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Schellingiana

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

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

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and Dennis Vanden Auweele

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The handwritten original of the quatrain on page 1

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

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

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

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

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- 1 Cf. J. Wirth (2015): *Schelling's Practice of the Wild. Time, Art, Imagination*. Albany, NY, 175.
 - 2 The classical view on this issue, a view endorsed by both Horst Fuhrmans and Xavier Tilliette, is that Schelling breaks free from the bonds of German Idealism and consequently is no longer subject to Kant's auto-critique of reason. See H. Fuhrmans (1956/57): »Der Ausgangspunkt der Schellingschen Spätphilosophie«. In: *Kant-Studien* 48, 302–323; X. Tilliette (1970): *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir*. 2 vol. Paris. More recently, it is argued that Schelling does not so much oppose Kantian idealism but opens up new ways of doing philosophy after taking seriously Kant's critical philosophy. For further discussion, see D. Vanden Auweele (2020): *Exceeding Reason. Freedom and Religion in Schelling and Nietzsche*. Berlin / New York, 195–223.

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

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

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

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

I Freedom in Schelling's *Freedom Essay*

The Intelligible Deed

*On a Shared Preoccupation of Schopenhauer and Schelling**

Lore Hühn

Zusammenfassung

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

About the Authors

CHRISTIAN DANZ studied Protestant Theology at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena (1985–1990); 2000–2002 professor of systematic theology in Essen, since 2002 professor of systematic theology at the University of Vienna, president of the Deutsche Paul-Tillich-Gesellschaft e.V. since 2006. Since 2009 member of the commission to the edition of the works of Schelling of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften and since 2015 of the project »Schelling – Archive and Edition« of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. His research fields include dogmatics, philosophy of religion, theology of religions, history of 19th and 20th century Protestant theology, and German idealism (Schelling). He is the author of *Gottes Geist: Eine Pneumatologie* (Tübingen 2019), and of *Jesus von Nazareth zwischen Judentum und Christentum: Eine christologische und religionstheologische Skizze* (Tübingen 2020).

BRIGITA GELŽINYTĖ received her PhD from Vilnius University in 2020. She is currently an assistant professor at Vilnius University. Her research interests include German Idealism and Romanticism, early modern philosophy and contemporary continental philosophy. Among her recent publications is »When the Mirror Breaks: On the Image of Self-Consciousness in Hegel and Schelling« (Journal of CCPC, 2020).

LORE HÜHN studied philosophy, German literature and political science in Marburg and at the Free University of Berlin. In 1992/93, she obtained a PhD in philosophy with a thesis on *Fichte and Schelling on the Limit of Human Knowledge*. In 2002/03, Habilitation at the Department of Philosophy and Humanities of the Free University of Berlin with the thesis: *The Transition. On a Structural Problem of Schopenhauer's and Kierkegaard's Philosophy Originating in German Idealism*. Since WS 2003/04, she is Full Professor of Philosophy at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg. Since 2019, she is also Principal

Investigator, Coordinator of Research Area D and Board Member of the Cluster of Excellence Living, Adaptive and Energy-autonomous Materials Systems (livMatS). Her research focuses on ethics, anthropology, philosophy of nature, philosophical aesthetics, philosophy of modern times with an emphasis on German Idealism, and practical philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries. She is the author of *Fichte und Schelling. Oder: Über die Grenze menschlichen Wissens* (Stuttgart/Weimar 1994) and of *Kierkegaard und der Deutsche Idealismus: Konstellationen des Übergangs* (Tübingen 2009).

LJUDEVIT FRAN JEŽIĆ received his PhD from the University of Zagreb in 2015 with a thesis on *The Development of Fichte's Jena System of Transcendental Philosophy in the Context of Post-Kantian Discussions*. He is now an associate professor at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. His main research fields are Greek philosophy, Jewish philosophy, classical German philosophy and comparative philosophy.

JOSEPH P. LAWRENCE is emeritus professor of philosophy at the College of the Holy Cross. He wrote *Schellings Philosophie des ewigen Anfangs* (Würzburg 1989) and translated *The Ages of the World (1811)* (New York 2019).

PHILIPP LUY [né Bohlen] is a PhD student of philosophy and a research assistant at Bonn University. His main research interests are German Idealism, new and speculative realism, and philosophical aesthetics. His doctoral dissertation deals with the freedom of being in Schelling's philosophy of revelation.

RYAN SCHEERLINCK studied philosophy and classical philology in Leuven, Ghent and Munich. He wrote *Philosophie und Religion - Schellings Politische Philosophie* (Freiburg i.Br./Munich 2017), *Gedanken über die Religion. Der ›stille Krieg‹ zwischen Schelling and Schleiermacher* (Stuttgart 2020), and articles on Seneca, Kant, Nietzsche, Lyotard and Friedrich Georg Jünger.

HENNING TEGTMEYER obtained a PhD in philosophy in 2004 and completed his Habilitation in 2012 (both at Leipzig University). Since 2013, he is associate professor of metaphysics and philosophy of religion at KU Leuven. His areas of specialization are German Idealism and natural theology. He is the author of *Gott, Geist, Vernunft: Prinzipien und Probleme der Natürlichen Theologie* (Tübingen 2013) and of various papers on natural theology.

MARK J. THOMAS is associate professor of philosophy at Central College in Pella, Iowa. He received his PhD from Boston College in 2013 with a dissertation on Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*. His research interests include the metaphysics of German Idealism, aesthetics, and the epistemology of authority. He is the author of *Freedom and Ground: A Study of Schelling's Treatise on Freedom* (New York 2023).

DENNIS VANDEN AUWEELE received his PhD from KU Leuven (University of Leuven) in 2014 with a dissertation on *Pessimism in Kant and Schopenhauer*. He is currently a researcher affiliated to KU Leuven. His main research interest is the history of modern European philosophy of religion. His most recent monograph is *Exceeding Reason: Freedom and Religion in Schelling and Nietzsche* (Berlin 2020).

NORA C. WACHSMANN is a PhD student at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (title of her dissertation: *Freedom under the Conditions of Nature and History in Schelling*). Her research focusses on freedom theories in German Idealism (especially Kant and Schelling), concepts of truth in ancient philosophy (especially the Sophists and Plato), and Hans Kelsen's legal theory. She is co-editor of *Schellings Freiheitsschrift – Methode, System, Kritik* (with Th. Buchheim and Th. Frisch, Tübingen 2021) and *SOMA: Körperkonzepte und körperliche Existenz in der antiken Philosophie und Literatur* (with Th. Buchheim and D. Meißner, Hamburg 2016).

JASON M. WIRTH is professor of philosophy at Seattle University and works and teaches in the areas of continental philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, aesthetics, and environmental philosophy. His re-

cent books include *Nietzsche and Other Buddhas: Philosophy after Comparative Philosophy* (Indiana 2019), *Mountains, Rivers, and the Great Earth: Reading Gary Snyder and Dōgen in an Age of Ecological Crisis* (New York 2017), a monograph on Milan Kundera (*Commiserating with Devastated Things*, Fordham 2015), and *Schelling's Practice of the Wild* (New York 2015).

FERNANDO WIRTZ studied philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires and received his PhD from the Eberhard Karl University of Tübingen with a dissertation on Schelling's philosophy of mythology, which was published recently under the title *Phänomenologie der Angst* (Tübingen 2022). After several post-doc stays in Japan, he is currently assistant professor at Kyoto University. His main research interests are the philosophy of myth, modern Japanese philosophy and German Idealism. He is also a board member of the Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie.

YU XIA is a PhD student of philosophy at KU Leuven. Her research interests include German Idealism, contemporary continental philosophy, and phenomenology. Her doctoral dissertation deals with the problem of nature and the real in F.W.J. Schelling and Martin Heidegger.

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