INTRODUCTION

On the German Contribution: Giving Form to Freedom

Because this book takes an unusual approach to the philosophy of freedom, it is appropriate to preface it with some explanation of why it was written, what it aims to accomplish, and how it proposes to accomplish it.

The reason for the book can be stated simply: it was written out of a conviction that our current conception of freedom is deeply problematic. Although we cannot enter here into a full exploration of the current conception and its implications,[1] it is important to say enough to orient the reader to the study of Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel that follows. On the one hand, there is a general recognition—regardless of where one falls in the political spectrum—of freedom as a great human good, something worth promoting and protecting even at the cost of sacrificing other goods; on the other hand, there has been an impoverishment of our understanding of the notion, so that freedom has come to represent little more in the popular imagination than the power to choose. What is problematic about this understanding is not simply that it fails to do justice to the reality that originally warranted recognition as a great human good. What we wish to suggest is that this reduction actively undermines the *good-character* of freedom. In other words, our claim is that there is something essentially self-destructive in the contemporary relationship to freedom; the nature

1. Problems with the conventional view have been raised from a variety of different perspectives, for example: Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*; Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*; MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*; Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*; Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*; Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*. We have worked out some of the problematic implications in "Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects," in *Augustine and Politics*, 67–96, esp. 68–75.

of what we pursue erodes the very thing we wish to affirm and cultivate. The problem, in a nutshell, is that we think of freedom as an end but define it as a means, and so we treat a *bonum utile* as if it were a *bonum honestum*. But this is not a mere problem of logic or classification. Instead, this confusion has far-reaching philosophical and cultural implications. To put the problem in its starkest terms, instrumental goods can only ever be good in a derivative sense; a means can be, not just an instrument, but an instrumental *good*, only through a relationship to an end to which it is subordinate. If we make a means an end in itself, we do two things at once: we both eliminate its goodness and we elevate its status; we transform the absence of goodness into a purpose. Inside of this confusion of ends and means is therefore what we could justifiably call a kind of nihilism. To the extent that we exclude those features of freedom that would qualify it as an end, and at the same time continue to promote it as such even in this reduced form, our notion of freedom becomes a source of nihilism.

The difficulty seems to stem from the conception of freedom in terms of possibility or potency: it is the *power* to choose or the *ability* to do X, Y, or Z. While this view of freedom—which we will henceforward refer to as the "possibilistic" conception—is quite obvious in the popular definition of freedom as indeterminate choice; it also lies in the highest-level articulations of the dominant political theory of contemporary English-speaking society. According to John Rawls, for example, to be free means two things: "First, citizens are free in that they conceive of themselves and of one another as having the moral power to have a conception of the good."[2] He goes on to specify this as the "moral power to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good," and to include in the meaning of this power the right of citizens "to view their persons as independent from and not identified with any particular conception of the good."[3] Second, it means that free persons "regard themselves as self-authenticating sources of valid claims," which means they regard themselves "as being entitled to make claims on their institutions so as to advance their conceptions of the good."[4] Now, it is not the place here to enter into a discussion of Rawls' theory in all its detail; we wish only to point out the identification of freedom with *power* that lies at the foundation of this theory. It is a power that he characterizes as standing *over* the good, insofar as the power determines the good (i.e., the means determine the

2. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, 21.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 23.

end) rather than the other way around. This power is absolute in the sense that it stands *outside of* and *above* any context (it is "independent from and not identified with any particular conception of the good"), and in the sense that it is, therefore, essentially "self-authenticating," which means its goodness, its justification, does not derive from anything outside of itself. The social expression of freedom, according to Rawls' view, is the radiation of the power from individual agents into the public sphere; it is, so to speak, the force of this power felt by institutions. It may be the case, in reality, that people cannot help but be determined to some extent by the institutions—culture, family, tradition, and so forth—in which they live, but this means only that people are not perfectly free. To be free is to have *power over* these institutions. Rawls' description of freedom is a paradigm of the "possibilistic" conception that we have suggested bears within itself a latent nihilism.

As Steven Smith has observed, "[i]t is now virtually a commonplace that as a theory of politics, not to mention human personality, liberalism is seriously impoverished."[5] But the greater part of the discussions of freedom in the English-speaking world tend to take for granted some version of the possibilistic conception of freedom as the starting point of the conversation rather than the very thing that requires scrutiny. So, for example, in the political arena, the discussion generally concerns how best to protect and promote the ability to choose, and where exactly to place the boundary that marks the point at which this ability must subordinate itself to the order imposed by law, or the point at which rights get trumped by duties. The conversation appears to penetrate more deeply when one introduces Isaiah Berlin's classic distinction between negative and positive freedom, or as some put it, "freedom *from*" and "freedom *to* or *for*." Along these lines, a fairly recent book has attempted to get to the root of the contemporary problem of freedom by contrasting two nineteenth-century theorists of liberalism, John Stuart Mill and Lord Acton (John Emirich Dalberg-Acton).[6] While the former conceived of freedom simply as the ability to do what one wants, the latter insisted that true freedom requires a recognition of the ends proper to man, and a directing of our choices to those ends. Genuine liberty is thus "ordered liberty," which means freedom that is limited by reason, nature, law, or some other determining principle that lends meaning by providing an orienting context. This subordination of freedom to other goods might appear to overcome the

5. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism: Rights in Context*, 232.

6. Gregg, *On Ordered Liberty: A Treatise on the Free Society*.

problematic character of the current notion we have been describing insofar as it resists absolutizing a power, and, indeed, this approach does seem to recover the "goodness" of freedom that the absolutizing of instrumentality surrenders. But we suggest that the approach remains inadequate for two reasons: first, it fails to do justice to the deep intuition we have that freedom is more than merely an instrumental good—that it makes sense, in other words, to say, without qualification, "I desire to be free,"[7] and that St. Paul, for example, is not spinning a vicious circle when he speaks of our being set free "for freedom" (Gal 5:1). Second, insofar as this approach concedes the definition of freedom in terms of power, and then insists that this power be exercised according to certain limits, it does not reach the heart of the matter. Instead, it only contains, rather than resolves, the problem. It is not ultimately a critique of the conception of freedom so much as a critique of the use to which it is put; it is, in other words, an essentially *moral* rather than a substantial response. And because this is the case, it arguably tends to reinforce the nihilism we mentioned above even in its efforts to combat it.

The more abstract or theoretical discussions of freedom in philosophy, for all the scrutiny they give to various dimensions of the issue, operate for the most part with the same basic assumption regarding its nature. They are largely concerned with the mechanics of the exercise of free will, understood as a power, and with the conditions and implications of this exercise.[8] Indeed, there is a boundless array of philosophically interesting questions and problems surrounding free will and the act of choosing proper to it. What makes a choice free? Can the freedom of choice be reconciled with determinisms of various sorts? With causal necessity? With logical necessity? With moral or rational necessity? Can we be free in the context of physical coercion—i.e., while sitting, like Socrates, in a jail cell? Can we be free in the absence of physical restraints, but in the presence

7. It is not intelligible, by contrast, to say without either explicit or implicit qualification, "I desire to be able."

8. This is not to suggest that all contemporary philosophers assume that freedom equals the ability to choose between alternatives without any necessity or coercion, i.e., the notion of freedom as unfettered choice. In fact, this—still fairly common—philosophical view is beginning to be challenged in a variety of ways (see, e.g., Kane, "Some Neglected Pathways in the Free Will Labyrinth," in *Oxford Handbook on Free Will*, 406–37. I am grateful to my colleague, Jesse Couenhoven, for drawing my attention to this interesting text). Instead, our claim is that even these challenges reflect on freedom as in some sense a *power* of the will, something the will exercises in discrete acts, however this power may otherwise be qualified so as to be compatible with various external or internal determinations.

of psychological ones, perhaps even of our own making—i.e., addictions and the like? Do we need knowledge to be free or does knowledge curtail freedom? Do we need to be able to choose even that which motivates any particular choice in order to be free? What boundaries can we legitimately set to freedom? Are we responsible for only those actions we have done freely? Are we free in all those actions for which we can be held responsible? These philosophical discussions, by their nature, reach something more essential than engagements with the question that remain within the sphere of politics, but it should be evident that they generally occur within the same horizon of what we have been calling the "possibilistic" conception of freedom, no matter how opposed the responses may be to the sorts of questions just raised: they take for granted that a philosophical exploration of the nature of freedom (*libertas*) is essentially an investigation of the faculty of choice (*liberum arbitrium*)—its conditions of possibility, its necessary features, or even its existence *simpliciter*. While these discussions may address certain problems involved in the question of freedom, they do not touch the one that prompts this book most directly: the instrumentalizing of freedom.

The conviction behind the present book is that a full response to the problematic notion requires getting beyond a "possibilistic" conception. The book thus aims to retrieve a genuine alternative to this conception, to articulate at least some features of freedom as a kind of *actuality*, and therefore not as a mere (possibilizing) instrument, but as a true end in itself, as a perfection that thereby does not require something else for its justification. There would be many ways to proceed in the pursuit of this aim; the present book does not at all claim to be definitive, but seeks in the first place to begin a new conversation.[9] It is meant, in this sense, to have a sort of "experimental" character: What would be entailed in a conception of freedom as actuality, and what would follow from such a conception? Where is such a conception of freedom to be found? To this end, the book focuses on just one aspect of the issue, namely, the *relationship between freedom and form*—which is a primary locus of actuality in classical philosophy—and explores this relationship in three thinkers, Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). To oversimplify a bit for the purposes of basic orientation, we may say that

9. If circumstances permit, this book will be followed up with one that pursues the same end on the basis of the classical philosophical and Christian intellectual traditions, and will engage in a more systematic critique of the conventional notion of freedom and the things associated with it.

the term "form" in this context generally means what would be understood in the time period under discussion by the word "Gestalt," namely, a complex, structured whole. It should be noted, however, that this definition will have to be fleshed out more concretely as we proceed. To think of freedom in terms of form means to conceive freedom in the first place as denoting a kind of completion or ontological perfection, to conceive it not simply as a quality of agency or action, but more fundamentally as a *mode of being*—which will, of course, subsequently bear on the way one acts and the manner of choice. Because the conventional view defines itself as possibility, it contrasts itself with actuality, and therefore with limit and everything that would entail limitation. As a result, the conventional view tends toward a kind of atomistic abstraction, and thus sets in motion a series of oppositions: between individuals, between the individual and the community, between freedom and nature, freedom and reason, freedom and law, freedom and desire, and so forth. Thinking of freedom in the first place, not as opposed to limit, but precisely as integrated with form and so realized *in* (and indeed not only compatible with but essentially defined by) limitation, therefore promises to avoid these problems, which are increasingly being attributed to the conventional view. But our principal interest here will lie in the extent to which this way of thinking about freedom helps close the gap between our explanations and the rich reality of our experience of freedom. The aim, in other words, is, not to say everything that needs to be said about freedom, but nevertheless to say something essential, to disclose something of freedom *in its truth*, however incomplete the endeavor will inevitably turn out to be.

Why these particular authors? In his famous speech, delivered at the Athénée Royal in Paris in 1819, Benjamin Constant introduces the substance of his presentation with the following question: "First ask yourselves, Gentlemen, what an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a citizen of the United States of America understand today by the word 'liberty.'"[10] He then contrasts this understanding—which he labels the "modern" conception—to the "ancient" view of freedom professed by the classical tradition, explaining that we have tended to fall into confusion because we use the same word for something significantly different, if not altogether opposed.[11] There are a number of things about Constant's articulation of

10. Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," in *Political Writings*, 310.

11. Constant ultimately identifies the modern conception of freedom with "the enjoyment of security in private pleasures." An argument would be necessary to show how this view is "possibilistic" in the sense we have been using the term, or how it

the issue that are interesting for our purposes. First, he groups the French together with the English and Americans as sharing the same concept of freedom, and contrasts it only with the "ancient" view. He thus leaves out other conceptions of freedom, among them the notion of freedom being developed by thinkers in Germany at this time. Setting aside whatever historical grounds there may be for this omission,[12] it is interesting to consider its implications. The omission is significant above all, not only because Germany was in the midst of a period of almost unparalleled philosophical creativity, but also because this creative work took place to a great extent—and much more explicitly even than in France and England—under the banner of freedom.[13] The text that has come to be known as the "Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism" claims as its goal to rethink every aspect of philosophy in relation to the sole legitimate absolute, namely, freedom. There is, then, not just the "modern"—i.e., French and Anglo-American—and the "ancient" view, but also the *German* conception of freedom.[14]

This leads to another point. While the three thinkers we explore in this book understood themselves to be developing a "modern" conception of freedom, they did not in the least think of their conception as something opposed to the classical notion. To the contrary, they sought

relates to the conventional view of freedom as the ability to choose. There is no place for such an argument here, since our aim is not to analyze Constant's particular understanding of freedom. Nevertheless, it ought to be pointed out that he himself describes what he means by the modern view of freedom in terms of the right to choose and express one's opinions, one's labor, one's comings and goings, one's religion, and so forth ("Liberty," 310–11). Moreover, he understands this as *essentially* individualistic. Insofar as this implies a rejection of any primacy accorded to the whole of which the individual is a part; insofar as a whole represents completion; and insofar as completion is actuality, then an individualistic notion of freedom is a possibilistic one.

12. Constant was more familiar with German literature than he was with philosophy. He did, however, know both Goethe and Schiller well, and discussed Schelling's philosophy with them on occasion. He does not seem to have had any contact, however, with Hegel.

13. In his early text, *The German Constitution*, Hegel claims that it is precisely the "desire for freedom" that represents the fame of the Germans in history: *Political Writings*, 10 (GW.5.58).

14. In his first publication, Hegel identified modern fragmentation geographically with the Northwest—i.e., England and France—which places Germany, and Swabia in particular (the homeland of all three figures we treat in this book), directly between the modern world and the ancient world of the Southeast, i.e., Greece and Rome: Hegel, DS, 91 (esp. fn 10) (GW.4.14). Domenico Losurdo cites a number of authors who place the Germans outside of the Western spirit altogether: see *Hegel and the Freedom of the Moderns*, 268–72.

to articulate a view ample enough to hold together *both* the "ancient" view *and* the various insights gained in modern thinking on the matter. This point is even more significant for our general project than might initially appear, since it sets into relief what is essentially inadequate about any "polarized" thinking. To set up opposed notions, as Constant did, is plausible to the extent that there is at least something compelling about each side. And yet to present the two as mutually exclusive opposites is to force a person to reject one to the extent that he embraces the other. There is, in other words, something essentially fragmentary about this way of thinking, which begins within a horizon that precludes from the outset the possibility of a genuinely comprehensive perspective: it leaves out, in its very terms, the unity that necessarily precedes the opposition. In this respect, any polarized approach to freedom, which would simply pit a modern conception against the ancient one, or positive freedom against negative freedom, or even "freedom" against "liberty," is locked in fragmentation from the start.[15] If part of the impoverishment of the current view of freedom is due to its reductionist character and its isolation from the classical tradition, then a perspective, like that of the Germans, that embraces the modern without abandoning the ancient, will be especially promising.

More needs to be said, however, about our particular selection of authors. In addition to the three here, there are other German thinkers who made freedom central to their philosophical reflection, not only the most obvious ones, Kant and Fichte, but also less prominent figures in histories of philosophy, such as Jacobi and the Romantics. The reason we have focused on Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel is that these three represent, to our mind, particularly fruitful resources specifically for an integration of freedom and form. The other thinkers we mentioned, while they introduce essential insights into the nature of freedom, nevertheless adopt, in our judgment, some version of a "possibilistic" view, and so do not represent as distinct an alternative to the conventional understanding of

15. Someone might argue that we are *also* engaged in polarized thinking by pitting the German "against" the French/Anglo-American conception, or a holistic conception "against" a possibilistic one: but our argument is that a conception is good, "adequate," to the extent that it can show it includes whatever is positive in the view it rejects, and so does not oppose itself to anything that would ultimately be compelling in itself. In other words, in a paradoxical way, it is polarized, if you will, but only in relation to polarization in itself. Incidentally, it is worth noting that the sort of comprehensive approach we are pleading for here is different from what we would call a "bipartisan" approach in the political sphere, which means striking a compromise that is equally acceptable to all sides (which remain opposed). Instead, it aims at genuinely integrating whatever is good within a unified view.

freedom as do these others. Schiller conceives of freedom as *aesthetic form*, Schelling—at least in his early thought—thinks of it as *organic form*, and Hegel as *social form*. Schiller aimed at overcoming the division between human subjectivity and the objectivity of the world that Charles Taylor has identified as the central philosophical problem of the age,[16] and did so by conceiving a notion of phenomenal form that was adequate to the infinite ideality of spirit. This he called the manifestation of freedom in the *lebende Gestalt*, the living form, which Hegel subsequently took to be the necessary breakthrough beyond the subjectivizing tendencies in Kant and Fichte.[17] This view of form, then, became a model for both Schelling and Hegel: for Schelling, in his lifelong endeavor to unify "freedom and system," and for Hegel in his interpretation of the highest achievement of the human spirit in the objective order, that is, the social sphere. In their developments, as we will see, Schelling and Hegel save Schiller's notion from its temptation to collapse into bourgeois aestheticism, but they also restrict some of the richness of Schiller's notion, which leads to fundamental problems in both cases. We will suggest, in our conclusion, how a retrieval of this richness would allow one in principle to reconcile the notorious differences between Schelling and Hegel while also preserving the particular achievements of each.

From this brief description, it should be clear that this study is not primarily historical. Though Schelling and Hegel were contemporaries, and even, for a time, friends, and though they were quite familiar with Schiller's work, both poetic and philosophical, we will not be exploring their historical points of contact and the significance this contact may have had on the development of their own thought on freedom.[18] Instead, our interest is decidedly philosophical, and, indeed, we approach the work of these thinkers against the backdrop of a specific contemporary philosophical interest, namely, an enrichment of our conception of freedom, the articulation of a genuine alternative to the possibilistic notion that dominates most English-language discussions. Our basic aim is thus, in

16. Taylor, *Hegel*, 3.

17. Ernst Cassirer observes that Kant resolves the dichotomy between freedom and form by reducing form to freedom, that is, to the subject's spontaneous self-positing. The same could be said even more directly regarding Fichte. See *Freiheit und Form*, in Cassirer, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, 176–80.

18. On Schiller's importance for both Schelling and Hegel, see Cassirer, *Idee und Gestalt*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, 344–45; on Schiller's significance for Hegel specifically, see Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, 46–58, and Kelly, *Hegel's Retreat from Eleusis: Studies in Political Thought*, 55–89.

each case, to give an "internal" philosophical interpretation of the ideas of the particular thinker, which means above all to attempt to articulate the unity that can account for the variety of claims the thinker makes on the particular topic. Historical detail may be illuminating in this regard, and receives mention when it is, but it is not made an object of exploration for its own sake. We reflect on their integration of freedom and form against the backdrop of their philosophies more generally, which requires somewhat different approaches in each case. Because Schiller is not as well known specifically in philosophy as the other two, we spend more time giving a general presentation of his style of philosophy before explaining, specifically, his particular notion of freedom in form. Similarly, we expound at some length aspects of Schelling's philosophy of nature, on the one hand, and his late philosophy of revelation, on the other, because these aspects of his thought are not as well represented in English-language scholarship as some others. The treatment of Hegel is much more directly focused on his philosophy of freedom because there is no shortage of books and essays written about every aspect, not only of his thought but also of his life more generally.

It is our hope, moreover, that this focus on the integration of freedom and form casts these thinkers in a relatively new light. In the intellectual history of this period in Germany, it has been observed that the figures of Kant and Goethe stand as antipodes of a sort, representing in each case a different ethos, a different basic stance toward reality:[19] Kant represents, we might say, the philosophy of spirit, the unconditionality of moral freedom, and so the transcendence of the material world—in a word, the "modern." Goethe, by contrast, represents the holism of nature, the harmony between spirit and the objective world of matter—i.e., the "classical."[20] Now, as one would no doubt expect, most philosophical treatments of the three authors in this book interpret them in relation to Kant: Hegel and Schelling thus appear as figures along the line of "German Idealism" that extends from Kant and through Fichte, while Schiller is essentially taken to be a Kantian thinker who seeks to extend—successfully or not—some of Kant's thinking in a new aesthetically-grounded direction. One of the

19. See Kuno Fischer's characterization, for example, in *Schiller als Philosoph*, 8.

20. This is, of course, an oversimplification. While there is some legitimacy to associating Kant with the "modern," Goethe is a broader figure, who stood at the origin of many of the modern movements in German literature (*Sturm und Drang*, romanticism), but was also taken as a representative of classicism. That is in part the point we wish to make: the spirit of Goethe can include the spirit of Kant, while one cannot make the converse claim so readily.

more general ways of characterizing the peculiar approach adopted here would be to say that, as the prominence of "form" probably already suggests, this book reads these three thinkers primarily in the spirit of Goethe, even if the relation to Goethe is only occasionally made explicit. Schiller, of course, was a great friend of Goethe's, and this friendship proved to be a wholesome light that brought many of Schiller's native thoughts to blossom. Schelling, who received much support from Goethe in his early period, shared with this latter a conviction regarding the one-sidedness of the Fichtean notion of subjectivity, and so, like Goethe, sought to enrich our understanding of the "objective" world of nature. Hegel remained a devoted lifelong admirer of Goethe, and even conceived of his work as a transposition of Goethe's vision of the world into the conceptual terms of philosophy.[21] When read with Goethe in mind, aspects of the meaning of freedom and its relation to form, which would otherwise be eclipsed by more familiar Kantian themes, stand out in sharp relief. Needless to say, however, bringing out the "Goethean" side of these thinkers is not meant to exclude the evident Kantian themes in a new polarization. Rather, as we will see, all three of these thinkers seek to do justice to the Kantian revolution in philosophy even while rethinking the themes of that revolution from within the more concrete and holistic perspective that stands under the sign of Goethe.

If reading these thinkers in the spirit of Goethe casts them in an unfamiliar light, we wish to suggest that this light does not distort them, but rather illuminates something central in their thought. While this claim can be justified only through the more detailed expositions that will follow, it may be helpful to state very briefly how the approach in this book compares with current general trends in English-language scholarship. Schiller has often been taken to be a philosophical dilettante, if he is read as a philosopher at all. While new attention has been given to the work he did, especially in the philosophy of freedom,[22] this book argues that his most essential contribution will be overlooked to the extent that we think of him as an idiosyncratic Kantian. Schiller in fact seeks to articulate and practice a significantly different *approach* to philosophy, which follows from his interpretation of freedom in terms of form, and vice versa. Only in light of this philosophy of freedom do the apparent inconsistencies and contradictions that have frustrated so many scholars fall away.

21. According to Kaufmann, "Hegel is closer to Goethe than to Kant" (*Hegel*, 45).
22. See, for example, Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Reexamination*.

Moreover, the light of his particular integration of freedom and form sets in relief a new profile of the notions of freedom developed by Schelling and Hegel. Regarding Schelling, he is coming more and more in English-language scholarship to stand, above all, as the philosophical pioneer of the irrational, largely, it appears, because of the work of Slavoj Žižek, who reads Schelling as a precursor to Jacques Lacan.[23] But this line of interpretation, however brilliant it may be, isolates one evident stream in Schelling's philosophy over against the rest, and as a result significantly distorts his thought. While it is true that Schelling endeavored to open philosophy to the essential surprise, the "Unvordenklichkeit" (literally, the "unprethinkability"), of the real, and harshly criticized his former seminary roommate Hegel for imprisoning the life of the world in rational concepts, he nevertheless never desired to downplay the ultimate intelligible order of the world. Contrary to claims in recent scholarship, Schelling did not, even at the end, aim to explode the system for the sake of freedom,[24] but always sought to reconcile the two, however opposed they may appear or even be in principle.

Finally, with respect to Hegel, the integration of freedom and form allows us to make some sense of the notion of objective spirit, which has been an especially elusive one for the broad "anti-metaphysical" stream in English-language scholarship: the essence of spirit is freedom and its objectivity is the actualized form that freedom takes in the world. Unless we come to terms with this peculiar mode of spirit, we will fail to grasp what is most *Hegelian* in Hegel's political thought, namely, the concept of *Sittlichkeit* (usually translated as "ethical life" or "ethical substance"), and instead tend to reduce his notion of freedom to something more familiar to the Anglo-American tradition, whether that be freedom as self-determination, as pure negativity (i.e., pure possibility), or as a form of Roussean self-realization. We will discuss all of these at greater length in due course.

To conclude, it bears remarking once again that this book contains little that one generally would expect from a philosophical treatment of freedom: almost nothing is said about the question of choice and the

23. Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: Essays on Schelling and Related Matters*; and his essay in *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*.

24. Jason Wirth, for example, defines freedom, in Schelling's sense, as "an *infinite lack* that is, as such, the infinite power otherwise than every beginning and ending but given within and thereby dis-completing every beginning and ending": see his "Foreword" to Schelling's *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, x.

problem of determinism; almost nothing about agency and responsibility; almost nothing about equality, rights and duties, political power, and law. Instead, the book tries to show that, taken most concretely, the question of freedom is inextricably bound up with a series of other questions, which at first glance seem to have no more to do with the nature of freedom than they do with one another. But they seem that way only to a mind wed to a possibilistic conception of freedom, and which therefore cannot imagine what relationship freedom might have with form. Some examples of claims made here: the question of freedom is essentially connected to architecture, the quality of marriage, the way one takes one's meals, one's relationship to one's work, methodology in science, one's conception of the church, the nature of light, what is distinctive about the organism, what counts as good poetic style, the notion of God and creation, and the relationship that exists among the various academic disciplines. This may seem to be an impossibly eclectic list (and it is by no means exhaustive). The point in all of this, as we will elaborate over the course of the book, is that freedom cannot properly be understood primarily as an instrumental *power*, but rather as an *actual, and so formed, reality*, which one first enjoys and only in a secondary sense uses or directs to some further end. The enjoyment of a mere power is the essence of perversion: it is, as Plato so insightfully perceived, a kind of *incurvatio in se*, in which there is, finally, no real self into which to be absorbed: a self-less selfishness. But to say this does not mean that power—as *potentia* or *dynamis*—has no place in freedom properly conceived. Instead, the argument will be that potency is liberated by form: as objective, complete, and real, form *elevates* the subject, makes the subject more "able," which will mean in fact more fruitful of form. In other words, the achievement of form is the achievement of freedom. The argument of the book is that, properly understood—and indeed contrary to what one might call the entire liberal tradition—form and freedom coincide. As our title has it, form represents "the perfection of freedom."

But the book is not intended primarily as a polemic and will make such observations incidentally in trying to bring out what is unique in the thinker in question. One of the many things that stands out about these three great figures, and it can be said about many of the thinkers of the *Goethezeit*, is that they recognized that the essential philosophical questions, in whatever area they arise, cannot be separated from one another. The fruitfulness of this period is no doubt due in part to this habit of "synopsis," which the Germans shared with the original philosophers in

ancient Greece. In any event, it has helped give rise to an understanding, which—such is our hope—at least does more justice than the conventional notion to the deep sense we have of freedom as a great human good.