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## Schelling on the Possibility of Evil: Rendering Pantheism, Freedom, and Time Consistent

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**Abstract:** German idealism stems in large part from Fichte’s response to a dilemma involving the concepts of pantheism, freedom, and time: time is the form of the determination of modes of substance, as held by a pantheistic or “dogmatic” person, or the form of acts generated by human freedom, as held by an idealistic person. Fichte solves the dilemma by refuting dogmatism and deducing time from idealism’s first principle. But his diagnosis is more portentous: by casting the lemmas in terms of person-types, he unintentionally invites Schelling’s philosophical rethinking of personality. In his middle period, Schelling argues for the consistency of the concepts of pantheism, freedom, and time, claiming that it depends on a “good” as opposed to “evil” personality. However, since on his view personality is an absolute or *originally undecided* capacity for good and evil, the trio’s consistency is entirely contingent. In §1, I trace Fichte’s resolution of the dilemma. In §§2–3, I reconstruct Schelling’s arguments for consistency from the *Freiheitsschrift* and *Weltalter*, texts written just a few years apart. In §4, I allay a Kantian worry that this consistency relies problematically on the liberty of indifference or *Willkür*.

**Keywords:** dogmatism, evil, Fichte, freedom, nihilism, pantheism, personality, Schelling, time, unconsciousness

German idealism stems in large part from Fichte’s response, during the period of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, to a perceived dilemma involving the concepts of pantheism, freedom, and time. According to this dilemma, time is the form of the infinite determination of a mode of substance, as is held by the pantheistic or what he calls “dogmatic” person, or it is the form of the acts generated by human freedom, as held by an idealistic person. Fichte solves the dilemma by espousing an idealism that is capable of refuting pantheism and by deducing time from idealism’s first principle. I want to suggest that his diagnosis of the

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dilemma is more portentous than his solution, for it is by casting the lemmas in terms of person-types that Fichte unintentionally invites Schelling's philosophical rethinking of personality.

The first lemma depends, according to Fichte, on a dogmatist's refusal to affirm her self-sufficiency. Debasing her humanity yet unable to shirk her commitment to the pursuit of ends, she generates the inconsistency between freedom and time. It is the result of a person-type marked by bad faith<sup>1</sup> or evil.<sup>2</sup> As early as the "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism", Schelling rejects Fichte's understanding of this trio of concepts and, in his middle period, accounts for the possibility of their consistency. In *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom (Freiheitsschrift)*, he argues that pantheism, understood as a system of nature, is impossible unless it is grounded in freedom, while, in the *Ages of the World (Weltalter)*, he argues that freedom is the time—specifically, the "transcendental past"—that conditions the possibility of any such system. Combining these arguments, taken from texts written just a few years apart, we find a view in which pantheism is the consequent of an anterior act of freedom—a view, that is, in which the trio of concepts are not only consistent, but mutually dependent.

Schelling claims, furthermore, that their consistency depends on personality, where personality is cast in terms of an originally undecided capacity for willing good and evil. As he says in the second draft of the *Weltalter*, "personal I-hood" is "the ground" of the being of beings (Schelling and Žižek 1997, 170). On this view, personality can express itself as evil—i.e. an anxious disavowal of one's role in conditioning the possibility of a system of nature—or as good—i.e. an authentic recognition of that role. An evil will sever condition from conditioned, disowning its hand in nature's intelligibility. It is only by resisting evil that one can generate the consistency among pantheism, freedom, and time. This requires a personality devoid of what in the *Freiheitsschrift* Schelling calls "impetuosity" and "arrogance" (SW I/7, 360). Hence, as we will see, even if Fichte fails to detect a real dilemma, his diagnosis of person-types opens

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1 See Fichte: "A person who has faith in himself cannot accept any variety of dogmatism or fatalism" (GA IV/2, 17).

2 See Fichte: "an act of freedom is purely and simply because it is, and it is what is absolutely primary, something that cannot be connected to anything else and cannot be explained on the basis of anything else. Only if one fails to take this into account does one encounter those difficulties that so many people encounter when they arrive at this point [ ... ] To be sure, it can be predicted and comprehended that a human being will remain at the lower points of reflection for a long time, perhaps even for his entire life, since there is absolutely nothing that drives him higher, and experience confirms that the former is at least generally the case. To this extent, evil is inborn in human beings" (SW IV, 182).

conceptual space for Schelling to conceive of the radical contingency of will—the unprethinkable ground of the being of beings. We will see, moreover, that whereas Fichte ascribes evil to dogmatism,<sup>3</sup> Schelling’s novel conception of evil denotes our capacity to deny, not simply our self-sufficiency, but our grounding responsibility for the philosophical systems we endorse.

In §1, I trace Fichte’s resolution of the apparent dilemma. In §§2–3, I reconstruct Schelling’s arguments for the consistency of the concepts of pantheism, freedom, and time from the *Freiheitsschrift* and *Weltalter*. In §4, I allay a Kantian worry that this consistency problematically relies on the liberty of indifference or *Willkür*.

### §1

It is during the pantheism controversy sparked by Jacobi that Fichte detects a dilemma: either time is the form of the infinite determination of a mode of substance or it is the form of the acts generated by human freedom. Jacobi registers the first lemma in *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*. On his reading, a mode’s determination by an endless chain of preceding efficient causes constitutes a temporal series in which that mode is fixed, one among qualitatively identical time-phases. Jacobi recounts his childhood reaction to this idea: “That *extraordinary* [view] was a representation of endless duration, quite independent of any religious concept. At the said age, while I was pondering on eternity *a parte ante*, it suddenly came over me with such clarity, and seized me with such violence, that I gave out a loud cry and fell into a kind of swoon [...] The thought of annihilation, which had always been dreadful to me, now became even more dreadful, nor could I bear the vision of an *eternal forward duration* any better” (Jacobi 1994, 362). Jacobi’s worry is that if time is the form of the infinite determination of modes, that is, if, as Spinoza holds, a mode is preceded and succeeded by an endless causal series, then the concept of time is inconsistent with that of human freedom.

Why does Jacobi identify this threat with “annihilation”? What death results if, with Spinoza, we solve the dilemma by banishing the concept of human freedom? Consider Jacobi’s conception of life in *David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism*: “All truly actual things are *individuals* or singular things, and, as such, they are living beings (*principia perceptiva et activa*)” (Jacobi 1994, 317–8). By this definition, living beings are distinguished, not by efficient causes, but by final causes, that is, as beings that contain the principle that

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<sup>3</sup> See Fichte: “We have explained the evil in human beings as follows: anyone who is supposed to be able to be called a human being has to achieve a consciousness of himself. This demands nothing more than that he become conscious of the freedom that is involved in his choice of actions” (SW IV, 198).

guides their action toward their proper ends. It is only because they contain this principle that such beings are free. Hence Jacobi's remark to Lessing regarding Spinoza's pantheism: "If there are only efficient, but no final, causes, then the only function that the faculty of thought has in the whole of nature is that of observer; its proper business is to accompany the mechanism of the efficient causes" (Jacobi 1994, 189). The mechanism that is entailed by Spinozism annihilates living beings, that is, beings capable of striving freely toward ends. This is why, on Jacobi's view, pantheism annihilates free beings.

The nihilistic threat posed by this lemma motivates Fichte to refute pantheism, under the label "dogmatism", and to vindicate the second lemma, under the banner of transcendental idealism. He gives an indirect refutation of dogmatism in *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*. There, Fichte defines philosophy's "first task" as the search for the absolute ground of experience (SW I, 423). The options in this search are the Not-I or substance and the I or what Fichte elsewhere calls "life" (Fichte 1987, 111). Rather than directly refute the dogmatist, Fichte shows that she refutes herself. Insofar as positing the ground of experience is a response to a normative demand, namely, the demand posed by the first task of philosophy, it is an act for which one is responsible. It is I who heed this task as a task, and so stake my claim. But by positing the Not-I as ground, the dogmatist posits a principle whose nihilistic entailment precludes her capacity to do so. A mode lacks the kind of responsibility that the dogmatist must assume in order to posit her first principle. Through a performative contradiction, she belies her principle simply by positing it.

In this way, Fichte can dismiss the inconsistency between freedom and time by imputing it to the dogmatic person's confused act. He may then turn to vindicate idealism, which in the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo* he does by inviting us to perform what we might call an *act experiment*. I can think the wall. I can also think myself thinking the wall. When I do, "the thinking subject and the object of thought cannot be distinguished from each other in the way they could be while I was still thinking about the wall [ ... W]hen I think about the I my activity is self-reverting" (GA IV/2, 29). In thinking myself thinking, my act of thought is its own object. It is therefore not determined by an external cause, but is self-determining. Fichte calls our awareness of this free act an "intellectual intuition" (GA IV/2, 31) and since what it cognizes is the I, which is the first principle of idealism, it demonstrates the truth of idealism.

Having removed the concept of pantheism and secured that of freedom, Fichte can now salvage the concept of time. For the sake of systematicity, he requires that this concept be deduced from idealism's first principle, where deduction consists in deriving *a priori* those conditions on which it is possible

for the I to posit itself over against a world (see GA IV/2, 9). Like Hegel and, for a brief period, Schelling, Fichte refuses to consign time to brute forms of human sensibility, which confounds systematicity and yields Kant's notorious distinction between what appears to these forms and what is in itself. Consequently, he must deduce time from the I.

One version of this deduction occurs in the Second Introduction of the *New Presentation*. Fichte draws its first premise from a passage in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which states that "it is the understanding which adds the object to appearance, and it does this insofar as it connects the manifold of appearance within a single consciousness". Fichte's second premise states that the object "exercises an effect only insofar as it exists". Now, if thought contributes the synthesis of the object's very existence, so, too, must it contribute the object's capacity to exercise an effect—hence Fichte's inference that the object "is only thought of" as exercising an effect. He then draws a further inference:

Since this affection itself is only something we think of, then everything associated with this affection [including, therefore, our own ability to be affected] is, undoubtedly, also something that is only thought of [...] And when you think that this is what occurs in the case of every object you perceive, then you think of yourself as *generally affectable*. In other words, it is *by means of this act of your own thinking* that you ascribe receptivity or sensibility to yourself (SW I, 488).

If the existence and effect of any object are contributed by thinking, then the very idea of affection derives from thought. And since thought does not merely "accompany a mechanism", as Jacobi had feared, but is free by virtue of being grounded in the I, it is ultimately the I from which the idea of affection derives. Finally, since, for us, affection consists in sensibility, whose forms include space and time, we can say in particular that time derives from the I alone.

Fichte insists that this is *Kant's* position as well—that it is the spirit, if not the letter, of Kant's view that my restriction by space and time occurs "as a consequence" of my intellectual intuition of the I (SW I, 489). Another version of Fichte's deduction of time, occurring in the *Nova Methodo*, makes its reliance on intellectual intuition more explicit. There, he says that intellectual intuition,

which does not occur *in* any time, is here *extended* to form a temporal series. Within every heterogeneous manifold, this act of self-determination is posited over and over again; yet every time it is posited, it is posited as the same single act of self-determination, and this is the source of the continuity of the temporal series. I determine myself to move from A to B; this act of self-determination is an act that does not occur within any time. An experience occurs as a consequence of this act of self-determination; this transition from A to B occurs within time. This movement of transition is conditioned by the causality of my will (GA IV/2, 130, emphasis added).

According to this deduction, it is my exercise of freedom that generates the time-phases of an action. As any action's absolute ground is the free act of intellectual intuition, the "source of the continuity" of its time-phases must be singular rather than many. It is due to its singular grounding role that intellectual intuition cannot be said to occur at any particular time. This would be akin to the category mistake of supposing that our entitlement to the pure concept of causality arises from any particular perception. The particular in each case is intelligible only by virtue of an *a priori* condition of possibility. Just as, for Kant, the experience of causation is only possible on condition of an act of understanding, so, for Fichte, the experience of temporal duration is only possible on condition of an act of freedom. Time is therefore a series generated by freedom. And as freedom is conceived in terms of the intellectual intuition of the I, idealism's first principle must be the derivational source of the concept of time.

We may dispute Fichte's claim to Kantian heritage on this point. However, by removing pantheism, Fichte is able to set freedom on an absolute footing, from which concepts like time can be taken in stride through systematic deductions. Schelling's objection, as we will see, is that the instigating dilemma is merely apparent, for it rests on a misunderstanding of the concepts of pantheism, freedom, and time.

## §2

As early as 1795, Schelling offers a charitable assessment of the dogmatist, which Fichte fails to consider. He defends a pluralist position in the "Letters" by arguing that intellectual intuition is a state that we could never inhabit—as it effaces the difference between subject and object—and thus a state that could never provide *cognition* of the I, one consequence of which is that idealism cannot be vindicated over dogmatism (SW I/1, 325).<sup>4</sup> On Schelling's view, positing a first principle instead enacts a *decision*, namely, to live in accord with a particular system, one whose value is "subjective" in this sense and whose validity is to be sought practically (SW I/1, 312). It is for this reason that he can espouse idealism with Fichte even while admiring "the calmness with which Spinoza approached the completion of his system", and can ask sincerely: "Who would think any worse of [Spinoza's] serene spirit for harbouring such an image, under which he found bearable the thought at which his system stopped?" (SW I/1, 316).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For an account of Schelling's pluralism in the "Letters", see Bruno 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Schelling: "the question as to which (*abstract*) principle could furnish the starting point for philosophy [ ... is] unworthy of a free man who knows his own self", who knows that "man was born to act, not to speculate, and that therefore his first step into philosophy must manifest the arrival of a free human being" (SW I/1, 242); and: "individual freedom is surely

What is crucial is that Schelling's early pluralism involves fundamentally rethinking pantheism and freedom, a rethinking he elaborates in the *Freiheitsschrift* and *Weltalter*. In the former, he argues that Spinoza's denial of freedom owes, not to his pantheism, but to his *fatalism*. It is clear from the following passage that, by "fatalism", Schelling means what Jacobi understands as nihilism:

[Spinoza] treats the will also as a thing and then proves very naturally that it would have to be determined in all its activity through another thing that is in turn determined by another, and so on *ad infinitum*. Hence the lifelessness of his system, the sterility of its form, the poverty of concepts [...] hence his mechanistic view of nature follows quite naturally as well. Or does one doubt that the basic view of Spinozism must already be essentially changed by a dynamic notion of nature? (SW I/7, 349)

Recall Jacobi's definition of living beings: they are free because they contain a principle that guides their action, that is, because they have final causes. Spinoza rejects the very idea of final causation (Spinoza 2002, IApp), from which, as Schelling says, it follows "very naturally" that any mode, including a human will, must be determined by something other "*ad infinitum*". The "poverty of concepts" in Spinoza's system accordingly owes to the absence of the concept of a final cause, while its "sterility" owes to the absence of purposiveness. Schelling's claim is that we "essentially" alter Spinoza's pantheism by introducing a non-fatalistic or "dynamic" conception of nature.<sup>6</sup> The "*lifelessness*" of Spinoza's pantheism, then, leaves open the possibility of a *pantheism of freedom*. Hence Schelling says: "That the fatalistic sense may be connected with pantheism is undeniable; but that this sense is not essentially connected with it is elucidated by the fact that so many people are brought to this viewpoint through the most lively feeling of freedom" (SW I/7, 339). Our challenge is to rethink pantheism as a system of nature that does justice to our feeling of

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connected in some way with the world as a whole (regardless of whether it be thought in a realist or idealist manner)" (SW I/7, 337). Schelling's pluralism presents certain difficulties, for Spinoza would agree neither that we have no knowledge of substance nor that his is a merely subjectively valid system that must share logical space with the system of idealists. As a post-Kantian, however, Schelling can offer him no better than this: simply accepting the first lemma as Jacobi and Fichte conceive it invites an unlivable nihilism.

**6** Compare Schelling: "others find the true archetype of pantheism in the doctrine of Spinoza. Spinoza deserves serious consideration. Far be it from us to deny in Spinoza that for which he was our teacher and predecessor. Perhaps, of all the modern philosophers, there was in Spinoza a dark feeling of that primordial time of which we have attempted to conceptualize so precisely [ ... ] But he knows only the balance, but not the conflict that emerges out of the equipollence [ ... ] Consequently, his substance, or the common being of [extension and thought], persists in an eternal, immobile, inactive parity [ ... ] Hence the lack of life and progression in his system" (SW I/8, 339-40).

freedom. A few years later, the *Weltalter* voices the existential difficulty of this challenge: “[most people] would no doubt find real pantheism to be horrifying. But were they capable of penetrating the exterior surface of things, they would see that the true prime matter of all life and existence is precisely what is horrifying”, namely, our own “abyssal freedom” (SW I/8, 304, 339).

How, then, is freedom consistent with a system of nature? Schelling argues for this in four steps in the *Freiheitsschrift*: “Since no concept can be defined in isolation [...] and only proof of its connection with the whole also confers on it final scientific completeness, this must be pre-eminently the case with the concept of freedom, which, if it has reality at all, must not be simply a subordinate or subsidiary concept, but one of the system’s ruling centre-points” (SW I/7, 336). The first premise states that the definition of a concept must be holistic: it depends for its “scientific completeness” on its relation to all other concepts in a systematic “whole”. The second premise states that this criterion applies to the concept of freedom. The third premise states that this concept cannot stand in a “subordinate” relation to other concepts—the threat of nihilism reminds us why. It follows that freedom must stand in a grounding relation to all concepts within a system. As Schelling says, freedom’s definition must be pre-eminent. It is not one concept among many, but the condition of the possibility of any system of nature.<sup>7</sup> In this way, according to Schelling, freedom is consistent with pantheism.

One might worry that Schelling sacrifices nature’s absoluteness by grounding the system of nature on human freedom. An insight from Iain Hamilton Grant’s lectures on the *Freiheitsschrift* shows us why “nature” and “freedom” are not, in fact, competing terms.<sup>8</sup> Consider that nature is not merely given to us. If it were, what would we be to receive it? And what would the giving be? Human freedom is not extra-natural: as agents, we are nature’s own autonomy. To balk at this is to miss that the *Freiheitsschrift* propounds a pantheism of freedom. Rather than viewing nature sideways on—a system of relations of necessity to which freedom must be integrated subordinately and so, as the four-step argument shows, *per impossibile*—Schelling conceives freedom as the active ground of nature. His aim is not to weave freedom into a pre-existing tapestry, but, to exploit Jacobi’s simile (Jacobi 1994, 509-10), to investigate the activity of

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Gabriel 2014: “The starting point of the *Freedom Essay* [ ... ] is a conception of thought and reference as full-fledged objects of freedom, as actions” (6).

<sup>8</sup> These lectures were given at the Pittsburgh Summer School in Contemporary Philosophy on Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* at Duquesne University in August 2013.



weaving itself. Such an activity is no more human than natural.<sup>9</sup> This is why, in the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling identifies the ground of God's existence with "the will of the understanding", which is to say, the "human will" (SW I/7, 359, 363).<sup>10</sup> That which in us freely desires to comprehend relations of necessity in nature is inseparable from this ground.<sup>11</sup> Hence the *Weltalter's* claim that "from eternity the necessary is subject to freedom" (SW I/8, 253).

By removing the tension between freedom and pantheism that gives Fichte the impression of a dilemma, Schelling is able to dislodge Fichte's conception of dogmatic evil and, as we will see in §4, to reconceive the same. But first we must see how Schelling renders the concepts of freedom and pantheism consistent with that of time.

### §3

Schelling's conception of freedom as human-all-too-natural should help to explain, not only his identification of the ground of God's existence with the will of human understanding, but also his claim in the third draft of the *Weltalter* that "one who could write completely the history of their own life would also have [...] concurrently grasped the history of the cosmos" (SW I/8, 207-8). Schelling's conception of freedom can only help to explain this strange claim if we have the right notion of "history", for to grasp my life's complete *empirical* history is surely to exclude the complete *empirical* history of the cosmos: the contents of these histories are not concurrent. I will argue that Schelling's conception of history in the *Weltalter* is not empirical, but *transcendental*—and it is here that the concept of time will turn out to be consistent with those of pantheism and freedom.

Consider the distinctive priority of a transcendental condition. Such a condition is not empirically prior to the experience that it makes possible. It precedes experience, not at some moment, but as that without which experience would be impossible. Neither, however, is a transcendental condition logically prior to experience, for it is not necessary, according to general logic, that anything should make experience possible. It is only given that we have a certain kind of experience and can investigate its possibility, under the aegis

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<sup>9</sup> Freedom's essential openness, no more than its naturalness, guarantees the incompleteness of the totality we aim philosophically to grasp. See Gabriel 2014: "The idea of a complete map of the world is inconsistent because the appearance of the map as an event in the world alters it. The special ontological status of the concept of unrestricted totality is that it cannot be closed if our reference to it belongs to it" (11).

<sup>10</sup> See Schelling: "human will is the seed—hidden in eternal yearning—of the God who is present still in the ground only" (SW I/7, 363).

<sup>11</sup> See Schelling: "Created out of the source of things *and the same as it*, the human soul is conscientious of creation" (SW I/8, 200, emphasis added).

of transcendental logic, that the conditions we discover have the kind of priority they do. Given both experience and transcendental logic, we find that transcendental conditions have the priority of that with respect to which experience is essentially belated. That is to say, experience is always already constituted by such conditions. This sheds light on Kant's claim in the first *Critique* that the categories are "ancestral concepts" (A13/B27, A81/B107).<sup>12</sup> Rather than an empirical history, transcendental conditions comprise what we may call the "immemorial past"<sup>13</sup> of experience, that is, its transcendental history.

Now, recall Schelling's four-step argument in the *Freiheitsschrift* that freedom grounds pantheism. In this argument, freedom precedes pantheism as its condition of possibility. It follows that freedom precedes pantheism, not in time, but as that time with respect to which a system of nature is essentially belated. Freedom, in other words, is pantheism's ancestral or immemorial past. As I will show, the *Weltalter* develops precisely this conception of freedom as transcendental history—as that time which the third draft calls "a past that did not first become past, but which was the past from the primordial beginning and since all eternity" (SW I/8, 254). To grasp this development, we must first trace Schelling's motivation for a non-empirical conception of history, after which we must see why he conceives this time-before-time in terms of freedom.

In the second draft, Schelling says that if the past is one among qualitatively identical time-phases in a "chain of causes and effects", we are left with a "mechanistic system". Mechanism assumes the idea of empirical time, according to which the past is only quantitatively distinct from the present. It is, in other words, the nihilistic idea of a homogeneous series of moments linked by efficient causation. To avoid this nihilistic consequence, Schelling implores us to "rise above" empirical time so that we may grasp an "authentic past" (Schelling and Žižek 1997, 119-21). Avoiding mechanism requires us, in turn, to fill the explanatory vacuum that it leaves. Hence Schelling's rhetorical question of how we could "recognize the present era without a science of the past" (Schelling and Žižek 1997, 121). The implication is that the "present era" is what we experience and that this experience is unintelligible unless we discover its ground, which minimally requires that we avoid mechanism, namely, by conceiving the past in a non-empirical register.

Schelling describes this non-empirical register in the third draft: "different times (a concept that, like many others, has gotten lost in modern philosophy)

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<sup>12</sup> In contrast to a transcendental deduction of such ancestral concepts, Kant claims that an empirical deduction secures only an "ancestry from experiences" (A86/B119), whose conditions of possibility the former deduction is meant to provide.

<sup>13</sup> Compare Levinas 1989, 84.

can certainly be, as different, at the same time, nay, to speak more accurately, they are necessarily at the same time [...] What has past certainly cannot be as something present, but it must be as something past at the same time with the present” (SW I/8:302). Modern philosophy is misled by a one-sided conception of time, one that yields the mechanistic view that the past is a momentary phase shifted along a homogeneous causal chain and the nihilistic consequence that time precludes freedom. We avoid this consequence by conceiving of a time that is not present, yet simultaneous with the present. This is precisely the temporality of a transcendental condition: while such a condition qua condition precedes what is present in experience, the former cannot fail to coincide with the latter, namely, by conditioning it. The empirical present is never without its transcendental history.

It is this transcendental history that Schelling has in mind when describing the concurrence of life and cosmos. Autobiographical and cosmological history are concurrent only insofar as they form one and the same transcendental condition of empirical history. Having traced Schelling’s motivation for conceiving history in a non-empirical register, we can now see why he conceives this time in terms of freedom.

We saw that, for Fichte, philosophy begins with intellectual intuition of the sole, correct first principle. I briefly noted Schelling’s argument in the “Letters” that intellectual intuition is an uninhabitable state that consequently affords no cognition at all.<sup>14</sup> It follows from this argument that there can be no position from which to determine that one’s principle is correct and another’s incorrect. As Schelling says in the Sixth Letter: “If we want to establish a system and, therefore, principles, we cannot do it *except by an anticipation of the practical decision*. We should not establish those principles *unless our freedom had already decided about them*” (SW I/1, 312-3). A system is not ventured by those who profess to cognize a first principle—which risks a kind of despotism<sup>15</sup>—but rather by those who freely decide to endorse it. Decision in this sense is the resolve to live a kind of life, whether Spinozistic or Fichtean. By deciding how to live, one removes the opposition between these systems: decision (*Entscheidung*) removes the cision (*Scheidung*) that their opposition poses.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On Schelling’s argument for the unlivability of intellectual intuition, see Bruno 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See Schelling: “for a spirit who has made himself free and who owes *his* philosophy only to himself, nothing can be more unbearable than the despotism of narrow minds who cannot tolerate another system beside their own” (SW I/1, 306); and compare: “Nothing could more enrage a youthful and fiery sensibility, burning for the truth, than the intention of a teacher to prepare his audience for some one special or particular system, wishing in this way to emasculate them by underhandedly removing the freedom of inquiry” (SW II/3, 16).

<sup>16</sup> That the will is free “to be utterly one thing or the other” (SW I/8, 220) shows that it precedes predication. This is despite our paradoxical ability to predicate it with impredicability; see SW I/

Schelling describes this “cision” in the *Weltalter* as a “doubling of ourselves [...] in which there are two beings, a questioning being and an answering being”. In asking how to live, I am doubled: I put myself into question. One of the *Weltalter*’s innovations is to show that deciding this question is not done “consciously or through deliberation”. This is because “no one has chosen [their] character following reasoning or reflection. One did not consult oneself” (SW I/8, 304). Living as a Fichtean is grounded, not on conscious reflection, but on free decision, that is, on a pre-conscious commitment to a way of life in which my autonomy is a foregone conclusion and, thus, an external question.<sup>17</sup> I may seek to recover this decisive commitment in conscious reflection by constructing a myth about absolute grounds, but this will always presuppose my conviction in a framework by virtue of which such a reflection has sense.<sup>18</sup> It would be wrong to infer, however, that the non-conscious decision presupposed by consciousness must be irrational, as opposed to arational.<sup>19</sup> Schelling’s claim is simply that we must recognize this presupposition as consciousness’ condition of possibility, that is, as its transcendental past:

There is no dawning of consciousness (and precisely for this reason no consciousness) without positing something past. There is no consciousness without something that is at the same time excluded [...] That which in consciousness is simultaneously the excluded [...] can only be the unconscious. Hence, all consciousness is grounded on the unconscious and, precisely in the dawning of consciousness, the unconscious is posited as the past of consciousness (SW I/8, 262).

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7, 408. Compare Tritten 2012: “The unprethinkable is not equivalent to the unthinkable because it is indeed thinkable but only *per posterius* and not *from* the posterior. The unprethinkable does not preclude that it may be post-thinkable” (66). It is not obvious, then, that we must distinguish the will from the unground or indifference point (see Gabriel 2014).

**17** Fichte himself asserts that intellectual intuition “produces no consciousness, not even self-consciousness”, but “merely serves to put the I into a position in which self-consciousness—and, along with this, all other consciousness—becomes possible. But no actual consciousness has yet arisen at this point” (SW I, 459).

**18** See Schelling: “The decision that would make any kind of act into a true beginning may not be brought before consciousness. It may not be *recalled*, which rightly means as much as taking it back. Whoever reserves it to themselves again and again to bring a decision to light never makes a beginning” (SW I/8, 314). Compare Nietzsche 1990: “[Philosophers] all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic [ ... ] while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an ‘inspiration’ or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract—and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact” (8).

**19** See Gabriel 2009: “If *the only way* to confer meaning on statements is to blindly accept certain things, then this acceptance cannot be seen as an irrational shortcoming. It rather enables rationality without itself being rational” (76).

Unconsciousness is the time before consciousness, preceding yet simultaneous (“at the same time”) with it. Such a time, while empirically present, is transcendently past. But as it is precisely one’s free decision that embodies this unconscious time-before-time, we discover that the concept of freedom is consistent with the concept of time conceived at the transcendental register. As the concept of freedom is already consistent with that of pantheism, we find a consistent trio where Fichte had envisioned none. Indeed, we find a set of concepts whose members are mutually dependent.

We are now in a position to consider Schelling’s account of the role of personality in this unity, an account that, I suggest, Fichte’s notion of a person-types unwittingly invites.

#### §4

Like Fichte, Schelling invokes personality to solve a problem posed by a specific set of concepts. For Fichte, we can discern two person-types for whom this set is inconsistent: one that dogmatically rejects freedom and one that idealistically rejects pantheism.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, Schelling discerns a personality for whom this set is consistent, in line with the above-reconstructed arguments. I will conclude by showing how this difference between Fichte and Schelling tracks the latter’s distinction between good and evil in the *Freiheitsschrift* and how the capacity for good and evil developed in that text reflects Schelling’s conception of personality during his middle period.

In the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling describes personality in terms of “the capacity for good and evil” (SW I/7, 353, 364). An evil person “steps out from [her] being beyond nature in order, as general will, to make [herself] at once

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**20** It is perhaps more accurate to read Fichte’s dictum—the “kind of philosophy one chooses [ ... ] depends on the kind of person one is” (SW I, 434)—as stating, not that one can be either an idealistic or a dogmatic person, but that one’s personality is either *authentically* or *inauthentically* idealist. In the *New Presentation*, he states: “The object of idealism has an advantage [ ... ] over that of dogmatism, for the former can be shown to be present within consciousness—not, to be sure, as the explanatory ground of experience, for this would be contradictory and would transform this system into a portion of experience; yet it can still be shown to be present, as such, within consciousness. In contrast, the object of dogmatism cannot be considered to be anything but a pure invention, which can be made into something real only by the success of this system” (SW I, 429). The dogmatist’s “object” or ground is a fiction because positing the Not-I is a normative and thus free response to philosophy’s first task. She has no true object *and therefore no philosophy*. But if dogmatism is no philosophy and if one’s philosophy depends on one’s person-type, then one cannot be a dogmatic person, but rather a failed idealist. The dogmatist lives her freedom despite herself—in bad faith. Fichte’s summons to posit the ground of experience sets a task that we can fail to meet, in which case we express an inauthentic personality.

particular and creaturely” (SW I/7, 366). We saw that freedom, properly conceived, does not lie “beyond nature”, but is the decisive act that grounds the system of nature: nature, as we saw, has a transcendental past.<sup>21</sup> The evil person disowns her grounding role, paranoid that nature may be her responsibility.<sup>22</sup> She takes refuge from this paranoia by viewing herself as “creaturely” rather than creative—as accidental rather than essential to the constitution of nature.<sup>23</sup> In bad faith, she disavows the significance of her decision to live a kind of life. Thus, the Fichtean explains the vicissitudes of selfhood—contingency and mortality—in terms of the permanence of I-hood—necessity and immortality<sup>24</sup>—while the Spinozist explains the finitude and mutability of modes in terms of the infinitude and immutability of substance.

The evil person’s paranoia turns to hubris when, having disowned her role as ground, she demands a crystal clear and impersonal insight into the ground of experience, displaying what Schelling calls “arrogance” and “Fichtean impetuosity” (SW I/7, 360). The allusion here is to Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition, an act whose form is alleged to depend on nothing particular about any individual subject. Spinoza’s doctrine of intuitive knowledge likewise concerns cognition, not merely from the human subject’s perspective, but from the perspective of eternity.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of her metaphysical disposition, the evil person claims as a particular will to speak for the “general will”. She must accordingly renounce any consistency among pantheism, freedom, and time: on the one hand, she is suspicious enough of the freedom of subjects to deny that it can ground the system of nature; on the other hand, she is impetuous enough to demand an impersonal insight into the ground of that system.<sup>26</sup> The trio’s consistency is thus contingent on

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21 As Henningfeld 2003 correctly observes, this transcendental past necessarily has its own empirical present: “Als intelligible Tat darf die Entscheidung nicht in die Zeit fallen. Der Gegenbegriff zu ‘Zeit’ ist ‘Ewigkeit’.

Also muss es sich um eine ewige Tat handeln—aber doch so, dass sie in das zeitliche Sein hineinwirkt” (110). Like a transcendental condition without an empirical conditioned, a decision not enacted in time is an empty form. Thus, I manifest no character, but at best a mere wish, in failing or refusing to venture a certain kind of life.

22 See Schelling: “most people are frightened precisely by this abyssal freedom in the same way that they are frightened by the necessity to be utterly one thing or another” (SW I/8, 304).

23 Compare Fichte: “the only thing that exists is reason, and individuality is something merely accidental. Reason is the end and personality is the means [ ... ] Reason alone is eternal, whereas individuality must ceaselessly die off” (SW I, 505).

24 See Fichte 1987, 111, 122-3; SW I, 505; GA IV/2, 220.

25 See Spinoza 2002, VP36.

26 See Schelling: “The understanding is born in the genuine sense from that which is without understanding [ ... ] The arrogance of man rises up against this origin from the ground and even seeks moral reasons against it. Nevertheless we would know of nothing that could drive man

the existence of a good personality, one that resists the oscillation between paranoia and hubris and exhibits what Schelling calls “temperance” (SW I/7, 371).

This raises a concern, for even if evil is a “misuse of freedom” (SW I/7, 366), it is nevertheless as arbitrary as goodness. This is because human freedom is originally undecided. As the ground of the system of nature, it is “a wholly undetermined capacity to will one or the other of two contradictory opposites” (SW I/7, 382). A Kantian may object that this reduces the will to the liberty of indifference, that is, the capacity for free choice or *Willkür*. The capacity to issue maxims of choice with indifference contrasts with *Wille*, the capacity to legislate one’s actions according to the moral law. *Willkür*, the Kantian will argue, is free only if it is determined by *Wille*, and is otherwise arbitrary (see AA 6, 226). The Schellingian, he will conclude, is wrong to hold that cognition, which practically consists in *Wille*, is grounded in a decision that amounts to sheer *Willkür*.

We can allay this worry by considering a passage from the *Freiheitsschrift*, in which Schelling denies that decision is tantamount to *Willkür*:

For the common concept of freedom, according to which freedom is posited as a wholly undetermined capacity to will one or the other of two contradictory opposites, without determining reasons but simply because it is willed, has in fact the original undecidedness of human being as idea in its favor; however, when applied to individual actions, it leads to the greatest inconsistencies. To be able to decide for A or ~A without any compelling reasons would be [...] a prerogative to act entirely irrationally and would not distinguish man [...] from the well-known animal of Buridan (SW I/7, 382).

This passage distinguishes freedom as decision from freedom as *Willkür*. Unlike *Willkür*, decision does not express an “individual” action of which we might deny that it lacks “any compelling reasons”. This is because the decision to live a kind of life enacts a *general capacity* for individual actions, actions that strive to exemplify that life. As Schelling says in the third draft of the *Weltalter*: “absolute freedom [...] is not freedom for a particular deed” (SW I/8, 304). Freedom as decision is a pre-conscious commitment to a framework within which my deeds can be measured against my willed vocation. The “original undecidedness” of the will thus differs from *Willkür* as it is the past on which this framework is grounded—the decision by virtue of which my doing A (or ~A) can pose internal questions about which reasons for doing it are compelling. In other words, decision does not express a

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more to strive for the light with all of his strength than the consciousness of the deep night from which he has been lifted into existence” (SW I/7, 360).

specific course of action because it grounds what it means generally to take a course of action, given some framework for living. For this same reason, decision is also not an expression of *Wille*, which itself presupposes one's resolve to live a life of practical reason. Decision is instead the unprethinkable ground of both *Willkür* and *Wille*.<sup>27</sup>

Here, the Kantian may find an unexpected ally, for it is Kant who, in the Concluding Remark to the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, acknowledges that the “necessity” of the moral law’s normative force on us is incomprehensible.<sup>28</sup> As the moral law is not an exceptionless law of nature, but a law of action that, as we show in cases of self-conceit, we can transgress, the necessity of its normative force is inscrutable. Schelling locates the unprethinkable freedom of decision at precisely this site of inscrutability: the normative force of deciding on a kind of life, since it cannot be deliberative, is incomprehensible. He can thus be read as radicalizing Kant’s view that the question “what is the human” is deeper than any question about what we can know, what we ought to do, or for what we may hope.<sup>29</sup> Like Kant, Schelling sees that facts are always already conceptual and so bound up with transcendental conditions. Deepening Kant’s position, he also sees that such conditions are always already willed and so bound up with a kind of person. Nature’s deepest question lies here.

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<sup>27</sup> On Schelling’s resistance to Kant’s practical philosophy, see Kosch 2006, 97-8.

<sup>28</sup> See Kant: “It is therefore no censure of our deduction of the supreme principle of morality, but a reproach that must be brought against human reason in general, that it cannot make comprehensible as regards its absolute necessity an unconditional practical law (such as the categorical imperative must be); for, that it is unwilling to do this through a condition—namely by means of some interest laid down as a basis—cannot be held against it, since then it would not be the moral law, that is, the supreme law of freedom. And thus we do not indeed comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the moral imperative, but we nevertheless comprehend its *incomprehensibility*; and this is all that can fairly be required of a philosophy that strives in its principles to the very boundary of human reason” (AA 4, 463).

<sup>29</sup> See Kant AA 9, 25. Compare Schelling: “it is man himself that is the most incomprehensible” (SW II/3, 7).



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