

# Abstract - Schelling, Freedom, and Powers Ontology

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This paper constitutes an investigation into the relationship between powers ontology and human freedom through an exploration of the philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling. I begin by sketching an account of Schelling's ontology, arguing that his system presents an ontology of powers in process. As including human freedom within his system was one of Schelling's central concerns, and as he was keenly aware of the problems for freedom that arise from both determinism and indeterminism, I argue that his philosophy is well placed to provide insight into the possibility of securing freedom on the basis of an ontology of powers, as well as into the kind of freedom that this kind of account can allow for.

Following this, I provide a brief outline of Schelling's conception of freedom, as well as the ways in which this relates to his ontology as a whole, and how it arises from his metaphysics of powers. I use this as a starting point from which to assess the success of this conception of freedom, exploring the kind of freedom that this account entails, and considering whether this conception of freedom is preferable to those which other kinds of ontology are able to secure.

I argue that Schelling's ontology of powers is able to provide a conception of freedom which is continuous with natural causality – which itself is conceived neither deterministically nor as entailing complete indeterminism. Therefore on this account the agency of humans is able to have real effects on the unfolding of the process of reality without coming into conflict with the causal powers that are present throughout the rest of the natural world. I argue that the advantages of such an account lie in its ability to provide this conception of causality that unifies the organic and the inorganic as different instances of natural causal processes, which themselves arise from the interaction of powers. This account is thus both naturalistic and non-reductive, and I claim that it is this aspect of a powers ontology which allows for an account of human agency that includes a robust conception of freedom without the need to deny the influence of natural causality on human acts, as the agency possessed by humans is simply a distinctive kind of the same causality which is present throughout the natural world. I further argue that this account of agency and natural causality has positive implications for environmental ethics that other contemporary accounts of freedom are unable to secure.

I conclude by considering some potential problems with this account of freedom – for example, the process ontology which I demonstrate Schelling to be advancing, coupled with his account of human freedom as a naturally arising property, entails that human freedom can never be absolute – this is a freedom which always exists within limits, and agents are never able to be completely free from the natural forces and drives which constitute an aspect of their nature. However I argue that this should not be seen as problematic, but rather as providing a more realistic account of the nature of human freedom, and that this continuity of human powers and natural powers should rather be seen as a distinct advantage of this kind of account.