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Schelling and the Satanic: On *Naturvernichtung*

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*Nah ist
Und schwer zu fassen der
Gott.
Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.*

Friedrich Hölderlin,
Patmos (1802)

In her unsettling book, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, Elizabeth Kolbert quotes Joseph Mendelson, a herpetologist at Zoo Atlanta: “I sought a career in herpetology because I enjoy working with animals. I did not anticipate that it would come to resemble paleontology.” Kolbert elaborates on Mendelson’s despair:

Today, amphibians enjoy the dubious distinction of being the world’s most endangered class of animals; it’s been calculated that the group’s extinction rate could be as much as forty-five thousand times higher than the background rate. But extinction rates among many other groups are approaching amphibian levels. It is estimated that one-third of all reef building corals, a third of all freshwater mollusks, a third of sharks and rays, a quarter of all mammals, a fifth of all reptiles, and a sixth of all birds are headed toward oblivion. The losses are occurring all over: in the South Pacific and in the North Atlantic, in the Arctic and the Sahel, in lakes and on islands, on mountaintops and in valleys. If you know how to look, you can probably



find signs of the current extinction event in your own backyard.¹

At the heart of this natural catastrophe is perhaps the earth's most problematic creature: *ourselves*. Schelling *prophetically* grasped this pandemic outbreak amid the earth's natural systems when he warned of "the true annihilation [*Vernichtung*] of nature" (SW V: 275) and when he characterized modernity as constituted by the absence of nature because "it lacks a living ground" (SW VII: 361).

I do not use this adverb *prophetically* lightly. Like the Hebrew prophets, Schelling presaged the virulent emergence of a genuine—indeed, radical—evil and he also intimated the possibility of its overcoming in the advent of the kingdom of God on earth, that is, the intimation of a utopian or religiously awoken future. "The future is intimated" and the "intimated is prophesied" (SW VIII: 199) as the well-known opening lines of all of the extant drafts of *The Ages of the World* announced. What manner of future is intimated? The re-emergence from the oblivion of the past, the "striving towards ἀνάμνησις [*anamnēsis, Streben nach dem Wiederbewußtwerden*]" (SW VIII: 201), of a golden age whose access has inevitably been obstructed, blocked, contested, resisted. "What holds back that intimated golden age in which truth again becomes fable and fable again becomes truth" (SW VIII: 200)? Buried in the oblivion of the past is an anticipatory relationship to the future in which truth presents itself as fable and Hesiod's Χρυσόν Γένος² (*Chryson Genos*), the golden age, or the Hebrew Bible's garden of Eden or the *Mahābhārata*'s *satya yuga*, the age of the fullness of being (*sat*), is intimated as a lost (buried in the past) but future paradise on earth. Indeed, in the first draft (1811) of *The Ages of the World*, Schelling succinctly defined the prophet as the one who can discern the manner in which the past, present, and future hold together as a dynamic whole, the one who "sees through the hanging together of the times [*der den Zusammenhang der Zeiten durchschaut*]."³

As Dante confirmed for Schelling, the only reawakening to a future paradise runs straight through the *inferno* of the past, a path that therefore demands that we confront the satanic. Perhaps he failed, but Schelling endeavored to take up the prophetic voice, to liberate a different future by exorcising our relationship to nature and to do so demanded that he go straight into the primordial abyss of hell.

I am fully aware that to contemporary sensibilities such language sounds resoundingly quaint, even demented, and no doubt we are called to find new ways of liberating Schelling's insight. Nonetheless, it is my hope here to defend the thrust of the central elements of the manner in which Schelling prophetically framed what has matured into the contemporary ecological crisis. The crisis of what Schelling called

1 Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 17-18.

2 This is described in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, lines 109-126. See also Plato's evocation of Hesiod's golden age, the primordial time in which nobility prevailed, in Plato, *Cratylus*, 397e.

3 Schelling, *Die Weltalter in den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813 (Nachlaßband)*, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1946), 83.

Naturvernichtung—our growing oblivion to the question of nature—demands not only that we recover the question of nature, but that we also understand its original loss as, in the language of a new mythology, *satanic*. In other words, our increasing awareness of *Naturvernichtung* as constitutive of who we now are is simultaneously a revelation of radical evil.

To be sure, Schelling is no Manichean and he does not rehash tired and neurotic narratives about the epic battle between good and evil nor does he even hold that there is any such *being* as Satan. The latter is a principle and its potency has no being to call its own but it strives for being and hungers to be something and to have a self to call its own. As Joe Lawrence articulated it: “If Christ ultimately preceded the creation as the eternal Word through which it was spoken into being, Satan preceded it as the original chaos out of which it emerged.”⁴

As is well known, in the Freedom Essay Schelling dismissed the *privatio* conception of evil, which holds that evil is a mere lack, the absence of the divine plenum. Schelling argued to the contrary that evil is not anything negative, an inevitable and structural consequence of human finitude. It has a monstrous positivity and belongs, as Schelling insisted all the way until his final Berlin lectures on the *Philosophy of Revelation*, to the root or *ground* of humanity. Following an opening in Kant, evil is “radical,” a question of “*hereditary sin*” (SW IV: 270). It is not that we are born bad or broken, as if there were something intrinsically wrong with us. The positivity of evil does not mean, as Schopenhauer concluded in *Vom Leiden der Welt*, that evil and pain belong to the very fabric of appearance:

I know of no greater absurdity than that of most metaphysical systems which declare evil to be something negative; whereas it is precisely that which is positive and makes itself felt. On the other hand, that which is good, in other words, all happiness and satisfaction, is negative, that is, the mere elimination of a desire and the ending of a pain.⁵

Schopenhauer had “the conviction that the world, and therefore also humans, are something, that really should not have been”; we are but a “needlessly disturbing episode in the blessed stillness of the nothing” and life “as a whole” is, and here Schopenhauer uses English, a “disappointment, nay a cheat,” or, “to speak German,”

4 Joseph P. Lawrence, “Schelling’s Metaphysics of Evil,” *The New Schelling*, ed. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 177.

5 “Nachträge zur Lehre vom Leiden der Welt,” in “*Parerga und Paralipomena*, vol. 2, in Julius Frauenstädt (ed.), *Arthur Schopenhauers Sämtliche Werke*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1891), volume 6, 312-327. This citation is at 312-313. English translation found in Wolfgang Schirmacher (ed.), *The Essential Schopenhauer* (New York: Harper, 2010), 2.



it is *eine Prellerei*, a swindle or fraud.⁶ All in all, there is “utter disappointment with all of life.”⁷

For Schelling, it is not existence that is fraudulent, but rather Satan himself. The inheritance of sin and evil, the evil that attends to the ground of human existence, *is not found in the character of what exists*, either in a positive sense (Schopenhauer) or a negative sense (*privatio*). The “genuine philosophical idea of Satan” (SW IV: 271) emerges, Schelling tells us in the *Philosophy of Revelation*, from the “uncreated source of possibilities” (SW IV: 270). Satan is the “eternal hunger for actuality,” which the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:8) likened to hungry lion (SW IV: 271), roaming about (as he did in the preface to Job), looking for someone to devour. Pure angels never enter the world of creatures, and the very attempt to depict them vindicates Walter Benjamin’s lament about the catastrophic, wreckage-strewn wake of the angel of history.⁸ Indeed, one could say that the angel of history is satanic *κατ’ ἐξοχήν* (*kat’ exochēn, par excellence*). Only the dark angels, which actualize themselves insofar as humans aspire to take ownership of their ground, have mythological force and, at least in this way, they are real to us. “The evil angels are spirits that should not be ... and *should* have remained mere potencies” (SW IV: 284). Satan’s disobedience is his insatiable thirst to become something, to have being. His ...

demonic nature is an eternal avidity—*ἐπιθυμία* [*epithymia*, appetite, yearning, longing, concupiscence]. The impure spirit, when he is external to humans, is found as if in a desert where he lacks a human being in which to actualize his latent possibilities. He is tormented by a thirst for actuality. He seeks peace but does not find it. His craving [*Sucht*] is first stilled when he finds an entrance into the human will. Outside of the human will, he is cut off from all actuality—he is in the desert, that is, he is in the incapacity to still his burning longing for actuality.⁹

Žižek explains what makes this a problem of the Anthropocene—and of *ἄνθρωπος κατ’ ἐξοχήν* (*anthrōpos kat’ exochēn*, the human *par excellence*). The satanic inversion or perversion of the relationship between ground and existence is only possible for humans (as well as, we might here also already add, the religious awakening to the proper order of ground and existence) because only humans hold

6 Schopenhauer, “Nachträge zur Lehre vom Leiden der Welt,” 325/14.

7 Schopenhauer, “Nachträge zur Lehre vom Leiden der Welt,” 321/10.

8 This is the ninth of Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 257-258. The storm of progress pushes the angel irresistibly toward the future to which his back is turned. Behind is the past, which piles “wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.” Benjamin, “Theses on The Philosophy of History,” 257.

9 Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 648.

together the diremption of spirit and nature. Evil is only possible for the creatures who are subject to the problems of philosophical religion. Other animals can be cruel but only humans are capable of evil. If humans were only natural, humans would, like all of the other animals, “be an organism living in symbiosis with his environment, a predator exploiting other animals and plants yet, for that very reason, included in nature’s circuit and unable to pose a fundamental threat to it.”¹⁰

However, what Schelling in 1797 in the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* argued made philosophy as such possible, namely, the non sequitur marked by moments like wonder, doubt, and the general force of radical questioning, the shattering of the absorption in the present as one “strives to wrench oneself away from the shackles of nature and her provisions” (SW II: 12), already hinted at the satanic temptation at the heart of philosophy. Breaking with nature, the disobedient rebellion at the heart of reflection itself, is not in itself the recovery of nature. The latter demands the initial loss of nature, which is born from the lure of possibility itself. Is there not another way to live or other ways to know the things of our earth and of our living and dying? Such radical questioning interrupts the experience of nature as an experience of unrelenting necessity, but one runs the risk of becoming lost in this loss. Mere reflection, that is, reflection for the sake of reflection, is, accordingly and in anticipation of the Freedom Essay, *eine Geisteskrankheit des Menschen* (SW II: 13). *Eine Geisteskrankheit* is a psychopathology or mental disease, literally, a sickness of the spirit. One pulls away from the center of nature and its stubborn hold and retreats to the periphery of reflection. However, if one remains on the periphery, separated, alone in the delusion of one’s ipseity, that is, in the assumption that one is grounded in oneself, this is the experience of sickness and radical evil. Questioning separates one from nature and renders reflection upon it possible, but left to itself, nature (the ecological systems from which we emerged) now appears as separate, an isolated object to a discerning subject. We look *at* nature as if we were not *of* nature.

In the language of the introduction to the *Ideas*, when reflection reaches “dominion over the whole person,” it “kills” her “spiritual life at its root” (SW II: 13). Reflection, Keats’s celebrated “negative capacity,” always only has a “negative value,” enabling the divorce from nature that is our original but always mistaken perspective, but it should endeavor to reunite with that which it first knew only as necessity. Reflection is “merely a necessary evil” that, left to itself, attaches to the root, aggressing against the very ground of nature that prompted the original divorce from the chains of nature.

Philosophy is symptomatic of an awakening of and to spirit, but herein also lurks the satanic rub. Žižek: when the human relationship to nature is “raised to the power of spirit,” it is “exacerbated, universalized into a propensity for absolute

10 Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 63. See also Slavoj Žižek, “Selfhood as Such is Spirit: F. W. J. Schelling on the Origins of Evil,” *Radical Evil*, ed. Joan Copjec (London and New York, 1996), 1-29.



domination which no longer serves the end of survival but turns into an end-in-itself.”¹¹ In evil I am tempted to become the ground and, as such, annihilate nature. Speaking of the fate of philosophy in the *Lectures on the Methods of Academic Study* (1803), Schelling called this the “true *annihilation* of nature, analyzing and thereby atomizing nature into absolute qualities, limits, and affections” as something external to us (SW V: 275). Nature becomes present to the human subject, which now regards itself as the ἀρχή (*archē*). As Bruce Matthews elegantly tells us: “The complicating yet all too obvious fact, however, is that we too are a part of this world, and cannot therefore rip ourselves out of the ground from whence we live.”¹²

Yet we strive to do so in evil. For Žižek, “true ‘diabolical’ evil consists in the contraction of the spirit against nature: in it, the spirit, as it were, provides itself with a ground of its own, outside its ‘natural’ surroundings, with a footing from which it can oppose itself to the world and set out to conquer it.”¹³

Such a reading of the diabolical required Schelling to refute explicitly the “customary image” of Satan as a “created,” “individual” spirit who was originally a good angelic being, but who out of “hubris [*Hochmut*]” elevated himself above God and was eventually deposed and condemned to darkness (SW XIV: 242). Nonetheless, Schelling did not attempt in so doing to deny either “the reality of that idea overall” or the “dignity of Satan himself” (SW XIV: 242). Indeed, Schelling strove to ascribe to Satan “an even higher reality and an even higher meaning” (SW: XIV: 243).

Etymologically the name Satan derives from the Hebrew for *Widersacher* or adversary and the definite article makes him the adversary *kat’ exochēn, par excellence*. This already suggests that “the” Satan is somehow a spirit, but not therefore that he is necessarily an individually created being. Satan is a force of resistance, a lag in the divine economy, an obstacle, a force or potency that seeks “to constrain, to oppose a movement or stand in its way,” to come between some of the creative motions of the cosmos in order to resist them. He is therefore also called the διάβολος (*diabolos*, the diabolical), the enemy and slanderer (SW XIV: 243). This does not mean that the

11 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 63.

12 Bruce Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 4. On the problem of the *Naturvernichtung*, see Matthews’ fine discussion, 1-10.

13 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 63. Richard Bernstein argues that “Schelling’s originality consists in clearing a space for a richer, more complex, and more robust moral psychology ... He has profound insight into the violent battle that takes place in the soul of human beings. He grasps the power of the unruly, dark, unconscious forces that shape human life ... He is sceptical of any philosophical or rationalistic ideal that deludes itself into thinking that we can achieve complete transparency, equilibrium, and control over our unruly passions.” Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 96.

devil was a “created spirit” or a “creature” that “first *came to be* in the course of things” (SW XI: 244). It also does *not* mean that the satanic is by its nature evil, that it is a principle that is through and through evil and, as such, eternally opposed to God (SW XIV: 245).

As Job discovered in his pit, Satan “is a principle that belongs to the divine economy and as such is acknowledged by God” (SW XIV: 247). As Goethe also saw at the beginning of *Faust*, God does not regard Schelling’s Satan as something perversely created by God or as something strange and unrecognizable to God even as it opposes God. Schelling even recalls that the Bogomils, tenth century dualists in the First Bulgarian Empire, called Satan “Christ’s older brother” (SW XIV: 245). Job, God’s servant, is loyal, but *could* he be made disloyal? Satan drives possibility toward actuality. Satan is a “power that is, so to speak, necessary, by which the uncertain becomes certain and the undecided is decided.”¹⁴ Satan is not himself evil—indeed, he belongs to the potency of becoming itself, without which the universe would fall asleep and become mired in the paralysis of slumber. Nonetheless, he “brings forth and to the light of day concealed evil” and does not allow it to remain concealed by the good (SW XIV: 248).

This “power can be called envious” but in the sense in which Aristotle in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* spoke of the virtue of νέμεσις [*nemesis*], which is, per Schelling’s gloss, “begrudging, that is, envious, of the happiness of those who do not deserve to be happy” (SW XIV: 248-249; see also SW XIV: 265). Aristotle wedged the virtue of *nemesis*, the pain of the indignation that we feel before the spectacle of another’s unearned happiness and the good fortune of their unduly rewarded vice, between the extreme of outright envy (φθόνος, *phthonos*), that is, the ill-will toward and jealousy of the earned and deserved happiness of others, and its darkest extreme, *Schadenfreude*, ἐπιχαιρεκακία (*epichairekakia*), the malicious joy and delight at the misfortune and unearned sufferings of others (1108b1-10). For Aristotle, it is virtuous to begrudge unearned fortune, although it is a vice to begrudge earned fortune or to delight in unearned suffering. Satan, the power of *nemesis*, is neither the enemy of all joy in the world nor intrinsically malicious, dismissing neither the earned joy of others nor wishing to delight in their unearned pain. The potency in itself is not evil, but, in begrudging Job his original unearned halcyon life, it draws out Job’s hidden doubts, putting the disposition or *Gesinnung* “of humans in doubt and therefore putting them to the test” (SW XIV: 248).

Schelling’s point about Job is easy to appreciate. Is Job so sure that it is not the case that he loves God and keeps his covenant because God has been good to Job?

14 Lidia Procesi tells us that for the late Schelling Satan “is the force which makes the uncertain become certain, the undecided decided.” As such, he is “the impulsion to freedom from the pantheistic confusion and the metaphysical possibility of the birth of the conscience.” Lidia Procesi, “Unicité et pluralité de dieu: La contradiction et le diable chez Schelling,” *Le dernier Schelling: Raison et positivité* (Paris: Vrin, 1994), 113.



That God has exacted Job's loyalty by bribing him with good fortune? Is not the seemingly unyielding love even of the most righteous of humans a conditional love, a love rooted in reciprocity? If Satan the *nemesis* takes away the happenstance of Job's good fortune—for who really has earned their good fortune anyway?—would he still remain loyal to God? Who would be religious if religion were stripped of all rewards, bribes, and incentives? Could not unrelenting misfortune shatter the disposition of even the most ardently religious? Have I earned the right to consider myself religious, or is my putative religiosity just another aspect of what we might today call privilege? Do I value religion simply because it accords with the world being the way that I want it to be? Is not the radical possibility of the ground's subjunctive mood ready to flare up and inflame even the most seemingly recalcitrant reality? Satan is the "suspicious one that places disposition into doubt" (SW XIV: 249). Satan is not so much evil as "the one who *intimates* evil" (SW XIV: 249).

It is only when the struggle tilts back into the direction of life, when the now lost good can be thought precisely as good by revealing itself through its absence, just as health comes into relief precisely as what sickness has vanquished, that Satan "is felt as something that contradicts the good" (SW XIV: 249). This is not to say that one realizes that Satan is evil as such—Satan maintains the sublime dignity of possibility as such, the unrelenting divine conflagration of the $\mu\eta\ \delta\nu$ (*mē on*, what is in being as otherwise than being¹⁵)—but that Satan's coming to be had obstructed and blocked, and in so doing, had revealed the divinity and goodness of the ground.

In fact, there is ironically something quite diabolical about our penchant to misunderstand all things, even the diabolical itself: "All errors and obstacles of a true insight into science, especially in theology, comes from taking something that has truth for a specific moment and elevating or extending it into a universal concept" (SW XIV: 249). One might say that the *nemesis* that the ground's subjunctive mood holds over the reality of anything that allows for the eruptions of new actualities. It is in its own way genetic, begrudging the order in which it finds itself. New actualities, simply in affirming themselves, however, become the new order and therefore abdicate the possibility from which they emerged. Even if the new order is an order of *nemesis*, of obstruction and begrudging, it succumbs to its own idolatry, becoming reified accounts of diabolical creatures, which, in turn, is ironically diabolical.

Nonetheless, Schelling, in narrating his "higher history," is after "personalities" that are "not at a standstill or immobile and hence their very concept itself is mobile" (SW XIV: 250). This is certainly true for the concept of Satan, "the instigator of contradiction, the universal dis-uniter, through which death, discord, and evil itself first came into the world," and who is not the same in the end as he was in the beginning (SW XIV: 250). Possibility's hunger for actuality is finally the revelation of the divinity of divine possibility amid the sickness that, in becoming

15 For more on the *mē on*, see Jason M. Wirth, *Schelling's Practice of the Wild: Time, Art, Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 61-65.

something, takes itself out of the divine economy and languishes on its periphery.

As I attempted to show in *Schelling's Practice of the Wild*, Schelling, in defending the Freedom Essay from Eschenmayer in 1812, made the same kind of point about idolatry. When an image congeals into a fixed meaning, we have idolatry. When I assume that I am what I appear to be—I am *like* I appear—I fail to appreciate the manner in which Schelling understands the force of *likeness*. Schelling takes the problem of the image (or *das Bild*) in relationship to *das Ebenbild*, a precise or spitting image, in the sense that it has in Genesis 1:26 when “God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image [*Ebenbild*], in our likeness.’”

You scoff that it *falls* to us to make ourselves into the image [*Ebenbild*] of God, to which the understanding also adds its two cents, in that it shows quite artificially how God was actually *forced* to create such a corporeal image of himself. My belief in contrast is that it did not fall to humans to become the image of God, but rather that God himself made the human being in his image, against which it was certainly a different and opposed *Fall* (a fall of human beings and the devil) by which the human being became the non-image of God (SW VIII: 183).

Here Schelling is playing with two senses of *Einfall*. In the first sense it means a “sudden thought,” to come or “fall” to thought, that is, for a thought to occur to thinking. This is the innocence of the initial satanic moment, the hunger of possibility to be something, the eternal beginning that is the ground of all things. We *are* in the image of God, or we could even say, we are in each and every moment what falls to us and as us.

The loss of this relationship, however, speaks to another meaning of *Einfall*, namely, the fall of original sin (in the myth of Eden). One can speak of *der Einfall der Nacht*, the fall of night, but here the occurrence is the sudden fall from grace, or what is more typically called *der Sündenfall*. In the Freedom Essay, this is the fall from the center into the periphery. Schelling, quoting from the beginning of Malebranche’s *The Search after Truth*, rejects the claim that the spirit is what informs the body or is in any way on the side of the εἶδος (*eidos*, form). To be in the image of God is not to be a copy of another image, a replication of one thing based on another thing. To be made in the image of God is to be part of the divine ecology of the universe as the life of the imagination (*die Einbildungskraft*, the potency of coming into image). Having come into image one can fall from the divine economy by associating oneself with one’s image and making it (and therefore oneself) the ground. Satan who was the power of nothing becomes the one thing above all things, *the hunger to subsume the universe to oneself*. Schelling joined Malebranche in his distaste for those who “should regard the spirit more as the *form* of the body than as being made in the image and for the image of God” (SW VIII: 184). Idolatry, the Hebrew *pesel* or graven image, is



the sudden fall from grace and, as such, the loss of one's being as the image of God. The great bifurcation of sense and form that so permeates Western metaphysics has its heart in the fall and in our inclination toward evil (our striving for form severed from its imaginative source).

In this sense, it is important to interject that it is not an overreach to conclude that evil is not best imagined in extreme depictions of its violence, but rather in the fraudulent normalcy that such violence polices. The horrors of genocide are already looming in the kitsch depictions of normal and proper human life and therefore in all of the life set aside and excluded from such depictions (in the sense of Agamben's *homo sacer*). The virulence of the Shoah, for example, is already anticipated in the dismissal of artistic creativity as *entartet*, degenerate, that is, in violation of its proper kind, and the elevation of state-promoted kitsch images of idyllic Aryan family life. Furthermore, it is not enough merely to steal back white family life and oppose it to National Socialism as in the maniacally white kitsch of *The Sound of Music*. One understands why John Coltrane thought that his soprano saxophone was channelling the presence of God when one hears him revitalize and reanimate *My Favourite Things*. One also understands what the great Austrian writer Hermann Broch meant when, in his famous address to the German department at Yale University, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," he argued that kitsch is "evil in the value-system of art."¹⁶

When, as it does in kitsch, the struggle clarifies the forms of life that truncate themselves from life itself, not only does the former appear more and more evil, but it is also revealed as the ground of divine majesty, the upsurge of the ground itself in its original sovereignty and possibility. Satan is A become B, or, to be more precise, he is the *nemesis* by which the undecidability of A is suddenly decided, "the B posited through divine begrudging" and, as such, Satan is the "great power of God in the fallen world" (SW XIV: 252). The existence of B, however, is the possibility of the revelation of A, of the original divine undecidability that, although it is decided again and again, degenerates into the sickness of idolatry if its images obscure that they are made in the image of God, that is, if they block the *revelation* that they are through and through *mythological*. It is at this point in Schelling's strange ontidicy that affirms the positive (but always treacherous and mendacious) reality of sickness, death, evil, and madness, as also belonging to the way of all things, that they are not only seen as evil, "but rather a necessary principle to the divine governance of the world" (SW XIV: 253). Indeed, Schelling embraces both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as Kabbalistic texts like the *Zohar*, to speak of the "dignity" of Satan (SW XIV: 253) as an uncreated, non-creaturely "principle."

16 Hermann Broch, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," in *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, ed. Gillo Dorfles (New York: Universe Books, 1969), 63. See also Hermann Broch, "Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches: Ein Vortrag," *Dichten und Erkennen: Essays Volume 1* (Zurich: Rhein Verlag, 1955), 307.

In this sense, we need to revisit the problem of the A = B. The latter is not a creature, not a being, but rather the principle out of which every creature comes, “the ultimate *ὑποκείμενον* [*hypokeimenon* or substrate] of creation” (SW XIV: 256). The A emerges even out of the mythology of ground and “even this B is in the entirety of creation an object of overcoming,” an A that emerges out of its limits, only to set new limits again, only to again shed those limits. As such this B is the A posited as B, the “A brought back out of B into A” (SW XIV: 257). Satan as B is revealed as A and therefore in this respect not to have fallen. As B Satan is something, but, as such, Satan also sheds the boundaries and limits of whatever it is. Satan is both *ὄν* and *μη ὄν*, both creaturely and the questionability and undecidability and problem of that being.¹⁷ In the *Ages of the World*, Schelling retrieves this *μη ὄν* from its reduction to a mere absence of being in Platonism and returns it to the original force it had with Plato. “We, following the opposite direction, also recognize an extremity, below which there is nothing, but it is for us not something ultimate, but something primary, out of which all things begin, an eternal beginning [*ein ewiger Anfang*], not a mere feebleness or lack in the being, but active negation” (SW VIII: 245). The A is the living *μη ὄν* at the depths of any possible B. Satan is a “duplicitous being” (SW XIV: 261), both A and B, *μη ὄν* and *ὄν*. “There is only truth” in Satan in terms of the *μη ὄν*; “Therefore when he *is*, he is *outside* of the truth. His nature is only to be a lie” and hence when he speaks, he can only lie (SW XIV: 268). Satan is hence the “sophist *par excellence*” (SW XIV: 271). As soon as his possibility becomes actuality, it is a ruse and a lie.

Nonetheless, this B that A could be is tempting, “the false, treacherously specious magic” (SW XIV: 259). This is the perniciously creative temptation of *nemesis* as “the disturber of his peaceful happiness, disturber of the original, but precisely as such unearned, blessedness” (SW XIV: 260). But for possibility to be tempting, for it to lure one out of the peace of one’s Edenic innocence, it must itself also be fallen, A fallen to B while remaining A and, as such, exposing the evil within humans, indeed, revealing evil. In such evil, we believe the lie and affirm ourselves as lord.

17 Deleuze, turning to Plato’s subtle deployment of the *μη ὄν* in the *Sophist*, asks about the *μη*: the “non’ in the expression ‘non-being’ expresses *something other than the negative*.” Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 63; *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), 88. That is to say, “being is difference itself” or better: Being is also non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative*; rather it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and question.” Deleuze plays with three strategies to somehow convey the force of the *μη ὄν* (*mē on*). One could write it: “(non)-being” or better: “?-being.” Or he links it to the French NE: “an expletive NE rather than a negative ‘not.’ This *μη ὄν* is so called because it precedes all affirmation, but is none the less completely positive.” Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, 267/343. It is the “differential element in which affirmation, as multiple affirmation, finds the principle of its genesis.” Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, 64/89.



Indeed, the revelation of the satanic element of the Anthropocene makes it possible to understand the Ahab-like quality of contemporary industrial and capitalist life. Staring at his Ecuadorian coin, Ahab the *nemesis* begrudgingly muses, overwhelmed by the pure possibility of the inexhaustible sea, that “There’s something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,—three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab.”¹⁸ All that towers above the valley shall be made subject to the valley. That is how the vengeful valley seeks to live with mountains. This is confirmed as Ahab, against the lightning-filled sky, screamed, “I own thy speechless, placeless power ... I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee.”¹⁹ When Ahab becomes the power of the sea, there is only, the poet Charles Olson tells us, “OVER ALL, hate—huge and fixed upon the imperceptible,” a “solipsism which brings down a world.”²⁰ And what is this hate, this satanic force where there is only oneself, if not the lonely, world destroying, solipsism of the ego? “Declare yourself the rival of earth, air, fire, and water!”²¹

This is the great desert of the Anthropocene. Ahab is in the wealth of the sea, but he only knows it as an immense desert. The “eternal thirst for actuality” is born of the aridity of the great ontological desert—what Joe Lawrence rightly calls the ontological priority of hell—and the “aridity of the demonic” is associated, Schelling recounts, “with genuinely *waterless* places” (SW XIV: 273). This is the desert of spirits who in themselves “have no means to realize themselves” (SW XIV: 273). Schelling never wavered from his 1809 association of evil with sickness, and it, like an awakening from the fever of the *Naturvernichtung* of the Anthropocene, is a “struggle between life and death” (SW XIV: 278). As we confront the possibility of the imminent mortality of our species through the self-assertion of its lordship, this struggle comes shockingly into view.

18 Since the numbers of different versions of Melville’s 1851 classic, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*, are legion, I cite it here by chapter number, in this case chapter 99, “The Doubloon.”

19 Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chapter 119, “The Candles.”

20 Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (1947) (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 73.

21 Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 85.