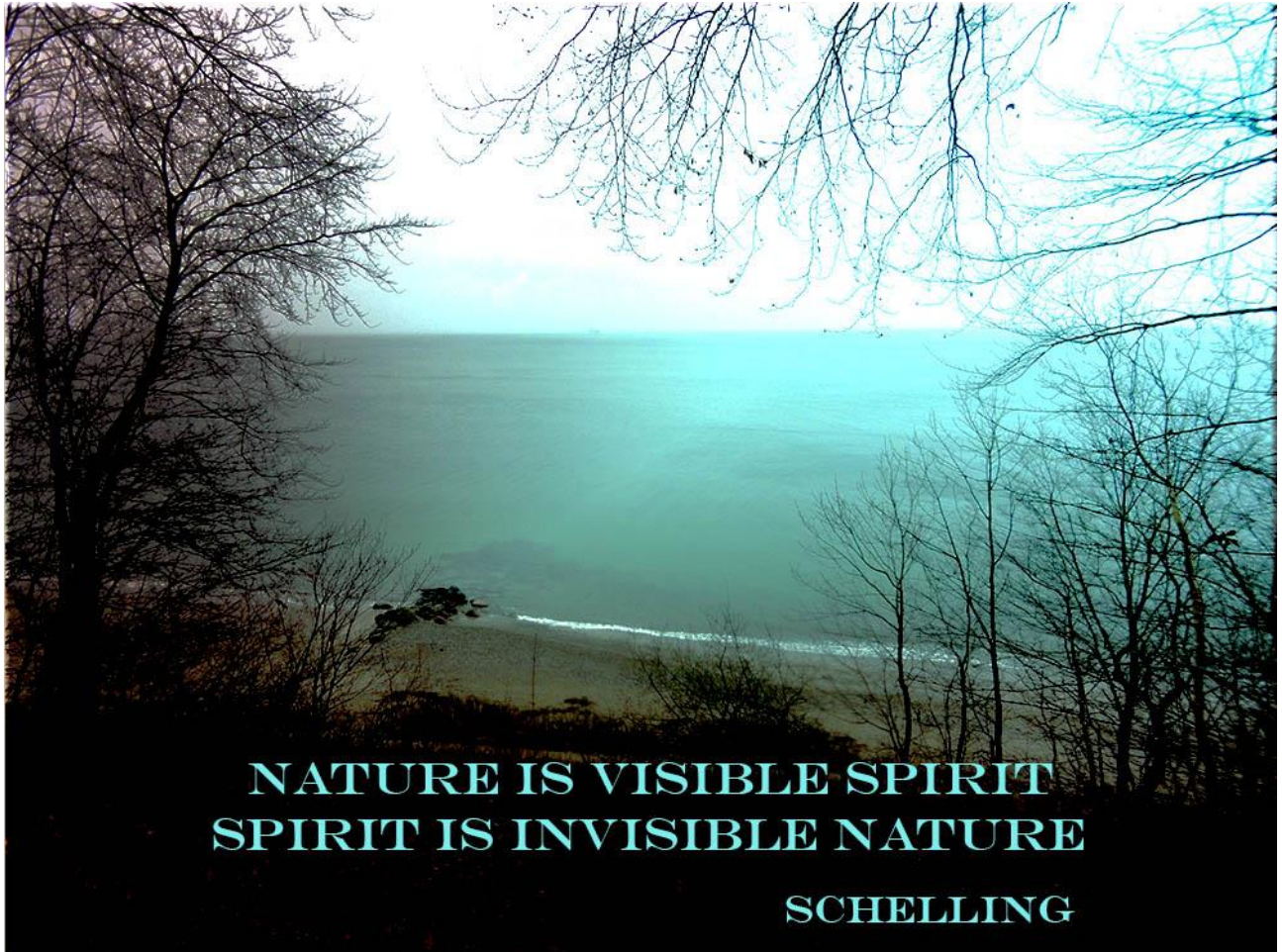


FREEDOM AND THE UNFOLDING OF BEING

A Process that Runs through all Reality



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Abstract

This essay investigates the ontological foundation of freedom through the late metaphysical writings of F.W.J. Schelling, focusing on his `Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom` and the `Ages of the World`. It argues that freedom is not primarily a function of rational subjectivity, but an expression of the deeper structure of being itself — a being that unfolds through tension, contradiction, and becoming.

Schelling's concept of freedom emerges from a divine duality: a dark, unconscious ground and a conscious, self-revealing spirit. The tragic potential for evil and fragmentation is not accidental but intrinsic to this structure. The world is not a finished order but a site of becoming, where spirit actualizes itself through nature and history.

This vision is crystallized in Schelling's ontological formula: "*Nature is visible Spirit; Spirit is invisible Nature.*" Nature and spirit are not separate substances, but two expressions of a single, dynamic unfolding. The essay thus repositions freedom as a metaphysical rhythm — the movement through which being becomes manifest in time, embodiment, and ethical responsiveness. The study situates Schelling in dialogue with Kant, Hegel, and contemporary phenomenology, offering a powerful reinterpretation of freedom as the visible and invisible motion of being — a unification of spirit, nature, and temporal existence.

Introduction

The nature of freedom and its development is an essential aspect of being. The term 'being' is used in its existential sense, referring not merely to the state of existing but to the lived experience of existence itself. In considering the relationship between freedom and being, we must begin with the question: what does it mean to be free? The question of human freedom stands at the heart of modern philosophy, and perhaps nowhere is it treated with more depth and theological seriousness than in the later works of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Born out of the post-Kantian movement known as German Idealism, Schelling's mature thought grapples with the paradoxes of existence: How can freedom truly exist within a world governed by necessity? How can evil arise from a creation deemed good by its divine source? And how can the finite human being find reconciliation with the infinite Absolute?

In his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) and later in *Die Weltalter* ('The Ages of the World'), Schelling develops a profound metaphysical system that refuses to reduce freedom to mere autonomy or evil to mere privation. For Schelling, freedom is ontological; it is at the very root of being itself. Without true freedom, neither the moral existence of the human being nor the personal nature of God could be sustained. Yet freedom carries within it the risk of evil, a possibility that Schelling regards as necessary if goodness is to be freely chosen rather than necessitated.

The climax of this metaphysical drama is found in the figure of Christ. Unlike other religious or philosophical systems that regard reconciliation as either an impersonal process or a simple return to an original state, Schelling envisions Christ as the historical and existential fulfillment of divine and human freedom. In this vision, Schelling's thought converges strikingly with Søren Kierkegaard, whose existential philosophy emphasizes the necessity of Christ as the mediator in the paradoxical relationship between the finite and the infinite.

1. Schelling's Early Thought: German Idealism and the Emergence of Freedom

1.1. The German Idealist Context: Kant and Fichte

Schelling's philosophy does not emerge in isolation. His early work must be understood against the backdrop of the German Idealist tradition that followed Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Kant had revolutionized philosophy by proposing that the human mind actively structures experience through a priori categories. Although Kant opened the door to freedom through his concept of the noumenal self, he left it in a mysterious realm, inaccessible to human knowledge.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, building on Kant, radicalized this insight by making the self — the "Ich" — the foundation of all reality. In Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* ('*Wissenschaftslehre*'), the self-posit itself and the not-self (the external world) through acts of pure activity. Freedom, for Fichte, becomes the essential characteristic of the self's infinite striving. The world is not something given, but something posited by the self in its practical striving toward moral perfection.

While initially influenced by Fichte, Schelling soon found this subjectivist account of freedom inadequate. Fichte's self, despite its dynamic activity, remains trapped within itself, unable to account for the independent existence of nature or for the genuine alterity of others. Reality becomes a projection of the self's own structure. As Schelling matured, he sought to move beyond Fichte's solipsism to a philosophy that could affirm both the self and nature as real, autonomous participants in a living cosmos. Freedom, Schelling realized, must be more than the self's internal striving; it must be ontologically rooted in the very structure of being itself.

1.2. Schelling's Early Philosophy of Nature

In his early works, particularly the *Ideas for a 'Philosophy of Nature'* (1797) and *'First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature'* (1799), Schelling explores nature as an active, living organism rather than a passive mechanism. Nature is not simply the stage on which human freedom unfolds; it is itself an expression of freedom in a primordial, unconscious form.

Nature, for Schelling, is "visible spirit," while spirit is "invisible nature." This famous formulation reveals the dialectical relationship he sees between the two. Nature moves towards self-consciousness, culminating in humanity, where spirit and nature find their synthesis. Thus, Schelling challenges the Cartesian division between mind and matter, spirit and nature. Freedom must be understood not merely as a property of isolated rational beings but as the culmination of a process that runs through all of reality. Already in these early works, we see the seeds of Schelling's later doctrine: freedom is not an accidental feature of a detached human subject; it is the very essence of being as such.

1.3. The Shift Toward Freedom and the Absolute

By the early 1800s, Schelling's thought underwent a decisive transformation. No longer content to conceive of freedom merely within the framework of nature's evolution, he began to investigate freedom as the essential structure of the Absolute itself. This shift is most clearly seen in his *'System of Transcendental Idealism'* (1800), where he attempts to reconcile nature and spirit through the notion of aesthetic intuition, and later more radically in *'Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom'* (1809).

In these works, Schelling asserts that the Absolute cannot be merely a rational structure (as it appears in Hegel) but must contain within itself a pre-rational, dynamic ground — a freedom prior to all necessity. If the Absolute were purely rational necessity, then freedom would be illusory. True freedom, Schelling insists, requires that the Absolute contain within itself the possibility of differentiation, opposition, and even evil.

Thus, Schelling's early development moves from a Fichtean idealism centered on the self, through a Naturphilosophie that affirms the living dynamism of nature, towards a profound metaphysical vision in which freedom is the innermost core of all reality. This sets the stage for his mature reflections on evil, divine personality, and redemption — themes to which we now turn.

2. Freedom and Necessity: Schelling's Break from Determinism

2.1. The Problem of Freedom in Philosophical Systems

The question arises, then: what is the positive content of freedom? One answer is that to be free is to act in accordance with one's authentic self. This notion of authenticity has deep roots in existential philosophy, particularly in the works of Heidegger (*Being and Time*) and Sartre (*Existentialism is a Humanism*). For these thinkers, freedom is not simply the capacity to choose, but the obligation to choose oneself—to assume responsibility for one's being and to act in a manner consistent with that commitment.

Freedom is often conceived in negative terms, as the absence of constraint or external imposition. Though not incorrect, this view is insufficient. The absence of constraint does not, by itself, constitute the presence of freedom in any substantive sense. To develop a more complete understanding, we must look beyond freedom as mere negation and inquire into its positive content.

One of the central tensions in the philosophical tradition Schelling inherited was the difficulty of reconciling human freedom with the apparent determinism of natural law and rational necessity. From the ancient Stoics to the rationalist metaphysicians of the Enlightenment, necessity had been regarded as the defining feature of true knowledge. If something could be known, it must be necessary; if it were contingent, it would elude rational grasp.

Spinoza's famous dictum, "In nature there is nothing contingent," epitomized this worldview. For Spinoza, God (or Nature) is a single substance, and everything that exists follows from the essence of God by necessity. In such a system, freedom becomes a kind of understanding of necessity — the enlightened realization that what we took for contingent is in fact determined by the infinite order of reality. Human agency and moral responsibility are thus reinterpreted within a cosmic determinism.

Schelling, however, finds this reduction intolerable. If freedom is simply the recognition of necessity, then it is not freedom in any meaningful sense. Moral responsibility requires that an individual could have done otherwise. Freedom, properly understood, must include genuine possibility — the possibility to choose not only the good but also the evil. The stakes of this philosophical debate are not abstract; they concern the very reality of human dignity, moral struggle, and divine life.

2.2. Schelling's Critique of Hegelian Necessity

Schelling's critique reaches its sharpest focus in his confrontation with Hegel. Hegel, Schelling's contemporary and onetime friend, developed a monumental philosophical system in which reality unfolds through dialectical necessity. In Hegel's view, contradiction is the engine of historical development: the real is rational, and the rational is real. Each stage of Spirit's unfolding negates and preserves its predecessor, moving inevitably towards absolute self-consciousness. Although Schelling and Hegel shared common roots in German Idealism, Schelling increasingly came to view Hegel's system as suffocatingly closed. By explaining every event and development, as necessary within the logic of Spirit, Hegel left no room for true contingency, true novelty, or true freedom. History becomes a mechanical process, albeit a rational one.

In his later writings, particularly the 'Freedom Essay' ('Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom', 1809), Schelling launches a powerful counterattack. Real freedom, he argues, cannot be the product of necessity, not even a dialectical necessity. Freedom must precede the unfolding of reason; it must be more primordial than rational order itself. In one of his most striking formulations, Schelling writes:

"There must be in God himself a ground of existence, which is distinct from His actual existence... a ground which is to be conceived as the basis of His existence, but which does not exist outside God himself."

This “ground” (‘Grund’) is not reason, not necessity, but pre-rational freedom. Without such a ground, Schelling insists, neither evil nor goodness would be possible; existence itself would be frozen into a static, mechanical order. The Absolute would be death rather than life. Thus, Schelling identifies freedom not as an accident of finite beings but as the very condition of existence, the very life of God. Against the Hegelian system, Schelling asserts the primordial priority of freedom over reason.

2.3. Freedom and the Structure of Being

If freedom is to be real, Schelling argues, it must be rooted in the fundamental structure of being itself. But this leads to a profound metaphysical revision: being must be understood as dynamic, not static; as living, not mechanical; as free, not determined. Schelling introduces a distinction between two principles within God: the principle of ground (‘Grund’) and the principle of existence (‘Existenz’). The ground is dark, irrational, and pre-conscious; the existence is light, order, and consciousness. Both are necessary, but they are not identical. Existence arises from ground, but it is not the mere mechanical outcome of ground. Rather, existence is the free revelation of the divine nature, the act by which God affirms and expresses Himself.

This dual structure — ground and existence — allows Schelling to explain how freedom and necessity coexist. Necessity arises as the order of existence, the rational structures through which God expresses Himself. But freedom is the original possibility that underlies and enables this order. Thus, the laws of nature, the rational order of the cosmos, are not brute necessities imposed from outside but the self-expression of a deeper freedom. Freedom is not the negation of necessity but its ground and possibility. In this way, Schelling transforms the traditional metaphysical hierarchy. Freedom is more primordial than necessity, love more original than law, life more fundamental than logic.

2.4. The Risk of Freedom: The Possibility of Evil, Contingency and the Future

Yet, if freedom is truly real, it must entail risk — the risk of deviation, of evil. If the divine ground were purely rational and determined, evil would be impossible. But because the ground includes a moment of irrational, pre-conscious freedom, there is the possibility of separation, of turning away from the good.

Evil, for Schelling, is not the absence of good but the perverse actualization of freedom without reference to the divine order. It is the self-assertion of the ground without its integration into existence. In other words, evil occurs when a being affirms itself in opposition to the whole, when the "I" seeks to be an absolute center independent of the divine life.

Thus, freedom is a gift but also a danger. It enables the highest good — love, creativity, moral responsibility — but it also opens the abyss of evil, suffering, and alienation. This tragic dimension of freedom — its capacity for both divine participation and monstrous deviation — places Schelling's philosophy in stark contrast to the optimistic rationalism of Hegel. In Schelling's world, history is not the necessary triumph of Spirit but a real drama, full of risk, uncertainty, and the necessity of redemption. One of the most remarkable features of Schelling's later thought is his affirmation of the radical openness of the future. If freedom is real, then the future cannot be fully determined by the past. History is not a closed system unfolding according to logical necessity; it is a living process, full of unforeseen possibilities, tragic failures, and moments of grace.

This openness demands that philosophy give up the illusion of total knowledge. We cannot predict the future because the future is not yet decided; it depends on the free actions of finite beings and on the continuing revelation of the divine life. Thus, Schelling's metaphysics of freedom becomes a metaphysics of hope. Because history is open, redemption is possible. Because freedom is real, love can triumph — but only at the cost of struggle, risk, and faith. In this vision, Schelling anticipates not only existentialism but also key aspects of modern theology, particularly the emphasis on history, contingency, and personal decision.

3. Schelling's Transformation of Traditional Metaphysics

3.1. God as the Ultimate Ground of all Being and Dynamic Force of Nature

At the heart of Schelling's mature thought is a revolutionary conception of God. Against Spinoza's vision of God as pure substance and Hegel's system of God as rational Spirit unfolding necessarily, Schelling insists that God must be understood as a living, personal being, not an abstract force or a logical process.

For Schelling, the highest concept of God is not being (Sein), nor thought (Denken), but freedom and personality (Freiheit und Persönlichkeit). God is not an indifferent unity but a dynamic self, a being who freely wills, loves, creates, and relates. Without freedom, there can be no true love; without personality, there can be no real relationship between God and the world.

This idea marks a fundamental transformation of traditional metaphysics. Whereas classical philosophy sought the unchanging, eternal, and necessary as the most real, Schelling proposes that life itself — with all its freedom, risk, and self-expression — is the deepest truth of reality. Thus, God's personality is not an anthropomorphic projection, as Feuerbach later argued; rather, it is the ultimate ground of all being. Human personality reflects divine personality, not the other way around. Central to Schelling's theology is the distinction between God's ground (Grund) and God's existence (Existenz). The Grund is the dark, pre-rational ground within God — a freedom that is prior to consciousness, law, or necessity. It is not evil, but it contains the possibility of self-assertion, differentiation, and individuation. It is the dynamic source from which existence arises.

In contrast, Existenz is the conscious, luminous revelation of God's being — the Logos, the ordered structure of reality that reflects divine reason and goodness. This distinction allows Schelling to resolve a perennial theological problem: How can God be perfectly good, yet create a world in which evil is possible?

- The Grund contains the freedom and irrationality necessary for real self-expression.
- The Existenz is the divine order, the manifestation of God's good will.
- Evil arises not from God's will, but from the potential of freedom misused by finite beings who emerge from this dynamic ground.

Thus, the Grund is a necessary precondition for creation and freedom, but evil itself is not a necessary product of the divine will.

3.2. Creation as a Free Dynamic Process

For Schelling, creation is not an emanation, as in Neoplatonism, nor a necessary moment in the development of Spirit, as in Hegel. Rather, creation is a free act of love, grounded in the divine personality. God is not compelled to create by necessity. He freely chooses to manifest His being, to bring finite beings into existence, and to offer them the gift of freedom.

This act of creation is inherently relational. God does not create the world as something wholly other; He creates it as a field in which freedom can unfold — a freedom that mirrors His own divine freedom. Thus, the world is neither wholly separate from God nor identical with Him (as in pantheism). It is the product of divine self-giving: the Absolute sharing its inner life through the risky gift of freedom.

3.3. The Divine Pathos: Risk, Suffering, and Love

Because God grants real freedom to finite beings, He accepts the risk of rejection, evil, and suffering. Divine freedom entails divine vulnerability. In contrast to the impassible God of classical theism — the God who cannot suffer — Schelling's God is a being who can suffer precisely because He loves. The history of the world is not a mechanical unfolding of preordained stages but a dramatic story filled with real risk and divine pathos.

In this view, God does not simply witness the unfolding of history from a safe distance. He is intimately involved, bearing the pain of creation's estrangement, laboring toward its reconciliation. The divine pathos — God's suffering love — becomes the foundation for understanding the necessity of redemption. Schelling anticipates here the later theology of figures like Jürgen Moltmann (*The Crucified God*) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (*Theo-Drama*), who similarly portray God as engaged in the tragic beauty of history.

3.4. The Definite Answer to the Problem of Evil

Given the dynamics of divine freedom, personality, and suffering, it becomes clear why, for Schelling, the incarnation of Christ is not a mere afterthought or contingency. It is the necessary culmination of divine self-revelation and the definitive answer to the problem of evil. Christ is not simply a messenger or moral teacher; He is the manifestation of divine personality in human form, the full expression of the divine will to reconcile freedom and necessity, love and law, ground and existence.

Through the incarnation, God enters fully into the condition of finite existence — into history, suffering, death — not as a passive observer but as an active participant in the redemption of creation. Thus, the divine personality is not abstract; it is historical, concrete, embodied. Christ reveals that the core of the Absolute is not pure logic but living, suffering, redeeming love.

3.5. The Restoration of Freedom

In Christ, Schelling sees the restoration of the original harmony between ground and existence, freedom and order. Through Christ's voluntary submission to death and His resurrection, the possibility of aligning human freedom with divine love is reopened. Finite beings, through union with Christ, are invited to participate in the divine life — not by being absorbed into the Absolute (as in some mystical traditions), but by being elevated into conscious, personal communion with God.

In this sense, salvation is not the abolition of individuality but its fulfillment. Freedom is not negated but perfected in love. Schelling thus offers a profound Christological vision: freedom is redeemed through love; love is revealed through freedom; and both find their perfection in the person of Christ.

4. The Ungrund as the Ground of all Existence

4.1 Introduction to the Ungrund

In Schelling's philosophy, the Ungrund serves as the deepest ontological ground of being. It represents the groundless ground from which all being emerges. The Ungrund is not an absence, nor a simple void, but an active potentiality from which both good and evil spring. Freedom, in Schelling's view, is the defining feature of this ground. The possibility of evil exists because the Ungrund allows for the pure potentiality of being—a world in which choices can be made, and mistakes can be made. It is crucial that Schelling's metaphysics accommodates evil as a necessary moment in the process of creation rather than an extraneous or accidental element.

4.2. The Nature of Human Fallibility

Human beings are born into the freedom of the Ungrund, and this freedom inherently involves the capacity for both good and evil. For Schelling, freedom is not a mere gift; it is the fundamental essence of reality. This radical freedom is what allows individuals to fall into evil, as they are free to choose what is contrary to their true nature. Human fallibility arises precisely because freedom allows for the possibility of error. Without the potential for error, human beings would not truly be free. In this sense, fallibility is not a flaw of creation but a necessary consequence of freedom itself.

The human ability to choose freely means that individuals can embrace their divine potential or misuse their freedom, leading to sin and evil. Fallibility is not a defect but part of human nature, and its existence is essential to the unfolding of history. To be free is to risk making choices that lead to suffering, but it is also to have the capacity for love, creation, and self-realization. Evil is therefore the negative counterpart to freedom—it is the abuse of the very freedom that gives rise to good and beauty.

4.3. The Problem of Evil and Cosmic Role in History

The classical problem of evil asks: If God is all-powerful and all-good, why does evil exist? Schelling's answer diverges from traditional responses. In his metaphysical system, evil is not an aberration but a necessary element of the dialectical process. Evil exists because of the absolute freedom of being. Schelling does not see evil as a flaw in divine creation, but as an inherent possibility in the freedom of existence. This freedom is not just granted to human beings but extends to the very nature of reality itself. The Ungrund, as the origin of all being, represents pure potentiality, and within this potentiality lies the risk of evil.

Rather than seeing evil as a contradiction in a good world, Schelling posits that freedom creates the conditions for both good and evil. It is not that evil is allowed or permitted by God but that it is the inevitable consequence of a world structured around absolute freedom. God, in this view, is not simply a passive observer of evil but is the ground from which all things, including evil, emerge. Schelling's theodicy is rooted in the idea that evil, while destructive, is not a permanent force. It is part of a larger dialectical movement toward reconciliation and redemption.

Schelling's view of evil is not static. Evil is part of a cosmic drama, an ongoing dialectical process of creation and destruction that unfolds over time. History itself is a narrative of redemption where opposites—good and evil, freedom and necessity—are reconciled. Evil is not the final word; it is a temporary and necessary condition within the larger process of cosmic evolution. This cosmic history is not simply a linear progression but an unfolding of moments of tension, conflict, and resolution. Each moment in history brings humanity closer to a higher synthesis where the divine plan for creation can be fully realized.

In this narrative, evil is not unnecessary suffering or an extraneous obstacle but a dialectical moment that reveals the tension between freedom and necessity. The possibility of evil was present from the very beginning and has always been a part of the unfolding of reality. This evil, however, is always destined to be overcome by the greater good of creation. Cosmic redemption is achieved not by eliminating freedom, but by transforming the evil that arises from it into a higher form of good.

5. The Fulfillment of Freedom

5.1. Freedom, Redemption and History

Yet, this burden of freedom is not without its promise. It is through the act of self-definition that one participates in the unfolding of being. To be is not merely to exist, but to become — to shape oneself in response to the possibilities offered by existence. Freedom, in this sense, is not a static possession but a dynamic process: an ongoing engagement with the question of who one is and who one may become.

Christ represents the fulfillment of freedom, the resolution of the tension between good and evil that has existed throughout history. For Schelling, Christ is not merely an example of moral goodness or a symbol of divine intervention; He embodies the absolute paradox that holds together the infinite (divine) and the finite (human). In this union, Christ shows that true freedom is not the ability to do whatever one pleases, but the freedom to choose the good and live in accordance with divine will. The incarnation is the ultimate act of freedom — God freely chooses to enter the world as human, fully embracing both the human condition and divine mission of salvation.

5.2. The Absolute Paradox: Christ and the Reconciliation of Opposites

Schelling sees Christ as the absolute paradox, as Kierkegaard famously calls it. Christ is both fully divine and fully human, and it is precisely this paradoxical union that makes redemption possible. In Christ, we see the reconciliation of opposites — freedom and necessity, good and evil, the finite and the infinite. Christ does not negate freedom but affirms it in its highest form, showing that freedom is most fully realized through self-sacrifice. The paradox of the divine entering into human suffering is not merely an intellectual puzzle; it is the existential truth that enables redemption. Through Christ, freedom is shown to be not just self-directed choice, but a radical openness to the divine will that transforms the individual and the cosmos.

5.3. Freedom's Highest Potential

Such a conception of freedom is laden with significance. If to be free is to assume responsibility for one's being, then freedom entails a kind of burden. It is not the lightness of liberty but the gravity of choice that defines the free individual. This is perhaps what Sartre meant when he declared that we are "condemned to be free" —that is, burdened with the inescapable task of defining ourselves through our actions (Existentialism is a Humanism).

In Schelling's view, human freedom, in its raw form, is a freedom to choose both good and evil. But true freedom, as revealed in Christ, is the ability to freely choose the good, even at the cost of suffering. The cross becomes the ultimate symbol of freedom—it is not simply an instrument of death, but an expression of freedom's highest potential. Through His sacrifice, Christ overcomes evil and frees humanity from the bondage of sin. Christ's death is not the end of freedom, but the beginning of a new form of freedom that transcends the limitations of evil and brings the world into alignment with divine will.

Schelling's notion of freedom is not a license to do as one wishes but a transformation of the will. Christ, as the fulfillment of freedom, does not abolish freedom but elevates it to its highest possibility: freedom to love, freedom to serve, and freedom to give oneself for others. Christ shows that true freedom is not exercised in isolation, but in relationship with the divine and with others. This is the divine freedom realized in the world.

5.4. The Role of the Leap of Faith

The leap of faith is a concept borrowed from Kierkegaard, which emphasizes the existential necessity of embracing the paradox of Christ's incarnation. Faith in Christ requires a commitment that transcends reason—it is not a logical or rational decision but an act of the will that involves the whole person. This leap is not irrational, but it requires that one accept the absurdity of the paradox that defines Christian belief: the divine becoming human, the eternal embracing the finite. Schelling's conception of Christ's role in history is inextricably linked to this leap of faith. Christ's freedom is not about making logical sense of the world but embracing the tension of existence. The leap of faith is not a denial of freedom but the affirmation of a higher freedom, the freedom to believe and to commit oneself to the divine will.

6. Myth, Narrative, and the Unfolding of Existence

6.1. The Role of Myth in Schelling's Philosophy

"History itself is the great myth that the spirit must unfold within itself in order to become conscious of itself." Schelling, The Ages of the World

In Schelling's later philosophy, myth, narrative, and existence itself are intimately connected. Myth reveals the hidden structures of being, existence unfolds as a living narrative marked by tension and reconciliation, and the figure of Christ stands at the center as the fulfillment of the cosmic story. For Schelling, myth is not merely a symbolic or fictional expression but an essential philosophical tool that reveals the underlying truths of existence. Myths express the unconscious structures of reality, offering insights into the cosmic process of creation, destruction, and redemption. Schelling's view of myth is deeply metaphysical—myths are not just stories told to entertain or instruct, but representations of eternal truths. They reveal the dialectical unfolding of reality, where good and evil, freedom and necessity, are woven into the fabric of existence.

6.2. Existence as Narrative: The Dialectic of Good and Evil

In this respect, Schelling's understanding of existence shows an important, if complex, relation to Spinoza. Like Spinoza, Schelling rejects a simple dualism between good and evil; evil is not an independent force opposed to God or Nature. For Spinoza, evil is ultimately a privation—an expression of the limitations of finite beings, a misunderstanding rooted in partial knowledge. In Schelling, however, evil is given a deeper ontological grounding. It is not merely a human misperception but arises from the fundamental dynamic within being itself: the tension between the dark ground (the unconscious will to exist) and the luminous principle of conscious existence. In myth, this inner structure of being—where the possibility of a "fall" into evil is not an accident but an essential risk of freedom—is symbolically disclosed.

6.3. The Drama of Freedom, Risk and Redemption

Thus, myths for Schelling are not arbitrary fabrications but the necessary narrative form through which the eternal conflict and reconciliation of ground and existence, darkness and light, freedom and necessity, are made manifest. Myth narrates what philosophy articulates: that existence itself is a story of the divine unfolding, not through mere necessity, but

through the drama of freedom, risk, and the real possibility of evil. In Schelling's vision, the mythic, existential, and Christological dimensions of reality are not separate layers but different expressions of a single unfolding truth: that existence is a drama of freedom, risk, and redemption, eternally grounded in the living God. Where Christ is the central figure in the cosmic narrative because He represents the telos—the end or goal—of history. Christ is the fulfillment of both the human and cosmic stories. His life and work bring the unfolding of history to its final and definitive conclusion. The tension between good and evil, freedom and necessity, is resolved in Him, and His narrative is the archetype of human existence. Christ's story is not just a historical event but the universal pattern of how creation moves toward redemption.

The historical and mythic dimensions of Christ's story cannot be separated. Christ's life and death are both historically real and symbolically eternal. The mythic dimension of Christ's story speaks to the deeper truths of existence, while the historical reality anchors it in time. In this way, Christ's story becomes the model for humanity's own narrative, showing how freedom, evil, and redemption unfold in the life of each individual and in the broader cosmic drama.

Schelling's view stands in contrast to deterministic or essentialist accounts of human nature, which posit a fixed essence to which individuals are presumed to conform. In rejecting such accounts, existential freedom affirms that there is no given blueprint for human life. We are, in a sense, self-authored. This does not mean that we create ourselves 'ex nihilo' (out of nothing), but rather that we must interpret and respond to the conditions of our existence in a way that is uniquely our own.

7. Conclusion: Freedom, Evil, and the Redemption of Being

In conclusion, the complex interplay between freedom, evil and redemption forms the core of Schelling's philosophical system, particularly in relation to his Christology. As we have seen throughout this essay, Schelling views freedom as the very ground of being, the origin of all creation, and the source from which both good and evil arise. The Ungrund, as the groundless ground of existence, sets the stage for the cosmic drama of creation, where freedom is the fundamental condition for the unfolding of being itself. It is this freedom that makes possible the emergence of evil, for without the capacity for error, human beings would not be free in the most profound sense.

The problem of evil, then, is not an anomaly in Schelling's system but an inevitable outcome of the free will inherent in creation. In line with this concept, evil is the necessary counterpart to freedom—a consequence of the unrestricted possibility that comes with the absolute freedom of the Ungrund. This understanding shifts the traditional theological conception of evil as an extraneous problem to be eradicated, instead placing it within a larger dialectical process that sees evil as a moment in the unfolding of the cosmos. It is, in a sense, a necessary phase in the journey toward redemption, where freedom's potential for error can eventually be reconciled with the divine will.

However, evil's presence does not negate freedom but remains actually an integral part of its realization. Schelling emphasizes that freedom is not absolute without the possibility of choice between good and evil. If the possibility of evil were removed, freedom would be reduced to mere necessity, a deterministic force rather than the open potentiality that allows for self-determination. In this sense, evil is the risk of freedom—the cost of having the genuine possibility to choose and to shape existence.

7.1 Redemption as Transformation of Evil

The cosmic history we discussed reveals that evil is not eternal but is an element in the dialectical process of creation. Through the unfolding of history, creation is constantly evolving, and the tension between good and evil drives the movement towards resolution. Schelling's system suggests that redemption is not a negation of evil, but its transformation. As history progresses, evil is reconciled in a higher synthesis where its power is absorbed and transcended by the greater good of the divine plan.

At the heart of this process of reconciliation is Christ, who represents the fulfillment of freedom and the resolution of the tension between good and evil. Christ, for Schelling, is the absolute paradox—the union of the divine and the human, the infinite and the finite. In His person, the absolute freedom of God is revealed as self-giving love, and this love is the means by which the world is redeemed from the consequences of its own freedom. Christ's sacrifice on the cross represents the ultimate act of freedom—a freedom that chooses the good, even at great personal cost—and it is this act that transforms the very nature of being. Through Christ, freedom is not simply preserved but perfected.

This leads us to an understanding of redemption as a transcendence of evil rather than its elimination. Christ's death and resurrection reveal that freedom can only reach its full potential when it is united with divine will. In embracing evil through the cross, Christ demonstrates that true freedom involves the choice of self-sacrifice, the ability to lay down one's will in love and service to others. This transformation of freedom is the fulfillment of human potential and the ultimate resolution of the problem of evil—not by removing evil but by showing that evil can be transformed into good through the divine process of redemption.

The mythic and historical dimensions of Christ's story also play a critical role in this process. Christ is not simply a figure of individual salvation but the archetype of the cosmic narrative. His life is both historical and symbolic, representing the culmination of the divine plan for creation. The narrative of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection becomes the central myth that provides meaning to all existence. As we saw, Schelling views myth as a means of understanding the deeper truths of being, and in Christ, we find the ultimate mythic narrative of redemption. This myth is not merely symbolic but metaphysically real, providing a structure for understanding the unfolding of existence as a divinely orchestrated drama in which every individual part plays a role in the final resolution.

Ultimately, the redemption of being is not an escape from the world but the fulfillment of it. In Schelling's thought, Christ's incarnation and sacrifice show that the world can be reconciled to the divine—not by overcoming freedom, but by redeeming it. Freedom becomes truly free when it is united with divine love, and in this union, the tensions of good and evil are no longer opposites but moments in a larger cosmic journey toward wholeness and unity.

Schelling's concept of freedom challenges us to rethink the very nature of existence. Freedom, with its potential for both good and evil, is the foundation of being, and it is only through this freedom that true redemption can be realized. The problem of evil is not one to be solved by eliminating freedom but by understanding it as the necessary condition for the unfolding of redemption. In Schelling's view, the ultimate fulfillment of freedom is represented through Christ, where evil is transformed, where the cosmic narrative reaches its climax in divine reconciliation. Here both the personal and the cosmic narrative find their ultimate resolution in a redeemed existence where freedom is fully actualized in the love of God.

In this light, freedom is not merely a matter of external conditions but of existential orientation — one's way of engaging with existence. A person may live in a society that guarantees rights and liberties and yet fail to attain a deeper sense of freedom. Conversely, one may find freedom even under limiting circumstances, provided one lives authentically and assumes responsibility for one's being.

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