



## THEORY CONSTRUCTION AND EXISTENTIAL DESCRIPTION IN SCHELLING'S TREATISE ON FREEDOM

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THEORY CONSTRUCTION AND EXISTENTIAL DESCRIPTION IN  
SCHELLING'S TREATISE ON FREEDOMI. *Introduction*

Schelling's treatise *On the Essence of Human Freedom* – the *Freiheitsschrift* of 1809 – begins by outlining two methodological possibilities open to investigators in this domain.<sup>1</sup> We can attempt to give content to the concept of freedom from a first-person perspective, seeking to retrieve through introspection our deeply ingrained feeling of our own freedom as self-conscious agents – a feeling which, Schelling emphasizes, is resistant to verbal articulation.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, we can take an objective and constructive approach, and concern ourselves with the problem of connecting the concept of freedom with other concepts, within 'an overall scientific view of the world' (SW I/7, 336). Such linkage is necessary, Schelling avers, because no concept can be defined in isolation, and only the demonstration of its connection with the whole of a worldview provides its 'final scientific completion' (*letzte wissenschaftliche Vollendung*). As this formulation makes clear, Schelling does not regard the two methodological options as alternatives. Rather, he thinks that the enquirer needs to follow both tracks, and that ultimately the two aspects of the investigation coincide (*fallen...in Eins*). But as soon as he has made these proposals, Schelling notes a possible objection to them: according to a longstanding view, the concept of freedom is simply incompatible with that of system, and any philosophy that makes a claim to 'wholeness and unity' cannot help but deny the possibility of freedom. (SW I/7, 336) And yet, as he goes on to point out, 'individual freedom', awareness of which he has just described, evidently does 'cohere in some way with the world whole (whether this is conceived idealistically or realistically)' – so *de facto* the incompatibility claim cannot be right. (SW I/7 336) Schelling's treatise aims to develop a new conception of system able to accommodate freedom.<sup>3</sup>

It will be noticed that one of the distinctive features of Schelling's approach is that the metaphysical conflict with which it deals – between the open future implied by freedom, on the one hand, and the necessity that must characterize the world when systematically comprehended, on the other – is replicated at the level of method. The problem of accommodating freedom within the structure of the world is mirrored by the problem of integrating the information which we derive from our direct, but elusive,

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3 awareness of ourselves as free agents (Schelling asserts that the feeling of freedom is  
4 'immediately stamped into everyone' – '*unmittelbar...einem jeden eingeprägt*' (SW  
5 I/7, 336)) and the results of an analysis of the concept of freedom, in its interconnection  
6 with other basic concepts. This inner duality of Schelling's thinking is highlighted by  
7 his claim, in the opening pages of the treatise, that 'without the contradiction of  
8 necessity and freedom not only philosophy, but every higher willing of the spirit would  
9 sink down into death.' (SW I/7, 338) Here he seems to suggest that the double  
10 perspective – and the conflict it produces – is essential to our intellectual and moral life  
11 and keeps it in motion.<sup>4</sup> It is one of the merits of Heidegger's 1936 lecture course on  
12 the *Freiheitsschrift* to have foregrounded this implication of Schelling's basic  
13 conception:  
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24 The question concerning the system of freedom is not simply an "object"  
25 [*Gegenstand*] of philosophy, it is also not merely its authentic and  
26 encompassing object, but it is firstly and fundamentally and finally the  
27 *condition* [*Zustand*] of philosophy, the open contradiction, *in* which it stands  
28 and which it brings about again and again. (Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung*,  
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36 What Heidegger means by this is that our intuitive conception of freedom as a  
37 'beginning having no need of a ground' (*grundunbedürftigen Anfang*) inevitably  
38 collides with the notion of system as a 'closed nexus of grounding' (*geschlossene[r]*  
39 *Begründungszusammenhang*) (*Schellings Abhandlung*, 75). Philosophy must struggle  
40 with the fact that the spontaneity of freedom – without which there could be no  
41 philosophical activity – seems incompatible with own its fundamental striving for  
42 explanatory closure. But the 'system of freedom' which Heidegger mentions, echoing  
43 a key idea of early post-Kantian Idealism, implies more than simply a reconciliation of  
44 freedom and comprehensive explanation, however achieved. The basic insight is that  
45 freedom cannot be inserted or injected into the system as an afterthought, as it were –  
46 for, in this case, it would break the explanatory chain. Rather, the 'system of freedom'  
47 must be a construction founded on freedom. This is why Schelling asserts, at the start  
48 of his treatise, that if the concept of freedom has any reality at all, it cannot be merely  
49 a subordinate or subsidiary concept, but must be 'one of the ruling middle points of the  
50 system' (SW I/7, 336). But if freedom is one of the central points that organize the  
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system, how can it be defined by its interconnections *within* the system? How could it be both conditioned and unconditioned simultaneously? In what follows my aim is to explore these issues by examining two sophisticated recent attempts to decipher the argument, philosophical status and achievement of Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*. Significantly, one of these – by Markus Gabriel – is more speculatively or theoretically, and the other – by Sebastian Gardner – more practically or existentially oriented.

## II. *Gabriel's Interpretation of the Freiheitsschrift*

In his short monograph, *Das Absolute und die Welt in Schellings Freiheitsschrift*, Markus Gabriel argues that Schelling's treatise embodies a distinctive kind of metaphysics – metaphysics being the attempt to 'think the world as world' (AW, 7), as opposed to explaining the nature and existence of particular entities or processes within the world. Like his German Idealist contemporaries, Schelling is aware that any comprehensive account of the nature of reality must go reflexive: it must include the existence – and allow for the possible validity of – such accounts themselves, as well as accommodating the activity of the kind of agents who can produce them. Reality is such as to generate – or at least permit the generation of – metaphysical pictures of reality. Any theory of the world that ignores this requirement and blithely proceeds *intentione recta* is what Gabriel calls 'dogmatic'. By contrast, Schelling's style of metaphysics is characterized by Gabriel as 'critical'. A critical metaphysics does not tacitly assume the existence of an unthematized – and therefore implicitly 'worldless' – subject of metaphysical thinking, as is often the case with philosophical theories which in fact can make no place for such a subject. Rather, a critical project in Schelling's style is made concrete in the thought that

the world as world is only through the fact that it is inserted into a transcending movement, which can only be carried out by world-beings. (AW, 10)

Two important ideas are compressed in this quotation. One is that the world can only come into view *as* the world contrastively: 'For even the world is only through the fact that it is distinguished from something else, which it is not.' (AW, 12) Hence the phrase 'transcending movement' refers to a striving which must aim out beyond the world towards whatever constitutes its negative counterpart. Gabriel goes on to suggest that, according to Schelling, it is also through this transcending movement that the world

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3 acquires articulation. Whatever it may be which is articulated, Schelling calls 'being  
4 insofar as it is merely ground of existence' (*Wesen, sofern es bloß Grund von Existenz*  
5 *ist*); while the process of articulation he calls 'being insofar as it exists' (*Wesen, sofern*  
6 *es existiert*). (SW I/7, 357) The ground cannot *determine* its articulation, for then the  
7 latter would be simply an effect of the ground, and not the result of its transcendence:  
8 consciousness of a differentiated world requires a free movement of going beyond.<sup>5</sup>  
9 Correspondingly, the existent cannot fully absorb the ground, for then there would be  
10 nothing of which it was the articulation.  
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19 Let us now consider what the movement of transcendence is directed towards. It  
20 cannot be an element of the world, for then the transcendence would not be *of* the world.  
21 But it cannot be an element of the same *kind* as the world – even if *differing* from it –  
22 either, for then it would still belong to the same logical domain as the world, and hence  
23 be drawn back into its orbit, rather than lying beyond it entirely. If the transcending  
24 movement of articulation generates – to use a familiar phrase – an all-inclusive 'space  
25 of reasons', then what the movement transcends towards cannot be a 'reason' (also  
26 rendered in German, in this context, by '*Grund*'). Schelling therefore calls it the 'un-  
27 ground' ('*Ungrund*') (SW I/7, 407). The un-ground cannot be said to exist (since, for  
28 Schelling, anything which exists exhibits a combination ground and existent).  
29 Nonetheless, Gabriel argues, we can regard it as the 'absolute' that we require in order  
30 for the world to appear *as* world (see AW, 37-46).  
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41 Presumably in order to connect up with more familiar philosophical vocabulary,  
42 Gabriel re-labels Schelling's ground and existent as 'substance' and 'structure',  
43 suggesting that these two basic dimensions of being stand in relation of unstable,  
44 antagonistic interdependence. This is because of the second major idea contained in the  
45 quotation: namely that the transcending movement has to be carried out by a being  
46 within the world (for there are no others), and therefore places this being in an  
47 amphibious position. We are 'world-beings' because we stand *in* the world, yet can also  
48 stand *out* from it, and can entertain the (contrastive) thought of its sheer existence. We  
49 are able to separate ourselves self-consciously from the ground; but we should not allow  
50 this capacity to deceive us into thinking that – ontologically – we are in principle  
51 detached from the ground, since, as Gabriel puts it, 'Without the basis [*Boden*] of the  
52 given, of the world, we could not stand out from the world.' (AW, 18) On Gabriel's  
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account, this ambivalent status gives rise to anxiety, which we strive to overcome by dominating – and controlling the contingency of – the world. The world appears as contingent because – in contrast with the ‘absolute’ as envisaged by other philosophers – Schelling’s un-ground, by definition, does not explain the existence of the world. The world’s contingency, in turn, infects us humans. It offends against the status apparently endowed by our capacity to envisage the world as a whole, dividing us against ourselves, and giving rise to the fundamental thrust of human existence, which Gabriel terms ‘*Kontingenzbewältigung*’ – the mastering of contingency (AW, 18).

Gabriel would probably concede that his interpretation of the *Freiheitsschrift* can best be defended as an exercise in ‘rational reconstruction’. But, as with all such exercises, judiciousness is required to prevent the imperatives taken to stem from the term ‘rational’ from distorting the purport of the original text. In the case of Gabriel’s monograph, I now want to argue, such misrepresentation occurs. Certainly, Gabriel is respectful of the Idealist demand that, if human freedom is to be taken seriously, it must be built into the fundamental dynamics of the system – go ‘all the way down’ – and in this respect his exegetical efforts are instructive. But because he ignores the implications of the dual methodological perspective which Schelling outlines at the beginning of his treatise, he ends with an implausible conception of freedom.

In one of the most famous statements in the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling declares that ‘Idealism in fact provides on the one hand only the most general, on the other hand the merely formal concept of freedom. The real and living concept of freedom is that it is a capacity for good and evil.’ (SW I/7, 352) One might easily assume that the prime way in which such freedom poses a problem for the construction of a system (Schelling immediately goes on to say that it has been experienced as a difficulty for ‘more or less’ all systems) is that the openness of the future implied by the exercise of free will is incompatible with the closure of system. But in fact this issue, though salient, is not the ultimate focus of Schelling’s attention. More specifically, Schelling regards his theory of the noumenal choice of one’s own moral character – an adaptation and development of Kant’s account, as presented in the first book of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (61-63) – as having successfully reconciled freedom and necessity. Like Kant, he argues that, although our actions flow necessarily from our empirical moral character, this character is itself the result of our non-time-bound choice of its

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4 intelligible correlate. Human beings in general, Schelling argues, presuppose some such  
5 process – though, of course, not usually in this philosophically explicit form – since we  
6 do not regard an appeal to a person’s determinate moral character as a valid excuse for  
7 wrongdoing (see SW I/7, 383-388). So, for him, the most urgent issue is no longer  
8 *individual* freedom versus the necessity. Rather, it is the problem posed by the  
9 *variability* of moral choice, with many human beings opting for evil. The concept which  
10 freedom, viewed under this aspect, affects ‘most strikingly’, Schelling says, is the  
11 concept of ‘immanence’. By this he means that the inclusion of evil within the ‘infinite  
12 substance’ or ‘primal will’ would ‘completely destroy’ the concept of a ‘most perfect  
13 being’ (SW I/7, 353).

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22 Here Schelling may seem to be wavering between metaphysical formulations and a  
23 more explicitly theological vocabulary. But this is entirely typical of German Idealism.  
24 Religious experience could no more be excluded from the Idealists’ attempts to  
25 integrate the divergent dimensions of human existence than any other basic form of  
26 experience. Hence their projects can be regarded as requiring a salvaging or a  
27 secularization of the religious, depending on one’s point of view. In the present case,  
28 the concept of a ‘most perfect being’ can be taken as referring to a world all of whose  
29 positive attributes can in principle fully unfold without thwarting one another, because  
30 they flow from or express a single, infinite ground. In fact, this describes what Schelling  
31 understands by ‘system’ at this stage of his intellectual development. Systematicity is  
32 therefore not simply a construct, but the anatomy of the world itself, which philosophy  
33 tries to reconstruct.<sup>6</sup> However, the ethical-religious tenor of the characterization will  
34 also be apparent.

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46 The problem of evil arises because for Schelling – again following Kant – evil  
47 consists in an inversion of the proper relation of the universal and the particular,  
48 whereby the individual, empirical self seeks to exploit or dominate – and thereby  
49 distorts – the universal.<sup>7</sup> (This is, of course, the aspect of Schelling’s argument which  
50 Gabriel latches onto.) A particular being which arrogates to itself the status of the  
51 universal may, for example, assert its *faux*-universality through aggressive expansion,  
52 by contrast with that incorporation of particularity *into* universality which is both the  
53 ethically and the metaphysically correct order of things. However, Schelling does not  
54 base this argument on an ontology of bare particulars and abstract universals: for him,  
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3 the relation of universal and particular is best exemplified by something like the *life* of  
4 an organism, as it imbues the co-operating functions of the body's individual organs.  
5 Nonetheless, even if universal and particular are understood as ontological vectors or  
6 tendencies rather than as discrete metaphysical statuses, as Schelling proposes, it is still  
7 possible for the appropriate relation between them to become contorted. In Schelling's  
8 view, if such inversions were a permanent, irreducible feature of reality, then the  
9 'wholeness and unity' of the world – to take up the expression used on the first page of  
10 the *Freiheitsschrift* – would come under threat. But why does Schelling think this? –  
11 both that the world is a unity, and that evil poses a threat to this unity?  
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20 As regards the first part of this question, it may be useful to refer to some remarks  
21 Kant makes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* concerning 'how the natural course of  
22 human reason is constituted'. Kant writes:  
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26 First it convinces itself of the existence of **some** necessary being. In this it  
27 recognizes an unconditioned existence. Now it seeks for the concept of  
28 something independent of all conditions, and finds it in that which is the  
29 sufficient condition of everything else, i.e. in that which contains all reality. The  
30 All without limits, however, is absolute unity, and carries with it the concept of  
31 one single being, namely the highest being; and this reason infers that the  
32 highest being, as the original ground of all things, exists in an absolutely  
33 necessary way. (Kant 1998a: A586/B614)  
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42 Kant, of course, argues that – despite this inbuilt impulsion of reason – we must suspend  
43 judgment concerning whether such a single, ultimate source of reality exists. For  
44 Schelling, however, such a stance would be equivalent to destroying the coherence of  
45 the instrumentarium we employ to do philosophy in the first place and therefore it could  
46 not be sufficiently motivated, no matter how ingeniously Kant tries to restrict assertions  
47 of existence to the field of appearances. In short, if a necessary being is described as  
48 merely problematic or possible, this characterization contradicts its necessity.  
49 However, for Schelling the upshot is not that we can arrive at knowledge of God or the  
50 unconditioned as we would knowledge of some finite thing (in this respect he entirely  
51 agrees with Kant). Rather, as he puts it in the *Stuttgart Private Lectures*, delivered a  
52 year after the publication of the *Freiheitsschrift*, 'The existence of what is  
53 unconditioned cannot be proven like the existence of something finite. The  
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3 unconditional is the element wherein any demonstration becomes possible.’ (SW I/7,  
4 423) The consequence is that, for Schelling, while the ultimate wholeness and unity of  
5 the world – as stemming from a single absolute source – cannot be demonstrated,  
6 neither can it be put in doubt as a presupposition. Fundamentally, if we did not assume  
7 that reality is held together by a single ultimate principle, we would not be trying to  
8 theorize a *world* at all. In this context, the theory of evil as ontological inversion allows  
9 Schelling to supersede what he regards as implausibly anodyne conceptions of evil as  
10 a mere privation of the good (SW I/7, 370-372), while denying evil’s ultimate inner  
11 consistency. He needs to show that the inversion need not be conceptualized as an  
12 original and permanent – rather than a temporary, albeit long-term – feature of reality,  
13 for otherwise the world would have two incompatible grounds. Not only would this  
14 simply push the demand for explanation back one stage, the Manicheanism be  
15 destructive of our ethical orientation.  
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28 By contrast, in Gabriel’s reconstruction, the notion of evil as inversion disappears  
29 entirely, for he portrays evil as the inherent condition of a self-conscious but finite  
30 being. As he puts it, ‘To be free means to be evil, because all free beings are world-  
31 beings and, because of their unstable structure, world-beings necessarily try to  
32 dominate the world. There is no free individual who is not evil.’ (AW, 32- 33) But to  
33 assert that ‘Freedom accrues to the human being because he is radically evil’ (AW, 50),  
34 or that ‘It belongs...to the dynamics of the I to be evil’ (AW, 26), directly contradicts  
35 Schelling’s claim that freedom consists in a capacity for good *or* evil. Employing the  
36 metaphors of centre and periphery which are pervasive in his text, Schelling compares  
37 evil to a disease in which one organ, which should play its particular, subordinate role  
38 within the overall functioning of the organism, clamours for centrality, for dominance,  
39 and thereby brings the body as a whole into a state of pain and disorder (SW I/7, 366).  
40 It is difficult to see how such sickness — which Schelling describes as the ‘true image  
41 of evil’ (SW I/7, 366) – could be understood as the form taken by human freedom.  
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54 Admittedly, at one point in the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling states that ‘The vanity of  
55 the human being strives against this origination from the ground.’ (SW I/7, 360) This  
56 may seem to confirm Gabriel’s claim that we are necessarily caught up in a project of  
57 *Kontingenzbewältigung*. However, Schelling insists that ‘it is not aroused selfhood in  
58 itself which is evil; but only insofar as it has torn itself away entirely from its opposite,  
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3 light or the universal will.’ (SW I/7, 400) As we have seen, in Schelling’s conception  
4 ground and existent are not discrete, static layers of being, but can be better described  
5 as a particularizing and a universalizing thrust or striving of being. He highlights this  
6 feature by also referring to them anthropomorphically as the ‘particular will’ and the  
7 ‘universal will’. We can characterize these wills as ‘proto-ontological’, because any  
8 actually existing thing consists of a specific tension and equilibrium of ground and  
9 existent. In one respect these two wills repel each other: the particular will strives to  
10 maintain its particularity over against the universal will, while the universal will recoils  
11 from degradation by the particular will. But at the same time, they are profoundly  
12 interdependent. The particular will or ground is not simply an opaque process of  
13 withdrawal and self-involution, but what Schelling calls ‘a will to revelation...which,  
14 precisely to bring this about, must call forth ownness and opposition.’ (SW I/7, 375) It  
15 cannot be disclosed *as* particular, except through recourse to universal terms.  
16 Correlatively, the existent requires a ground of existence in order to be more than  
17 merely ‘ideal’. (SW I/7, 410) Since each form of the will is bi-directional, striving both  
18 against and towards the other, there is no reason why they should not ultimately  
19 coalesce. However, such fusion would not entail the complete dissolution of the  
20 material into the ideal, or of the particular into the universal. Schelling’s most  
21 compelling image for this process is the manner in which a transparent object, while  
22 not ceasing to be matter, can become ‘the bearer and – as it were – the container of  
23 light’ (SW I/7, 364).

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Gabriel, for the most part, fails to recognize the profoundly dialectical character of  
Schelling’s conception, in which the identity of each vector of being is not only semi-  
dependent upon, but internally riven by its relation to its opposite. He interprets the  
relation between existent and ground in a unidirectional and primarily epistemic  
manner: the replacement of Schelling’s plastic conception of a developmental  
interaction of particular and universal wills, which between them give rise to the forms  
of the natural world, with the more inert concepts of ‘substance’ and ‘structure’ is  
telling in this regard. Thus he writes: ‘What is observed is ultimately the substance of  
the world. How it is observed, is its structure.’ (AW, 42) This reading, in which  
structure is apparently imposed on substance by the knower, simply ignores Schelling’s  
aim of providing an account of the relation of particular and universal which is both  
ethically and metaphysically viable.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it fails to explain how structure

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can be the structure of substance, in the sense – that of a subjective genitive – which the *Freiheitsschrift* clearly intends. Gabriel's attempt to deal with this issue by applying the term 'structure' to the *relation* between substance and structure simply compounds the problem: either he has thereby violated his own definition of structure, or he has generated a regress (see, for example, AW, 39: 'Insofar as substance and structure of the world reciprocally presuppose one another they constitute a symmetrical structure.').

Correspondingly, Gabriel reduces freedom to the thrust of transcendence as such, understood primarily in cognitive rather than practical terms: 'The world being thinks the world. That is its freedom.' (AW, 36) The result is a general account of the dynamics human existence as characterized by contingent individuation and the attempt to overcome contingency through the imposition of structure. This is summed up in his claim that 'Evil is the individual, who asserts herself against the world.' (AW, 30) Yet, to propose such an interpretation, Gabriel has to discount the passages in the *Freiheitsschrift* where Schelling describes the experience of being torn by the choice between good and evil; the good being, in Schelling's view, that identity of the particular will with the universal will for which his principal image is the concentric relation between a circle's centre and periphery. In the case of human beings, the particular will has become self-conscious, and therefore fears the loss of self entailed by its coincidence with the universal will, even though this is ethically required. As Schelling writes, 'The anxiety of life itself drives the human being out of the centre in which he was created: for this [centre], as the pure essence of all willing, is a consuming fire for each particular will; in order to dwell in it the human being must die to all ownness, for which reason there is an almost necessary attempt [*ein fast notwendiger Versuch*] to step out of it into periphery, to seek there repose for one's selfhood.' (SW I/7, 381) It will be noted that Schelling uses the expression 'almost necessary attempt': he does not claim that evil is irresistible, and indeed his definition of freedom as a capacity for good or evil would not make any sense if he did. In a similar vein, Schelling describes how the will of the ground 'necessarily reacts against freedom as the super-creaturely [*das Überkreatürliche*] and awakens in it the desire for the creaturely, just as he who is seized by dizziness on a high and precipitous summit seems to hear a secret voice urging him leap down' (SW I/7, 381). Although this response of the ground to

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3 the abyssal character of freedom is inevitable, Schelling does not assert that we are  
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5 *necessitated to obey* its call.  
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8 This last passage highlights the fact that, on Gabriel's interpretation, the  
9 *Freiheitsschrift* cannot achieve what he himself proposes as its aim. For Schelling,  
10 freedom – the defining feature of an entity capable of doing metaphysics – indicates a  
11 position above and beyond the creature (beyond anything with a given nature). Only  
12 from such a standpoint can we glimpse the existence of the world as a whole. This  
13 means that, for Schelling, world-transcendence is inseparable from the experience of  
14 having to *choose*, since to transcend the world is to have no nature that prescribes what  
15 one does, unlike entities fully determined by their role and location within the world.  
16 In this context, Schelling takes the choice between good and evil as paradigmatic  
17 because, in our *moral* choices, we determine who we fundamentally are, and hence  
18 these decisions cannot be seen as simply an *effect* of who we are.<sup>9</sup> As Schelling writes  
19 in the 1796/97 *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre*,  
20 'We only become aware of freedom through the power of choice [*Willkür*], in other  
21 words through the free choice between opposing maxims which mutually exclude one  
22 another and cannot coexist in the same act of willing.' (SW I/1, 440) Conversely, if we  
23 are simply *defined by evil*, if our attempts at knowing are invariably spurred on by an  
24 insecurity that gives rise to the drive for *Kontingenzbewältigung*, if we have always  
25 already hurled ourselves from the summit, then we are not in a position to detach  
26 ourselves from the world in order to apprehend it as a whole. The capacity to bring the  
27 world into view presupposes a freedom which Gabriel's theory of freedom as  
28 coterminous with evil (with practical-epistemic egocentrism) negates.  
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46 In short, Gabriel can only produce his reading by ignoring the methodological  
47 dualism invoked by Schelling at the beginning of his treatise. Certainly, Schelling, like  
48 his fellow German Idealists, aims to produce a metaphysics which can accommodate  
49 the existence of beings capable of doing metaphysics. But he does not consider that the  
50 theory of freedom and its role in the world which we eventually formulate can simply  
51 ignore the phenomenology of freedom as disclosed in our immediate self-awareness.  
52 And the most basic feature of this phenomenology is the constant demand for decision.  
53 Human life, we could say, is an endless series of minor and major moral emergencies.  
54 Correspondingly, Schelling rejects the view that a drive for instrumental domination  
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(Gabriel's *Kontingenzbewältigung*) is an inevitable concomitant of our selfhood. We are not essentially defined by an urge for mastery, which Schelling's dialectic of ground and existent shows to be self-defeating. For him, the basic problem is the *prioritization* of selfhood – which is the source of antagonism, rather than being an inevitable response to it. Without such prioritization, there would be no stark opposition of universality and particularity, and therefore no compulsion: human beings would no doubt take many instrumental measures to secure their survival and well-being, but these could occur within a framework of reciprocity between the human and natural worlds.

Gabriel's conception of the *Freiheitsschrift* as primarily a self-incorporating metaphysical theory simplifies Schelling's method and truncates his analysis of freedom. It can therefore provide no answer to the question of how theory and existential description fit together in the text. An interpretation that puts the emphasis on the practical dimension, on the first-personal consciousness of freedom, but which also derives Schelling's metaphysical claims from such consciousness, may therefore seem to have more chance of success. This is the approach taken by Sebastian Gardner.

### III. Gardner's Interpretation of the *Freiheitsschrift*

Rather than interpreting the *Freiheitsschrift* as stemming from the demand for a critical, self-reflexive, metaphysics, Gardner proposes that Schelling works his way from a mode of practical consciousness to conclusions concerning the ultimate character of being. As he puts it: 'Schelling's argument from human freedom to general metaphysics, from the practical to the theoretical, can be viewed in the terms helpfully proposed by Paul Franks. Kant's Fact of Reason provides, Franks argues, a template for German Idealism, which adopts the strategy of deducing the actuality of the intelligible ground of the world (ultimately, nothing less than the *ens realissimum*), an ontic ground, from an epistemic ground, our consciousness of the normativity of pure reason.' ('The Metaphysics of Human Freedom', 00)<sup>10</sup> Schelling's main alteration of Kant's procedure, Gardner suggests, is to give due weight to the ambivalence of our moral situation: we are not only capable of respect for the moral law, as a normatively positive fact which discloses the reality of freedom, but are also profoundly susceptible to the pull of moral evil, where evil is regarded the inverse or negation of normativity.

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Whereas for Kant the source of evil is a secondary consideration, which does not bear on the use he makes of the fact of reason (our susceptibility to the imperative force of pure practical reason), for Schelling the attraction of evil should be equally salient in the description of our practical consciousness, and needs to be accounted for. Gardner proposes that the dramatic differences between Schelling's and Kant's metaphysics flow from this.

There are important insights contained in Gardner's interpretation. Certainly, one of the young Schelling's aims was to correct Kant's conception of willing by giving moral evil the status of an active counter-force. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant proposed that choice can be truly free only when it subjects itself to the moral law, since it is only through our experience of ourselves as moral agents that freedom evinces its reality: there are no grounds for regarding oneself as free when driven by natural desire. But at the same time, unless there is a genuinely open choice between alternatives, between right and wrong, placing oneself under the moral law cannot itself be an act of freedom. From the theoretical standpoint, therefore, we cannot understand how morality can be the realization of freedom, while from the practical standpoint we cannot understand how free choice can result in moral transgression. As Kant puts it:

although experience shows us that man as a sensible being has the capacity to choose in opposition to as well as in conformity with the law, his freedom as an intelligible being cannot be defined by this, since appearances cannot make any supersensible object (such as free choice) understandable. We can also see that freedom can never be located in a rational subject's being able to make a choice in opposition to his (lawgiving) reason, even though experience proves often enough that happens (though we still cannot conceive how this is possible).  
(*Metaphysics of Morals*, 52)

We have already seen that, in his earlier commentaries on Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schelling conceived of our consciousness of freedom as consciousness of choice. Kant's conception of freedom as an autonomy that detaches us from empirical impulse – the conception which leads to his difficulties – is inadequate because 'we can only think a positively moral action if we oppose a positively immoral one to it. This opposition must be real, in other words both actions must emerge in our consciousness



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3 as equally possible.’ (SW I/1, 430). The conclusion which Schelling drew from his  
4 argument, however, is that our experienced power of choice (*Willkür*) is merely the  
5 empirical appearance (*Erscheinung*) of absolute freedom, of a universal willing, ‘whose  
6 voice only reaches us through the medium of reason’ (SW I/I, 433). Our experience of  
7 the positive pull of moral evil is – as it were – a transcendental condition of the  
8 experience of choice, but is not regarded as having any correlate at the level of ontology  
9 or metaphysics.  
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17 By 1809 Schelling had become dissatisfied with this solution, since it denies that  
18 moral choice is an ultimate reality, reducing it to one of the ‘necessary limitations of  
19 our nature’ (SW I/1, 439); on this account, in the intelligible world, our freedom is  
20 identical with the ‘absolute determination of the unconditioned through the mere  
21 (natural) laws of its being’ (SW I/1, 437). Schelling, in other words, eventually  
22 concludes that such absolute noumenal determination is not real freedom at all (in brief,  
23 it is Kant’s ‘freedom of the turnspit’), and that to settle for the mere appearance of moral  
24 freedom would be to fall short of the systematic ambition of Idealism: to achieve a  
25 genuine integration of the apparently incompatible ways in which human beings  
26 experience themselves and the world. A radically revised ontology is therefore required  
27 in which the instability of choice – the precarious relation between ground and existent  
28 – is built into the fabric of things (goes ‘all the way down’). The result is that Schelling,  
29 in the *Freiheitsschrift*, is no longer simply adding an emphasis on the *Hang zum Bösen*  
30 to Kant’s theory of the fact of reason, because he no longer thinks that there is any such  
31 thing as the normativity of pure practical reason; as the following passage indicates:  
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46 If evil consists in the discord of the two principles, then goodness can only  
47 consist in their complete harmony, and the bond which unites them both must  
48 be divine, since they are one not in a conditional, but in a complete and  
49 unconditional way. The relation of the two cannot therefore be represented as  
50 arbitrary morality, or as a morality produced by self-determination. This last  
51 concept presupposes that they are not one in themselves; but how are they  
52 supposed to become one, if they are not?’ (SW I/7, 393)  
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As Schelling makes clear, he does not find moral goodness in a rational will that operates independently of our empirical selfhood (with the consequence that the

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3 question of whether our impulses push in the same direction or an opposing direction  
4 is irrelevant to the moral standing of the will). On the contrary, ground and existent, the  
5 particular will and the universal will, are entirely fused in the ethical person. Being truly  
6 ethical cannot consist in rational self-determination, because if we have to *determine*  
7 ourselves to do the right thing, then we are already in a state of inner moral division,  
8 and self-applied enforcement cannot unify the two principles within us.<sup>11</sup> Of course,  
9 one might always reply that Schelling has got the moral psychology wrong. But later  
10 in the *Freiheitsschrift* he presents the psychological implications of his metaphysics in  
11 more concrete terms. And his description offers – at the least – a plausible alternative  
12 to what he refers to as ‘our negative morality’, reflecting his basic view that  
13 particularity (the ‘ground’) can support and energize the universal (the ‘existent’), but  
14 cannot be entirely neutralized by or absorbed into it:  
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26 A good without effective selfhood is itself an ineffective good. [...] The  
27 passions against which our negative morality wages war are forces which share  
28 a common root with the virtue that corresponds to them. The soul of all hate is  
29 love, and in the most violent anger there is revealed a stillness, which has been  
30 attacked and aroused in its innermost centre. In appropriate measure and organic  
31 equilibrium they are the strength of virtue itself and its immediate tools. (SW  
32 I/7, 401)  
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41 But it is not simply that the notion of pure practical reason fails to fit the phenomena  
42 of our ethical life. Schelling’s point is that – as Kant himself concedes – the theory of  
43 the moral person as divided between transcendental freedom and the pull of empirical  
44 incentives cannot account for the attraction of evil at all. Because of his commitment  
45 to what has come to be known, after Henry Allison, as the ‘incorporation thesis’ (the  
46 view that no empirical incentive can move us unless taken up into a maxim),<sup>12</sup> Kant is  
47 at a loss to explain how human beings could be tempted to adopt a fundamental  
48 principle which gives a dominant role to empirical incentives in the first place. It is  
49 precisely for this reason that Schelling is driven to devise a new theory of willing as  
50 ‘primal being’ (*Ursein*) (SW I/7, 350), focused on the repulsion and attraction of its  
51 particularizing and universalizing dimensions.  
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This theory enables Schelling to construct a narrative of the developing interaction

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3 of ground and existent, culminating in the emergence of human beings – creatures  
4 capable of self-conscious freedom. A contemporary analogy to this move, which may  
5 help to make it more intelligible, is provided by Thomas Nagel’s argument concerning  
6 the presuppositions of ‘value realism’. According to Nagel, even value reductionism  
7 must be committed to realism with regard to some values – for example, the value of  
8 truth. Having admitted this, we must further concede that ‘Value realism must make  
9 sense of the fact that the biological evolutionary process and the physical and chemical  
10 history that preceded it have given rise to conscious creatures, to the real value that fills  
11 their lives and experiences...’ (Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 117) But since to regard value  
12 as a contingent product of valueless processes would eviscerate it, contradict its  
13 intrinsicality, which we cannot avoid taking seriously in the last instance, this requires  
14 ‘The teleological hypothesis...that these things may be determined not merely by  
15 value-free chemistry and physics but also by something else, namely a cosmic  
16 predisposition to the formation of life, consciousness, and the value that is inseparable  
17 from them.’ (*Mind and Cosmos*, 123)

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32 Such inferences – for which Nagel notes German Idealist precedents (*Mind and*  
33 *Cosmos*, 17) – are significantly different from the process that Gardner describes. As  
34 we have seen, his suggestion is that, by following Kant’s procedure for moving from  
35 practical moral consciousness to theoretical outcomes, Schelling has exhibited freedom  
36 and evil as ‘ultimate ontological facts’, and thereby satisfied our thirst for any further  
37 explanation (‘The Metaphysics of Human Freedom’, 00). Yet Kant is only able to use  
38 moral consciousness as the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom because he takes us to be  
39 aware of a morality as an unconditional demand to conform to a principle of law. But  
40 we now know that if we think of morality in this way, we cannot account for the  
41 attraction of evil in the first place. Consequently, Schelling cannot be using a  
42 consciousness of pure normativity to support his metaphysical conclusions. Rather,  
43 following his twin-track approach, he attempts to construct a theory of the internal  
44 dynamics of being that is constrained by respect for the phenomenology of good and  
45 evil.

#### 56 57 58 IV. Schelling and Soft Naturalism 59 60

The sophistication and complexity of Schelling’s theorization of freedom should by

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3 now be apparent. Nonetheless, a majority of contemporary philosophers would no  
4 doubt take the view that the approach to the problem of freedom embodied in the  
5 speculative enterprises of the German Idealists belongs irretrievably to the past, and  
6 that we now have more plausible means to manage comparable issues. I believe that a  
7 project such as Schelling's cannot be dismissed so easily, however. In order to show  
8 this, I shall conclude by comparing the *Freiheitsschrift* with the classic essay by Peter  
9 Strawson which also deals with the relation between the phenomenology and the  
10 metaphysics of freedom. Strawson's work in this area, in fact, pioneered the 'soft  
11 naturalism' which is now widely regarded as resolving many problems which drove the  
12 speculative efforts of the Idealists.<sup>13</sup>

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23 In 'Freedom and Resentment' Strawson famously argues that adopting the  
24 objectifying attitude towards human beings which some adamant determinists believe  
25 should follow from the theoretical truth of their doctrine would involve the  
26 generalization of a stance which we currently adopt *only* when special circumstances,  
27 or the unusual characteristics of the person concerned, persuade us that our normal  
28 responses to the human other should be put out of play. However, in Strawson's view  
29 this is 'practically inconceivable'. We cannot take seriously the thought that 'general  
30 theoretical conviction might so change our world that, in it, there were no longer any  
31 such things as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them.' ('Freedom  
32 and Resentment', 12) To claim that a decision to abandon such relationships would be  
33 the rational consequence of a certain theoretical truth would be to put in doubt the very  
34 meaning of the term 'rational'. For in what sense would it not be more rational, even if  
35 such a truth *could be* established, to preserve the essential qualities of our human form  
36 of life? At the same time, Strawson denies that we need recourse to what he calls the  
37 'obscure and panicky metaphysics of libertarianism' ('Freedom and Resentment', 27)  
38 in order to provide backing for our spontaneous moral responses of blame, resentment,  
39 indignation, and so forth, along with their positive correlates. Such responses express  
40 our human nature, and there is nothing beyond this to which we can – or need to –  
41 appeal.

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58 While both Schelling and Strawson make use of existential description as an  
59 irreplaceable element in their strategies (a large part of Strawson's essay, in fact,  
60 consists not of philosophical argument in any standard sense, but simply of piling on

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3 the phenomenology), there are evidently major differences between them. Firstly, while  
4 Schelling does not think that a deterministic system, however tightly constructed, could  
5 force us to gainsay our feeling of our own freedom, he argues – as we have seen – that  
6 our struggle with the relation between freedom and necessity lies at the very heart of  
7 philosophy and animates it. This means that the kind of shoulder-shrugging solution  
8 proposed by Strawson, in which a *de facto* acceptance of determinism (or, at least, a  
9 naturalistic aversion to libertarianism) is regarded as compatible with our normal moral  
10 practices of praise and blame, reward and punishment, is not an option for Schelling.  
11 Certainly, determinism cannot definitively overwhelm our ingrained consciousness of  
12 freedom, but – in Schelling’s view – *failure* to show the ‘connection between the  
13 concept of freedom and the whole of our view of the world’ (*‘der Zusammenhang des*  
14 *Begriffs der Freiheit mit dem Ganzen der Weltansicht’*) can render the concept of  
15 freedom ‘unstable’ (*‘wankend’*) – vulnerable to recurrent skeptical doubt. (SW I/7, 338)  
16 Furthermore, for Schelling, the conflict between the objectifying view of human beings,  
17 and the first-personal or existential one, is not simply an ivory tower dispute, but is a  
18 disturbing feature of modern societies. The ‘split between head and heart’ to which  
19 Schelling refers elsewhere in the text (SW I/7, 348) can be seen as foreshadowing the  
20 threat of what has come to be known as ‘nihilism’.<sup>14</sup> The consequence is that, in contrast  
21 to Strawson’s complaisance, Schelling is convinced that freedom and necessity need to  
22 be interconnected through a philosophical effort that goes far beyond the mere  
23 description of our habitual moral responses, or an appeal to our inexpugnable feeling  
24 of freedom. They need to be reconciled in two different senses. It must be shown that,  
25 even though our actions may flow with necessity from our character, that character can  
26 be understood as freely chosen in some non-empirical sense. But, secondly, we need  
27 reassurance that, assuming freedom is fundamental in this way, the long-term result is  
28 not chaos. For the belief that the world is – deep down – morally chaotic would be no  
29 less potentially nihilistic than determinism. This is the point at which Schelling’s  
30 argument that the world must form a system acquires its motivational significance –  
31 becomes, in the idiom of the time, a project of theodicy.  
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57 Perhaps some might still respond that, from a Strawsonian or ‘soft naturalistic’  
58 perspective, there is no need for all this grandiose fuss. Evidently, there are dangers  
59 involved in allowing the objectifying perspective on human beings to invade the  
60 lifeworld on unsuitable occasions or in inappropriate ways (for example, as when

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4 politicians urge us to behave as though different ‘races’ were driven by a Darwinian  
5 struggle for supremacy); but so long as we maintain a hygienic division of labour  
6 between perspectives, no harm is done, and we can simultaneously avoid metaphysical  
7 extravagance. However, as Gardner has argued elsewhere, the soft naturalist, on pain  
8 of conceding to hard naturalism, is still obliged to adopt a meta-perspective from which  
9 the first-personal and objectifying perspective can each be endorsed as *genuinely*  
10 *disclosing reality* in its own way. (see Gardner, ‘The Limits of Naturalism’, 33-34) For  
11 if the soft naturalist abstains from ontology, and contends that purpose, intentionality,  
12 accountability, and so forth merely *look* real from *within* the lifeworld perspective, then  
13 the hard naturalist can reply: ‘exactly’. In this respect, there is no difference between  
14 Schelling and the soft naturalist in terms of the philosophical altitude – though evidently  
15 in terms of the degree of elaboration – of the viewpoint which asserts the validity of  
16 both perspectives.<sup>15</sup>  
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28 This last claim will no doubt appear contentious, and it may therefore be worth  
29 spending a little more time considering it. In his lecture series, *Skepticism and*  
30 *Naturalism: Some Varieties*, Strawson further developed the position put forward in  
31 ‘Freedom and Resentment’. The essay had strongly hinted that the truth of determinism  
32 (or at least the implausibility of libertarianism) was not being contested. In the book,  
33 however, Strawson is more even-handed. He defends what he calls ‘a certain ultimate  
34 relativity in our conception of the real’: (*Skepticism and Naturalism*, 44) a  
35 ‘reconciliation of apparently conflicting views’ can be achieved ‘by relativizing the  
36 conception of the real, of what really exists or is really the case, to different  
37 standpoints’. (94-95) Concomitantly, Strawson denies that there is any ‘superior  
38 standpoint’ (53) beyond that of hard or ‘reductionist’ naturalism and soft or ‘catholic’  
39 naturalism. But Strawson’s train of argument is inconsistent. His proposed  
40 reconciliation already presupposes a superior standpoint which relativizes hard  
41 naturalism and the lifeworld perspective (in contradiction to the consciousness of their  
42 proponents). Furthermore, this manoeuvre has *not* reconciled the ‘apparently conflicting  
43 views’, because these views are not like two perspectives on a physical object, for  
44 example. They make incompatible claims regarding the constitution of the world, and  
45 if they are genuine ‘conceptions of the real’ with an – albeit qualified – validity, rather  
46 than just imaginings, it still needs to be shown how the real can accommodate both of  
47 them. Strawson offers no argument to show that such an enterprise is not possible. He  
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3 simply assumes that a claim to comprehensiveness could only be based on the inflation  
4 of one or the other perspective, ruling out their joint supersession in a new construction.  
5 This leaves him entangled in the performative contradiction of denying the possibility  
6 of the meta-perspective. There are general lessons to be drawn for the standing of soft  
7 naturalism.  
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## 12 13 14 V. Conclusion

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17 As his own critique of soft naturalism would lead one to expect, Gardner's essay on the  
18 *Freiheitsschrift* reaches a sympathetic, subtle and suggestive conclusion. He proposes  
19 that Schelling's achievement is to have transformed incomprehensibility – i.e. the  
20 incomprehensibility of freedom – from an indication of the limit of our powers of  
21 cognition (as in Kant) into a feature of reality as such (this move is highlighted by  
22 Schelling's claim that the 'ground' embodies the 'ungraspable basis of reality, the  
23 indivisible remainder which cannot be assimilated by the understanding even with the  
24 greatest effort' (SW I/7, 360)). Gardner summarizes:  
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34 Thus one might say that Schelling has eliminated the incomprehensibility of  
35 freedom asserted by Kant, but without providing a comprehension of freedom;  
36 and, with reference to the problem of evil, that what Schelling has done is to  
37 allow the question, *Why is there evil?*, to receive the answer, *For no reason* –  
38 he has supplied conditions under which this counts as the complete and correct  
39 answer. The Freedom essay may do the work of the Theodicy in exonerating  
40 God and reconciling us to existence, but the means employed are the reverse of  
41 Leibniz's. ('The Metaphysics of Human Freedom', 00)  
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49 However, Schelling does not think that the tasks of a theodicy can be fulfilled simply  
50 by disclosing the bare facticity of freedom and evil. For one thing, in contrast to Kant,  
51 he wants to make the choice of evil *intelligible*, given the dilemmas of human selfhood,  
52 even though it may not be ultimately rational; intelligible in the way that we can see  
53 why a person might balk at an ultimately life-saving amputation. But furthermore, his  
54 aim is to understand how and why evil must come to an end – this being the temporal  
55 facet of satisfying the demand for a system. In other words, Schelling has to work  
56 through both aspects his dual methodological perspective. And this returns us to the  
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3 question which was left open at the end of our consideration of Gabriel: does Schelling  
4 in fact achieve his goal of reconciling these two ways of seeing?  
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8 I would argue that the *Freiheitschrift* is a magnificent failure in this respect. This is  
9 because Schelling had not yet adequately worked out how to integrate the theoretical  
10 and existential aspects of his enterprise.<sup>16</sup> Or, more precisely, he was not yet up to the  
11 even more perplexing task of integrating these aspects, *without suppressing* the conflict  
12 of freedom and necessity which he claims to be intellectually and spiritually vital.  
13 Ultimately, in the *Freiheitsschrift*, he gives the priority to theory, as his opening  
14 suggestion that our immediate awareness of freedom needs to be given ‘final scientific  
15 completion’ indicates (SW I/7, 336). This theoreticism is also revealed by his  
16 assumption that the world – understood as the process of God’s self-disclosure – must  
17 be characterized by moral perfection, as opposed to regarding the notion of such  
18 perfection as implying – through not necessarily as exhausted by – a practical demand.  
19 Schelling shows why evil is self-destructive, since its involution tends towards a pure  
20 particularity which is ontologically self-cancelling. But he is unable to justify his  
21 metaphysical prediction that our freedom could not allow evil, as such a tendency,  
22 repeatedly to erupt in ever-new forms, as opposed to declining, in the long term,  
23 towards zero.  
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39 The problem continued to preoccupy Schelling deeply, and he did not achieve a more  
40 durable solution until, in his first Munich lecture course of 1827/28, he began to  
41 elaborate the distinction between ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ philosophy (see Schelling,  
42 *System der Weltalter*, 83-92). Negative philosophy is the *a priori* science of  
43 conceptualized being, but it is unable to provide the *why* of being, to render the world’s  
44 existence intelligible in terms of origination and purposiveness, since operations of pure  
45 reason – Schelling now concurs explicitly with Kant – strive towards but are unable to  
46 establish the reality of the unconditioned. Positive philosophy is a hermeneutics of the  
47 developmental history of human consciousness, guided by the categories generated by  
48 negative philosophy. The transition between negative and positive philosophy consists  
49 of a moment in which reason is ‘posited outside itself’ (*aus sich gesetzt*), opens itself  
50 up to the ‘un-pre-thinkable’ (*unvordenklich*) source from which the world and its  
51 history spring. But is this origin freedom, and therefore potentially reason – or is it  
52 merely the brute, coercive facticity of being (*das Blindseyende*)? (see, e.g., Schelling,  
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*Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 154-160) Schelling's final proposal is that there is no purely theoretical answer to this question, and therefore no definitive overcoming of the conflict between freedom and necessity. We can only say that there *will have been* freedom, to the extent that – practically and ethically – human beings overcome the *Hang zum Bösen*, succeed in abandoning the striving to be the ground of their own freedom. It is from this future anterior that human existence hangs suspended.

### Abbreviations

Schelling's *Sämmtliche Werke* (Schelling, F. W. J. *Sämmtliche Werke*, edited by K. F. A. Schelling. Stuttgart/Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856-61) are referred to in the following form: SW I/1 = *Sämmtliche Werke*, division I, volume 1. The *Freiheitsschrift* occupies I/7, 331-416. A convenient recent edition of the text, with excellent notes, introduction and scholarly apparatus, has been produced by Thomas Buchheim for Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg (2nd improved edition 2011); this edition contains the *Sämmtliche Werke* pagination and can thus be employed to find the references provided in the present article. There exists a classic English translation of the *Freiheitsschrift* which, despite various faults, is still serviceable (Schelling, *Of Human Freedom*, translated by James Gutman. Chicago: Open Court, 1936 (many reprints)). Since this edition also contains the *Sämmtliche Werke* pagination it can be also used to find the passages to which I refer. However, all translations from German texts in this article are my own. AW: Markus Gabriel, *Das Absolute und die Welt in Schellings Freiheitsschrift*. Bonn: University Press Bonn, 2006.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to Hauke Brunkhorst, Sebastian Gardner, Wayne Martin and two anonymous reviewers for the BJHP for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Schelling's use of the term 'feeling' refers not to a psychological process or event, but to a basic – perhaps *the* basic – form of self-consciousness. Schelling states that the feeling concerned is of the 'fact of freedom' (*die Tatsache der Freiheit*) (SW I/7, 336). Clearly, facts are not among the kinds of things which human beings are normally said to 'feel'. In a comparable context, to which we will return later, Peter Strawson refers to 'that sense of agency or freedom or responsibility which we feel in ourselves and attribute to others'. (Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism*, 32)

<sup>3</sup> The conception of system at work in German Idealism requires the structure of reality to follow with intelligible necessity from a single ultimate principle (some of the reasons for the commitment to such a conception should emerge later in this essay), generating problems similar to those posed by scientific determinism. The role of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) in launching the intense post-Kantian discussion

of system and freedom is now a commonplace of the relevant Anglophone literature, following the pioneering account in Beiser's *The Fate of Reason*.

<sup>4</sup> Because of the bicentenary, which fell in 2009, Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* has been the focus of much recent discussion, including at least three collections of essays arising from conferences (see Roux 2010, Paetzold and Schneider 2010, and Ferrer and Pedro 2012). As far as I am aware, however, little attention has been paid to the methodological dualism which Schelling advocates in the opening sentences of the work, and its consequences.

<sup>5</sup> In responding to misunderstandings of his text Schelling, emphasized that he did not intend the term 'ground' to be taken in a causal sense, but as 'fundament, support, foundation, basis' ('*Fundament, Unterlage, Grundlage, Basis*'). See Schelling's letter to Georgii, 18 July 1810 (*Aus Schellings Leben in Briefen*, 221).

<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* of 1810 Schelling states that 'there has long been a system before man thought about creating one – the system of the world' (SW I/7, 421).

<sup>7</sup> For more detailed discussion of Schelling's theory of evil, in the context of post-Kantian Idealism, see Dews, *The Idea of Evil*, ch. 2.

<sup>8</sup> At one point, Gabriel does discuss the fact that the ground 'tends...towards understanding' (22), but the tenor of his conception of the relation between structure and substance is generally impositionist. Although he concedes, at the end of his monograph, that Schelling's aim is the coincidence of substance and structure (or of 'content and form'), his interpretation has made this unthinkable, and he is obliged to appeal to a 'divine act of grace' – a notion not to be found in Schelling's treatise (see AW, 53).

<sup>9</sup> In support of this view, consider that, though we may regret our inadequacies of intelligence, strength, creativity and many other things, it is only when plagued by moral conscience that we feel damaged in our essential identity.

<sup>10</sup> Gardner is drawing on the account of the centrality of Kant's 'fact of reason' to the methodology of German Idealism to be found in ch. 5 of Paul Franks's *All or Nothing*.

<sup>11</sup> In this context Schelling anticipates Bernard Williams's well known 'one thought too many' argument: 'He is not conscientious, who, when a case occurs, first has to hold the command of duty before himself, in order to decide to do the right thing out of respect for it.' (SW I/7, 393). For a thorough contextualization and analysis of the *Freiheitsschrift* as a critique of Kantian conceptions of freedom as rational autonomy, see Dörendahl, *Abgrund der Freiheit*.

<sup>12</sup> The term 'incorporation thesis' was introduced by Allison in *Kant's Theory Freedom*, 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Soft naturalism is widespread in contemporary philosophy, being represented not only by post-Rawlsian constructivists, such as Christine Korsgaard, and philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein, such as John McDowell, but by interpreters of Hegel such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, and Critical Theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth. Peter Strawson seems to have been responsible for introducing the term (see *Skepticism and Naturalism*, 1, and *passim*).

<sup>14</sup> For an interpretation of Schelling's late philosophy as a response to the threat of nihilism, which – on my reading – is already looming in the *Freiheitsschrift*, see the discussion by Christian Iber, *Subjektivität, Vernunft und ihre Kritik*, 191-210.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that, in Strawson's usage, there is an asymmetry between hard naturalism and soft naturalism. The former is 'reductionist', and grants at most epiphenomenal validity to its counterpart; soft naturalism, by contrast, concedes a non-exclusive, but irreducible validity to hard naturalism, albeit one which contradicts hard

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5 naturalism's self-understanding. This asymmetry is best communicated by Strawson's  
6 term 'catholic naturalism', which he offers as a synonym for 'soft naturalism'  
7 (*Skepticism and Naturalism*, 1, 2, 40, 94).

8<sup>16</sup> In his famous lecture commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Schelling's  
9 death, 'Schelling und die Anfänge des existentialistischen Protestes', Paul Tillich  
10 described Schelling's thought as seeking to navigate between 'essentialism' and  
11 'existentialism'. Tillich concluded that, despite the grandeur of his enterprise, Schelling  
12 failed in this aim.  
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