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## The Subversion of German Idealism in Schelling's Revival of Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin

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This essay aims to develop a systematic comparison between Augustine's and Schelling's conceptions of the origin of evil.<sup>1</sup> The main similarity in the

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<sup>1</sup> The question of the metaphysical or anthropological necessity of evil—beyond the possibility inherent in nature—continues to be a central and controversial point of reference in current research on the Freedom Essay. In his influential Schelling Lecture from 1936, Heidegger summarized Schelling's approach in the formula of a "metaphysics of evil" (*Metaphysik des Bösen*). Subsequently, in more recent research, Lore Hühn and Lisa Egloff in particular emphasize the inescapability of evil, which means that the intelligible deed as the main condition of human existence necessarily converges with the positing and realization of evil in every individual. As will be shown in this essay, it is indeed possible to highlight significant passages in the Freedom Essay that speak in favor of this reading. Cf. Lore Hühn, "Die intelligible Tat. Zu einer Gemeinsamkeit Schellings und Schopenhauers," in *Selbstbesinnung der philosophischen Moderne. Beiträge zur kritischen Hermeneutik ihrer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Christian Iber and Romano Poci (Cuxhaven: Traude Junghans, 1998), 55–94. In her own monograph, Lisa Egloff interprets evil as the "realization of human freedom," so that the decision in favor of evil is synonymous with the exercise of genuine human freedom. See Lisa Egloff, *Das Böse als Vollzug menschlicher Freiheit. Die Neuansichtung idealistischer Systemphilosophie in Schellings Freiheitsschrift* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016). Thomas Buchheim has argued in his critical debate with Heidegger in favor of taking seriously the "and" in Schelling's definition of real freedom as the "capacity for good and for evil [*Vermögen zum Guten und zum Bösen*]" (SW VII: 354) and of granting man the primordial freedom to do good in equal measure. Buchheim's interpretation has significant anthropological consequences: If God continues to grant humans the capacity for good, it can no longer be said that humans are completely subject to original sin. Thus, against Schelling's (supposedly) monolithic determination of freedom toward the "execution of evil," it can be asked whether freedom is not completely cancelled if man, in the positing of his being, must always and can only choose evil. Moreover, if every human being is

intentions of both thinkers lies in the fact that the late Augustine and the author of the Freedom Essay recognize the positivity of evil, which they seek to reconcile with the omnipotence, all-goodness, and personality of God. While Augustine considers true human freedom—understood as the free capacity to choose between good and evil—lost for all human beings subsequent to the fall of Adam, Schelling regards this same capacity as the eternal, transcendental, and in this sense, indestructible principle of human individuality. In this way, he seems to have mastered the Augustinian challenge in the Freedom Essay. Augustine’s position is generally challenging, even and especially for today’s readers, because he considers all humans to be evil after Adam’s fall into sin, so that there is no possibility that anyone can do good of their own accord.

Whereas according to Augustine, freedom is an endowment that God only conceded to Adam, at first glance, it looks as if Schelling rescues human freedom as an original self-beginning open to every individual.

In contrast to this favorable impression, I would like to show in this article that Schelling does not succeed, in the Freedom Essay, in leaving the doctrine of original sin behind him. I will argue that Schelling cannot get rid of Augustine’s dark shadow. I want to demonstrate that Augustine haunts Schelling’s vital and real concept of freedom (as a capacity for good and evil). This is especially true if one favors a strict interpretation of the intelligible deed. In this interpretation, man must choose evil in order to individuate himself—whereas, in a less rigid interpretation, it would be possible for each individual to decide once and for all to choose the good. The leading thesis of this article, therefore, is that the intelligible deed begins to hollow out human freedom introduced as self-determination when Schelling proclaims that “man apprehended himself from eternity in his individuality and selfishness, and all who are born are born with the dark principle of evil within” (SW VII: 388).<sup>2</sup>

The essay is divided into five sections. In the first section, a concise presentation of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin is given, wherein, in

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inevitably evil in his or her origin, this does not necessarily lead to a tragic theory of human freedom but could conversely result in a trivialization of evil, insofar as people differ only slightly from one another within their overarching inclination toward evil. See Thomas Buchheim, “Metaphysische Notwendigkeit des Bösen. Über eine Zweideutigkeit in Heideggers Auslegung der Freiheitsschrift,” in *Zeit und Freiheit. Schelling—Schopenhauer—Kierkegaard—Heidegger*, ed. Istvan Feher and Wilhelm G. Jacobs (Budapest: Keteft Bt, 1999), 183–192. In contrast to the predominant focus on evil, Markus Gabriel argues instead that Schelling was interested in rescuing free self-determination toward the good in the *Freedom Essay* and that he therefore primarily deals with Kant’s theory of action. See Markus Gabriel, “Schellings Theorie des Guten,” in *Freiheit nach Kant. Tradition, Rezeption, Transformation, Aktualität*, ed. Saša Josifović and Jörg Noller (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 236–250.

<sup>2</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY, 2006), 53.

addition to the third book of *On Free Choice of the Will (De libero arbitrio)*, a focus on the relevant texts concerning the doctrine of grace—advocated from 397 onwards—is warranted<sup>3</sup> Schelling’s theory of the intelligible deed can then be considered in the second section. Following from this, the third section discusses the hermeneutical problems regarding the explainability and lifeworld manifestation of original sin and the intelligible deed. Augustine and Schelling agree, it is illuminated, in their respect for the epistemic status of their respective theorems, to the effect that both theorems—original sin and the intelligible deed—cannot be fully understood in their nature insofar as each describes a phenomenon understood to *precede* intratemporal realization—of the existence of man as such (Augustine) and of the individual (Schelling)—as that realization’s very condition. In the fourth section, the philosophical core of these considerations is reached in raising the question of whether Schelling does not subtly legitimize the intelligible deed and the evil chosen in it as a means of the self-revelation of divinity. The latter consideration is undertaken within the framework of a systematic and structural comparison between the doctrine of original sin and the intelligible deed. The fifth and final section contains a brief summary of the results.

### Augustine’s Concept of Original Sin

Augustine defines original sin as a heredity transmitted through procreation and attached to the individual as a human being. Ontologically, Augustine underpins the notion of original sin with the theory of Traducianism, which can be characterized as Platonism with a biological dimension. According to this theory, all human beings share in the one soul substance of Adam, who forfeited free will and chose evil (turning away from God). In the third book

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<sup>3</sup> On the origin, conception, and criticism of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, see Kurt Flasch, *Logik des Schreckens Augustinus von Hippo: De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum I 2* (Mainz: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2012). On the development of Augustine’s thought from early Manichaeism to Christian Platonism and to the late doctrine of grace, see Johann Kreuzer, *Augustinus zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2013). With regard to the dogmatic dispute (a dispute in which the question of the relationship between divine grace and human free will plays a fundamental role) between Augustine, on the one hand, and the Celtic British theologian Pelagius (condemned as a heretic in 418) and his Italian successor Julian of Eclanum, on the other, see Andreas Urs Sommer, “Das Ende der antiken Anthropologie als Bewährungsfall kontextualistischer Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung: Julian von Eclanum und Augustin von Hippo,” in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 57, no. 1 (2005): 1–28. Pelagius accused Augustine of reviving his (Augustine’s) earlier Manichaeism with the doctrine of original sin—deeming Augustine to have erected the evil actualized by Adam’s fall to the status of an independent power. Moreover, according to Julian’s criticism, Augustine taught a moral fatalism: because Augustine denied man the ability to free himself from entanglement in evil through his own efforts of will, the individual was helplessly under the disposal of divine fate and in this powerlessness could only hope that God would have mercy on him.

of *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine writes “that the person who knowingly does not act righteously loses the knowledge of what is right; and the person loses the capacity to do good who did not want to act righteously when he was able to do so.”<sup>4</sup> By abusing his freedom, Adam has forgotten his capacity and knowledge of what it means to act virtuously and justly. Since all men sinned in Adam, they are all born with the negative characteristics of ignorance (*ignorantia*) and incapacity (*difficultas*), which they inherited from their forefather.

For Augustine, this also means that all subsequent human beings—unlike Adam, who was completely free at the beginning—cannot make an impartial choice between good and evil, but are predetermined to exist throughout their lives as separated from God—compelled by their sinful nature “to do not the good [they] want, but the evil [they] do not want is what [they] keep on doing.”<sup>5</sup> As a consequence of original sin, God acts justly in condemning all men; and he testifies to his mercy by redeeming some men. In his dispute with Julian of Eclanum, Augustine even goes so far as to suggest that innocent infants are included in this: damned because their suffering indicates guilt incurred before birth. This illustrates that from 397 onward, Augustine conceives of the will to evil, which continues to operate in desire (*concupiscentia*) and arrogance (*superbia*), as an inevitable state that is inherent in all human beings as a consequence of the Fall. In opposition to what Schelling propounds in the Freedom Essay—as will be shown shortly—from Augustine’s perspective, no individual can have an independent, free beginning. Because all human beings sinned in Adam, they collectively participate in his first guilt, through which the knowledge of the good was forfeited. Due to Adam’s abuse of freedom, human nature in Augustine’s view is incapable, at least at the beginning of individual life, of being permanently guided by a good, God-centered will.

In a reinforcement of the Pauline contrast between human law and divine grace, Augustine emphasizes that man cannot know who is condemned or redeemed because both punishment and reward are based on God’s infallible and inscrutable decree. God is so omnipotent and omniscient that man, entangled in deception as a result of the Fall, cannot even discover whether he himself is good or evil by scrutinizing his own maxims and actions. It is obvious that this not only prevents man from understanding God, but also excludes him from a deeper understanding of himself. We can thus fully

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 7:19.

endorse Andreas Urs Sommer's judgment that Augustine marked the end of ancient anthropology.<sup>6</sup>

### Schelling's Notion of the Intelligible Deed in the Freedom Essay

Schelling describes man as the free being who stands at the "summit where he has in himself the source of self-movement toward good or evil in equal portion" (SW VII: 373).<sup>7</sup> In man, self-will is transfigured into light; as spirit, he can (and must) redefine the order of the two wills—the particular will and the universal will—for himself. According to Schelling, the good is realized in the (nearly impossible) consent of the particular will to its subordinate position under the universal will, whereas the almost undeniable supremacy of the self-will (*Eigenwille*) over the general is classified as evil, which finds its life-worldly expression in the phenomena of selfishness and insatiable desire. It is therefore essential for man, as spirit, to bring the two wills into an arrangement within himself, which is tantamount to deciding between good and evil. The only question concerns when and how this choice is made.

To answer this question, Schelling combines Spinoza's and Kant's concepts of freedom in his notion of the intelligible deed: Free is a being that acts out of the necessity of its own nature (Spinoza's legacy) and determines itself in its own will (as Kant says). But true self-determination cannot take place in time, because everything in time is absolutely governed by cause-and-effect relationships. Moreover, freedom cannot be seen in the pure indifference between two options, since in that case the choice would be arbitrary and could not derive from one's own nature. If freedom is not located on the intra-temporal level, the self-determination of the individual must logically be based on a trans-temporal act through "which [the will] makes itself into something and is the ground of all ways of being" (SW VII: 384).<sup>8</sup> Referring to Kant's distinction between the thing in itself and appearance, Schelling argues that the intelligible deed is "unhampered" by time and therefore reaches to the "beginning of creation" (SW VII: 386).<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Augustine's prelapsarian scenario, Schelling's human being does not initially exist in an indifferent state and—at some point or after careful consideration—then choose good or evil. On the contrary, in transcendental self-decision man creates his own being and is in this sense *causu sui*. From this, and from Schelling's rejection of the liberty of indifference (*liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*), it follows that man did not originally have an actual choice

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<sup>6</sup> See Andreas Urs Sommer, "Das Ende der antiken Anthropologie," 1–3.

<sup>7</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 41.

<sup>8</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 51.

between good and evil that could have been carried out by means of rational deliberation. Rather, man has always already made a decision, without being able to remember the act of decision, which he himself *is* in his innermost being and from eternity.

Now that the basic characteristics of Augustine's doctrine of original sin and Schelling's concept of an intelligible deed have been presented, it is possible to examine why both thinkers emphasize the unrecognizability and inaccessibility of these fundamental acts, which reach back to the beginning of time.

### **The Unrecognizability of Original Sin and of the Intelligible Deed in Spatiotemporal Life**

For Augustine, original sin cannot enter human consciousness as a recognizable fact or in an empirical situation—for two main reasons: First, Adam's fall created man as a species who is devoted to his own desires and who absolutizes finitude. Therefore, as an individual, man cannot recall an act lying in the eternal past—an act which, as a constitutional condition of finite existence, precedes all possible knowledge. Second, Augustine argues from a theological perspective why a profound understanding of original sin must remain inaccessible to humankind. Referring to Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, Augustine intends to distinguish the divine and human wills as sharply as possible. For Augustine—as for Paul—any philosophical claim to rationally reconstruct the event and consequences of the Fall, or even to evaluate them substantively, represents a selfish presumption on the part of humanity, who, as finite, flawed creatures, believe they can judge their eternal and wise Creator. Here, too, Augustine draws inspiration from Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*. In the ninth chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans*, the apostle refers, *on the one hand*, to the absolute will of God regarding the seemingly unjust condemnation of most people and the almost inexplicable redemption of selected individuals. On the other hand, due to the creatureliness of humankind, Paul rejects as illegitimate and blasphemous any complaint addressed to God about the individual state of soul:

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" But who are you, a

human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory?<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to Augustine, Schelling argues far more phenomenologically to make visible the plausibility of the intelligible deed that manifests itself in the ethical life of an individual. Thus, Schelling not only points to the rare and mysterious moments that allow a human being to realize that “he had been what he is already from all eternity and had by no means become so first in time” (SW VII: 386).<sup>11</sup> Rather, for Schelling, the evidence of a time-pervading self-selection also manifests itself on a performative linguistic level when someone excuses themselves with the words “that’s just the way I am” (SW VII: 386)<sup>12</sup> in order to justify an ethically questionable action. Furthermore, to support the idea that consistency of attitude and action constitutes the essence of human beings, Schelling assumes that the inclination toward evil is already irresistibly evident in children—without them having been able to make a rational, conscious decision for evil in life:

How frequently does it occur that, from childhood on, from a time when, considered empirically, we can hardly attribute to him freedom and self-reflection, an individual shows a propensity [*Hang*] to evil from which it can be anticipated that he will bend neither to discipline nor to doctrine, and which consequently brings to ripeness the wicked fruit that we had foreseen in the earliest sprout [*Keim*]; and yet no one doubts his capacity to deliberate, and all are as convinced of this individual’s guilt as they could only ever be if each particular action had stood within his power. This general assessment of a propensity to evil as an act of freedom which, in accordance with its origin, is utterly unconscious and even irresistible points to an act and, thus, to a life before this life, except that it is not to be thought just as prior in time since that which is intelligible is altogether outside of time. (SW VII: 386)<sup>13</sup>

From a speculative and philosophical perspective, however, *the reference to conscience*, in which, according to Schelling, the good principle never completely

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<sup>10</sup> Rom. 9:15–23.

<sup>11</sup> F.W. J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 52.

extinguishes, *is to be taken seriously*. In the emergence of this “inner voice of his own better nature” (SW VII: 389),<sup>14</sup> the human being’s original decision toward evil becomes thematic negatively. In conscience, God calls man, who allowed the evil principle “to-act-within-himself [*das in-sich-handeln-Lassen*]” (SW VII: 389),<sup>15</sup> out of the universal will, to subordinate his particular will again. Thus, a trace of the initial choice is revealed in conscience, but now it is perceived and becomes transparent as an act that should not be.

### **Remarks on the Main Similarities and Differences in Augustine’s and Schelling’s Theories of Evil**

In this section I would first like to take up a key quotation from the Freedom Essay that will guide the further analysis. In his discussion with Leibniz and the tradition of theodicy,<sup>16</sup> Schelling comes to the radical conclusion: “Thus, in order that there be no evil, there would have to be no God himself” (SW VII: 403).<sup>17</sup> It should be recognized from the outset that Schelling incorporates numerous levels of mediation in order to avoid blaming God for the existence of evil. For example, Schelling repeatedly highlights that God alone lets the ground be active, whereby the associated stimulation of selfhood<sup>18</sup> merely represents the possibility of evil. The realization of evil, on the other hand, is only achieved through the reversal of the structure of universal and particular will. This structure is united in God. In the intelligible deed, it is converted on the part of man by using the universal will to serve the particular will. However, the quotation points to a deeper problem, which becomes visible when the logical structure of the sentence is inverted. If the restrictive negations are removed, the sentence reads: “In order for God to exist, there must therefore be evil.” Evil thus becomes the condition, not of His existence, but of God’s self-revelation in history and in man. This initially provocative thesis should be explored and substantiated in the following. To this end, the first step will

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<sup>14</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 54.

<sup>15</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> On the merits of Schelling’s Freedom Essay theodicy, which is able to reconcile man’s abuse of freedom with God’s omnipotence, and does not trivialize evil but rather transforms the Fall of Man from a mythical to a systematic-theoretical form, see Friedrich Hermanni, *Die letzte Entlastung. Vollendung und Scheitern des abendländischen Theodizeeprojektes in Schellings Philosophie* (Wien: Passagen, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> From an eschatological perspective, Schelling also understands the “arousal of the particular will” as a means for the will of love to find a contrast in whose suppression it can testify to itself. See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 47: “Yet the ground continues to be incessantly active in individuals as well and arouses individuality [*Eigenart*] and the particular will precisely so that the will of love may appear in contrast.” (SW VII: 381)

be to prove that Schelling sharpens the vital and real concept of freedom (as the capacity for good and evil) to the almost inevitable realization of evil:

The fear of life itself drives man out of the centrum into which he was created: for this centrum, as the purest essence of all willing, is for each particular will a consuming fire; in order to be able to live within it the man of all particularity must become extinct [*absterben*], which is why the attempt to step out of this center into the periphery is almost necessary in order to seek there some calm for his selfhood. Hence, the general necessity of sin and death as the actual extinction of particularity through which all human will must cross in order to be purified. Notwithstanding this general necessity, evil remains always an individual's own choice, the ground cannot make evil as such, and every creature falls due to its own guilt (SW VII: 381.).<sup>19</sup>

Schelling thus speaks of the “fear of life,” which—as a kind of human condition—expels self-will from the divine center and encourages the human spirit to take the place where God should be. In this way, man becomes an “inverted God” (SW VII: 381).<sup>20</sup> To put it bluntly: Man must sin in order to be able to exist at all, i.e., to enter into existence. The above passage poses the tragic dilemma that man had to choose evil, since he could live only in the “purest essence of all willing” (SW VII: 381)<sup>21</sup> if all of his particularity were to be extinguished and he were to therefore no longer exist. Nevertheless, it is not only because of the severability of the bond between the universal and the particular will, or because of the “propensity to evil” (SW VII: 386)<sup>22</sup> inherent in nature, that it is inescapable for man to divorce himself from God. In addition to the “fear of life,” two other reasons for the necessity of evil can be adduced in the *Freiheitschrift*, which are related to the revelation of God as a living being:

a) As a free being, God wants to reveal himself in another being that, as a “derived absoluteness” (SW VII: 346),<sup>23</sup> having its origin in his ground but at the same time as spirit, is equally free from the ground as well as from the

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<sup>19</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 47f. It is important to recognize the ambiguity in Schelling's expression “fear of life”: On the one hand, it refers to the fear for one's own life (the desire for existential self-preservation; in German: *um* das eigene Leben), which drives humans away from the divine center. On the other hand, it is also the fear of life in God (in German: *vor* dem Leben) that motivates man to rely on his own will. I would like to thank Christina Galego for this helpful comment and her thorough reading.

<sup>20</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 18.

universal will.<sup>24</sup> However, since Schelling combines the formal-idealistic and the real concept of freedom in such a way that man always seeks to constitute himself in his own original and fundamental will—and thus against God—being human as such coincides with the choice of evil, because otherwise man would not differ from God. If God can only reflect himself in a free being and therefore needs man for his revelation, but man is necessarily evil, then God also wants evil when he wants himself as a “creaturely God,” i.e., as man.

b) Even if we recoil from these drastic consequences, it can also be argued from another direction that the human life of error and deception, which corresponds to the decision for evil, is justified by Schelling in terms of the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*) and as an overarching necessity. This argument can be supported by Schelling’s statement that everything that exists can only reveal itself in its opposite, love only in hate and unity only in discord:

For, if God as spirit is the inseverable unity of both principles, and this same unity is only real in the spirit of man, then, if the principles were just as indissoluble in him as in God, man would not be distinguishable from God at all; he would disappear in God, and there would be no revelation and motility of love. For every essence can only reveal itself in its opposite, love only in hate, unity in conflict. Were there no severing of principles, unity could not prove its omnipotence; were there no discord, love could not become real [*wirklich*].<sup>25</sup> (SW VII: 373)

It therefore requires the extreme inversion of the relationship between the two wills in the direction of the human positing of evil for the eternal unity of God to become self-aware and realize itself in contrast to a human counter-unity. In order to verify this proposition, I would like to quote another significant passage from the Freedom Essay, in which Schelling vindicates the manifestation of sin by stating that only in its opposition and subsequent overcoming can the essence of God appear:

Incidentally, obvious sin does not fill us with regret, as does mere weakness or incapacity, but with fear and horror, a feeling that is only explicable on the basis that sin strives to break the word, touch the ground of creation, and profane the mystery. But this should also be revealed, for only in the opposition of sin is revealed the most inner bond of the dependence of things and the being of God which is, as it were, before all existence (not yet mitigated by it) and, for that reason,

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<sup>24</sup> On the important role of the ground in Schelling’s *Freedom Essay*, cf. especially Sean McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2012); Mark Thomas, *Freedom and Ground: A Study of Schelling’s Treatise on Freedom* (Albany: SUNY, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 41.

terrifying. For God himself cloaks this principle in creatures and covers it with love in so far as he makes it into the ground and, so to speak, the carrier of beings.<sup>26</sup> (SW VII: 391)

We can relate this to Schelling's eschatological vision at the conclusion of the *Freiheitschrift*, according to which the end of revelation is accompanied by "casting out evil from the good" (SW VII: 391).<sup>27</sup> and the "explanation of evil as complete unreality." (SW VII: 391).<sup>28</sup> Hence, love or goodness cannot simply be revealed in opposition to mere selfishness, but must contend with the full manifestation of evil, so that in the final outcome—as Schelling says with reference to 1 *Corinthians* 15:25—"he [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."<sup>29</sup> This leads to the assumption that the underlying evil in man had to come to the surface in order to be finally separated from the good. Only in the resurrection of Christ could death be finally overcome as "the last enemy to be destroyed."<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to Schelling, Augustine would never have gone so far as to legitimize original sin as a transitory stage on the way to divine self-revelation. It is also remarkable that Schelling thinks even more radically than Augustine insofar as, following the interpretation of the Freedom Essay presented here, there has never been the possibility that man could be good. If, in Schelling's case, the intelligible deed is fixed in the indispensable decision for evil, one that concerns man as a generic and individual being in equal measure, and if, at the same time, it is stressed that man, who exists within time, cannot again dispose of his transcendental freedom or revise the original decree, then the result at least seems strikingly similar: According to both authors, man is condemned to evil, whether God has consigned him to it because of an assumed original

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<sup>26</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 68.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Cor 15:26. Note the Pauline reference passage 1 Cor 15: 21–28: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.' For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." In the Freedom Essay, Schelling himself speaks of love—which is "Alles in Allem" (SW VII: 408)—as being even higher than the spirit, a reference to the *First Letter to the Corinthians*. On Schelling's philosophical concept of Christ, see Christian Danz, *Die philosophische Christologie F.W.J. Schellings* (Stuttgart Bad-Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1996).

sin (Augustine), or whether man himself must decide in favor of the inversion of the principles—an operation that Schelling identifies with evil—to distinguish himself from God and to be able to emerge as an individual. The extent to which Schelling borrows motifs from Augustine’s doctrine of original sin in the *Freiheitschrift*, and the way he intensifies these motifs in existential terms, can be demonstrated in particular by the following key passage:

Once evil had been generally aroused in creation by the reaction of the ground to revelation, man apprehended himself from eternity in his individuality and selfishness, and all who are born are born with the dark principle of evil within[,] even if this evil is raised to self-consciousness only through the emergence [*Eintreten*] of its opposite. As man is now, the good as light can be developed only from the dark principle through a divine transformation [*Transmutation*]. This original evil in man, which can be denied only by one who has come to know man in and outside himself only superficially, although wholly independent of freedom in relation to contemporary empirical life, is still in its origin his own act and for that reason alone original sin.<sup>31</sup> (SW VII: 388)

It is very telling that Schelling speaks of “original sin,” whereby he directly refers to the Augustinian coinage of this crucial term. Insofar as Schelling believes that man has always had to choose evil in order to constitute himself as an individual, he erases any prospect of an original good, which at least Adam as the first man could still have selected in Augustine’s conception. In Schelling’s view, therefore, evil is much more deeply inscribed in the human condition than in Augustine’s. With reference to the above quotation, some aspects can be highlighted that point to illuminating parallels between the two thinkers and at the same time illustrate how much Schelling transcends Augustine in his radicalism:

Similarity (a): Schelling and Augustine are in agreement in believing that every individual is born with a guilt that is inherent in the whole of humanity as such; all human beings receive the “dark principle” (SW VII: 388)<sup>32</sup> without any possibility of conscious rejection or free renunciation.

Similarity (b): Man cannot become good or act virtuously of his own free will. Whereas in Schelling’s *Freiheitschrift* and in *On Free Choice of the Will* [*De libero arbitrio*] man can at least autonomously ask God for help and admit his need for redemption, in late Augustine even the humble turning to God presupposes an act of divine care and grace (*gratia praeveniens et operans*).

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<sup>31</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 53.

<sup>32</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 53.

Difference (a): An important difference between the two authors can be seen in the fact that Schelling's original evil is not inherited by biological procreation, but is created anew by each individual through his or her own actions.<sup>33</sup> In this *a priori* self-will, the moral disposition is established once and for all, as it were, in order to then unfold in every single intra-temporal act.

Difference (b): Furthermore, it can generally be underscored that Augustine's thinking—especially in early works such as *On the Happy Life (De beata vita)*, *On Order (De ordine)*, and *On Christian Belief. True Religion (De vera religione)*—is influenced by Neoplatonism to a far greater extent than Schelling's Freedom Essay. This (neo-)Platonic influence has the effect of Augustine's proclaiming a dualism between the transcendent-eternal and the spatial-temporal-empirical world—and this applies to all phases of his work, finally culminating in *The City of God (De civitate Dei)*. This dualism in turn makes it easier for him to justify and maintain the ethical binary opposition of “good” vs. “evil,” in that the one reference element of good is assigned to the eternal or the divine sphere of transcendence, while evil, in contrast, only has an effect in the sensory world. In deviation from Augustine, it is characteristic of Schelling, especially in the *Freedom Essay*, that he does not divide “good” and “evil” into two realms—separated by a *chorism* and governed by two different temporal orders. Schelling thus breaks through Augustinian dualism. As was shown above, however, Schelling's conception of the capacity for freedom cannot simply be localized on the side of the axiological-ontological good—since man must almost inevitably choose evil (i.e., turning away from God) in order to individuate himself.

The fundamental ontological difference from Augustine can be seen in the fact that Schelling anchors the process of decision and individuation in the Freedom Essay in the center of a pantheistic-Spinozian system framework. For Schelling, all things remain in God, who has nature in himself, whereas for Augustine, God is conceived in a genuinely Christian sense as a transcendent creator who stands beyond the natural order. Last but not least, it is of considerable philosophical-historical significance that Schelling, alongside Gnostic tendencies, Pauline theology, and Spinoza's pantheism,<sup>34</sup> draws in particular on Jakob Böhme<sup>35</sup> as a source of inspiration. In incorporating

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<sup>33</sup> With regard to the question of whether each person performs the intelligible deed for herself and uniquely—which is affirmed in this paper— or whether, even for Schelling, each individual necessarily participates in a collective original fault, I thank Kyla Bruff for her astute and clarifying remarks.

<sup>34</sup> On the question of the compatibility of pantheism, freedom, and system in Schelling's Freedom Essay, see Bernard Freydtberg, *Schelling's Dialogical Freedom Essay: Provocative Philosophy Then and Now* (Albany: SUNY, 2008), 19–30.

<sup>35</sup> See Jacob Böhme, *Psychologia vera, oder Vierzig Fragen Von der Seelen, Ihrem Urstande, Essentz, Wesen, Natur und Eigenschaft, was sie von Ewigkeit in Ewigkeit sey* (1620), in Jacob Böhme,

Böhme's motifs, such as the "*Ungrund*," divine longing, the will that initially desires itself alone, and the overall concept of a becoming and suffering God into his system of freedom, Schelling moves even farther away from Augustine—who endows God with the classical attributes of immutability, omniscience, eternity, and omnipotence—from an ontological perspective.

## 5. Conclusion

The status of the intelligible deed in the Freedom Essay remains ambivalent and controversial. It cannot be identified with the Fall of Man exclusively in negativist terms, since the intelligible deed is valued positively by Schelling in at least three respects: Firstly, Schelling privileges the intelligible deed insofar as it coincides with the peak of human existence. It is the intelligible deed that enables freedom as the capacity for good and evil to become real in the first place; and it is with this conception of an initial, transcendental decision that Schelling overcomes the formal, idealistic concept of freedom. Secondly, Schelling solves Kant's third antinomy with the intelligible deed by pointing out how a true self-determination of man can arise uninfluenced by empirical circumstances and the causality of nature. Thirdly and finally, Schelling's central concern about the contradiction between freedom and necessity and the search for their true unity finds its solution in the figure of the intelligible deed. Schelling thereby approaches—as perhaps only Plato before him in book ten of the *Republic*—the deepest problem of philosophy: to shed light on the roots and origins of the individual self.

Schelling's subversive theory of the intelligible deed, on the other hand, disrupts the systematic framework of German idealism. In the Freedom Essay, Schelling vehemently rejects Augustine's doctrine of predestination because it leaves no room for human freedom. It is Schelling's declared aim to defend human freedom, whereas Augustine, at least in Schelling's perspective, delegates the decision for good or evil to an unexplainable divine decree. Since Kant and Fichte, the topic of human freedom has been incorporated into the fundamental principles of idealism and forms its philosophical center. Schelling explodes this center from within. For Schelling, human freedom can be saved only at the cost of the individual carrying out on himself what, in Augustine's view, resulted from a collective punishment of man by God: In this interpretation of the Freedom Essay, man has to condemn himself to evil and guilt in order to be able to exist at all. Schelling therefore does not emancipate himself from Augustine's doctrine of original sin in order to protect human freedom. Instead, he succumbs to the philosophical temptation

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*Facsimile reprint of the 1730 edition in eleven volumes*, ed. Will Erich Peuckert, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1960).

of an out-of-time self-determination to such an extent that only a God can save man (“*nur ein Gott kann uns noch retten*”). Building on this, we can fully agree with Lore Hühn that Schelling radicalizes the idealistic concept of freedom from within:

The intelligible deed is therefore a cipher whose sin-theological interpretation mainly states that the original exercise of freedom coincides with the culpable transgression of this freedom [Die intelligible Tat ist mithin eine Chiffre, deren sündentheologische Lesart hauptsächlich besagt, daß der ursprüngliche Vollzug der Freiheit mit der schuldhaften Verfehlung dieser Freiheit zusammenfällt].<sup>36</sup>

It can therefore be asked whether a moderate interpretation of the *Freiheitschrift* should be welcomed—even against Schelling’s own, sometimes harsh statements about the inevitability of sin or being evil. Following this rather neutral and conciliatory reading, man could choose the original good by his own power and will. From Augustine’s point of view, this position would have to be labelled as Pelagian. Admittedly, Schelling also denies that Cato, who is presented in the *Freiheitschrift* as a model of good character, acts out of free self-determination. This is because true goodness is brought about by a “divine magic,” which Schelling describes as the “immediate presence of what has Being in consciousness and cognition” (SW VII: 392).<sup>37</sup> Just as evil is based on the discord between the two principles, good consists in their complete accord. This unity cannot be created by man’s self-determination, for this would presuppose “that the two principles were not in themselves one; but how are they supposed to become one if they are not one” (SW VII: 391)?<sup>38</sup> Thus Schelling understands the bond that unites the two principles as “divine” (SW VII: 392).<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, the perfectly good man seems to have the greatest freedom and autonomy, being bound only by his “own law” and affirming what is necessary with his “spirit and heart” (SW VII: 391).<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it is revealing that Schelling describes this correspondence between the awareness of spiritual light and moral behavior as “religiosity according to the original meaning of the word” (SW VII: 391) and as “conscientiousness” (SW VII: 391).<sup>41</sup> Finally, when Schelling integrates the concept of faith, it becomes clear that the “severity of disposition” (SW VII: 393)<sup>42</sup> derives above all from

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<sup>36</sup> Hühn, “Die intelligible Tat. Zu einer Gemeinsamkeit Schellings und Schopenhauers,” 59.

<sup>37</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 56.

<sup>38</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 56.

<sup>39</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 56.

<sup>40</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 56.

<sup>42</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 57.

the relationship of the particular will of man to the divine light, which can only be formed and maintained by God.<sup>43</sup> Schelling sees the “original meaning” of faith as “trusting, having confidence, in the divine that excludes all choice” (SW VII: 393).<sup>44</sup> If faith is the basis of moral behavior, but faith only exists in the fact that man acts as “his God instructs him” (SW VII: 393),<sup>45</sup> then there seems to be no freedom or self-determination of man for the good. Yet man is not even free to permit the good spirit to be present in his consciousness. Schelling insists that even this opening or closing of oneself to divine help is already decided in that “initial action” (SW VII: 389)<sup>46</sup> through which a person is herself and no other. If, therefore, the intelligible deed of the individual does not already include an openness to the possible influence of divine grace, man will always have to be evil.

But the critique must then be directed at Schelling as to whether human freedom is not misconceived, does not cancel itself out, should it not be justified in any other way than as an original offense against God and as the guilt of self-affirmation. The dreadful implication would then be that man has always been entangled in a mysterious and unavailable self-positioning. He would be forced to lead a life of deception and sin if God did not exercise mercy.

All in all, it is difficult to see what has become of Schelling’s enthusiastic claim to honor freedom as the “beginning and end of philosophy.” With some provocative exaggeration, one could even claim that Schelling, despite all assertions to the contrary, subtly adopts the dualism of Gnosticism or Manichaeism. This dualism maintains that there is an evil creator and a good savior God: In the *Freedom Essay*, the “consuming fire” (SW VII: 391)<sup>47</sup> of God first drives man out of the center. Since human particular will cannot exist in God, man is constrained to turn to himself and to favor evil. God, as love, can thus retain his innocence in order to redeem man from his precarious situation. Paradoxically, the individual has been dragged into this painful situation by the ineluctable isolation from the universal will; an isolation that God himself desired as a self-revealing person. Thus, in an intensification of the doctrine of original sin, Schelling’s *Freedom Essay* holds that man is always born with corruption, while Augustine takes the less extreme position that the evil principle was not innate in man from the beginning of the human species.

At this point it becomes clear that a further, sharp criticism of Schelling could be developed on the basis of Augustine’s doctrine of grace: the very fact

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<sup>43</sup> On the theological embedding of the *Freedom Essay*, see John Laughland, *Schelling versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 58.

<sup>45</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 56.

that human beings believe that they can assign their own character to themselves in a free act—a position that Schelling obviously helps to philosophically consecrate in the Freedom Essay—is for Augustine an expression of the deepest, even unsurpassable human hubris. Even if, in line with the sin-theological reading of the Freedom Essay, Schelling should admit that the act of human self-creation is always tainted with guilt, for Augustine the problem lies one level deeper: namely, it is based on Schelling's pretension that man's essence and being could be formed independently of God, or—even worse—that this self-creation was also wanted by God. In the end, it could also be said that Augustine—as Pelagius and Julian pointed out—makes God an arbitrary ruler, while Schelling tends to use evil as a means of divine revelation.