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Articoli/3

Being in centro

The Anthropology of Schelling's *Human Freedom*

Michael Vater

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Schelling presents the 1809 freedom essay as the *idealistic* flowering of a vision of system he always held. He is not disingenuous but somewhat perplexing in claiming that the system always was complete *in nuce*, even though not expounded completely. Tilliette captured the ambiguity nicely in designating Schelling's oeuvre «*une philosophie en devenir*»¹. This mid-career essay must be read backwards to the earliest essays republished with it – especially to their views of willing, freedom, and moral responsibility – and simultaneously forward to the late philosophy's analysis of God's freedom as freedom from being, even necessary being. I locate *Freedom's* fulcrum in the novel anthropology or affective psychology that Schelling brings to the philosophy of will. Material freedom, capacity for good or evil, is assessed by norms of psychological maturation, whether conscious or unconscious forces determine behavior. If 'moral necessity' or normativity is the lens for assessing agency, formal self-determination moves from the domain of deliberation to a pre- or unconscious option for good or evil, and one's character unfolds necessarily.

Introduction

The 1809 *Investigations* appeared in a collection of Schelling's earlier essays meant to announce his turn from a transcendental idealism aligned with realism or *Naturphilosophie* to an explicit idealism². Schelling remarks that this essay and its sole precursor, *Philosophy and Religion*, are conversational in tone although much of their contents might be rigorously argued, and that they

¹ Tilliette writes: «Le développement demeure la grande énigme, et la principal intérêt de la philosophie schellingienne... À condition que l'on enlève à l'image sa resonance pejorative, nous n'aurons pas de répugnance à récupérer l'enseigne de Protée» (X. Tilliette, *Schelling, une philosophie en devenir. I: le Système vivant 1794-1821*, Paris 1969, pp. 14-15).

² Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* I, 17, eds. C. Binkelmanm, T. Buchheim, T. Frisch, V. Müller-Lüneschloss, Stuttgart 2018, pp. 25-26/*Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters*, tr. P. Hayden-Roy, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler, New York 1987, pp. 217-18. The earlier essays had argued that transcendental idealism is oriented toward action and presupposes freedom, that freedom is absolute necessitation or self-determination, and that the absolute identity is best viewed as the end of action, not a state of consciousness abolished in a singular intuition.

merely signal the turn to idealism that subsequent studies will develop³. The essay's title, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters*, invites reflection on what Schelling's previous versions of *system* offered as the basis of philosophy and how the turn to the problem of freedom alters the program of objective idealism. The new direction replaces previous static accounts that made *absolute identity* or *subject-objectivity* their principle with an emergent ontology of willing [*Wollen*] modeled on the psychodynamics of human reality. Systematic philosophy now takes psychological development, not mathematics, as its paradigm; moral, not logical necessity governs the journey from nature to humanity to personality – or from *yearning* to *willing* and *love*. The shift alters Schelling's previous conversations with Spinoza and Kant that were focused on physics and epistemic questions but underplayed the thinkers' concerns with life-guiding activity or liberation from negative emotions.

The freedom essay undertakes new conversations with old friends. Two exchanges with Spinoza, one on freedom and necessity⁴, the other on identity and system⁵, bookend an extended dialogue with Kant on the nature of willing or reason guided activity. Schelling ignores the logical apparatus of Kant's formal theories – prescriptivism, universality and uniformity – but embraces his candidate for material freedom, a timeless (hence unconditioned) option for good or evil that manifests as altruistic or egoistic character. He follows Kant's view that egoism is radical evil by making a self-enclosing tendency the antecedent condition for developing what in humankind become *consciousness* and *conscientiousness* [*Bewußtseyn, Gewissenhaftigkeit*]⁶ and in God becomes *love* or personality. This same self-will or claustrophobic self-reversion that presents as madness or evil in the psychic domain occurs in nature as the first dimension of matter, the expansive but other-repelling component of gravity. In dynamic language, this is the *will of the ground*; viewed statically, it is bare *being*, the necessary condition for the unfolding of the *existent* or *subject of being* (*das Seyende*) in all areas that matter to idealism or philosophy of spirit--physiology, psychology, morality, God and religion. In Schelling's view, it is the same (not just analogical) self-will that manifests in nature as darkness or materiality – from matter's impenetrability to the limited cycle of life, reproduction and death in organisms – that in agents or self-determining subjects presents as extreme states or symptoms, clinical and moral: health or contagion, sanity or derangement, good or evil. As an emergent (evolutionary) process, humanity makes itself into an ontological wager, a precarious spirit whose mastery of both elemental energies and conscious processes is logically open and without guarantee, a matter for fundamental or ontological choice. In God's timeless self-separation from the natural ground and journey into personality – a necessary identity of natural and spiritual powers – God leaves open a middle ground of contingency

³ *Ibid.*, p. 174 n./p. 279 n. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-123/pp. 219-231.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-179/pp. 276-284.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159/pp. 264-265. Subsequently cited as HKA I, 17, __/HF, __.

between natural necessity and the moral necessity of love that voluntarily binds autonomous beings into an intentional unity⁷. Humankind is that open space, the center – the personality it may or may not become.

This paper explores some of the freedom essay's views on metaphysical monism, willing and human freedom by looking to Schelling's earlier theories, but its central concern is the novel psychology he places at the core of the system of spirit that makes affect and impulse the core of the human psyche, something akin to kinetic energy and resistance in mechanistic physics, or to Spinoza's *conatus essendi*. Although earlier attempts to turn transcendental idealism into a system preserved the outline of Kant's critiques of cognitive, practical, and reflective judgment--while excising items like the thing-in-itself and the categorical imperative as speculative excess – the freedom essay recovers the pragmatic focus of Kant's late essays on morality, politics, religion and anthropology. Just as Schelling adapted the dynamical sections of Kant's metaphysical groundwork of nature – the view of planetary motions as a dynamic equilibrium of opposed forces, or Newtonian gravity – as the template for his *Naturphilosophie* 1797-1806, he now adapts the psychodynamics of *Religion within the Limits of Reason* – with egoism or universalism marking as the polar directions of the agent's moral compass, as the framework for his philosophy of freedom. If in 1800 he could epitomize the transcendental account of human capacities as «the Odyssey of spirit»⁸, he might well now describe the path from nature to freedom as an 'Odyssey of conscience'. Schelling's claim is that a theory of freedom which merely describes willing as choice or self-determination is empty («formal») if one looks away from humankind's individual and collective vocation, the decision between good and evil. Decision between good and evil is the measure of psychodynamic maturity (or response to «moral necessity») for the agent poised on the knife edge between instinctive self-concern and awareness of others. Choice between them sets one's moral character – a choice hidden from the ebb and flow of events in a dimension Schelling calls «eternity», but we might call the repressed or the *irrecoverable*. In relocating moral psychology to a hidden, preconscious domain, much the way Plato relocates it to the mythical domain⁹, Schelling restlessly breaches the Enlightenment wall between philosophy and religion, enlarges the repertory of human deeds to powers both demonic and divine, and

⁷That Schelling also paints this journey of onto-psychological maturation as a version of Christianity's core narrative of creation, fall, and redemption in the Word/world of God's making might seem *to us* a distraction. In the Eurocentric historicism of his time, to search for a concordance of all narratives and all sciences seemed a 'scientific', not a culinary, pursuit. But Christian doctrine is subjugated to the philosophical question of theodicy in 1809. Later, positive philosophy takes the theology of revelation as the *quod est demonstrandum* of philosophical inquiry. See *Lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation (1841/2), On the Distinction between Revelation and Mythology and the Comprehensibility of Revelation*, trs. J. Carew and M. Vater, in *The Schelling Reader*, eds. D. Whistler and B. Berger, London 2020, pp. 386-392.

⁸*Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* I, 9.1, eds. H. Korten and P. Ziche, Stuttgart 2005, p. 328/*System of Transcendental Idealism*, tr. P. Heath, Charlottesville 1978, p. 232. Hereafter cited as HKA I, 9, 1, ___ /STI__.

⁹Plato, *Republic*, 588b-598a, 617d-620c.

reasserts for his not-quite-postmodern time the 'divine comedy' of Christian revelation – or for us perhaps the tragicomedy proffered by psychoanalysis or Deleuze's deconstructions of difference, desire, and virtuality.

I will first consider the freedom essay's defense of Spinoza's monism, its revision of the logic of identity, and proposal for a philosophy of will (grounding). Then I turn to Schelling's investigation of human freedom, contrasting theories of its emergence from the strife of naturalistic self-absorption to the equilibrium of consciousness and conscientiousness to the impersonal phenomenology of willing offered in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. I then explore Schelling's vision of material freedom, the human power to retain or restrain the evolutionary order of being, both natural and psychic, to harness disordered basic energies into purpose. The basic pattern is Platonic in inspiration, the social-moral transformation of desire into social order and to love – or to interfere with orderly evolution (being-in-the-center) and instead move to the periphery of individualism. While it is certainly difficult to be a card-carrying Platonist after Darwin, Schelling's construction is still of interest because it maps a scheme of affective disorder-or-development onto the moral domain and adopts something of the grim tooth that today's religious thinkers, psychoanalysts, and anti-theorists exhibit for the grittier things of life. A look to the unpublished *Stuttgart Seminars* of 1810 which offer a finer array of affects than the *longing-willing-love* triad of the freedom essay leads me to reflect on the plausibility and value of this sort of story. Things imaged in the mirror of language might yet be useful, if not empirically true. To put norm and fact in the same bed is difficult.

1. First Conversation with Spinoza: Identity, Ground, and Willing

Schelling always looked to Spinoza and Kant as the two points that determined the orbit of his thought, though at difference times one or the other functioned as the solar peg or gravitational center, while its counterpart defined the imaginary point that made its course elliptical. The identity that was always Schelling's concern was not a static hybrid of realism and idealism, or some reflective compromise between theory and practice, but a dynamic identity of opposites whose dynamism connoted real opposition and a processive resolution of those oppositions. The *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* defend the theoretical reach of Spinoza's monism, but offer a critique that will become as perennial as it is programmatic: the unity of the system is not the problem, but its lifelessness, or needless sacrifice of agency and freedom to an argument that erringly equated logical *necessity* and *determinism*¹⁰. Schelling's initial discussion

¹⁰ Schelling extensively quotes Jacobi's conversation with Lessing, where the former gives a highly interpretive formulation of Spinoza's monism as a theory «permitting no egress from the infinite to the finite», a theory superior to prior «Kabbalistic» constructs linking creator and creation. See *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, I, 3, eds. H. Buchner, W. G. Jacobs, A. Pieper, Stuttgart 1982, pp. 83-84, 95-96/F. W. J. Schelling, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, tr. F. Marti, Lewisburg 1980,

in the freedom essay defends Spinoza's metaphysical monism, his equation of causality and necessity, but attempts to surpass his earlier arguments that mere construction from dynamic elements supplied life to a unitary system, and offers a reinterpretation of the principle of identity that captures procession or emergence rather than static unity. Schelling's overall view in 1809 is that a living system incorporating both a divine evolution towards personality and a contingent spiritualization of humankind will reconcile claims to freedom, necessity as self-determination, and «moral necessity» or normativity. The task requires one remake the philosophical lexicon in three respects: a) redefining *identity* from static identity to sufficient reason: the emergence of consequence from conditions or consequent from antecedent, b) changing the summum genus from *being* to *willing*: metaphysical voluntarism, and c) positing an ontological difference that distinguishes being (ontic reality) from existence as subject (ontology).

Schelling articulates this logic of emergence in what he bills as his «final verdict» on Spinoza's pantheism: his monism may be necessitarian or fatalistic, but it is predicated on a model of mechanistic physics, not on ontological grounds. Metaphysical monism leaves formal freedom at least possible; dependence does not eliminate freedom. Spinoza's mistake is not that things are in God, but that *besides* God, there are *things* in the abstract sense of sensible appearances. Neither God nor modes are conceived as the living realities that speculative physics discovers in nature – «ideas» or organic unities of ideal and real powers¹¹. The immanence of things in God does not define pantheism, nor even the insistence that there are no beings *praeter deum*. Schelling recalls a distinction he made in passing in 1801 between being or ground of being (*Seyn*) and existence or being a subject (*das Seyende*) to argue that spirit or self-responsible being must have captured that position (personhood) by an ascent from the former to the latter, an emergence from a passive state of being into subjecthood or agency. This spiritual definition of being as free agency applies equally to God and to the dependent beings of creation: *becoming*, not *being*, is the sole concept apt for a self-defining being, and this requires an original nature or ground in the agent from which she emerges. The creature must be rooted in a ground different from God, viz. nature, or «that which is in God, but *is not God himself*, i.e., in that which is the ground of his existence»¹².

pp. 177-178, 185-186. Schelling wrestles with Spinoza's refusal to justify his disjunction of the two attributes knowable to us or to explain the difference of matter and mind in the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* and subsequent works, arguing that «in and of itself, nothing is finite». See M. Vater, «*In and of itself, nothing is finite*»: Schelling's Nature (or So-called Identity) Philosophy, in *Kant, Fichte, and the Legacy of Transcendental Idealism*, eds. H. Kim and S. Hoeltzel, Lanham, MD 2015, pp. 191-210. In *Human Freedom*, Schelling reverts to the Kabbalistic alternative, portraying the emergence of human reality from nature and God's evolution as personal as part of a cosmic history. See P. Franks, *From World-Soul to Universal Organism: Maimon's Hypothesis and Schelling's Physicalisation of a Platonic-Kabbalistic Concept*, in *Schelling: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity*, ed. G. A. Bruno, Oxford 2020, pp. 71-92.

¹¹ HKA I, 17, p. 122/HE, p. 230.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130/pp. 236-238.

Schelling closes the first conversation with Spinoza by suggesting a reorientation of metaphysics to a volitional terrain, focused upon a preconscious energy seemingly akin to the blind, purposeless force that Schopenhauer will posit as the irrational counterpart of reason. But the «will» Schelling has in mind is not a titanic bundle of tormented energies but the quiescent *facies totius universi* on view in the refined Spinozism of the 1804 Würzburg lectures¹³. «Will is original being and to it alone all predicates of being apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation»¹⁴. The key concept here is *self-affirmation*; the being that births itself by stepping up from being to subjecthood is expressive. Spinoza, and in his footsteps Fichte, both advanced the axiomatic claim that being is powerful, expansive, or expressive--an intrinsically unlimited energy in need of the determination (negation) that limitation supplies.

2. Kantian Theories of Freedom, Formal and Material

The central argument of the *Philosophical Investigations of Human Freedom* elaborates a richer concept of freedom than the «formal freedom» that Kant and post-Kantian discussions of moral theory offered. If one eliminates the undetermined choice implicit in 'arbitrary choice' and the under-determined choice of teleological theories that look to results or conformity to 'natural law', only self-determination accounts for the unforced yet specific nature of an agent's choices. But apart from some vision of what one decides to be, self-determination is an empty formula. The power to make oneself *something* involves alterity: to determine oneself to be *this* as opposed to that, or in *this way* as opposed to that. Both states or modalities must be genuine possibilities within the reach of my bodily and psychological functions. And the choice involves a *decision*, a fork in lifepaths joined at one sole point; option for one puts the other beyond reach. Schelling calls such fundamental decision *material freedom*.

One can imagine that a person makes several materially important decisions in her life – choice of beliefs and vocation, or of partnered, solitary or communal lifestyle; these are ontic choices. Schelling follows Kant in thinking there is one and only one *ontological* exercise of material freedom, the choice between whether one is for-oneself (egoism) or for-others (universalism) – the will's decision between good and evil as a timeless choice of character or 'essence'. Late in his life, Kant had put forth his ideas on rational (or moral) religion in a pragmatic or unsystematic manner in *Religion within the Limits of Reason*; using a thin version of his classic theory of morality that contrasted self-concerned behavior (following private maxims) and moral conduct (obeying universal laws), he posited a core of «radical evil» in humankind to explain the persistent tendency to self-interest. The evil lies not in sensibility nor in a corruption of

¹³ Letter 54: *Spinoza to Schuller*, in Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, tr. S. Shirley, Indianapolis 1982, pp. 253-254.

¹⁴ HKA I, 17, p. 1232/HF, p. 231.

reason, but in a tendency to adopt self-interest rather than the general will as the spring of one's conduct¹⁵. More precisely, evil is the disordered choice of maxim over law, and evil's root is the capacity to order (rightly or wrongly) these conflicting springs of action. Schelling quietly adopts Kant's analysis, calling the bent toward egoism the «will of the ground» and law's countervailing insistence on universality «understanding», whose cognizant yet volitional quality he underscores by calling it *consciousness* and *conscientiousness*. He is wholly in accord with Kant in maintaining that what is at issue in *material freedom* is ordering (or failure to order) private and universal springs of conduct, or natural and intellectual powers (the will of the ground and understanding). For Kant, the disposition of these powers is the agent's moral capacity; for Schelling, it is the defining quality of spirit (*Geist*).

Schelling parses his exposition methodically, inquiring about the possibility of evil, then its actuality, its appearance in humankind, then in individual humans. Our specific interest centers on the last two, the anthropological dimension, and on the subjective or psychological cast he gives it, moving moral psychology closer to personal narrative or 'confession' than the spiritual director's handbook or clinician's diagnostic manual. Like contemporary theorists who move from conceptual discussions to pieces of cinema that concretely locate human possibilities (Cavell, Žižek, Deleuze), Schelling's early nineteenth century writings, many unpublished sketches, move toward concrete, even novelistic, representations of affects, attributing a power or motive force to them that is overlooked by objectifying concepts such as Spinoza's *conatus* or Kant's *maxim*. What is interesting in Schelling's treatment of affects here, the *Stuttgart Seminars*, *Clara* and drafts for *Ages of the World*, is the precognitive teleology with which he imbues affects, an ontological but noncognitive direction that locates the subject, or the subject-in-diaspora, as a search for inclusion, incorporation, or relative identity in interdependence. Schelling refocuses the romantic problematic of *fragment* or *system* as the subject's (whether human or divine) life-defining question in a play of affects that move from inchoate to explicit scenarios of personal (or interpersonal) integration. Schelling relocates the typical species-defining mark of reliance on rational process to an intermediate role on the path from the inchoate dreaming of self-absorption to love or other-identification. This is a distinctly modern psychology, marked by contingency, singularity, and a horizon of failure – for norms presume both adherence and failure as live possibilities.

3. Willing Objectified – the Transcendental Viewpoint

Schelling previously conducted a survey of the whole phenomenology of willing in the practical section of the 1800 *System of transcendental Idealism*;

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, AA I, 6, A28-30/B35-37, A38-44/B41-47.

the picture he produced there is comprehensive, but impersonal, a product of observation, analysis and theory, not introspection. We must examine this text if we are to appreciate the radical novelty of the 1809 *Investigations* which place desire in the center of being, or, as in the 1810 *Stuttgart Seminars*, describe the core human function as «self-existing spirit [*sua natura Seyende*], a self-igniting flame, but since as existing it is distinguished from being [*Seyn*], really nothing other than addiction [*Sucht*] to being»¹⁶. The unflattering picture of spirit as for-itself *deflated* to in-itself is a First-Step admission of failed agency, the anxiety-ridden confession of one for whom freedom is agonizing choice, not purposiveness. The descriptive, almost sociological objectivity of the earlier *System* is, by contrast, God's-eye or transcendental.

In the public's eye at least, Schelling was still allied with Fichte in 1800. From the standpoint of *Wissenschaftslehre*, the finitude of empirical perception allows intuition only of objective states, never of the infinite activity that produces them. Original activity and limitation are transcendental suppositions introduced on a theoretical level, in order to unpack the accomplished synthesis that experience delivers. Therefore, the philosopher who surveys the *System of Transcendental Idealism* lacks a direct intuition of reason's agency and can only undertake its imaginative reconstruction in a reflected or «intellectual» intuition. Schelling's narrative portrays infinite activity as a 'technical' or self-concretizing endeavor, a production, whose product is partially captured in a finite state or intuition and partially retroflected back to itself. As reflected, productive activity becomes a second intuition, a cognition or intuitant of the preceding intuition. Production ceaselessly concretizes activity, but always partially and within a limit that is merely ideal, hence surpassable and repeatable¹⁷. If we can imagine a transcendental 3-D printer that would materialize intangible energies, its program would dictate an accumulation of successive layers of product, each ontologically 'thin' but resulting in 'thicker' items like states, functions, and entities. Were the device self-designed, self-programed, and materially self-supplied, this digital demiurge would approximate Schelling's Absolute. What we take as higher-order intuitions, sensation, perceptions, and propositions access only produced, concretized acts of self-determination. Arranged as a series of episodes of production-intuition, the system displays freedom in its body (nature) and soul (spirit as second nature), but never in its pure energetic form of activity or self-determination.

In such a context – which is as objectivistic as our technical analogy suggests – *willing* cannot appear as the self-constitution of the subject, but only an environment of objective and intersubjective conditions for self-determination. The activity is hidden; the philosopher's sole access to it is through an act of «absolute abstraction» wherein intelligence turns away from objectivity and

¹⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* II, 8, ed. V. Müller-Lüneschloss, Stuttgart 2017, p. 156 (translation mine).

¹⁷ HKA I, 9, 1, pp. 88, 90-91/STI, pp. 48, 50.

acts upon itself¹⁸. Schelling can map each condition in its connection to its neighbors and argue that what other accounts of will and morality propose as sufficient conditions for right action are one-sided or incomplete, but the system's motor forever hides 'self-enacting freedom' in an array of physical, mental and interpersonal qualities, forces, and constraints which are but its products. The philosopher-archaeologist can reconstruct the ground-plan of the refractory of spirit from its geological traces but cannot conjure Hephaestus' fire. No metaphysics of will is possible, for activity is evanescent. Willing shows up only in traces as individual states of mind and social interaction, ossified into habits, folkways, commands, law, the drift of history and spectral remainders like institutions, technologies, sciences, and art. Schelling's «Odyssey of spirit» presents an itinerary, but its hero is missing.

Nonetheless, the *System's* phenomenology of willing is comprehensive. Before it becomes active in a practical sense, the I is already autonomous or self-constructing. In willing, it first becomes objective to itself; it locates the sum-total of its activities in an already determined objective environment, its *situation*, to which it makes further active contributions. Its active projection and realization of goals are the counterpart of its hitherto unconscious production and intuition, the foundation of the objective order¹⁹. Schelling here bridges Kant's abyss between theory and practice but relocates the tension to the I's own productive activity: self-determining yet situated, hidden from its constitutive activity as intelligence. A pre-established harmony between my willing and another will which is located in an external intelligence is needed to provide a voluntarist account of objectivity, a summons or *Aufforderung* that signifies the pressure of other wills upon mine. The limits that this other intelligence places upon mine become a necessary condition of my agency²⁰. Autonomy or self-determination morphs into obligation, the objective or theoretical form willing takes before it can engage. Obligation is objectified self-recognition, a universal will seemingly opposed to the agent's; it is the practical counterpart of the objective world collectively projected by the interaction of intelligences²¹. The objectivity of the common world and pressure of intelligences upon my will lead to a third restriction of activity, concretion into individuality, and the restriction of willing to the few remaining features of the world that remain un- or under-determined in advance of my action. My overall passivity in the face of nature and the social world is the condition of the limited agency I have, and even then, I am not able to refrain from completing the world in some way. Situated freedom means that freedom is limited before I can become conscious that I can and should act²². Schelling here deconstructs Fichtean promethean activism into the primal geometry of Leibniz's monadic metaphysics where one

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231/p. 155.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-236/pp. 156-159.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-238/pp. 160-161.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242/p. 164.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 246-247/pp. 168 -169.

acts only insofar as one reacts to a cloud external influences which are the work of other agents.

Schelling extends the paradox of limited agency situated in an 'open' but unconscious horizon of nonactivity that I have in fact authored to a second round of limitations or compromises. The object of willing at this level is the work of the imagination which interweaves ideal and real activities into a constellation of functions that appears to be something objective, a *drive*, but which appears internally as only as *feeling*, or awareness of limitation. Through its drive, the I takes on the character of a substance over time, an orderly change of states or accidents. But its sense of being a self is its perception of being-affected as a self²³. This concretion of the I's activity into an objective world-order means that agency is a disappearing item: «we act freely, and the world comes to exist independently of us»²⁴. Action has just as much reality as the world it acts upon; each is illusory. Drive therefore becomes objectified in a somatic nexus, and internal impulse and external demand compel willing merely as conditions for the appearance of self-consciousness²⁵. The psychic dimensions of self-interest, desire for happiness, deliberation in the context of a hedonic calculus, and arbitrary choice are added as further determinants of the appearance of will, but Schelling is clear that individuality, choice, and subjectivity are disappearing factors – or mere appearance – in the face of the unconscious or preconscious self-determination that transcendental freedom requires. The subject disappears into a single pixel on the screen backlit by the ontological self-determination the *System* constructs.

The major difference between the 1800 *System* and *Human Freedom* is the absence of the concrete subject in the former, and its vivid presence in the later. The wider view of objective idealism espoused in the intervening years convinced Schelling that the philosopher need not be restricted to the empiricism which is the result of Kant's theoretical philosophy nor to the abstract legalism of his practical philosophy. It would take us far afield to find a methodological rationalization for this wider view, but it certainly breaks free of the conceptual timidity of a skeptical 'modern' philosophy anchored in doubt and attempts a broad historical conversation with philosophies of nature and ethics, trading in the 'modern' Plato of *Theaetetus*' preoccupation with logic, belief, and justification for the mythic Plato of *Timaeus* and *Philebus*, with their striking mixture of metaphysics and mathematics. Schelling's lifelong practice was to alternate academic systematic construction with popular discussion. The former, which often directly appealed to a form of intuition even when set out in a quasi-deductive form, employed a form of Leibnizian explanation that Schelling called *Darstellung*. It offered a situated conceptual analysis sufficiently intense to produce insight, which carried a narrative rather than logical necessity. The later might take the form of essays, polemics, critical reviews, or even dialogues

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260/pp. 178-179.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264/p. 182.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272/pp. 187-188.

and novellas, but they essentially involved testing the axioms and arguments of philosophical alternatives against one another²⁶.

4. The Subject Who Wills – the Platonic-Kantian Account

We return to the central sections of the 1809 *Investigations* where, Schelling initiates his discussion of anthropology – and of the possibility of evil – by defining the human's mode of being as *spirit*: a willed union of her natural basis, the ground of particularity or self-will, and light or universal will. The possibility of evil lodges in the human's ontological makeup. By being spirit – willing or decisive being – humanity is free from both principles, able to choose whether the contractive will of the ground remains subject to universal will, light, or asserts itself against it as intentional self-will. The first is called being *in centro*, the latter flight to the periphery – or quiescence in equilibrium as opposed to anarchy²⁷. It is difficult to decipher these initial statements; one must return to the Platonized anthropology of *Bruno* where «ideas» were said to be the union of finite and infinite elements, the real 'things' as opposed to the sensible experience of «fallen» individuals, or to the *Naturphilosophie* of that era which argued that transparent objects are the genuine natural things, as opposed to opaque objects where light is retarded by gravity²⁸. If being spirit – contingent capacity to will or determine itself – means that humanity as the unity of matter and light can either make itself into universal will or go opaque and obscure the light it carries, then the capacity for good or evil or *freedom of decision* becomes the fundamental human power or basic mode of being, not just a transient ontic state. Humanity is essentially a question about what it is and what it shall be. Raised to «supernaturalness» by the divine process of self-creation/revelation, humanity can instead revert to nature; rather than be a single will that commands or rules its psychic forces, it can become a torrent of desires, longing, and craving. When the archaic life principle, irritability, steps out of the depths where it was the bond of opposite forces, an imaginary life of falsity, fantasy, and unrest ensues – comparable to body disease and mental disorder²⁹. Unlike the animal, where instinct provides an automatic union of powers that

²⁶ See J. Schmid, *Schelling's Method of Darstellung*, in «Studies in History and Philosophy of Science», LXIX, 2018, pp. 12-22.

²⁷ HKA I, 17, pp. 134-136/HF, pp. 242-243.

²⁸ *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* I, 11, eds. M. Dürner and I. Radrizanni, Stuttgart 2017, pp. 365-366/E. W. J. Schelling, *Bruno, or On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things*, tr. M. Vater, Albany, 1984, p. 143 – Cited hereafter as HKA I, 11, ___/B, ___. See also *Presentation of My System*, § 99, Cor. and Expl. and § 100. and Expl. in *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence* (1800-1802), eds. and trs. M. Vater and D. W. Wood, Albany 2012, p. 181.

²⁹ Schelling cites Franz Baader's speculations on the relationship between wildfire and organic heat, inflammation, and health – keeping fire and water energies in balance – and the possibility of transferring from being *in centro* O and being at the periphery O°. All these analogies turn on concepts of balance or equilibrium, or their opposites. See HKA I, 17, p. 137 n./HF, pp. 244-245 n.

functions as desire or blind craving, human spirit can choose whether to affirm or destroy the bond of forces that it is³⁰. Schelling's discussion of the actuality of evil pictures a cosmo-theological process that posits an evolution of a ground of selfhood in nature and its spiritual repetition in mythology and history, all as part of the story of the divine self-articulation. The method of *Darstellung* requires no new data to move from possibility to actuality, just intensified intuition, so it is not surprising to see Schelling bracket this account with repeated references to the human center-or-periphery choice. The divine drama is the backstory of humanity's existential situation.

Man is placed on the pinnacle where he has the source of self-movement toward good and evil equally within him; the bond of principles within him is not a necessary one but a free one. He stands at the junction; whatever he chooses, that will be his deed. But he cannot remain in indecision, because God must necessarily reveal himself and because in creation nothing whatsoever can remain ambiguous³¹.

In the cosmic perspective, the will of the ground is merely the foil for the unfolding of the divine will of love; only in the divine history is the reign of love secure. Our experience, however, is of the arousal of the ground, the dance of the irrational and accidental, the night sweats of contingency. Schelling imbues his story with the aura of tragedy, with its unrelenting contrast between the equanimity of the gods and implacable human suffering. Not only is the will of the ground a counterforce to the will of love, but it is force destructive of intelligence and freedom, a rage against the «supernatural». For the individual human, life in the center is both fiery and suffocating so that one flees from center to the periphery where one's life goes from idiosyncratic self-absorption to self-enclosed life and thence to death. «The fear of life itself drives man out of the center in which he was created, for this center is, as the purest essence of all will, a consuming fire for every particular will; man must... attempt to step out of it into the periphery in order to seek rest there for his selfhood»³².

A third segment of the discussion of the interrelation of freedom and evil combines elements of formal freedom – perennially figured by Schelling as self-determination – and choice of good or evil. The latter is a timeless choice of character, unconscious or preconscious when viewed from empirical consciousness, but made within the parameter of nature or «first creation». It is a determination that is not a negation or qualification of a generality, but the positing of a timeless essence. This essence will be realized progressively in time, hence according to necessity, but it is nonetheless the individual's free choice. «[P]recisely this inner necessity is itself freedom; man's essence is essentially *his own deed*; freedom and necessity are one being which appears as the one or the other only when viewed from different aspects; in itself it is freedom, formally

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142/p. 249.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143/p. 250.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 149/p. 256.

it is necessity»³³. The comment is one of Schelling's few commendations of a Fichtean idea after 1806. Prior to knowing, neither knowing nor not-knowing, it is basic positing or self-affirmation, willing that makes itself into the basis of all essence. The human individual's self-creation mirrors divine creation, but the contingency of one's choice reflects the 'crisis' quality of the move, the sharp edges between living in nature, acting in spirit, or dwelling in love.

Closing the discussion of freedom with a coda on the appearance of evil in humanity, Schelling moves to the territory of 'religion' or pneumatology where his argument hews close to St. Paul's that humans must choose what kind of spirit to be. Humanity's choice for good is the opening for divine love to be the bond of forces – to become perfect understanding; the opposite choice is the attempt to be that bond independently, to be ruled by «false imagination» and become the «inverted god»³⁴. True religiosity, claims Schelling, echoing comments made in 1804, is conscientiousness [*Gewissenhaftigkeit*], acting according to one's knowledge [*Wissen*] and not contradicting the light of knowledge in one's actions³⁵. It can appear as heroism, courage, decisive trust in the divine, or simple adherence to duty. In all cases, to do what is right is to do exactly what one must do – and cannot omit doing³⁶.

The decentered will of false imagination entails disorder; the inverted god lives in rebellion or a false independence. Yet the centered human will that joins itself to divine love seems to both be independent in some respects and in others to live subjected to the rule of a superior. Schelling describes divine love in terms he once used to define sexual union and biological dimorphism: «[T]here is love neither in indifference nor where opposites are combined which require combination in order to be, rather...this is the mystery of love, that it combines what could be by itself and yet is not and cannot be without the other»³⁷. Our bias may lead us to see a coequal 'romantic' relationship in this «cannot exist without the other», but it may be the codependence of a quite gendered relationship, as Alison Stone has suggested³⁸. As the centered human moves into personhood by sublimating longing into luminous consciousness and unites both into spirit, spirit itself looks to the initial unground raised above all, the same toward all but

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 152/p. 259.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157/pp. 262-263.

³⁵ *System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere* (1804), § 310 (Expl.), in *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's Sämtliche Werke* I, 6, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, Stuttgart 1856-61, pp. 485-489. Hereafter cited as SW I, 6____.

³⁶ HKA I, 17, pp. 158/HF, 265-266.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172/278. Cp. *System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere* (1804), §211. Schelling there explains biological dimorphism and sexual reproduction through God's connection of the real to the ideal: «True identity is seen only in exponential form, i.e., in such a unity that though each factor is for itself, yet it never is without the other. [...] This is the character of a divine identity, different from the finite where only such opposites can be combined as require each other in order have substantiality, but of such opposite factors where each is absolute, yet cannot exist without the other» (SW I, 6, p. 407).

³⁸ A. Stone, *Nature, Freedom, and Gender in Schelling*, in *Schelling's Philosophy: Nature, Freedom and Systematicity*, ed. G. A. Bruno, Oxford 2020, pp. 167-184.

unaffected by all. «It is beneficence, free from all, yet pervading all – in a word, it is love, which is all in all». Although Schelling uses masculine language to speak of God as a martial spirit who *subjugates* both the dark ground of nature and the will to clarity, he also speaks of human reason as the analogue of the divine *primum passivum*, divine wisdom which is traditionally figured as feminine³⁹.

5. «Moral Necessity» – Yearning, Willing, Loving

Before considering Schelling's second conversation with Spinoza that concludes *Human Freedom*, we should flesh out its new volitional psychology – blind desire that is controlled by knowing (consciousness and conscientiousness) which, in turn, becomes spirit under the control of divine love. The triadic psychology of desire, habituated conscience, and *eros* in pursuit of wisdom of course defines Platonic psychology, not the epistemically oriented triad of sensation, perception, and judgment that dominates modern philosophy. The 1810 *Stuttgart Seminars* amplify the scheme with details that show not just the influence of Fichte's psychology of feeling (*Gefühl*, receptivity arising from self-limitation) but the refined taxonomy of the emotions projected in both classical and romantic German literature⁴⁰. Schelling explains in more detailed manner how being is evolution, both in God and humankind, a move from unconscious nondifferentiation into conscious distinction and ordering of the dark and light powers. «Life in its entirety is properly speaking always only an intensified coming to consciousness [...]. There always remains a residual obscurity (nobody ever reaches both the highest good and most debased evil)»⁴¹. Creation consists in God ejecting the dark element in order to educate, transform, and transfigure it into something godlike. It is original matter or the primal unconscious, bare being; God's intent is to transform it into something kindred, the existent subject⁴². God is neither the self-complete essence that orthodox Christian doctrine presumes nor the colorless universal that pantheism imagines; rather what is most *individual* in God serves as basis for *universal will* in a developmental process that is morally necessitated. «If there is love in God, there is also wrath, and it is the wrath of God's own proper force that lends support, ground and permanence to love»⁴³.

Schelling's explanation of evil in the *Stuttgart Seminars* again returns to the theme of humankind lodging in the middle of things, poised between nature's nonbeing and God's absolute being. The human is said to be both in the middle

³⁹ HKA I, 17, pp. 172/HF, 278; cp. *Ibid.*, p. 178/p. 283.

⁴⁰ See D. Breazeale, *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre: Themes from Fichte's Early Philosophy*, Oxford 2013, p. 116 and n.

⁴¹ *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* II, 8, ed. V. Müller-Lüneschloss, Stuttgart 2017, p. 96/*Stuttgart Seminars* (1810), in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, tr. T. Pfau, Albany 1994, p. 207.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 100/pp. 208-209.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 106/p. 210.

of and above nature, the point of transition from darkness to light; at once the result of a long process of intensification or empowerment in nature, the human is the place where nature adapts to the spiritual. Hence, as the central being, the human is placed at the point of indifference⁴⁴. But the ontotheological process whereby God, in parting from nature, unites it with humanity is mirrored in reverse by a dark stage in human development, a self-subjugation to nature wherein species unity is sundered into a multiplicity of agents whose internal life is dominated by externality⁴⁵.

According to the *Seminars*, the internal life of the central being is a structure of three capacities whose activity situate it either in nature, as self-positing spirit, or dwelling in the divine unity; each function is expressed on three levels. The first capacity is *Gemüth*: habitual disposition or temperament, an inarticulate outreach to absent objects. Its first expression is *Sehnsucht*, the second *Schweremuth*, and the third *Gefühl* – yearning or nostalgia, melancholy, and feeling or sensitivity. In both yearning and nostalgia, desire is haunted by absence. Melancholy is the antithesis of spirit, a self-igniting fire whose ‘high’ involves literal substance-abuse: dependence on being. In feeling, the human is closer to the threshold of imaging, expressing and communicating, but its affection is primarily internal and so is mute⁴⁶. Feeling is the foundation of psychic life just as irritability is the foundations for the organisms more developed functions of sensitivity and reproduction.

The universal dimension of spirit, therefore, is desire – addiction to being. Its second capacity allows it to actualize desire as spirit in conscious desire or *willing*, the correlate of *Human Freedom’s* «conscientiousness and consciousness». At its primary level, willing is blind *appetite*, forceful and egoistical – unless it is informed and mastered by the third or highest power, *understanding*, the counterpart of *Freedom’s* ‘universal will’. Between the two is willing proper, an underdetermined will with a deviant power to erect nonbeing in place of being or create disordered situations like disease, error and evil⁴⁷. Although we commonly speak of spirit as the highest human capacity, it is portrayed here as middling and malleable capacity haunted by dire possibilities – not the dignified central being of the freedom essay.

The third and highest capacity of spirit makes it more of an entity than a function, or a point rather than an algorithm: *Seele*. Soul is science itself rather than knowing, and the good itself rather than right action. Yet it can be viewed functionally since it anchors the *continuum* of psychic functions – all of which can be figured as forms of desire. Soul is the principle of *eros* connected with its ultimate object, the good. The capacity, its object, and its end all merit moral esteem – the philosopher’s vision, according to Plato. But if soul does not rule and its functions are discontinuous, there arise either affective disorders in the order

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140/p. 225.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142/p. 226.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 156/p. 230.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158/p. 231.

of temperament, or cognitive disorders, nonsense, and miscommunication in the intellectual order, or in soul itself the ultimate malady, madness – the realization of the irrational⁴⁸. With the delineation of its operations as *temperament*, *conscious willing*, and *soul*, the *Seminars*' construction of spirit is complete. Schelling nonetheless extends the consideration of soul in an interrogative way, briefly raising here as he does extensively in *Clara*, the question of whether soul's life might continue after its separation from natural and conscious life⁴⁹. These explorations are conversational or tentative in nature; Schelling was interested in animal magnetism or hypnotic connection to departed souls as much as in religious ideas of personal survival. For us, however, what is interesting in Schelling's new volitional psychology are the normative ideas of order and disorder, connection and disconnection, health and pathology embedded in the discussion. Although such norms can be applied diagnostically from the outside by the scholar, clinician, or psychoanalyst, they essentially concern an internal organization of functions that is the responsibility of free individuals and/or supporting social environments. They are about dispositions or states of freedom vis-à-vis unfreedom, 'crisis'-management in the ontological sense of the term. What is most striking about Schelling's psychological scheme is its ancient-and-modern character: if all is in order in the house of mind, Schelling's account reads like Plato's three-part soul; if all is not in order and dynamic equilibrium gives way to displays that are pre-personal, unconscious, repetitive and non-purposive, the scheme points us toward psychoanalysis or forms of medical and social intervention. The life of freedom is what most defines the central being, or the fragility of that life.

6. Bringing Spinoza to Life: Ontology Subordinated to Axiology

Final sections of the Kantian discussion in the freedom essay make the case that the normative (Schelling says «morally necessary») character of the whole cosmic evolution – the taming of nature, the freeing of humankind, and the personalization of divine forces that were initially impersonal – yields a

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 162/pp. 233-234.

⁴⁹ *Clara*'s date of composition is disputed, though conventionally assigned to 1810. One feature arguing for that date is the position it assigns to soul at the pinnacle of the psychic heap, as do the *Stuttgart Seminars*. «Bliss is freedom and the rule of the soul» (SWI, 9, pp. 43-45, 177-78/ F. W. J. Schelling, *Clara, or On Nature's Connection to the Spirit World*, tr. F. Steinkamp, Albany 2002, pp. 33-34, 80). Yet the connection of the psychic powers presented in the dialogue is not the center-periphery, or top-down hierarchy of *Human Freedom* and the *Stuttgart Seminars*, but rotation or alternating patterns of connection between them, betokening something more like interdependence than Platonic order. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48/pp. 35-36. Only when domestic altercations between the claims of body and those of spirit have been quieted can the *Verklärung* of human capacities occur and the human become one thing – in God's hands. But until then, the rotation of powers here figured as the life of the psyche seems more like the rotation of powers in the undecided imagination of the archaic deity featured in *Ages of the World*. See F. W. J. Schelling, *Die Weltalter, Fragmente*, ed. M. Schröter, Munich 1966, pp. 36-38/*Ages of the World, Book I* (1811), tr. J. Lawrence, Albany 2019, pp. 95-97.

convincing theodicy. Evil is not due to an insoluble conflict of principles, nor to some privation tainting intrinsic goodness. That nature is ejected from godhead as the price of God's becoming personal, and that humans are left free to flee the center – the place of ontological connection – and degrade the enviroing nature into a jumble of discordant forces is a satisfactory outcome if judged from a cost-benefit or double-effect theoretical point of view⁵⁰. I am not sure Leibniz would find it optimal, but the metaphysical constraints on a theory of freedom are heavy: a person has agency on the basis of forces impersonal and personal, she is responsible for integrating those forces without an internal model, and what model she has is constructed from various social voices, personal and impersonal. Schelling's theodicy is psychologically realistic, based on careful anthropology – but provocative theology if divine and human personality are analogically related in a symmetrical way⁵¹.

Schelling returns to Spinoza and the territory of metaphysics in the essay's final pages. That Spinoza's metaphysics is pantheistic is not objectionable; its theory of being is comprehensive and unitary. What can be said about being apart from its manifestations in natural or mental phenomena is quite uncomplicated: it is one, expressive or powerful, its manifestations causally successive, governed by a necessity at once mechanistic and logical. All this Schelling accepts. His perennial complaint against Spinozism, however, is that it is a lifeless construct, a robotic march of inexplicable modes of attributes (material and mental) that we do not really comprehend. On a grand-theoretical scale, Schelling easily solves the problem. Personality, or the life of conscious agency involves uniting and controlling impersonal forces, physical and mental, so that they become powers of a living subject (*das Seyende*) instead of passive facts or found episodes of motion (*Seyn*). Personalization is the emergence of subjecthood from nature as the sum-total of bodily and mental events. Jacobi's assertion that God's *personality* is incomprehensible was a refusal not only to Spinozism but to philosophy as such – for there is nothing closer to us, or subject to so much concern or anxiety on our part, than the normative weight of becoming and remaining personal⁵². If our closest concern is to become personal, what better candidate for the item of ultimate concern than the process of personalizing or humanizing the upshot of impersonal, natural, unconscious forces. At the core of any metaphysics that would explain humans' conscious and conscientious abiding in historical values and traditions is the image of humanity as a fragile convergence of natural, psychological, and moral capacities – the suffering hero. Paraphrasing a passage from *Bruno*, Schelling claims, «Being becomes sensitive to itself only in becoming [...]. [I]n actualization through opposition there is

⁵⁰ HKA I, 17, pp. 164-167/HF, pp. 270-273.

⁵¹ Orthodox theology argues that natural reason can know God analogically, but the likeness is intelligible only on the human side. Only apophantic theology can be precise in its denial of the accuracy of the likeness. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 12, Q. 9, *Resp.*, ed. A. Pegis, New York 1945, pp. 109-110.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176/pp. 280-281.

necessarily a becoming. Without the concept of a humanly suffering God [...] all of history remains incomprehensible»⁵³.

Schelling calls this second discussion with Spinoza «dialectical». It opens on a logical note and clarifies the asymmetric logic of emergence – result from ground, *das Seyende* from *Seyn*, living unity from discord – that justifies using concepts seemingly so anthropocentric as *personality* and personalization in basic ontology. The emergent personalization that Schelling sees at the core of the cosmic process is the end phase of logically larger process that begins in undifferentiated identity or *indifference*, blossoms into conflicting tendencies of will (the will of the ground versus the will of love) that are brought to perfect personal identity in God. These conflicting wills are only contingently reconciled in humanity's fragile freedom which is the as yet undecided but always to-be-decided contest between the blind force of impulse and the merely ideal limitation imposed by human consciousness and conscientiousness, haunted by enduring ambiguity⁵⁴. Of course the divine will provides a paradigm for the evolution of freedom/ambiguity into the settled states of love, science, and the good, but the existential odyssey humankind must undergo as cosmic evolution pushes from bare unity into loving community is a journey of suffering, fear and discontent – for failing to discover the central position of humankind and abide there entails sickness, psychopathology, depression and madness for the individual agent.

Schelling's evolutionary ontology sweeps aside the static questions and answers of an old rationalism, and instead presents an axiological pattern to be enacted, an anthropogenesis in seed. One no longer asks whether God exists but whether a divinized humanity shall exist. Humankind assumes the work of co-creation in Schelling's epic prophecy, and the position of redeemer of nature:

[A]ll natural beings have mere being in the ground, or in the initial longing that has not yet achieved unity with the understanding, so that they are mere peripheral beings in relation to God. Only man is in God, and through this very being-in-God, he is capable of freedom. He alone is a central essence, and therefore should also remain in the center. In him all things are created, just as it only through man that God assumes nature and combines it with himself⁵⁵.

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⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 168/p. 274; cp. HKA I,11, p. 375/B, p. 152.

⁵⁴ HKA I, 17, pp. 170-172/HE, pp. 276-278.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174/p. 280.