

Nonground and the Metaphysics of Evil. From Heidegger's First Schelling Seminar to Derrida's Last Reading of Schelling (1927–2002)¹

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“Relisez Schelling, et Heidegger sur Schelling”—“Reread Schelling, and Heidegger on Schelling”²—this was the appeal Jacques Derrida made to his students in the last seminar he gave in the winter term of 2001/02, and outlines the theme of the following paper. The paper thus addresses Heidegger's and Derrida's repeated re-readings of Schelling texts, mainly of his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* of 1809, spanning quite precisely three quarters of a century. The following reflections are based on the *systematic* assumption that Heidegger's and Derrida's repeated perusal and interpretation of Schelling's *Freedom Essay* is grounded in the fact that both thinkers see a motif, (pre-)formulated in Schelling's text, that is central to the development of their own philosophical conceptions. This motif might best be described as an “unrealisable or original withdrawal” [*uneinholbarer oder ursprünglicher Entzug*]; as a movement which “unprethinkably” [*unvordenklich*] precedes but at the same time conveys, carries and latently structures thought and knowledge. Schelling's theoretical constellation of the withdrawing of *ground* and *nonground* [*Ungrund*] is of special interest to Heidegger and Derrida, as it does not merely allude to the ‘simple Other’ of thought, which is divided from thought *per hiatus* or by means of an intransgressible boundary; rather, this element of withdrawal is incorporated into the presence of thought and *lógos* itself as an irresolvable provision. In this respect, Schelling himself, as is well-known, speaks of the “irreducible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding [*Verstand*],” and indeed, Schelling

¹ My thanks to David Carus for having assisted with the English in this essay.

² Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 155; idem, *Séminaire. La bête et le souverain. Volume 1 (2001–2002)*, ed. Michelle Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud (Paris: Éd. Galilée, 2008), 212. All translations from German and French have been slightly modified throughout. If no translation is quoted, translations are mine.

then continues, from that “which is without understanding [*dem Verstandlosen*]” the “understanding [*Verstand*] is born in the genuine sense.”³

Furthermore, from an *historical* perspective, the constellation ‘Schelling—Heidegger—Derrida’ shows exemplarily that 20th-century-philosophy is not merely to be understood in terms of an ‘overcoming’ or ‘breaking off’ from the so-called ‘epoch of metaphysics.’ Rather, by Heidegger and Derrida drawing on Schelling’s thought, it shows that philosophers of the 20th century take up theoretical propositions which had become vital in classical German philosophy. Of course, this is not to say that Heidegger and Derrida *simply* echo Schelling—nor, on the other hand, that Schelling’s philosophy is *simply* an anticipation of what is to follow. Nonetheless, this interrelation makes visible a certain line of continuity which casts doubt on narratives concerning a discontinuation of or ‘end’ to ‘metaphysics.’

The following discussion is to provide a first step towards understanding the relevance of this theoretical background and a certain line of continuity by focusing on *explicit* interpretations of Schelling’s thoughts in Heidegger’s and Derrida’s works.⁴ In doing so, our attention will be directed towards only recently published material of Heidegger’s *first* reading of the *Freedom Essay*, taken from a seminar in Marburg in 1927/28, and Derrida’s *final* interpretation of Schelling, from a seminar held in 2001/02, as quoted above. It will be shown that both these Schelling interpretations mark an essential and systematic alteration in emphasis, when compared with Heidegger’s well-known Schelling-lecture of 1936. Both Heidegger’s interpretation of 1927/28 and Derrida’s interpretation of 2001/02 focus on the concept of the *nonground*,⁵ which Heidegger’s lecture of 1936 mentions only once and *en passant*. However, in the following it will be argued that this very concept of nonground marks the deepest level of Heidegger’s and Derrida’s deliberation on Schelling. Albeit only indirectly, Heidegger’s affinity with this concept can also be garnered from certain passages in the lecture of 1936. Thus, in order to identify this tendency

³ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 29; idem, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart/Augsburg: Cotta, 1856–1861), hereafter SW I/7, 360. The German “*der nie aufgehende Rest*” is usually translated as “the indivisible remainder.” I follow Gutmann’s older translation here to avoid the association with “impartable.” “Unresolvable” would also be a possibility. Cf. the well-known analysis of this motif of Schelling’s by Žižek, in Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder. An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London/New York: Verso, 1996).

⁴ On account of brevity, the differences between Heidegger and Derrida—in their philosophies in general and their relation to Schelling specifically—cannot be examined in detail here. In particular, as Derrida’s remarks on Schelling are too brief to allow one to form any precise opinion on his position towards Heidegger. An analysis of this type would have to grapple with their respective interpretations and the consequences of these for the two philosophers’ own thought.

⁵ The term is adopted by Schelling from Jacob Böhm. On this, cf. Robert F. Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling. The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809–1815* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977). See also the recently published work, also on Heidegger: Hans-Joachim Friedrich, *Der Ungrund der Freiheit im Denken von Böhm, Schelling und Heidegger* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2009).

and particular indications of the relevance of the concept of *nonground* as the focal point of the debate surrounding Schelling, it will be necessary to first of all point out the primary characteristics of Heidegger's 1936 reading of Schelling.

The following paper is divided into four sections. As a *first* step, particularly relevant characteristics of Heidegger's 1936 lecture will be put forward for discussion. In this context, I will mainly discuss two central assumptions Heidegger makes in this lecture: a) the 'failure' he ascribes to Schelling's thought; and b) his interpretation of the *Freedom Essay* as a "metaphysics of evil." As a *second* step, I will reconsider the only marginal examination of the nonground in the aforementioned lecture, including a short glance at Heidegger's examination of this concept in a lecture he gave in 1941 and seminars in the years 1941–1943. Against this backdrop, the *third* step draws back on Heidegger's more focused analysis of this term in the Marburg seminar of 1927/28. The *fourth* and final step is devoted to Derrida's references to Schelling, which are, as is well-known, only loosely formulated and to be found scattered throughout his works.

I. Schelling's 'Failure' and the Metaphysics of Evil: Heidegger's Lectures of 1936

Heidegger's 1936 interpretation of Schelling's thought⁶ does not take the form of an elaborate and complete treatise. Indeed, to substantiate this point, there is no

⁶ On these lectures, see esp. the articles in Lore Hühn and Jörg Jantzen, eds., *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar (1927/28). Die Protokolle von Martin Heideggers Seminar zu Schellings "Freiheitsschrift" (1927/28) und die Akten des Internationalen Schelling-Tags 2006*, in co-operation with Philipp Schwab and Sebastian Schwenzfeuer (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2010). Cf. Michael G. Vater, "Heidegger and Schelling. The Finitude of Being," *Idealistic Studies* 5 (1975): 20-58; Jean-François Courtine, "Anthropologie et anthropomorphisme. Heidegger lecteur de Schelling," in Ute Guzzoni, ed., *Nachdenken über Heidegger. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1980), 9-35; Joan Stambaugh, "Heidegger on Schelling on Human Freedom," in Joseph J. Kockelmans, ed., *Hermeneutic Phenomenology. Lectures and Essays* (Lanham/London: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, 1988), 91-105; Wayne J. Froman, "Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom and Heidegger's Thought," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1990): 465-480; Claus-Artur Scheier, "Die Zeit der Seynsfuge. Zu Heideggers Interesse an Schellings Freiheitsschrift," in Hans M. Baumgarten and Wilhelm G. Jacobs, eds., *Schellings Weg zur Freiheitsschrift. Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1996), 28-39; William Vaughan, "'Nur Geistiges ist schrecklich.' Heidegger on Schelling's Metaphysics of Evil," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 21 (1996): 231-260; David L. Clark, "Heidegger's Craving. Being-on-Schelling," *Diacritics. A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 27 (1997): 8-33; Thomas Buchheim, "'Metaphysische Notwendigkeit des Bösen.' Über eine Zweideutigkeit in Heideggers Auslegung der Freiheitsschrift," in István M. Fehér and Wilhelm G. Jacobs, eds., *Zeit und Freiheit. Schelling—Schopenhauer—Kierkegaard—Heidegger* (Budapest: thos Könyvek, 1999), 183-192; Dietmar Köhler, "Von Schelling zu Hitler? Anmerkungen zu Heideggers Schelling-Interpretationen von 1936 und 1941," in Fehér and Jacobs, *Zeit und Freiheit*, 201-214; Pascal David, "Heideggers Deutung von Schellings Freiheitsschrift als Gipfel der Metaphysik des deutschen Idealismus," in Harald Seubert, ed., *Heideggers Zwiegespräch mit dem deutschen Idealismus* (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2003), 125-140; Peter Warnek, "Reading Schelling after Heidegger. The Freedom of

need for subtle reflections on the nature of the ‘book,’ which Derrida sets out to do in the opening passage to *La Dissémination*.⁷ It is sufficient to quote Heidegger’s own statement on Schelling’s late philosophy. He states that Schelling’s late philosophy is only available in the form of lectures, but “between lectures and a finished self-contained work there is not only a difference of degree, but an essential difference.”⁸ The character of Heidegger’s Schelling interpretation, in the form of lectures, already becomes evident in the summaries he gives at the beginning or end of each of his own lectures.⁹ In fact, Heidegger at one point characterizes his own elucidations of Schelling’s philosophy as “incomprehensible” and then reformulates the respective passage in the lecture that followed.¹⁰ More importantly however, the lecture-series of 1936 pays differing degrees of attention to certain passages, which is presumably only partly due to the subject matter itself. While Heidegger elucidates the “Introduction” in great depth and at length (this encompasses more than half of the entire lecture-series) as well as elaborately and repeatedly explicating the central difference between “ground” and “that which exists,” towards the end of the semester, his latter comments on subsequent passages are very brief—and this is especially the case as regards the last few pages of the *Freedom Essay*, which I will comment on later.¹¹

Hence, even on the basis of these rather formal remarks, the lecture-series of 1936 cannot be viewed as a ‘commentary’ on the *Freedom Essay*.¹² Furthermore, Heidegger himself emphasizes that his interpretations of Schelling are not to be read as a ‘neutral’ representation of the history of philosophy. On the contrary, Heidegger repeatedly speaks of a “one-sidedness” being wholly apparent in his lecture: it is “consciously one-sided in being directed towards the principal side of philosophy, the question of Being”¹³ and, thus, the “one-sidedness [is] directed towards the *One* decisive thing.”¹⁴ It is the detailed

Cryptic Dialogue,” in Jason M. Wirth, ed., *Schelling Now. Contemporary Readings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 163-183.

⁷ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans., with an introduction and additional notes by Barbara Johnson (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), 3-4; idem, *La dissémination* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1972), 11-12.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 3; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, ed., Hildegard Feick (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1995), 2nd ed. [1st ed. 1971], 4.

⁹ Cf., e.g., Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 34-35, 44; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 41-42, 53-54. In some passages, these recapitulations are less visible as such, cf., e.g., Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 69; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 83.

¹⁰ Cf. Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 134-137; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 161-165.

¹¹ In fact, Heidegger does give a reason for this brevity with respect to the matter itself. Cf., e.g., Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 159; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 191: “Still, we must state that Schelling’s initial impetus and keenness of metaphysical questioning diminish towards the end.”

¹² For a discussion of this, cf. Köhler, “Von Schelling zu Hitler?” and Sebastian Kaufmann, “Metaphysik des Bösen—Zu Heideggers Auslegung von Schellings Freiheitsschrift,” in Hühn and Jantzen, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar*, 193–226.

¹³ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 146; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 176.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 106; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 128.

interpretation of the “Introduction” in particular—namely Schelling’s discussion of “pantheism”—which is to demonstrate that the *Freedom Essay* is by no means to be understood as an “isolated” treatise on human freedom or as “a special view of Schelling’s on evil and freedom.”¹⁵ Rather, in investigating human freedom, the treatise at the same time raises the question of the system as a whole, and, for Heidegger, this poses “philosophy’s fundamental question of Being.”¹⁶

Nonetheless, Heidegger, for the main part, offers a thorough interpretation of the *Freedom Essay*, only very rarely specifying his approach as such. Remarkably and in accordance with this, Heidegger’s two famous and influential theses on the work are only sketched rather roughly: According to Heidegger, Schelling’s book is first and foremost to be read as a “*metaphysics of evil*.” Secondly, it is to be read with a view to what Heidegger calls Schelling’s “*failure*” [*Scheitern*].¹⁷ Essentially, there are only three short though significant passages in the entire lecture-series where Heidegger actually develops these two central theses.¹⁸ In reconstructing these three passages, our attention will be focused on a certain ambivalence in Heidegger’s deductions, especially with respect to Schelling’s “failure.”

1. An initial but brief explanation of Heidegger’s approach to Schelling’s thought is apparent in the “Introductory Remarks to the Lecture Series.” As quoted above, Heidegger in this instance refers to Schelling’s *Nachlass* and the fact that Schelling for the most part remained “silent” following the publication of the *Freedom Essay* in 1809. According to Heidegger, this period of “silence” was not due to extraneous circumstances, but instead “casts light upon the difficulty and novelty of questioning and on the thinker’s clear knowledge of all this.”¹⁹ And Heidegger adds: “But, if one may say so, Schelling had to fail [*scheitern*] in his work because his approach, his questioning, did not allow for an inner center in terms of philosophy’s standpoint *at that time*.”²⁰ In other words, the primary reason Heidegger gives for Schelling’s ‘failure’ is an historical [*geschichtlich*] one. Schelling’s questioning points beyond his epoch and its capacities for thought. Accordingly, it is stated a little later: “Schelling is the truly creative and bold thinker [*schöpferische und am weitesten ausgreifende Denker*] of this entire age of philosophy [i.e., German Idealism]. Indeed, to such an extent that he drives German Idealism from within beyond its own fundamental standpoint

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 97; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 117.

¹⁶ Ibid. The most detailed discussion of the “question of Being” is to be found in Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 63-66; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 77-80.

¹⁷ The German verb “*scheitern*” and its corresponding noun “*Scheitern*” is translated by Stambaugh interchangeably as “to get stranded,” “breakdown,” “*impasse*,” or “to fail/failure.” If a consistent translation were preferred throughout, “failure” and “to fail” would probably be the best solution.

¹⁸ On these passages, see also Jason M. Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life. Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 201-202.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 3; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 3. Note that Heidegger here does not speak of a *specific* failure of the *Freedom Essay*. The notion of “failure” refers to Schelling’s philosophy in general and his late work specifically.

²⁰ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 3; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 4; emphasis added.

[*Grundstellung*].”²¹ To this extent, Schelling’s ‘failure’ is not the object of Heidegger’s criticism, but instead the failure necessarily results from the potential of Schelling’s work to point to the future: this “great failing [*Scheitern*]” is “not a failure as such [*Versagen*], nothing negative at all—on the contrary. It is the sign of the advent of something entirely different, the heat lightning of a new beginning.”²² From this perspective, Schelling appears, in the first instance, and beside Nietzsche, as a precursor to Heidegger’s own thinking on the “other beginning” [*andersanfängliches Denken*].

2. However, what exactly this ‘heat lightning of a new beginning’ is in Schelling’s thought and in what respect he transcends German Idealism is not explained in any further detail in this passage. It is only significantly later in the second half of the lecture-series that Heidegger raises this question anew and succinctly outlines his interpretation as a whole, namely in the transition from the “Introduction” to the “Main Part” of the treatise. By posing the question of the “real and thus vital concept of human freedom,” Schelling poses a question “which Idealism did not raise and can no longer raise.”²³ With this in mind, Heidegger quotes Schelling’s own words: “Idealism provides namely, on the one hand, only the most general conception of freedom and, on the other hand, a merely formal one. But the real and vital concept is that freedom is the capacity [*Vermögen*] for good and evil.”²⁴ It is precisely this question of the “vital”

[*lebendig*] concept of human freedom, and the question of *evil* raised along with it, which not only drives idealism beyond its typical boundary but through which the “ontological and theological foundation of philosophy, all of ontotheology, becomes questionable.”²⁵ It is clear from the preceding comments that the question of evil does not, for Heidegger, refer to the essence of human freedom as an ‘isolated’ problem or indeed to a merely moral one. Heidegger’s argument is the following: by Schelling posing the question of freedom as the faculty of good and evil, he at the same time alters the understanding of the system as a whole, and with it, of Being, in such a way as to ‘assimilate’ or ‘enable’ the possibility and actuality of evil. Heidegger therefore states: “Evil itself determines the new approach [*Ansatz*] in metaphysics. The question of the possibility and actuality of evil brings about a transformation of the question of Being.”²⁶ On the basis of this, Heidegger can then state that Schelling’s *Freedom*

²¹ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 4; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 4.

²² Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 3; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 4.

²³ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 96; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 116.

²⁴ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23; idem, SW I/7, 352. Cf. Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 97; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 116.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 96; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 116. Note that Schelling in the cited passage is *specifically* criticizing a ‘one-sided’ abstract idealism, namely that of Fichte. Heidegger, however, interprets this passage as transcending idealism on the whole and as such— that *includes* Schelling’s own earlier philosophy of nature and philosophy of identity as well as Hegel’s system, which was at that point not yet fully developed.

²⁶ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 97; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 117.

Essay “is at its core a metaphysics of evil” and that “with it a new, essential impulse [*Stoß*] enters into philosophy’s fundamental question of Being.”²⁷

Within this context, Heidegger then comes back to the question of Schelling’s “failure.” By reading Schelling’s treatise as relating to the “question of Being . . . we understand in looking further ahead, precisely in terms of this question, why Schelling, in spite of everything, had to become stranded with his philosophy; that is, had to get stranded in *that way* in which *he* failed. For every philosophy fails, that belongs to its concept.”²⁸ In other words, Heidegger discerns two aspects of “failure.” On the one hand, there is a *specific* failure unique to Schelling’s thought—however, the comment Heidegger makes on Hegel immediately prior to this passage (Schelling’s treatise “shatters Hegel’s *Logic* before it was even published!”²⁹) exemplifies that Heidegger nevertheless sees this ‘failure’ as being necessary when considered in terms of Idealism’s “fundamental standpoint” [*Grundstellung*]. On the other hand, failure is a “fundamental trait” [*Grundzug*] of philosophy as such. Thus, Heidegger’s notion of Schelling’s ‘failure’ cannot be construed as a criticism, even less so than it might have been in his introductory remarks.

However, up to this point it still remains unclear what exactly Heidegger considers as the “impulse” [*Stoß*] for the question of Being within Schelling’s treatise and its “metaphysics of evil.” It is indeed remarkable that Heidegger once again does not offer any further explanation as to the cause for this fundamental question. A first suggestion, however, is to be found in his elucidation of philosophy’s fundamental failure. Heidegger writes: “Philosophy is always completed when its end becomes and remains what its beginning was, the question. For only by truly remaining in the mode of questioning does it force that which is worthy of being questioned [*das Frag-würdige*] into view.”³⁰ Put paradoxically: Philosophy ‘succeeds’ precisely *by* ‘failing.’ It necessarily fails to give a definite, closed and final answer to the question of Being—and only *by* thus failing, and keeping the question *open*, does “it help bring about the openness of Being.”³¹

Heidegger’s interpretation of Schelling’s impulse within the “metaphysics of evil” seems to point in the same direction. This is indicated in a more subtle fashion and in passing several pages later, when Heidegger states that evil is usually “taken for granted as the nongood, as a lack” and thus as “[n]onbeing [*Nichtdasein*], nonpresence [*Nichtvorhandensein*]” and as “nonexistence [*das Nichtseiende*].”³² Apparently, however, evil is not to be

²⁷ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 98; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 118.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 97-98; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 118. “To get stranded” and “to fail” both refer to “*scheitern*” in German throughout the quoted passage.

²⁹ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 97; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 117.

³⁰ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 98; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 118.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 101; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 122. It might be clearer to translate “*Nichtdaseyn*” as “nonexistence” and “*Nichtseiendes*” as “nonbeing” here. To avoid misunderstanding, however, I follow Stambaugh’s translation and note the German expressions in parenthesis.

considered as ‘*absolute*’ or ‘*pure*’ nonexistence. Bearing this in mind, Heidegger then states:

The difficulty here lies in the concept of the nonexistent [*das Nichtseiende*]. . . . Without delving into this now, we must, departing from our present consideration, hold fast to one thing and transfer it into the following reflections. The question of evil and thus the question of freedom somehow have to do essentially with the question of the being of the nonexistent [*das Nichtseiende*]. Regarded in terms of the principle of the system in general, that is, of the question of Being, this means that the question of the nature of being is at the same time the question of the nature of the not [*Nicht*] and nothingness [*Nichts*]. The reason for this can only lie in the nature of Being itself:

As a lack, it is true that a lack is a not-being-present [*Nichtvorhandensein*]. Nevertheless, this absence is not nothing. . . . Thus, nothingness is not nugatory, but, rather, something tremendous, the most tremendous element in the nature of being.³³

En passant and without developing this point in any further detail, this section reveals what in fact, according to Heidegger, gives the “impulse” in Schelling’s treatise: The metaphysics of evil points to the fact that *nothingness* cannot be thought as a ‘pure’ or ‘simple’ negation, excluded from Being, but instead, nothingness is a *fundamental trait* [*Grundzug*] of Being itself. Without doubt, this is the very perspective in which Heidegger considers Schelling to be a precursor to his own thought on the so-called *turn* [*Kehre*].³⁴ Being is not to be thought of as pure presence, but as unconcealment [*Entbergung*], for which at the same time the trait of concealment [*Verbergung*] is essential.³⁵ The absence, which is never the ‘pure’ absence of mere nullity, does not exist *beyond* Being, but rather *in* Being itself. In other words, Being is in itself *withdrawal*.

3. Once again, it is peculiar that this point is not developed in further detail in Heidegger’s extensive interpretation that follows these passages on the central difference between “ground” and “that which exists,” which he himself calls the

³³ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 101; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 122. The last sentence quoted reads in German: “Also ist das Nichts nichts Nichtiges, sondern etwas Ungeheures, das Ungeheuerste im Wesen des Seyns.” Remarkably, very much later, in his Berlin lectures of 1841/42, Schelling himself highlights the ‘discovery’ of the “relative nonexistent” [*das relative Nichtseinende*] as a major achievement of his earlier philosophy. See, e.g., Kierkegaard’s lecture notes: “Relative-non-being is the real linchpin of identity philosophy,” Not. 11:7, in Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks*, vol. 3: *Notebooks 1–15* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 309.

³⁴ Cf. on this Froman, “Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom,” 471–476 and, recently, Kaufmann, “Metaphysik des Bösen,” 202–203.

³⁵ Cf. on this—albeit much later—the lecture *Time and Being* (1962) in Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 1–24; idem, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 1–25.

“jointure of Being [*Seynsfuge*].”³⁶ Only at the very end of the lecture-series—in Heidegger’s relatively sparse and cursory remarks on the final section of the *Freedom Essay*—do we again find some enlightening elucidations on the interpretation of Schelling’s thought as a whole. At this point, Heidegger asks after the correlation between the system as such and a) evil and b) the “jointure of being.” According to Heidegger, this question is “echoed” in the last passages of the text “but is not seized upon and above all not yet penetrated in its inner difficulty.”³⁷ This statement appears to in fact imply a ‘criticism’ of Schelling, mainly directed to Schelling’s concept of system. Heidegger quotes Schelling: “In the divine understanding [*Verstand*] there is a system; yet God himself is not a system, but rather a life.”³⁸ According to Heidegger’s interpretation, this passage reveals that by virtue of the question of evil and the notion of the “ground,” the system is in fact “split open”:³⁹ “But when the system is only in the understanding [*Verstande*], the ground and the whole opposition [*Gegenwendigkeit*] of ground and understanding are excluded from the system as its other and the system is no longer system with regard to being as a whole [*das Seiende im Ganzen*].”⁴⁰

At this stage of the argument, Heidegger deepens and at the same time modifies his notion of Schelling’s ‘failure’:

That is the difficulty which emerges more and more clearly in Schelling’s later efforts with the whole of philosophy, the difficulty which proves to be an *impasse* (*Scheitern*). And this *impasse* is evident since the factors of the jointure of Being, ground and existence and their unity not only become less and less compatible, but are even driven so far apart that Schelling falls back into the rigidified tradition [*starr gewordene Überlieferung*] of Western thought without creatively transforming it.⁴¹

This “impasse” or “failure” is discussed in a twofold manner: Schelling fails to incorporate evil (and with it nothingness as a fundamental trait of Being) into the closed form of a system (1)—and *because* he fails to do so, he falls back into the tradition which has, essentially, become questionable through his own philosophical conception (2). Compared with his earlier comments, Heidegger’s perspective has apparently shifted: Schelling’s failure does not or at least not in

³⁶ Cf. Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 104-146; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 125-176. Cf. on this concept Scheier, “Zeit der Seynsfuge;” cf. also Damir Barbarić, “Zeitlichkeit, Sein und Seiendes: Schelling—Heidegger,” in Fehrer and Jacobs, *Zeit und Freiheit*, 215-224.

³⁷ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 160; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 193.

³⁸ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 62; idem, SW I/7, 399.

³⁹ Cf. Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 98; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 118.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 161; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 194. “Of ground and understanding” is added to “opposition [*Gegenwendigkeit*]” by Stambaugh. For a critical objection to this interpretation of Heidegger’s, see Buchheim, “Metaphysische Notwendigkeit des Bösen.”

⁴¹ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 161; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 194. The addition of “*Scheitern*” in parenthesis is Stambaugh’s.

the first instance) appear to be a productive “impulse,” but instead a fall-back. In fact, the tendency to interpret Schelling in this manner also becomes evident through Heidegger’s elucidation of the relation between the first and second beginning. Schelling’s failure is “so very significant” since it “only brings out difficulties which were already posited at the beginning of Western philosophy.”⁴² Moreover, since these difficulties appear to be “insurmountable” *within* the first beginning, it is revealed that “a second beginning becomes necessary through the first but is possible only in a complete transformation of the first beginning.”⁴³ Put differently, Schelling’s treatise and its failure is no longer considered in an ‘affirmative’ sense as the “heat lightning of a new beginning,” but instead reveals only *ex negativo*, as it were, the difficulties of the first and the *necessity* for a second beginning. Contrary to the interpretation given before, Schelling’s failure in this case does not refer to a ‘fundamental’ failure of philosophy as such; rather, it proves to be a very *specific* failure in “overcoming” the first beginning, which Schelling still remains caught up in.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, it is important to note here wherein exactly Heidegger’s ‘problem’ lies. In fact, the problem is *not* Schelling’s failure in the narrower sense, but rather—and at first glance paradoxically—the fact that Schelling *does not fail in a consistent fashion*. The impossibility of including nothingness (which comes into view through the question of evil) in an enclosed system, for Heidegger, makes apparent that a system *as enclosed* is not adequate for the truth of Being. Schelling’s “failure,” in a deeper sense, lies in the fact that he adheres to an enclosed and systematic (i.e., metaphysical) jointure of Being. In other words, the problem is not the failure of the metaphysics of evil (this *necessarily* fails), but rather, the problem lies in the fact that Schelling develops a *metaphysics* of evil at all. Thus, the *Freedom Essay* does indeed give an impulse to *metaphysics*, but nonetheless, Schelling fails to ‘overcome’ the first, metaphysical beginning.

II. The Nonground in Heidegger’s Readings of Schelling from 1936 and 1941–1943

1. Following on from the passages just quoted from Heidegger’s 1936 lecture, it is decisive, both for the systematic dimension of the relation between Schelling and Heidegger, and for the interpretation of Heidegger’s first reading of Schelling from 1927/28, in what way Heidegger interprets the final section of the *Freedom Essay*. Indeed, it is this section which, according to Schelling, represents the “highest point of the entire investigation.”⁴⁵ Remarkably,

Heidegger views the latter stages of the *Freedom Essay* in terms of the

⁴²Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 161; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 194.

⁴³Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 161; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 194.

⁴⁴ Cf. for a critical discussion on this topic Lore Hühn: “Heidegger—Schelling im philosophischen Zwiegespräch. Der Versuch einer Einleitung,” in Hühn and Jantzen, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar*, 3-44, here esp. 4-5.

⁴⁵Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; idem, SW I/7, 406.

aforementioned ‘fall-back.’ In fact, in Heidegger’s view, the final passage itself *contains* the fall-back into the tradition which had become questionable by virtue of the development of Schelling’s own discourse:

At this stage of the treatise on freedom it is not yet clearly evident to Schelling that precisely positing the jointure of Being as the unity of ground and existence makes a jointure of Being as a system impossible. Rather, Schelling believes that the question of the system, that is, the unity of being as a whole [*Einheit des Seienden im Ganzen*], would be saved if only the unity of what truly unifies [*die Einheit des eigentlich Einigenden*], that of the Absolute, were correctly formulated.⁴⁶

Put differently: Heidegger identifies the Absolute—the “highest point” of the *Freedom Essay*—with *unity*; and this unity of the Absolute at the same time stands for Schelling’s (failing) attempt to secure the unity of the system. Yet Schelling himself aims to show in the respective passage that the “First” is precisely *not* to be conceived of as the unity of the “ground” and of “that which exists.” The specific conception of the Absolute in the *Freedom Essay* does not become clear in the lecture-series of 1936, the reason for this being a peculiarity in Heidegger’s interpretation: The central term in Schelling’s presentation of the Absolute is not mentioned even once, it *drops out* completely—the concept of *nonground*. In fact, Heidegger does quote the term once, albeit very much earlier, without further commentary and in relation to the “jointure of Being.”⁴⁷ A few pages later—still in terms of the interpretation of the “jointure of Being”—Heidegger also quotes the passage which immediately precedes Schelling’s introduction of the term “nonground”: “For even the spirit is not yet the highest thing; it is but spirit or the breath of love. Yet love is the highest. It is what existed, then, before the ground and before that which exists (as separate) but not yet as *love*, rather—how should we describe it?”⁴⁸ Yet Heidegger does *not* quote Schelling’s answer, which is in itself again presented as a *question*: “how can we call it anything other than the original ground [*Urgrund*], or rather, the

⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 161; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 194. There is a certain tension in Heidegger’s interpretation here. On the one hand, apparently, Schelling is said not to be conscious of the potential to “split open” the system in his philosophical approach; and Heidegger seems to imply that Schelling becomes conscious of it later on and that this is precisely the reason for his “silence” post 1809. On the other hand, however, Heidegger firmly believes the *Freedom Essay* to be the deepest and most productive work, not only of Schelling’s but of German idealism as a whole—and his comments on Schelling’s late philosophy make explicit that this is where he locates the essential ‘fall-back’ into tradition.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 122; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 147. Stambaugh translates “*Ungrund*” as “the *groundless*” here. Cf. on the nonground in relation to Heidegger’s interpretation Ryosuke Ohashi, “Der Ungrund und das System 403–416,” in Ottfried Höffe and Annemarie Pieper, eds., *F.W.J. Schelling: Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1995), 235–252 as well as Friedrich, *Der Ungrund der Freiheit*, esp. 98–100.

⁴⁸ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; idem, SW I/7, 405–406. The last passage reads in German: “aber noch nicht war als *Liebe*, sondern—wie sollen wir es bezeichnen?”

nonground [*Ungrund*]?⁴⁹ Heidegger only briefly remarks: “Here words leave the thinker, too.”⁵⁰ This commentary is, however, telling. Despite its brevity it reveals that the Absolute in the *Freedom Essay* essentially *withdraws* from presentation through and in the presence of a concept—and, thus, precisely embodies the “fundamental trait” of Being which, according to Heidegger, expresses the “impulse” given in the *Freedom Essay*. Nowhere does Schelling in fact get closer to the objective of Heidegger’s interpretation than in this concept of the nonground as an “unseizable withdrawal” [*uneinholbarer Enzug*], even preceding the differentiation made between the “ground,” which withdraws, and “that which exists.”

This can also be seen, albeit tacitly, in Heidegger’s brief commentary of the final passage itself, although his intention is in the first place to understand the Absolute as unity and thus as a ‘fall-back.’ In accordance with Schelling and inexplicitly altering his first interpretation of the Absolute as “unity,” Heidegger *himself* writes that the “First” is “no longer the unity of what belongs together (identity).”⁵¹ Rather, the Absolute is said to be “absolute indifference” and “the only predicate which can be attributed to it is lack of predicate.”⁵² And it is not by chance that Heidegger at this point gets back to the very concept he had introduced earlier as the central motif for Schelling’s “impulse,” i.e., the concept of *nothingness*. The following comment reads like an echo of Heidegger’s earlier elucidations on “nothingness,” as a fundamental trait of Being itself: “Absolute indifference is nothingness in the sense that every statement about Being [*Seinsaussage*] is nothing with regard to it, but not in the sense that the Absolute is nugatory [*das Nichtige*] and merely of no use [*das reine Nichtsnutzige*].”⁵³

⁴⁹ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; idem, SW I/7, 407. Neither Gutmann nor Love and Schmidt explicitly translate the important German word “*vielmehr*” “rather”) here. However, the main point is that Schelling considers the term “original ground” [*Urgrund*] inappropriate and *corrects* it to “nonground” [*Ungrund*]. Cf. on the nonground in Schelling and this shift from *Ur-* to *Ungrund* esp.: David F. Krell, “The Crisis of Reason in the Nineteenth Century: Schelling’s Treatise ‘On Human Freedom’ 1809,” in John C. Sallis et al., eds., *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum. The First Ten Years* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), 13-32, here: 25-28 Krell’s translation includes the “rather”). Cf. also idem, *The Tragic Absolute. German Idealism and the Languishing of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 94-100. For a discussion of the nonground within the systematic context of the *Freedom Essay* and for a discussion of the literature on the topic, cf. Jochem Hennigfeld, *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schellings ‘Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände’* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 127-133. Cf. recently also Markus Gabriel, “Der Ungrund als das uneinholbar Andere der Reflexion—Schellings Ausweg aus dem Idealismus,” in Diego Ferrer and Teresa Pedro, eds., *Schellings Philosophie der Freiheit. Studien zu den Philosophischen Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2012), 177-190.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 128; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 154.

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 161; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 195.

⁵² Ibid. Heidegger paraphrases Schelling here, cf. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68-69; idem, SW I/7, 406.

⁵³ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 161; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 195. Again, this is a word for word paraphrasing of Schelling’s text, see Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 69; idem, SW I/7, 406-407.

That is to say: through Heidegger's own interpretation, the unattributed) nonground shifts, in the space of only a few lines, from a 'backwardly' [*rückständig*] unity of the Absolute to a withdrawing nothingness which is, however, not to be thought of as 'pure' absence. And even in his critique that follows—it would appear against his own intention—Heidegger's affinity to the concept of nonground shimmers through:

Here, too, Schelling does not see the necessity for an essential step. If Being in truth cannot be predicated [*nicht gesagt werden kann*] of the Absolute, that means that the essence of all Being is finitude and only what exists finitely has the privilege and the pain of standing in Being as such and experiencing what is true as beings [*als Seiendes*].⁵⁴

"If Being in truth cannot be predicated of the Absolute"—that is how deep in fact Schelling's insight is, and it is here that Heidegger would have to locate Schelling's "impulse." However, instead of making the nonground visible precisely as the concept which comes closest to nothingness as the fundamental trait of Being itself, Heidegger instead clouds this affinity by not naming Schelling's central concept and thereby unfolding his critique, according to which Schelling has failed to take the "decisive step." In a different sense than the one Heidegger attributes to his own reading, as being "one-sided," it is in fact "one-sided" in interpreting Schelling's concept of the Absolute *exclusively* as a 'fall-back' and not *at the same time* accentuating the potential Schelling offers to "split open" the system, which is given through and incorporated precisely in the concept of the nonground. In fact, Schelling's concept of nonground as a withdrawal, which cannot even be coined as an identity of difference, makes Heidegger's objective more explicit than the concept of evil and even the jointure of Being.

2. Before going back to Heidegger's first reading of Schelling, from his Seminar of 1927/28, I will by means of an intermediate step briefly analyze Heidegger's examination of the concept of nonground in his seminars and lectures from 1941–1943. In his repeated readings of Schelling—in the lecture of the first trimester 1941 and some seminars from 1941–1943⁵⁵—the nonground is again

⁵⁴Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 161–162; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 195.

⁵⁵ Heidegger's notes on the 1941 lecture and the 1941–1943 seminars are partly printed as an "Appendix" to the first German edition as well as the English translation of the 1936 lecture. In two passages, however, in which Heidegger notes the term "nonground," the term is omitted in these versions, cf. Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 170, 173; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 208, 210; cf. the complete edition of the 1941 lecture and the first 1941 seminar in Martin Heidegger, *Die Metaphysik des Deutschen Idealismus. Zur erneuten Auslegung von Schelling: Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände (1809)* (*Gesamtausgabe*, series II, vol. 49), ed. Günter Seubold (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1991), 85, 89. Cf. in the complete edition of the notes to the 1941–1943 seminars idem, *Seminare Hegel–Schelling* (*Gesamtausgabe*, series II, vol. 86), ed. Peter Trawny (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2011), 223, 226–227, 240–241, 258, 260. Heidegger's "Late remarks and notes"

rarely heeded and only *en passant*. Two short notes, however, are exceedingly relevant in the given context.

In one of the last comments to his lecture held in the first trimester of 1941, Heidegger adds a brief and somewhat cryptic marginal note on the distinction between “ground” and “that which exists.” This note reads as follows: “There is no figuration of the unity of the nonground, of what is “beyond being” [*des Überseyenden*].”⁵⁶ This remark is too short and too isolated to draw any far-reaching conclusions. However, it at least gives the impression that Heidegger is here modifying his interpretation of the Absolute as “unity” from his lecture in 1936: The nonground is precisely that which does not appear in a “figuration of unity.” That is, Heidegger himself accentuates in 1941 the tendencies of the withdrawal of the nonground and separates it from the concept of unity, which dominated his reading previously.⁵⁷

In accordance with this shift in interpretation, we discover an illuminating passage in the notes to the Seminars of 1941-1943, in which Heidegger compares Schelling to Hegel. Towards the end of this comparison, Heidegger maintains a certain preference for Schelling and notes: “Schelling’s idea of *identity* and of the *nonground* as *in-difference* is more original *within* the absolute metaphysics of subjectivity, but only within it; a mere rebuke (*Ab-sagen*).”⁵⁸ Once again, Heidegger modifies his interpretation when compared with 1936. In this instance, we are given a twofold perspective, which had not been made explicit earlier on: Schelling’s notion of nonground (together with his specific concept of identity as the jointure of Being) reveals the “original” trait of the *Freedom Essay*; and it is precisely in the nonground that the “impulse” [*Stoß*] contained in Schelling’s treatise is to be found. Nonetheless, for Heidegger, this “impulse” remains intrinsically interwoven with metaphysics. However, as a “rebuke” [*Ab-sagen*], the nonground is no longer thought as a re-stabilization of

on Schelling from the 1950s apparently inspired by Karl Jasper’s and Walter Schulz’s books on Schelling from 1955) are remarkable, especially as Heidegger in this case takes Schelling’s *Erlangen Lectures* into account for the first time. The nonground, however, is not mentioned again in this latest reading of Schelling’s. Cf. Heidegger, *Seminare Hegel–Schelling*, 517-527.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 174; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 212; cf. Heidegger, *Die Metaphysik des Deutschen Idealismus*, 93n.

⁵⁷ This aspect is of interest especially in relation to the fundamental tendency in Heidegger’s 1941 interpretation to read the *Freedom Essay* as a “metaphysics of will” and thus conceive of Schelling as a precursor to Nietzsche’s “will to power.” Insofar as the nonground “has no predicate, except as the very lacking of a predicate” Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 69; idem, SW I/7, 406), it is at least questionable if the nonground (as the “highest point” of the investigation) can be said to be will. Apparently, the nonground is *beyond* the sentence “Will is original being [*Ursein*]” which is at the center of Heidegger’s 1941 interpretation cf., e.g., Heidegger, *Die Metaphysik des Deutschen Idealismus*, 83-90; cf. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 21; idem, SW I/7, 350).

Thus, it is the nonground that challenges an interpretation of Schelling’s thought in terms of a “metaphysics of will.”

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise*, 193; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 234; translation and italics modified according to Heidegger, *Seminare Hegel–Schelling*, 212. The addition of “*Ab-sagen*” is Stambaugh’s. The whole passage reads in German: “Schellings Gedanke der *Identität* und des *Un-grundes* als *In-differenz* ist ursprünglicher *innerhalb* der absoluten Metaphysik der Subjektivität; aber auch nur *innerhalb*; ein bloßes *Ab-sagen*.”

the system and a fall-back; instead, it is, albeit only negatively, a counter-impulse to tradition.

Even these two late and rather cursory remarks reveal Heidegger's affinity with the concept of nonground more clearly than the lecture of 1936. His most extensive discussion of this concept, however, is to be found in his seminar of 1927/28.

III. "That which has Absolutely Disappeared": Heidegger's First Seminar on Schelling 1927/28

The only recently published Marburg seminar from the winter term of 1927/28 entitled "Schelling's treatise on the essence of human freedom" contains Heidegger's first reading of Schelling's *Freedom Essay*. Apparently, Heidegger's attention had been drawn to this work a little earlier in 1926 by Karl Jaspers who had sent him a volume of Schelling's works.⁵⁹ The Seminar, which was announced as a "tutorial [*Übung*] for advanced students," is divided into two sections: For the sessions two to four, there are minutes written by Heidegger's students which give evidence of a close reading of the text, as well as eight hand-written pieces of notepaper written by Heidegger himself. Sessions five to nine contain five seminar papers by well-known students of Heidegger's, such as Hans Jonas (on Augustine) and Walter Bröcker (on Leibniz).⁶⁰

In the given context, clearly, the first part of the seminar on Schelling is of greatest interest. Compared to the 1936 lecture-series, three aspects of the seminar of 1927/28 should be accentuated: *First*, the approach of the seminar differs considerably from the later lecture-series. Whilst Heidegger in 1936 works through the *Freedom Essay* chronologically and (despite all ambivalence in the details) provides one consistent interpretation, the approach in 1927/28 is marked by a circular procedure and re-evaluates central terms at different stages and from different perspectives. Furthermore, Heidegger's interpretation is in broad terms more tentative and preliminary in its discussion than the decisive approach of the later lecture-series. *Secondly*, however, it is to be observed that even at this time Heidegger examines topics that will be of central interest in his later interpretation:⁶¹ In all three sessions, the later so-called "jointure of Being" (the difference between ground and that which exists) is the focus of Heidegger's interest, as well as the concept of evil, which emerges, quite distinctly, as a

⁵⁹ In this respect, Heidegger writes to Jaspers on April 23th, 1926: "I have to thank you explicitly again today for the little Schelling volume [*das Schellingbändchen*]. Schelling ventures much further philosophically than Hegel although he is more untidy conceptually [*begrifflich unordentlicher*]. I have only started reading the treatise on freedom. It is too valuable to me to want to get to know it by merely reading it through roughly." Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1920–1963*, ed. Walter Biemel and Hans Saner (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1990).

⁶² It is unsure which edition Heidegger had received from Jaspers. However, it seems to have been a compilation of several works.

⁶⁰ Cf. in detail: Philipp Schwab and Sebastian Schwenzfeuer, "Editorischer Bericht," in Hühn and Jantzen, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar*, 267–317.

⁶¹ For a summary of these three sessions, see *ibid.*, 308–314.

second and main point of interest.⁶² Moreover, the interpretation set forth in 1927/28 is already principally orientated towards and along the “question of Being.”⁶³ In addition, Heidegger’s ambivalent stance towards Schelling’s work, according to which it transcends German Idealism, but nonetheless “fails,” shines forth for instance when Heidegger speaks of “enlightening sentences which appear all of a sudden” and which “show that Schelling’s standard is far above Idealism, even if he did not succeed in keeping to this standard persistently.”⁶⁴

Thirdly, however, despite all parallels with and the anticipation of the themes addressed in the later lecture-series, there are some essential differences in the content when compared with the lecture-series of 1936. The most remarkable difference is that in 1927/28 the concept of *nonground*—which is, as indicated, only quoted once in 1936—is at the core of Heidegger’s discussion. Indeed, on only 40 pages (as opposed to 200 in 1936) the concept is quoted or referred to 19 times in the 3rd and 4th session and five times in Heidegger’s own notes. This quantitative peculiarity is reflected by the fact that Heidegger, in a systematic perspective, repeatedly returns to this concept as to the “highest point of the entire investigation,” in order to clarify central questions in his interpretation of the *Freedom Essay*.

On the whole, the interpretation of the nonground in the seminar of 1927/28 is twofold: *On the one hand*, Heidegger’s commentary on the nonground in his Marburg seminar sheds light on the marginal treatment thereof in the “great” lecture-series of 1936, insofar as Heidegger already considers the nonground in terms of *unity* here. The reason for this, lies in the fact that he consistently views this concept *from the perspective of* the “jointure of Being” and *with respect to* it. The nonground is of interest to Heidegger for the simple reason that it sets forth an explanation of the relation of the ground to that which exists. In doing so, Heidegger brings the nonground so close to the “jointure of Being” that he quite literally *identifies* it with the “inseparability” [*Unzertrennlichkeit*] of both principles in God, or with love as the “final” unity

⁶² Cf. esp. the interpretations in the 2nd and 3rd sessions in Martin Heidegger, “Protokolle einer Übung von Martin Heidegger zu ‘Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit’ aus dem Wintersemester 1927/28 in Marburg,” text critically edited with commentary and an introd. by Philipp Schwab and Sebastian Schwenzfeuer, in Hühn and Jantzen, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar*, 263-463, here: 335-337, 340-341.

⁶³ Cf. esp. the 4th session which works through the concept of “Being at all” [*Sein überhaupt*] thoroughly, in Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 345-354. The specific approach to the “question of Being,” however, marks a fundamentally different stance when compared with the lecture series of 1936. In his first seminar, Heidegger repeatedly stresses that the determination of Being is, in Schelling, to be understood as *based on* human freedom. In 1936, on the contrary, Heidegger states several times that human freedom must be understood within the horizon of Being itself. It is in accordance with this that Heidegger in 1927/28 *skips* the introduction whilst in 1936 it is precisely the introduction which is supposed to illuminate the ontological dimension of the *Freedom Essay*. It would be of great interest to interpret this shift against the backdrop of the development of Heidegger’s thought, even more so as the first seminar was held only shortly after *Being and Time* was published.

⁶⁴ Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 340. Certainly, the minutes cannot be taken to be word-by-word transcriptions of what Heidegger said. However, compared to Heidegger’s own notes and given the fact that they are fairly consistent in themselves, they appear to be a rather reliable source.

of the two. At the same time, however, the nonground already poses a “problem” for Heidegger in 1927/28, since it is, indeed according to Schelling’s text, *not* to be considered in terms of a unity of both principles. Repeatedly, Heidegger raises the question of the “ontological status” of the nonground but does not arrive at a definite conclusion. However, and in contrast to the lecture-series of 1936, Heidegger continually rethinks this ‘problematic’ nature of the nonground. *On the other hand*, for precisely this reason and in repeatedly reconsidering this problem, Heidegger makes the fundamental aspect of *withdrawal* more explicit here than in his later lectures by describing the nonground as *that which has absolutely disappeared* [*das schlechthin Verschwundene*]. This double-sided aspect of the nonground will now be examined with a view to its development in the text, and in particular with respect to the three passages which explicitly deal with the nonground (two in the minutes of the 3rd and one in the minutes of the 4th session).⁶⁵

1. The point of departure for the interpretation of the nonground is, as was said, the question of ground and that which exists. The minutes begin as follows: “The discussion in the first place picks up the question as to how Schelling solves the problem of the *unity* of essence [*Wesen*] as ground and essence as existence.”⁶⁶ As indicated briefly in the lecture-series of 1936, but more extensively, Heidegger then points to the fact that this unity is in a certain fashion not to be thought of *as* unity, yet without explicitly discussing the tension in this constellation: “The unity of essence [*Wesen*] as ground and as existence is neither the one nor the other, nor the unity of the opposition of the two, therefore neither of the two can be opposed to the other.”⁶⁷ In one of his notes, Heidegger attempts to express this tension of unity and non-unity by describing the nonground as “the pre-dual, pre-oppositional ‘*positive*.’”⁶⁸ However, Heidegger places the “positive” in quotation marks; and it is in fact questionable whether the nonground can, in this manner, be described as positive.

The passage that immediately follows in the minutes contains Heidegger’s most radical definition of the nonground in his discussion of the *Freedom Essay* as a whole. Heidegger states, namely, that the “indifference,” that is, the nonground, has to be “assessed seriously.”⁶⁹ In the following, Heidegger quotes the central passages concerning the nonground—which he does nowhere in the 1936 lecture-series—according to which it “has no predicate, except the very lacking of a predicate, without it being on that account a nothingness [*ein*

⁶⁵ I will cite Heidegger’s own notes as far as they are relevant in the respective passages.

⁶⁶ Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 338; emphasis added.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 324. In German: “Das vor-gegensätzliche—vor-duale ‘*Positive*.’” According to its structure, this note belongs to the 4th session; however, the aspect quoted here is not developed there explicitly and is actually discussed in the 3rd session.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 338.

Nichts] or non-thing [*ein Unding*].”⁷⁰ Heidegger then comments on this, further specifying his idea: “That statement is formally clear, it means assessing the indifference seriously, the idea of that which has absolutely disappeared.”⁷¹ The nonground as “*that which has absolutely disappeared*”:⁷² This refers precisely to nothingness as a fundamental trait of Being, quite the same way as Heidegger unravels it in his lecture-series of 1936, yet in that later lecture it is *not* applied to the nonground. Heidegger’s remark reveals that the nonground, as the “highest point” of the investigation, brings about the ambiguous sense of withdrawal, which ‘defines’ the Absolute in Schelling’s *Freedom Essay*. Indeed, as the passage quoted from Schelling clearly indicates, the nonground, even if it is “that which has absolutely disappeared,” is not mere nothingness. With this earlier explanation, Heidegger steps closer to the affinity that binds the intention of his 1936 lecture with the nonground, than the one suggested in the later lecture-series itself.

However, in the seminar of 1927/28, Heidegger does not dwell on this point either, and neither does he comment on the concept of nothingness, which he had just quoted from Schelling. The notion of the nonground as “that which has absolutely disappeared” remains a rather abrupt insight, and the reason that it remains such is that it does not give a direct and satisfying answer to Heidegger’s primary question, that is, the question of the unity of ground and that which exists. The ambiguity which lies in the nonground shines forth once more when Heidegger raises the *question* of the “ontological” status of this concept.⁷³ In his *response*, Heidegger *leaves* behind the nonground once more by focusing on its ‘consequences.’ Thus, the ontological status of the nonground is explicated by means of “two equally eternal beginnings,” into which it is “divided,” as well as by pointing to the fact that the ground and that which exists cannot be predicated of it “as opposites” but in fact “as non-opposites, that is, in disjunction and each for itself.”⁷⁴ That is to say: Heidegger does not clarify the status of the nonground *itself* but rather of that which ‘emerges’ from it. Unsurprisingly, Heidegger abandons this discussion and at the same time suggests the need for a critique of the concept of nonground:

⁷⁰ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68-69; idem, SW I/7, 406. The passage of the *Freedom Essay* which introduces the nonground, however, is only given in an abbreviated form in the minutes: “S. 406 ‘Before all ground, there must be’.” cf. Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 338.

⁷¹ Ibid., 339.

⁷² This notion is in fact based on a passage by Schelling (Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; idem, SW I/7, 406), yet interpreted independently by Heidegger. Schelling speaks of a “disappearance of all opposites” and adds that at this point “most people forget . . . that these [the opposites] have now really disappeared.” In other words, in Schelling’s philosophy, it is the *opposites* that disappear *in* the nonground; in Heidegger, by contrast, the disappearance refers to the nonground *itself*.

⁷³ Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 339.

⁷⁴ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 69-70; idem, SW I/7, 407-408. This passage on the “two equally eternal beginnings” is quoted twice by Heidegger, thus revealing his main interest in the ‘origin’ of ground and that which exists. Cf. Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 339, 352.

In a purely abstract and formal sense (simply owing to Schelling's terminological definitions of essence, ground, existence, nonground), we do not get any further, instead we have to attempt to grasp Schelling's entire paradigm understanding of existence [*Dasein*]) in such a manner as to make "ground" and "existence" more comprehensible. In consideration of this pre-emptive anticipation of the ontological result, the question arises whether a legitimate problem is still apparent, if one draws back upon the nonground, and how the nonground is to be determined ontologically. Hence, the discussion reinvestigates Schelling's treatise by trying to grasp his understanding of the human being and existence [*Mensch- und Daseins-Erfassung*] more acutely.⁷⁵

This remark is telling. On the one hand, it reveals that Heidegger is in fact primarily concerned with the relation between the ground and that which exists; on the other hand, however, Heidegger himself makes explicit that the 'ontological status' of the nonground still remains unsettled, and, significantly, the discussion leaves the nonground aside and turns to the concept of evil.

2. Yet only a little later Heidegger returns to the concept of nonground and attempts to examine the concept from a different angle. It is even clearer here, though, that Heidegger doesn't aim to clarify the concept for its own sake but instead to readdress it, in order to explicate something which lies beyond it. Heidegger's question here is the following: "Why does the indifference, the inseparability [*Ungeschiedenheit*] of the nonground (original ground) have to be annulled [*aufgehoben*]?"⁷⁶ Again, not the nonground *itself*, but rather its consequences are being questioned. And Heidegger answers by quoting Schelling: "Because of God's will for self-revelation, 'because God must necessarily reveal himself and because nothing at all can remain ambiguous in creation.'" ⁷⁷ This passage in Schelling, however, is devoted to the *human being's* decision making and does not directly refer to the 'division' [*Scheidung*] within the nonground. Heidegger, though, refers this question to the nonground and asks how an "ambiguity" is possible "within the absolute indifference" in which "everything has disappeared."⁷⁸ Once more, Heidegger is here querying Schelling's conception of the nonground:

"Both this-and that" [*Sowohl-als auch*] is an expression of ambiguity, in such a fashion, as to suggest that Schelling grasps the nonground here in a way that he himself rejects it. . . . Schelling does not

⁷⁵ Ibid., 340.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 341.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Cf. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 41; idem, SW I/7, 374.

⁷⁸ Heidegger, "Protokolle," 342.

distinguish sharply enough in this instance between “both this-and that” and “neither-nor.”⁷⁹

In fact, this critique only comes about owing to the fact that Heidegger addresses the indifference of the nonground ‘too early.’ He identifies it with the “inseverability” [*Unzertrennlichkeit*] of the two principles in God,⁸⁰ that is to say, with the “jointure of Being,” which in Schelling’s passage of thought is not ‘yet’ the indifference of the nonground.

3. Furthermore, in the last passage on the nonground in the 1927/28 seminar, Heidegger’s tendency is again to interpret this concept with regard to its consequences. The minutes to the 4th session show that Heidegger uses the nonground to clarify the structure of “revealing oneself by means of the opposite” [*Offenbarwerden im Gegenteil*].⁸¹ In this context, Heidegger raises the question of the “meaning” of evil with respect to the revelation of God as love, and hereby refers to a central statement of Schelling’s: “For every essence [*Wesen*] can only reveal itself in its opposite, love only in hate, unity in conflict.”⁸² So again Heidegger does not discuss the nonground for its own sake here, even although the term is mentioned several times. Heidegger’s focus is in this case not the systematic *initiative* for Schelling’s discourse, but rather the concept of *love* as its *end*; that is, Heidegger here focuses on the ‘unification’ of the opposites. The fact that Heidegger brings these two concepts (nonground and love) so close to one another, that they are in fact even identified with each other, becomes blatantly apparent in the imprecise rendering of a quotation which, be it due to Heidegger or to the minute-taker, reflects the overall tendency of his reading of the nonground in 1927/28. It is noted that that which “unifies is ‘love *or*—what should we name it?’”⁸³ Schelling, however, uses this phrase to raise the question of what love was when it was “*not yet* as love, *rather*—how should we describe it?”⁸⁴ And indeed this “first moment” *before* love is love, which withdraws from description, is the *nonground*.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Cf. esp. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 33; idem, SW I/7, 363. This concept refers to the “difference” between God and man, and Schelling in fact describes this as a “unity:” “The same unity that is inseverable in God must therefore be severable in man—and that is the possibility of good and evil.”

⁸¹ Cf. Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 350.

⁸² Cf. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 41; idem, SW I/7, 374; cf. Heidegger, “Protokolle,” 350. This passage immediately precedes the one just quoted on the necessity of revelation in God. In this context, Heidegger also quotes the passage on God as a “system” and “life” without, however, at this point referring to a “splitting open” of the system. Cf. also *ibid.*, 343.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 353; emphasis added. This passage is (for the most part) correctly quoted *ibid.*, 350.

⁸⁴ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; idem, SW I/7, 405–406; emphasis added. In German, the contrast is even clearer. The minutes’ version is: “Das, was sie einigt, ‘die Liebe—*oder* wie sollen wir es nennen.’” In Schelling, it is: “*aber noch nicht* da war als Liebe, *sondern*—wie sollen wir es bezeichnen?” (emphasis added). Note the significant shift of the dash.

In broad terms, the continual regression to the nonground in Heidegger's Interpretation of 1927/28 proves to be of a rather problematic nature. Heidegger attempts again and again to clarify the structure of Schelling's treatise by returning to the "highest point" of the investigation. Yet this then causes discrepancies in the interpretation, since he continually refers Schelling's final explanation of the 'first moment' to passages earlier in the text. On the basis of this, Heidegger's marginal and rather critical treatment of the nonground in his 1936 lecture-series becomes somewhat more intelligible. *On the one hand*, Heidegger has in 1927/28 already thought the nonground primarily as the 'highest unity.' Even if the concept of a "new beginning," which suggests something beyond the "metaphysical" system, is not yet developed, the nonground is nonetheless identified with unity. And insofar as this unity, as a *metaphysical* unity, proves to be problematic for Heidegger in later years, so must *eo ipso* the notion of nonground become questionable too, since Heidegger believes it to be responsible for stabilizing this unity. *On the other hand*, the not yet clarified 'ontological status' of the nonground in Heidegger's 1927/28 reading points forward to the 'irritation' in the "question of Being" precisely through this concept of the nonground. Furthermore, Heidegger's conceptualization of the term as "that which has absolutely disappeared" already points to nothingness as a fundamental trait of Being. By virtue of this line of thought the nonground comes into view as the concept which actually embodies the "impulse" in Schelling's treatise in the very sense in which Heidegger himself develops it in 1936.

Looking back at Heidegger's discussions of the nonground from 1927/28, 1936 and 1941-1943 as a whole, we can see that in none of these three analyses the nonground is clearly emphasized as the preferred concept. Nonetheless, a synopsis of these texts proves that in all three 'periods' there are passages which reveal a strong affinity with this concept: In the lecture-series of 1936 it was shown that the concept of nonground, despite Heidegger's pointed critique thereof, comes closest to the objective of his interpretation of the *Freedom Essay*. The discussion spanning 1941-1943, especially the confrontation with Schelling and Hegel, brought to light that the nonground embodies the most "original" dimension of Schelling's thought. Finally, in the seminar of 1927/28, the concept of "that which has absolutely disappeared" forms the prelude, as it were, or point of departure for this line of thought which is, however, blurred by Heidegger's association of nonground with unity right at the beginning.

On the whole, it is at least remarkable if not highly astounding that Heidegger does not in fact undertake a 'semantic' analysis of the *word* "non-ground" [*Un-grund*] in any of these texts, in order to clarify the ambiguity which already lies in the expression itself: the paradoxical constellation of a ground which is at the same time *not* a ground. That this peculiarity, however, does not escape Heidegger's attention, and indeed indicates what he attaches to this in

terms of his own thought, becomes evident by means of a marginal note Heidegger presumably adds between 1929 and 1931—shortly after his first reading of Schelling—to his own copy of the first print of *On the Essence of Ground*: “Wherein lies the necessity of grounding? In the abyss and the non-ground.”⁸⁵

IV. “Absolute Alterity” and “Groundless Ground”: Derrida on Schelling

When compared with Heidegger’s repeated, intense and detailed reading of the *Freedom Essay*, Derrida’s scattered remarks on Schelling appear almost cursory. For this reason, the following analysis, which is limited to *explicit* references Derrida makes to Schelling, cannot be viewed as more than an appendix to Heidegger’s interpretation. Yet despite their brief and dispersed character Derrida’s remarks are enlightening. In particular, with a view to the *specific* passages he quotes from Schelling and *how* they are cited. These references to Schelling may be divided into four ‘periods’ or ‘perspectives’:⁸⁶

1. The first and significant ‘bundle’ of remarks on Schelling is to be found in *Writing and Difference* from 1967. In the first essay of the book, “Force and Signification” first published in 1963), Derrida, without citing a source and *en*

⁸⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken (1919–1961)* (*Gesamtausgabe*, series I, vol. 9), ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm v. Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2nd ed., 1996), 127. In German: “Wo liegt die Notwendigkeit für Gründung? Im Ab- und Un-grund.” A few pages earlier, Heidegger refers to Schelling’s *Freedom Essay* in the printed text, cf. *ibid.*, 125–126. Cf. on this Sebastian Schwenzfeuer, “Natur und Sein. Affinitäten zwischen Schelling und Heidegger,” in Hühn and Jantzen, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar*, 227–261. Also in *Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1935, Heidegger doubtlessly alludes to Schelling’s terminology when asking for the relation of original ground [*Ur-grund*], abyss [*Ab-grund*] and nonground [*Un-grund*]. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, new trans. by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2000), 3; *idem*, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (*Gesamtausgabe*, series II, vol. 40), ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1983), 5.

⁸⁶ Given the form in which Derrida’s works are currently accessible, it is, naturally, quite likely that there are further references to Schelling in more secluded contexts. Thus, the following analysis cannot claim to be absolutely complete. The literature on Schelling—Derrida is rather sparse up to now. Cf. Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration. Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London/New York: Verso, 1987), 19–31; Manfred Frank, “‘Différance’ und ‘autonome Negation,’” in *idem*, *Das Sagbare und das Unsagbare. Studien zur deutsch-französischen Hermeneutik und Texttheorie*, new ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), 446–470, here: 465–467; Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy. An Introduction* (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. 67–75; David L. Clark, “The Necessary Heritage of Darkness: Tropics of Negativity in Schelling, Derrida, and de Man,” in *idem* and Tilottama Rajan, eds., *Intersections. Nineteenth-Century Philosophy and Contemporary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 79–146; Simon Skempton, *Alienation after Derrida* (London/New York: Continuum, 2010), 33–35, 44–48. For a discussion on this topic see also Bernard Freydenberg, *Schelling’s Dialogical Freedom Essay. Provocative Philosophy Then and Now* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 115–116.

passant, refers to Schelling as the author of the phrase: “all is but Dionysus.”⁸⁷ This is apparently an abbreviated quotation from Schelling’s “Philosophy of Revelation.”⁸⁸ What is truly remarkable here is the context in which Schelling is quoted for the very first time, since Derrida is in this instance discussing *difference* in general and more specifically the difference between Dionysus and Apollo. On this, Derrida remarks:

The divergence, the *différance* between Dionysus and Apollo, between ardor and structure, cannot be erased in history, for it is not *in* history. It too, in an unexpected sense, is an original structure: the opening of history, historicity itself. *Différance* does not simply belong either to history or to structure.⁸⁹

This is precisely where the Schelling quotation comes to bear. That is to say, at this point Schelling and his understanding of Dionysus is associated, albeit only loosely, with an exteriority or the exterior—an exteriority of history which neither completely merges into history nor totally escapes from it, insofar as this exteriority itself *discloses* history.

Derrida returns to this structure later in the book. Having briefly referred to the expression “‘the irony of God,’ of which Schelling spoke”⁹⁰ in the essay on Jabès (first published in 1964), the most extensive Schelling citation in Derrida’s early writings is to be found in the Levinas-Essay “Violence and Metaphysics” first published in 1964 as well). In this work, Derrida first quotes Schelling’s *Erlangen Lectures* and his *Philosophy and Religion* on knowledge, reason, egoity and finitude.⁹¹ Towards the end of the text, Schelling appears again in the context of *empiricism*. This concept is introduced by Derrida by adding the following remark to his discussion on Levinas’ thought on the Other:

But the true name of this inclination of thought to the Other, of this resigned acceptance of incoherent incoherence inspired by a truth more

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans., with an introd. and additional notes by Alan Bass (London/New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1993), 34; idem, *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1967), 47.

⁸⁸ Cf. Schelling, SW II/3, 463; cf. also SW II/2, 376; SW II/3, 425.

⁸⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 34; idem, *L’écriture et la différence*, 47.

⁹⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 82; idem, *L’écriture et la différence*, 103. Cf. for instance Schelling, SW II/2, 90; SW II/3, 304; SW II/4, 24, 151; cf. also Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. and with an introduction by Manfred Frank (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 202, 256.

⁹¹ Cf. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 163; idem, *L’écriture et la différence*, 192. The references to the sources in Schelling are not mentioned in the French original (Derrida simply writes “Schelling”) nor are they mentioned in the English translation, but are given in the German translation. The quoted passages are to be found in: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, “On the Nature as Philosophy as Science,” trans. Marcus Weigelt, in Rüdiger Bubner, ed., *German Idealist Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 1997), 210-243, here: 241-242; idem, SW I/9, 244; Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion (1804)*, trans., annotated, and with an introd. by Klaus Ottmann (Putnam: Spring Publications, 2010), 30-31; idem, SW I/6, 42-43.

profound than the “logic” of philosophical discourse, the true name of this *renunciation* of the concept, of the *a priori* and transcendental horizons of language, is *empiricism*.⁹²

Thus, and despite Derrida’s at times critical approach to Levinas, he develops the concept of empiricism to fit closely with his own philosophical project. This is particularly evident in the following remark: “It [empiricism] is the *dream* of a purely heterological thought at its source. A *pure* thought of *pure* difference.”⁹³ However, empiricism is not conceptualized as a ‘simple’ overcoming of ‘logocentric’ philosophy. As Derrida writes, empiricism “has ever committed but one fault: the philosophical fault of presenting itself as a philosophy.”⁹⁴ Since empiricism itself invokes the concept of *experience* and since this concept has, according to Derrida, “always been determined by a metaphysics of presence,” he sees a certain “complicity between empiricism and metaphysics.”⁹⁵ This, then, is the context in which Schelling is cited: “It [this complicity] calls for closer meditation. Schelling went quite far in this direction.”⁹⁶ In the respective footnote, Derrida goes on to cite the final passage from Schelling’s “Exposition of Philosophical Empiricism”:

God would be the absolute Being which is only within itself, that which is entirely introverted [*das ganz in sich Gekehrte*], substance in the most eminent sense, that which is absolutely free of relation. But precisely by considering these determinations as purely immanent, as relating to nothing external to him, the demand is made upon us to understand them through and from Him [*von Ihm aus*], that is, to understand him as their *prius* and accordingly as the absolute *prius*. Thus, Empiricism, by virtue of its last inferences, drives us to the supra-empirical [*das Überempirische*].⁹⁷

Derrida himself adds: “Naturally, by “enclosed” and “enfolded” [*das ganz in sich Gekehrte*] one is not to understand finite closure and egoistic muteness, but rather absolute alterity, which Levinas calls the Infinite absolved of relation.”⁹⁸ More explicitly than before, Derrida associates Schelling with the concept of an

⁹²Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 189; idem, *L'écriture et la différence*, 224.

⁹³Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 189; idem, *L'écriture et la différence*, 224.

⁹⁴Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 189; idem, *L'écriture et la différence*, 224, “philosophical” is missing in the English translation.

⁹⁵Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 190; idem, *L'écriture et la différence*, 225.

⁹⁶Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 190; idem, *L'écriture et la différence*, 225.

⁹⁷Cf. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 411n; idem, *L'écriture et la différence*, 225n; cf. Schelling, SW I/10, 286; my translation. The English translation of this passage given in *Writing and Difference* is apparently only based on the French and hence rather problematic.

⁹⁸Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 411n; idem, *L'écriture et la différence*, 225n.

“absolute exteriority”⁹⁹—an exteriority, however, which is not *simply* a negation of the ‘inner’ or a ‘simple’ alterity. Instead, the quoted concept “*prius*” reveals that this exteriority is at the same time a “*prius*” to *something*; more precisely, to *everything* that is. There is no doubt that the passage quoted from the “Exposition of Philosophical Empiricism” points towards the central concept of Schelling’s late philosophy, that is, towards “unprethinkable Being” [*unvordenkliches Sein*]. And there is no doubt as well, that this very concept is a term that follows up on the nonground of the *Freedom Essay*. It is this motif of an “unprethinkable” and withdrawn origin, which catches Derrida’s attention in his first remarks on Schelling, apparently dating back to 1963/64.

2. Nonetheless, in the works that immediately follow there are no further significant references to Schelling. Schelling’s thought is not an object of discussion in *Of Grammatology* and in *Speech and Phenomenon* (both 1967).

Schelling is also mostly absent from Derrida’s writings of 1972; only in the “Hors Livre” to *Dissémination* is Schelling’s name mentioned twice with regard to the Schelling critique in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, yet without further commentary.¹⁰⁰

A second ‘series’ of references is not to be found until the early 1980s, and in fact, this is Derrida’s most extensive discussion of Schelling’s thought, at least in quantitative terms. However, these references only relate to a rather specific context and are limited to a single text of Schelling’s, namely, to his

Lectures on the Method of Academic Study (held in 1802, first published 1803).

Derrida’s attention seems to have been drawn to the lectures through a French translation of the text dating from 1979.¹⁰¹ In accordance with the main topic of these *Lectures*, between 1980 and about 1986, Schelling becomes one of

Derrida’s dialogue partners in his reflections on academic institutions; furthermore, Derrida refers to Schelling during this period when pondering questions on translation and “imagination.” The first reference to Schelling in

⁹⁹ On this and the cited passage see Markus Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos. Untersuchungen über Ontotheologie, Anthropologie und Selbstbewußtseinsgeschichte in Schellings “Philosophie der Mythologie”* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2006), esp. 10n, 359n.

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 18–19; idem, *La dissémination*, 29–30. In this context, Derrida had also quoted Schelling’s name indirectly in a passage taken from Bataille in *Writing and Difference*, cf. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 269; idem, *L’écriture et la différence*, 395.

¹⁰¹ This translation is quoted by Derrida throughout: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, “Leçons sur la méthode des études académiques,” trans. Jean-François Courtine and Jacques Rivelaygue, in *Philosophies de l’Université. L’idéalisme allemand et la question de l’Université. Textes de Schelling, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Humboldt, Hegel*, ed. Luc Ferry, Jean-Pierre Pesron and Alain Renault (Paris: Payot, 1979), 41–164 (Derrida seems to have been involved in the development of this volume, cf. *ibid.*, 9n). A first French translation, which was apparently unbeknown to Derrida, dates back to 1847 !): Schelling, “Leçons sur la méthode des études académiques,” in idem *Écrits philosophiques et morceaux propres à donner une idée générale de son système*, trans. from German and with a preface by Charles Bénard (Paris: Joubert et Ladrangé, 1847), 1–226.

this series is to be found in the lecture “Mochlos” first held in 1980);¹⁰² the most detailed debate on Schelling is to be found in the lecture “Theology of Translation,” held in 1984 in Toronto, which cites Schelling on nearly every single page.¹⁰³ The two aforementioned lectures were published later in *Right to Philosophy*. This volume contains several other lectures from 1981-1983, which briefly refer to Schelling, and throughout to the *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study*.¹⁰⁴ One last and brief reference to this text is to be found in the essay “Psyche” from 1984/86), later published in a volume of the same title.¹⁰⁵

Although Derrida provides a lucid reading of Schelling’s lectures in the aforementioned texts and doubtlessly incorporates some productive insights into Schelling, no deeper affinity to the latter’s philosophy, as was visible in *Writing and Difference*, can be established here. Quite the contrary, in the “Theology of Translation,” Derrida considers Schelling’s theory of translation entirely in terms of “onto-theology.”¹⁰⁶ Yet one short remark made in this essay is certainly worth noting within the given context: In discussing Schelling’s fourth *Lecture*, Derrida refers to Schelling’s critique of a type of thinking of the enlightenment that creates “artificial oppositions.” Derrida then adds in parenthesis: “there is an analogous movement in Heidegger, and this will not be the only affinity he has with Schelling.”¹⁰⁷ This statement on “Heidegger’s affinity with Schelling” immediately marks the transition to the next series of Derrida’s references to Schelling.

3. The third series of references to Schelling is to be found within the period 1986/87, that is, they immediately follow on from the reference mentioned above. However, these references must be distinguished from the earlier ones in terms of content. These newer references can be referred back to a particular inspiration, to be found for the first time in the seminal text, “How to Avoid Speaking,” from 1986. Indeed, Derrida’s reflections on “Negative Theology” in this text would have to be taken into account in a systematic confrontation between Derrida and Schelling.¹⁰⁸ Yet as regards *explicit* references to Schelling there is only one single note containing Schelling’s name. Remarkably, Derrida

¹⁰² Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, vol. 2: *Eyes of the University*, trans. Jan Plug et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 88, 106; idem, *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Éd. Galilée, 1990), 404, 429.

¹⁰³ Cf. Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, vol. 2, 64–80; idem, *Du droit à la philosophie*, 371–394.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, vol. 2, 57, 63, 131, 151–152, 164; idem, *Du droit à la philosophie*, 362, 370, 464–465, 493–494, 510.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Psyche. Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 41–43; idem, *Psyché. Inventions de l’autre*, vol. 1, new augm. ed. (Paris: Éd. Galilée, 1998), 55–58.

¹⁰⁶ Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, vol. 2, 77; idem, *Du droit à la philosophie*, 390. Cf. also Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, vol. 2, 76; idem, *Du droit à la philosophie*, 388. Particularly in this context, however, the passage I just referred to from “Psyche” would have to be taken into account in greater detail. There, Derrida speaks of a “supplement of invention” and a “supplementary logic” in Schelling.

¹⁰⁷ Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, vol. 2, 74; idem, *Du droit à la philosophie*, 386.

¹⁰⁸ On this, cf. Clark, “The Necessary Heritage of Darkness.”

does not refer to Schelling directly, but rather, and for the first time, to Heidegger's Schelling-lecture of 1936.¹⁰⁹ By means of a 'detour' through this text, numerous references are to be found to Schelling in Derrida's discussion of Heidegger in *Of Spirit* from 1987. Yet once more the relevance of these references is limited. As is well known, Derrida is not in this instance interested in Schelling for his own sake, but rather in the 'history' of Heidegger's use of the term "*Geist*" (with and without quotation marks). Thus, all references to Schelling made here are mediated through Heidegger's 1936 lecture and serve solely to illuminate Heidegger's understanding of *Geist*.¹¹⁰ In any case, it is remarkable that Derrida now, albeit indirectly, refers to Schelling's *Freedom Essay* for the first time. And it is also noteworthy that Derrida, in *Of Spirit*, cites, by means of and in the context of Heidegger's own interpretation, the passage which in Schelling immediately precedes his introduction of the term "non-ground": "Yet love is the highest. It is what existed, then, before the ground and before that which exists (as separate) but not yet as *love*, rather—how should we describe it?"¹¹¹ Furthermore, Derrida also quotes Heidegger's laconic remark pointing to the (unnamed) nonground as inexpressible: "Here words leave the thinker, too."¹¹² Quite astonishingly, and as it would seem, purposefully, Derrida takes up one of the few passages in Heidegger's lecture which deals with the concept of the nonground, and yet this concept is not named in 1987 but is central to Derrida's final references to Schelling in his last Seminar of 2001/02.

4. The probably most significant direct reference to Schelling is only to be found in the first half of Derrida's final seminar *The Beast & the Sovereign*. It might be said that by virtue of this very text the discussion on Schelling comes full circle, in that Derrida *mutatis mutandis* returns to the topic which had originally brought him to Schelling some 35 years earlier in *Writing and Difference*. The thematic analysis of Schelling's thought in the fifth session on 30 January 2002 is nevertheless specific to the context in which it is perused. To shed some light on how Derrida refers to Schelling in this lecture, it is necessary to briefly outline his stance.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Psyche. Inventions of the Other*, vol. 2, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 312n; idem, *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre*, vol. 2, new augm. and rev. ed. (Paris: Éd. Galilée, 2003), 192n. Here, as he does in *Of Spirit*, in the French original, Derrida quotes next to the first German edition) Courtine's translation: Martin Heidegger, *Schelling. Le traité de 1809 sur l'essence de la liberté humaine*, ed. Hildegard Feick, trans. Jean-François Courtine (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). However, since Derrida quotes *Of Spirit* (1987) here in the previous footnotes as well as in the ones that follow, it is quite likely that this reference was only inserted in 1987 and is thus of a later date than *Of Spirit*.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 1989), 5, 35, 63, 71, 75, 77-78, 80-81, 102-104, 106, 117n, 125n, 133n, 138-139n; idem, *De l'esprit. Heidegger et la question* Paris: Ed. Galilée, 1987), 19, 23, 58, 102, 113, 120, 122-124, 127, 129, 152, 168-171, 175.

¹¹¹ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; idem, SW I/7, 405-406. Cf. Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 77-78; idem, *De l'esprit*, 122-124. In the context of Derrida's reading of Heidegger, of course, this quotation is inspired by the fact that Heidegger, in referring to Schelling, speaks about spirit.

¹¹² Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 128; idem, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 154.

In thinking through the “odd couple” of beast and sovereign, Derrida draws attention to the semantics of the French lexical field of *bête*. The peculiarity of this lexical field lies in the fact that whereas the noun *bête* means creature, animal or beast, the adjective *bête*, including its derivatives *bêtement* and *bêtise*, would approximate to “stupid,” “stupidly” and “stupidity.”¹¹³ The point of Derrida’s reflections is that the term which, in its root, refers to the animal or beast—*bêtise*—cannot be predicated of an animal, but only of a human. The ‘intermediary,’ who, in this context, leads Derrida to Schelling, is not Martin Heidegger—although his lecture-series of 1936 is mentioned as well¹¹⁴—but Gilles Deleuze. Derrida quotes a passage from *Difference and Repetition* in which Deleuze discusses *bêtise* and raises a “transcendental” question, which at the same time undermines transcendental thought: “How is *bêtise* and not error) possible?”¹¹⁵

The reason Derrida is led to Schelling via Deleuze is by virtue of the fact that Deleuze binds *bêtise* to individuation, whilst he at the same time refers individuation to a preceding ground [*fond*]: “Individuation as such . . . is inseparable from a pure ground [*fond*] that it brings to the surface and tails with it.”¹¹⁶ In this regard, Derrida states: “One would understand nothing of Deleuze’s argumentation about *bêtise* that presupposes thought as human freedom in its relation to individuation, as a phenomenon of individuation (*Vereinzelung*) that stands out from and is determined against a ground [*fond*], without reconstituting Schelling’s whole discourse on human freedom and evil.”¹¹⁷ The point of reference would appear to be the passage from the *Freedom Essay* in which Schelling writes that evil can only come to light in man, insofar as only man “can voluntarily tear apart the eternal bond of forces.”¹¹⁸ And Schelling adds, quoting a passage from Baader: “Unfortunately, however, man can stand only below or above animals.”¹¹⁹ With regard to this ‘special status’ of man, Deleuze, referring to the term *bêtise*, draws a conclusion very likely inspired by Schelling, yet not formulated in the *Freedom Essay* itself: Only in the individual, and not in the animal, is there a *relation* to the preceding ground. This ground, however, is for Deleuze “the *indeterminate*, but the indeterminate insofar as it continues to embrace determination”; it is that which in itself “assumes neither form nor figure” and which is thus “difficult to describe.”¹²⁰ And it is from this very collision of the individual and the indeterminate that the abyssal possibility of *bêtise* which is not simply error) arises: “Stupidity [*bêtise*] is neither the ground

¹¹³ Of course, Derrida’s point here is that this lexical field ‘resists’ a precise translation. Cf. Derrida, *The Beast*, 149; idem, *Séminaire. La bête*, 205-206.

¹¹⁴ See Derrida’s appeal quoted at the outset of this essay.

¹¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 151; idem, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 197.

¹¹⁶ Deleuze, *Difference*, 152; idem, *Différence*, 197.

¹¹⁷ Derrida, *The Beast*, 153; idem, *Séminaire. La bête*, 209-210; the addition of “*Vereinzelung*” in parenthesis is Derrida’s.

¹¹⁸ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 40; idem, SW I/7, 373.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Deleuze, *Difference*, 152; idem, *Différence*, 197; emphasis added.

nor the individual, but rather this relation in which the individuation brings the ground to the surface without being able to give it a form.”¹²¹ Because Deleuze thus associates *bêtise* with the *indeterminate* and the *inexpressible*, Derrida, when drawing on Schelling’s concepts at the deepest level of his commentary, does not simply go back to the *ground*, but ‘further back’ to the *nonground*— even if this concept is not named in the respective passage by Deleuze.¹²² It is here that Derrida quotes the central passage of the *Freedom Essay*, which was not uttered even once in its complete form by Heidegger:

How can we call it anything other than the original ground [*Urgrund*], or rather, the *nonground* [*Ungrund*]? Since it precedes all opposites, these cannot be distinguishable in it nor can these be present in any way. Therefore, it cannot be described as the identity of the opposites; it can only be described as the absolute *indifference* of both.¹²³

It is quite remarkable that Derrida, as opposed to Deleuze in this passage, actually quotes the term *nonground* and, more importantly, that it is not solely used to shed light on Deleuze’s understanding of *bêtise*. Rather, it seems, through his rereading of *Difference and Repetition*, Derrida ‘discovers’ the *nonground* as a *systematic* motif that was somehow not able to come to light in his first reading of the *Freedom Essay* through the eyes of Heidegger in 1987. Deleuze, however, uses the term *sans-fond* or *sans fond* throughout his work and, in some passages, quotes the German term *Ungrund* and explicitly refers it back to Schelling.¹²⁴ But Derrida’s ‘discovery’ of the *nonground* is not limited to the context of the fifth session either. Instead, he repeatedly refers back to the term in later sessions and in some cases also uses the German word *Ungrund*, thus undoubtedly also associating the motif with Schelling. In addition, Derrida associates the term with the notions of “abyss” and “vertigo.” In doing so, we notice a shift in terminology when compared with Deleuze: Whilst the latter uses the terms *sans-fond* or *sans fond* throughout (according to context translated as “the groundless” or “groundlessness” respectively), Derrida mostly uses the notion of “*fond sans fond*” (translated as “groundless ground” and “bottomless bottom” respectively).

¹²¹ Deleuze, *Difference*, 152; idem, *Différence*, 197.

¹²² In the footnote referring to the “splendid pages” on “stupidity” in Schelling, he also simply speaks of the “ground,” cf. Deleuze, *Difference*, 321n; idem, *Différence*, 198n. In fact, Deleuze does make the connection between *nonground*, *bêtise* and individuation, albeit in a passage much later, cf. Deleuze, *Difference*, 274-275; idem, *Différence*, 351-353.

¹²³ Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; idem, SW I/7, 406. Cf. Derrida, *The Beast*, 154; idem, *Séminaire. La bête*, 212. Derrida refers to Schelling several times throughout this whole passage, once also quoting the *Stuttgart Lectures*, cf. Derrida, *The Beast*, 152-156; idem, *Séminaire. La bête*, 209-214.

¹²⁴ Cf. the use of German *Ungrund* and the reference to Schelling in one and the same paragraph, Deleuze, *Difference*, 229-230; idem, *Différence*, 296; cf. on Schelling also Deleuze, *Difference*, 190-191, 230, 276-277, 342-343n; idem, *Différence*, 227n, 246-247, 296, 354. On the “groundless” or “groundlessness” cf. Deleuze, *Difference*, 67, 91, 114, 125, 154, 166, 229, 242, 258, 274-277, 284, 292; idem, *Différence*, 92, 123, 151, 164, 200, 216, 296, 312, 332, 351-355, 364, 374.

Thus, Derrida sharpens the paradoxical notion of the *Ungrund*: namely, as a term that designates a *ground* which is at the same time *in itself* groundless.¹²⁵

In terms of its *historical* interpretation, this late discovery and repeated recourse to the *Ungrund* reveals Derrida's affinity with the concept, and in fact this motif refers, *systematically*, to the deepest parallels in Derrida's thought with Schelling's philosophy. The paradoxical constellation of an 'inexpressible' and 'transcendent' or 'exterior' ground, which in itself is *not* a ground and at the same time groundless, is neither 'pure' presence nor 'simple' absence, a nonground which "unprethinkably" precedes any *specific* difference, but is at the same time its 'impure origin,' without already containing it archetypically, no doubt marks a systematic parallel with Derrida's own notions of *différance* and supplement.¹²⁶ To conclude with only one telling example, Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*: "There cannot be a science of difference itself in its operation, as it is impossible to have a science of the origin of presence itself, that is to say of a certain nonorigin."¹²⁷

A systematic investigation would have to *reverse* the direction of the analysis I have sketched above and, inspired by the prominent reference to the nonground in Derrida's seminar from 2001/02, go *back* to Derrida's early writings and thereby fathom how deep the parallels with Schelling actually lie with respect to the subject matter itself.

Yet at this juncture, it should already have become clear that it is the concept of nonground which points to the most profound level of Heidegger's and Derrida's relationship with Schelling.

¹²⁵ Cf. esp. Derrida, *The Beast*, 267-268n; idem, *Séminaire. La bête*, 359n, where Derrida refers again to Schelling as well as to a passage in Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics* I quoted above, cf. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 3; idem, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 5; cf. also Derrida, *The Beast*, 138, 149-150, 180, 184, 334; idem, *Séminaire. La bête*, 191, 205-206, 244, 249, 443.

¹²⁶ Cf. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 100n; on a reading of the *Freedom Essay* and the nonground especially *vis-à-vis* Derrida, cf. Clark, "The Necessary Heritage of Darkness," esp. 119-140.

¹²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 63; idem, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1967), 92.