Contributi/2

The Concepts of Negative and Positive Necessity in Schelling's Freiheitsschrift

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The following article seeks to explain Schelling's distinction between *negative* and *positive philosophy* by discussing some of the core concepts of Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*, namely, the concepts of *Identity*, *finite-identity* and *positive-necessity* of *free will*. Obviously, the distinction between *negative* and *positive philosophy* is not explicitly present in Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*. Consequently, the article will demonstrate (and reconstruct) this concept as an implicit consequence of the *Freiheitsschrift's* investigation on *identity*, *free will* and *necessity*. Additionally, there will be minor references to other works to indicate the place of these notions within Schelling's oeuvre. The article intends to elucidate *some* of the key notions, that are needed to understand the *Freiheitsschrift*. In turn, other topics are only touched upon, if not left out. This, however, is not meant to be an indication about their significance. The article introduces the concept of *negative necessity* by elaborating the notions of *identity* and *finite-concepts* (see 1.), examining the case of Aristotle and defining *negative philosophy* (see 2.). The result attained will then be further illustrated by revisiting the topic of *free will* as it is discussed by the examples of Spinoza (see 3.) and Kant (see 4.). The final paragraph (see 5.) will introduce Schelling's notion of *positive philosophy* by discussing the nature of *free will* as the paradigm case of *positive necessity*.

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1. Identity and Necessity

In this section, I outline how the concept of necessity is employed in *negative philosophy*. Let us call the concept, thus employed *negative necessity*. Although Schelling never uses this term, what is in effect an argument for it can be found in his writings, most prominently in his *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), hereafter referred to simply as the *Freiheitsschrift*. This notion of *negative necessity* is introduced in connection with a core concept of Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*, namely *identity*[1].

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[1] One of the earliest discussions of this can be found in Schelling's *Formschrift*. F. W. J. Schelling, *Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt*, *SW* I/1, for all references see: *Sämmtliche Werke* (= SW), ed. by K. F. A. Schelling, I Abtheilung Vols. 1–10, II Abtheilung Vols. 1–4, Stuttgart 1856-61.

Commonly, *identity* is thought to be about *something* (i.e. an object). Philosophy generally tends to describe and explain *something* by using certain terms like *concept*, *quidditas*, *form* and so forth. Evidently, the meaning of these terms can vary and this will affect the way something is understood, including *identity* and *necessity*. Even so, these terms will still be based, to some degree at least, on a common notion of *identity*. This becomes apparent when one considers that these terms are commonly used to investigate or describe *things*: the word *thing* generally refers to some kind of distinct and finite object which is distinguishable from others by relying on some notion of *identity* and its determinate negation, i.e., difference. This happens always, and not only often, when we differentiate things from each other. As a matter of fact, the very word *identity* originated from the Latin pronoun *idem*, which then in the Middle Ages developed into *identitem* and thence into *identitas*[2]. The latter was used to designate the fact that things seem to keep their distinct way of being in contrast to other things *across* (at least some interval of) *time*. If we abstract from our practice of identification, the result on the level of the things we refer to is commonly understood as *sameness*. Insofar as terms like *quidditas, concept* and so forth are understood as referring to *something*, they are all defined by the inherited notion of *relative sameness*, i.e., sameness relative to, or across, time, which is also regarded as a form of *identity*: certain relevant aspects or parts of things remain the same for some time or even forever (Aristotle, for example, considered the prime mover to be everlasting, since its identity is defined as unchangeable[3].) Furthermore, this notion of *identity* is also *relative* in the sense that its sameness is understood in contrast to a notion of an object of change, i.e. matter.

According to Schelling, it is not uncommon to misunderstand the notion of *identity*[4]. If the understanding of *identity* is, however, being tied to a certain notion of things and knowledge, the notion of *free will* will be restricted. Since this affects the whole of philosophy, this common misunderstanding is worrying[5]. Consequently, to misunderstand *identity* also means to misunderstand the very nature of things. This becomes increasingly apparent when we reflect on different notions of *identity* – as they are used as methodical paradigms in definitions and judgements, for example in mathematical propositions. The problem is that we typically use one sign and model for all kinds of *identities*, namely «=». The same holds for ordinary language and the copula «is the same as», understood

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[2] S. Knuuttila, *Supposition and Predication in Medieval Trinitarian Logic*, in *Supposition Theory Revisited*, ed. by E. P. Bos, Leiden 2013, pp. 206-274, here p. 265.

[3] Aristotle, *On the Heavens,* I, p. 270a28.

[4] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift*, *SW* I/7, p. 344.

[5] «Da jedoch kein Begriff einzeln bestimmt werden kann und die Nachweisung seines Zusammenhangs mit dem Ganzen ihm auch erst die letzte wissenschaftliche Vollendung gibt; welches bei dem Begriff der Freiheit vorzugsweise der Fall sein muss, der, wenn er überhaupt Realität hat, kein bloß untergeordneter oder Nebenbegriff, sondern einer der herrschenden Mittelpunkt des Systems sein muß: so fallen jene beiden Seiten der Untersuchung hier, wie überall, in eines zusammen» (*ibid.*, p. 331).

as expressing such an equation, i.e., merely «=»[6]. Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* offers many aspects and examples of how *identity* can be misunderstood in this manner, some of them in a discussion of Spinoza and Kant. Their philosophies are presented as different types of *negative philosophy*. According to Schelling, *difference* in types of *negative philosophy* are possible because, on the one hand, *negative identity* and *negative philosophy* derive from a prevalent methodical prioritisation of *negative necessity*. Yet, on the other hand, each philosophy is defined by a different set of inherited problems, conceptual distinctions, and methodical arrangements. Thus, the result of each philosophy is to be understood as a different type of *negative philosophy* as well. As a result, it is not easy to define *negative philosophy* because it is not easy to explain the notions of negativity, *identity* and *necessity* which determine when a philosophy is to be regarded as negative. Nevertheless, I will argue that *negative philosophy* is generally definable by its methodical application of *negative necessity* and (*negative*) *identity*. To do so, it is necessary to explain the notion of *identity* underlying *negative philosophy*. Towards this end, let us first discuss two major presuppositions of *negative identity*. These presuppositions are not independent of one another, but they are emphasized in different ways by different protagonists of *negative philosophy*. The first presupposition may be called *the thesis of the genetic independence of knowledge*, the second *the thesis of the finite identity of things*.

The *genetic independence thesis of conceptual knowledge* can be summarized as follows: the being and nature of things can be understood and described in relative independence from the temporal-dynamic nature of their existence, that is, the character of each and every thing as exposed to change over time, as something which has come into existence some time ago and will probably cease to exist sometime in the future. This inherent changeability and temporality do not limit, but neither do it guide conceptualization as knowledge. Hence, the nature of each thing can be grasped in relative independence of its character as an existent, hence as an object of becoming. The *genetic independence thesis of conceptual knowledge* is often considered a principal necessary condition of the concept of something either already gone or yet to come into existence, i.e., for the concept of something not present. Its *relative* independence is also considered evidence (among others) for its generality. To this extent, it is often considered a reliable starting point for philosophical investigations. One famous example of this can be found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. According to Aristotle, the epistemological abilities of humans allow for general knowledge of something. This knowledge is held to be true regardless of the ever-changing matter of the very thing that allowed its perception in the first place[7]. Knowledge is regarded as *relatively* independent from its object (the finite thing). This is because the nature of becoming, being and existence is not considered as something that rescinds, allows for, explains, or restricts, the validity of a concept in a more

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 345.
[7] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, II/1, p. 994a27.

fundamental way than the concept itself. Or, to put the matter differently: the verbalization of being, existence and becoming is subjected to the precedence of conceptual knowledge and is subsequently judged by its inherent standards of conceptual clarity and logic. In consequence, the subjection and prioritisation of (seemingly) temporal-dynamic independent concepts works as a touchstone for every judgement about objects of knowledge. Hence, the modes, phenomena and dynamics of existence are subjected to and judged by the predominant methodical notion of relative conceptual independence. This notion prioritizes the available conceptual logic at the time before the fundamental notion of existence as *ground* of being (Schelling, thus, distinguishes between existence as mere content or finite being and existence as the un-thingend ground of being/existence). Most commonly, this is done by referring to certain concepts as methodical paradigms for the general possibility of a-temporal, everlasting conceptual truth[8], i.e. the definitions of mathematics[9]. However, this does not determine that knowledge is, can or cannot be fully independent from the things to be known. There may be different opinions about the relationship between things and knowledge within the shared framework of *negative identity*. Nevertheless, knowledge is undoubtedly acquired within time and space. In order for knowledge to qualify as independent from the temporal-dynamic aspects of things, it must be considered as the sole conceptual ruler of the temporal-dynamic notions of being that may appear within its framework phenomenally[10].

This is mirrored by the second presupposition of *negative necessity*: *the thesis of the finite identity of things*. According to this assumption, the explanatory logic of identity is generally thought to be analogous to logical or mathematical equations: every case of identity is to be explicated as a set of conceptual elements which are ordered in virtue of something, i.e. a general principle or concept. The finitude of the elements of conceptual definitions like this is often twofold[11]: 1) to be intelligible, the explanatory logic of *finite-identity* elements is limited by their adherence to general logic and the conceptual framework at hand. 2) But every element is also defined by its distinction to others. The individuality of these elements is thus articulated as a set of explicable properties and so every definable element of an identity can also be subjected to further definition. To equate something with that discursive explication of its identity is to state its conceptual conditions. These conditions constitute the sameness of the thing at issue, in abstraction from those conditions which we cannot fully verbalize as finite elements, for example being, existence, change and time (obviously, the condition of individuality is of utmost importance for the empiricist

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[8] F. W. J. Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung*, *SW* II/1, p. 296 and p. 518.
[9] Notable examples are: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I/2, p. 982a24f., R. Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, eds. C. Adams, P. Tannery, Paris 1983, pp. 20-21, I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. B23 ff. and B. Spinoza, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*. For further reading, see: U. Goldenbaum, *The Geometrical Method*, «The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy», https://www.iep.utm.edu/geo-meth, last accessed 25.12.19.
[10] T. Nitz, *Absolutes Identitätssystem*, Marburg 2012, p. 64.
[11] Spinoza's philosophy is a notable exception within the tradition of *negative philosophy*, see 3.

approaches/features of *negative-philosophy*. This is because, every notion of determinate single-track causal necessitation of one thing by another depends on the existence of distinguishable objects. If this condition, however, is understood in the framework of *negative-necessity*, it will lead to an epistemological problem.

It is noteworthy that the logic of mathematics and formal syllogisms is defined by its abstraction from time and being. This is required to establish the seemingly exact, clear, and definite framework of mathematics and formal logic[12]. *Negative philosophy* aspires to a similar systematic exactitude, clarity, and certainty. Obviously, most of the topics with which philosophy is concerned emerged some time ago. They thus exhibit certain temporal-dynamic features of being. To achieve systematic clarity, becoming and existence are described in the same way as all other elements of a *finite-identity-definition*. As a result, the explanatory logic of *negative philosophy* subjects the way things come into being and their original existence to their finitude[13]. In other words, if the *finite-identity-thesis* is employed, the nature of existence and becoming cannot be understood or explained as something of its own. Instead, becoming, existence and being are understood or explained as if they were things or definite entities among others.

2. Negative Necessity and Philosophy

Speaking of things, as it has been outlined above, presupposes that it is generally possible to distinguish between the thing at hand and the appropriated knowledge, that is the result of its conceptualization. This seemingly enables the articulation of the very principle(s) coercing the condition (or nature) of the thing and its elements to be what they are, independently of the temporal-dynamic basis for being so, including its history, ground and mode of existence. One example for this is the formal definition of a triangle, which is taken to capture what a triangle essentially or necessarily is. Its definition is often taken to be truly necessary and sufficient[14]. In this sense, to describe something as necessary in a given framework, for example, geometry[15], is to assert a condition that seemingly results solely from certain concepts that are used to characterize the *negative identity* of a finite thing. This allows us to define *negative necessity*: *Negative necessity* is a certain kind of coercion. It is part and parcel of the nature and application of concepts which are formed without regard to the categories that articulate becoming, existence and being as non-thingend beings.

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[12] By this, Schelling refers to Plato's *Republic*, p. 511b-c. According to Plato, formal mathematics is neither defined by nor oriented towards the notion of being, it is based on, but by a set of assumptions, which can be gained by abstraction from being. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie, SW* II/1, p. 265.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 377-378.
[14] R. Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, pp. 64-65.
[15] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift, SW* I/7, p. 332.

The elements of a *finite-identity-definition* adhere to their general concept, their genus, as well as the current logic at hand. Consequently, *negative necessity* is to be understood as the only kind of coercion that *negative identity* allows for: coercion by conceptual definition according to the rules of logic, that presupposes the subjection of the existential-temporal-dynamic grounding of its object. (On a side note, this also holds true for the agent and the act of definition itself). These concepts and rules may, of course, be articulated in different ways, i.e. as a seemingly realistic ontology or as mere forms of subjective understanding.

Indeed, both forms of *negative philosophy* often strive for some understanding of time and being. Yet *negative identity* is defined by its inherent subjection of existence because of its inherent predominance of conceptual knowledge. Even though its protagonists may think otherwise, this allows for a notion of coercion which is only conceptually intelligible within the framework of *finite-identity*. Everything inferable is like it is according to the standards of logic and syllogism. In the process, the object of the syllogism (the finite thing) is predominantly understood as an object of inferring rather than as an original ground of, and yardstick for experiencing and demonstrating itself in its own right[16]. If the object of inferring, were regarded as an original ground of experience, being and discursive differentiations, it would be regarded as an existence that allows for conceptual distinctions predominantly in virtue its own original laws and way of being. In this case, it cannot be ruled out that the existent in question could also be characterized by a dimension (or an element) of individuality that cannot be articulated in terms of *negative identity* yet must be somehow present within our experience and grasp.

An illustration of what is meant by *negative necessity* can be found in Aristotle's *On the Heavens*. His proof of the prime mover constitutes one of the most influential arguments of this sort in the history of philosophy. According to Schelling, the definition of something perfect allows or forces Aristotle to conclude its existence: the movements of celestial bodies are defined as perfectly self-contained[17], hence the only movement that can continue forever[18]. Consequently, celestial bodies cannot be subject to any kind of gravity and are unchangeable. Nevertheless, celestial bodies still belong to the materiality of nature, so their eternal movement and origin cannot be uncaused. Since the movement of the celestial bodies is unchangeable, the cause of their movement must guarantee its persistence without any potentiality for change. But something inherently unchangeable cannot be transient. Therefore, something exists without any materiality, defined by pure action and actuality[19]: the unchangeable and everlasting prime mover of the celestial bodies. The processual relations between substantial things are to be understood as actions of change

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[16] F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, *SW* II/1, p. 261.
[17] Aristotle, *On the Heavens,* I, p. 270a28.
[18] Aristotle, *Physics,* VIII, and *Metaphysics*, XII 6, p. 1071b11.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 1071b12–22.

brought about by the prime mover. The latter can't be subjected to any change[20]. According to Aristotle, however, change without any internal material change is the very definition of thinking[21]. Moreover, thinking is a property of living beings. Consequently, the prime mover must also be alive[22]. At this point, Aristotle's proof may be understood as proof of the existence of God.

For Schelling, considerations like this demonstrate the limits of the logic of *negative necessity* rather than the existence of God[23]: *negative necessity* is only viable *as a post-hoc-demonstration* and articulation of the logic that an existing thing allows for within a certain set of laws (see 5.). To a certain extent, Aristotle *seems to* agree; but he also implicitly stipulates a perfect conceptual harmony that allows for a definition of God and its existence. Yet to do so, one must assume that the perfectness of God only relates to his definable properties. This can only be done by ignoring the fact that a perfect being cannot be bound by its definition and our corresponding knowledge without detriment to its capacity to disregard or change its definition and logic at any time. One is conceiving God in a manner which negates God's *free will* because it binds God to a more manageable as well as seemingly intelligible *finite-identity definition.* Although God is conceived as perfect, with regard to the properties which inhere in Him, God's being itself is not recognized as its own original ground of being and the determinant and sovereign of its concept. The notion of God is thus misunderstood (this is why Schelling, among others, does prefer to describe the notion of God rather in terms of its *absoluteness* than its *perfectness*).

From this perspective, the very idea of an actual perfect conceptual harmony between knowledge and God is to be considered as a twofold hypostasis: firstly, Aristotle's proof is merely an iteration of his presupposed subjection of existence and being in favour of inferring from concepts and definitions. Secondly, *finite-identity concepts* are conditioned by what is already known or assumed about finite things. Neither unknown possibilities nor unknown actualities, the nature of being and becoming *tout court*, can be articulated as (de)finite. So, Aristotle's conceptual harmony is a twofold overestimation of the status (hypostasis) of conceptual knowledge. Even so, proofs such as his are still helpful since they allow one to clarify the usage and methodical scope of *negative necessity* and philosophy in general. Erroneous ways of thinking need to be rigorously pursued to expose their limitations. Aristotle may be wrong, but he is also paradigmatic for rigorous thinking and clarity. Additionally, deductive thought and *finite-identity concepts* certainly do have their proper place both in everyday life and in most routine science and philosophy.

This example demonstrates why *negative necessity* cannot be understood without taking the concept of *negative identity* into account: *negative necessity* is

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 1072a26.
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 1074b34.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 1072b23.
[23] F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, *SW* II/1, p. 272, p. 299.

coercion by temporal-dynamic abstract concepts. It is therefore bound to a set of already appropriated concepts of things as possible objects of *finite-identity*. As the Aristotelian Simplikios noted, within this framework, even the analysis of nature results in physics about (all) *things* (ta physika panta pragmata[24]) rather than in a theory about the physics of the all (tou pantos phuseos[25]).

The subject accepts certain rules which define both the thing it is concerned with as an object of knowledge and its own relation to it. If the identity of things is defined negatively, the appropriate rules are formed in abstraction from, and suppression of, both the temporal-dynamic aspects and the associated distinction between the logic of finite things and its ground of being, that is existence as the un-thingend condition of being. In this respect, *negative necessity* does not differ from the routines of formal logic and mathematics. The latter disciplines investigate their topics quite successfully without investigating the temporally-dynamic being of its objects. Their method is often presented as a timeless example of precise or exact thinking, i.e. by Aristotle and Kant[26].

Undoubtedly, formal logic and mathematics investigate their objects successfully. But they do not seek to explain the underlying notion of force (or compulsion) that is implied in the notion of conceptual and deductive coercion. Similarly, *negative philosophy* does restrict the scope and presentation of its topics by basing its method on the paradigm of *negative necessity*, successfully used by formal logic and mathematics. Therefore, *negative philosophy* implies certain thematic restrictions without being able to substantiate its use of *negative necessity* in advance. In consequence, *negative philosophy* is unable to explain the force and origins of coercion appropriately. Yet in contrast to formal logic and mathematics, these topics are not insignificant for its own investigations. In summary: if *negative necessity* is employed consistently enough, it will result in a methodical prioritisation of conceptual logic that superordinates the conditions it is based on, that is, becoming, existence and being which allows the abstraction by *finite-concepts* in the first place.

This permits definition of *negative philosophy:* first, the adjective *negative* marks the methodological decision to entertain *negative necessity* as well to rely on its results, namely the aforementioned negation of certain contents[27] and methods. While each *negative philosophy* is defined by the same standard of *negative necessity*, it is important to note that this is not the case for the related concept of *negative identity*. Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* provides an example for this when it compares the philosophies of Spinoza and Kant. Obviously, the philosophies of these two thinkers are quite different. Thus, each is based on

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[24] Simplicius, *In Physiciam*, p. 198.28; P. Lautner, New York 2013.

[25] Platon, *Timaeus*, p. 47a, 27a5. For further reading: Schelling: *Timaeus*, in *Schellingiana IV*, ed. by H. Buchner, Bad Cannstatt 1994. For further reading: G. Hamilton, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, New York 2008.

[26] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 1005b19; I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. B XXIII. Frankfurt am Main 2009.

[27] In this respect, the late Schelling characterizes the method of *negative philosophy* as «via exclusionis» (F. W. J. Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung*, *SW* II/3, p. 71).

a different case of *negative identity*. Spinoza's *Ethic* starts out with a definition of God as an essence whereas Kant begins his investigation in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* with the topic of judgement in order to explicate in analytical fashion the elements necessarily constitutive of it. Yet both avail themselves of the same notion of *negative necessity*, as can be seen by their shared admiration for mathematics.

The word *negative* derives from the Latin word *negare/nego* as *to negate* as well as *to deny.* Obviously the first translation is commonly understood in a predominantly logical or abstractly mathematical sense. It thus fits well with a conception of mathematics as a methodological paradigm for philosophy. Yet the verb *to deny* is also fitting: it marks the fact that the application and reality of *negative necessity* is only possible insofar as one from the outset denies its fundamental dependence on origin in the nature of existence. Without a prior dynamic of becoming and being, neither action nor change would ever be possible. Naturally, this also includes the dynamics of coercing/force itself, even if its formal representation and content may *appear* to be fully independent from time, being and space.

Schelling reflects on this in his *Freiheitsschrift* (among other writings): even the tautology a=a is not truly without a temporal-dynamic dimension of being. The equation defines the anterior as something that remains the same *after* being related to itself. Thus, the posterior is a consequence of the continued existence of the anterior[28]. Tautologies are often used to express or introduce a trite logical relation. But to do so one must assume that the subject of understanding comprehends one part of the equation after another. This sequence in time allows to understand the meaning of the sentence, which expresses the tautology, as well as the intention and rules of the given framework, i.e., the inherent exclusion of certain dimensions, i.e. time, existence and being. In consequence, the anterior can be considered free of merely being its anterior. Every finite identity is as infinite as the underlying temporal-dynamic is based on allows for. As Schelling's discussion of Spinoza shows, this is often overlooked.

3. Spinoza's Gambit

Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* addresses the topic of *negative necessity* by discussing concepts such as identity as well as by example, most prominently Kant and Spinoza. The philosophies of both authors are, of course, quite different. Yet Schelling presents each philosophy as the counterpart of the other within the shared framework of *negative identity* and *negative necessity*. And according to Schelling both find themselves in error about the nature of *free will* because of how they understand identity.

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[28] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift*, *SW* I/7, p. 344-346.

Spinoza's pantheism is characterized by a notion of finite things, which is formed in disregard of the aforementioned distinction between *individual* existence and general concepts. This is done to provide a more unified explanation by *finite-identity concepts*[29]. Schelling thus argues that Spinoza's rejection of *free will* is not the result of pantheism but rather a consequence of his notion of identity[30]. If identity is understood as a mere relation of conceptual elements necessitated by a more general concept, then there is no concept that is not necessitated by another. In consequence the only notion of necessity available is negative coercion by concepts which do not refer to anything conceptually independent. This means that there is no necessitation nor unconditioned change of something according to itself (that is *free will*) in contrast to any of its definitions by *finite-concepts*. This is even true for God: if every element of God is necessitated by its concept, the name «God» does not refer to something different than the logic of its concepts. In other words: no concept is available for something not conceptually necessitated; there is no-thing in virtue of itself. Spinoza thus rejects the second of the two aspects distinguished of the concept of *finite identity* (see 1.).

In this way, Spinoza unwittingly sheds some light on a possible fallacy of *negative necessity* and *negative identity*: the conceptually implied genetic dependence of one thing on another does not prevent something from being truly independent in and of itself[31]. The conviction that it does may be named the *genetic fallacy* (Spinoza certainly did not think of it as a fallacy, nor as a specific problem. So, it also may be named as the *genetic thesis*.) At first glance, this fallacy seems easy to avoid. For example, most people would think that a child is relatively independent of its parents. It does, after all, move by itself. It can therefore be recognized independently of its folks. This assumption is, of course, also of utmost importance for the more empiricist protagonists of *negative-philosophy* like John Locke[32] and Aristotle. But one may note an epistemological dimension of the *genetic fallacy*: if something is itself predominantly in and of itself, then it is relatively independent of the concepts that are used to express its being. In this case, the conceptual determination of being is, at best, only viable as a careful *post-hoc* articulation of the present status, which does not determine its possibilities of change by itself. (Hence its future may be in contrast to its present concept.) Thus, it may not be entirely comprehended by something other than itself, it cannot be understood in terms of the antecedent logic of its anterior, for example its history and conceptual dependencies. To put it differently: it is not entirely explainable within a framework of definite conceptual determination.

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[29] F. W. J. Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung*, *SW* II/1, p. 275.

[30] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift*, *SW* I/7, p. 348.

[31] «Aber Abhängigkeit hebt Selbstständigkeit, hebt sogar Freiheit nicht auf. Sie bestimmt nicht das Wesen und sagt nur, daß das Abhängige, was auch es auch immer sein möge, nur als Folge von dem sein könne, von dem es abhängig ist; sie sagt nicht, was es sei und nicht sei» (*ibid.*, p. 346).

[32] F. W. J. Schelling, *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, *SW* I,10.

Yet any notion of conceptual determination by genetic dependence of one thing by another (like a species is defined by its genus), is based on the assumption, that the finitude of its objects allows for a definite logic of its dependencies. If there is a being, that cannot be properly defined by finite concepts, then the extent and structure of its relation to its own concept may not be graspable. This is true regardless of whether conceptual logic is understood solely in the framework of Spinoza's geometric necessity or within the framework of a full-fledged Aristotelian ontology. The *genetic fallacy* may at first glance seem easy to avoid. But it does lead to an epistemological problem: if a being is not entirely defined by the logic of its anterior (for example its history, origins, conceptual or logic dependencies like its genus), then it is not truly definable within a framework, that is based on the generality of logic. Yet any science is based on generality and, at least to some degree, deduction by concepts. Therefore, from the viewpoint of Spinoza, the *genetic fallacy* can be reassessed as a profound thesis as well as truly consequential basis for conceptual deduction and science.

In this way, Spinoza's philosophy can be described as a radicalization of Aristotle and Descartes: Aristotle retains some notions which contradict his approach mostly because his arguments involve a mixture of deduction, descriptive phenomenology, and empirical claims. Descartes, on the other hand, may be considered a more radical protagonist of deductive method and negative *finite-identity concepts*. Yet he does not apply his method fully to the notion of God. To preserve God's independent will, Descartes attributes to God unknowable properties[33]. From Spinoza's perspective, this is an inconsistent restriction of deductive method. For this reason, Spinoza castigates Descartes' recourse to unknowable properties as the *asylum ignorantiae*[34], an asylum which undermines the validity of his method by methodical ignorance. For if God possesses unrecognizable properties, it ultimately cannot be excluded that God possesses some unknowable reason to thwart the epistemic capacities of human beings. Clearly, if this is so, then Descartes' proof of God's goodness accomplishes nothing, because it is need for a *finite-identity* concept of God.

The case of Spinoza demonstrates that *negative necessity* cannot be consistently maintained without giving up any non-negative notion of identity (for example *free will, individuality* and *originality*). One famous example of this is the concept of soul as *auto kath' auto, that is,* as something which exists according to itself in and through itself as an original reality in its own right, in contrast to its generalizable concept as something finite. According to this, the identity relation A=A is only intelligible if every part of the equation is entirely defined by the other as well as by the general logic which allows for the relation in the first place. To understand the equation otherwise would mean to presuppose a necessitation of identity that is not fully definable within general

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[33] R. Descartes, *Principia Philosophiae*, § 41.
[34] B. Spinoza, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata, Pars Prima De Deo Apendix*, Hamburg 2010, p. 80.

logic (this is exactly what Schelling proposes as the positive point of departure for his critique of *negative philosophy*).

Spinoza's popularity among post-Kantian philosophers stems from this open-minded gambit: he sacrifices what he considers to be a neglectable pawn, that is, certain notions of philosophy like *individuality*, *originality* and *free will* – in order to achieve conceptual clarity and coherence within a framework of *negative necessity*. His philosophy may be mechanical and fatalistic; but it does not suffer from inner inconsistency. This poses an important challenge. Undoubtedly, it is not easy to grasp an alternative to Spinoza's gambit: If something is *predominantly being itself by itself,* then the application of generalize-able concepts is subjected and limited by its originality.

4. Kant's Castling

Spinoza's gambit did not remain uncontested, for one of the sacrificed pawns is indispensable: the notion of *free will*. This is best demonstrated by Kant's antinomy of *free will*[35]: if there is no *free will*, there is nobody that will act according to himself. Yet, every judgement is an act authorized by someone. Arguments, however, are always presented and comprehended as judgements. Therefore, any argument against *free will* leads to contradiction since there cannot be judgement without someone's authority. This does not prove the positive reality of *free will,* but it discloses its assumption as a *negative necessity* analytically contained within the concept of judgement.

Kant's critique of pure reason offers an analysis of the limits of method and knowledge within the framework of *finite-identity concepts*. As a result, he seems to avoid the antinomy while maintaining its framework. According to Kant, knowledge is always conditioned and limited by the nature of the subject as well as by the objects its nature allows to perceive. If, however, the subjective basis of judgement is analysed as a matter of *finite-identity*, then the nature of the subject is thoroughly conditioned by the logic of *finite-identity concepts*, including its epistemic abilities. This allows Kant to maintain three theses: a) the analysis of the categories of judgement as well as the forms of conception is necessitated by an underlying *finite-identity* concept of judgement. Transcendental philosophy proceeds in the fashion of deductive-analytics and mathematics. Judgements can be the object of analysis like any other object of scientific method; b) Every judgement is the realization of a concept by a subject of understanding; c) understanding is thoroughly conditioned by a twofold notion of limits: it is immanently defined by elements that can be presented and predicated within the limited framework of its *finite-identity* concept. Yet, transcendental analysis is also limited by the non-predicable conditions of judgements it is based on. *Free will* is our example at hand as it is defined as the capacity for *unconditioned*

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[35] I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. B 454.

spontaneity[36]. *Negative philosophy* treats its objects as *conditioned* (and therefore analysable) by the logic of *finite-identity concepts*. Consequently, *free will* cannot be predicated within its framework without contradiction. As is well-known, Kant considers this true for every positive predication of the non-objectifiable basis of judgements, for example, the *thing-in-itself*, which can only be *negatively* indicated.

Kant develops his notion of pure reason while demonstrating the functional role of these non-conceptual conditions for judgements. At the same time, he denies the possibility of any positive predication of these conditions. Consequently, certain conceptual elements immanently point towards something primordial and prior to the subjective part of conceptual experience. The aforementioned notion of being/existence, for example, indicates something, that precedes its conceptualization as a thing or category of *finite-identity concepts* by being there in the first place. According to Kant, this notion is distinguishable from the definable concept of judgments and the like: The latter are definable by *finite-identity concepts*, the resulting notion of conceptual content is not. To maintain a notion of content, which is not entirely the result of mere *conceptual necessity*, conceptual content must be defined in contrast to the analytic form of *finite-identity concepts*. If the spontaneity of experience is to be explained, its occurrence cannot be entirely explained by the necessitation of *finite-identity concepts*. For this reason, Kant is in need for the indicative term of *thing in-itself*. To distinguish these from the contents of finite-conceptual knowledge, he refers to term by the name *idea*. An *idea* cannot be the object of definite predication, but indicates a necessity, that is not comprehensible within the framework of *negative-philosophy*.

Spinoza's gambit amounted to the abandonment of certain key notions in philosophy, e.g. *free will*. Kant's antinomy of *free will* gave reason to deny this move without being exposed to the *genetic fallacy*. But in order to do so, Kant had to counter Spinoza's gambit by a castling, as it were: he moved his key piece, the king of *free will*, into the corner of the *idea* instead of letting it stand in the lucid centre of the chess board. This was done to protect the self-necessitating character of judgements, from the more aggressive moves of *negative philosophy*. The king, however, remained unmovable and was obscured by the queen, that is, by *negative necessity*. The latter secretly still dominates the board. Put differently: Kant does recognize the notion of *free will* as its own ground and as a non finite principle of all judgement, but his attempt to articulate and justify the notion is constrained by the framework of *negative philosophy*.

This poses some problems: 1) First of all, *free will* is conceived something specific and original when understood as an *unconditioned spontaneity*. The reality of *free will* can, however, neither be positively proven nor ever be the subject of intelligible experience. So Kant is unable to explain the fact that one experiences

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[36] I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. B 561.

free will as something specific in its own right[37] rather than, for example a mere psychological effect besides others. As the same time, *free will* is a key piece of his philosophy. As Schelling rhetorically asks in *Freiheitsschrift:* why does one elevate the notion of *free will* to the pinnacle of one's philosophy if it can neither be grasped by concepts nor ever be a possible object of one's feelings and reasonable thoughts[38]? Morever, Kant acknowledges that *free will* cannot be articulated as a *finite-identity*[39]. Yet he is able to characterize it as conceptually different (as an *idea*), for example, as the capacity for self-necessitation, as a preceding condition for judgements etc. This is because, if the truth to be told, there are no pure concepts truly separable from the realm of ideas and the ground of existence, since the notion of *idea* does not allow to articulate the predicative distinctions, which are required for this. Analysing concepts in the fashion of mathematics may be helpful. But both *negative necessity* and the notion of analytic lucidity inherent to it are constituted by disregarding a certain presence *within* every concept and judgement, that is indicated by the term *idea*. 2) Secondly, it is rather strange that Kant still adheres to the framework of *negative philosophy*: his critique had already exposed its limited scope and debunked its inherent notion of pure conceptual lucidity by indicating its dependence on *ideas*. These are certainly not lucidly present within this framework, but they are present nonetheless. In this respect, it remains unclear why Kant did not propose another methodological framework or recognize the need for a different notion of knowledge, method and concept. More importantly, it raises the question of why Kant did not posit the notion of *free will* as a self-necessitated ground for the applicability of negative *finite-concepts*. That he did not do so is odd inasmuch as the antinomy of *free will* cannot be convincing unless one assumes *free will* as (at least to some degree) an object of reasonable thought and of *some* positive content.

But the answer to this questions is in fact simple and has already been alluded to in the discussion of Spinoza's gambit: if one embraces the concept of *negative necessity*, then certain topics only remain possible if one abandons the methodological paradigm. Kant no less than Spinoza equates method not only with deductive thought, *finite-identity concept,* and *negative necessity* but also with the nature of rationality in general. Therefore, neither philosopher is willing to give up *negative philosophy*. For *negative philosophy* excludes all objects that may endanger the lucidity and logic of this notion of rationality. Kant limits rationality, in order to preserve *free will*. Yet this solution falls short as a counter to Spinoza's gambit: introduction of certain *ideas* by negative indication still presupposes something beyond the limits of *negative philosophy*, as something in its own right, in contrast to and distinct from its generalizable *finite concept*. Thus, Kant cannot rule the possibility out that *ideas* such as that of *free will* will distort the scope and applicability of *negative rationality* in unknowable

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[37] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift, SW* I/7, p. 333.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 351.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 351.

ways. Consequently, there is no truly rational explanation for the success of rationality within this framework. In fact, *ideas* may just as well be a result of unknowable confusion or subconscious factors because of the unknowable and uncontrollable hidden side of the limits of understanding. If both the scope of deductive and analytic demonstration is limited by, and its concepts are at least partly dependent on, unknowable conditions and forces, we may never know their true value and proper application. Thus, Kant's *negative philosophy* is neither lucid nor stable and secure, especially when compared with its role model mathematics. While it is true that *free will* is indispensable for any model of rationality, it is also true that rationality is not the sole determinant of its conditions. Kant's failure permits one to see this with unprecedented clarity. It is for this reason that Schelling praises Kant as the pinnacle of *negative philosophy*[40] as well as the starting point for his own undertaking, namely, *positive philosophy*.

5. The Positive Necessity of Free Will

So far, *free will* was discussed regarding its *explanatory* function within the framework of *negative philosophy*. For the most part, the practical dimensions of this framework were omitted. Nonetheless, *negative philosophy* is also unable to properly comprehend the practical dimensions of *free will*. To prove this, the *Freiheitsschrift* examines the notion of *evil*. Based on these considerations, the concepts of *positive-necessity* and *positive-philosophy* will be introduced.

As stated, *negative philosophy* is unable to fully comprehend the practical dimensions of *free will*. This is best shown by contrasting the notion of *evil* with that of goodness and badness. The latter two can be explained, at least to some degree, by *negative philosophy*: goodness can be presented as the accorded realization of all necessary elements of a (de)finite concept, which is mostly understood as *essence*. Conversely, badness can be presented as a lack of realization, that is traditionally described in terms of *privation*: A bad person is unable to realize the concept of a reasonable being, most likely due to lack of comprehension. It is important to note, that this kind of explanation can be applied to lifeless *things* as well. The goodness of a bathtub, for example, can also be presented as the realization of all necessary elements of its (de)finite concept. In both cases, the object seems to be comprehensible within the framework of *finite-identity concepts*. This does not, however, hold true for the phenomenon of *evil*. Firstly, *evil* is not defined by any lack of competence. On the contrary, it requires the ability to comprehend concepts masterly as well as their associated normative standards, in order to perverse them in a targeted manner. Secondly, *evil* cannot be presented as the realization of a (de)finite concept or *essence,* since it does not necessitate any good. Thirdly, *evil* is neither necessarily conditioned

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[40] F. W. J. Schelling, *Andere Deduktion der Principien der positiven Philosophie*, *SW* II/3, pp. 152 ff.

by motive nor bound to logic, as it is not defined by any lack, including a lack of *free* will any conceptual necessitation. Hence the 'logic' of the phenomena of *evil* can only be *stated* (but not defined) by reference to its irreducible being, that is, the mere possibility to be truly unreasonable. *Evil* is uncoerced *will*, which puts itself in the place of *necessitation* by reasoning, it is, as Schelling puts it, *Eigenwille*[41].

Unsurprisingly, *negative philosophy* tends to downplay or divert the phenomenon of *evil*, for example by enclosing it to the realms of psychological privation, like Aristotle, or faith, as Kant did. Yet, if *free will* is not considered as some *thing* or as a mere *concept* of *finite-identity*, then *evil* can be adequately addressed. From this point of view, *free will* can be articulated as the irreducible ability for unconditioned coercion and necessitation by action, be it evil or some degree of goodness[42]. Though, *evil* is not truly definable by *finite-identity concepts*, it can be *stated*, *felt*[43], *evinced* or *presented* (more on this later). *Positive necessitation* can thus be *presented* as follows: *Positive-necessitation* is coercing by becoming, limiting, ruling, defining, dominating, relating and creation of *being* (including concepts) by action in unconditioned accordance to one's self. This includes, among others, the ability to *act* according to concepts and *being* as well as to negate and divert their current logic. Being able to create and divert what is, means to unconditionally define what can be known and conceptualized by *finite-concepts*. To put it differently: *free will* allows to reverse, define, and create conceptual and normative standards by *action* without being externally necessitated by any- *thing* or *being*. Yet, most importantly, *free will* also allows to subject or subjugate one's self to any set of rules. *Negative-necessity*, thus, is to be *presented* as the result of conceptual self-restriction by the *positive internal necessitation* of one's own set of assumptions. Against this background, *evil* can be presented as follows: *evil* is unregulated *positive-necessitation* of badness. This is because, its action takes advantage of concepts as well as the order of reason and being without being guided nor necessitated by its inherent logic or intent. Action, thus, without any intelligible guidance, is perversion of intent, motive and *will*. In conclusion: the *origins* of *evil* can be understood. Though, it is not de(fineable) or intent, since *evil* is nothing more then the mere realization of the possibility for unintelligible badness, vileness and so forth. In return, *good will* is defined by the subjection will to the original intention, tendency, or direction of the ground of existence, that is, the unconditioned ground of being[44].

There are, of course, many important things to say about this. To add to this description, however, would be questionable, without clarifying the concepts it is based on. Three examples for this are Schelling's notions of *existence* (as a term for a discrete being as well as the unconditioned ground of

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[41] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift, SW* I/7, p. 389.

[42] «Der reale und lebendige Begriff aber ist, daß sie [Freiheit – annotation by Till Ermisch] ein Vermögen des Guten und Bösen sey» (*ibid.*, p. 352).

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 414.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 389.

being), *identity* and his extended notion of representation of contents, that is, his revaluation of the nature of judgements, feelings and language. As has been alluded to before, *evil* is rather *presented* and *evinced* by words, then it is definable by *finite-identity concepts*. In order to achieve a better understanding of these notions, the final parts of the *Freiheitsschrift* outlines an alternative approach to philosophy, later known as *positive-philosophy*. This is done by discussing the relationship of the aforementioned notions: it has been said, that *existence* is not fully comprehendible within the framework of *finite-identity*, since it is the preceding ground of any concept as well as any abstraction by negation. Having said that, concepts are also to be understood as *real* consequences of the *positive-necessitation* of *existence* as being. Nonetheless, they can be applied in ignorance of their origin, that is, *existence* as the unconditioned ground of *being*. Therefore, the relation between finite concepts and their objects is to be considered as *relatively* non-identical, hence the *sameness* of *identity* is also always *relative* to an object of original abstraction. *Finite* concepts *relate* to their objects like children to their parents: some of them resemble them more than others, none of them are identical with their parents in every respect, yet all of them are within a determine continuum of dynamic change, that is, *time* and *being*, preceding any notion of *identity*.

These considerations, however, come with its own set of challenges. Firstly, philosophy is always communicated by conceptual language, thus it depends on *finite-identity concepts*, at least to a certain degree. Secondly, if all concepts are a consequence of a preceding existence, then the validity and generality of any philosophical investigation seems to be in question. Of course, the topic of *identity* is an important one throughout most of Schelling's works. For example. Schelling's *Darstellung meines Systems* from 1801 still asserts, that *identity* is the highest law for all of being[45]. In contrast, the *Freiheitsschrift* considers *being* and *existence* as the preceding basis for any notion of *identity*. This insight, however, is not to be confused with the devaluation of philosophy but shows the need for a revaluation of the validity of judgements, knowledge, and language. To some extent, the *Freiheitsschrift* indicates this to implicitly by turning to the topic of *feelings*. *Feelings* are deemed to be not entirely exhaust-able by *finite-concepts*, but they are meaningful indicators nonetheless. It is, however, important to note, that these notions were considered as insufficiently developed by the late Schelling[46]. The notion of *feeling*, however, can be elucidated by the explicit methodical rearrangement of the *Freiheitsschrift*, which is, the introduction of

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[45] «Das höchste Gesetz für alles Seyn […] ist das Gesetz der Identität» (F. W. J. Schelling, *Darstellung meines Systems*, *SW* I/4, p. 116).
[46] «Es war eine Zeit, wo ich diese Folge von Möglichkeiten eines vorerst noch zukünfthigen Seyns nur bildlich […] darzustellen wagte. […] Ich kann nicht rühmen, das dieses Wort […] nicht eher verhöhnt worden» (F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, *SW* II/1, p. 294).

the notion of *Deutung des Seins*[47], hereafter referred to as *interpretation* or *exegesis* of existence as the unconditioned ground of being.

The novelty of a philosophical notion of *interpretation*/exegesis, at this point in time, is often overlooked. Yet, *interpretation/exegesis* is a cornerstone of *positive-philosophy*. It is based on the assumption, that every concept, *being* and *thing* is characterized by the presence of the *positive-necessitation* of *existence* in some way or another, that is the natural ground of any notion of finitude. Consequently, *any* notion of method is to be regarded as a post-hoc investigation of *existence* by being, that is, a quest for knowledge about existence within the boundaries of a discrete human being. However, Schelling already proved that being a consequence does not necessarily imply, that its concept is fully determined by the logic of its origin (the evidence for this is *free will*). It follows that every object of philosophical investigation is characterizable by a notion of its finitude (and generalizable logic) as well as by the originality, that denotes the limits of *identity* by being non generalizable, that is, being *non-identical* with (de)finite concepts. The relation between both dimensions of being may differ from case to case. Proper *interpretation*, thus, is only possible by respecting both dimensions of the object of knowledge. It should be noted that, some words, experiences or *feeling* do *present, indicate* or *evince* these dimension without assert any de(finite) notion of identity themselves, whereas concepts are de(fined) by a framework of assumptions in order to arrive at determinate content as well as a more practical applicability of knowledge within the realm of finitude, i.e. the *physics* of *things*. *Interpretation*, thus, is not only to be considered as an alternative approach for philosophy, but as the very ground of *any* method, including *negative-philosophy*. From this perspective, the *Freiheitsschrift* is to be read as demarcation of *negative-philosophy*. The late Schelling continues in this fashion by concluding that there is no *positive-philosophy* without the knowledge of a full grown *negative-philosophy* to be had[48].

These considerations permit definition of *positive-philosophy*, as it is presented in conclusion of the *Freiheitsschrift*: *positive-philosophy* investigates the nature of all against the background of the relation between *existence, positive-necessitation*, words, and concepts. This is done by inquiring about the results, origin and nature of *positive-necessity*, as it is the evident ground of any further distinctions. Its investigations are based on the critique of *negative-philosophy* and on the resulting paradigm of *interpretation*. Additionally, *positive-philosophy* is also obligated to the document history[49] of conceptual as well as practical appropriation of *existence*, most importantly in form of theology and mythology. This is because both are deemed to be the earliest historical documents regarding the origins, interpretation, and development of being. At any rate, it offers an already existing semantic framework as well as an interesting narrative

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[47] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift,*, *SW* I/7, p. 415.

[48] F. W. J. Schelling, *Andere Deduktion der Principien der positiven Philosophie*, SW,II/3, p. 753 footnote.

[49] F. W. J. Schelling, *Freiheitsschrift, SW* I, 7 p. 415.

for articulating the contrast between being, existence, history, and concepts. Additionally, both seek to articulate the becoming of nature in accordance with the positive-necessitation of itself, that is, in accordance with existence as its own, unconditioned ground of being. While *negative philosophy* investigates the nature of all by an descending logic from *finite-concepts*, *positive-philosophy* strives to comprehend all philosophical investigations as an ascent from what is known and already distinguished into the non-conceptual conditioned nature of all. By this means, philosophy itself is understood as a ascending movement of the development of nature itself. Proper *judgement, good description* as well as *feelings* receive their truthfulness not by a relation of *sameness*, but by *expressing* the ascent of nature itself by being so.

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