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# **The History of Evil in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

1700–1900 CE

**Volume IV**

**Edited by Douglas Hedley, Chad Meister,  
and Charles Taliaferro**  
**Series editors: Chad Meister  
and Charles Taliaferro**

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## 10 Evil in Schelling and Schopenhauer

Alistair Welchman

### Chapter summary

Schelling (1775–1854) and Schopenhauer (1788–1860) both operate in the German idealist tradition initiated by Kant (1724–1804), although both are critical of some of its developments. Schelling's interest in evil – which is at its most intense in his 1809 *Freedom* essay (full title: *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom and Related Matters*) – stems from his belief that Kant's account of morality, and hence much of the idealist tradition, in fact makes evil, in the broad sense of moral badness, impossible. For Schelling this is a disaster because without a meaningful choice whether to act morally we are not free, and without agency he thinks we are not even individual persons. We become mere puppets of universal reason. In the *Freedom* essay Schelling links these theories with the traditional Christian conception of evil as a privation, and attempts by contrast to develop a concept of “radical” or “positive” evil that grounds both our freedom and individual personality. The project falters not necessarily with the conception of evil, but with Schelling's residual commitment to the rationality of morality and inability to frame a satisfactory conception of freedom to match his conception of radical evil.

Schopenhauer argues on both a priori and empirical grounds that life is not worth living: he is the first philosophical pessimist (although he was himself slow to embrace this term). As a result he is primarily interested in situational evil in a broad sense understood as just badness of some kind. But he also has an account of moral evil, both in the broad and narrow senses. In the broad sense of general moral badness, he attributes evil to egoism; but he also has an account of a class of special motivations that he terms “malicious” which are evil in a narrow sense, i.e., comprise an intense subset of the morally bad. Schopenhauer may solve some of the problems Schelling encounters, but he in his turn encounters other problems with his theory.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of “radical” evil is popular again now, and so Schelling is of great contemporary relevance; and Schopenhauer's account of the overpowering ubiquity of situational evil presents a constant challenge to each generation, as well as having an indelible impact on Nietzsche's philosophy.

### The Kantian background<sup>2</sup>

In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant develops claims that free (rational) agency and the moral law mutually entail one other (1902ff 4:450),<sup>3</sup> what Henry Allison calls the Reciprocity Thesis (Allison 1986).

But on the face of it, the Reciprocity Thesis itself entails the impossibility of freely choosing evil, for if an action violates the moral law, then this implies that it cannot have been a free action. On this model, when we violate the moral law it is as if our agency is overwhelmed by something outside it. In Kant's terminology, we are taken over by our pathological interests and inclinations to such an extent that it is no longer “we” who are acting. It is as if every violation of the moral law is a kind of *crime passionnelle* for which we are not ultimately responsible. A correlative implication of this view is that I can never go wrong, morally speaking: for if I succeed, all well and good; but if I fail, then it turns out there was no failure because it was not “I” who was acting at all, but rather my agency had been temporarily suspended, overwhelmed perhaps by my inclinations.<sup>4</sup> According to a number of commentators, most especially Kosch (2006), this problem in Kant and post-Kantian idealism is what motivates Schelling's turn to a theory of evil in 1809.

Kant himself however appears to respond to this problem in his 1793 *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. There he contrasts the Stoic account of evil as mere folly with a properly Christian account of wickedness. Evil as folly is a corollary of the Socratic identification of virtue with knowledge. Kant describes the “Christian” conception of evil he tries to develop in the text as a “positive principle” of evil, and one that he sees as legitimating talk of evil spirits and hell (1902ff 6: 59f; see the *Groundwork* at 4:43).

To distinguish this “positive” conception of evil from the classical conception of folly, Kant maintains that “only our own *act* is something morally evil, i.e. something that we can be responsible for” (1902ff 6: 31). Since we are not responsible for our pathological inclinations, it follows that evil is something different from being overwhelmed by inclinations. And indeed he argues in the *Religion* text “the ground of evil cannot be placed . . . in human sensibility . . . [because] we are not responsible for the existence of that sensibility” (6: 34–35). What is the origin of evil? We must *choose* to act on inclinations because an incentive to action (like inclination) “can determine the will to action *only so far as the individual has incorporated it into his maxim*” (6: 23–24). Henry Allison terms this view the Incorporation Thesis (1990: Chapter 2): sensibility, inclination, the pathological and the body in general are not themselves either evil or the source of evil in me; rather they become so only when I *incorporate* them into the structure of my choices, into what Kant terms my “maxims” of action.

It is not obvious that the Incorporation Thesis helps, for it removes what looks like the only explanation Kant had for evil actions, that I am overtaken by inclination; if instead I have to choose to incorporate inclinations into an evil maxim, then it become completely opaque how I could do so, consistently with the Reciprocity Thesis, i.e., consistently with the fact that free choice implies

(and is implied by) the moral law. Indeed Kant remarks that the choice of evil is “inexplicable” (1902ff 6: 21 note). It looks as if the cost of maintaining freedom with the Incorporation Thesis is rejection of the Reciprocity Thesis, and this is indeed where Schelling (and Schopenhauer) end up.

There are a couple of other issues relating to Kant that provide important background for Schelling’s response. The first concerns the term “radical evil” that Kant coins in the *Religion* text (1902ff 6: 21), and which has achieved some popularity (see e.g., Bernstein 2002). But the term is apt to mislead. Evil is radical because it characterizes the most basic maxim governing our behavior, and is therefore “woven into human nature; it has, as it were, taken root there” (6: 32). This radicality of this root does not therefore have anything to do with the question of a genuine, freely chosen evil; in fact it seems to militate against the latter, for if radical evil is a part of human nature, then it looks as if it cannot be chosen at all. Kant appears to concede this when he describes evil as “radical” and simultaneously “inborn” (6: 32).

But then, and this is the second issue, Kant makes a daring move that Schelling and Schopenhauer both follow quite closely: he argues that our most basic maxims may be regarded as chosen not empirically but transcendently, that is to say, atemporally. This explanation itself exploits the *Critique of Pure Reason*’s account of transcendental freedom and accounts simultaneously for the fact that evil is chosen, since our basic maxims are chosen, and for the fact that it appears not to be chosen, because the choice takes place outside of time and hence appears phenomenologically to have always already happened.<sup>5</sup>

### Idealist background

This problem of freedom for Schelling is also the problem of maintaining the possibility of individual human personality that reaches its zenith in Hegel, whose *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the first work of his mature system, was published in 1807, two years before the *Freedom* essay. This aspect is related to the Kant’s view that moral action presupposes that we have rational hope that a moral world, the kingdom of ends, can actually be realized. This rational hope is for Kant merely problematic, but it is characteristic of the idealists generally to dispense with Kant’s epistemic strictures and “metaphysicalize” such claims. Thus the universality and necessity of Kant’s rational autonomy stands in a direct relation to the cunning of reason in Hegel’s system, where spirit’s coming to self-consciousness rationally determines the course of history, adjusting individuals’ merely partial perspectives into a rational whole. Schelling himself was not, in his early work, immune from similar views: he and Hegel were roommates and close intellectual collaborators until the turn of the century (see Kosch 2006: 78).

So the investigation into human freedom involves on the one hand a broader investigation into the conditions of individuality and devolves into a more specific investigation into evil. To be an individual, we must be able to choose evil without *ipso facto* being unfree.

### Schelling

In the *Freedom* essay Schelling accepts Kant’s idea of an atemporal act, but he criticizes the “two-aspect” interpretation of this view, which claims that individual acts can be regarded under their transcendental aspect as free while they are determined causally under their empirical aspect. In Schelling’s view it is precisely my nature, essence or being [*Wesen*] that I choose: “the essence of the human being is essentially *its own act* . . . Only the human being can determine itself. But this determination cannot occur in time; it occurs outside of time altogether” (1856–1861 7: 385). And he criticizes “the inconsistent notion of the contingency of individual acts” (7: 384). Thus I freely choose my essence in an act that “coincides with the first creation, even though [it] is differentiated from it” (7: 385); but this essence necessarily determines all my individual acts. It is noteworthy that if we replace “essence” with “character,” Schelling’s view becomes Schopenhauer’s.

The problem that Schelling wants to address is that the idealist theory does not give an adequate account of freedom and personality because it does allow for a robust conception of evil. The view, common, although in different guises, to Kant, Hegel and the early Schelling, that “the good comes from pure reason,” leads to a situation in which “evil is completely abolished.” “Our era” he writes “pushes its love of humanity [*Philanthropismus*] to the brink of denying evil” (1856–1861 7: 371).

The claim that the good derives from reason can be coaxed fairly easily into an expression of half of the biconditional comprising the Reciprocity Thesis: if I rationally and freely will *x*, then *x* is consistent with the moral law. This doesn’t by itself entail the converse, that if *x* is consistent with the moral law, then I (could) rationally and freely will it. But Schelling goes on correctly to observe that “according to these notions, the sole ground of evil lies in sensuality or animality, or in the earthly principle” (7: 371). This looks like a version of the view that it is not the case that *x* is consistent with the moral law (i.e., *x* is evil), then *x* is not rationally and freely willed (but the result of pathological impulses); and this is the contrapositive of the desired converse. So Schelling does indeed identify idealism with something pretty close to the Reciprocity Thesis.

So under idealism “there is no freedom for evil (in so far as sensual tendencies predominate) – to speak more correctly, however, evil is completely abolished.” This is because, Schelling argues, “sensuality . . . produces evil actions with a kind of necessity” and hence the supposed agent of the evil action would themselves be “only passive in these actions” (1856–1861 7: 371–72). But if the alleged agent of a supposed evil action is not involved in the action, is only passive in relation to it, then evil “would have no meaning” for the alleged agent, indeed it “would have no meaning at all” (7: 372).

It is this conception of evil that Schelling describes as privative, and he is clear about its intellectual motivations: it stems from theism and the problem of evil. *Prima facie* it looks like God will be responsible for evil; but if evil is mere

imperfection or lack of goodness, i.e., conceived privatively, then god's responsibility is, so to speak, mitigated:

either real evil is admitted, in which case it is unavoidable to include evil itself in infinite Substance [i.e. Spinoza's god] . . . ; or the reality of evil must in some way or other be denied, in which case the real conception of freedom disappears at the same time.

(1856–1861 7: 353)

Some contemporary theorists of evil make a similar point (Calder 2007) with a view to re-thinking evil outside the context of theism. This option is however not available to Schelling, who operates so fully within the context of the theism that he thinks the problem of evil is one that “applies not just to this or that system, but, more or less to all” (7: 352–53). And given that Schelling wants to defend a positive conception of evil he realizes that he has put himself in a very delicate intellectual position: his conception of freedom commits him to a strong, positive conception of evil that exacerbates the tension with his theism.

A lot of the *Freedom* essay is taken up with the problem of evil, and some commentators regard this aspect of his work as central (Love and Schmidt 2006). Some commentators claim that Schelling offers a variant on the traditional Augustinian free-will defense (Kosch 2014: 157–58). But actually Schelling's account differs structurally from the standard free-will defense. The distinguishing feature of the free-will defenses is that god is logically constrained to permit moral evil if God creates a world with moral freedom. It is consistent with such defenses that God is (in some sense) responsible for creating evil, but God's actions are all things considered justified. Schelling does not however take this route, and instead argues that God is not justified if there is any way of connecting God with evil. His strategy is therefore to try to sever the link between evil and God, rather than give an all-things-considered justification of God's creation of a world with evil in it based on the logical necessity of evil as a concomitant of freedom. For instance, he argues that the difficulty of admitting positive evil is “no slighter if even the faintest connection is assumed between god and the world order” (1856–1861 7: 353).

Schelling also excludes the possibility of a Manichean dualism: “it is only a system of self-destruction and the despair of reason.” But at the same time he is aware of its attraction, “for,” he claims during his summary of the various historical positions explaining god's relation to creation, “if freedom is a power for evil it must have a root independent of [*unabhängig von*] god” (1856–1861 7: 354).

On the face of it therefore Schelling has set up a problem that cannot be logically resolved: there is no Manichean second force, only God and – to the extent that Schelling's Spinozism permits a distinction – God's creation; yet individuality, freedom and evil must be, or be derived from, something “independent of” God. Schelling is aware of this “contradiction” but boldly argues that it can only be solved by [individual] things having their ground [*Grund*] in that within God that is not God itself, i.e., in the ground of his existence (1856–1861 7: 359).

What does this claim mean? The principle of sufficient reason (*Satz vom Grund*, i.e., ground in German) poses a special problem in the case of God: if everything has a ground, then God must too; but (within the Spinozist framework Schelling is using) there is nothing external to God. So God must contain, in some way, the ground of God. Here is Schelling's reasoning: “as there is nothing before or outside of god, god must contain within itself the ground of its existence. [This ground is] in god, inseparable from god, to be sure, but nevertheless distinguishable from god” (1856–1861 7: 357–58).

And God's ground is “that within god which is not god,” i.e., what also plays the role of the ground of evil. This ground is the famous “irreducible remainder that cannot be resolved into reason by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depths” (1856–1861 7: 359–60).<sup>6</sup>

Schelling's position is a precarious one, as he admits: his view, he says, must somehow be a kind of dualism that is ultimately a monism, his view “is the only correct dualism, namely one that admits at the same time of a unity” (1856–1861 7: 359 note). And he works hard to show that this irreducible remainder is indeed not a second substance, depriving it of proper being: the ground, Schelling argues, is “forever only ground, without being itself” (7: 378). As a result there is no “evil fundamental being,” despite appearances (7: 374). As Slavoj Žižek argues, existence and the ground of existence should not be treated as competing *ontological* principles: “ground” isn't ontological; it is “hampered” being (1997: 3).

The content of moral choice is derived from the tension between ground and existence in one or other of the various guises they take in Schelling's work. Schelling starts out with metaphorical presentations of the contrast (often derived from Jakob Böhme) between God and God's ground: light versus dark (1856–1861 7: 360), light versus gravity (7: 358). But he quickly passes on to more familiar characterizations, the most significant of which is the transformation of ground and existence (via the axiom that being is will) into self-will (7: 363) and will of love (7: 375) or the wills of the particular (7: 363) and the universal (7: 364).

Self-will, *Eigenwille*, appears to have two components or phases: while it is still in the “depths” it is “mere craving and desire, that is a blind will” (1856–1861 7: 363); when it emerges from the depths, and is no longer blind, it is probably something more like interest. But in addition, Schelling also presents self-will as the condition of individuation or particularity, i.e., separation, especially separation from God: “the principle . . . by which a human being is divided from god is the selfhood in that being . . . as an egocentric, particularized being. . . – the very relation [to god] constitutes personality” (7: 364). Thus Schelling connects the ground of evil not only, as in Kant, with selfishness but also with the very idea of a self, with personality and individuality as such.

In their proper relation the universal will “subordinates [the particular will] to itself as a mere tool” (7: 363), a description that is reminiscent of both Hegel's cunning of reason and Schelling's own 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*; indeed the idea stretches back to Kant's use of god as a practical postulate to guarantee the needed reconciliation between merit and reward.

Still, these kinds of reconciliation are just what Schelling is critical of, and so we should not expect there to be an easy identification of self-will with evil and universal will with good. In fact Schelling's account of good and evil is *formalist*: the contents of the two wills are subject to two different possible formal relations (1856–1861 7: 370/46). Evil is the inversion [*Verkehrung*] of the proper formal relation of the principles. In this way Schelling avoids a Manichean dualism. But at the same time his view has clear similarities with the privation theories he describes: neither evil, nor its precursor in the ground, are strictly beings at all.

Only human beings have the capacity to distance themselves in their particularity from re-immersion in the universal, and hence they represent the apogee of individuality, true personality (1856–1861 7: 363). Even God cannot do this, for the proper relation of “forces” is “inseverable [*unzertrennlich*] in god” (7: 364).

When someone chooses rightly, they choose in accordance with the universal; when someone chooses wrongly however it is not just that they choose individuality and particularity over the universal. Rather, self-will has to “seek to be, as a particular will, that which it is only in its identity with the universal will” (1856–1861 7: 365). That is, it is not just that the particular and universal exchange places, but that the particular must try to present itself as universal, to make a “false” universal or unity (Žižek 1997: 48; see Schelling 7: 365, 7: 371).

Schelling tries to explain this using an analogy with disease that he takes from Franz von Baader (1856–1861 7: 366). Disease is clearly distinct from mere relative lack of health in that a disease actively interferes with your health. In the same way, evil, the inversion of the proper relation of the principles of universality and particularity, is not mere absence of goodness (voluntary integration with the universal) but an active disruption of universality. It is this “positive perversion or reversal” that makes Schelling's conception of evil a “positive antithesis” rather than a merely “negative concept” of a Leibnizian “*malum metaphysicum*” (7: 367). A disease like cancer has its positive existence, its own “false unity” (7: 371) that mocks the true unity of the universal.

Schelling's understanding of evil can also be compared to the notion of *hegemony*. In Gramscian Marxist theory, if a group acts hegemonically, then it is a particular selfish interest group that seeks to satisfy its own peculiar interests; but it does so not in the normal egoistic manner, but by appearing to speak for or to represent everyone, by successfully getting others to accept its norms as universal norms. As Žižek (1997: 48) puts it, the Party speaks for the State, the bourgeoisie for the nation, etc. One might make a similar case for Schelling's account of evil: evil occurs not when the forces of particularism, especially individual interests and inclinations, overwhelm the moral subject, but rather when those particular interests set themselves up as a (false) universal, as the norms of moral goodness as such.

This is both a timely conception of evil, and one that provides the resources to resolve a worry that many thinkers have about the general contemporary use of the term “evil.” The worry is that the thought of evil is irretrievably theological and cannot be retrieved for a secular thought. Calder (2015) for instance notes a number of contemporary evil theorists who think the concept should

be eliminated because of its theological baggage, and Richard Bernstein (2006) draws particularly critical attention to the way the concept was deployed by the Bush administration after 9/11. The general structure of the politicized use of the claim that something is evil (in the narrow sense) is to put an end to discussion and legitimate any action the claimant proposes by appealing to the acuteness of the moral bad, an acuteness that demands immediate action not discussion. What Schelling proposes is that this structure is in fact an instance of the general structure of *evil itself*: a particular will paradoxically poses itself as universal by *claiming to be the universal arbiter of good and evil*.<sup>7</sup>

Schelling clearly accepts the Incorporation Thesis: there is no question of being “overrun” by the passions: “the passions in themselves do not constitute evil, nor do we have to struggle just with flesh and blood but with an evil in and outside of us that is spirit. Only this evil, contracted through our own act but from birth, can on that account [*daher*] be termed radical evil” (1856–1861 7: 388).

But Schelling takes the step that Kant could not: he rejects the Reciprocity Thesis. This occurs, I think, in two ways. First, it seems clear that for Schelling, the will is not constituted by the universal (rational) principle. As willing beings, we are positioned outside of the two principles: a human being “stands on the threshold [*Scheidepunkt*]” (1856–1861 7: 374) at which stage, in the “initial creation,” (and so outside of time) that human being is “an undecided being” (7: 385; see also 7: 381). What we must decide is our essence, for good or evil; and hence it follows that in the initial state human will is external to good and evil, and hence cannot be constituted by either of them. This is to deny at least one direction of the biconditional expressed by the Reciprocity Thesis: that (rational) willing implies the good.

But I have put “rational” here in quotation marks because Schelling makes a further departure from Kant. The Reciprocity Thesis really involves not two but three terms: will and the good (the moral law) but also *reason*. Kant takes it for granted that willing is rational. So the argument, e.g., of the *Groundwork* can be taken as proof showing that it is the rational aspect of our willing that commits us to the moral law. Although Schelling does not thematize it at great length, it seems clear enough that the will of love, the universal will, is intended to be rational. Thus it would appear that Schelling rejects the Reciprocity Thesis not because he denies that reason entails the moral law (and vice versa) but rather because the human will is not rational.

Such an outcome is clearly consonant with the metaphysics of the “irreducible remainder” of which he writes specifically that it “cannot be resolved in the understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground” (1856–1861 7: 360). But Schelling is I think not altogether happy about this outcome, given his account of *libertas indifferentiae*, arbitrary choice or what Kant terms *Willkür*. Specifically referring to Buridan's ass (7: 382), Schelling rejects the notion of arbitrary choice, as in the case where one stands before two possible courses of action that have “equal weight [*Gleichgewicht*]” and chooses one arbitrarily. He has two arguments. First, any such choice would be “irrational [*unvernünftig*]”;

and second, it would “introduce a complete contingency of individual actions” (7: 382).

On the face of it these reasons are inconsistent with Schelling’s own views, which emphasize the introduction precisely of the “irrational and contingent [*das Irrationale und Zufällige*]” (1856–1861 7: 376) into the otherwise pristine world systems of his idealist forebears. Actually, Schelling is not inconsistent here because the contingency introduced by arbitrary freedom is at the level of “individual actions” (7: 382), and Schelling denies that individual actions are contingent: they follow necessarily from one’s essence. Thus, while arbitrary, irrational choice at the level of *individual actions* is impossible, it may nevertheless be that it is just such a choice that each of us makes in the fundamental choice of our characters, for good or evil. Schelling himself introduces his critique of arbitrary choice at the empirical level by commenting that arbitrary choice at least “has in . . . the original undecidedness of human being as idea in its favor” (7: 381).

Kosch (2014: 148–49) argues that this puts Schelling back at Kant’s view: determinism at the empirical level that excludes arbitrary choice but combined with an “inscrutable” (because arbitrary) choice at the empirical level that grounds moral responsibility (1902ff 6: 44). But I do not think this is correct: what is “inscrutable [*unerforschlich*]” in Kant is why anyone would choose to fail to be determined rationally *when their will is rational*. This is the crucial premise that Schelling is willing to break, and which blocks his acceptance of the Reciprocity Thesis.

Still Schelling does not appear to have been happy with this existentialist type of reasoning, and tries to distinguish between a “negative” understanding of “indifference” between good and evil, which looks like the arbitrary freedom mode, and a “vital, positive capacity for good and evil,” which he is in favor of, but gives us few resources to distinguish from negative, arbitrary freedom (1856–1861 7: 354).

Schelling’s account also has another limitation: it sees evil as ultimately no deeper than or distinct from egoism. The dark principle is a metaphysicalized version of Kant’s selfish maxim. Arguably Schelling’s account is positive (although in the “formal” sense described above); and arguably Schelling moves beyond Kant’s conception of a selfish maxim is treating evil as an attempt on the part of particularity to present itself hegemonically as the universal. But the particularity that thereby achieves hegemony is still nothing more than egoism masquerading as morality. Schelling, like Kant, does not therefore give any special attention to putatively special evil motives (like cruelty) or to acts of intense badness.

Although Schelling himself never returns to the topic of evil with such energy as in the *Freedom* essay, some commentators, Michelle Kosch in particular, argue that he does resolve some of these problems in his later philosophy. There Schelling drops the characteristically idealist view that the good is itself rational or that human beings can use their reasoning to figure it out. Instead he affirms the other side of the Euthyphro dilemma, arguing, in a form of what Kosch terms “theological voluntarism” (2006: 113, citing 1856–1861 10: 58) that morality is determined by God. As a result, we can find out what the good consists in only

empirically, by studying God’s revelation (both textual and material). On this view, it is no longer positively irrational to choose evil; and so, to the extent that Schelling’s rejection of arbitrary choice is predicated on a hesitation over how plausible it is to explain the existence of evil by means of a choice of what one knows to be irrational, Schelling’s late view is more plausible. However, the cost of the assumption of theological voluntarism is also high since it appears to entail not just that the good is not rational anymore, but also that it (and evil too) are essentially unconstrained.

### Schopenhauer

Like Schelling, Schopenhauer claims that everything is, at the most basic level, will. In his main work, the 1819 *World as Will and Representation* (WWR), the proximity to Schelling’s claim that “will is primal being” is striking: “only the will is *thing in itself*: . . . The will is the innermost, the kernel of every individual thing” (1988 2: 131).

Nevertheless, despite the similarity of the result, Schopenhauer’s arguments are quite different from Schelling’s, and so the consequences of his identification of will and being are also different. Schelling’s problematic in the *Freedom* essay is fundamentally moral: his identification of will and being is intended to make room for genuine human choice (and hence the possibility of a genuine choice of evil). Schopenhauer’s identification of will and being is in the first instance motivated theoretically: will is the key to our understanding of the world because it is the only answer to the question of what things are ultimately in themselves. But the answer to this question returns to the issue of evil because Schopenhauer’s answer is the basis of his philosophical pessimism, his claim that the world is irredeemably suffused with suffering, i.e., situational evil.

When Schopenhauer says that the will is the in-itself of everything, he does not mean that the in-itself of everything is exactly like human will, which is characteristically intentional and goal-directed. Rather he thinks of the will as essentially striving and only contingently either conscious or intentional. In fact Schopenhauer argues that it is impossible for the will as such to have a goal: space and time are the conditions of individuation; but, as with Kant, space and time apply only to phenomena; the will is not phenomenon but thing-in-itself; so the will as such cannot be individuated. But intentional willing requires individuation, minimally a distinction between the subject of willing and the state of affairs intended. In even more compressed form: intentionality presupposes representation; but the will is *not* representation. Schopenhauer then uses a characteristic analysis of (intentional) willing as *want*, i.e., lack of the desired state of affairs that is experienced as dissatisfaction to make the following argument:

All striving comes from lack, from a dissatisfaction with one’s condition, and is thus suffering as long as it is not satisfied; but no satisfaction is lasting; instead, it is only the beginning of a new striving. We see striving



everywhere inhibited in many ways, struggling everywhere; and thus always as suffering; there is no final goal of striving, and therefore no bounds or end to suffering.

(WWR I 1988 2: 366)

This is the core of Schopenhauer's pessimism: the will strives eternally without even the possibility of satisfaction; and this striving is experienced as suffering.<sup>8</sup> Thus the world is essentially will, which manifests itself in consciousness as suffering: situational evil is ubiquitous.

Schopenhauer's view depends on a negative conception of desire or willing "[t]he basis of all willing is need, lack and thus pain" (WWR I 1988 2: 367). To defend this view, Schopenhauer makes some empirical observations, like the well-rehearsed claim that it is only depictions of pain, suffering, evil and hell that are capable of convincing sensuous representation in the arts; no compelling imagination of happiness is possible (as many romantics have remarked about Milton's God and Satan figures in *Paradise Lost*). But really his argument is metaphysical: the role of the intentional object of willing or striving is progressively attenuated as one descends the great chain of being, until it is finally completely eradicated at the transcendental level of the will as in-itself. But this intentional object is the locus of possibly pleasurable positivity in contrast to what we want (in both senses). So at the level of the Big Will there simply is no such positivity of pleasure. There is only "pure *goalless* striving" from which there is no possibility of respite. This is manifest, Schopenhauer argues, on the phenomenal level in boredom: when we have (temporarily) satisfied all our empirical desires, their very satisfaction is experienced as pain (2: 366f).

Schopenhauer's metaphysical argument for the ubiquity of situation evil, of suffering, is however a bit of a short circuit. Here again a comparison between Schopenhauer's will and Schelling's dark ground is instructive. Schelling's most prominent conceptual distinction is between the dark ground and existence, while Schopenhauer's is between thing-in-itself (conceived as will) and appearances (subordinated to the Principle of Sufficient Reason). Given the Kantian background that they both affirm and which provides a common source, it is tempting to think that the dark ground and the will (the most novel elements in both their systems) are performing analogous functions. Certainly both are the metaphysical roots of evil.

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer's will and Schelling's dark ground operate differently. For Schelling the ground is the source of personality or life and is as a result a condition of individuation. This individuation is what resists the implacable operation of impersonal rationality, which motivates Schelling to construct a system that makes room for freedom. Evil is an organizational corollary.

For Schopenhauer by contrast, the will is itself fully impersonal and only the ultimate cause of evil; the proximal cause of evil is precisely individuation, which makes it possible for the will to consume itself. The constitutive illusion of individuation is that I am distinct from others. It is this illusion (what he often terms the Veil of Maya) that makes it possible for me to satisfy the cravings of my will

at the expense of others. And it is this, in turn, that, from the point of view of the will itself is self-consumption: the individual at whose expense my (illusorily) individual will satisfies itself is metaphysically identical with me: "[t]ormentor and tormented are one; the former is mistaken in thinking that he does not share the torment, the latter in thinking that he does not share the guilt . . . in the fierceness and intensity of the will's desire it buries its teeth into its own flesh" (WWR 1988 2: 419). In fact this is Schopenhauer's theory of eternal (as opposed to temporal) justice: the crime (inflicting suffering on others) is immediately its own punishment at the metaphysical level, since the criminal is one with the victim (2: 414f).

It is possible for us to achieve insight into our metaphysical identity with others – and with the rest of creation. And this is the source of moral goodness, since such insight leads us to refrain from harming others and to help alleviate their sufferings. Schelling (like Kierkegaard) wants to preserve a moment of independence of the universal so that the individual and freedom are parts of the same solution. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, sees individuation as a condition of evil and positively wants to be reabsorbed into, as it were, the collective (unless the whole thing can be abolished in saintly renunciation).

As a result both Schelling and Schopenhauer (like Kant) see egoism as a major cause of evil, but Schelling also sees egoism as related to normatively valuable phenomena like individuality, personhood and freedom, while Schopenhauer sees egoism (via individuation) as an unalloyed bad: the world would be a better place if individuation could be eliminated, even if, it is as a matter of fact impossible to do so, and even if moral egoism is related, as Schelling believes, to individuality and personality, what Schopenhauer calls "character." Here is Schopenhauer on egoism, from his 1840 essay *On the Basis of Morality* (BM): "it is colossal: it towers above the world. For if the choice were given to any individual between his own destruction and that of the world, I do not need to say where it would land in the great majority (1988 4: 197)."

Indeed in some places Schopenhauer makes nonegoistic ("disinterested") action the criterion that distinguishes an action of true moral worth (BM 1988 4: 402); this claim of course has the corollary that morally bad actions, i.e., evil actions in the broad sense, are those motivated by selfish concerns. Thus, despite an sustained attack on Kant's account of morality, occupying the majority of BM, Schopenhauer uses essentially the reasoning of Kant's *Groundwork* to identify good with disinterest and evil interest. This is however by no means the whole story for Schopenhauer.

First it is worth noting that Schopenhauer has a lively sense of the possibility of moral rationalization (indeed he is here a forerunner of Freud, see Rosset 1967). So he by no means thinks that all actions that present themselves as disinterested in fact are: this he says would a "juvenile" error (BM 1988 4: 187). The position is similar to Schelling's "hegemony" view; but it is not identical. Schelling appears to think that egoism is evil *only* when it attempts to occupy the position of the universal, to present itself hegemonically. Whether this position is coherent is another matter, but it is certainly not Schopenhauer's, who, despite being one of

the first philosophers to be sensitive to rationalization, does not think it affects the constitution of evil in the broad sense.

Ultimately Schopenhauer does not in fact end up identifying evil with interest and good with disinterest, for he proposes a clear narrow understanding of evil based on the category of disinterested motives for causing suffering to others. These are the malicious or “devilish” actions that Kant claims human beings are not capable of (WWR 1988 2: 393; BM 199f). They are the inverse of compassionate actions motivated by “loving kindness [*Menschenliebe*]”: in compassion the suffering of the other becomes a motive for us to relieve their suffering even at our own expense; in disinterested envy, the sight of the happiness of the other becomes a motive for us to cause or at least wish them suffering, again, even at the expense of our own interests (BM 1988: 215ff). On Calder’s (2015) taxonomy, Schopenhauer delineates a narrow conception of evil on the basis of a particular set of very bad motives. As a result, Schopenhauer sees real evil in actions with quite trivial actions as teasing and practical jokes (1988 6: 228).

Although I have (and Schopenhauer does this too) been speaking glibly of evil “actions,” in fact actions are not the proper target of moral evaluation for Schopenhauer: he is a virtue theorist, and hence it is one’s character rather than one’s actions that may be evil. On this issue, Schopenhauer follows Schelling (and in some ways Kant) quite closely, and indeed has a more consistent resolution of the issues than Schelling. First, like Schelling and Kant, he is a phenomenal determinist: “each deed of a human being is the necessary product of their *character* and of the *motive* that occurs” (BM 1988 4: 56) or, as he pithily expresses it, “*operari sequitur esse* [actions follow from essence]” (4: 57). Second, he is even more dismissive than Schelling of the *liberum arbitrium*, treating Buridan as a *reductio* (4: 58). Indeed Schopenhauer takes positive pride in his determinism, regarding belief in free will (at the phenomenal level) as at best childish (WWR 1: 298, BM: 243) and at worst a rationalization for theists to resolve the problem of evil (BM 4: 72–73).<sup>9</sup> But, second, and despite his polemics against the notion of free will, Schopenhauer still takes the notion of responsibility seriously; and argues in his prize essay *On the Freedom of the Will* that responsibility presupposes freedom (1988 4: 93–94). He resolves this dilemma using the same transcendental resources as Kant and Schelling, distinguishing between empirical and intelligible (or transcendental) character, and characterizing the former as “the temporal unfolding of an extra-temporal and thus indivisible and unalterable act of will, or an intelligible character” (WWR 1988 2: 355–56). One is therefore responsible for what one *does* only because one is responsible for what one *is*.

This view lands Schopenhauer in a similar position to Schelling and Kant: how is the non-temporal act of character to be explained, if arbitrary choice is impossible; how, ultimately, is the choice of evil to be explained? Like Schelling, Schopenhauer does not address the issue directly. But in contrast to Schelling, Schopenhauer positively embraces the irrationality of the will:

in Kantian ethics . . . we see the thought always hovering in the background that the inner, eternal essence of the human being consists in *reason*.

Here . . . I must be content with the sheer assertion of the opposite, namely that reason, and the cognitive faculty in general, is something secondary, something belonging to appearance, indeed conditioned by the organism, while by contrast the genuine core, the only thing metaphysical and hence indestructible in the human being is *his will*.

(BM 1988 4: 132)

There is no Schellingian hesitation here about the possibility of a groundless and hence arbitrary choice of egoism or malice at the level of “intelligible” character (given what Schopenhauer says, the term is not particularly accurate).

Similarly, Schopenhauer avoids the Kantian problem of the complete inexplicability of choosing evil in Kant, by denying any constitutive connection between reason and the good. Here Schopenhauer is a little less clear. On the one hand he sometimes (and more famously) talks about morality in terms of some kind of cognitive achievement, and especially about the cardinal virtue of morality, compassion (German: *Mitleid*): the virtuous person comes to “see through the *principium individuationis* [principle of individuation]” and recognizes that there is ultimately no clear distinction between people (WWR 1988 2: 438, 439). Still, this achievement is definitely not a rational-conceptual one for “virtue is as little taught as genius: indeed, concepts are just as barren for it as they are for art” (2: 319–20). Virtue, even on this quasi-cognitive model is based in a kind of perceptual cognition, not in reason. On the other hand, Schopenhauer sometimes goes further, suggesting an inversion of the relations between compassion and the ability to see through individual to our non-distinctness at the level of the will. For instance, when he defines compassion in *The Basis of Morality*, he describes it as “the wholly immediate *sympathy*, independent of any other consideration, in the first place towards another’s *suffering*” (BM 1988 4: 209), going on to comment that it is “an undeniable fact of human consciousness, is essential to it, does not rest on presuppositions, concepts, religions, dogmas, myths, upbringing and education, but instead is original and immediate, resides in human nature itself” (4: 213). These views suggest a different account: it is compassion that enables us to see the suffering of the other as somehow our own, rather than the cognitive achievement of such perception that yields compassion. Either way, reason is clearly not, as it is for Kant, and for the Schelling of the *Freedom* essay, in any way constitutive of the good. Thus the choice of the good is not determined by reason; and so the choice of evil is not incomprehensible in relation to reason.

Still, Schopenhauer does not by any means solve the problem that Schelling identifies in Kant and the rest of the idealists; but his failure is the result of a different dilemma, namely this: that our individuality is supposed to be a function of a choice of character, for good or evil, at the transcendental level; but at the transcendental level, there *are* no individuals. Thus for Schopenhauer falls into the same trap Schelling identifies for Kant and the idealists: he has ultimately not room for the individual personality. Schopenhauer essentially admits this in a late work where he observes that for his moral theory, individuality must go

beyond the phenomena, but that he “cannot answer” the question of “how far down the roots of individuality go” (1988 6: 243).

Schelling and Schopenhauer are transitional figures to modernity, showing various signs of independence from the theist tradition they are immersed in. Most pointedly, both of them see theism as having a vested interest in denying either the existence or the importance of evil, encapsulated in what Schelling terms the “privation” theory. And as a result they are both unusually sensitive to the scope of evil and its significance in relation to human freedom and responsibility.

## Notes

- 1 This essay builds on the account of Schelling and Schopenhauer given in Welchman (2015).
- 2 My account of Schelling's relation to Kant draws on the excellent account in Kosch (2006).
- 3 Translations from this and other German sources are my own, but I have consulted the translations mentioned in the references.
- 4 See also Welchman (2014: 33) for the comparison with *crime passionnelle*.
- 5 This is Kant's account of original sin, although he correctly rejects the German term *Erbünde* or inherited sin as inconsistent with the Incorporation Thesis (1902ff 6: 31–32). See also Welchman (2016) for an elaboration of the significance of this eternal deed in Schelling and Schopenhauer.
- 6 Žižek (1996) takes the title of his book on Schelling from this phrase.
- 7 These two paragraphs are based on Welchman (2015).
- 8 Commentators have not been convinced. See Soll (2012) for an extensive attack.
- 9 See Welchman (2017) on the importance of determinism to Schopenhauer.

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