Reiner Schürmann

Modern Philosophies of the Will

Lecture Notes for Courses at the New School for Social Research

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Afterword

'The willing animal to whom nature must conform'

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The aim of the present lecture course is to pinpoint a series of historical and philosophical turning points through which the problem of the *will* came to dominate the self-understanding of the subject, strengthening its claim to mastery over the world. Whether under the auspices of 'spirit,' the 'Overman,' or 'technology,' the subject of late modernity would come to understand itself as "the willing animal to whom nature must conform." It is the hypothesis of the current lectures that the global reach of technology, which regulates our experience of phenomenality presently, must be understood as the "unbridled offspring of the transcendental turn in modern philosophy."

At first glance, the accusation may appear paradoxical: did Kant's transcendental inventory of the subject not place new limitations on the rational subject? Did his synthesis of rationalism and empiricism not announce a movement away from the rationalism of his predecessors? However, as Reiner Schürmann explains, the effort to set limits on the rationalist project wound up producing an even more unlimited project in its wake. Having secured its basis in the Kantian system, the will in modern philosophy then swelled like a monstrous spider in a cartoon that pulls everything into its web, until it ultimately "triumphed." Moving from Aristotle and Augustine to German Idealism and Nietzsche, and finally to Heidegger's critique of technological voluntarism, *Modern Philosophies of the Will* retraces this sequence whereby the "will comes to determine primarily and at times exclusively the human subject." Following

¹ In this volume, 18.

² Ibid., 17.

³ Ibid., 18. Cf. also Schürmann's unpublished lecture notes for the course *Philosophical Anthropology II: Its Contemporary Crisis*, in the Reiner Schürmann papers, NA.0006.01, box 4, folder 1–7 (New York: The New School Archives and Special

the example set by Paul Ricœur, Schürmann isolates a series of decisive conjunctures or "contexts"⁴—ethical, religious, epistemological, critical—until arriving, with Nietzsche and Heidegger, at the *fundamentum concussum*, that moment where "the long hidden crack bursts open."⁵

In a first moment, Schürmann shows how the grounds of the transcendental philosophy of the will were prepared by Aristotle, Augustine, and Descartes. Although the ancient Greeks have no precise word for 'will,' in its emphasis on freedom from constraint and choice among alternatives Aristotle's analysis in the Nicomachean Ethics of proairesis, or deliberated choice, forms a necessary starting point.6 However, since the purview of deliberated choice is ethical rather than epistemological, its cosmological significance remains decisively bounded. It is only with Augustine that the "stage of the drama of the will," with its agonal simultaneity of velle and nolle, willing and nilling, is properly set. In Augustine, the will's power to turn either away from or toward God, as a "boundless either/or," endows it with a newfound capacity for evil. Infinite in its capacity for God, yet finite in its impurity, the will is lodged midway between desire and reason, divided against itself. Hence, the need for an exercitatio animi, an ascetic dressage of the will by which it becomes rational through submission to the mind's command. In this 'spiritualization,' the human has the pure will of God as its model and goal—a tension Kant will later

Collections), 32: "[the] human subject results from the *will* to submit all other forces to reason" (emphasis added).

⁴ Ricœur's reconstruction of the will for the *Encyclopedia Universalis* follows a similar sequence of "contexts." See P. Ricœur, "Volonté," in *Encyclopedia Universalis*, *XVI* (Paris: Encyclopedia Universalis France, 1973), 943–948 (II.A.296).

⁵ Schürmann, "Legislation-Transgression: Strategies and Counter-Strategies in the Transcendental Justification of Norms," in *Tomorrow the Manifold. Essays on Foucault, Anarchy, and the Singularization to Come*, eds. Malte Fabian Rauch and Nicolas Schneider (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2019), 96.

⁶ On the position of Aristotle's doctrine within the Greek context more generally, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Intimations of the Will in Greek Tragedy," in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (with Pierre Vidal-Naquet), trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

⁷ In this volume, 22.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

interiorize. We thus see the scope of the will beginning to widen. It is against this backdrop that Descartes will introduce a new set of questions. In his *Meditations*, the will remains a central issue, as it was for Augustine; however, the problem to which the Cartesian strategy responds is no longer primarily ethical or psychological (since we do not 'experience' willing, only judgment's results), but epistemological. "Why is there anything else but truth?"—this is the question to which the will supplies an answer.9 In this way, the exercise of the will is tethered no longer to the foundations of the good but to those of knowledge. As the "power of contraries" 10 which either affirms or negates the ideas of the understanding, the will appears to Descartes as an indifferent energy, innocent in itself yet not in its uses, since its misuse can push the mind beyond the limits of its understanding. Herein lies the possibility of error and deception (and only secondarily, of evil). In the Cartesian preoccupation with the correct usage of the will, a certain "megalomania" 11 of the latter advances to the fore in modern philosophy, in the form of an epochal decision to which all other strategies must respond, whether they be to extend, contain, or else dismantle it.¹²

'The will set loose'

The preceding three historical contexts paved the way for the critical or transcendental strategy. This strategy encompasses two fundamental turning points: a "subjectification" of the will, followed by a movement that displaces it beyond the narrow purview of the

⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Schürmann's use of the term 'strategy' does not point to a subjective project or agenda, but to those modifications of thinking and acting brought about by mutations in the 'modalities' of presencing. Indissociable from an "interpretation," strategies belong neither on the side of heteronomy nor on that of autonomy, but play out at the intersection between thought and practice, cutting across and reconfiguring their configuration. Thinkers are less the agents than the 'site' in which strategies are epochally inscribed, invested and invited. On this point, see *HBA*, 299, and *Tomorrow the Manifold*, 78–80.

subject into the ground of the divine, or of being as such. Whereas the problem of the rational or irrational character of the will for Kant is still framed in terms of the relation between reason and its opposite, with Schelling and Nietzsche the 'critical' turn leaps over itself into a cosmological vision of unbridled illimitation.

While Schürmann tackles Kant's practical philosophy in greater depth elsewhere, the scope of his engagement in the present lecture course is somewhat more restricted, focusing on those works in which Kant deals directly with the relation between the will, reason, and desire. 13 Taking his cue from Ferdinand Alquié's *Leçons sur* Kant, 14 Schürmann observes that, already in the pre-Critical works, the will appears as an operator of harmony or unification between rational acts and irrational feelings, partaking in both. However, the ground of this harmony still remains subjectively bounded: so long as the will's 'intermediary' role depends upon an inner sense of peace in the subject, its 'unifying' agency can never be universalized. For instance, in *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, the harmony afforded by "moral sense" is far more radical than that found among feelings, being rooted in our recognition of a rational community that demands the subordination of our individual will to its universal will. With each new phase in Kant's work, its unifying function will be expanded, as its rationality comes to be increasingly defined in terms of universal formal obligations, rather than material desire. In the final account, moral perfection will no longer be a public fact visible to others in the city, be it happiness or "objective excellence," but a purely formal disposition or intention—"purity of heart," as Rousseau put it. Kant thereby prepares what Schürmann calls the "subjectivation" of the will.

¹³ The most sustained treatment is found in *BH*, vol. II, Part I, B. "The Regime of Spontaneous Consciousness: 'I, the Possessor of the World,'" 445–510. Schürmann also taught a course entitled *Kant's Political Philosophy*, in which the "systematic unity of Kant's critical thinking" is analyzed following the guiding thread of 'autonomy' in its theoretical, moral, and political notions. See *Kant's Political Philosophy*, Reiner Schürmann papers, NA.0006.01, box 5, folder 1–22 (New York: The New School Archives and Special Collections), 4f.

¹⁴ Alquié's lectures at the Sorbonne on Kant's moral philosophy have been collected as Ferdinand Alquié, *Leçons sur Kant: La morale de Kant*, cited in this volume, 127.

By rejecting happiness as the *end* of the will (Aristotle) and science as its guide (Leibniz), Kant casts aside both the eudaimonism of classical antiquity and the utilitarian premises of his contemporaries. At the same time, if Rousseau was right to insist that "we can be humans without being scholars," then moral or practical reason must be separable from theoretical reason and, at the same time, irreducible to empirical knowledge. In other words, if practical reason is to overcome the traps laid for it by rationalism and empiricism, moral evidence must be distinguished from cognitive evidence. For all these reasons, a *pure* moral philosophy demands a new specification of the will and its relation to reason and sensibility.

The transcendental framework that responds to these imperatives will be consolidated in the *Groundwork*. As Schürmann observes, if the "critical point of view" can no longer be rooted in the empirical phenomenon of moral decision-making (the purview of psychology), it must seek instead to establish the "conditions of morality *within* ourselves." In order for practical philosophy to liberate itself from its servility to science and desire, reason and sensibility, the will must operate independently. If the will is to be good, it must be so through its own willing (*Wollen*) alone. Its "autonomy," its capacity to become a "law to itself," offers the sole source of its moral goodness. As Kant famously argues, such goodness depends upon the universalization of individual maxims, or those rules that I give myself in acting, in accordance with a "categorical imperative."

By stripping moral quality of any reference to empirical goal-directed activities rooted in "inclination" or the "desire always to desire *something*," Kant strove to release practical philosophy from the "teleocratic" rule of ends. And yet, as Schürmann observes, the linkage between will and reason is never truly severed. Quite the contrary: although the goodness of the will is rendered independent from its capacity to achieve its ends, a different mode of subjection to archic command is reintroduced through Kant's insistence on

¹⁵ Rousseau, "La Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard," cited in this volume, 28.

¹⁶ In this volume, 32, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Kant, GMM, 108, cited in this volume, 114.

¹⁸ In this volume, 39, emphasis added.

"respect," that feeling of reverence for "reason as the principle of action and not for any content nor goal." Naturally, such respect is something by which only a reasonable being can be affected: a being that is not only capable of representing the law to itself, but which stands prepared to render it present (to *re-present* it) at all times, so as to maintain it constantly before its eyes. What had initially appeared as an emancipated will, an autonomous, unifying and unified agency unwilling to subject itself to any law of which it cannot "regard itself as the author," now finds itself grounded instead on a respectful self-subjection. "Good will" is ultimately nothing but the will "subjected to reason alone."

This representational character is key to understanding the triumph of the will in modern philosophy according to Schürmann. When Kant presents duty as "the necessitation of our subjective, individual will by reason" solely out of respect for the rationality of the law, he does not merely reinscribe the subjection of will to the dictates of reason. By transposing it to the realm of the transcendental, he grounds 'representation' as the condition of the subject's mastery over itself and the world. This fundamental ambivalence, whereby the will is at once *subjected* and *subject*, attests to what Schürmann will refer to as the 'double bind of legislation-transgression.' ²³

This 'double bind' is a central feature of Schürmann's reading of the Western tradition, and of transcendental philosophy in particular. It is referenced in the title of Part III of *Modern Philosophies of the Will*, "Legislation and Transgression,"²⁴ of which only a few

¹⁹ Ibid., 41, emphasis added.

²⁰ See Kant, GMM, 99; also, in this volume, 114.

²¹ In this volume, 38.

²² Ibid., 39.

²³ Schürmann addresses the legislative-transgressive double bind in several writings: see "Legislation-Transgression: Strategies and Counter-Strategies in the Transcendental Justification of Norms," in *Tomorrow the Manifold*, 77–120; "Ultimate Double Binds," in ibid., 121–149; "On Judging and its Issue," in *The Public Realm: Essays on Discursive Types in Political Philosophy*, ed. R. Schürmann (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 1–21; *BH*, vol. II, Part II, Ch. 7, "The Singularity to Come," 700–712 and passim.

²⁴ At some point during the decade leading to the completion of *Broken Hegemonies*, Schürmann had considered "Legislation-Transgression" as a title for different parts of his magnum opus. He had also considered titling the latter *Le tragique légiférant* [*The*

dense pages on Kant have been preserved. In brief, what is at issue in the double bind is the tragic revelation, through suffering, that there is "no legislation without transgression immanent within it." ²⁵ If the act of legislating is "identically, formally, an act of transgressing the law that is so declared,"26 then beneath all archic acts of the will there is an an-archic undertow always already working to fatally "draw them toward their ruin."27 It is this insight, above all else, that serves as the conducting thread between Schürmann's early major works and his posthumously published magnum opus, Broken Hegemonies. In the latter, the broken edifices of Western metaphysics are revealed to have been erected out of an attempt to legitimate human practice through simple nomothetic acts. To retrace the topology of their phantasmatic hegemonies is to grasp the work these edifices accomplished, namely, to blind us to the "fracture" on which they each rested.28 Whereas Broken Hegemonies tracks these sites of (self)-blinding across the entire span of the West, highlighting those singular moments or cracks in which a blinded history came to see itself as such, it is in Modern Philosophies of the Will that the essentially principial role played by the will in this topological retrieval was first delineated.

Urgrund sive Ungrund

Kant transformed the will into a metaphysical operator: through its own self-imposition, a unified, nomothetic subject emerges as the site of any possible proper decision. However, as we saw above, Kant's effort to manage the legislative-transgressive double bind generates a fundamental ambivalence: the will is at once *subjected* and *subject*. The "ontologization" of the will by Schelling, as well

Lawmaking Tragic]. We would like to thank Ian Alexander Moore for this last piece of information.

²⁵ BH, 134.

²⁶ In this volume, 109.

²⁷ BH, 3.

²⁸ Ibid., 36.

as its historicization via the "ontology of the will to power"²⁹ by Nietzsche—both of which effectively dismantle it as a discreet faculty—will each be carried out as *reactions* to this subjection of will to representational reason. In this way, in spite of his efforts to enclose the will within the limits of reason and law, Kant inadvertently prepares the road to its triumphant expansion beyond both altogether.

While F.W.J. Schelling plays only a marginal role in Schürmann's published works, the "ontological turn" he introduces into the philosophy of the will stands at a decisive turning point in the present lecture course. In his dissatisfaction with the Kantian transcendental method, whose stark opposition between subject and object condemns us to a sterile and mechanistic view of nature, servile to the laws imposed upon it by the subject, Schelling will gradually extend the will all the way to the register of the absolute. In order for nature to recover its autonomous, organic form and spiritual life, spirit or reason must be understood as nothing other than nature "return[ing] completely upon itself,"30 and vice-versa. What, then, is the common ground subtending and unifying the two realms? The ground of the identity between subject and object, spirit and nature, is precisely will. With this, Schelling not only ontologizes the will, he also provincializes reason. As the ground of the relation between freedom and necessity, mind and nature, the absolutized will is independent of the rational structures of subjectivity. Reason is merely one of its dimensions, but can no longer exhaust it.

However, Schelling's concern is not simply to unify the Kantian fracture between nature and spirit, but also to offer a positive account of the possibility of evil, an arduous task that will demand rescuing the individual or the singular as the "ultimate obstacle to reason."³¹ Canonical theories of evil tend to return us to a basic aporia: either evil is located solely in the finite particularity of the senses (as opposed to infinity and reason), and is therefore not a consequence of our freedom; or else, if it finds its possibility in the

²⁹ In this volume, 75.

³⁰ Schelling, SW, I, 3, 341, trans. by R.S., cited in this volume, 44.

³¹ In this volume, 46. Schelling boasted he had announced the "the divinity of the singular" [die Göttlichkeit des Einzelnen]. Cf. Schelling, SW, I, 7, 143 (19).

latter, then we are obliged to trace it back to the ground of nature, that is to say, to God, whose goodness is thereby abolished. Evil is reduced either to a state of privation or to ignorance—negativity or unfreedom. In his effort to leap over these alternatives, Schelling commits a mad wager, introducing an element of irrationality into the divine, not in its being, but in its very *ground*. Evil, he boldly asserts, is something *positive*: it is the irrational freedom that forms the independent ground of nature, and which therefore must be traced all the way back to the will of the absolute.

With the will promoted to the rank of ultimate ground in which rationality and irrationality collide, the question still arises as to how to grasp the locus of this strife. As Schürmann is quick to highlight, Schelling's solution owes an important, albeit tacit, debt to Meister Eckhart.³² Just as Eckhart distinguishes between Godhead and God, or God's (ineffable) nature and his (knowable) being, Schelling parses God's existence from his ground, or "the longing which the Eternal One feels to give birth to itself,"33 aligning this distinction with his own unique association between freedom and evil. In this way, Schelling arrives at a framework for understanding both nature and history. God and his ground are now opposed in the absolute as one will to another: what appears outwardly as order, form, and organic rule henceforth can no longer be understood as primary, but as *orderings* of a "dark," unruly non-ground— "Urgrund, primordial ground, but also Ungrund, abyss."34 Lawful nature, subjective reason are merely the dark will in the absolute that has been "brought to order."35

Schelling extends the illimitation of will to the absolute. In so doing, he radicalizes the transcendental legislative impulse, without ever escaping it. By projecting the Kantian tension between rational, universal will (*Wille*) and irrational, individual will (*Willkür*) beyond man into the Divine itself, Schelling displaces the human

³² Schürmann reminds his students of Schelling's Neoplatonic ascendency, via Plotinus, Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, Jakob Böhme, Spinoza, and "many intermediary figures"; in this volume, 43, and passim.

³³ Schelling, HF, 28, cited in this volume, 49.

³⁴ In this volume, 50.

³⁵ Schelling, HF, 28, cited in this volume, 50.

subject in the process: from now on, all efforts of rational universality to *appear* will be forever haunted by the disorderly and chaotic irrational abyss of its own freedom, which knows only singularity and individuality. Whence Schelling's 'Eckhartian' imperative, with which Schürmann closes his discussion: "Man must die to everything proper to him." ³⁶

It is only with Nietzsche's historicization of the will that the shattering of the 'facultative' analysis of the subject initiated by Schelling finally comes into its own. However, in order to bring into view the full stakes of Schürmann's excavation of this plurification of the *site* of the subject, and the epochal turn that announces itself through it, a bit of context may prove useful.

Mental, ecstatic, and epochal time

Schürmann taught Modern Philosophies of the Will three times: first in the fall of 1980, then again in the spring of 1987 and the spring of 1992. That the substance of his argument never substantially changed means that its referential bearings are rooted in the context of its initial composition, which was flanked by two major works: first, the posthumous appearance in 1977–1978 of Hannah Arendt's two-volume Life of the Mind; second, Schürmann's own Le principe d'anarchie: Heidegger et la question de l'agir, which would appear in French two years after Modern Philosophies of the Will (1982), and from which the current course incorporates several lengthy excerpts. Sandwiched between these two works, Modern Philosophies of the Will can be fruitfully read as Schürmann's attempt to trace an alternative philosophical archaeology of the will to that of Arendt, in the mode of an an-archaeology of the voluntarist subject understood as an epochal dispensation. This same methodology will then serve as the basis for his 'backward' interpretation of Heidegger's deconstruction of the West in Le principe d'anarchie, the English edition of which is significantly dedicated to Arendt's memory. If this is correct, then Schürmann's response to Arendt's

³⁶ Ibid., 50, cited in this volume, 50.

thought supplies us with essential clues as to the critical requirements he applied to his own project in these lectures. For this reason, we deemed it important to include it in this volume.

In the spring of 1980, Schürmann founded a series of symposia at the New School for Social Research to commemorate the work of his late colleague, who had been a member of its philosophy faculty from 1967 until her death in 1975.37 That summer, he published a strident review of The Life of the Mind, entitled "The Time of the Mind and the History of Freedom."38 In it, he criticized Arendt for taking over the anti-hermeneutical and a-historical approach of her mentor Karl Jaspers, which relates to the tradition as if it were an open book accessible to unbiased scrutiny. Once the sediment of history offers no resistance or opacity, the compass for the thinker's exchange with the past naturally shifts inward, to be moved instead by the agreement or disagreement between the source material and "one's own experience of inner dialogue." Philosophy thus appears less as a thoroughly historical phenomenon than as the exercise of mental faculties (thinking, willing, judging) whose relation to history is at best ambiguous.

At the same time, of course, Arendt was by no means content to remain in the sphere of subjective inwardness, and sought to draw broad conclusions about the source of the evil displayed by historical figures such as Adolf Eichmann, which she attributes not to ignorance or malice but to "thoughtlessness," the "negation of meaning."

Herein lies the rub. According to Schürmann, not only do the two sides of Arendt's account of the will—mental and historical, *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*—never quite come together, they even "flatly contradict one another." Inner life as she por-

³⁷ A selection of talks from the Hannah Arendt Memorial Symposia was edited by Reiner Schürmann and published as *The Public Realm: Essays On Discursive Types in Political Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989).

³⁸ See the Appendix to this volume, "*The Time of the Mind and the History of Freedom*," 117–125. Schürmann's review was first published in *Human Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1980, 302–308.

³⁹ Schürmann, "The Time of the Mind," in this volume, 119.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

trays it is riven between an apodictic account of the 'faculties' of mind and a political account of evil and freedom, and although the latter should have contextualized the mind's permutations from a historical-developmental perspective, the cleft between the two regimes of time is never ultimately bridged. It is never clear why Arendt believes she can explain an epochal mutation such as the ascendency in philosophy of the will in modernity by indexing it to the sudden "mental preeminence" of this or that mental faculty, e.g. the mind's "pro-jection" of the future, the essential nature of which remains unchanging. According to Schürmann, such a formalistic or "axial" approach to historical shifts, which implicitly relies on a fixed transcendental account of the faculties, ultimately falls short of explaining epochal change. 42 Although Arendt asks the right question—namely, how it is that the will comes "to be the particular stamp of one age, technology?"43—her methodology prevents her from offering a satisfactory answer, as it rests upon, and thus fails to deconstruct, the metaphysical distinction between vita contemplativa and vita activa.44 In the final account, Arendt abides firmly within the Augustinian and Kantian legacy, operating with the "presupposition of a mind whose structure remains unaffected by history"; she is, in other words, "a 'metaphysical' thinker." 45

The result is a methodological differend. The need for an alternative an-archaeology of the sort found in *Modern Philosophies of the Will* issues from the necessity of arriving at an "understanding of history as *constitutive* of man's existence."⁴⁶ It is a central tenet of Schürmann's reading that only a threefold temporality linking the *ecstatic* to the *epochal*, and the latter to the *evental*, can eventually yield such a "historical understanding." In his view, epochal mutations cannot be explained by referring them back either to a fixed transcendental account of mental operations, *or* to Dasein's ecstatic

⁴² As Schürmann asks, "if the mind comes to life because of its directedness toward the future, toward death, how can this *essentially* anticipatory constitution of the mind be held to account for the particular features of one *epoch*, modernity?" Schürmann, "The Time of the Mind," in this volume, 121.

⁴³ Schürmann, "The Time of the Mind," in this volume, 121.

⁴⁴ Ibid., in this volume, 124.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 308, in this volume, 124, emphasis added.

temporality.⁴⁷ Such accounts must still answer a further question: "to what prior understanding of time and history can technology appear as the age of the will?"⁴⁸ For Schürmann, the installation of this "prior understanding" of time and history must be grasped not as rooted in pre-existing structures of subjectivity, but in "constitutive acts of existence."⁴⁹ Instead of taking a transcendental account of the subject as the point of departure, and only *later* historicizing its instantiations or configurations, Schürmann insists on the historicization of the subject's faculties themselves: the epochal, as the situating of the evental temporalization, must be the starting point to which ecstatic or transcendental strategies constitute a response. What, then, is the *site* of these acts of existence, if the latter cannot be positioned within transcendental subjectivity? And what happens to this site with Nietzsche and Heidegger, such that "the long hidden crack bursts open"?

A destiny of decline

A fundamental ambivalence surrounds the Nietzschean philosophy of the will. On the one hand, in its humanistic metaphysics of the artist, Nietzsche's thought represents a continuation and extension of the triumph of the transcendental legislative subject. On the other hand, in his conception of an a-telic, and a-subjectivistic will—the "will to power"—Nietzsche initiates the dismantling of this very same subject. In this, Nietzsche's site mirrors our own, he being both "still very much a metaphysician" and yet already "catapulted out of metaphysics." ⁵⁰

In what sense does Nietzsche's theory of the will to power as the "preservation and enhancement of complex forms of relative life-

⁴⁷ "The 'ecstatic' opening cannot disown its antecedent, transcendental subjectivity." HBA, 126.

⁴⁸ Schürmann, "The Time of the Mind," 306, in this volume, 122.

⁴⁹ Ibid., in this volume, 123.

⁵⁰ In this volume, 89.

duration within the flux of becoming"⁵¹ allow us to glimpse the destitution of the voluntarist subject that readies itself within us today?

As we saw above, for Augustine as for Kant, "the will is the agent that unifies man." ⁵² Upon its joining activity depends the possibility not only of a harmony between inner and outer life—the possibility, that is, of a "spiritualized way of life"—but the very unity of the mind itself, as a ternary structure bound together by legislative determinations. ⁵³ What came into view through the Nietzschean strategy was not solely the dependency of supposedly fixed transcendental forms upon formative acts of domination or primordial legislation, thereby demoting the lawgiving subject to merely "one among an infinite number of possible I-saying forces." ⁵⁴ Of even greater importance was the disclosure of the epochal site of the subject as both the source *and* the result of these forces. This disclosure was itself only possible now that this site had itself become incapable of sustaining the illusion of full self-presence that had ensured the normative continuity between inner and outer life.

"All philosophers have seen a multiplicity in the human subject—multiplicity of 'parts' of the soul, or of 'soul and body,' or faculties of the mind." The novelty of our time, Schürmann seems to say, lies not in the proliferation of difference, multiplicity, or fragmentation, whether inside or outside of the subject. What marks our site as an-archic is *the impossibility of producing any substantive unity through it.* This impossibility has at least two decisive aspects. It refers, first, to the impossibility of a system of enduring transcendental forms, all of which appear (after Nietzsche and Heidegger) as irreducibly *artificial*; secondly, to the recognition that this artificiality of principles has its origin within the subject itself. Once it no longer denotes "any subject as numerically one, the I ceases to be capable of instructing us about the legitimacy or illegitimacy

⁵¹ Nietzsche, WP, 380, cited in this volume, 56.

⁵² In this volume, 23.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Schürmann, "Legislation-Transgression: Strategies and Counter-Strategies in the Transcendental Justification of Norms," in *Tomorrow the Manifold*, 97.

⁵⁵ In this volume, 56.

of norms."⁵⁶ If the subject is inherently multiple, if the systematic order of experience is not universal and necessary but a contingent achievement capable of greater or lesser coherence, then the normative referents that found their basis in the subject prove to be groundless.⁵⁷ In short, it is with Nietzsche that "'reason' as a faculty disintegrates together with the will," which sinks into the subject as into a fractured and dysfunctional ground.⁵⁸ It is this revelation that Schürmann has in mind when he asserts that the Nietzschean site reveals the *fundamentum concussum*: the moment where "the long hidden crack bursts open." If we must conclude, with Nietzsche, that "there is no such thing as the will," how was it that, at the same time, our site came to witness its supreme "triumph"?⁵⁹

Following Heidegger, Schürmann identifies in our age a shattering of the archai, i.e., those binding representations or metaphysical Firsts that previously gathered words, actions, and things into a coherent historical regime of presence. This *kenōsis*, this emptying out of foundational referents, is at once historical and systematic in nature. As Nietzsche and Wittgenstein attest, our contemporary site is marked by a "dispersal" of those unique foci or ultimate grounds that once allowed us to peacefully live, construct, and govern ourselves (divine authority, reason, historical progress, etc.). Today the dispensation of presence is not referred back to a simple principle (as per the 'pros hen' referentiality) but refracted through a multiplicity of Herrschaftsgebilde (formations of domination), "constellations of will to power" or "language games and their grammars."60 This systematic fragmentation brings to a close a certain historical cycle that begins with the Greeks, and whose defining feature lay in the vocation it assigns not only to the philosopher ("functionary"

⁵⁶ Schürmann, "Legislation-Transgression: Strategies and Counter-strategies in the Transcendental Justification of Norms," in *Tomorrow the Manifold*, 96.

⁵⁷ In this volume, 56: "What is new is that in Nietzsche, the concept of a multiple subject makes it *impossible to retain the idea of a substantive subject* as for the metaphysicians."

⁵⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, eKGWB/NF-1887,9[98], cited in this volume, 55; Schürmann, "Legislation-Transgression," 96.

⁶⁰ Schürmann, "On the Philosophers' Release From Civil Service," *Kairos* 2 (1988), 136.

of humanity, as Schürmann observes)⁶¹ but also, we might add, to the political militant operating in his or her shadow. Whether in thought or in politics, the founding public service consisted in securing an ultimate ground for civilization, a "mooring" for all that is.⁶² Yet where life appears as "without a goal, without *telos*," we perceive "the impossibility of rendering that foundational service to our civilization" today.⁶³

At the same time, Schürmann glimpses in this systematic and historical *closure* something distinct from the destitution of this or that metaphysical First: a *dessaisie* or "peremption"⁶⁴ of the *archē*, a "relinquishment of any representation functioning as plainly and simply normative."⁶⁵ Whereas Schürmann uses the term 'destitution' to refer to the collapse of legislative referents, he reserves the term *dessaisie* to describe the quashing or annulment of hegemonic, nomothetic validity as such: a time in which the entire cycle of institution/destitution finds itself concluded, having lost its condition of possibility. In so doing, he names our site as that out of which a *divestment* from hegemonic order, and a *recovery* from the tragic denial of its double binds, first becomes possible.⁶⁶

The obscenity of our current political order must be placed against the backdrop of this closure and dispersion of the *archē*. The meanness and cruelty of our anomic order represents a hollow effort to "reinstitute figures of some authoritative First that in fact have been lost for good." The various resurgent fundamentalisms of our time—from religious zealotry to right wing Constitutional-

⁶¹ BH, 601.

⁶² Schürmann, "On the Philosophers' Release From Civil Service," 135.

⁶³ HBA, 10; Schürmann, "On the Philosophers' Release From Civil Service," 135.

⁶⁴ For a detailed account of Schürmann's "hypothesis of closure" and the key notion of *dessaisie* or "peremption," see Malte Fabian Raunch and Nicolas Schneider, "Of Peremption and Insurrection: Reiner Schürmann's Encounter with Michel Foucault," in Schürmann, *Tomorrow the Manifold*, 151–181.

⁶⁵ Schürmann, "'Only Proteus Can Save Us Now': On Anarchy and Broken Hegemonies," eds. Francesco Guercio and Ian Alexander Moore, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 41*, no. 2 (forthcoming).

⁶⁶ BH, 546: "Dessaissie signifies the loss of every hegemony." On this point, see Schürmann, "'Only Proteus Can Save Us Now.'"

⁶⁷ Schürmann, "On the Philosophers' Release From Civil Service," 137.

ism—comprise a vast work of *archē*-mourning, so many efforts to conjure up a principle capable of shoring up the authority of commandments.

Archē-mourning of this sort affects not only ruling elites, but all those activisms that are content to oppose to power merely another title of legitimacy. Just as the vocation of the philosopher in the West was to place his time under the authority of a normative standard affording "private consolation" and "public consolidation," too many political militants today still understand their vocation as that of repairing the "attributive-participative schemas" of reigning institutions, by restoring to them the legitimacy ('consensus') that they allowed to wither and decay.⁶⁸ A desperate yet farcical effort to resuscitate withering institutions by subordinating them to a will above and beyond them permeates radical political thought of all stripes.⁶⁹ Whereas the right looks beyond the laws of the Rechtsstaat toward the sovereign decision that rejuvenates it, the left scours uprisings for "the smallest grain of constituent power." 70 The will has become the principle sustaining every "enterprise of legitimation," restoration and rebellion alike. 71 So long as all political opposition can be translated into competing claims to a single symbolic center, the system can perpetuate itself through its own opposition. The voluntarist political project of modernity guides our response even to its own decline. Schürmann here invokes a striking formulation of Arendt: "the will acts like 'a kind of coup d'état."72 As he explains,

When, in the closing age of philosophy, the human will becomes absolute, willing nothing but itself, it shows forth its insurrectional nature. It is that force which seeks to establish the self as permanent and time as lasting. If

⁶⁸ Ibid., 134; HBA, 5.

⁶⁹ *BH*, "there is something comical about those beautiful urges to force a solution wherein one resorts to an ultimate authority so as to escape from the double bind."

⁷⁰ Marcello Tarì, *There is no Unhappy Revolution*, Trans. Richard Braude (New York: Common Notions, 2021), 19.

⁷¹ HBA, 288.

⁷² Arendt, Life of the Mind, Vol. I, 213, cited in this volume, 71.

'justice' means for each thing to arrive and depart in accordance with the economies, 'will' is the name for rebellion against that justice.⁷³

This link between the establishment of the 'self as permanent' and the so-called 'injustice' toward presencing deserves to be emphasized. Injustice disjoins us from the ontic flow of absencing-presencing-absencing, while denying the ontological "structure of hiding-showing." Faced by a withering capacity to unify itself, threatened by the hollowing out of its unifying referents, voluntarism reacts by feverish action. In this way, the endless agenda of crisis management today, combined with our perpetual "busy-ness," ensures that the insistence on presence becomes a veritable *injunction to absence*. In our frenetic attempts to 'mechanize' our contact with the world, we 'harden' ourselves against "the epoch-making disjunctive decisions," refusing to face the truth of our transitional situation. It is in this hardening, Schürmann suggests, that we find the "source of all thoughtlessness."

An-archic ethics

Nothing is to be repaired or done over. Just let be. Not abandon. Let be so that everything may be. Lay hands neither to the past nor to the images. The origin bides its time. At least unlearning possession. Letting go all holds.⁷⁶

If a space of ethical decision is left, it cannot assume the thetic form of a postulate or maxim set *against* the given. Yet what does it mean for practical philosophy to quit the "enterprise of legitimation" as such? What does it mean to subvert the principial relationship between being and acting, to cease imposing on inner and outer phenomena the stamp of normative Firsts and instead to *release* ourselves into our an-archic epoch?

⁷³ In this volume, 71.

⁷⁴ HBA, 142.

⁷⁵ In this volume, 71.

⁷⁶ Schürmann, Origins, trans. Elizabeth Preston (Zurich: diaphanes, 2016), 104.

Schürmann cautions us against any simplistic temptation to supplant the fractured subject with a positive or pragmatic concept of activity. To do so would only reinstate its operating principle under a different guise, substituting one form of depth outside of consciousness for another. While such a substitution might succeed in relegating 'being' to a derivative concept, this alone is not enough to exit the terrain of metaphysics more generally.

If it is true that each age confers a distinctive responsibility on its thinkers, today this task can be stated simply: to drive whatever is left of the West's idols "into their tomb." This means helping people to "unlearn the normative phantasms that are alien to every-dayness," and in this way, to "release life, both public and private," from the "standards whose grip becomes all the more brutal and irrational *as they fade.*"

The emptying out of founding principles opens onto a space of ethical decision that is genuinely epochal. The great advantage of transitional ages such as ours lies in the practical *a priori* of releasement that their implosion facilitates. Once the "hubris of principles has lost its credibility for an entire civilization," it is finally possible "to will non-willing." For Schürmann, action can take as its sole measure or verticality its *situation* or site, the varying alethic constellations. If there is a legacy of Heidegger's thought that belongs within a destituent lineage, it resides in his call to remain faithful to phenomena:

Heidegger understands $dik\bar{e}$, justice, as a harmony in presencing, as the jointure (Fuge) between arrival and withdrawal. Adikia, then, is disjointure. [...] Both Hölderlin and Nietzsche dared to 'let'—to abandon—themselves to the movement of transition in which the modern age, and perhaps the metaphysical age, comes to an end. ⁸⁰

The immediate effect of unlearning metaphysical postulates is not amnesia or ignorance of what the tradition offered; rather, "hege-

⁷⁷ Schürmann, "On the Philosophers' Release From Civil Service," 141

⁷⁸ Ibid., 144, 138, our emphasis.

⁷⁹ In this volume, 72, our emphasis.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 71.

monic posits would show themselves to be broken from within."81 The principle of anarchy—if such a strained formulation can be sustained—directs us to dwell within, and thus fulfill, the closure of epochal history by exhibiting the "destitution of man, the legislator of presence" through a fidelity to our singular situation. 82 These two features of the principle are indissociable: it is precisely through our fidelity to our situatedness that we best exhibit the brokenness of "standards turned hollow and brutal."83 In question is not a new "decisive" act of the will that would command us to "settle happily in a place deprived of principles,"84 but a practice of refusing to unstick ourselves from the unruly coming-into-form of the sensible. Only in this way do we avoid betraying phenomena "in their place of manifestation."85 If we can still speak here of a principle, this is because there is "only one rule": to "heed the modality in which phenomena come about in any given economy," and to act so as to release ourselves into an an-archic economy "freed from ordering principles."86 Fidelity to the anarchy of our time renders any effort to metaphysically derive acting from being "non-operational."87 The impulse to legitimate this or that practice by referring back to a stable subject beneath them must be systematically unlearned: let "normative consciousness collapse."88

That ours is an "age without a beyond" certainly means that "we lack all models." And yet, as Schürmann reminds his hasty critics, the fact that "our heritage is preceded by no testament" is not a formula for nihilism or relativism. That the situation offers the only verticality does not mean there *is none*. On the one hand, ethical *compliance* with epochal decisions as expressed in the unstable presencing of our situation must first pass through a moment of

⁸¹ Schürmann, "'Only Proteus Can Save Us Now'."

⁸² HBA, 302-303.

⁸³ Schürmann, "On the Philosophers' Release From Civil Service," 141.

⁸⁴ BH, 630.

⁸⁵ Schürmann, "'Only Proteus Can Save Us Now'."

⁸⁶ HBA, 286, 289.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 296.

⁸⁸ BH, 514.

⁸⁹ HBA, 292; in this volume, 100.

⁹⁰ Char, Fureur et mystère, 106, cited in this volume, 105.

"non-attachment" [Abgeschiedenheit] to schemas of foundation. A Schürmannian ethics would take shape through the revocation of any claim on the part of actors to be rooted in firm foundations, origins, or teleocratic principles. In this way, it seeks to turn "our estrangement from experience into a detachment from the self that guards and objectifies it"; or, in other words, "to abandon oneself and let the world be."91 Such an ethics is, from a first vantage point, an "apprenticeship to undoing, to nothingness—the only asceticism still available."92 On the other hand, if there is a 'law' to anarchic economies, it originates not in the legislative subject, but in the sensible becoming of nature, in the fissured pull of situated existence. As Schürmann writes, "what makes the law is phuein, unstable presencing."93 Ethics consists in a paradoxically simultaneous movement of *departing* from grounds in order to *stay* with the given, deposing our predicates in order to be as the situation calls us to be: "[to take leave,] Abschied nehmen, is what those detached always do."94

In conclusion, *Modern Philosophies of the Will* provides us with a conceptual toolbox to question, and even to undo the imperative that 'we' constitute ourselves as a *willing subject*, whether personal or popular. By inviting us to unlearn the desire to legislate "in regard to our existence," Schürmann's an-archic ethics announces not a new and brighter epoch to come, but another way of inhabiting our own:

I am not asking for the start of a new age. I know very well that it would stink. No tomorrows, but a today effervescent with levity. So that I can look this arbitrary past in the eye, without floundering.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Michele Garau, "Senza perché: l'apriori esistenziale dell'agire destituente," *Qui e Ora* (online), June 2021. Our translation.

⁹² Schürmann, Origins, 147.

⁹³ HBA, 290.

⁹⁴ In this volume, 99.

⁹⁵ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 430, cited in BH, 501.

⁹⁶ Schürmann, Origins, 238.

Remarks on this edition

This volume is based on a 106-page numbered typescript by Reiner Schürmann containing his incomplete lecture notes for a semesterlong course titled *Modern Philosophies of the Will.*⁹⁷ The typescript is conserved in the Reiner Schürmann papers, NA.0006.01, box 5, folder 1–22 (New York: The New School Archives and Special Collections).⁹⁸ Although mostly written and annotated in English, the typescript contains a considerable number of pages in French.⁹⁹ The latter were sourced from Part V, "Agir et Anarchie," of *Le principe d'anarchie: Heidegger et la question de l'agir*, and used as lecture notes for sections of the course on Heidegger. Since Christine-Marie Gros' English translation of *Heidegger: On Being and Acting*

⁹⁷ *Modern Philosophies of the Will* was conceived and taught as a 'seminar' (coded GH 384). In the 1986–1987 bulletin, the following description of the seminar is provided: A study of key texts tracing the rationality and irrationality of the will, its ontological scope, and its functions in theories of legitimation: I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*; F.W. J. Schelling, *Of Human Freedom*; A. Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*; F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*; M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" and *The Question Concerning Technology*.

Interestingly, Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*—indicated as "optional reading" in the 1992 course description—is mentioned here as a core text to be analyzed. In the 1991–1992 bulletin, a broader description of the seminar is instead given:

The relation between the will and the law will be traced through Kant, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Issues include: the will as principle of morality, of lifeforms, and of technicity; the will's rationality and irrationality; the ontological turn in the conception of will; the will's megalomania and teleology; from obligation to self-overcoming, to 'decision'; a formal identity of legislation and transgression.

⁹⁸ The original typescript of *Modern Philosophies of the Will* was preserved by Pierre Adler, who—after Schürmann's premature death in 1993—assembled the latter's *Nachlass* and helped render it available for research at the NSSR archive. The rigor and dedication Adler has shown in preserving and indexing Schürmann's notes, thus laying the material conditions for our editorial work, have been inspirational to us.

⁹⁹ This plurilingualism is continuously found all throughout Schürmann's lecture notes (sometimes even in the same sentence). Perhaps jarring for readers unfamiliar with the author, it would appear less surprising, should one consider Schürmann's poliedric intellectual biography. Being perfectly fluent in German, English, and French, (as well as mastering ancient Greek and Latin) Schürmann—instead of preparing written translations of his non-English writings and lecture notes—often translated them orally into English as he was lecturing to his students.

was prepared in close collaboration with Schürmann himself, we included the relevant passages here rather than retranslating them anew. However, the French typescript not only differed slightly from both the French and English print versions, but also included a considerable number of hand- and type-written marginal notes by Schürmann. The current edition integrates all three versions, while remaining as close as possible to a translation Schürmann himself approved. Divergences and marginalia are noted in curly brackets in the endnotes.¹⁰⁰

By contrast, the English pages in the typescript were prepared by Schürmann specifically to serve as lecture notes. Thirteen of the sixteen pages constituting Part II, sect. 2, "Nietzsche: being as 'imposed' by the will" were typed in a different font than the rest and clearly show an alternative—yet successively crossed-out and formatted—pagination. It is reasonable to assume that those thirteen pages pertained to another set of lecture notes and had been redacted either for a now-lost version of *Modern Philosophies of the Will* or, perhaps, for an unretrieved course partially or wholly dedicated to Nietzsche.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed explanation of all editorial marks please refer to the Editorial guidelines in this volume, 15.

¹⁰¹ Schürmann's engagement with Nietzsche begins at least as early as his time at the French Dominican school of Le Saulchoir, during which he participated in "L'interprétation par Martin Heidegger du mot de Nietzsche 'Dieu est mort'," a meeting held at La Chaux castle in September, 1967, as indicated by the event proceedings conserved at Le Saulchoir library. In the Spring of 1975, during his professorship at Duquesne University (1973-75) Schürmann taught a course entitled Nietzsche and the Problem of Time. In the same period, and at the same institution, he also addressed Nietzsche-alongside several others-in a course titled Philosophy and Literature; see "Duquesne University—Undergraduate Catalogs 1972-1975" (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University, 1972-1975). Schürmann's first course at the NSSR in the Summer of 1975, was initially entitled Nietzsche and the Problem of Truth, and later retitled The Philosophy of Nietzsche. In a NSSR course bearing the title Philosophical Anthropology II: Its Contemporary Crisis, Schürmann devotes two lectures to Nietzsche. Here Schürmann also makes explicit reference to his "Duquesne lectures" on Nietzsche; see Reiner Schürmann papers, NA.0006.01, box 4, folder 1-7 (New York: The New School Archives and Special Collections), original typescript, 26. The reader is also referred to the recently published lecture course, The Philosophy of Nietzsche, ed. F. Guercio (Zurich: diaphanes, 2020), as well as the invaluable reconstruction by Michel Haar, "The Place of Nietzsche in Reiner Schürmann's Thought and His

Page 1 of the *Modern Philosophies of the Will* lecture notes is dated 'Fall 1980' whilst the 'course description'—two extra pages numbered '1' and '2'—bears the date 'Spring 1992.' The presence of successively adjointed materials would seem to indicate that Schürmann regarded the structure and core argumentation of the 1980 course as sound, being content to edit it and integrate other materials into it over time until 1992, without ever fully discarding it.

Additionally, the whole typescript presents handwritten notes, glosses, erasures, re-editings as well as significant integrations and terminological shifts added through the years. Hence, in order to enable readers to ponder this osmotic process or, as it were, to grasp how Schürmann's classroom allowed for the emergence of (his) thinking—while being, at the same time, its first proving ground—we decided to supply all significant marginalia within curly brackets in the endnotes.

Editorial interventions are signaled in the volume by square brackets within the text as well as in the endnotes. Typos and misspellings in the original typescript have been silently amended, while abbreviations of names, works, and concepts have been fully spelled out. When, in rare instances, syntactically as well as semantically ambiguous sentences occur, they have been rearranged for readability, and their original form provided in the endnotes. All conjectures and interventions not of a strictly editorial nature have also been clearly demarcated.

In his lectures, Schürmann often modifies existing English translations or provides his own renditions from the original texts. Wherever possible, we have indicated where Schurmann diverges from standard English translations, as well as tracked down and provided the original sources for cited materials within square brackets in the endnotes. Bibliographical references have been unified and updated when necessary.

As Schürmann's 'course description' indicates, *Modern Philosophies of the Will* was to be divided into three parts, preceded by an historical introduction, as follows:

Reading of Heidegger." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2 – Vol. 20, No. 1, (New York: New School for Social Research, 1997), 229–245.

Historical Introduction
Rationality and Irrationality of the Will
The Ontological Turn in the Philosophy of the Will
Legislation and Transgression¹⁰²

Unfortunately, the typescript shows a few sections missing. Whereas the Historical Introduction and Part I of the typescript are complete, Part II, sect. 1: on Schelling, is missing, ¹⁰³ and Part III lacks both sect. 2: on Nietzsche, and sect. 3: on Heidegger; only its sect. 1: on Kant, has been partially retrieved.

The editors wish to thank Ian Alexander Moore, Malte Fabian Rauch, and Nicolas Schneider for their insightful comments on this afterword, and to express our gratitude to Christine-Marie Gros, Indiana University Press, Springer, Michael Heitz and the Schürmann estate for their cooperation in letting us bring out this volume.

July 2021

¹⁰² Or "Will and Law," as the 1992 course description has it.

¹⁰³ Schürmann's marginalia suggest that Part II, sect. 1 was likely to have dealt with Heidegger's 1936 lecture course, *Schelling's Treatise on Human Freedom (1809)*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985).