this future and the distant god that will bestow this future. I have been

advised that if I behave appropriately, if I “do unto others as I would have done unto me,” I will be rewarded in the future. I will be granted entrance into a realm of the Good, of unity. Interestingly, a similar precept can be found in all of the world’s religions.

While in theory this way of conceptualizing God is satisfying, its uncertainty deems it inadequate. It seems our understanding the mythological process this way renders it impossible to ever experience the Good in this life. Unwilling to concede to this conviction, I reevaluated the meaningfulness of establishing mythology as a movement through moments to discover God’s presence in this world.

If we all whole-heartedly lived according to the Golden Rule, mandated in all religions, we would actually be able to cultivate a realm of Good in which we all embody the Good and as such, reunite in this life. However, despite the commonality of the teachings, something interferes, rendering it impossible to reunite humanity to its primordial oneness. Religious institutions with their rites, particular deities and often, hierarchical structure, is what interferes, distracting people from the spirit of the religions. It distracts from the Word, the “Word that was with God,” and “the Word that was God.”<sup>10</sup> The Word, which can be translated as *logos*, or reason, has the potential to deliver us to the spirit, but the Church impedes our liberation. Thus, the only way to experience God in this world is through a philosophy of theology.

The first step towards developing a philosophy of theology is taking Jesus and the equivalent divinities of the other religions off their pedestals. Perceiving Jesus as a miracle worker and savior renders his Word, that we are all children of God, inaccessible. How are we to conceive that we, like he, are children of God, if we see him as such a capacious spirit? We must revolutionize our conception of Jesus, identifying him as a

man, no different than us. Then, each of us can assert: "I am a child of God, as Jesus is a child of God, as every other member of humanity is a child of God." Recognizing that we are all children of God is to recognize that we all possess divinity, and to recognize that we are all united in this way. When humanity comes to this realization, God's self-actualization will be complete. Unfortunately, people are averse to the proposition of knocking Jesus off his pedestal because he is after all *Jesus Christ, our savior*. As such, he has been particularized, which is the unfortunate propensity of humanity.

To be able to develop a philosophy of theology and consequently, confidently knock Jesus off his pedestal, we must understand that the true God is nothing in particular, but rather, openness, or Love. The mythological process, perpetually deferring divinity from one god to another clearly implies that each particular god is not the true God. Each time a people make a god particular, when they make it their own, the god loses its significance. The Bible tells us "God is Love" and thus, we must look to Love to understand what the true God is.

### **Love**

True, unconditional love, the emotion, as I have experienced it, is accepting someone as they are and even when they do something that irritates me, I accept them nonetheless. Schelling eloquently articulates the mystery of love: "that it combines what could be by itself and yet is not and cannot be without the other."<sup>11</sup> That is to say, I could be by myself, but I am not and choose not to be because I love and am loved for who I am, as I am. To be with someone and make him what you want him to be and love him only as long as he does what you like is not to truly love that person. To be truly loved is to be free to be yourself. To be falsely loved is to be what the lover wants you to be.

True, unconditional love is the true God. In contrast to the true God that is Love, or openness, the false gods are particular. To make a god particular is to give it a name and characteristics according to your liking. Peoples have throughout the mythological process particularized gods by calling out names to specific personalities when they feel the vulnerability and fragility of life. The relationship between peoples and their particular gods, like Jehovah and Kronos, are predicated on the exploitation of each other. Jehovah, a jealous god, demands the faithfulness of his people, repeatedly commanding throughout the Old Testament, “I am the one true God...You shall have no other gods before me.”<sup>12</sup> In exchange for the people’s allegiance, Jehovah grants them hope that their prayers will be answered and that he will bestow them with salvation.

This god is not free to be itself, but rather is manipulated and molded according to its people’s likings. This god who is not free to be himself will be forsaken by the people if he fails to meet their demands. Similarly, when the people forsake Jehovah, as they do repeatedly throughout the Bible, Jehovah unleashes his wrath. Both the people and their particular god are bound in their relationship. A relationship with the true God, conversely, is Love in which God and his people are free to be themselves.

We become truly free only when we act according to understanding. We attain this understanding by virtue of the *logos*. Logos cuts across all divisions. As I mentioned above, every world religion is predicated on the same precept. Jesus was fully aware of this commonality. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, “there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek (Gentiles): for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.”<sup>13</sup> In this declaration Jesus highlights the imperative truth of all humanity, which has been distorted in the course of history.

It is the particularization of gods that has hindered humanity from recognizing its intrinsic unity. The mythological process reveals the inadequacy of particularizing gods, and consequently compels us to posit the opposite, Love. When we conceive of Jesus as a specific divinity, our savior, we put him on a pedestal, rendering his word inaccessible. However, when we make him nothing in particular, a man just like any other man, his word restores its meaning. We can actually posit that we, including Jesus, are the children of God. When we act according to this understanding, that is, when we come to recognize this “absolute identity, the spirit of Love,” we treat each other with kindness and love—we live in the Good.<sup>14</sup>

God’s self-actualization is completed when every member of humanity comes to appreciate the Word and live in Love. The process of self-actualization of God is epitomized by the words of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” and also “God is Love.”<sup>15</sup> In the first proclamation, John encourages humanity to seek God in the Word, just as I have been advocating for the *logos*. Considered together, the two assertions corroborate my thesis that the Word delivers us into Love, which is God. The mythological process renders our appreciation of the Word possible. Through the mythological process, we come to understand that particularizing gods is a futile endeavor in the quest to understanding God. When we stop particularizing gods, like Jesus, we can take him off his pedestal. Doing so makes his Word accessible so that when we are subjected to his teachings, we can truly appreciate them. Understanding his Word, that “we are all God’s children,” we recognize that we all possess divinity, in other words, “God is all in all.”<sup>16</sup> When He asserts Himself in all things, God completes his actualization.

## References

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Schelling, F.W.J. "Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters." In *Philosophy of German Idealism*. Edited by Ernst Behler. NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1987.

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<sup>1</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. "Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters." *Philosophy of German Idealism*. Edited by Ernst Behler. (NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1987), 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>3</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2007), 148.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Schelling, *Freedom*, 130.

<sup>6</sup> Schelling, *Mythology*, 147.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that the transformation of the mythological process is actually disclosed in the Bible suggests its significance in the process of God's self-actualization.

<sup>8</sup> 22 Genesis.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> 1 John.

<sup>11</sup> Schelling, *Freedom*, 278.

<sup>12</sup> 20 Exodus.

<sup>13</sup> 10 Romans.

<sup>14</sup> Schelling, *Freedom*, 279.

<sup>15</sup> 1 John, 4 John.

<sup>16</sup> Schelling, *Freedom*, 276.