

## When Time Preceded Eternity: Schelling's Conversion to History

ASHLEY U. VAUGHT

Through his early work and the *Identitätsphilosophie*, Schelling's view of time and eternity corresponds to the metaphysical tradition that identifies the temporal modality of eternity with knowledge of the highest truths and most perfect being. Against this, successive temporality, or time, remains always an imperfect, partial vision, which is the condition for the revelation and the 'existence' of finite things. Time belongs to that which shall not always be. This tradition has always affirmed the principle that true knowing can only grasp what does not suffer being otherwise.

Yet in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), Schelling departs from that tradition, so as to think more rigorously the function of temporality in relation to human freedom and divine revelation. The increasing importance of temporality and its character, particularly vis-à-vis eternity, is a foreshadowing of the movement Schelling shall later make towards 'positive philosophy', in which the facticity of existence opposes the solipsism of 'negative' reason. Schelling's 'conversion' to history is not to be understood in terms of the conviction that temporality must be anchored in the knowing subject, as he indicates in the *Stuttgart Lectures* (1810).<sup>1</sup> Rather, this movement bears on the function of time for eternity. In the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling claims that being requires becoming for its own formation, its *Bildung*. "Being becomes aware of itself only in

<sup>1</sup> "There is no external time; all time is subjective" ('Stuttgart Lectures', In *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*, trans. T. Pfau [Albany: SUNY Press, 1994], pp. 195-243, p. 205; *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling [J.G. Cotta, 1856-1861], 7, p. 431; hereafter *SW*).

becoming".<sup>2</sup> To put this differently, eternity knows itself only through time. This formula is reproduced *both* in God's dependence on his revelation in creation and in human history, *as well as* in the dependence of the eternal act of self-actualisation of each human being on the self-organised life they endure.

In what follows, I examine this reassessment of time and its elevation above eternity in the *Freiheitsschrift*. In the first part, we witness the primacy of the eternal act of self-actualisation as it gives birth to the 'universal productive will'. This will is the expression of the design of the divine understanding. Natural history exhibits a certain self-organisation corresponding to the primacy of this universal will in its direction of the evolution of nature, through different forms of life up to the 'creation' of human being. The appearance of the human being is the final stage in the unfolding of natural history. In the second part, we closely observe the eternal and temporal dimensions of human freedom. In human freedom, the essence of the individual is produced through the eternal act of self-actualisation. The latter appears to possess a similar teleological force in the moral life of the individual, as did the 'universal productive will' in the evolution of natural history. Yet the account of one specific form of moral life—that of the convert—indicates, by contrast, that temporality effectively determines the eternal act of self-actualisation. In my conclusion, I pose several questions about the way to comprehend the meaning of human freedom and the primacy of moral life.

The context for the treatment of time and eternity in the *Freiheitsschrift*, namely, the problem of conceiving freedom, recommends a Spinozistic privileging of eternity over time, which would be consistent with other earlier works by Schelling. For example, in *Bruno* (1802), eternity was undoubtedly the metaphysical horizon for the account of the relation of philosophy to its outside (art, mythology). The primary difficulty for the *Freiheitsschrift*, in this context, is to present human freedom without reducing it to an inferior cognitive view of eternity. In *Bruno*, the finite is generally conceived in this manner.<sup>3</sup> But

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. J. Love and J. Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), p. 66; hereafter *FS*. See also *SW*, 7, p. 403.

<sup>3</sup> There, Schelling conceives three levels of cognition and being, which he calls the finite, the infinite, and the eternal. It is of course remarkable that Schelling insists

Schelling wants to turn Spinoza on his head, in a proto-Marxian sense. In other words, Schelling wants to make Spinozistic substance turn on its modes. This intention corresponds exactly with Gilles Deleuze's own avowed intention in interpreting Spinoza.<sup>1</sup>

To see why we might expect Schelling to advance a Spinozist hierarchy of eternity over temporality, we need only look at texts like *Bruno*. Although *Bruno* is concerned with the relation of philosophy to its outside, the emergence of finite beings plays as central a role as it had throughout his work. Yet until the *Freiheitsschrift*, works such as *Bruno* (which Schelling even places in a lineage of work with the former) repeatedly subordinate human freedom to the pacifying force of the absolute. In the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling makes human freedom the principle of the development and fulfilment of God's existence. In so doing, he raises the finite temporality of human freedom above eternity.

Schelling's true insight in the *Freiheitsschrift* is two-fold. First, Schelling must move beyond the strictures of the critical and modern philosophy that associates totality with a merely conceptually rigorous whole. In other words, Schelling must surpass Descartes' anti-anthropomorphic identification of God with the infinite. "The entire new European philosophy since its beginning (with Descartes) has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground".<sup>5</sup> Although Schelling here remarks on the concept of nature, both God and nature are the recipients of his newly conceived 'living ground', which is in the *Freiheitsschrift* 'the ground' of God's existence, separate from that existence. Much later in the text, he writes that all life must have a condition,<sup>6</sup> and this goes for nature as well as for God. The dark ground is the condition for nature and for God's existence. Second, Schelling understands human freedom as the capacity for good and evil. This conceptualisation is only possible now that a 'dark ground' has been presented as the condition for all existence. Human freedom finds its abyss in the event in which the principle of the dark ground within the

on identifying temporal modality with ontological status. F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno, or On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things*, trans. M. Vater (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), pp. 148-152.

4 G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 40.

5 *FS*, p. 26/*SW*, p. 356.

6 *FS*, p. 62/*SW*, p. 399.

human soul rises above the 'universal will' or the will of the understanding that directs the teleological development of all of nature. With this context in hand, we are ready to approach the *Freiheitsschrift*.

From the beginning of the *Freiheitsschrift*, the traditional attributes of God are displaced by the division of God into existence and ground, as well as by the precedence of the dark ground to the divine light. Like the *Weltalter* drafts to follow, here Schelling strives to present the genesis of the divine 'personality' and the conditions necessary for God's being. Schelling fashions the 'dark ground', at least in part, to explain the fact of the coexistence of human freedom and God's existence in all of what is, "[I]ndividual freedom is surely connected in some way with the world as a whole ... [thus] some kind of system must be present, at least in the divine understanding, with which freedom coexists".<sup>7</sup> To explain this coexistence without quickly snuffing out the limited powers of individual freedom, Schelling postulates a ground in God that is not God. This ground is the condition for the actuality of human freedom.

The first traditional attribute to suffer displacement by Schelling's account is the notion of God's eternity, which here discovers its genesis. By God's eternity I mean the positing of the 'representation', first solicited by an irrational 'yearning'. The yearning is properly an expression of the dark ground, but the "representation" is that "through which, since it can have no other object but God, God sees himself in an exact image of himself".<sup>8</sup> This representation is the divine understanding itself. The divine understanding and the yearning "become a freely creating and all-powerful will and build in the initial anarchy of nature [the dark ground] as in its own element or instrument".<sup>9</sup> I identify the divine understanding with God's eternity for two reasons. First, the divine understanding is effectively the cause of creation, although this divine understanding is itself something generated—and as we will see, it undergoes a reciprocal process of formation by the created world. This description resonates with Leibniz's view of the divine understanding, which was necessarily the eternal cause of the created world and had pre-conceived all possible worlds in order to determine the best.<sup>10</sup> Second, all

7 *FS*, p. 9/*SW*, p. 337.

8 *FS*, p. 30/*SW*, pp. 360-361.

9 *FS*, p. 30/*SW*, p. 361.

10 I part with Heidegger's insistence on the eminence of Leibniz throughout the *Freiheitsschrift* (M. Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise 'On the Essence of Human*

forms of temporality are conceived in relation to cognition, following Schelling's comments in the *Stuttgart Lectures*. The divine understanding is the first and ultimate form of cognition in the *Freiheitsschrift*.

Yet God's eternity must be qualified as an eternity not to be confused with endless (and therefore indeterminate) or even total duration. Divine eternity cannot be endless duration, because in the dark ground it finds a limit (although arguably it is not a determinate limit). Divine eternity also cannot be total duration, as it is clearly preceded by a dark ground that would lie outside its exhaustive, totalising aims. All claims of a before and after are alien to this temporality, as Schelling understands it: "Here there is no first and last because all things mutually presuppose each other, no thing is another thing and yet no thing is not without another thing".<sup>11</sup> The reciprocal causation within eternity likens it more to a circular temporality. The divine understanding finds in the dark ground the condition for its own existence. But the dark ground as well is nothing before it is opposed to the divine understanding. As we will see, divine eternity also has a sense of circularity in its relation to the ends (and beginnings) of creation. But there eternity will intersect with successive temporality.

*Freedom*, trans. J. Stambaugh [Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985], p. 38; esp. pp. 83-96). Instead, I would argue that Spinoza remains, beyond the *Identitätsphilosophie*, the philosopher with whom Schelling grapples. Most commentators link the *Identitätsphilosophie* with the apogee of Spinoza's influence over Schelling's thinking. This view is particularly wrong in consideration of the continued provocation of Jacobi's *Pantheismusstreit* polemic. Spinoza must be recalled as the progenitor of that debate, as well as the primary referent behind the word *pantheism*. The entire introduction of the *Freiheitsschrift* is devoted to unravelling the meaning of pantheism—the text is a clear defense of pantheistic metaphysics—and Spinoza's view there plays a crucial role. His view there of Spinoza's pantheism is both tremendously banal and novel. It is banal in that he claims, like all of his predecessors, that Spinoza is an acosmist, who by reducing creatures to God effectively de-actualises them. But his view is quite novel in that he claims this occurs through a dramatic generic difference between things and God. As far as I know, the *Freiheitsschrift* is the only place where Schelling so describes this "gulf" separating God and things in Spinoza. Such a view is quite favourable to Schelling's own quite novel attempt to reclaim the concept of "immanence" as a proximity to God increasing proportionally to the freedom of a created being. Thus, the most free beings are also the most "immanent" beings. On this view, for Schelling all created beings are "transcendent" in relation to Spinozan substance.

<sup>11</sup> *FS*, p. 28/*SW*, p. 358.

When speaking of divine eternity, Schelling unsurprisingly finds himself bound by the limitations of language and the necessity to term creation a sort of 'moment'. The 'yearning' that solicits the divine understanding does, as a 'yearning', imply a duration leading to some epochal emergence or break. That emergence doesn't properly occur in the rise of the divine understanding, but in the 'act' of creation that the divine understanding and this 'yearning' cooperatively produce. Together, the divine understanding and this yearning are a will of the understanding, which is the primary power giving shape to the dynamic, yet formless ground. This is God's existence in the created world, and as such the invention of successive temporality, time, constitutive of the natural world. To amplify this point: the divine understanding is synonymous with God's eternity. The divine understanding is the concept or image through which God grasps himself. That self-conception effectively produces itself in the created world—bringing God's existence into being. Duration or succession belongs to existence.

As presented, Schelling's notion of divine eternity appears to serve as a transcendental principle for temporal succession. The successive time of creation is itself dependent upon the creative power exercised through the divine understanding in concert with the yearning of the dark ground. This will of the understanding, as Schelling will call it, bears an eternity that causes and brings into being God's existence in creation. But although we might speak of the chronological *and* logical priority of the eternity of the divine understanding, God's existence in creation shall in turn 'moment' God's essence. To see this, we need only consider the different stages of creation.

The first stage of creation brings the natural world into existence. In this we include presumably the universe and earth, as well as plant and animal life, or, in brief, body: "The forces split up ... in this division are the material from which the body is subsequently configured. ... [Following which appears,] the vital bond which arises in division—thus from the depths of the natural ground, as the centre of forces—however, is the soul".<sup>12</sup> This soul appears in perhaps plant (as irritability) but certainly animal life (sensation, autonomous locomotion). The soul is the bond of two separate principles—the universal will and the self-will—

<sup>12</sup> *FS*, p. 31/*SW*, p. 362.

emerged from the opacity of the body. A veritable evolution appears in the animal kingdom developing to a soul in which this bond unites two principles equally independent of one another, whereas hitherto the universal will had constantly been dominant. The human soul possesses these two wills in equal power and opposition to one another.

The word 'evolution' is, to my mind, therefore not inappropriate in describing the development of created nature. Unlike Darwinian evolution, certainly, no external criterion determines the selection and continued genesis of creatures. Creation bears a truly internal teleological principle in the will of the understanding or universal will, as it directs the development of the bodied world to its end, the human being. Natural history is successive and asymmetrical. Given that the divine understanding directs this natural evolution through the will of the understanding's creative power in nature, eternity remains a transcendental principle in which natural history merely bears out the pre-conceived design of the divine understanding. Eternity is a principle of self-actualisation—the creation of an essence that is then mirrored in corporeal existence. Natural creation, by contrast, is an unfolding self-organisation, in which all development reflects the essence 'pre'-conceived within eternity.

I introduce the terms self-organisation and self-actualisation to emphasise the vital functions of time and eternity, respectively. By self-organisation I mean the teleological organisation of a being that unfolds in successive temporal existence. In self-organisation, we see the domination of a being by a rational principle, which in the case of God's *existence* is the divine understanding. Self-organisation is a becoming in time, but a becoming that is directed. By self-actualisation I understand the actualisation or creation of an essence, which occurs 'in' eternity and cannot be reduced to a temporal becoming. Self-actualisation is a radical non-anticipated happening. It is a spontaneous essence producing act in which arguably—in the case of God's existence—neither the divine understanding nor the dark ground is alone active, but in which the dark ground is certainly the principle of solicitation. The dark ground incites self-actualisation. Below I will show how these same functions of time and eternity, self-organisation and self-actualisation, appear in human being.

We may, however, pose some temporary conclusions concerning

the relation of time and eternity in God. First, the eternity of the divine understanding functions as a transcendental principle that shapes and gives order and direction to successive the temporality of natural creation. Second, this transcendental relation is consistent with the onto-theological tradition that precedes Schelling. Third, the succession of time in natural history is incomplete, as we have only reached the creation of human being and, as Schelling puts it, the "possibility of evil", or the opposition of the two wills. Nevertheless, the creation of human being is the teleological endpoint of natural history.

Human history overturns the happy teleological order of natural history. In natural history, the universal will had dominated the development of created beings. This development reaches its acme in the equi-position of the universal and self wills of the human being. Human freedom, is, however, *both* the selection *and* the affirmation of one of those two wills, *both* in temporal experience of human life *and* in the eternal event of self-actualisation. As we examine these different temporal modalities of human freedom, it will become apparent that successive, phenomenal human experience is primary in relation to the eternal event of self-actualisation. In his account of human freedom, Schelling observes at least three distinct moments. The first considers the *possibility* of good and evil, the second turns to the *actuality* of good and evil, and the third compares several different moral characters. Schelling's oblique treatment of the moral character of the convert will provide ground to reconceive the hitherto transcendental force of self-actualisation, and think the priority of temporality over eternity.

We have above briefly presented the possibility of human freedom, rehearsing the development of natural history in the creation of (human) bodies with souls possessing equipotent wills (the universal and self wills). In human being "there is the whole power of the dark principle and at the same time the whole strength of the light".<sup>13</sup> These two principles form the structure or the basis of the freedom of the human being for good or for evil—and this is for Schelling a fundamental insight of the *Freiheitsschrift*. It is not enough to conceive freedom as an exception from the strictures of the spatio-temporal, as a kind of spontaneity. The latter was Kant's insight, as Schelling notes.<sup>14</sup> Rather, we will see that

<sup>13</sup> *FS*, p. 32/*SW*, p. 363.

<sup>14</sup> *FS*, p. 21/*SW*, p. 351. Presumably Schelling is referring to the cosmological description of freedom in the "Third Antinomy" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

human freedom contains a strictly successively temporal component in the lives of different moral characters. But the positive concept of freedom comes, at least in Schelling's description, not from its temporal dimension, but from the will's capacity for good and for evil. This corresponds to the metaphysical conditions that are necessary for freedom to coexist by God's intellect, namely, that there is a part of God that is not God.<sup>15</sup>

The possibility of human freedom, however, is not wholly explained by the equiposition and the separability of these two wills, for this is a condition that does not *actually* obtain. Instead, Schelling merely describes this as the condition for human being; human being is not the separation of those wills, but their unification. "Selfhood as such is spirit [the identity of both principles], however it is at the same time raised from the creaturely into what is above the creaturely; it is will that beholds itself in complete freedom, being no longer an instrument of the productive universal will in nature, but rather above and outside of all nature".<sup>16</sup> The selfhood of the individual is necessary for its freedom, for its independence from the "universal will."<sup>17</sup> As we will see below, this selfhood is what precipitates the eternal event of self-actualisation. Selfhood has two basic choices (as well as several variations thereon); first, it "can strive to be as a particular will that which it only is through identity with the universal will" and this would be tantamount to the selection of the "good spirit"; or it "steps out from its being behind nature, in order as general will to make itself at once particular and creaturely, [and] strives to reverse the relation of the principles, to elevate

15 One of the consequences of this condition is *not*, as one might expect, that a being is more free insofar as they are separate from God—in other words, the closer they are to the "dark principle". This conclusion would seem to follow from the requirement that freedom demands a separate principle. Instead Schelling claims that a being is "more immanent" to God insofar as these two principles of the soul are separate from one another. "[O]nly what is free is in God to the extent that it is free, and what is not free is necessarily outside of God to the extent that it is not free" (FS, pp. 18-19/SW, p. 347). Schelling transforms the meaning of immanence to denote ontological proximity rather than spatial proximity and/or causal overdetermination.

16 FS, p. 33/SW, p. 364.

17 Note that by freedom Schelling here means independence, whereas at other points Schelling will describe human being's highest freedom as the affirmation of the universal will.

the ground over the cause" and this is evil.<sup>18</sup> To amplify, the good spirit describes the subordination of the particular will to the universal, whereas the evil spirit raises itself above the universal will to become the dominating principle.<sup>19</sup>

We have now described the possibility, or the structural account, of the freedom of the will. But for Schelling this is insignificant in relation to the eternal event of self-actualisation and the life of self-organised spirit. I mean to emphasise that freedom is *not* separate from its temporal modalities. Schelling must describe the metaphysical conditions of freedom. Yet the actuality of freedom is more important, insofar as it is the life of human being that is the way by which God is revealed, and this actuality occurs both in eternity and in the temporality of human experience.

The account of self-actualisation precedes Schelling's description of the different moral lives, and this would lead one to believe that self-actualisation is an event that occurs before human life. Schelling will deny that the word *before* would apply here, as we are speaking of an eternal event, yet it is quite evident from Schelling's language that he intends the eternal self-actualisation to precede human life, even if only logically. The actuality of evil occurs with the 'solicitation' of this equiposition of wills to break their stalemate.<sup>20</sup> As in emergence of the divine understanding, the dark ground incites self-actualisation. The equiposition of the wills must be broken. This does not mean that the will of the ground, which solicits this act of choosing, is the determining force. It also does not mean that equiposition of will represents a state of indeterminateness.

Instead Schelling invokes a "higher necessity", "an inner necessity springing from the essence of the acting individual itself".<sup>21</sup> It constitutes the "inner necessity" of the human being because it is what makes that person who he or she is. Despite these accents on necessity, Schelling perceives this necessity as perfectly identified with freedom. Thus, there

18 FS, p. 33/SW, p. 365; p. 34/SW, p. 365.

19 In fact, Schelling gestures towards at least four different moral characters, including the life of "religiosity", or that of the good spirit; that of the sinner, or of the evil spirit; that of someone exhibiting *akrasia*; and that of the convert.

20 FS, p. 41/SW, p. 374.

21 FS, p. 49/SW, p. 383.

is a strange kind of circularity in Schelling's account of this "inner necessity", not unlike the way that Fichte claims that the ego is its own act.<sup>22</sup> This analogy is particularly suggestive because this act "produces" consciousness.<sup>23</sup> Presumably, Schelling means by consciousness not merely the transcendental form of consciousness, but the moral character of the individual. This is what is at issue. The type of spirit that will eternally dominate the will: "as man acts here so has he acted from eternity and already in the beginning of creation".<sup>24</sup> Schelling embraces a notion of predestination in this limited conception, as opposed to the traditional notion by which the essence of man is the result of a 'groundless' decision of God. For Schelling, this 'decision' is the act of each individual.

As I said above, there is a strange circularity to this eternal act, not only insofar as it "is not to be thought as prior in time" and insofar as an act of self-actualisation is an act by the self which is effectively being produced, but also because this act of self-actualisation is a kind of 'second creation' that repeats the 'first creation'. By the 'first creation' Schelling understands the emergence of the will of the understanding from the yearning of the dark ground. The 'second creation' is the act by which the individual, according to an 'inner necessity', determines her essence. The act whereby the essence of a human being is produced repeats the act where by God and creation came into being. Even a fourth sense of this circularity appears when we consider Schelling's description of this eternal "act" as what "does not belong to time but rather to eternity; it also does not temporally precede life but goes through time (unhindered by it) as an act which is eternal by nature".<sup>25</sup> Self-actualisation "goes through time [*durch die Zeit*]". Despite the fact that Schelling explicitly states that self-actualisation does not 'belong' to time, eternity possesses some kind of relation to time. What can be said with certainty is that self-actualisation is an act of determination that is not over, but is continually being-determined; it is not a becoming-determined.<sup>26</sup> How it goes through time we shall see below.

22 *FS*, p. 50/*SW*, p. 385.

23 *FS*, p. 52/*SW*, p. 386.

24 *FS*, pp. 52-53/*SW*, p. 387.

25 *FS*, 51/*SW*, pp. 385-386. My emphasis.

26 Obviously, even the presentist language of "being-determined" is inadequate in speaking of eternity, as it is imbued with the sense of temporal succession.

Does this mean that in life the individual's moral character becomes, but not in eternity? Perhaps, if 'becoming' has been reduced to denoting simply the temporal modality at issue. The logical precedence of this eternal act to the moral life of the individual would suggest that the temporal modality is merely that—a modality, and therefore inessential in relation to the ontological event taking place. But that view is mistaken, although this only becomes clear when we look at moral life.

The first accounts of the self-organisation of moral life again reify the transcendental priority of eternal self-actualisation. "It is true in the strictest understanding that, given how man is in fact created, it is not he himself but rather the good or evil spirit in him that acts".<sup>27</sup> This is the reason why the moral character of the individual presents him as he has been from all eternity. The thoroughly determined moral character thus betrays a teleologically organised 'becoming', and in this regard parallels the teleological evolution of created nature.<sup>28</sup> "Because there is the highest harmony in creation, and nothing is as discrete and consecutive as we must portray it to be, but rather in what is earlier that which comes later is also already active".<sup>29</sup> No moment passes that is not already bound up with the destiny of creation. The teleological resonance in this passage is unmistakable.

Yet the case of the moral convert complicates this teleological account, and leads Schelling to some unpleasant, yet perhaps unavoidable conclusions. If in the good or evil individual, strictly speaking, the spirit acts, in both respects a teleological meaning is unquestionable. Yet Schelling curiously raises the question of the moral convert, who is moved from the life of evil to that of the good—by some sort of assistance.

But suppose now that human or divine assistance—(man

27 *FS*, p. 54/*SW*, p. 389.

28 It is for this reason that I again adopt the language of self-organisation to describe the moral life of the individual. By self-organisation, in addition to the temporal becoming in time, I think of the way that Kant speaks of a "self-organising" being in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790). "[T]he possibility of the parts ... must depend on their relation to the whole. ... the parts of the things combine into the unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form." I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), pp. 252-253 (§65).

29 *FS*, p. 52/*SW*, p. 387.

always requires some assistance)—may destine an individual to convert to the good, then, that he grants the good spirit this influence and does not positively shut himself off from it, lies likewise already in the initial action whereby he is this individual and no other. That is why in the man in which this transformation has not taken place but in which the good principle is also not completely extinguished, the inner voice of his own better nature, in terms of what he now is, never ceases to exhort him to such transformation, just as he first finds peace within his own inner realm through a real and decisive turnaround and, as if only now the initial idea had been satisfied, finds himself reconciled with his guardian spirit.<sup>30</sup>

Schelling's reference to "assistance" is beguiling: how, if an individual's spirit is what acts, can she be "assisted" in conversion? The account of the convert implies that the good spirit holds back in reserve until a moment when through a sort of "magical stroke," the conversion occurs.<sup>31</sup> The evil spirit is therefore active within the individual until, at an unspecified, ostensibly inexplicable moment, the individual *reconciles* with the good spirit. We also know from this passage that, at least when the evil spirit is in ascendance, the good spirit is normally "extinguished [*erstorben*]". Does Schelling mean the power of the universal will has died in this case? If so, whether this is the case for the self-will when the good spirit dominates is unclear.

The language of this passage corresponds to the human experience of conversion—the before and after of conversion—yet according to the concept of an eternal self-actualisation, this is impossible. How then are we to think this conversion within the space of eternal self-actualisation? It must be the case that the human essence is eternally in an active state of being-determined, not becoming-determined. But can being-determined sustain transformation? It cannot sustain indeterminacy or contingency,<sup>32</sup> and this requires us to answer this question negatively. One solution, however, is offered if we posit the temporal existence of the human being

30 *FS*, p. 54/*SW*, p. 389.

31 *FS*, p. 52/*SW*, p. 387. Schelling uses this expression, "magical stroke", to capture the spontaneity of the event of the self-actualisation, yet it seems that, in a different sense, it is equally applicable here.

32 *FS*, pp. 50-51/*SW*, p. 384-385.

to be a determining force of self-actualisation. Can the moral life of the individual in turn affect her *spirit*? This would not only be possible, but necessary, if human assistance intervened and precipitated conversion.<sup>33</sup>

In turn, such a function of moral life would explain why human life is, whatsoever, and it would coincide with the function that human freedom plays for divine revelation. For Schelling, the only way pantheism may be consistent with a concept of human freedom is if the latter is a crucial moment in the unfolding of God's revelation. To put this back into the context of divine creation, natural history expresses a teleology that is overcome by the *event* of self-actualisation of the finite individual. The freedom exemplified in human being is not merely the selection of the dominant will in self-actualisation, but also the affirmation of that will in the self-organised life of the individual. Similarly, God becomes what he is through his revelation in creation: "Being becomes aware of itself in becoming."<sup>34</sup> In other words, the ontological act of creation is not complete in its eternal modality and its temporal aspect is not reducible to a mere moment of the latter. Rather, we find that temporality equally *goes through* eternity.

But it is not enough to posit a symmetrical relation between eternity and temporality, such that the latter equally affects the former. We must go a step further and acknowledge the paradoxical purposivity of human history as the goal of divine revelation. In particular, we must inquire into the validity of creation as a purposive act and the meaning of creation to the degree that it is conceived as the means by which the divine revelation is complete. At present, we are poised to join commentators like Dale Snow and Michelle Kosch, who comprehend the *Freiheitsschrift* as an account of moral voluntarism or a theory of human character.<sup>35</sup> But to conclude, as I seek to, that temporality *precedes*

33 Divine assistance could mean as little as it does for Augustine, when he speaks of the help that we received when we turn our will to God. That is, it could mean simply that the will's free choice of the good, or God, is the assistance or help that the convert receives.

34 *FS*, p. 66/*SW*, p. 403.

35 D. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), p. 155ff. M. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling and Kierkegaard* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 88-89. In Snow's defence, her account is very rich and multifaceted, developing significantly the account of metaphysical pantheism in relation to what she shall call a "theory of character." Kosch, by contrast, seems genuinely flummoxed by the *Freiheitsschrift*.

eternity does not mean raising the accounts of moral life above the metaphysical speculations of the text, so as to ground the latter in something immediately and unproblematically coherent. Such accounts facilitate the appropriation of Schelling as a proto-existentialist thinker. Although such conceptual anticipations of existentialism exist, Schelling is profoundly *not* an ethical thinker.<sup>36</sup>

The speculative confusion of the conclusion of the *Freiheitsschrift* is not a mere problem of dressing his notion of “moral voluntarism” in mystical, onto-theological, pantheistic language. In recovering the primacy of moral life in relation to the eternal self-actualisation, Schelling has revealed the limitations of tidy, conceptual accounts of divine personality.<sup>37</sup> For this reason he will claim that God is life, not merely a system.<sup>38</sup> By this he means the following: God *is* a system in respect of the divine understanding, which is an idea of creation as it exists and unfolds. Divine understanding foresaw the evolution of natural history and the creation of human being. But divine understanding—God’s eternal essence—finds its condition in the ground, which is both the material of creation and what interrupts the teleological organisation of nature and human being. In respect of the ground, God is a life.

Yet Schelling allows the theological resonances of the *Freiheitsschrift* to distract from the orientation of his account. Whereas earlier passages sung of the “indivisible remainder” of the ground,

36 Schelling is to metaphysics as Spinoza is to ethics. Which is to say, the affective, experiential language of Schelling’s texts may lead us to the conclusion that he is concerned with ethics. Insofar as ethics or practical philosophy concerns freedom, this may be true. But Schelling thinks primarily in terms of metaphysical problems which happen to coincide with certain ethical problems. In particular, Schelling remains stubbornly focused on the meaning of finitude throughout his work. Whereas the non-experiential, quasi-technical language of Spinoza’s *Ethics* and the primacy of its metaphysics thereto, has had the horrible consequence of confusing scores of German readers (including Schelling) into believing Spinoza was a metaphysician, when in fact he was concerned with human flourishing.

37 Although this is not the place to develop this theme, the *Freiheitsschrift* conceives the limitations of reason in favour of the understanding, and this constitutes a fundamental reversal in the cognitive hierarchy that persisted throughout the *Identitätsphilosophie*. For example, in the ‘Presentation of My System of Philosophy’, Schelling begins by identifying reason with being and subordinating *Verstand* (‘Presentation of My System of Philosophy [1801]’, trans. M. Vater, *Philosophical Forum*, 32:4 [Winter 2001], pp. 339-371, at p. 349).

38 *FS*, p. 62/*SW*, p. 399.

Schelling broaches the questions of the purpose of creation and of the reason God permitted evil. Such questions necessarily lead to inadequate, impotent answers and self-destructive speculation. Thus, Schelling finally is drawn to speak of the radical separation of the *Nichtsein* of the ground from *Sein*, the reduction of evil to non-being.<sup>39</sup> This is the point at which Heidegger believes Schelling has fallen “back into the rigidified tradition of Western thought without creatively transforming it.”<sup>40</sup> Schelling has reinscribed the anarchic possibilities of human freedom back into the complete revelation of God. Ironically, when evil has been reduced to non-being, God loses the “life” which excepted Him from system.

In conclusion, on my view, the teleological trappings of Schelling’s account of creation demand resolution in the complete submission of God to the vicissitudes of human history. In other words, in order for this unique teleology to complete itself, it must empty itself wholly into human being and human freedom. Where a conclusion to divine revelation remains, human freedom is simply instrumentalised.

39 *FS*, p. 67/*SW*, p. 404.

40 Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, p. 161.