



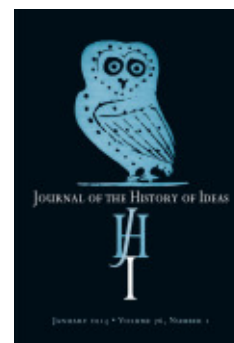
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“Altars to the Beautiful Necessity”: The Significance of F. W. J. Schelling’s “Philosophical Inquiries in the Nature of Human Freedom” in the Development of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Concept of Fate

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In 1829 Ralph Waldo Emerson’s aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, wrote a letter to her nephew that began as follows: “Dear Waldo, Your *knee—how does it?* I would it were well. [. . .] How came it *philosophically?* Was it one of a series of events inevitable—or provided as a means of virtue? Either reposes the mind that excludes blind chance.”¹ It is immediately clear Emerson’s aunt did not write “mere” letters. As a woman all but incapable of unnecessary levity her metaphysical joke swiftly turns didactic. Indeed it contains in miniature a history of New England philosophical theology: the Calvinist conception of predestination, the notion that everything may be construed as a moral symbol, and the rejection of contingency. It was thirty-one years later that “Waldo”—as the family called Ralph Waldo Emerson—finally published his own contribution to this deeply entrenched debate in his 1860 essay “Fate.” Emerson began that essay, published in *The Conduct of Life*, by asking “how shall I live?” But he immediately stated that “we are incompetent to solve the times. Our geometry cannot

¹ Nancy Craig Simmons, ed., *The Selected Letters of Mary Moody Emerson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 266; Mary’s emphases.

span the huge orbits of the prevailing ideas, behold their return and reconcile their opposition.”² That the “prevailing ideas” we cannot “span” are freewill and fate is suggested by the title of the essay, but it may also be inferred from the same paragraph: “We can only obey our own polarity. ’Tis fine for us to speculate and elect our course, if we must accept an irresistible dictation.”³ Now Emerson’s playfulness is to the fore, and doled out just as seriously as it was by his aunt. There are, as any reader would know, two poles: so what does it mean to “obey your own polarity”? Also “election” most commonly denotes free choice and as such it is at the heart of American democracy; but it also connotes Calvinist “election”—that is, those chosen from the beginning of things to join God in heaven at the end of them. The one word contains both the poles that we must “obey.” Language, then, as the words “pole” and “election” illustrate, dictates to us our existential condition through its own duplicity.⁴

Emerson almost immediately restated the terms of the paradox: “But if there must be irresistible dictation, this dictation understands itself. If we must accept Fate, we are not less compelled to affirm liberty, the significance of the individual, the grandeur or duty, the power of character. This is true and that other is true.”⁵ What I shall show in this essay is that Emerson’s contentment with these paradoxes was not mere whimsy or even rhetoric. It was a considered compatibilist perspective, long wrought, which actually came very late in his thinking.⁶ For, though he published “Fate” in 1860, when he was fifty-seven and a well-established literary and intellectual figure, he had been pondering its perceived complexities since at least 1822, when he was just eighteen and had barely begun to compose his epic lifelong journal. Always present in this extensive hinterland is the local influence of Calvinism, echoed in his aunt’s letter. But more importantly Emerson was informed by the post-Kantian idea of freedom put forward by the European Romantic thought that had made its way across the Atlantic through such interpreters as Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This was further augmented by James Elliot Cabot’s serendipitous translation in 1844 of

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 9 Vols., ed. Alfred R. Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: University of Harvard Press, 1971–2012), 6:1. Hereafter *Works*.

³ Emerson, *Works*, 6:2.

⁴ For a productive take on a more obscure pun here, “condition” and “con-diction,” see Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), 81–82.

⁵ Emerson, *Works*, 6:2.

⁶ For an outline of the history of “compatibilism” see Robert Kane, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Freewill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9–14.

F. W. J. Schelling's *Philosophischen Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* (1809) as "Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom and Matters Connected Therewith." The original handwritten manuscript is in the holdings of the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe,⁷ and what follows is the first attempt using that manuscript to explore the influence of Schelling's ideas, as Emerson read them, on his concept of fate. This should prove productive for an Emerson scholarship that has long noted the influence of Schelling upon Emerson but has taken it to be slight, second-hand, and focused on the Identity Philosophy and the Philosophy of Nature.⁸ This should also enable a reconsideration of the importance of Schelling in the United States that precedes, albeit only by a few years, Johann Bernhard Stallo's *General Principles of the Philosophy of Nature* (1848), and by a generation the work of the St. Louis Hegelians.⁹ Nevertheless, in what follows I am primarily interested in what Emerson could have read in Cabot's translation and the impact it had on his intellectual trajectory. As such, to compare and contrast Cabot's translation with the original or with more recent scholarly translations would not represent Emerson's experience and has been largely avoided in the body of the essay. I have, though, noted when necessary instances where Cabot's translation of Schelling may have prejudiced Emerson's ability to grasp the fundamentals of his argument.¹⁰

I.

In 1844 Emerson became acquainted with the young man who would, in the fullness of time, become his literary executor: James Elliot Cabot.

⁷ "The Cabot Family Papers" (A-99, Box 4, Folder 62), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Hereafter Schelling, "Cabot" followed by the manuscript page number.

⁸ See, for example, Henry David Gray, *Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of its Chief Exponent* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1917); Stephen Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Perpetua, 1961).

⁹ Elizabeth Flower and Murray G. Murphy, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1977), 463–516. For work on Emerson and German thought more generally, see Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America: Literary and Philosophical Influences* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957); René Wellek, *Confrontations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); and Gustaaf Van Cromphout, *Emerson's Modernity and the Example of Goethe* (Columbia: University of Columbia Press, 1990).

¹⁰ I am very grateful to the advice of Dr. Iain Grant in this regard.

Cabot, a philosopher and Germanist, was in his early twenties, and had recently returned from attending Schelling's Berlin lectures. Probably towards the end of 1844 he gave Emerson his manuscript translation of Schelling's long 1809 essay "Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom and Matters Connected Therewith." Schelling's essay seeks to explain from first principles why there is evil in the world and why it is that man is free to choose it or to choose good. In Cabot's translation Emerson read: "the true & vital idea [of Freedom is] that it is the faculty of Good and Evil."¹¹ According to Johannes Schmidt and Jeff Love, the essay's most recent translators, it was therefore a theodicy; a tract which would, in Milton's famous words, "justify the wayes of God to men."¹² Schelling's aims are further extended by Joseph Lawrence, who takes the *Freedom* essay to be a Theogony: the history and ground of God.¹³ It is not, then, just a work about human freedom, it is a work about God's freedom. The intertwining of these radical ways of thinking about freedom and the divine was important for Emerson, who, as I shall show, wanted both to assert man's freedom and to locate it cosmologically.

It was perhaps as early as 1844, though more likely 1845, that Emerson first misquoted in his journal some lines from Cabot's translation of Schelling's essay that would appear in the late essay "Fate": "There is in every man a feeling agreeing [consonant] with this, that he has been what he is from all eternity, & by no means first [and not merely] became such in time."¹⁴ That Emerson had been thinking about these lines, turning them over in his mind, and making them his own, may account for the two discrepancies from Cabot's translation. (There is a precedent for this kind of loose quotation in Emerson's thought. Every time Emerson quoted Coleridge's Latin refrain "Quantum, sumus scimus"—"you are what you know"—he wrote it as "quantum scimus sumus.")¹⁵ In June of 1845 Emerson made a longer and more complex reference to Schelling's essay: "The philosophy we want is one of fluxions & mobility; not a house, but a ship

¹¹ Schelling, "Cabot," 25.

¹² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara Lewalski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 12; F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. and intro. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), ix–xxix.

¹³ Joseph P. Lawrence, "Schelling's Metaphysics of Evil," *The New Schelling*, ed. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (New York: Continuum, 2004), 167–89.

¹⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 16 vols., ed. William H. Gilman et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960–82), 9:101. *JMN* hereafter. The text in square brackets is from Schelling, "Cabot," 75–76.

¹⁵ For example, *JMN*, 3:164, 171, 185.

in these billows we inhabit. [. . .] Thus all philosophy begins from Nox & Chaos, the Ground or Abyss which Schelling so celebrates. And in every man we require a bit of night, of chaos, of Abgrund, as the spring of a watch turns best on a diamond.”¹⁶ It is not easy to tell from this idiosyncratic passage how much of Schelling’s work and language Emerson had understood, but I do want to argue that Schelling is part of the story of Emerson’s developing concept of fate. For, however differently they were construed—and Emerson would have had no interest in merely accepting his philosophy—Schelling’s fundamentally dynamic tropes of creation, darkness, ground, and abyss (*Grund* and *Abgrund*) as they appear in Cabot’s translation became part of Emerson’s own elaborate philosophy of flux to set against dogma, determinism, and fate. Indeed, whatever the limitations of the translation, Emerson certainly had the opportunity to grapple with elements of Schelling’s linguistic richness. He would have seen in a footnote to the manuscript Cabot’s observation that *Grund* in German can mean “ground, foundation, cause, bottom, also by ellipsis, chasm or abyss, in which latter sense Schelling often uses it.”¹⁷ But what I also want to show in this essay is that Emerson was well prepared to get something out of Schelling. Indeed, in many identifiable ways Schelling’s questions and conclusions, if not his dialectical method, prefigured what Emerson had been working through for over twenty years. These “coincidences” may be summarized as follows: 1) that evil and good are essentially connected; 2) that freedom is one with necessity; 3) that there is a “dark ground”—or “aboriginal abyss”¹⁸—underlying and competing with the spirit which creates evil and good, freedom and fate; 4) that man is part of God, but moreover, that as such he is a creation that creates; 5) that man has emerged from, and will return to, this prior unity; 6) that in order to do so man must attune his will to the will of the divine; 7) that only this yields the self-given law which is, properly speaking, freedom.

Despite this marked convergence Schelling’s was a book that Emerson found hard to pick up and hard to let go. In September of 1845 he writes to Cabot that “I am a very bad borrower of books” and of how “This admirable Schelling, which I have never fairly engaged with until last week, demands the ‘lamp’ & the ‘lonely tower’ and a lustrum of silence. I delight in his steady inevitable eye, and the breadth of his march including & disposing of so many objects of mark.”¹⁹ Curiously he recorded here that he

¹⁶ Emerson, *JMN*, 9:223.

¹⁷ Schelling, “Cabot,” 32.

¹⁸ Emerson, *Works*, 2:70.

¹⁹ Ralph L. Rusk and Eleanor Tilton, eds., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 7 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939, 1990–95), 3:298. Hereafter *Letters*.

had just begun to “fairly” engage with the book two months after he had registered significant knowledge of it in his journal, and a year after it came into his possession. This implies a rather desultory approach to his reading that is supported by the next letter he wrote to Cabot later the same month: “Schelling continues to interest me, but I am so ill a reader of these subtle dialectics, that I let them lie a long while near me, as if in hope of an atmospheric influence when the Understanding refuses his task.”²⁰ All but a year later, in August of 1846, he wrote “the Schelling I have only now concluded to let alone.”²¹ The editor of Emerson’s correspondence, Ralph L. Rusk, sees in this intellectual defeat.²² I am not so sure. Emerson had absorbed all that he would, and it was not, indeed, a work that would speak to Emerson’s “Understanding,” which for him, following Coleridge, meant the purely rational mental faculty; but it was one that would speak to his “Reason,” that is, again after Coleridge, the intuitive truth-seeking aspect of his self. Indeed, there is no modern philosopher whom Emerson could be said to have properly studied. But this does not at all mean that he was not influenced in crucial ways by a shared sense of intellectual purpose, or that much of his most famous and even idiosyncratic thought was not developed from insights picked up through “atmospheric influence.”

The first question that was at stake for Emerson was, in a not yet nineteen-year-old Emerson’s words: “No elaborate argument can remove the fact which strikes the senses, and which is the first & chief difficulty in the way of the belief of an omnipotent good Principle, namely the existence of evil in the world.”²³ In answer to this Emerson outlined one of his major theodical themes: “compensation.” Over extended time: “a succession of misfortune & suffering is counterbalanced by an equal sum of happiness.”²⁴ (In order to turn this fully into his doctrine of “compensation” Emerson would have to do little but reduce the element of time involved to nothing, and this he achieved, to his own satisfaction, over the next two decades.) What was also quickly established was the connection between good and evil and freewill and fate, for in an aborted comment that he made a few lines later, he observed that if there is a plan on such a scale then we are but the “painted figures” of a grand “Artist.” Emerson asks: “is this a fair view? Are free agents nothing more than painted emblems? are—(but I have left my proper course of thought and must return to it again).”²⁵ Here,

²⁰ Emerson, *Letters*, 3:303–4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3:343.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *JMN*, 1:92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Emerson, *JMN*, 1:93.

suddenly, while thinking about good and evil, the issue of freedom and fate enters into his train of thought and is just as swiftly suppressed. Hitherto Emerson had been following a simplified and consolatory eighteenth-century theodicy that this is the “best of all possible worlds” and that the presence of evil is either a misunderstanding or a want of perspective. But anything which takes this grand view will struggle to deal with the idea of freedom: for if evil “now” is to be balanced by good “to come” then the ledger in which the accounts are squared is already writ. References to this nagging question of freedom and fate are scattered throughout Emerson’s journals and notebooks and I shall advert to a few to illustrate the polarized nature of the problem.

Later the same year, 1822, he asked: “How shall [man] reconcile his freedom with that eternal necessary chain of cause and consequence which binds him and Nature down to an irreversible degree? How shall he reconcile his freedom with that prophetic omniscience which beheld his end long before the infant entered the world?” and, moreover, how can this be reconciled with “Justice” and “Omnipotence”?²⁶ The mixture here of the discourses of natural science (“cause and consequence”) and religion (“prophetic omniscience”) is entirely typical of Emerson and sheds much light on the way that he saw both science and religion as equally important, and for this issue at least, equally impotent, ways of grasping the universe. Again, he would conclude, it is want of perspective—but this, he knew, while it might allow for the compensations of infinite justice does little to address “the doctrine of human necessity.”²⁷ Nevertheless he did nothing to avoid the contradictions of the issue. In October of 1829, a month before his aunt would inquire about his knee, and now writing as a serving minister, he noted: “the government of God is not on a plan—that would be Destiny; it is extempore.” A few months later, in March of 1830, he presented this idea more formally in preparation for a sermon: “Finally, as to the question of how far it is presumptuous or inefficacious to pray because of God’s omniscient Providence;—why, we may conceive God as governing extempore, each moment, from a view of all the facts, & my earnest desires make up one of the facts.”²⁸ This says much of God’s liberty, but it also says much of ours, for it allows God to be surprised by us: it leaves room for divine improvisation based upon human freedom. While this may be construed as optimistic, it should be set against the darkness that intruded

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:167, 183.

in October 1832, at the very moment of his resignation from the ministry, where man endures a “terrible freedom.”²⁹

By 1838 Emerson’s prose had developed far enough for him to represent this dark liberty in a hasty series of figures:

men are not made like boxes[,] a hundred[,] a thousand to order, & and all exactly alike, of known dimensions, & all their properties known[;] but no they come into nature through a nine months’ astonishment & of a character each one incalculable & of extravagant possibilities[;] out of darkness & out of the awful Cause they come to be caught up into this vision of a seeing, partaking, acting & suffering life, not foreknown[,] not fore-estimable but slowly or speedily they unfold new, unknown, mighty traits. Not boxes but these machines are alive, agitated, fearing, sorrowing[.]³⁰

Here the “awful Cause” is dark, as he would see in Schelling; it is also unknown, that is, “extempore,” which again would be central to Schelling’s argument. Emerson’s God, by 1838, was depersonalized and his power was to create and grow, not to judge and know. Thus human life was not “foreknown” or even “fore-estimable.” Rather Emerson appeared to be suggesting a principle of life which opposes a principle of mechanism, but which is also one with it: “these machines are alive.” Here, again, he showed himself sympathetic to what he would read in Cabot’s translation of Schelling, where nature itself insists on liberty.³¹ Even so, this principle of indeterminate life is not Emerson’s sole or even dominant perspective. Just over a year later, in 1840, he contradicted himself again and returned to the authority of the mechanical: “There is no leap—not a shock of violence throughout nature. Man therefore must be predicted in the first chemical relation exhibited by the first atom. If we had eyes to see it, this bit of quartz would certify us of the necessity that man must exist as inevitably as the cities he has actually built.”³² Here was an absolute determinism of the whole to set against an absolute belief in the liberty of each individual. Nevertheless, in his 1841 address “The Method of Nature,” he wrote: “permanence is perpetual inchoation.”³³ Here nothing is stable, all is malleable.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7:147; editors’ interpolations.

³¹ Schelling, “Cabot,” 61.

³² Emerson, *JMN*, 7:399.

³³ Emerson, *Works*, 1:124.

This is derived from nature's superabundance: "that redundancy or excess of life which in conscious beings we call *ecstasy*."³⁴ This excess has a ready parallel in Schelling. In Cabot's translation it is "the incomprehensible basis in the Reality of things; the never eliminated remainder, that resists the utmost efforts of the understanding, and remains eternally behind."³⁵ The "never eliminated remainder" is central to the *Freedom* essay, for without it creation could not be, or at least it could not be free. For, as Emerson would read: "were the dependent or subsequent not self-existent there would be a contradiction."³⁶ Freedom emerges only when the "consequent" is not contained in the "cause" (recalling Emerson's terms), but rather has its own essence, and this lack of ground is born of the remainder. For Schelling, as for Emerson in this mood, everything that appears ordered or mechanized in nature is only a temporary staying of the "uncontrolled" that always "might once more break through."³⁷ It is, then, into the space opened up by this on-going and seemingly inescapable incompatibilist contradiction, figured by mechanism and organicism, that Emerson's reading of Cabot's Schelling developed as an extension of, and an answer to, this fundamental problem of Emerson's intellectual life: freedom and fate. Of course, I am not the first to examine freedom and fate more broadly in Emerson's thought. Many critics have seen Emerson's trajectory as one in which the early idealism of freedom gives way to the more practical demands of fate. This has been increasingly challenged in recent years and this essay belongs to that challenge.³⁸

II.

Despite whatever difficulties Schelling's dialectics may have provided for Emerson it should be evident that he would have found much that corresponded with his own perspective in "On the Nature of Human Freedom." In addition to the dark ground and the remainder he would certainly have been cheered to note that it was something that he would have understood as idealism in the tradition of Immanuel Kant that offered a credible principle for rescuing freedom from necessity. Emerson had acknowledged Kant

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:127.

³⁵ Schelling, "Cabot," 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See Whicher, *passim*; and Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 282–83.

as the father of New England “Transcendentalism” in a lecture of that title in December 1841. Terminological (and temporal) accuracy, however, was never Emerson’s strong point and for him Transcendentalism was “Idealism as it appears in 1842.” In the lecture he had used “Immanuel Kant, of Konigsberg” as an authority to challenge “experience” with “intuition,” or the “understanding” with the “soul”: his earnest desire being to reassert the rights of a spiritual principle over the emerging authority of mechanism in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁹ Emerson described this condition as “double consciousness,” and it corresponded to the fundamental psychic rift that German idealism had opened between reason and faith. That Emerson’s position was a misunderstanding of Kant is not something he could have been aware of at that time as he was without first-hand knowledge.⁴⁰ But, ironically, this very misunderstanding would enable him to accept aspects of Schelling’s work as it appeared in Cabot’s translation.

What Kant had achieved in *The Critique of Pure Reason* was a more or less convincing separation between two “worlds,” the phenomenal and the noumenal (which would lead, errantly, to Emerson’s “double consciousness”). The phenomenal world is the world of experience, ordered by cause and effect and operating on entirely deterministic lines. In the phenomenal world freedom is impossible; Kant calls this “natural necessity.”⁴¹ But Kant’s significant move, as Emerson would come to understand it, was to locate causality not in the things themselves but rather in the way those things are perceived or represented. We can only know the world as determined; this does not mean that *in itself* it is determined. The noumenal world, which we can intellectually speculate upon, but not know, Kant argued, is entirely free from time, and hence from determination. Kant called this “the transcendental idea of freedom” and it is “the independence of the power of choice from *necessitation*” that allows for spontaneous judgment. Here Kant, who could be defined as an agent-causal incompatibilist, removed freedom from the realm of sensibility (“an *animal* power of choice”), because “in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independent of necessitation by sensible impulses,”⁴² and delivered it to the realm of reason.

³⁹ Emerson, *Works* 1:201, 206, 207, 213.

⁴⁰ See David Van Leer, *Emerson’s Epistemology: The Argument of the Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 56–57; and David Greenham, *Emerson’s Transatlantic Romanticism* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 35–54.

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 535/A538–41/B566–69.

⁴² Kant, *Critique*, A533/B561–A534–B562; Kant’s emphasis. See also Kane, *The Oxford Handbook of Freewill*, 23; and Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 15–29.

Emerson would have come across a version of this thesis in Coleridge when he read and re-read him in the early 1830s. In his *Aids to Reflection*, for example, Coleridge was at pains to distinguish the realm of mechanical necessity from the realm of the liberated spirit, and James Marsh adverted to the importance of this in his famous preliminary essay to the 1829 American edition.⁴³ However, Coleridge's reading is tendentious. For Coleridge freedom is essentially spiritual and can be accessed not merely negatively (Kant provided an argument in which it was not illogical that freedom could exist rather than asserting its reality—it is basically a negative position),⁴⁴ but by an active regenerate faith, that is, by direct intuition.⁴⁵ Thus, because of Emerson's understanding of reason via Coleridge, freedom is construed as quasi-mystical and available to intuition. It is in this spirit that he would read the following in Cabot's translation of Schelling:

The whole doctrine of Freedom in fact was first raised by the Idealistic system into the region wherein alone it becomes intelligible. The spiritual principle in everything, & especially in Man is beyond all connection of Cause and Effect, & beyond or above all Time. Thus it can never be determined by aught preceding it, since on the contrary it precedes everything else, that is or that comes into being within it, not so much in Time as in idea, as the absolute Unity, which must be ever present as a perfect whole to afford the necessary condition of all particular action or determination.⁴⁶

Here the *Freedom* essay, in line with the dissatisfaction with Kant's conclusions that were the seedbed of German Romanticism,⁴⁷ accepts Kant's position only to speculate on the "reality" of freedom which Cabot calls "the spiritual principle." Cabot's translation of Schelling's "*intelligible Wesen*" as "spiritual principle," rather than "intelligible essence,"⁴⁸ would suggest to Emerson that *qua* spiritual the principle of freedom in man could *not* be

⁴³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. James Marsh (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), xxxi, lv–lix, 44–45. For Emerson's reading of Coleridge's *Aids* see Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 92–93.

⁴⁴ Kant, *Critique*: A558/B586, 546.

⁴⁵ Coleridge, *Aids*, 143–56.

⁴⁶ Schelling, "Cabot," 72.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 42–47.

⁴⁸ F. W. J. Schelling, *Schelling: Of Human Freedom*, trans. and intro. James Gutmann (Chicago: Open Court, 1936), 61.

understood but only intuited, whereas Schelling is arguing to the contrary that this “essence,” not principle, *is* available to the full rigors of dialectical intelligence. (Interestingly Cabot had erased the beginning of the word “intelligible” in his manuscript.) Emerson, however, in taking “spiritual principle,” defined in the foregoing quotation as “an absolute Unity, which must be ever present as a perfect whole,” as something mysterious, would feel released from Schelling’s larger argument, instead relying on direct intuition. Cabot’s translation may also imply that unity is *antecedently* present, whereas for Schelling the idea, as unity, only emerges in a particular act. Cause and consequent must be ungrounded or there would be no such thing as freedom; as such antecedence becomes “present” only in this act. This, as we have seen in part, is clarified elsewhere in the translation: “Were the dependent or subsequent not self-existent, there would be a contradiction. It would be a dependence without a dependent; a consequence without a consequent [*Consequentia absque Consequente*]; & thus no true consequence; i.e. the whole conception would destroy itself.”⁴⁹ Thus the spiritual principle (*intelligible Wesen*) exists in and of itself; it is undetermined by what precedes it or else it would not be free. Nevertheless, the spiritual principle’s free acts still must be determined, but crucially they are determined “not, indeed, from without, for this contradicts its nature; not from within by any merely accidental or empirical necessity, since all such [. . .] lies beneath it;—but itself, as Man’s essence; i.e., his proper nature, must determine it.” The spiritual principle, then, is free, but only because it acts in accordance with its own “inward nature.” That is, it is free insofar as it follows the “laws of its own essence.”⁵⁰ This must have seemed to Emerson to be very close to his own doctrine of Self-Reliance. As he put it in the essay of that name: “No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature.”⁵¹ Thus Schelling would appear to him to be using a recognizable romantic logic of self-determining laws (which Kant, Schlegel, and Coleridge apply to art and genius) to distinguish between a merely empirical necessity of cause and effect and a transcendent necessity which emerges out of the “spiritual principle” itself under no compulsion from anything exterior to its being. The *Freedom* essay’s move, though, is far from narrowing the point of liberty to the “mere” self. Rather the answer to the question, “But what then is this inward necessity” that is also “the very point at which Necessity and Freedom must be united,”⁵² can only be understood through an account of God’s own coming into existence.

⁴⁹ Schelling, “Cabot,” 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵¹ Emerson, *Works*, 2:30.

⁵² Schelling, “Cabot,” 74.

Schelling's description of God's becoming is analogous to that of his immediate predecessor Johann Gottlieb Fichte's description of man. For Fichte (and Emerson digests this again by way of Coleridge) man comes into himself through a process of reflection on otherness.⁵³ As an infinite subject man is initially infinitely projected and as such only through his own act, his will, which is nothing other than this projection, he encounters objects in experience and comes to understand his own limits and find himself. In the "Nature of Human Freedom" Schelling applies the same dialectical process to God. God can only come to be for himself in some kind of otherness. The difficulty is that as God is omnipresent there can be nothing that is other. Schelling is ingenious here. He argues that there is a primal unity which he calls "Will." As Emerson would have read in Cabot's translation, "Will is original Being, and to it alone apply all the attributes of Being: Independence of Cause: Eternity: Independence of time: Self-Affirmation."⁵⁴ But in order to allow that "Will" to play itself out God divides himself into light and dark, spirit and ground. This is the origin of matter. Matter, darkness, the ground (the *Grund*) seeks independence and separation: it desires all for itself. This will to individuality, or "particular will,"⁵⁵ is what Schelling calls evil. On its own, though, it has no existence; it can only emerge against light, or love, which seeks unity not for itself but by losing itself in that which is universal. Schelling calls this good. Emerson likewise, and in anticipation of what he would read in Schelling, had written in "The Method of Nature" that "It is sublime to receive, sublime to love, but this lust of imparting as from *us*, this desire to be loved, the wish to be recognised as individuals,—is finite, comes of a lower strain."⁵⁶ For both, then, the principle of separation is allied with what we call nature, that is, brute, mechanical matter, which in the human tends to evil. It is led by desire. Spirit which counters that evil exists only in one created material being: man.

Man, Schelling argues, is exactly poised between matter and spirit, good and evil, God and the ground. In Cabot's translation Emerson would have read it as follows: "The human will is the germ of the Deity, as yet present only in the Ground, concealed in eternal Desire: it is the glance of God when he willed nature, but concealed in the Abyss. In him (in man) alone has God loved the world."⁵⁷ This is exactly the kind of passage that

⁵³ Greenham, 70–81.

⁵⁴ Schelling, "Cabot," 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁶ Emerson, *Works* 1:130.

⁵⁷ Schelling, "Cabot," 42.

Emerson would have struggled with, but in which he would have yet found suggestive reinforcement. For Schelling man contains both good and evil as possibilities: sown beyond time in the abyss he can grow to the light by choosing God's love. "Man," Cabot's translation continues, "is in the original creation an undecided being: (which may be represented mythically as a condition of innocence & original happiness, preceding this life,):—he alone can determine himself. But his determination cannot take place in Time, but beyond Time, & this is the original creation; tho' as an act distinct from it."⁵⁸ This freedom is, for Schelling, a consequence of "the never eliminated remainder" that liberates cause from effect. In the instant, then, when God separates light from darkness the spirit of all men comes into existence, each equally poised between the selfish desires of the ground and the love of spirit. At that moment, if a thing out of time can be called a moment, each human being chooses its fate: to be good or evil. The choice is not willed by God, but by each individual as a part of that ungrounded creation. Hence, Schelling concludes: "there is in every man a feeling consonant with this; that he has been what he is from all eternity, & not merely become such in time."⁵⁹ Emerson included this quote in his journal, as we have seen, and repeated it twice more: in 1849,⁶⁰ and then again eleven years later in his essay "Fate" as "there is in every man a certain feeling, that he has been what he is from all eternity, and by no means became such in time."⁶¹ In "The Nature of Human Freedom" this passage comes at precisely the point where Schelling has explained man's freedom as a primal choice, and it is to this that Emerson alludes. Man is empirically bounded, but transcendently free: it is easy to see why this would have appealed to Emerson the transcendentalist.

III.

Over the years, between his reading of Schelling in the middle 1840s and the publication of "Fate" in 1860, Emerson would come back to the issue

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁹ Schelling, "Cabot," 75–76. See also Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 74. For the importance of this work and the idea of "radical evil" in particular for Schelling see: Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, 57–65; Lawrence, "Schelling's Metaphysics of Evil," 171–74; and Jason M. Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and his Time* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 165–68. Perhaps provocatively, Cabot translates "radical evil" (*radikale Böse*) as "original Sin": Schelling, "Cabot," 35.

⁶⁰ *JMN*, 9: 101, *JMN*, 11:106.

⁶¹ Emerson, *Works*, 6:7.

of freewill and fate time and again, testing it against familiar and emergent ideas such as scientific determinism or Adolphe Quetelet's new theory of statistics. Throughout these years it would be Emerson's goal to define an idea of freedom in the midst of nineteenth-century American society, while striving to understand the conflict between light and dark, spirit and ground, adduced by Schelling.

Emerson's concern was registered in a journal entry from 1848: "The mechanical laws might as easily be shown pervading the kingdom of the mind, as the vegetative." Everywhere he looked Emerson saw determinism and mechanism at work: from the "tyrannical" family, which shaped the individual life; to "phrenology," where the head shaped the thoughts it contained, or was shaped by them (as a determinist position it made no odds); to "guano," Emerson's cruel metaphor for the "destiny" of the "German & Irish nations" and the "Negro," whose labor, and bodies, fertilized the American continent.⁶² This gross reduction of the human capacity by, and ultimately to, mere physical forces, the evil of separation, always divorcing individuals from unity, was ironically best illustrated by the work of Quetelet, a Belgian statistician whose work Emerson encountered in the late 1840s. It is ironic because Quetelet's work was, if anything, a rejection of men as individuals, seeing them only *en masse*. However, as a group of particular wills, rather than as a unity, it was a persuasive study of the influence of the "dark ground." In 1849, under the heading "Destiny," Emerson quotes the following from Quetelet: "Every thing which pertains to the human species as a whole belongs to the order of physical facts."⁶³ Even so, just a few days later under the heading "Contradictions" he would assert, once again, that "our freedom is necessary."⁶⁴ Though freedom might be at the root of what it is to be human, Quetelet gives Emerson powerful, if ultimately reductive, arguments which would attest to the bounds of that freedom. "One must study Quetelet," he wrote wryly, "to know the limits of human freedom. In 20,000, population, just so many men will marry their grandmothers. Doubtless, in every million, there will be one astronomer, one mathematician, one comic poet & one mystic."⁶⁵ Quetelet maps, for Emerson, the dark ground of man and his conclusions

⁶² Emerson, *JMN*, 9:55, 218, 376. For an examination of Emerson's use of the term "guano" see Eduardo Cadava, "The Guano of History" in *The Other Emerson*, ed. Branka Arsić and Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 101–30.

⁶³ Emerson, *JMN* 11:67.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11:76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11:91.

appear inescapable. However, it is not necessary for Emerson to escape these limitations, be they derived from Quetelet's conclusions, or the binds of race. Rather he needs to sublimate them into his growing, increasingly Schellingian, view of freewill and fate.

Just a page or so after he had coldly dismissed the Irish, the Germans, and the Negro as having "a deal of guano in their destiny,"⁶⁶ he returns to this main theme:

I see but one key to the mysteries of human condition, but one solution to the old knots of Fate, Freedom, and foreknowledge;—the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man is to ride alternately on the horses of his private & his public nature [. . .] so, when a man is the victim of his fate, has a hump-back, and a hump in his mind; a club foot & a club in his wit; (for there is nothing outward that was not first within) or is ground to powder by the vice of his race;—he is to rally on his relation to the Universe, which his ruin benefits. From the demon who suffers, he is to take sides with the God. ~~who damns him~~⁶⁷

These lines, which will appear almost unchanged in "Fate," represent Emerson at his most ironically bitter—albeit he scratches the most desperate words. If we are fated to a certain end, or curtailed by a certain limitation, then we must needs "rally on" how that defect serves the universe's ends if it does not serve ours. That Emerson alludes here to Milton's fallen angels, who after the great parliament of Pandemonium "sat upon a Hill retir'd / In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high / Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate, / Fixed Fate, freewill, foreknowledge absolute, / And found not end, in wandering mazes lost"⁶⁸ is not insignificant. We are also "demon[s] who suffer"; we are also, a-mazed, wandering lost and unable to synthesize the dualism of fate and freewill. But here it is our lot, unlike Satan's host, to take sides with God and accustom ourselves to his decree. As such, Emerson's "double consciousness," slightly reoriented here from its appearance in "The Transcendentalist," is apparently passive: one side of it is the disgusted recognition of our limitation; the other side asks us to settle into some kind of compatibilist contentment that it is the universe's will. However, this acquiescence, which could appear to belong to

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11:376.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 11:377–78; *Works*, 6:25–26.

⁶⁸ Lewalski, *Paradise Lost*, 52–53.

the determinist streak in Emerson's thought, is very far from being in accordance with such a conclusion, be it Puritan pre-destination or scientific necessity. For the Puritan or the deterministic scientist creation is once and once only. We are thence forward creatures contoured by God or nature. But for Emerson our passivity, if it can be called such, makes us enactors of continuous creation—we are, as he shall say, “of the Maker not the Made.”⁶⁹ Though Emerson was unlikely to have been aware of it, this is strongly analogous to the suggestive pantheism in Schelling's idea of the human as the “co-poet” (*Mitdichter*) in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800): “If [God] *does* not exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he himself *would not be*, then we are co-poets of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play.”⁷⁰ The emergence of this ultimately tense compromise with the universe should come as no surprise from someone whose most famous lines celebrate how he became “nothing,” and was yet, triumphantly, “part or particle of God.”⁷¹ This is, as we shall see, very close to Schelling's conclusions in “The Nature of Human Freedom,” and as such his reading of that essay would have provided further support for Emerson in the 1850s as he developed his idea of “Beautiful Necessity”⁷² through which he could posit the unity of mind and matter, freedom and fate.

IV.

Emerson's reorientation of double consciousness caused him to consider the dualism between thinking, which represents freedom, and matter, which represents fate. For example, in 1851 he wrote: “The intellect conquers Fate,” “Fate stands opposed to intellect,” and “Strong thinking dissolves the material universe.”⁷³ In 1854 he wrote “we are used as brute atoms, until we think.”⁷⁴ Freedom continued to be the power of self-movement or “flow.” Flow had been a crucial trope in his earlier essay, “The Method of Nature,” and it is something Emerson happily finds in his re-reading in the

⁶⁹ Emerson, *JMN*, 14:305.

⁷⁰ F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 210. Translation slightly altered.

⁷¹ Emerson, *Works*, 1:10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 6:26.

⁷³ Emerson, *JMN* 11:388, 413, 442.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13:302.

early 1850s of the neo-Platonic philosophers Iamblichus and Proclus, whom he calls the “dissolvers of Fate,” for they are “*Οι ρεοντες*,” or “the flowing ones,” for whom “liberty means the power to flow. To continue is to flow. Life is unceasing parturition.”⁷⁵ Fate, as a limitation of life, is here nothing but the effort to restrict this flow, this constant rebirth. Intellect or mind, as an ecstatic force, analogous to the vitality of Schelling’s “never eliminated remainder,” has the power to break that restriction by “*Becoming somewhat else*,”⁷⁶ though all the elements of chemistry, race, disposition, culture, and form (the dark ground) may stand against it. Crucially, though, what Emerson was interested in is not the triumph of freedom over fate (even in “The Method of Nature” excess does not deliver a liberty of indifference: there is “no private will,” man is “not an agent”: he is a “necessary actor”).⁷⁷ Rather Emerson was determined to locate the balance between freedom and necessity which allows them both to be what they are. Thus, in the mid-1850s (the precise date is uncertain) he wrote: “a perfect freedom is only the counterpart to the perfect nature. When that is born, & ripened, & tried,—& says, ‘Here stand I, I cannot otherwise,’—nature surrenders as meekly as the ass on which Jesus rode.”⁷⁸ Emerson’s citation of Martin Luther’s famous statement at the Diet of Worms illustrates how liberty is equally a form of necessity.⁷⁹ These are united in balance against the kind of dogmatism that would arrest all change, at least from Emerson’s lapsed protestant position. But what this balance allows for is change itself, which, as his neo-Platonists would suggest, is freedom. Freedom and necessity become increasingly entangled, ultimately, to be one.

The unity of freedom and fate would be Emerson’s way of effecting the escape of poor Grumphy the pig. In an 1855 journal entry he wrote, apropos of “the secret pass from Fate to Freedom,” that “Whatever transcendent abilities Fichte, Kant, Schelling, & Hegel have shown I think they lack the confirmation of having given poor piggy a transit to the field. The log is very crooked, but still leaves poor Grumphy on the same side of the fence he was before.”⁸⁰ In order to effect the transit himself Emerson would

⁷⁵ Ibid., 13:302, 407–8.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 13:408; Emerson’s emphasis.

⁷⁷ Emerson, *Works*, 1:127, 128.

⁷⁸ Emerson, *JMN*, 14:53.

⁷⁹ Daniel Dennett sees Luther’s words as a form of compatibilism allowing for moral responsibility (Kane, *The Oxford Handbook of Freewill*, 15–16).

⁸⁰ Emerson, *JMN*, 13:403–4; this figure is reused in his 1858 lecture “The Powers of the Mind” in *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson 1843–1871, Volume 2: 1855–1871*, eds. Joel Myerson and Ronald A. Bosco (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), 71.

abandon “dialectics and logomachies”⁸¹ and simply assert the unity of freedom and necessity. Nevertheless, I would argue that Schelling remained vital to poor Grumphy’s liberty and to Emerson’s next step. His remarkable move, made in 1859, shortly before the publication of *The Conduct of Life*, was to divide fate from its usual synonym, necessity, for only as such could he affirm that freedom is necessity. The significant journal entry begins as follows:

Our doctrine must begin with the Necessary & Eternal & discriminate Fate from the Necessary. There is no limitation about the Eternal. Thought, Will is co-eternal with the world; and, as soon as intellect is awakened in any man, it shares so far of the eternity,—is of the Maker not the Made. But Fate is the name we give to the action of that one eternal all-various Necessity on the brute myriads whether in things, animals, or in men in whom the intellect pure is not yet opened. To such it is only a burning wall which hurts those who run against it[.]⁸²

Emerson adopted Schelling’s view that freewill is co-eternal with the world, and that in “sharing” (and that is an important word) will man is free as is God. Or rather, as he put it, man is “of the Maker not the Made.” However, unlike Schelling, Emerson did not come to extend freedom to nature itself more broadly conceived. For Emerson only human will is one with the Eternal and as such is Necessary. Even so, such will is not, again, a liberty of indifference, as if any wild choice could be made to affirm man’s freedom. Will acts freely when, as we have seen, as “intellect pure,” that is, as intuition, it harmonizes with the universal will (as Schelling would call it), for then it truly becomes unlimited—part or particle of God. As Emerson continues:

The great day in the man is the birth of perception which instantly throws him on the party of the Eternal. He sees what must be, and that it is not more that which must be, than it is that which should be, or what is best. To be, then becomes the infinite good, & breath is jubilation. A breath of Will blows through the Universe eternally in the direction of the right or necessary; it is the air which all intellects inhale & exhale, and all things are blown or moved by its order & orbit.⁸³

⁸¹ *Later Lectures*, 73.

⁸² Emerson, *JMN*, 14:305.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 14:305–6.

Perception here is more than just a sensation: it is an intuition into the divine plan (“what must be”). This epiphanic moment, the excitement of which is registered in the awkward syntax, was for Emerson a kind of conversion: to *do* the Will of the divine is to *be* the Will of the divine; that is to become part of the divine. This, again, marks Emerson’s distance from the Calvinists, including his aunt Mary, for whom this would be blasphemy, and demonstrates his closeness to Schelling, albeit optimistically skewed. To fail to see this, for Emerson, is to belong to the class of animals or the afflicted, led by “appetite” or “disease,”⁸⁴ mere products of necessity. It is a curious kind of liberty: man is free insofar as he elects the divine plan. The divine plan, then, for Emerson, is just that working out of freedom across Eternity.

It was with this hard-won compatibilist conviction that Emerson composed “Fate” from his journals. He called the essay “Fate” not because he had become inured to those powers which might transcend his own youthful idealism, but, on the contrary, in order to destroy the very concept so named. His process is fairly simple. The essay itself is divided roughly into two halves, the first of which is about limitation and the second about power. It is always the intention that power will triumph. In the first half Emerson listed that which constrains man including phrenology and Quelet’s new statistics. In addition he alluded to the polygenetic conclusions of the Swiss émigré and natural historian Louis Agassiz to bolster his own darker views on race.⁸⁵ He also demonstrated some knowledge of nascent evolution in terms of species and inheritance (though Darwin’s great work, published the year before, was not on Emerson’s horizon). Always, though, however understood, the limiting factor is nature. As he put it bluntly: “Nature is, what you may do” and “The book of Nature is the book of Fate.”⁸⁶ This is the *fated* side of the split, coinciding with Kant’s “natural necessity.” Emerson called it “limitation”: “The element running through entire nature, which we popularly call Fate, is known to us as limitation.”⁸⁷ But there is, after Schelling, an excess:

Man is not order of nature, sack and sack, belly and members, link in a chain, nor any ignominious baggage, but a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the universe. He betrays his relation to what is below him,—thick-skulled, small-brained, fishy, quadrumanous,—quadruped ill-disguised, hardly

⁸⁴ Ibid., 14:206.

⁸⁵ See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (London: Flamingo, 2001), 103–20.

⁸⁶ Emerson, *Works*, 6:8.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 6:11.

escaped into biped, and has paid for the new powers by loss of some of the old ones. But the lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is in him.⁸⁸

That man's "freedom" is not of the order of Quetelet's or Agassiz's nature is appropriately Kantian, but the romantic fire of the last sentence, that we share planet and star making powers, figuratively allies itself with Schelling's conception of eternity. There is, though, a tension with Cabot's Schelling in Emerson's definition of freedom. For Emerson freedom appears continuous: "Forever wells up the impulse of choosing and acting in the soul. Intellect annuls Fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free."⁸⁹ For Schelling, as we have seen, choice happens at the speculative and timeless "beginning" of all things: at the moment of creation each infinite "spiritual" being makes a choice between good and evil, God and the ground. This one-off choice, "coeval with the Creation & constituting the very essence of Man's nature,"⁹⁰ determines his actions throughout his empirical existence. It is thus ever "present," at least in Cabot's translation, but unchanging. This freedom is, for Schelling, "an entirely groundless decree of God."⁹¹ But for Emerson freedom is an ungrounded decree of Man. Thinking challenges fate at every moment: "The revelation of thought takes man out of servitude into freedom. We rightly say of ourselves, we were born, and afterwards we were born again, and many times."⁹² Eclectic though this is, using the language of the East in terms of reincarnation, and the West, in terms of conversion, what Emerson is attesting to is the power to be new, to forget the old. Nevertheless, though indicative of an agent-causal perspective, such freedom is still not in any sense a mere freedom to do what we will (as Jason Wirth says of Schelling: "Human freedom [. . .] is not to be confused with voluntarism").⁹³

Indeed, if intellect annuls fate, asserting freedom, it is only because nature, that which is fate, has become transparent to it as the part finds itself in the whole. This is the ability of the mind to perceive what will be because it understands what is and that allows it to have power and thus to be free: "Just as much intellect as you add, so much organic power. He who sees through the design, presides over it, and must will that which must

⁸⁸ Ibid., 6:12.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 6:12–13.

⁹⁰ "Cabot," 78.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Emerson, *Works*, 6:14.

⁹³ Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life*, 164.

be.”⁹⁴ And what is seen is unity: that necessity and power are one not two. Their perceived doubleness is an illusion, but only because “the copula is hidden.”⁹⁵ So, for Emerson, as he stated at the outset of the essay, freedom *is* necessity; that it is free lies only in that it knows itself to be necessitated, but without the providential superstition of predestination. Nevertheless, in real life we are forced into “double consciousness,” where “man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and public nature,” and though we will blame fate for our ills we must also “rally on [our] relation to the universe, which [our] ruin benefits.”⁹⁶ This, then, is our polarity, that stupendous antagonism which makes up man. We are free insofar as we are able to recognize that we are part of a universal end; it is this double consciousness which reveals, paradoxically, the unity that underlies all things: one nature, one process, one design. But—and this is crucial for Emerson and perhaps the most important thing he could have found support for in Schelling—we are a creative part of that end: the makers not the made. The dark ground rises to our intellect: “The whole world is the flux of matter over the wires of thought to the poles or points where it would build.”⁹⁷ So, “Let us build altars to the Blessed Unity which holds nature and souls in perfect solution, and compels every atom to serve an universal end.”⁹⁸ As such, Emerson’s compatibilist freedom remains subordination—Emerson would prefer the word “obedience”—to a larger unifying order. Freedom on any other terms, those of mere individual “whim” for example, would be meaningless: “Let us build altars to the Beautiful Necessity. If we thought men were free in the sense, that, in a single exception one fantastical will could prevail over the law of things, it were all one as if a child’s hand could pull down the sun. If, in the least particular one could derange the order of nature,—who would accept the gift of life?”⁹⁹ Liberty is one with law, but it is a self-given law, not God’s; or at least not a benevolent and providential God that Emerson’s aunt Mary would have recognized: “Law rules throughout existence, a law which is not intelligent but intelligence,—not personal nor impersonal,—it disdains words and passes understanding; it dissolves persons; it vivifies nature; yet solicits the pure heart to draw on all its omnipotence.”¹⁰⁰ Emerson’s law is not God: it is a dynamic

⁹⁴ Emerson, *Works*, 6:15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6:21.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6:25.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6:23.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6:26.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 6:27.

process that dissolves persons into its greater whole as it is itself generated from the free acts of those individual selves. It is here that Schelling's and Emerson's thinking come closest together. Later on in his treatise Schelling wrote: "True freedom is in harmony with a sacred Necessity, such as we feel in all true knowledge, wherein spirit and heart, following only their own law, freely affirm that which necessarily is."¹⁰¹ Schelling's "sacred necessity" becomes Emerson's poetically compatibilist "beautiful necessity." It is where the self grasps, and freely asserts, that it is part of a whole. It is in this way that, to return to the beginning of Emerson's essay, "dictation understands itself"; but this is not the dictation of scripture for it "disdains words": it is the dictation of a design in which we are creative co-partners, a vast plenum which our polarities shape as they obey its law. But even more, for Emerson, it is about the shape we give our lives through "the power of character" or "the grandeur of duty." Indeed, *The Conduct of Life* is the telling title of the book which contains the essay "Fate," and ultimately it will be through behavior, character, and duty, the lineage of pragmatism, rather than metaphysics, that we may come to trust that freedom is working through us.¹⁰²

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¹⁰¹ Schelling, "Cabot," 85.

¹⁰² See Cornell West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); and Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).