

*Henning Tegtmeier /  
Dennis Vanden Auweele (eds.)*

## Freedom and Creation in Schelling

Schellingiana

34

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*frommann-holzboog*



Hy bin de. if uav. ne l.  
Hy bi de if lō- ne l.  
Hy uav de if lō- ne l.  
Hy de lō- de if lō- ne l.

# Schellingiana

Sources and Treatises on the  
Philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling

Edited by Walter E. Ehrhardt  
and Jochem Hennigfeld on behalf of  
the Internationale Schelling-Gesellschaft

Volume 34

# Freedom and Creation in Schelling

Edited by Henning Tegtmeier  
and Dennis Vanden Auweele

frommann-holzboog

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The handwritten original of the quatrain on page 1

Ich bin der ich war.  
Ich bin der ich sein werde.  
Ich war der ich sein werde.  
Ich werde sein der ich bin

is found in the archive of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie  
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## Introduction

Responding to a criticism from Adam Karl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling writes that »freedom can never be taken up fully in the concept, and there must always be a remainder that does not resolve into the concept«.<sup>1</sup> Here, Schelling implicitly addresses a seemingly Kantian qualm about his famous essay *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), usually referred to as the *Freiheitsschrift* (*Freedom Essay*). Did Schelling, after Kant had explicitly forbidden this, turn freedom into a concept that could be understood through theoretical reason? This was close to blasphemy for those who took seriously Kant's restriction of knowledge to the realm of possible experience, a realm that did not include a sensory intuition of freedom. Or did Schelling come up with new ways to talk about freedom that go beyond but do not conflict with transcendental idealism?<sup>2</sup>

Whatever Schelling's relationship to Kant may be, a topic that will return time and again in this volume, it is beyond dispute that Schelling's essay on human freedom did open up a new avenue for philosophical idealism, one that was gladly taken by Schelling's erstwhile roommate, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel took Schelling's cues and claimed that freedom could be understood by a more robustly dialectical philosophy that uses the long arch of history for

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1 Cf. J. Wirth (2015): *Schelling's Practice of the Wild. Time, Art, Imagination*. Albany, NY, 175.

2 The classical view on this issue, a view endorsed by both Horst Fuhrmans and Xavier Tilliette, is that Schelling breaks free from the bonds of German Idealism and consequently is no longer subject to Kant's auto-critique of reason. See H. Fuhrmans (1956/57): »Der Ausgangspunkt der Schellingschen Spätphilosophie«. In: *Kant-Studien* 48, 302–323; X. Tilliette (1970): *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir*. 2 vol. Paris. More recently, it is argued that Schelling does not so much oppose Kantian idealism but opens up new ways of doing philosophy after taking seriously Kant's critical philosophy. For further discussion, see D. Vanden Auweele (2020): *Exceeding Reason. Freedom and Religion in Schelling and Nietzsche*. Berlin / New York, 195–223.

spirit to come to know itself. Hegel's philosophy of freedom and history is well known. But what roads did Schelling walk after the *Freiheitsschrift*? That remained a question mark for a long time. Schelling's post-idealistic philosophy was not taken very seriously after the damning critiques of his late Berlin lectures. Even a philosopher of the stature of Edmund Husserl confided in 1913 to Karl Jaspers that »Schelling is not to be taken seriously as a philosopher«.<sup>3</sup> Over the last decade or two, however, there has been an increase in interest in Schelling's philosophy in and after 1809, both in the German literature – for example R. Scheerlinck (2020), G. Kozdra (2016), R. Dörendahl (2011), O. Florig (2010), M.D. Krüger (2008), and L. Knatz (1999) – and in French-speaking scholarship – for example A. Roux (2016 and 2010), M. Saule (2011), and J.-F. Courtine / J.-F. Marquet (eds.) (1994) –, but also in the English-speaking world – for example D. Vanden Auweele (2020), A. Hampton (2019), B. Freydborg (2017), J.M. Wirth (2015), L. Ostaric (ed.) (2014), T. Tritten (2012), and M. Gabriel (2011).

The present volume attends to Schelling's development on the notion of freedom in and after his *Freedom Essay*. This development gets tangled up with numerous other issues, most importantly creation (*Schöpfung*). It appears to be a basic assumption of Schelling's that God's act of creating the world is an important measuring rod for understanding human freedom. Though he initially felt attracted to other views of creation, Schelling, in his late philosophy, eventually settled on the thought that creation is an expression of unforeseeable freedom. There is no way to make sense of the act of freedom – at least within a *negative* system of philosophy. Freedom can only be discovered by a *positive* philosophy of nature, history, and of Christian revelation.

Schelling's philosophy did not evolve only through the organic development of his own thinking but took shape by means of reading and dialoguing with other philosophers. Though he disappeared

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3 »Schelling sei doch gar kein ernst zu nehmender Philosoph« (K. Schuhmann [1977]: *Husserl-Chronik. Denk- und Lebensweg Edmund Husserls*. The Hague [*Husserliana* 1], 175).

to some extent from the spotlight between 1810 and 1840, Schelling did keep paying close attention to what was happening in German philosophy and theology. Accordingly, numerous essays in this volume detail his ongoing dialogue with numerous interlocutors, such as Hegel, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Eschenmayer, and many others.

The contents of this book are divided into four sets of essays. In the first set of chapters, the topic at hand is the notion of freedom in the *Freedom Essay*. Lore Hühn explores how Schelling's views of freedom and pantheism are entangled in a complex relationship with Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Jacobi and Schlegel, and analyses the way in which Arthur Schopenhauer takes up and radicalises Schelling's approach. Nora C. Wachsmann puts Schelling's material conception of freedom over and against Kant's more formal account. She queries whether Schelling really succeeds in overcoming the formalism of which he accuses Kant. Brigita Gelžinytė takes a more metaphysical approach and discusses how the notions of will, *Abfall*, and freedom relate in the *Freedom Essay*, and how Schelling treats this relation differently than Fichte and Hegel do. Finally, Ryan Scheerlinck interprets Schelling's *Freedom Essay* as a contribution to natural theology.

The second set of chapters discusses how Schelling's drafts of *The Ages of the World* and related works transition from the *Freedom Essay* to his late philosophy. Dennis Vanden Auweele argues that Schelling entertains at least three radically different transitional views of ›freedom‹ throughout these three drafts, each suffering from its own difficulties. Philipp Luy explores the conjunction of time, being, and creation in these various drafts. Christian Danz, finally, examines how Schelling's mature notion of negative philosophy in the early Berlin years enables him to reconcile his own earlier philosophy of identity with his later, ›positive‹ approaches to nature, history, and God. A special focus is on the development of the theory of the potencies that forms a constant in Schelling's thought from his early philosophy of nature to his late account of negative philosophy. At the same time, the provisional and unfinished character of this synthesis is highlighted in Danz's contribution.

The third set of chapters discusses how topics that arise in the *Freedom Essay* are treated differently in Schelling's late philosophy. Fernando Wirtz scrutinises how the topic of existential *Angst* develops from the *Freedom Essay* to the *Philosophy of Mythology*. Jason M. Wirth discusses the concept of *Wesen*, or essence, in the *Freedom Essay* and afterwards. His focus is on the peculiar ways human beings can come to relate to their own essence. He argues that Schelling's rethinking of freedom is an answer to the ›profanization‹ (making profane) of the world in modern thought. Henning Tegtmeier's paper looks at the original version (*Urfassung*) of the lectures on revelation and examines how the topics of divine freedom and creation evolve in them.

The final set of chapters discusses Schelling's complex relationship to his contemporaries and the way later philosophers came to appreciate his thoughts on freedom and creation. Mark J. Thomas interprets the much alleged but infrequently investigated connection between Schopenhauer and Schelling from a different angle than Hühn in the opening chapter, focussing on Schelling's and Schopenhauer's views of freedom as either self-grounding or groundlessness. Yu Xia critically analyses Heidegger's rejection of Schelling's *Freedom Essay* as the work of someone unable to overcome idealism and ontotheology, arguing that this critique is based on an over-simplification of Schelling's philosophy. Ljudevit Fran Ježić traces Schelling's discussions with Friedrich Schlegel, especially those following up on the publication of the *Freedom Essay*, with a focus on how these discussions impacted Schelling's shift towards positive philosophy. Finally, Joseph P. Lawrence stages a debate between Schelling and Nietzsche on a variety of topics, including Christ and Dionysus, evil and forgiveness, the terror of virtue, and intra- and extra-academic freedom.

What most of the contributions have in common is a genealogical perspective on the later Schelling's development as a philosopher of freedom, with a strong emphasis on the thematic unity and continuity of his oeuvre, from his early struggles with Kant and Fichte until his late debates with fellow philosophers, theologians, and other scholars of his time. The worn-out cliché of the ›many Schellings‹, of Schelling as the ›Proteus of philosophy‹, that goes back to Hegel is laid aside and replaced by views that appreciate the combination of intellectual

rigour and open-mindedness that prevented Schelling from coming up with a closed, ready-made dogmatic system of his own but allowed him to stay true to his own most profound initial questions concerning the relation of nature and reason, freedom and determinism, the place of humankind in the order of nature, and the relation between God and the world. Schelling's evolving philosophical methodology and the shift of focus from nature to history reflect his deepening sense of what is at stake in treating these questions.

Obviously, this cannot mean that the authors who contribute to this volume interpret Schelling in one single manner. They rather explore different paths towards understanding and interpreting this master of nineteenth-century philosophy, and they suggest different contexts in which his thinking might prove fruitful. This pluralism of views and approaches helps to identify a whole series of important questions for future research, of which we list just a few here: Regarding the *Freedom Essay*, the concept of freedom that Schelling proposes continues to be controversial. One might ask oneself, for example, how coherent it is and what its limits are, and whether the dialectic of freedom and necessity that Schelling seeks to establish in this text is really compelling. Obviously, the same questions can also be raised with respect to the *Ages of the World* fragments. Regarding Schelling's theology, the impact of natural theology, theosophy, cabalistic speculation, and revealed (Christian and Jewish) theology at the different stages of his philosophical career, as well as the varying use he makes of the respective vocabularies, continue to be a source of disagreement and confusion. This is not just a hermeneutic issue; it has systematic consequences, for example, regarding an adequate understanding of Schelling's idea of a ›philosophical religion‹ and its relation to traditional Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faith. At the same time, it will be impossible to treat the vexed issue of ontotheology in Schelling properly without an accurate understanding of the different registers of his theological language.

Regarding Schelling's position within the history of philosophy in general and German Idealism in particular, grasping the interplay between ›negative‹ and ›positive‹ philosophy in his latter philosophy (including the way in which this distinction is prepared in his

earlier works) will be crucial for a nuanced answer to the question whether Schelling either ›completes‹ or ›overcomes‹ German Idealism, to which extent he continues to be indebted to Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, and in which sense his ›higher realism‹ paves the way for German Post-Idealism (Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Engels, Bloch, Heidegger, the Frankfurt School). It seems safe to say that Schelling is neither a rationalist nor an irrationalist, neither a vitalist nor an existentialist, neither an orthodox theist nor an atheist, neither a subjective idealist nor a materialist, and yet his insistence on a rigorous and careful philosophical methodology in combination with his emphasis on the irreducible significance of the affections and emotions, his profound philosophy of life and lived experience, his firm conviction that a philosophy without philosophical theology would be doomed and that the latter cannot be replaced by simple orthodoxy, his insistence that understanding consciousness is the key to philosophy in combination with his ceaseless efforts to examine its embeddedness in nature, make him a major source of inspiration for nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism, idealism, vitalism, existentialism, materialism, theism, and for both process metaphysics and its critics. Without a doubt, the fact that Schelling escapes any neat philosophical categorization is a merit rather than a shortcoming of his thinking. In their different ways, the contributions to this volume all underline the lasting relevance of Schelling's philosophy of freedom for contemporary debates about human freedom and its limits, about God and nature, the pathologies of modernity and the prospects of humanity.

The focus of this volume is on Schelling's theoretical philosophy, on metaphysics, meta-ethics, philosophical anthropology, and philosophical theology, although some authors also highlight ethical implications of Schelling's theoretical views. Schelling's practical and political thinking, by contrast, for example his allegedly conservative views of modern institutions and the modern state and his sometimes rather progressive views of race and gender, would be a topic for an entirely different line of research. We are convinced, however, that Schelling's practical philosophy cannot be made sense of without a sound understanding of his theoretical philosophy. Although Schel-



ling never presented a completed system of philosophy, there can be no doubt that he was an extremely systematic thinker.

We would like to end with words of thanks. First of all, we would like to thank the editors of the *Schellingiana* for including a volume on the later Schelling's philosophy of freedom and creation in this prestigious series. We are also very grateful to Sarah Perner, Katrin Kraemer and Harald Schmitt for all their help in bringing the manuscript into good shape. A special work of thanks goes to Yu Xia who helped us organise the workshop on Schelling's philosophy of freedom at KU Leuven in May 2019, on which most of the texts in this volume are based, and to the KU Leuven Centre of Metaphysics, Philosophy of Religion and Philosophy of Culture for supporting the book project in various ways. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Geschwister Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation. Without their generous funding, it would have been impossible to publish this book.

Leuven, June 2022

Henning Tegtmeier

Dennis Vanden Auweele

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## I Freedom in Schelling's *Freedom Essay*



# The Intelligible Deed

## *On a Shared Preoccupation of Schopenhauer and Schelling\**

Lore Hühn

### *Zusammenfassung*

In Schellings Theorie der Freiheit spielt Kants Begriff der ›intelligiblen Tat‹ eine zentrale Rolle. Die transzendente Freiheit zum Guten und Bösen wird bei Schelling in der Selbstkonstitution als Handlungssubjekt gegründet, die zugleich die notwendige Abweichung von der universalen Ordnung darstellt. Paradigmatisch zeigt sich Schelling zufolge diese negative Form der Freiheit im fichteschen Begriff der ›Freiheit‹ als Selbstsetzung und voraussetzungsloser Anfang, da in dieser Konzeption von den immer schon gegebenen Vorbedingungen subjektiven Handelns abstrahiert wird. Insofern sieht Schelling im idealistischen Begriff der Autonomie einen Ausdruck des Bösen. Schopenhauer radikalisiert Schellings Freiheitsbegriff in seiner negativistischen Konzeption transzendentaler Freiheit als Daseinsverneinung auf der Basis eines voluntaristischen Seinsbegriffs.

Arthur Schopenhauer mentions only in a passing remark that one of the central tenets of his negativistic metaphysics of will refers to Schelling's philosophy of human freedom (ZA 6, 123 ff.).<sup>1</sup> That Schopenhauer remarks on this affinity to his idealistic colleague is

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\* Cf. also an earlier version of the paper, revised again for the present volume: L. Hühn (1998): »Die intelligible Tat. Zu einer Gemeinsamkeit Schellings und Schopenhauers«. In: *Selbstbesinnung der philosophischen Moderne. Beiträge zur kritischen Hermeneutik ihrer Grundbegriffe*. Ed. by C. Iber / R. Pocai. Cuxhaven/Dartford, 55–94. I am very grateful to James Fisher (Freiburg) for the translation. Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy – EXC-2193/1–390951807.

1 Schopenhauer's works will be cited with the abbreviation ›ZA‹ and an indication of the volume and the page number. The following edition has been used: A. Schopenhauer (1977): *Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden*. Ed. by A. Hübscher. Zürich.

noteworthy, and due to the similarities he names thus deserves all the more attention. The reference to Schelling also merits consideration because, throughout his life, Schopenhauer rejected being labelled a pupil of Schelling. He generally minimalises his own dependence on German Idealism; he seldom reflects upon this relationship, and when he does, then it is generally in the terms of a superficial and exaggerated polemic. Schopenhauer's all too obvious dependency on German Idealism is, according to his own estimation, never direct. Instead, he views it as the result of a shared point of departure that he identifies in Kant's heritage. Schopenhauer's philologically proven interest in Schelling has deeper roots than a superficial reconstruction of influences could bring to light. It goes much deeper than Schopenhauer himself would like us to believe when he formulaically refers to Kant as the shared source of German Idealism and himself.

### 1. Schelling's Hamartiological Radicalization of the Idealistic Concept of Freedom

Schopenhauer was driven to follow the impulses of German Idealism in their specifically Schellingian formulation back to their Kantian origins. Basically, this may have to do with the fact that Schelling had radicalised the Kantian concept of freedom from inside out, thus coercing this concept to transgress its immanent boundaries. In Schelling, Schopenhauer clearly recognises the completion as well as the overcoming of a conception of freedom that is based on the actions of practical subjectivity. Programmatically claiming this speculative transgression, Schelling sustainably prepared the way for those considerations which prefigure Schopenhauer's negativistic philosophy of freedom. This fact could hardly escape so kindred a reader as the *Freedom Essay* had found in Schopenhauer.

Schopenhauer reads the entire essay as a postlude to the Kantian theme of a transcendental deed, which permeates »the entire being and essence (*existentia et essentia*) of man« (ZA 6, 123 ff.). This deed precedes the individual actions of humankind, in that it shapes the factual being – thus and not otherwise – of our character. For Schopen-

hauer, Schelling is the only among the German Idealists to have taken up Kant's theory of a »a subjective ground of human actions preceding every act apparent to the senses but that itself must be nonetheless an *actus* of freedom« (FE 53; AA I,17, 155).<sup>2</sup> He speculatively raised this theory to the guiding concept of a »transcendental act that determines all human Being« (ibid.) and in the horizon of which the entire completion of our life is conducted.

Schopenhauer knows himself to be united with Schelling in the assumption that our relation to ourselves and to the world is grounded in the unprethinkability of an act of freedom. Man cannot raise himself to the level of this act on the strength of his own Will since this act always precedes our willing and acting and renders them possible. By referring to this act, Schelling attempts to validate the insight that moral actions can only be attributed to humankind to the extent that, as a subject of freedom, it determines itself to be determined by good and evil.

It is literally true to say that, given how man is in fact created, it is not he himself but rather the good or evil spirit in him that acts; and, nonetheless, this does no harm to freedom. For precisely the allowing-to-act-within-oneself (*das in-sich-handeln-Lassen*) of the good and evil principles is the result of an intelligible act whereby his being and life are determined (FE 54; AA I, 17, 156).

The ›intelligible deed‹ is the hypostasis of a transcendental self-positing that determines the moral character of a person. Being always already accomplished, this self-positing establishes that we are ethically responsible for our actions and can be legally held account-

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2 In the following, the *Freedom Essay* will be cited in English according to the following edition: F.W.J. Schelling (2006): *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Trans. by J. Love / J. Schmidt. Albany, NY. It will be cited in the body of the text with ›FE‹ and an indication of the page number. In addition, I will indicate references to Schelling's complete works with ›AA‹ and indication of the section, volume and page number. F.W.J. Schelling (1976 ff.): *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. Ed. by the Projekt Schelling – Edition und Archiv der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt. The works not appearing in this edition will be cited according to: F.W.J. Schelling (1856–1861): *Sämmtliche Werke*. Ed. by K.F.A. Schelling. Stuttgart/Augsburg (= SW).

able for them. The intelligible deed is thus an act of freedom that at the same time grounds our moral accountability. It proves to be the groundless, primordial decision which – unconstrained by the conditions of time and causality – is present in our empirical actions as their profound basis. The element which elevates this primordial decision above the level of a one-time occurrence, which would ground itself in a temporally specified ›before‹, is the processual omnipresence of its present. The intelligible deed is not a ground in the sense of substance and does not relate to the empirical deeds in terms of exteriority; it could not even be conceived of without them. An action of the highest order, this deed attests to its presence in our individual deeds in that it guarantees that we can be held accountable for them time and again.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond their shared interest in moral accountability, Schelling and Schopenhauer are united in the basic hamartiological conviction that the original use of freedom is its abuse. The intelligible deed is then a cipher the interpretation of which reveals that the original accomplishment of freedom goes hand in hand with its own sinful failure. As no other reader of the *Freedom Essay* before him, Schopenhauer appropriates the discovery that the original accomplishment of freedom does not lie in an indifferent self-relation on the basis of which the decision for good or for evil is made after the fact. The ethical difference between good and evil is so deeply engrained in this self-relation from the very beginning that this self-relation can no longer be reduced to the original dimension of a mere capacity, of pure possibility, let alone that of spontaneity or self-initiation. The original dimension in which the self of this self-initiation is already located is not a completely open horizon for acting out possible decisions, which would

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3 »Hence, the intelligible being can, as certainly as it acts as such freely and absolutely, just as certainly act only in accordance with its own inner nature; or action can follow from within only in accordance with the law of identity and with absolute necessity which alone is also absolute freedom. [...] Were this being a dead sort of Being [*ein totes Sein*] and a merely given one with respect to man, then, because all action resulting from it could do so only with necessity, responsibility [*Zurechnungsfähigkeit*] and all freedom would be abolished« (FE 50; AA I,17, 152).



be without criteria that can be rationally investigated. Rather, Schelling's efforts are devised to thematise the way the original dimension and the way it renders actions possible receive their internal orientation from the question of failure – and by extension of accomplishment. Schelling also sees the dimension that grounds this realisation as its own self-empowerment as a potentiality that has always already transgressed into its own mode of reality and done so in a specific way. The freedom of humankind is then definitely not a capacity to realise any possible action whatsoever, not a free-floating capacity that can be reductively treated as a simple capacity for beginning as »the negative of indifference, before any development«.<sup>4</sup> The capacity of human freedom is always ordered within a horizon qualified by the difference between that which is morally required or rejected.

Schelling inscribes this pre-forming normative horizon into his definition of human freedom. Inverted to a theory of subjectivity, this horizon characterises the capacity for freedom from inside out in two opposite ways. For him, the essence of human freedom is a capacity for good and for evil. These are founded on the same origin, so that this capacity originally anticipates the realisation of freedom in the execution of acts. Given that it is always shaped by this anticipation, Schelling views the essence of human freedom as based on such a transition that occurred long before any concrete choices have presented themselves. Schelling presupposes this transition as a necessary condition of possibility when he declares – following his reading of Genesis 3:3 – that humankind, with the first accomplishment of its freedom, inevitably established the sinful failure of this very freedom, thus bringing sin into the world.<sup>5</sup> That the first use of this freedom

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4 I. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Rel.), B 39. (Kant's works will be cited according to: I. Kant [1900 ff.]: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. by the Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin.). Cf. U.J. Wenzel (1992): *Anthroponomie. Kants Archäologie der Autonomie*. Berlin, 23 ff.

5 »Once evil had been generally aroused in creation by the reaction of the ground to revelation, man apprehended himself from eternity in his individuality and selfishness, and all who are born are born with the dark principle of evil within even if this evil is raised to self-consciousness only through the emergence [*Eintreten*] of

is at the same time its abuse – an abuse which Schelling equates with sin – refers to the dimension of a truth in the light of which the accomplishment of human freedom as a »sinful self-failure« first becomes legible and attributable. The standard according to which this accomplishment reveals itself to be sinful evidently cannot be taken from this accomplishment itself, for it inevitably circles within the structures which first rendered it possible. This accomplishment is perceived in a thoroughly circular fashion in that it presupposes itself in the pejorative sense that the *definiendum* already contains the *definiens*. If the first accomplishment of freedom is set in such a way that it is at once transgressed, then it also works the other way around: from the transgression of freedom one may conclude that freedom is the condition of the possibility of its transgression. If Schelling's hamartiological model amounted to a mere tautology, then the responsibility for sin would fall back on the human capacity for freedom. It would do this in such a way that the non-derivable fact of freedom would be located on the same level as the non-derivable fact of always already having been sinful – and yet one would be unable to view sin as an act of freedom. The effort of such an investigation would hardly be worth it if the grounding of sin were exhausted in the fact of its self-presupposition. Such an understanding would not attain the level of Schelling's claim, as one would if one thought that the sinful transgression of freedom lay in the modality of *modus ponens* – such that its (decided) reality were presupposed in the form of an (undecided) possibility.

I should emphasise that even humankind's original act of freedom has a virtual horizon of possibility – a horizon behind which every individual act of realisation lags to the extent that this specific, possible action can only come to be through the exclusion of other, unchosen possible actions. This aspect also plays a certain role in the *Freedom Essay*, but not the decisive one. This is because such hints,

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its opposite. [...] This original evil in man, which can be denied only by one who has come to know man in and outside himself only superficially, although wholly independent of freedom in relation to contemporary empirical life, is still in its origin his own act and for that reason alone original sin« (FE 53; AA I,17, 155).

given their abstract nature, do not provide any solutions, as I see it, for the problem of the standard by which the first accomplishment of human freedom falls under the order of transgression, ridden with guilt and even sin.

Rather, it is my thesis that this transgression is sinful in accordance with a truth contained in God – a truth which Schelling reveals as the repressed possibility of the modern thought of autonomy. The genesis and structure of this thought are so fundamentally inscribed within this transgression that it touches upon the relation of man to God. For it is in humankind's very relation to itself that it inevitably relates to God by wanting to place itself in His stead, thus rendering him redundant. In Schelling's eyes, this repression acts fatefully in that the latent repression announces itself as a form of perversion. It does this in the form of the inner dynamic according to whose standard the modern definition of human freedom is accomplished.

»The reversed God« (FE 54; AA I,17, 156), which, as the result of the Promethean hubris of humankind, seeks to become a »self-creating ground« (FE 55; AA I,17, 156) and to occupy the place »where God should be« (FE 54; AA I,17, 156), serves as a metaphor for the divisiveness of a process in the *Freedom Essay*. This process cannot genuinely exclude God but can do so only in the way of repression – or more precisely by means of mere reversal. In this sense, it continues to be present.

The peculiar divisiveness initiated by this process can be seen in the way the modern thought of autonomy, at its very core, maintains a relationship to that which it denies by means of repression – namely to God. This relation remains vital, and it seems that, for Schelling, nothing can more deeply testify to it than its transgression. The most noticeable gesture of this transgression is evident in the thought that the essence of human freedom is realised in self-positing – the option of being radically made from oneself and by oneself. Such a self-positing raises its lack of presuppositions to its sole presupposition. To this extent, the modern concept of autonomy falls into the self-contradiction which, according to Schelling, is inscribed in the very foundations of modernity, namely, that of wanting to determine the very ground which renders one possible. This ground is placed in

God (»being in so far as it is merely the ground of existence« [FE 27; AA I,17, 129]) even if – and this is the core of the theodicy problem in the *Freedom Essay* – this ground is separate from God himself (»being in so far as it exists« [ibid.]).

For Schelling, this deeply contradictory process only becomes a sinful relation to God – in the theological sense of the term – because humankind seeks to erase the traces of its heritage in another. In this way, it seeks to replace God and render him redundant.<sup>6</sup>

It is no accident that the attributes of God reappear, inverted through the theory of subjectivity, as the core of the capacity for freedom. This is particularly evident with the Kantian and idealistic figures of self-positing and their standard of being able to initiate a causal chain without any prerequisites. This concept openly inherits the originally cosmological thought of a *causa sui* and usurps this tradition. In his *Freedom Essay*, Schelling deals only with the most important successors of this tradition: the hypostasis of an intelligible deed that posits itself, as it is associated with Kant, and the ›Tathandlung‹ as situated at the ground of practical philosophy by Jacobi, following Fichte. For Schelling, these figures, despite their differences, are all of a kind. It does not appear to matter to him in which way the *causa sui* figure, which is usually associated with Baruch Spinoza, takes on different forms under the auspices of its inversion through the theory of subjectivity: whether as a moral character that autonomously constitutes itself; or as an action without a substrate which is what it produces and which produces what it is such that its origin, telos, and execution are but the processual moments of one structure of movement. These diverse figures of self-positing all follow the same hamartiological programme of a philosophy of freedom – for which reason Schelling can deal with them in a single breath. The autopoietic self-authorisation located in each and every one of these

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6 »It is only in its individuality [*Eigenheit*] that this spirit is untruth, Satan. In its non-individuality (*Nichteigenheit*), when it merely wants to be ground, it is not untruth« (F.W.J. Schelling [1992]: *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*. Ed. by W.E. Ehrhardt. Hamburg [vol. 2], 644. Translated by James Fisher.).

figures of self-positing testifies to an event which occurred long ago. For the philosopher from Leonberg, this self-authorisation mirrors and documents the modern form of original sin in its pure form:

Thus is the beginning of sin, that man transgresses from authentic Being into non-Being, from truth into lies, from the light into darkness, in order to become a self-creating ground and, with the power of the centrum which he has within himself, to rule over all things. (FE 55; AA I,17, 157)

Schelling cites the Promethean self-authorisation of man to »become a self-creating ground« as the programmatic formula behind which the primal scene of modernity's original sin is concealed.<sup>7</sup> This self-authorisation is only one aspect of what he phenomenologically delineates in the *Freedom Essay*. The other aspect – hidden beneath the surface of the first – becomes apparent in the metaphor of the »reversed God«. This metaphor serves as a keyword which mainly achieves one thing: It opens the horizon within which Schelling undermines the accomplishment of human freedom by means of its repressed conditions of possibility as its own ground – a ground which gains in presence precisely by being excluded and under the conditions of an external alienation. The presence of this ground in the inner-worldly relation of humankind does not present itself as withdrawal but rather

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7 The thought of a self-creation of an intelligible being which first renders individual actions determinable creates a tension. Michael Theunissen connects this, above all, with the fact that this thought rescinds the insight of a »derived absolute«, through which Schelling introduced his theological speculations on creation in the *Freedom Essay*. »The transcendental nature of a human being which creates itself excludes the theological understanding that he has been created. Through its transcendental deed, humankind, as Schelling further states, surpasses that which is created, it is a free and eternal beginning« (M. Theunissen [1965]: »Schellings anthropologischer Ansatz«. In: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 47, 187). Through this relapse into transcendental philosophy, Schelling fails to reach his original aim – according to this polemic – to undermine the hypostasis of self-creation by means of a theological anthropology of creation. Unlike Michael Theunissen, who seeks to play this tension against Schelling's text, I hope to profile this tension as the original and unique intension of the *Freedom Essay*. It should become clear that the figures of self-positing under discussion are always already broken through the hamartiological heritage to which they adhere, for which reason Schelling questions them.

in the form of perversion. Nonetheless, the attribute of »becoming a self-creating ground«, which Schelling cites as the definition of practical subjectivity presents the form of this perversion – merely tangible for the theory of liberty – as being located in God.

This form is already stigmatised by a process which Schelling consciously presents in the peculiar form of a reversal of that for which God stands as a cipher. If this attribution appears in the form of a timeless positing which exhausts itself by presupposing itself, then it can hardly be considered as emerging from a process seeking to internalise the predicates of God in the interior of the essence of human freedom. If one wished to view this internalisation purely for itself, abstracted from its theological framing and from normativity, then it would refer to the will for a radical new beginning, thought as an unconditional duty to oneself: the will to one's one absoluteness. In this sense, Jacobi was correct in the suspicions of nihilism he raised against Schelling. Schelling, in turn, would have difficulty arguing against Jacobi's renowned dictum of »tertium non datur«:

Man therefore loses himself as soon as he resists finding God, as his originator, in a way that is incomprehensible to his reason; as soon as he wants to ground himself *in himself alone*. Everything then dissolves for him gradually into his own Nothingness (*Nichts*). Yet man has such a choice; this one alone: *Nothingness* or *God*. In choosing Nothingness, he makes himself to God. [...] I repeat: God is, and He is outside of me, a *living being, which stands for itself*, or *I am God*. There is no third option.<sup>8</sup>

Schelling appropriates Jacobi's thesis that the structure of subjectivity, viewed by the standards of *causa sui*, amounts to nihilism. Yet he leaves no doubt that there is a third way for him, which, for Jacobi, carries the abstract dualism of faith and knowledge, of a God without nature and a nature without God, as its innermost presupposition.<sup>9</sup> For Schelling, at least, the motif of repression belongs to this as to all

<sup>8</sup> F.H. Jacobi (2004): »Jacobi an Fichte«. In: id.: *Werke. Gesamtausgabe*. Ed. by K. Hammacher et al. Hamburg (vol. 2,1), 187–225, here: 220.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding Schelling's debate with Jacobi, cf. S. Peetz (1995): *Die Freiheit im Wissen. Eine Untersuchung zu Schellings Konzept der Rationalität*. Frankfurt am Main, 150f., 244ff.

other figures of a capacity for beginning without prerequisites. This repression refers both to the excluded other, namely the ground of possibility that God contains, and to the act of exclusion itself.

## 2. The Ruinous Self-Perversion of Being Able to Begin without Prerequisites

To the extent that this double-sided cluelessness as to one's own self-realisation (*Selbstvollzug*) is advanced to the definition of our practical relation to ourselves – a cluelessness manifested in the fiction of an autonomous ability to begin – the exclusion of God becomes a sign of falsehood. Yet a possibility presents itself in letting this falsehood become what it is in all its falsity. This possibility would consist in thinking of our relation to the other, even within our self-relation, in such a way that this other is not reduced to an implication of the theory of freedom or an internalised moment of one's self-relation. An obligation to a self-relation the immediate realisation of which transcends itself towards this other becomes the vanishing point before which all our actions turn out to be a sinful self-transgression. The first accomplishment of human freedom bears the sign of falsehood and expresses much more than what is suggested by its immediate constitution. Schelling anchors this insight in his text in such a way that he introduces nearly imperceptible shifts to the Kantian figure of the intelligible deed. From the very beginning, however, he radically surpasses that which the philosopher from Königsberg had much more humbly suggested. In a prominent passage, Kant had declared that he understands »freedom in the cosmological understanding as the capacity to initiate a state oneself, the causality of which does not follow the laws of nature in itself standing under a previous cause which determines it in its time«.<sup>10</sup> It is Schelling who transforms this conception into an explanation. He does so in such a way that the entire explanation rests on the classical formula of *superbia* – the Will to be like God. This Will is not satisfied with being similar to God, it

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<sup>10</sup> Kant, CPR, B 561.

strives to be God's equal and, like God, »to rule over all things« (FE 55; AA I,17, 157).

It is a well-known maxim of Schelling's dialectic to view the entire process from the perspective of the subject who, through its action, brings about the perversion of its relation to God. One thing is evident: Through its ability to begin radically, humankind carries in its core the tension of a relationship to God which has become perverted and strikes back against itself as sin in the form of evil.

In the early phases of German Idealism, the capacity for absolute spontaneity was evoked emphatically as the inner-worldly point from which a process could be initiated without prerequisites. For Schelling, this point marks an unprethinkable constellation of sin. Humankind, in its self-relation, constantly reconfirms this sin in its practical self-relation, especially when it must admit that it is »through its sin« that it is the originator of its own actions and restraints.<sup>11</sup> Attributing the radical capacity for beginning to an inner-worldly point – the essence of human freedom – amounts, for Schelling, to denying the origin of this freedom. This denial takes the form of a purely transcendental grounding of human freedom. For Schelling, affirming this means cementing the sinful self-relation of humankind, although such a cementation necessarily denies this, thus making its sinful character unrecognisable. The capacity to begin without presuppositions, clothed in the timeless shape of a self-positing *a priori*, is hardly recognisable as sin. Nonetheless, this attribute stands in the shadow of the grandiose self-authorisation of humankind to set itself »in the place where God should be« (FE 54; AA I,17, 156).

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11 The entire passage reads: »This sort of free act, which becomes necessary, admittedly cannot appear in consciousness to the degree the latter is merely self-awareness and only ideal, since it precedes consciousness just as it precedes essence, indeed, it first produces it; but, for that reason, this is an act of which no consciousness at all remains in man since anyone, for instance, who in order to excuse a wrong action, says ›that's just the way I am‹ is surely aware that what he is like he is through his guilt, as much as he is right that it was impossible for him to act otherwise« (FE 51f.; AA I,17, 153f.).



The flipside of this self-authorisation comes up in the experience of powerlessness in a self-exclusion which collapses from its own inner contradiction. This exclusion is ruinous – and this is the hamartiological intensification of the *Freedom Essay* – because it frees a dynamic which, having come into the world with sin, in the form of evil, strikes back against humankind. This evil does not simply occur but is restlessly grounded in the activity of subject formation. In constantly trying to exclude the ground, which cannot be excluded, through the realisation of its freedom, humankind operates with a borrowed strength that works towards its self-denial, to the extent that it resists that which nourishes it. The resistance against its own constitutive ground does not only relate to that which it resists but even aids this ground to realise itself, albeit in the form of extreme perversion.<sup>12</sup> The ground of the possibility of human freedom can only be present under the conditions of an external alienation. This fact exposes the entire tragedy of a conception of autonomy which is overtaxed by and snared within its claims of self-grounding. The tragic side of this relation comes to light in the self-contradictory move in which this conception, in its decision to be in and by itself, stubbornly excludes that in relation to which it defines its independence. This independence can only be maintained in constant contradiction with itself – which is demanding enough – by excluding the sources of its own stability. This constitutes the sheer, endless restlessness of a process which can only wear itself out. »In evil there is the self-consuming and always annihilating contradiction that it strives to become creaturely just by annihilating the bond of creaturely existence and, out of overweening pride [Übermut] to be all things, falls into non-Being« (FE 55; AA I,17, 157). Even though this process, which falls back on itself and amounts to nothing, may at first sight appear powerless, it nonetheless strikes mercilessly back against those who are the true agents of the exclusion of their possibility. Phenomenologically speaking,

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12 »Man never gains control over the condition, although in evil he strives to do so; it is only lent to him, and is independent from him; hence, his personality and self-hood can never rise to full actuality [zum Aktus]« (FE 62; AA I,17, 164).

this form of self-contradiction amounts to no less than a compulsive operation (*Zwangsveranstaltung*) which humankind – blind to its own potential drive in the »hunger of selfishness« (FE 55; AA I,17, 157) – brings about through an enormous expenditure of strength and support, even though it is delivered to the automatism of this compulsion. This duplicitous relationship further presents itself as the experience of a contradiction explicated by the fact that humankind disintegrates into a being which is divided into the position of the culprit and that of the victim. Humankind carries out this tragedy, which results from a usurped self-empowerment, in its interior in the form of a ruinous self-harming which, for Schelling, threatens to devolve into the destructive self-completion of the »hunger of selfishness«:

For the feeling still remains in the one having strayed [*gewichen*] from the centrum that he was all things, namely, in and with God; for that reason, he strives once again to return there, but for himself, and not where he might be all things, namely, in God. From this arises the hunger of selfishness which, to the degree that it renounces the whole and unity, becomes ever more desolate, poorer, but precisely for that reason greedier, hungrier, and more venomous. (FE 55; AA I,17, 157)

The self-harm that is revealed in these comparisons is the expression of the identity of humankind inasmuch as it is always threatened by the reversal into its own opposite. Schelling calls this problem by name when, in allusion to Böhme,<sup>13</sup> he speaks of self-addiction (selfishness – *Selbstsucht*) in a sense which is clearly more than metaphorical. Like other addicts, the one who is imprisoned in his self-addiction falls into an automatism which is completely out of one's control. This automatism, though it is one's own doing, is not maintained by one's own authority. Rather, one is held in check by

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13 »Der *Ungrund* ist ein ewig *Nichts* und machet aber einen ewigen Anfang, als eine *Sucht*; Denn das *Nichts* ist eine *Sucht* nach Etwas; und da doch auch *Nichts* ist, das Etwas gebe, sondern die *Sucht* ist selber das Geben dessen, das doch auch *Nichts* ist, als bloß eine begehrende *Sucht*«. (J. Böhme [1955–1960]: »Mystericum pan-sophicum oder Gründlicher Bericht von dem Irdischen und Himmlischen Mystério«. In: id.: *Sämtliche Schriften*. Reprint. Ed. by W.-E. Peuckert. Stuttgart [vol. 4], VIII, 97).

the command of inner compulsion at the price of genuine powerlessness. The constantly disappointed search, which cannot remove but only enforce the origin of its endless realisation, obeys a dynamic which cannot rest until all life has fallen prey to the relentless cycle of creation and destruction. There is certainly no progress which can run through this process. Every act of realisation fails to achieve what it seeks, and every further action only potentiates the structure of perennial failure, so that the way – to take up a metaphor from Schelling's phenomenology of addiction – can only lead deeper into this structure but cannot escape it. The structure of perennial failure is also intimately related to the results of addiction in the sense that it merely feigns an elevated life. It also belongs to its essence that it exerts a power of attraction which drives towards the self-destruction of all life beneath the surface of a self-potentiating dynamic – rushing on from one failure to another. In this way, life is diminished to the negated positing of a betrayed presence. The destructive nature of this realisation brings to light the shadow side of this process, which at the same possesses a considerable seductive power. The fascination this process exerts is produced by its inherent self-design. Human-kind sketches itself against a horizon of possibilities which precedes all reality. The extent to which it avenges itself by imagining itself in worlds of appearances by transgressing reality with ever new possibilities proves – thus anticipating a basic figure of Kierkegaard's<sup>14</sup> – that one, »out of overweening pride [Übermut] to be all things, falls into non-Being« (FE 55; AA I,17, 157).

Such a self-conception, which ultimately exhausts itself in the all-consuming game of mere possibilities, is not purely illusory. Rather, it devolves into »obvious sin« (FE 55; AA I,17, 157), particularly when it imagines that the horizon of possibilities is real, i.e., when it behaves as if this horizon could genuinely be produced in reality – even if only by means of the detour of a constantly deferred progress. This self-conception cannot be completed, particularly when occasioned

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14 Cf. G. Figal (1980): »Schellings und Kierkegaards Freiheitsbegriff«. In: *Kierkegaard und die deutsche Philosophie seiner Zeit. Kopenhagener Kolloquium zur deutschen Literatur*. Ed. by K. Bohnen / S.-A. Jorgensen. Copenhagen/Munich (vol. 2), 121 f.

by the »false imagining« and the »spirit of lies and falsehood« (FE 56; AA I,17, 157). The negativity of its beginning continues, according to Schelling, throughout the individual filiations of the entire process. This process presupposes the falsehood of sin in such a way that this falsehood becomes a necessary moment of self-realisation, which for this reason constantly fails. Furthermore, if, in this process, one failure is merely replaced by another, then they are literally suspended in the air, only able to stay afloat because they seek, through their own power, to compensate that which they replace by acting out a dynamic of appropriated power which constantly exaggerates itself. Instead of pausing the automatic process or breaking out of the compulsions of constantly accelerating attempts to overcome oneself, every action merely continues the chain of hopeless self-entanglement. The way this auto-empowerment is acted out at any price shows how deep the experience of powerlessness goes. This experience persists in orbiting an unconsciously performed exclusion of one's own conditions of possibility.

Not only is this experience of powerlessness the unmistakable mark of a God who is only present in the form of absence: it is also the manifestation of a relation to God which, for Schelling, can only be represented in the form of perversion. It is in a certain sense tragic that the presence of this relation to God becomes all the more evident the more humankind imagines itself as being free from it in its practical self-relation. The rigour with which humankind acts against itself and others demonstrates the extent of its distress. This distress becomes increasingly painful as one seeks to occupy the place of unconditional self-empowerment, God's contested territory, and thus to compensate for the fact of being »derived«.<sup>15</sup> Schelling has good rea-

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15 »The concept of a derived absoluteness or divinity is so little contradictory that it is rather the central concept of philosophy as a whole« (AA I,17, 120). On Schelling's concept of a »derived absoluteness« see M. Theunissen (1965): »Schellings anthropologischer Ansatz«. In: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 47, 175 f. On its historical background in the works of Böhme and Baader see M. E. Zovbo (1996): *Natur und Gott. Das wirkungsgeschichtliche Verhältnis Schellings und Baaders*. Würzburg, 147 ff.

son to say of freedom's autonomous capacity for beginning that it offers the sad drama of a competition which, from the very beginning, is hopeless. In this competition, blind to the incentives of its own actions, humankind obscures its own view of its enabling ground by believing that it could leave God behind and put this ground to use through its own strength. Leaving God behind could not have failed more thoroughly, and there is a considerable price to pay for this. This is reflected in the previous power of a God now harnessed to the service of human fantasies of omnipotence. Throughout the whole of history, this God proves His presence and influence through all his deformed manifestations. For that which fails in this attempt is the same as that to which the erstwhile presence of God testified: namely, to the form of a relation which, precisely by being repressed, renders the presence of God possible to experience, and does so in two ways.

Schelling's metaphor of the »reversed God« (FE 54; AA I, 17, 157), which was inspired by Luther's satanology,<sup>16</sup> characterises the presence, which is located twice in our experience, by attributing to God a kind of indissoluble, original power, in spite of modernity's conception of autonomy. This power makes itself felt precisely when humankind falls into the sin which it alone commits, especially when it attempts to free itself from it. This original power is not merely immanent to the context of sin but also transcends it. Schelling deliberately emphasises both sides of sin by highlighting the exaggerated nature of merely usurped self-power not only in the experience of deepest powerlessness, but also beyond it. He traces it back to where our inner-worldly behaviour is grounded, namely, in the freedom with which humankind cannot empower itself by the strength of its own Will but in which it merely participates. In this participation, humankind first experiences itself as a part of creation, through the facticity of being grounded in freedom. For Schelling, the experience of this participation utterly illuminates what has always been inherent in »the most

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16 Cf. Luther's interpretation of Matthew 4:9: »For it is the greatest danger, when the devil comes, that he does not come as a devil, but dresses himself as if he were God Himself« (M. Luther [1915]: *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Weimarer Ausgabe*, vol. 52. Ed. by G. Buchwald-Rochlitz. Weimar, 420).

lively feeling of freedom« (FE 11; AA I,17, 113). This »most lively feeling of freedom« is no naïve experience of pantheistic unity which could reactivate archaic layers of semi-anthropological constancy by saying ›open sesame‹. On the contrary, the modernity of this conception is evidenced in Schelling's deeply disillusioned analysis of his era. He fixes his gaze on the deepest experience of un-freedom as a place which ontologically grounds the »formal freedom«<sup>17</sup> of humankind and its excluded Other, namely nature and feeling, to the same extent. In this grounding, the one side does not experience the other as its border, but rather as the condition of its own self-realisation.<sup>18</sup>

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17 »Still, idealism itself, no matter how high it has taken us in this respect, and as certain as it is that we have it to thank for the first complete concept of formal freedom, is yet nothing less than a completed system for itself, and it leaves us no guidance in the doctrine of freedom as soon as we wish to enter into what is more exact and decisive« (FE 21 f.; AA I,17, 123). Schelling presents his own definition of the essence of human freedom as »the capacity for good and evil« (FE 23; AA I,17, 125). He sees this as the result of holding the dominant philosophies of freedom in German Idealism up to scrutiny, summarising them under the label of »formal freedom«. This point is pertinently analysed by Friedrich Hermanni. Cf. id. (1994): *Die letzte Entlastung. Vollendung und Scheitern des abendländischen Theodizeeprojektes in Schellings Philosophie*. Vienna, 143–160.

18 I will now cite the most prominent passage in the *Freedom Essay*: »In the first connection we note that, for idealism which has been constructed into a system, it is by no means adequate to claim that ›activity, life and freedom only are the truly real‹ with which even Fichte's subjective idealism (which misunderstands itself) can coexist; rather, it is required that the reverse also be shown, that everything real (nature, the world of things) has activity, life and freedom as its ground or, in Fichte's expression, that not only is I-hood all, but also the reverse, that all is I-hood« (FE 22; AA I,17, 123f.). Schelling's gesture towards the universalisation of freedom testifies to an upheaval within the idealistic concept of freedom, which surpasses the priority of practical reason, as defended by Fichte, for the ontological dimension of a freedom which equally founds subjectivity and nature. I have elsewhere sought to show that Schelling already generated this upheaval in 1800: Cf. L. Hühn (1994): »Die Idee der Neuen Mythologie. Schellings Weg einer naturphilosophischen Fundierung«. In: *Evolution des Geistes. Jena um 1800. Natur und Kunst, Philosophie und Wissenschaft im Spannungsfeld der Geschichte*. Ed. by F. Strack. Stuttgart, 399 ff.

The paradox that a critique of universal compulsion, when it is driven to extremes, falls back upon its own position to the extent that it hands over all the criteria which exclude it from merely reproducing this same logic of compulsion – however cryptically or subtly it may do so – is not new. In the case of Schelling, there is no need to mention this paradox and spell out its consequences, as he presents the critique of his time as being in the theological grip of a God who is still at work in a completely alienated world and proves his presence through this very alienation. And yet the reference to this paradox is not entirely extraneous. For it is often overlooked that the hamartiological brackets within which Schelling presents his critique of modernity are not external to this critique. On the contrary, it defines the implicit standard by which a world fallen to sin can be identified as such and, by extension, transcended in the first place.

The binding and structuring power of this standard announces itself constantly, and in particular whenever one attempts to free oneself from it by thinking one could rule over everything. All our actions and omissions fall under this standard and stand under the negative sign of a sinful self-transgression. Our self-relation also relates us to God as He whose self-empowerment we would wish to usurp for ourselves. That the very first attempted act of freedom carries the omen of sin and transgression only underlines my central thesis – though considered from the other side – that Schelling presents human freedom as a capacity just as much as a power the abuse of which is not contingent but necessary. In the same move which defines freedom as the capacity both for evil and for good, Schelling characterises freedom as a susceptible power the transgression and failure of which are induced from within.<sup>19</sup> This power admits the conditions of its self-harm from the very beginning and – in terms of the history of philosophy – in three ways:

In the first place, the negativity of evil is a necessary prerequisite for the accomplishment of human freedom. Schelling recognises the nonsensical and abysmal character of evil without according it the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. F. Hermanni (1994), 132 ff.

marginal place of a lack of the good – as is customary in classical figures of theodicy.

In aiming to exonerate God for the evils of the world, the reasoning of such theodicies harnesses and exploits the powers of evil, thus rendering it not merely the other of good, but placing it in the service of the good. For Schelling, evil is no mere *privatio boni* but logically and ontologically of equal rank with good, as a necessary moment of a genuine opposition. He considers evil neither as a means for the achievement nor even, as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz does, as the *conditio sine qua non* of the greatest possible perfection in the world. According to Schelling, those who act in morally evil ways demonstrate the same *a priori* of freedom as those who pursue the moral good.

From the beginning, Schelling opposes any ontological disempowerment of evil, regardless of the form in which this disempowerment may occur. Whether evil – in the tradition of the Enlightenment – is taken as a force of cultural progress;<sup>20</sup> or whether the negative power of evil is reduced for idealistic reasons, in that it is minimised to a necessary step on the way to an as yet unrealised reconciliation;<sup>21</sup> or whether, through questionable references to Romans 8:18, it is reshaped by means of apocalyptic and soteriological expectations of salvation: in all these cases, one considers that evil will pay off in the end.<sup>22</sup>

Schelling counters these powerful positions from the philosophical tradition by showing how they all, in one way or another, place evil on the scale<sup>23</sup> in the sense of a *felix culpa*, in order to calculate it cynically into the equation of a telos.

20 Cf. W. Schmidt-Biggemann (1988): »Geschichte der Erbsünde in der Aufklärung. Philosophiegeschichtliche Mutmaßungen«. In: id. *Theodizée und Tatsachen. Das philosophische Profil der deutschen Aufklärung*. Frankfurt am Main, 90 ff.

21 Cf. F. Hermann (1995): »Vom Bösen, das noch stets das Gute schafft. Hegels sündenfalltheoretische Funktionalisierung des Bösen«. In: *Jahrbuch für Philosophie des Forschungsinstituts für Philosophie Hannover* 6, 29–46.

22 Cf. W. Jaeschke (1996): »Freiheit um Gottes willen«. In: *Schellings Weg zur Freiheitsschrift. Legende und Wirklichkeit*. Ed. by H. M. Baumgartner / W. H. Jacobs. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 217 f.

23 On the meaning of the scales (*ouk axia*) in Romans 8:18, see the discussion be-



In the second place, Schelling recognises the value of evil on account of its irreducible facticity. That which previously had only been recognised as the outer prerequisite and inner ground of possibility for human freedom is promoted to a definition of human freedom itself by Schelling. By raising evil to the status of a way of life which characterises and genuinely belongs to human life, he presents a theory of evil's origin in the world that locates this origin in the innermost core of the capacity for freedom.<sup>24</sup> The point lies in the foundation according to which the negativity of evil is indebted to the autonomy of the subject in such a way that evil only reflects back upon the execution of freedom by the human subject – rather than on God or nature (FE 38; AA I,17, 139f.). Thus, evil for Schelling is not something which simply occurs as a dark side of nature that is grounded in our sensuality, or as a power that approaches us from without. It is not a dark tendency but rather human freedom as such which Schelling identifies as the origin of evil. Humanity would only have been capable of hindering evil if it had refused to render its freedom actual, thus – paradoxically – relinquishing itself. Evil is so deeply rooted in the autonomy of modern subjectivity that, without it, there is nothing that humanity would be in its inner essence, to Schelling's understanding. »[T]he essence of man is fundamentally *his own act* [...]. [I]t is a real self-positing, it is a primal and fundamental willing [*Ur- und Grundwollen*], which makes itself into something and is the ground of all ways of being [*Wesenheit*]« (FE 50f.; AA I,17, 152).

In the third place, evil, through its status as a way of realising human freedom, attains the place of a principle that generates reality. It thus concerns the entire constitution of our reality and not merely

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tween J. B. Metz and J. Ebach in W. Oelmüller (1992): *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann. Neue Diskussionen zur Theodizeefrage*. Munich, 148 ff.

24 Annemarie Pieper thus argues: »Evil can thus not be located in one of the parts of the relationship, which ontologically embodies a pure negativity; it is rather manifest as a perversion of the entire structure of the relationship«. (A. Pieper [1995]: »Zum Problem der Herkunft des Bösen I: Die Wurzel des Bösen im Selbst [364–382]«. In: F. W. J. Schelling. *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*. Ed. by O. Höffe / A. Pieper. Berlin, 103 f.)

certain areas of activity. Schelling orders evil, as the adversary of the ethical good, in a world which is always already sworn to evil. Schelling addresses evil in the dubious duplicity<sup>25</sup> and circularity of

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- 25 Schelling makes the mistake of uniting in one act what he ought to have kept separate. As one of the two synthesised elements within his definition of human freedom – taken as the capacity for good and evil – evil receives its entire determination in opposition to good. The expansion of evil from a being merely part of an opposition to becoming the overarching whole collides with Schelling's own position, which states that the intelligible deed, as the facilitating ground of the opposition, is always more than just the totalised form of one of its moments. That Schelling raises evil, as the opposite of good, to a whole which encompasses the parts of its synthesis – this is a position that scholarship has been unable to affirm. For this expansion of the concept of evil makes it impossible to comprehend what genuinely separates the intelligible deed, as the horizon of possibility for our actions, from the inner-worldly realisation of these actions, including evil ones. If one takes this uninterrupted totalization of evil for Schelling's final word on the subject, then there is no room left for the intelligible deed as a transcendental decisiveness for an inner-worldly decision for either good or evil. The inner-worldly behaviour of human beings would move in a compulsive and nearly fatalistic way on the tracks of previously determined behavioural patterns, which for their part can no longer be altered or affected, let alone revised in favour of the moral improvement of humanity.

In the ongoing discussion on Schelling's ›failed‹ definition of the essence of human freedom, Christoph Schulte (1988): *Radikal böse. Die Karriere des Bösen von Kant bis Nietzsche*. Munich, Friedrich Hermann (1994), Siegbert Peetz (1995) and most recently Walter Jaeschke (1996) have, with reference to Michael Theunissen (1965), regretted the limited use of a so broadly construed concept of evil. They principally see an inconsistency in the very centre of the *Freedom Essay* as the instigator of this negative outcome: The intelligible deed through which Schelling advances his universalisation of evil does not allow for that which ought to render this deed possible and provide the ontological foundations for its transcendental-philosophical character, namely the inner-worldly foundation of a possible moral ›transmutation‹ to the good – a ›transmutation‹, which as the ›real and decisive turn around‹, seeks to reverse the once seized possibility of the human, ›through which he is this individual and no other‹ (FE 54; AA I,17, 156).

It may sound speculative, but to my understanding the idea of this ›transmutation‹ is taken up again in the experience of freedom which Schelling later refers to as the ›ecstasy of the ego‹. He profiles this ecstasy as a place where the human being is free to be another person – another person than the one he has become. ›One admits that a man may begin his moral life from the beginning again in the