'Schelling puzzles me for ever': Freedom, Evil, and Remorse in Coleridge's Critical Commentary on the *Freedom* Essay

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> Man is placed on that summit where he has in himself the source of self-movement toward good or evil in equal portions: the bond of principles in him is not a necessary but rather a free one. (OHF 41)[1]

> Schelling puzzles me for ever by his Man *made* up of two separate Principles—and yet *he* (as a tertium aliquid[)], *whose* not *who* these principles are, has the free power of separating them. (M IV 432)

IT IS NOT KNOWN PRECISELY WHEN COLERIDGE FIRST READ Schelling's *Freedom* essay and began to record his impressions of the work in a lengthy series of notes in the margins of his copy of the 1809 edition of Schelling's *Philosophical Writings*.[2] But by August 1812, he evidently knew the essay well enough to remark to Henry Crabb Robinson that Schelling 'appears greatest in his last work on Freiheit, tho' *his* is the philosophy of Jakob Böhme'.[3] By 1815, Coleridge's notes were extensive enough to be used as the basis for a manuscript essay criticising the treatment of the problem of evil in Edward Williams' Calvinist theodicy (see SWF I 396-41).[4] Strikingly, however, while this commentary eventually grew to 38 notes, dealing with a range of issues from the problems posed by Schelling's figurative terminology to the theological implications of his concept of the 'ground of existence', it makes no explicit mention of those questions which were later to become central to Coleridge's critical engagement with and ultimate rejection of Schelling's thought. In spite of the prominence of the problems of pantheism in the *Freedom* essay,[5] which came to inform Coleridge's attempts to develop what he saw as a non-pantheistic alternative to the theosophical systems of Schelling and Böhme, these early notes focus instead on this work's other major theme: the question of how the 'positive reality' of evil relates to (i) the nature of human freedom and (ii) the grounds of moral responsibility. Here I will give an account of Coleridge's main criticisms of Schelling's approach to this question.

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[1] F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* [1809], transl. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt, SUNY Press, 2006. Abbreviated as OHF throughout.

[2] Coleridge owned and extensively annotated a copy of Schelling's *Philosophische Schriften,* Landshut, 1809, vol. I. For Coleridge's notes on OHF, see M IV 421-45. For further brief observations on OHF, see CL IV 792, 883.

[3] *Selections from the Remains of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Edith J. Morley, Manchester University Press, 1932, 62. For Crabb Robinson's record of some of Coleridge's other remarks on Schelling and Böhme, see *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence* [1869], ed. Thomas Sadler, Cambridge University Press, 2010, I 195, 244, 249.

[4] Edward Williams, *An Essay on the Equity of Divine Government, and the Sovereignty of Divine Grace*, London: J. Burditt, 1809. See *Letters* IV 548-50 (10 Mar 1815) for details of Coleridge's reading and annotation of Williams' text.

[5] For an important recent study of these problems, see Richard Berkeley, *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, esp. 108-144, 179-86, which deal specifically with Coleridge's response to Schelling's *Freedom* essay.

In particular, I show that Coleridge's rejection of Schelling's account of free will and moral evil is motivated by both his endorsement of Kant's 'practical proof' of human freedom[6] and his own attempts to buttress further this Kantian mode of proof through an account of the 'essential [differ]ence, [betw]een [re]gret & [re]morse'[7] (M IV 434; cf. IV 652)—a difference Coleridge claims is central to moral self-awareness. Since Coleridge's view of will, freedom, and evil underwent significant development after 1815, especially in his *Opus Maximum* manuscripts, I confine my argument here primarily to the period covered by his *Freedom* essay marginalia and some related texts (c. 1808-15).[8]

Conveniently, Coleridge's principal philosophical concerns in reading the *Freedom* essay are neatly summarised in a long note on the back flyleaves of his copy of Schelling's *Philosophical Writings* (see M IV 443-5). Here he offers his overall assessment of the work, focusing in particular on what he sees as its major failings. The note is divided into two main paragraphs, laying out Coleridge's criticisms of Schelling's position before outlining his own counter-arguments. In the first, Coleridge (anticipating Schopenhauer) contends that Schelling not only fails to offer a plausible alternative to the theories of evil which he dismisses as inadequate, but also simply restates the solutions they propose in less readily comprehensible terms.[9] In the second paragraph, he gives his reasons for preferring the Kantian resolution of the problem of evil, implying that Schelling's attempt to develop a new account of the ontology of evil and its relation to human and Divine will has added nothing of note to this earlier approach, particularly with respect to the question of the origin of evil. I return to this second part of the note later to discuss further Coleridge's preference for Kant's theory of freedom and the concomitant conditions of moral action over the 'uncouth mysticism' (M IV 444) of Schelling's 'allegorizing' (M IV 427) account of the ontological relations between God, evil, and the 'mysterious *Ground* of Existence' (M IV 426; cf. OHF 32-3[10]). For the moment I focus on the first paragraph.

To quote the relevant passage in full:

> There are indeed many just and excellent Observations in Schelling['s] Phil. Unt. üb. das Wes. der Mensch. Fr. [sc. OHF] and yet even more

[6] Kant's proof is *practical* in the sense that it concerns human acts and their moral value, as opposed to speculative or purely theoretical claims regarding non-moral aspects of reality (e.g. the nature of physical laws, or our cognition of spatiotemporal relations). The major arguments concerning Kant's practical postulates and proofs are set out in ch. II, sections III-VII of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. See Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 236-54.

[7] Unless stated otherwise, extensive insertions of square brackets indicate the Bollingen editors' readings of heavily cropped words.

[8] For Coleridge's later and more sustained treatment of the topics of will, freedom, and the origin evil, see e.g. OM 5-24, 96-119, 166-77, 187-95, 215-22, 236-43 (c. 1819-22); AR 73-88, 265-91 (1825); CN V 5813-14 (1828). While these texts contain further details and development, I believe that Coleridge lays much of the groundwork for his 1820s views in the c. 1812-15 *Freedom* essay marginalia. See Murray J. Evans, *Sublime Coleridge*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 9-30 on Coleridge's theory of will in OM.

[9] See Schopenhauer, *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will* [1839], transl. Eric F. J. Payne, Cambridge University Press, 1999, 74–5.

[10] For a lucid exposition of Schelling's concept of the 'ground of existence' or *Ungrund*, see Berkeley, *Crisis*, 118-26.

> *over*meaning or unmeaning Quid pro Quos—ex. gratia, *Thing*-phrases, (such as Licht, Finsterness, Feuer, center, circumference, Ground, &c &c) which seem to involve the dilemma, that either they are mere similes, when that, which they are meant to illustrate has never been stated; or that they are *degrees* of a *Kind*, which Kind has not been defined. Hence Schelling seems to be *looking objectively* at one thing, and imagining himself *thinking* of another. And after all this mysticism, what is the result? Still the old Questions return, & I find none but the old answers.—This Ground to God's existence either lessens, or does not lessen, his Power—in the first, it is in effect a co-existent God, evil because the ground of all evil—in the second, it leaves us, as before. With that "*before*" *my* understanding is perfectly satisfied.—and, vehemently as Schelling condemns that Theory of Freedom, which makes it consist in the paramouncy of Reason over the Will, wherein does his own solution differ from this [i.e. Kant's position]—except in expressing with uncouth mysticism the very same notion?—For what can be meant by the individuality, or Ich-heit, becoming excentric—& usurping the circumference—if not this?—He himself plainly says that moral Evil arises not from Privation much less Negation, but from the same Constituents leaving their proper ordination—i.e. C. B. A. instead of A. B. C.—But wherein does this differ from the assertion, that the Freedom of Man consists in all the selfishness of his nature being subordinated to, and used as the instrument and materia of his Reason—i.e. of his sense of the universal will? (M IV 443-4)

Beginning with this passage, I will try to show that Coleridge actually offers little in the way of sustained argument to support his claim that the *Freedom* essay has not advanced significantly beyond Kant's account of moral evil and its relation to the conditions and possibility of human freedom.[11] Rather, he rejects Schelling's approach from the outset, due to a fundamental disagreement over the appropriate mode of proof or argumentative strategy to employ in an inquiry into the problem of evil. As we shall see, the details of Coleridge's alternative mode of proof can be filled in by turning to his extensive analysis of the distinction between regret and remorse in some 1808 lecture notes (LL I 63-4).

The difference in argumentative strategy which separates the respective positions of Schelling and Coleridge is grounded in their divergent approaches to two key problems:

1. The question of whether, in attempting to account for the relationship between human freedom and moral evil, there is any benefit in granting primacy to either. That is, should such an inquiry start with questions concerning the conditions required to account for the possibility human

[11] For Kant's theory of 'radical evil' and its relation to human freedom and moral action, see *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, 1998, esp. 45-73 (Part I).

freedom and its realisation in certain forms of action, and then take these conditions as the basis for any further claims concerning the nature and origins of moral evil? Or, should we begin with an attempt to account for the existence of moral evil (as this is reflected in everyday human action and experience), and then proceed to questions about how its reality may be reconciled with the possibility of human freedom, on the assumption that a coherent theory of evil is a prerequisite for an adequate account of the conditions under which human freedom and moral responsibility may be realised? In short, the problem of whether either freedom or evil must be taken as ontologically or conceptually prior to the other in any coherent account of the possibility or grounds of both and the nature of the relations between them. Call this the Priority Problem.[12]

2. The closely related question of whether the immediate, seemingly undeniable human experience of moral and physical evil presents insuperable difficulties for any system of theodicy. That is, should the philosophical and theological difficulties faced by attempts to provide an account of the origin and existence of such evil and its compatibility with God's 'pure goodness' (OHF 24) ultimately compel us to give up the project of theodicy as hopeless or fundamentally misconceived? Put another way, does a theory of evil which does not seek to deny outright the existence of God necessarily require a vindication of God's goodness? Or, is it possible to account for the reality of evil in human affairs, and the human capacity for moral evil, without having first to provide what Coleridge calls a 'solution ... of the origin of Evil compatible with the attributes of God' (M IV 445, which emphasises 'his *Goodness*')? Call this the Compatibility Problem.[13]

Schelling's approach to the Priority Problem can be summarised by Robert Brown's observation that since the *Freedom* essay 'gradually shifts its emphasis from the problem of freedom to the problem of evil, becoming an extended analysis of the ontological nature and source of evil', it 'might better have been entitled "An Essay on the Nature of Evil," in relation to which the problems of theodicy and human freedom are treated as the "correlative issues"'.[14] As Brown, Heidegger, and others interpret it, the *Freedom* essay is primarily concerned with Schelling's 'attempt to construct a metaphysics of evil'.[15] That Coleridge held a similar view is evident from his occasional reference to the *Freedom* essay as 'Schelling's "Treatise on Moral Evil"' (SWF I 397), and his repeated complaints about Schelling's failure to explain adequately how 'moral Evil arises' (M IV 444; cf. 432-7).

Schelling's stance toward the Priority Problem is neatly expressed by Dale Snow in her overview of his 'struggle to incorporate the reality of evil in his theory of being':

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[12] For Schelling's approach, see OHF 40-8, 50-8; for Coleridge's approach, see M IV 432-3, 443-5; cf. CN V 5813, OM 238-41.

[13] For Schelling's overview of this problem, see OHF 23-5 (see also 11-14); compare Coleridge's remarks at M IV 421, 423, 445.

[14] *The Later Philosophy of Schelling*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977, 117n.

[15] Dale Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1996, 150 (Snow paraphrases Heidegger here).

> The orthodox Christian asks how evil is possible, given God's goodness, thus taking the divine reality as primary. Schelling takes the human experience of the reality of evil as primary, and asks what sort of God could possibly coexist with our knowledge of evil. This is a distinctly post-idealistic stance which assumes the validity of the human experience first. The bridge between the worst in human beings and the best in God, and the struggle to do justice to both as comprehensible aspects of a larger whole, are the tasks of *Of Human Freedom*.[16]

For some commentators, this approach can be understood as a bold attempt to resurrect in a new form and set on more solid metaphysical foundations the theodical project that Kant, among others, condemned to philosophical moribundity.[17] Others interpret it as a theogony,[18] an account of the birth of God and the cosmos that is able to move beyond the impasses of traditional Christian theodicy by developing a radical new theory of the origins and emergence of God and moral evil which is able to reconcile the existence and actuality of both. Either way, it is evident that Schelling takes evil as the primary concern to be dealt with in his approach to the two problems outlined above. Before one can give a full and adequate account of human freedom and the determining grounds of moral action, one must first construct a metaphysics of evil, mapping out its relation to such grounds. Before one can develop a clear picture of the nature and attributes of God, as manifested or realised in the historical process of divine self-revelation, one first needs to make sense of the conditions underlying the emergence of evil and their relation to the being of God: that is, one must work out 'an extended analysis of the ontological nature and source of evil'.[19] This, at any rate, is how Coleridge's critical marginalia of the *Freedom* essay suggest he interpreted Schelling.

As many of his notes show, it is precisely this shift of emphasis from God and free will to the origin and ontological ground of evil that Coleridge identified as the primary source of Schelling's alleged errors. For, as we shall soon see, in addressing the problems raised by the *Freedom* essay, Coleridge draws on principles diametrically opposed to those of Schelling: he grants the Kantian account of human freedom and a broadly traditional Christian account of the 'Power' and '*Goodness*' of God (M IV 445) philosophical primacy over the ontological analysis of evil proposed by Schelling. An assessment of Coleridge's criticisms of the *Freedom* essay, then, needs carefully to consider his possible motives for rejecting Schelling's 'metaphysics of evil' as untenable at the outset, rather than entering into a direct engagement with its central

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[16] Snow, *Schelling*, 150.

[17] See Kant, *On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Attempts at Theodicy* (1791). For an overview of Kant's arguments against theodicy, see Love and Schmidt, OHF translator's introduction, xv-xix.

[18] See e.g. Joseph Lawrence, 'Schelling's Metaphysics of Evil' in *The New Schelling*, Wiltshire: Continuum, 2004: 167-189.

[19] Brown's phrase, *Later Philosophy of Schelling*, 117n.

claims.

Given that one of Schelling's principal aims was to develop a new, more robust kind of theodicy—a reading suggested by, among others, the *Freedom* essay's most recent English translators, Love and Schmidt[20]—it should be noted that Coleridge is generally hostile to such projects, particularly when they involve attempts to deny or explain away the apparent reality of evil.[21] However, while he would doubtless have recognised that Schelling himself also rejects traditional approaches to theodicy as fundamentally flawed, it is evident that Coleridge was dissatisfied with Schelling's proposed alternative account of the 'positive' reality of evil (OHF 23-4, 35). In part, this is simply because Coleridge is unwilling to endorse the sort of radical break with orthodox interpretations of Judaeo-Christian doctrines concerning God and Creation necessitated by the new theogony that Schelling partly adapted from Böhme.[22] But more importantly, it is also because he thinks that such an approach, by taking the construction of a metaphysics of evil as its principal concern, is required to adopt an argumentative strategy which fails to account adequately for what he considers the most significant element of any theory of evil and freedom: the fact that evil, in a moral rather than a purely physical sense, is not only something which has undeniable positive reality, but that such evil is something intuitively recognised by all human moral agents. In Coleridge's view, any theory that fails to account for this unique capacity to recognise moral evil as something realised in our own deeds through neglect of moral duty, or subordination of the demands of conscience to selfish personal desire, gains nothing from a new analysis of the ontological conditions under which evil emerges in its transition from potential to actual reality (in cosmic and human history). For if such a theory cannot explain the immediate human experience or apprehension of moral evil, its ontological sophistication comes to naught. The very thing which the theory is meant to account for—the actuality of moral evil in human life—disappears, with the corollary that the theory's capacity to account for the possibility of human freedom dissolves. This is because, on Coleridge's account, one cannot explain how free will could be possible if one does not also grant that moral evil must arise as the consequence of an uncompelled human choice, rather than, say, as a consequence of some aspect of God's being.[23]

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[20] See OHF, translators' introduction, 'Schelling's Treatise on Freedom and the Possiblity of Theodicy', esp. xix-xxvi.

[21] See e.g. CL IV 548-50, which equates the theodicy of 'Modern Calvinism' with 'Spinosism', quoting Spinoza's view of God as 'the Eternal Source of necessary Causes' with the implication that modern Calvinist metaphysics likewise denies the reality of human free will, and therefore the possibility of moral evil (in the absence of moral responsibility, choice, etc). Cf. esp. M III 505, for Coleridge's claim (with reference to Leibniz) that the 'Falsum Magnum [Great Error], on w[hi]ch all the Theodices have struck: & with them the first Principle of morality ... [is] the subordination of moral to physical Evill: in consequence of which the latter in reality constitutes the true evil of the former'. See M V 202 for related remarks on Spinoza's theory of evil as 'privation' or 'negation'.

[22] The most detailed study in English of Schelling's relation to Böhme is Brown, *Later Philosophy of Schelling*. For a shorter account, see OHF, 81 (translators' note on Schelling's use of theosophical texts) and Snow, *Schelling*, 147-8.

[23] Coleridge summarises his treatment of these problems at M IV 443-5. For more detailed analysis, see e.g. OM 236-43, CN V 5813-14. See Nicholas Reid, *Coleridge, Form and Symbol, Or the Ascertaining Vision*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, 137-150 for a lucid exposition of Coleridge's employment of the concepts of potentiality and actuality, and account of the origin of evil, in OM.

Coleridge takes Schelling's approach to the problem of evil to be vulnerable to such a failure to account for the human capacity to recognise moral evil intuitively. This view is evident in his frustrated reaction to the *Freedom* essay's overview of the three periods of human history in which evil 'break[s] out' and is gradually realised, as a 'necessary' part of the process of God's self-revelation in Creation (OHF 40-8).[24] Responding to the closing passages of Schelling's account of the 'general' or 'universal evil' (*allgemeinen Bösen*) 'which, if not exactly of the beginning, is first awoken in the original revelation of God by the reaction of the ground' and gradually 'develops into a general principle, then a natural propensity [*Hang*] of man to do evil' (OHF 47; cf. 39-46), Coleridge remarks:

> But where, after all, is the *Evil*, as contra-distinguished from Calamity, & Imperfec-tion? How does this solve the diversity, [the] *essential* [differ]ence, [betw]een [re]gret & [re]morse? [H]ow does [it] concur [ev]en with [th]e Idea [of] Freedom? [I] own, [I] am [dis]appointed: [and] that [I r]eject [this] system [& rea]lise, that [I r]emain [in] the same State, with the same harrying [?dim]ly & partially light-shotten Mists before [my] eyes, as when I re[a]d the same things [f]or the first time in Jacob Behmen! (M IV 434; cf. CL IV 883)[25]

Although this note does not directly criticise any specific claims asserted in the *Freedom* essay, Coleridge's later comments suggest that his target here is Schelling's account of the 'connection' and seemingly 'impossible' 'unification' of 'the general will with a particular will' in human beings in the figurative terms of 'centre' and 'periphery' (OHF 47-8). In part, Coleridge's dissatisfaction arises from his persistent doubts over whether Schelling's theory of 'the ground's being-active-for-itself' (*Für-sich-wirken*) (OHF 47; cf. 45) is able to 'explain [the] problem [of] Evil' (M IV 432) convincingly by accounting for the supposed causes and conditions of the gradual emergence of moral evil in history and its realisation in human affairs. However, his main concern in this passage is that this approach fails to do justice to the everyday human experience of evil as a positive reality that is necessarily 'contra-distinguished from Calamity & Imperfection' (M IV 434).[26]

What he means is that there is some intuitively apprehended and '*essential* difference' between the painful consequences of external circumstances or events which are beyond the control of any individual person, and those which have their cause in a self-willed act or decision of the individual themselves, considered as a freely acting moral agent whose choices are not compelled

[24] It should be noted, however, that Coleridge himself later began to grapple with the question of in what, if any, sense the existence of finite, creaturely wills (endowed with the capability of doing evil) are 'necessary' to the manifestation or revelation of divine being. See OM 238-43, CN V 5813. For further discussion, see Evans, *Sublime Coleridge*, 45-50.

[25] Coleridge's most intensive reading of Böhme probably dates from c. 1808, when he acquired the edition of Böhme's works that he subsequently annotated heavily (see M II 555), and so precedes his first encounters with OHF (c. 1810-12) by a few years.

[26] Coleridge returns to the problem of distinguishing moral from 'physical' evil at OM 238-41.

from without. In the former case, we experience only a sense of *regret*, whilst in the latter, the workings of conscience prompt *remorse*, the recognition of moral (as opposed to merely physical) evil and the sense of guilt at having ourselves been the direct or indirect cause of such evil. Coleridge's conception of this '*essential* difference' is set out in further detail in the notes to one of his 1808 lectures on poetry:

> That Regret and Remorse are feelings different in kind, and not merely as degrees and modifications of one and the same feeling, is a fact, which it only requires solitude & sincere quiet self-questioning to establish in the mind so, that no sophistry can reason it away, no fear of being deemed superstitious & unenlightened by philosophy can scare it, no ridicule scoff it, out of our consciences. Where ever we are distinctly conscious, that our Will has had no share direct or indirect in the production of a given event or circumstance, that is painful and calamitous to ourselves or others, we feel *Regret* … In cases not only independent of our will but out of ourselves, we find no difficulty in distinguishing Regret from Remorse—and what regards our own selves, yet which is not voluntary, the same distinction one would think rational[l]y to be made. (LL I 63)

Although Coleridge does not give a full account the other side of this distinction here, he would later point out that we feel *remorse* for 'an Evil which has its ground or origin in the Agent, and not in the compulsion of Circumstances', precisely because 'Circumstances are compulsory from the absence of power to resist or control them: and if this absence likewise be the effect of Circumstance (i.e. if it have been neither directly nor indirectly caused by the agent himself) the Evil derives from the Circumstances' (AR 266-7). Our actions can be evaluated as morally bad or evil if, and only if, the evil in question 'has its ground or origin in the Agent' (AR 266), particularly in those cases where the agent's will has some 'direct or indirect [share] in the production of a given event or circumstance, that is painful and calamitous to [them]selves or others' (LL I 63).[27] Remorse is prompted by the awareness that these 'painful and calamitous' actions were free from any morally mitigating 'compulsion of Circumstances', which latter would be cause only for regret.[28]

For Coleridge, then, the capacity for, and any feeling of, remorse necessarily derives from an individual's conscious recognition that although they were free to choose Good and act in accordance with the laws of conscience, they have instead chosen evil, wilfully subordinating the demands of these 'inner laws' to their own selfish desires. He considers such recognition to be a necessary condition for the reality of moral evil, as well as taking it to strengthen Kant's

[27] For further discussion of this point, particularly with reference to Coleridge's conception of sin, see Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Coleridge, the Bible, and Religion*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 17-20, 105.

[28] For an insightful extended analysis of this point, esp. as explored in Coleridge's play *Remorse* (1813), see Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge and German Philosophy*, London: Continuum, 2007, 51-2.

practical proof of freedom. Coleridge, like Kant, holds that our innate sense of moral duty and value can be said to have significance—and to be real and reliable—only insofar we can be deemed responsible for choosing, or deliberately failing, to act in accordance with such values or duties (i.e. the reality of this moral sense is what establishes the possibility of free will). It is our capacity to distinguish between feelings of regret and remorse, he contends, that gives us the surest indications of the reality of such a moral sense, and of the freedom that its existence necessarily entails:

> I have often remarked ... that this essential *Heterogeneity* of Regret and Remorse is of itself a sufficient and the best, *proof* of Free *Will*, and *Reason*: the co-existence of which in man we call *Conscience*, and on this rests the whole Super-structure of human Religion—God, Immortality, Guilt, Judgment, Redemption. Whether another & different Superstructure may be raised on the same foundation, or whether the same Edifice is susceptible of important alteration, is another question—But such is the Edifice at present—and this is its foundation.
>
> (M IV 651-2)

Consequently, Coleridge is reluctant to accept any approach to the problem of evil which begins with consideration of the 'ontological nature and source of evil',[29] before moving on to questions concerning its relation to, and realisation (as moral evil) through, the free actions of human agents. For him, the recognition of moral remorse is all we need.

Put another way, although Coleridge agrees with Schelling's emphasis on the need to 'take the human experience of the reality of evil as primary',[30] he does not think that the proof or validation of this reality requires the *Freedom* essay's grand attempts to construct a new metaphysics of evil. Rather, this goal can be achieved by a more modest theory of freedom. If we grant that the possibility of human freedom consists in the possibility of a an uncompelled choice between good and evil, with a concomitant capacity to recognise our own responsibility for any such choice and its moral consequences, then all that is required to confirm the reality of moral evil is the proof of the possibility of such a free choice. In short, if our (practical) metaphysics of freedom and the determining grounds of human action is sound, then the need to give an account of the source of evil which is supposedly met by a theodicy or ontology of evil simply falls away. As Coleridge puts it, formulating a Euthyphronic dilemma[31] that evidently favours both Kantian and Christian assumptions in his approach to freedom and evil:

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[29] Brown's phrase, *Later Philosophy of Schelling*, 117n.

[30] Snow's phrase, *Schelling*, 150. 'Primary' only in the sense of what is required—in the order of philosophical explanation—to account for the possibility of human knowledge or awareness (i.e. recognition through experience) of the reality of moral evil.

[31] By 'Euthyphronic', I indicate its similarity in form—and in content, as both concern 'the holy'—with Plato's classic dilemma, in the *Euthyphro* dialogue, which asks whether God loves the holy because it is holy, or something is holy because God loves it. My thanks to Peter Cheyne for drawing my attention to this parallel. For further discussion in relation to both Coleridge and Plato, see his *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy* (forthcoming, 2018).

> The whole Question of the origin of Evil resolves itself into one—Is the Holy Will good in & of itself or only relative, i.e. as a means, to Pleasure, Joy, Happiness, &c?—If the latter be the truth, no solution can be given of the origin of Evil compatible with the attributes of God—but (as in the problem of the Squaring of a Circle) we can demonstrate, that it is *impossible* to be solved. If the former, be true, as I more than believe, the Solution is easy and almost self-evident. Man cannot be a moral Being without having had the Choice of Good & Evil—he cannot *chuse* Good without having been able to choose Evil. (M IV 444)

Coleridge's view that Kant's practical proof resolves the most significant aspects of 'the whole Question of the origin of Evil' by accounting for the possibility of such a choice becomes further evident in his responses to Schelling's discussion of the Kantian account of 'predeterminism' and the distinction between phenomenal and noumenal, as well as 'inner' and 'outer', determining grounds of human action (OHF 49-50):

> all that is wanted is to prove the *possibility* of Free Will, or what is really the same, a Will. Now this Kant had unanswerably proved by showing the distinction between Phænomena and Noumena, by demonstrating that Time and Space were Laws of the former only (ἀι συνθεσεϊς ἀι πρώται τής αισθησέως Ο χρονος μην, η πρωτη, καθ' ολον συνθεσις τής αίσθησεως τής ἐσω, ο δε χωρος, τής ἐξο. [the first synthetic acts of sensibility, Time is the first general synthesis of the inner sense, while space is that of the outer sense]), and irrelative to the latter, to which Class the Will must belong. In all cases of Sense, the Reality proves the possibility, but in this instance (which must be unique if it be at all) the proof of the Possibility is only wanting to effect the establishment of the Reality. (M IV 435)

That Coleridge sees such a 'proof of the Possibility' of human freedom as bound up with the capacity to recognise moral evil intuitively, especially via the experience of 'Remor[se] and Self-accusation', is clear in his subsequent note concerning Schelling's assertion that the 'free is what acts only in accord with the laws of its own being and is determined by nothing else either in or outside itself' (OHF 50):

> And is not this a confirmation of the old Remark—that he, who would *understand* Freedom instead of knowi[ng] it by an act of Freedom (the myste[ry] in the mystery[)] must either flee to Deter[mi]nism a prio[ri] or ab extra or to Fatali[sm] or the Necessi[ty] ex esse[ntia] propri[a] [from its own nature]. In eithe[r] case ho[w] can w[e] explai[n] Remor[se] and Self-accusation other than as Delusions[,] the necessity of which does not preve[nt] the necessity of knowing them to be Delusions—&

> consequently, renews the civil war between the Reason and the unconquerable Feeling, which it is the whole Duty & Promise of Philosophy to reconcile? (M IV 436-7)

Coleridge's pointed contrast here between (a) attempting to '*understand* Freedom' and (b) 'knowing it by an act of Freedom' reflects his view of the relative merits of speculative or purely theoretical approaches to free will and practical proofs of human freedom through moral action (i.e. Kantian or Coleridgean Conscience). In Coleridge's view, insofar as the former kind overlook the practical, action-orientated aspects of human will, such theories not only fail to give an adequate explanation of how freedom could be possible (resulting instead in Schelling's 'Necessity ex essentia propria' ontology of good and evil principles, Calvinist 'Fatalism', or Spinozist 'Determinism a priori'[32])—they are also unable to show why we should regard the promptings of conscience 'other than as Delusions'.[33]

Coleridge, then, gives philosophical priority to practical proofs because he holds that our awareness of moral evil—as a 'positive' reality 'contra-distinguished from Calamity, & Imperfection' (M IV 434)—can never be the product of theoretical reflection or onto-theological speculation alone. Rather, the reality of this evil must be directly felt, or non-conceptually intuited, through the recognition of our own freely chosen failure to act in accordance with moral duty, a moment we are confronted with the realisation of 'what a direful and strange thing Remorse is!' (M IV 651): the painful awareness that 'having had the Choice of Good & Evil', our uncompelled decision was 'to choose Evil' (M IV 445). It is in this sense that Coleridge considers the experience of remorse to supplement, and evidently to surpass, Kant's practical postulates as 'itself a sufficient and the best, *proof* of Free *Will*, and *Reason*' (M IV 651). Coleridge's emphasis here on remorse as an essential aspect of the experience(s) of self-conscious moral agents indicates another of his main concerns about Schelling's methods: a slipping away from the personal responsibility of the will towards underlying and impersonal cosmic or natural forces.[34] If an analysis of moral evil shifts its focus away from human will, as the primary origin or cause of such evil, to Divine will or being and its relation to the cosmic emergence of evil as 'a general principle' (OHF 47), then it allows for the possibility that the 'Holy Will' is not 'good in & of itself' (M IV 445), since this seems to entail that Divine being has an ontological connection to the origins of evil. In Coleridge's view, if we accept such a Schellingian account of evil, then we not only fail to explain how freedom, remorse, and moral responsibility could be possible, but we are also compelled to concede that 'no solution can be given of the origin of Evil compatible with the attributes of God', especially 'his *Goodness*' (M IV 445). In concluding this

[32] On Coleridge and Schelling's respective views concerning the relation between determinism and pantheism, esp. in the context of Spinoza's philosophy, see Berkeley, *Crisis*, 111-5, 123-32.

[33] Coleridge's criticism of Schelling's 'Man *made* up of two separate Principles' (M IV 432) is prompted by similar concerns.

[34] On this point, see Berkeley, *Crisis*, 139-40.

essay, I will discuss in a little more detail why Coleridge thinks the philosophical priority of the proof of freedom (whether through Kantian conscience or Coleridgean remorse) not only renders Schelling's ontology of evil unnecessary, but is also able to avoid the explanatory difficulties involved in his analysis of the 'ontological nature and source of evil'.[35]

Coleridge's emphasis on the priority of a proof of the possibility of freedom to any account of the reality of good and evil in human moral experience is evident yet again in his response to Schelling's somewhat cryptic account of the 'transcendental act' whereby an individual's 'life is determined in time', although this act 'does not itself belong to time but rather to eternity' (OHF 53): 'Far better to have proved the *possibility* and to have left the mode untouched—The Reality is sufficiently proved by the Fact' (M IV 437). Again, Coleridge's remark is not especially helpful when it comes to assessing specific aspects of the *Freedom* essay's core claims, but his point appears to be that Schelling involves himself in unnecessary difficulties by attempting to establish his theory of the 'transcendental act that determines all human Being' (OHF 53) with an account of the mysterious 'decision' or 'free act' which 'occur[s] outside of all time and, hence, together with the first creation (though as a deed distinct from creation)' (OHF 51). As I explain below, Coleridge is less concerned here with the postulation of an atemporal, noumenal ground of human action that operates 'outside' of, and functions independently from, the material causal order of phenomenal nature (which he endorses) than with the 'uncouth mysticism' (M IV 444) of Schelling's onto-theological speculations about the nature and origin of this ground. This, of course, is not to say that Coleridge sees no philosophical value in the kind of reworked creation myth Schelling offers, but rather that he does not see the need for such myths to play a role in explaining the nature and possibility of human freedom and moral evil.[36]

Coleridge, by contrast, is happy to accept Kant's formulation of an 'inscrutable' 'first ground ... posited as the ground antecedent to every use of freedom given in experience', and taken to determine all (free, morally evaluable) human action and the inherent moral disposition of each individual.[37] Thus, as his comment suggests, what troubles Coleridge here is not Schelling's employment of the notion of an atemporal ground, but rather the speculative, quasi-mythological mode of accounting for the ground's origin and existence which the *Freedom* essay adopts. As in the case of the free choice between good and evil, because the reality of such a ground is not in

[35] Brown's phrase, *Later Philosophy of Schelling*, 117n.

[36] This may have been the case c. 1815, but Coleridge would later develop a more speculative account of the cosmic origin of evil that, evidently under the influence of Böhme, draws on the Fall *mythos* (see e.g. OM 236-43, CN V 5813-14).

[37] Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 47. Kant claims that this ground is '*innate* in' each 'human being' but that it 'cannot be any fact possibly given in experience' (47), adding that in every attempt to uncover it 'we are endlessly referred back in the series of subjective determining grounds without ever being able to come to the first ground' or original '*determining ground* of the power of free choice' (47n). Like Kant, Coleridge appears content to leave the nature and origin of this ground inscrutable, provided that it can be postulated to account for the possibility of 'the power of free choice' that both take to be a necessary condition of all moral action.

dispute, Coleridge thinks it is only requisite for a theory of freedom to prove its possibility. Since 'the Reality is sufficiently proved by the Fact' of our moral action and experience (M IV 437), and by the practical knowledge of freedom that can be acquired through consciousness of our own self-willed acts, there is nothing to be gained from Schelling's account of the mysterious pre-temporal origin of this noumenal ground or 'transcendental act' and the ontological conditions under which it comes into being at the moment of 'the first creation' (OHF 51), seemingly both in and outside of time. Even the highly sympathetic Love and Schmidt admit that this passage is 'one of the most enigmatic sections of the [*Freedom* essay]', where 'the timeless and time-bound meet', and 'Schelling appears to stumble into further problems by noting that the free act [that determines all human Being] is also a necessary one'.[38] More importantly, in Coleridge's view, Schelling's obscure figurative account of the birth of God and evil is at best just a less comprehensible version of Kantian moral theory: 'vehemently as Schelling condemns that Theory of Freedom, which makes it consist in the paramouncy of Reason over the Will, wherein does his own solution differ from this—except in expressing with uncouth mysticism the very same notion?' (M IV 444)

For Coleridge, if, by following Kant's strategy of practical proof, we can account for the possibility of this atemporal, noumenal ground and the free acts which it determines in time, then the thorny problem of freedom and evil takes care of itself. The reality of freedom and evil can be confirmed by reference to the indubitable facts of our everyday moral experience. Presumably, this is precisely why Coleridge says that 'the Solution is easy and almost self-evident' (M IV 444). As he puts it earlier in the same note: 'if God created a Being with a power of *choosing* Good, that Being must have been created with a power of choosing Evil—or there is no meaning in the word, Choice' (M IV 444). Or, as Coleridge avers in response to Schelling's contention that 'it is not comprehensible how a capacity for evil can result from God who is regarded as pure goodness' (OHF 24): 'But God will not do impossibilities [a]nd how can a Vermögen [capacity] for moral Good exist, (in a *Creature*) which does not *imply* a Vermögen zum Bösen [capacity for evil]?' (M IV 423). Simply put, freedom and moral responsibility, likewise moral good and evil, are mutually necessary to each other: both in an epistemic or conceptual sense, insofar as we can think such concepts coherently at all, and in an ontological sense, insofar as such phenomena as morally good and/or evil actions and their consequences can be said to exist in human life, as the outcomes of uncompelled human choices. For Coleridge, then, there is a significant sense in which the being or reality of moral good is bound up with, or dependent upon, that of moral evil, with each viewed as having 'its ground or origin in the Agent, and not in the compulsion of Circumstances' (AR 266). If one establishes this epistemic and metaphysical framework through a Kantian or Coleridgean practical proof of freedom, then it is quite unnecessary,

[38] See OHF, 163-5 (translator's note 76). Compare Coleridge's criticisms of Schelling at M IV 432, 436-7.

according to Coleridge, to enter the dark wood of Schellingian theogonic speculation.[39]

Whether or not this solution offers a more satisfactory account of human freedom and moral evil than Schelling's position in the *Freedom* essay is certainly open to question. At the very least, Coleridge leaves a great deal riding on Kant's mode of practical proof, without having decisively shown that such an argument necessarily allows us to dispense *a priori* with Schelling's attempts to construct a new metaphysics of evil. One can readily sympathise with Coleridge's complaint that Schelling does not do enough to elucidate his conception of 'the mysterious *Ground* of Existence' (M IV 426), and the precise nature of this ground's relation to the being and attributes of God, as well as its role in the process whereby evil, understood as something with a positive reality, comes to be realised in the actions of human beings. Yet, while these apparent lacunae in Schelling's argument pose undeniable difficulties for most readers of the *Freedom* essay, this is not in itself proof that Schelling's 'extended analysis of the ontological nature and source of evil'[40] is necessarily misconceived, nor does it confirm Coleridge and Schopenhauer's critical assessment that Schelling's approach fails to add anything of philosophical significance to Kant's theories of radical evil and practical freedom (see M IV 444-5).

Moreover, although Coleridge may be correct in pointing out certain parallels in the conclusions of Kant and Schelling's respective arguments, it is not obvious that Schelling would dismiss such similarities. After all, he would not reject Coleridge's claim that evil cannot arise except as the outcome of the freely willed choice of a human moral agent; nor would Schelling necessarily contest the assertion that his general argument does not ultimately 'differ from the [Kantian] assertion, that the Freedom of Man consists in all the selfishness of his nature being subordinated to, and used as the instrument and materia of his Reason—i.e. of his sense of the universal will' (M IV 445). What is at stake in Schelling's essay is not the relation between finite and absolute will considered as the condition of free, morally responsible action, but rather the ontological conditions that underlie this relationship, as the ground of its realisation in human action. Consequently, if Coleridge is to make good his claim that Schelling has not made any advances on the Kantian position he criticises, then he must show that Schelling's ontology of evil and the conditions of its possibility and actuality does not in fact add anything of moment to this earlier solution (even if one grants that Schelling's analysis of evil is unable to explain the, in Coleridge's view, 'essential [differ]ence, [betw]een [re]gret & [re]morse' (M IV 434)).

Ultimately, however, it seems as though the combination of Coleridge's theological reservations and his moral-philosophical allegiance to Kant

[39] For further discussion, see Berkeley, *Crisis*, 132-42 ('Coleridge's Critique of Schelling's Theodicy'), esp. 138-42. On Coleridge's later engagement with Schelling on these themes, in relation to the accounts of will and evil in OM, see Reid, *Coleridge*, 116-150.

[40] Brown, *Later Philosophy of Schelling*, 117n.

preclude the possibility of his critical engagement with precisely those aspects of Schelling's argument which seek to move beyond the terms of a Kantian account of the problem of evil. One is left with the uneasy feeling that Coleridge's own partly Kantian solutions may depend to a significant extent on an unwarranted suspension of the very modes of metaphysical inquiry without which Schelling's project in the *Freedom* essay could never have been attempted at all. Yet, even if one admits that Coleridge fails to engage adequately with Schelling's position, one must also acknowledge that his claims in these marginalia are informed and supported by his powerful prior account of the central role of remorse in human moral and emotional experience, and indeed in explaining the possibility of moral freedom itself. In the years that followed his commentary on the *Freedom* essay, however, Coleridge himself evidently grew dissatisfied with a philosophically modest account of human freedom and the origin of evil. In the *Opus Maximum* and various late 1820s notebook entries, he retains the ideas of God and free will as philosophical postulates, but begins to sketch a more speculative, mythologically inflected account of the relations between absolute and finite will, and the obscure cosmic origins of moral evil as a positive, irreducible reality in human life.[41] This project remains tantalisingly incomplete, but it bears witness both to Coleridge's capacity for continuous philosophical development, and to the search for a theologically satisfying resolution to the problem of evil that would persist until the end of his life.

[41] See e.g. OM 1-24, 187-95, 215-43; CN V 5523 (1827), 5813-14 (1828), 6386 (1830). For further analysis, see Evans, *Sublime Coleridge*, 9-30, 45-50; Reid, *Coleridge*, 137-50.