

# SCHELLING ON EVIL

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## Abstract

*This paper might be considered an attempt to exhibit the original and unique aspects in Schelling's consideration of the problem of evil within the framework of post-Kantian and post-Enlightenment thought. Fulfilling such a task requires, first of all, an elaboration of the influences on Schelling and of his own motivations concerning the problem of evil, while considering the impacts of Freiheitsschrift on his own philosophy and on later thought; second, a rather long summary of Schelling's Freiheitsschrift, and third, a comparison of some of the ways in which Kant and Schelling had taken up the problem of evil. Doing so will provide us with the opportunity to take notice of Schelling's ambition to overcome the mentality which he finds himself in odds with as regards the problem of evil, and hence to emphasise better the original aspects in his thought; and such a task is believed to be fulfilled best through a consideration of Kant-with regard to a comparison on the problem of evil-who manifested thoughts both in compliance and in opposition with the Enlightenment.*

**Key words:** Schelling, the problem of evil, Kant, Freiheitsschrift, human nature, free will, freedom of choice

## (Schelling'de Kötülük Sorunu)

### Özet

*Bu yazı, Schelling'in, kötülük sorununu ele alış konusunda, daha çok Kant ve Aydınlanma sonrası düşünüş içerisindeki özgün ve biricik olduğu yönleri ortaya koyma denemesi olarak görülebilir. Böylesi bir denemenin gerçekleşmesi için, ilkin Schelling üzerindeki etkiler ve kötülük sorunu konusunda Schelling'in kendi motivasyonu-Freiheitsschrift adlı yapıtının hem kendi felsefesinin bütününe hem de sonraki düşünüşlere etkisini de göz önünde tutarak- ele alınacak; ikincileyin, Freiheitsschrift'in geniş bir özeti eşliğinde sorunu Schelling'in nasıl kavradığının görülmesine çalışılacak; son olarak da kötülük sorununu ele alış biçimlerindeki bazı yönler bakımından Schelling'in düşünceleri, Kant'ın düşünceleriyle karşılaştırılacaktır. Böylelikle, Aydınlanma düşüncesine hem uygun hem de aykırı sayılabilecek düşünceler üreten Kant'ın-kötülük sorunu hakkındaki bir karşılaştırma bağlamında-ele alınması yolu izlenerek, Schelling'in, yer yer kendisini bir hesaplaşma içinde bulduğu bir zihniyeti aşma atılımı da gözden kaçmamış olacak ve onun düşüncesindeki özgün unsurlar daha iyi vurgulanacaktır.*

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Schelling, kötülük sorunu, Kant, Freiheitsschrift, insan doğası, özgür istenc, seçim özgürlüğü

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It is possible to argue that Schelling is the only philosopher among the German Idealists, who had taken up the problem of evil seriously and thoroughly. Despite the fact that German Idealists had many in common with Kant, and that Schelling too was influenced by Kant concerning the problem of evil, influences on Schelling and his motivation to take up the problem of evil cannot be limited to those of Kant. Moreover, Schelling could be argued to be more self-consistent, as well as, to have considered the problem from a broader perspective, given his defence of the implications of his views on evil.

The steps to be taken within the framework of this essay are, first, to give an account of the influences on Schelling and his own motivations concerning the problem of evil while elaborating the impacts of *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*-in short, *Freiheitsschrift* [from now on, *FS*] (*Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*) on his own philosophy and on later thought; second, to provide a rather long summary of *FS* and, to conceive the problem of evil from Schelling's viewpoint; and third, to compare some of the ways in which Kant-the inspiring philosopher of German Idealism- and Schelling had taken up the problem of evil, in order to emphasise that Schelling had a more distinct and unique standpoint, as regards the given problem. It should also be stated here that Kant is chosen as a philosopher whose thoughts generally reconcile with those of the Enlightenment in spite of some divergences, in order to make room for Schelling's ambition to challenge the Enlightenment ideals, regarding the problem of evil.

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Schelling's *FS* is considered by some thinkers as "the most titanic work of German idealism"<sup>1</sup>. Schelling intended to tackle the problem of radical evil in this article, as well as to give an account of human freedom, and to set the philosophical grounds necessary to make room for freedom, especially against determinism, and/or fatalism. The first few pages might be considered a clue for pointing out that Schelling is engaged in arguing against Spinozism, a position which had been a target for philosophers in Germany for decades. But this should not be interpreted in a way that Schelling's fundamental motive was to reject all the implications of Spinoza's thought. His project was more of overcoming a confusion which came along with Spinoza's legacy, while allowing room for freedom.

In *FS*, Schelling takes up the issue of pantheism, concerned to refute the idea that it necessarily leads to fatalism, so negating human freedom. Erasing the distinction between nature and God puts Schelling into a closer connection with Spinoza. However, as Hedley suggests, Schelling has tried to overcome the Spinozean distinction between *natura naturans* (dynamic) and *natura naturata* (passive); due to his intention to locate the fatalism in Spinoza, or the Spinozean formulation of pantheism or monism<sup>2</sup>.

On Andrew Bowie's view, what *FS* takes as a central issue is "...a non-reductionist account of the relationship of thinking to being. Spinoza's

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<sup>1</sup> J. Laughland, *Schelling Versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics*, Ashgate, UK, 2007, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> D. Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and The Mirror of the Spirit*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2000, pp.79-80.

system [...] is seen as 'one sidedly realistic' (in the sense of 'materialist'), and as in need of completion by an 'ideal' aspect in which 'freedom reigns'..."<sup>3</sup>.

During the process of writing *FS*, Schelling was influenced by Franz Xaver von Baader and the writings of Jakob Böhme, too. In fact, *FS* contains explicit references to Baader's doctrine of evil, and to Böhme's schematic creation myths, and uses the term "theosophy" (Paola Mayer carries out a detailed analysis of Böhme's thought on Schelling's argument in the *FS*<sup>4</sup>).

When philosophy of religion is a perspective of consideration, we should not ignore Schelling's motivation to show the compatibility of an account of radical choice of moral character with a philosophical system along the lines mapped out in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in other words, "to pull off the reconciliation" which Kant could not do<sup>5</sup>.

The major themes in *FS* could be said to be the existence of evil and the emergence into reason. Schelling offers a solution to the first, an old theological cliché, shortly cut "evil makes arbitrary choice possible". But this will definitely lead us to consider a challenge, namely, that God Himself makes room for evil. A modern reader of Schelling, namely Harald Høffding, argues thus:

" [...] Schelling attempts to show that we are only justified in conceiving God as a personal being if we posit an original antithesis within the absolute, within the essence of the Deity,-a dark irrational ground which becomes purified and harmonised...in the course of the life-development of the Divine Being [...] All evil consists in a striving to return to the chaos out of which the order of Nature has proceeded."<sup>6</sup>

Schelling's *FS* might also be seen as the beginning of his criticism toward his friend, G.W.F. Hegel, and a milestone in his own philosophical stages-marking a transition from the stage of *Identity Philosophy* to a *Philosophy of the Ages of the World (Weltalter)*<sup>7</sup>. Bowie argues that, another motivation for Schelling in writing *FS* had been justifying his pantheistic position<sup>8</sup>.

It is possible to argue that evil should be seen as active, both in God and all other created by Him; however, in Mayer's view, we must bear in mind the following distinction: evil can not stray out of its place, but in

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<sup>3</sup> A. Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> P. Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 1999, pp. 197-209.

<sup>5</sup> M. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling and Kierkegaard*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2006, p. 91. However, according to Michelle Kosch, Schelling is unsuccessful in fulfilling this task, and, this causes problems in the interpretations of *FS* (see *ibid*).

<sup>6</sup> H.Høffding, *History of Modern Philosophy II*, trans. B.E. Meyer (2 vols.), London, 1900, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*, Routledge, London, 1993; A. Bowie, "Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2010. [URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/schelling/>]

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

human beings, it may-and perfectly does-exceed its role of basing self-hood<sup>9</sup>. These thoughts surely remind us of Kant's "radical evil", which had first been known to us in *Religion Within The Boundaries of Reason Alone*. Concerning radical evil, John W. Cooper says: "Either evil is unreal or God is its cause. Schelling's solution to this perennial problem is to view God's freedom as the possibility of evil and human freedom as responsible for the actuality of evil"<sup>10</sup>.

According to Courtine, developing further the idealist conception of freedom in Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, which he had considered as undeveloped, and, the wish to "...absent a cleaner break with the rationalist systems of Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz, and a distinctive theory of its human element" could also be counted as motivations for Schelling to write *FS*<sup>11</sup>.

Now, we will see the problem of evil within the summary of *FS*<sup>12</sup>. Schelling takes the start by stating the traditional view that system excludes individual freedom; but on the contrary it does have "a place in the universe"; and considers this as a significant problem to solve<sup>13</sup>. The solution to the problem requires some clarifications and rejections of some formulations, such as that of Spinoza<sup>14</sup>. The issues of pantheism and fatalism should be reconsidered<sup>15</sup>.

Subsequently, the pantheist and rationalist systems of Spinoza and Leibniz are taken up and debated, with regard to the new philosophical perspective of Schelling<sup>16</sup>. He goes on by considering German idealism versus French atheistic mechanism as well as Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*<sup>17</sup>. The exposition and evaluation of the philosophical legacy is continued with the claim that idealism had not displaced pantheism<sup>18</sup>.

The crucial arguments concerning freedom and the possibility of evil start at *FS*, 352: Schelling points out that the real conception of freedom lies in the possibility of good and evil<sup>19</sup>. This is followed by a critique of the abstract conception of God; and of his own *Naturphilosophie*<sup>20</sup>. The next step is an attempt to show the ground of God and light<sup>21</sup>.

Schelling's critique of immanence, and his consideration of how

<sup>9</sup> P. Mayer, *Jena Romanticism...*, 1999, pp. 198-199.

<sup>10</sup> J.W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers*, Baker Academic, USA, 2006, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> J.-F. Courtine, "Schelling", *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, Simon Critchley, William Ralph Schroeder (editors), Blackwell, Wiley, 1999, pp. 86-87.

<sup>12</sup> The numbers given are shown in the Gutmann translation in the *margins*, and will be used in this paper as well. See F.W.J. von Schelling, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, 1809, (*Of Human Freedom*), translation with critical introduction and notes by James Gutmann, Open Court, Chicago, 1936 (*FS*, in the text and footnotes).

<sup>13</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *FS*, 336-338.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 338-343.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 343-348.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 348.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 349-352.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 352-355.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 356-357.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 357-358.

Baader conceives the problem of evil make us think that ethics and/or freedom is not the only framework within which the problem of evil will be considered<sup>22</sup>. This part of *FS* is also where Schelling expresses his objection to evil having a subjective meaning, as well as to an excessive form of philanthropism:

“If one assumes, however, that sensibility or the passive attitude toward external impressions produces evil actions with a sort of necessity, then the human being himself would have to be passive in them (viz. evil actions),-i.e. evil would have no meaning with respect to the person, that is, subjectively-and since what follows from a natural determination also cannot be evil, (evil) would have no meaning at all”<sup>23</sup>.

One might also find out that Schelling is in an attempt to link his optimistic position (even on evil) to the rationalism of contemporary moral psychology, in particular, to the Kantian and post-Kantian idealist inclinations of linking freedom with reason<sup>24</sup>.

The discussion is carried on with an emphasis on the relation between God and the problem of evil with the following issues: 1. Evil is necessary for God’s revelation (this part also implies the actuality of evil)<sup>25</sup>; 2. The irrational element in organic beings; disjunction of light and darkness<sup>26</sup>; 3. Golden Age<sup>27</sup>; 4. Actuality of Evil in Man<sup>28</sup>.

Since the problem of evil is taken up with regard to the thesis that freedom lies in the possibility of good and evil both, the direction of the inquiry turns back on freedom: Schelling formulates a formal conception of freedom<sup>29</sup>. As he is a German Idealist, it would be misleading to think that Schelling ignored a consideration of how idealism defines/conceives freedom<sup>30</sup>. A typical German Idealist, such as Fichte, would consider human being as a being of action, more than a being of consciousness or reason. It seems that Schelling is-in a sense-still under the influence of Kant and Fichte, while he argues that man’s being consists of his own deeds:

“The human being’s essence is essentially *his own act*... In the original creation, the human being is an undecided being...only he can decide himself. But this decision cannot happen in time; it happens outside of all time and therefore together with the first creation (though as an act different from it)...The act through which his life in time is determined does not itself belong to time, but rather to eternity: nor does it precede life temporally, but goes

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 359-373.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 371-372.

<sup>24</sup> M. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason...*, 2006, p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *FS*, 373-376.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 376-377.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 379-380.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 381.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 382-383.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 383.

through time (untouched by it) as an act that is by nature eternal”<sup>31</sup>.

However, the absoluteness of God in his system and influences from his *Naturphilosophie* period makes him consider predestination, as well as freedom<sup>32</sup>.

Schelling goes on with stating the general possibility of evil and inversion of the place of selfhood<sup>33</sup>. After doing so, he takes up God’s freedom; and it is this very section in the essay that we are inclined to question whether God might be considered as the ground of evil<sup>34</sup>. After a short break with a consideration of Leibniz<sup>35</sup> on laws of nature<sup>36</sup>, Schelling continues with his remarks on God: 1. That God is not a system, but a life; finite life in man<sup>37</sup>, 2. That God brought forward order from chaos<sup>38</sup>, and, 3. That even history is incomprehensible without a concept of a humanly suffering God<sup>39</sup>. The third remark is again an invitation to further questioning: is this the purpose of the creation of human being? The final thesis put forward on evil by Schelling, is that it is a parody<sup>40</sup>.

After giving a rather long summary of Schelling’s conception of the problem of evil as well as the influences on his thought, it is a good idea to compare the perspectives of Schelling and Kant on evil as stated above. For instance, the comparison could be started by stating that the shared viewpoint between these two philosophers includes an analysis of the problem on moral grounds.

The major works in which Kant and Schelling had taken up the problem propose a rather surprising content, given the titles of their works. That is, Kant puts the emphasis more on the actions of the agent in an essay whose title suggests an inclination towards a philosophy of religion—where we are more likely to face problems like the existence of and/or the rationality to believe in a God (*Religion Within The Boundaries of Mere Reason*); whereas Schelling considers the problem of evil from a variety of perspectives, including metaphysical, theological, epistemological, and so on, in an inquiry whose title proposes an analysis of human freedom (*Of Human Freedom-or FS*). However, the emphases put on the various aspects and implications of the problem of evil vary.

What is worthy of talking about the first two chapters of Kant’s *Religion Within The Boundaries of Mere Reason*, from Erik Hanson’s perspective, is that Kant addresses this phenomenon in a way that had not been done by his Enlightenment predecessors: The failure of human moral agents to observe the moral law is symptomatic of a character or disposition

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 385-386.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 387-388.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 389-393.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 394-395.

<sup>35</sup> Leibniz is a philosopher whose views could not be underestimated concerning the problem of evil. Schelling takes his views into account in the *FS*, but they will not be extensively referred here, since this essay limits itself to Schelling’s considerations of the problem of evil.

<sup>36</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *FS*, 396.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 399.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 402.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 403.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 409-411.

(*Gesinnung*) that has been corrupted by an innate propensity to *evil*, which is to subordinate the moral law to self-conceit. Because this propensity corrupts an agent's character as a whole, and is the innate "source" of every other evil deed; therefore it may be considered "radical."<sup>41</sup> However, this propensity can be overcome through a single and unalterable "revolution" in the mode of thought<sup>42</sup>. Kant's account of radical evil demonstrates how evil can be a genuine moral alternative despite the fact that it is also an innate condition. Given the general optimism of the Enlightenment era, Kant's view can be considered revolutionary<sup>43</sup>.

Despite the fact that Kant's views on evil could be considered revolutionary-like Hanson claims, the views Kant shares with the Enlightenment thought as expressed in, say, his *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795) which also had big impacts upon German Idealism, direct us towards a universal goal for humankind where only will to the good makes sense; that is to say, the Kantian view-when seen from a broader perspective-seems to make room only for "one determination of the will", namely "...will to the good"<sup>44</sup>. Schelling too was aware of the vulnerability of the Kantian context with regard to the explanation of evil. On his view, one can try to give an explanation of evil in two ways regarding the Kantian context; but both are subject to failure: 1. By claiming that inclinations of sensations overcome the intellectual principle, 2. By asserting that the intellectual principle permits the impulses of sensation to precede itself. The former leads to saying that evil is pure passivity, while the latter, to saying that it is impossible to think of evil; and bearing these in mind, Schelling is right to ask "...why does [the intellectual principle] not exercise its power?"<sup>45</sup>

Compared to Kant, Schelling seems to be a better defender of the implications of his view-as Kosch rightly argues; when he formulates the "formal" essence of freedom as the "...independence of determination by anything outside oneself, coupled with determination by one's own essential character, where such character is defined by an arbitrary choice for good or evil"<sup>46</sup>. Another issue to take notice of is Schelling's presentation of evil: "...Evil is rebellion against one's place in the cosmic order. It is a striving up to make oneself, as particular creature, the centre of the universe-the 'insolence of wanting to be everything'"<sup>47</sup>.

The final remarks on Schelling suggest an emphasis on his uniqueness within the history of philosophy: Schelling is the one to change the account of transcendental spontaneity-a legacy of both Kant and Fichte-by adding a layer of indeterminacy in the constitution of moral character; moreover, he is the one who shows us that it is necessary to give up the claim of the totality of the order and/or rational determination in order to make room for evil; that is, evil requires the introduction of some degree of

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<sup>41</sup> E. Hanson, "Immanuel Kant: Radical Evil", in <http://www.iep.utm.edu/rad-evil> (ISSN: 2161-0002)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> M. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason...*, 2006, p. 92.

<sup>45</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *FS*, 372; Kosch, *ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> M. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason...*, 2006, p. 96.

<sup>47</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *FS*, 391.

chaos<sup>48</sup>.

However, even a commemoration of a thought of chaos is sufficient to be in conflict with the Enlightenment ideals of human being and of social order. So, Schelling could also be argued to be the unique philosopher among the German Idealists, who boldly questioned the popular generalisations and/or judgments of Enlightenment thought.

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<sup>48</sup> M. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason...*, 2006, pp. 102-103.